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SAIGON CUTS OFF CAMBODIAN NEWS

U.S. Briefings Are Canceled After Complaints

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, May 16—South Vietnamese military authorities have moved to stop the flow of what they contend is inaccurate press information about operations in Cambodia.

The American information officer of the Military Region III Assistance Command, Maj. George E. Martin, said today that there would be no more briefings by American officers on South Vietnamese military activities. He said the decision to cancel the briefings followed complaints about news articles that followed sessions by Lieut. Gen. Nguyen Van Minh, commander of South Vietnamese forces in Cambodia.

The briefings have been the sole regular source of information about South Vietnamese activities in Cambodia. Gen. Minh has been inaccessible to the press since he took over after the death of his predecessor, Lieut. Gen. Do Cao Tri, in a helicopter crash Feb. 23. General Minh has not routinely granted permission for correspondents to travel to the front.

The last three monthly American briefings have indicated that the South Vietnamese task forces in eastern Cambodia, now said to total 11,000 men, have remained since the end of February on Route 7 between the Chup rubber plantation and the Vietnamese border, making little contact with the enemy although the area is said to be one of major North Vietnamese concentration.

Complaints relayed to the senior officer of the assistance command by General Minh and his staff were based on articles that followed the most recent briefing last Monday, Major Martin said.

General Minh earlier last week scheduled a trip into the battle areas for some reporters today but abruptly canceled it. The Vietnamese military spokesmen in Saigon yesterday refused to say even how many soldiers Saigon had in Cambodia.

Early this morning, the South Vietnamese announced that a new operation involving several battalions and more than a thousand troops had started yesterday in the Parrot's Beak area of eastern Cambodia near the Vietnamese border. So far only light action has been reported.

The American support of all the Vietnamese operations in Cambodia consists mainly of helicopter gunship missions and Air Force fighter-bomber strikes, which have been totaling several hundred a day for the last few months.

Major Martin said that he had recommended that the background briefings be dropped, before General Minh complained because they had been poorly attended.

"No one asked us to stop the briefings," Major Martin said. "They did send over a couple of articles this week to correct errors in them, and I was told that there were several others. I believe General Wagstaff [Maj. Gen. Jack Wagstaff, who takes over the regional assistance command from Lieut. Gen. Michael S. Davison on May 26] got that from one of his visits with the Vietnamese. But we have not been able to locate those articles."

Neither General Minh nor any of his staff officers could be reached for comment.

Two news agency reporters were asked to come back to Longbinh last week after their stories appeared. One of them was a reporter from Agence France-Presse, which filed an article saying that Communist military activities in Military Region III had doubled in the last three months, and that the Vietnamese attacks across the border in Cambodia had been stopped.

According to reporters from the agency, General Wagstaff called the newsmen to his headquarters, told him that General Minh had complained about the article and said that in fact the number of "incidents" in Military Region III had gone up.

According to reporters who attended the last briefing, the total number of incidents was said to have gone up, but that in Cambodia, Vietnamese activity was limited to within a few miles of Route 7.

The brief weekly report given by the South Vietnamese Command here today about Cambodian operations said that, "during the week, infantry, ranger and armored cavalry elements made sporadic contacts with the enemy in the Chrum and Kompong Trach area. Artillery and tactical air strikes supported the engagements in which 9 enemy were killed." It said that South Vietnamese casualties were 6 killed and 19 wounded.

Other military activity in Vietnam was reported to be light, with the largest clashes reported near the Ashau Valley where South Vietnamese artillery was said to have killed 14 enemy soldiers. A South Vietnamese marine reported to have been struck by mortars, causing light casualties and no fatalities.

An American unit of the 23d Americal Division 10 miles west-southwest of Hoi An was reported to have been attacked and two Americans were reported killed and five wounded. Five enemy soldiers were reported killed.