

SFC
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Phnom Penh Airlift Resumes--a 'Gamble'

Phnom Penh

American officials yesterday ordered a resumption of the supply airlift into Pochentong airport—the last remaining supply link between the Cambodian capital and the outside world—although the military situation around the airport appeared to have deteriorated.

The first DC-8 touched down shortly after 11 a.m. and flights continued through the day, although nearly 30 rockets hit the airport, many near the planes as they were being unloaded.

The airlift was stopped early Saturday after the insurgent rockets scored direct hits on two airlift planes—a C-130 and a DC-8 as they were unloading on the military side of the airport, injuring 14 Cambodia workers.

The next day, U.S. Em-

bassy officials said that the airlift was being suspended indefinitely—until the military situation near the airport improved.

Yesterday conceding that the military situation had not improved, an embassy spokesman said:

“I can only say we are making a calculated gamble. The military situation has not changed substantially.”

Yesterday the insurgent troops appeared to be having little difficulty in finding the range of the military area of the airfield where the airlift is taking place. Some airport workers said it was purely chance that no planes or workers were hit.

The rockets are being launched by the insurgents from positions northeast of the town of Tuol Leap, which is more than four

miles northwest of the airport.

For weeks, Cambodian troops have been trying unsuccessfully to clean out these positions that are heavily dug into dense stands of bamboo along the Prek O Khsach river.

Tuol Leap without question is the area with the highest military priority for the government. On it hinges the fate of the entire airlift which, with the Mekong river closed since the end of January, is the only steady means of supply of the isolated capital.

Elsewhere there was little significant action around the country. Western military observers reported a lessening of pressure around most of the other major provincial capitals that are encircled.

New York Times