

All Americans Evacuate Phnom Penh

Marine Helicopters Fly Out 150

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U.S. Marines and Marine Corps helicopters flew into the besieged Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh early today Cambodian time and evacuated all remaining Americans and some Cambodians, U.S. officials announced.

The U.S. embassy was closed. Ambassador John Gunther Dean and his remaining staff were among about 150 American evacuees, ending a five-year American effort to help the Phnom Penh government. There seemed to be little doubt that the government's fall would swiftly follow the dramatic departure of the Americans.

A contingent of 386 armed Marines participated in the operation, Pentagon officials said, standing guard around the area where the helicopters landed while U.S. warplanes patrolled

the skies. The evacuation, in which a total of 270 civilians were flown out of Cambodia, reportedly went off smoothly and no shots were fired. It was all over within about 2½ hours after the five helicopters from the carrier USS Okinawa landed near the embassy.

Defense Department spokesmen said the evacuees were taken to the Okinawa. Earlier reports from the State Department said their destination was to be Thailand. During the operation, there was no news from Phnom Penh, although news agencies said they were leaving some local employees on duty there.

In announcing the operation shortly after it began at 10 p.m. yesterday Washington time, State Department spokesman Robert Anderson said that

APR 12 1975
"there is no intent to use force, but if necessary it will be applied, only to protect the lives of the evacuees."

The identity of the Cambodians who left their country with the Americans was not known here last night. Anderson's statement described them as "Cambodians who have been associated with us." President Lon Nol left the country some time ago, and is now in Hawaii, and most of his high-ranking associates had also departed previously.

Ambassador Dean, who had spent most of his tour trying to bolster the waning military fortunes of the Cambodian army and find a way to gain a negotiated end of the fighting, reportedly ordered the evacuation after consultation with Washington. Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger and Gen. George S. Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs

See DEPART, A12, Col. 4

DEPART, From A1

of Staff, monitored the entire operation from the Pentagon's command center, Defense Department spokesmen said.

The Okinawa had been stationed in the Gulf of Siam, about 70 miles south of Phnom Penh, for weeks in the event such an operation was decided upon. Pentagon officials said a second helicopter carrier was also in the vicinity but was not needed in the evacuation.

Among the evacuees, in addition to embassy personnel and some of the embassy's Cambodian employees and their families, were American journalists and volunteer workers who had been trying to cope with the city's staggering food and health problems.

The emergency American airlift of rice and ammunition which had been keeping the city alive after the Khmer Rouge insurgents cut off all land and river access, has also been called off, according to reports from Saigon.

Although the departure of the Americans does not necessarily mean an end to the fighting that has devastated Cambodia since 1970, it is taken for granted by Americans and Cambodians that the fall of the government is imminent. The only question seemed to be whether the Khmer Rouge insurgents attacking the city would take it by force or whether there would be a negotiated surrender.

U.S. officials withheld announcement of the evacuation until it was under way, in an effort to forestall panic among Phnom Penh's citizens and soldiers. But an army that was already

on the ropes and a government already engaged in a frantic last-minute effort at negotiations could not be expected to last long without the support of their only allies, the Americans.

"We regret this development," the State Department announcement said, "because of its obvious implications for the government of the Khmer Republic."

Although it remained official U.S. policy right up to the last few days to try to keep the war going and give Cambodia more military aid to support that effort, President Ford hinted that the end was near in his foreign policy address to Congress Thursday night.

Asking more aid for South Vietnam but none for the Phnom Penh government, Mr. Ford said that in Cambodia, "I regret to say that as of this evening, it may soon be too late."

The imminent demise of the Phnom Penh government has been prematurely predicted many times in the past—most notably after Congress forced a halt to U.S. bombing of the Communist insurgents in August, 1973—but in the present circumstances not a single responsible voice has been heard saying that the fight could go on much longer.

For most of the Cambodian people, whose war began in gallantry and is ending in wretchedness with no discernible benefit to them, it has long been clear that an end to the war would be a blessing, regardless of the outcome.

Even former American Ambassador Emory C. Swank said on leaving

Phnom Penh in 1973 that the war was "losing more and more of its point and has less and less meaning for any of the parties concerned."

But the Cambodian war, set in motion by forces that the Khmer people only dimly understood and fought for objectives that meant nothing to most of the country's 7 million inhabitants, acquired a momentum of its own that has kept it going long past the point where there was much doubt about the outcome.

Once a sideshow to the war in Vietnam, the Cambodian war became a shattering event in itself, with the North Vietnamese backing the rebels and the Americans backing the government and its ragtag army.

The Americans recently have been the only foreign mission still in Phnom Penh. All others, including the French and the Japanese, had pulled out in the past few weeks as the insurgent forces tightened their noose around the city.

American involvement in Cambodia sprang from a combination of diplomatic opportunism and military adventure. Although the United States had secretly been bombing Vietcong and North Vietnamese troop emplacements inside Cambodia for some time, Cambodia was still theoretically neutral and generally at peace until March 18, 1970.

On that date, a group of disgruntled aristocrats and generals took advantage of the absence of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who was visiting Moscow, to depose him and put themselves in control.