

Carrier Was Ready 5 Days

Decision to Abandon Cambodia

Aboard USS Okinawa

While President Ford was asking for new military aid for Vietnam and reading Congress an appeal from the Phnom Penh government for help, the U.S. decision already had been made to abandon Cambodia as a hopeless cause.

According to American sources, the only thing lacking was the signal to "execute" from Ambassador John Gunther Dean in Phnom Penh, who was given discretion on when to order it.

For five days marines aboard this carrier in the Gulf of Siam had been up at 2 a.m. each day, ready to board helicopters for "Operation Pun Eagle" — the flight to Phnom Penh to carry out the evacuation.

The signal came from Dean a few hours after Mr. Ford's foreign policy address to Congress Thursday

night — a speech in which the President made no further requests for assistance to the beleaguered Cambodian government.

Word was flashed through military channels and, according to sources aboard the Okinawa, reached the ship about seven hours after

Mr. Ford finished his speech. The evacuation was carried out early Saturday Phnom Penh time.

United Press