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Phnom Penh Asks
Truce, Offers to
Yield

NOTE TO SIHANOUK

Insurgent Leader Said to Reject Proposal as Unacceptable

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, Thursday, April 17 — The Cambodian military Government asked yesterday for an immediate cease-fire from the Cambodian insurgents, who were attacking Phnom Penh from all sides. The Government said it would turn over power to them.

Several hours later, reports from Peking said that Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the nomin-

*Text of cease-fire proposal
is printed on Page 18.*

al leader of the insurgents who is in exile there, had rejected the cease-fire proposal as unacceptable.

There was speculation here that the insurgents might feel that being so close to military victory they had no need to accept anything less than total surrender.

The Phnom Penh Government's proposal, which might be described as conditional surrender, called for a complete transfer of power to the insurgent side under the supervision of the United Nations and representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross who are now in Phnom Penh. A second major point among the five in the proposal was a demand for assurances that there would be no reprisals against persons or organizations for their activities during the five-year war.

The cease-fire proposal, which was transmitted through the Red Cross delegation here, came as this suffering city of more than two million, relatively calm until now, began to show signs of collapse.

Throughout the day, the Communist-led insurgents pressed closer and closer on all sides, inflicting enormous casualties and sending scores of thousands of refugees pouring frightened into the city from the near outskirts. Exhausted soldiers who had had enough joined the refugees. Many of the refugees came into the very center of this cosmopolitan city with bullock carts and squealing pigs looking for a place to rest and a bit to eat.

Shells Land Regularly

In the hospitals there were wounded two and three to a bed, floors slippery with blood and children's shrieks of pain that tore any visitor's heart out.

Insurgent shells began landing last night at regular intervals in the northern part of the city. The airport, west of the city, was said to be falling.

Fear was spreading. French residents of Phnom Penh started putting up French flags on their gates and walls to identify their nationality, since France has recognized the insurgent government.

The Phnom Penh Premier, Long Boret, speaking in a telephone interview before the Sihanouk rejection had been reported, cited the United States decision to evacuate its embassy last Saturday and end its material support as the key factor in his Government's decision to ask for a cease-fire.

"We feel completely abandoned," he said in a voice

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whose weariness was discernible even over the telephone.

The 42-year-old Premier said the decision was made at about 11 A.M. yesterday at a meeting of the seven-member military-dominated Supreme Committee, which has been running the country since the Americans left last Saturday.

'We Are Realistic'

He said the decision was unanimous. Asked if there were any dissenting voices anywhere in the Government, such as some of the generals, he said, "No, we are realistic."

Mr. Long Boret, who with other Cambodian leaders has been marked for execution by the insurgents, said the military situation had become impossible, and added, "We have no more material means." As he spoke, rockets were exploding only about 200 yards from the telegraph office from which this correspondent was telephoning.

The Premier said that after the morning meeting, held at the headquarters of the military high command, the proposal was taken to the head of the Red Cross delegation here, Andre Pasquier, who was asked as a neutral intermediary to pass it to Prince Sihanouk. The prince, the former Cambodian chief of state, was ousted by the Phnom Penh Government.

Mr. Long Boret, who declared "our first objective is to end the suffering of the people," said Mr. Pasquier informed him later that he had transmitted the message to Red Cross headquarters in Geneva at 3 P.M. Cambodian time and that Geneva had quickly passed it to Prince Sihanouk in Peking.

Hotel a New Zone

Mr. Pasquier sent the message over his shortwave radio from the Hotel Le Phnom, which was today turned into a Red Cross-protected neutral zone for the treatment of the sick and the wounded. Huge Red Cross flags were hung around the building and atop it.

As dusk came, refugees and soldiers who had fled the fighting fronts wandered forlornly through the darkening streets looking for shelter and food. The setting sun was clouded by billows of black smoke from fires all around the city.

Last night, reports from refugees indicated that the airport, five miles to the west, was falling and might have already gone. It had been the Government's last supply link with the outside world.

Insurgents were said to be inside the airfields. Government T-28 fighter-bombers were reporting dropping napalm on them to try to halt their advance, apparently to little effect. The control tower was said to be in insurgent hands. Retreating Government troops were reported trying to pull together a defense line south of the airport.

Beyond the airport, the Government ammunition dumps, where everything including bombs is stored, are now cut off from the city. One of them may have fallen to the insurgents yesterday.

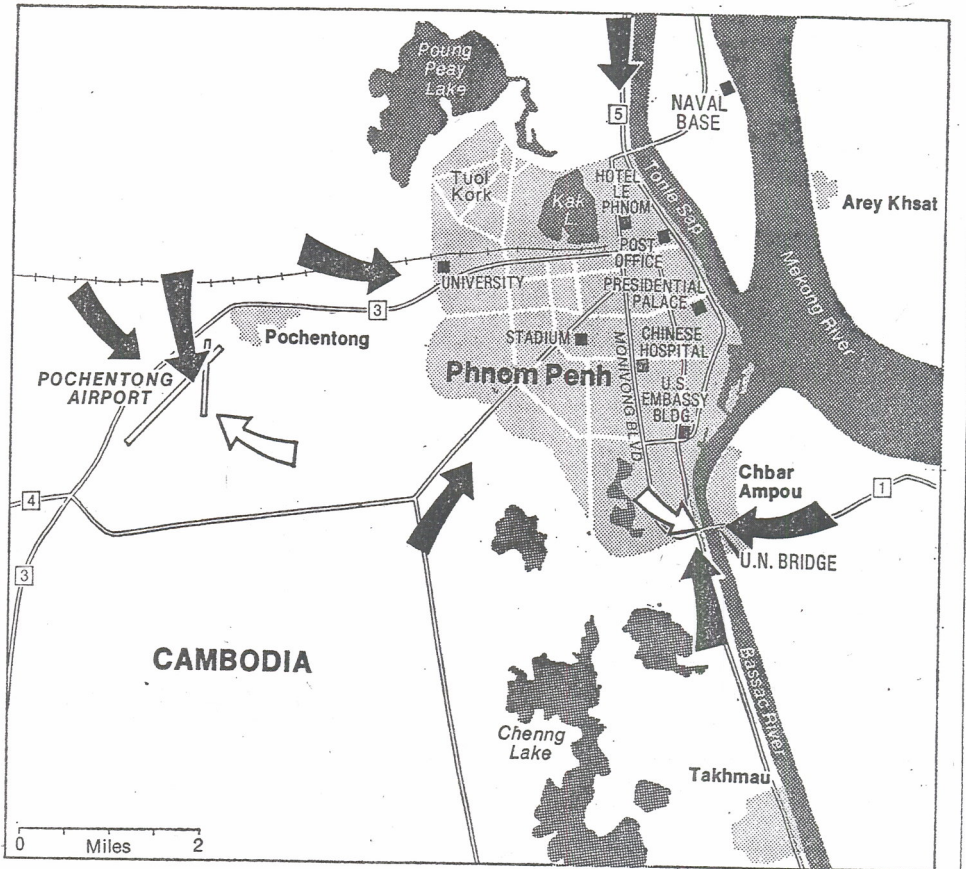
On the south, northwest and

west, the insurgents were at the capital's edges. In the north, refugees who reached Phnom Penh said the rebels were only a little more than a mile from the city limits and advancing steadily down Route 5.

It was on this front that perhaps the greatest Government casualties were suffered today. Many were civilians caught in crossfire or hit by blindly fired insurgent rockets as they ran from the fighting.

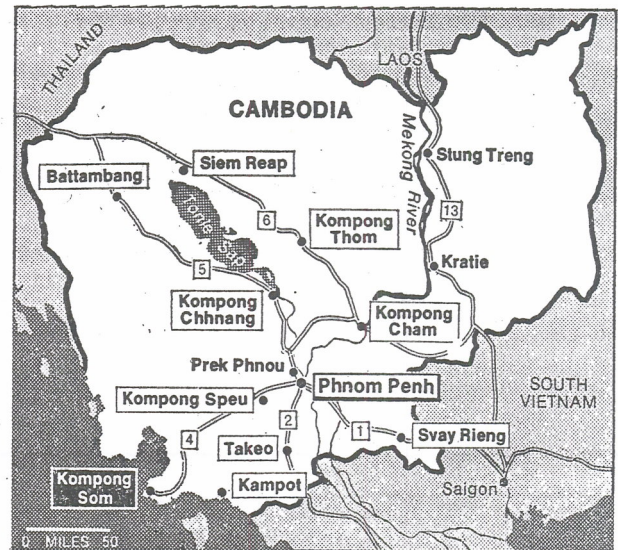
Another battle raged along the city's southern border, centering on the United Nations Bridge, which spans the Bassac River. Though newsmen could not get very close, the fighting seemed to be intense only a few hundred yards to the east of the bridge, in a neighborhood called Chbar Ampou.

Tuesday night, much of that neighborhood burned down as fierce fighting swirled in and around it. Hundreds of houses were reported destroyed in the blaze, which lit the sky. Refugees were being rushed to the bridge area yesterday. These



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Phnom Penh's Pochentong airport was reported lost to insurgents, with Government trying to set up defense line to the south. Rebels struck toward capital from all sides, and heavy fighting raged at U.N. Bridge at southern edge of city.



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With insurgents advancing, Phnom Penh Government had only a number of enclaves left (indicated by panels).

soldiers looked somber as their trucks raced through the streets of the capital in the morning.

Insurgent shells, some of them deadly accurate 105-mm. rounds, were exploding sporadically in the southern districts of Phnom Penh.

A curfew was in effect from noon yesterday "until further notice."

All Hope Gone

Nowhere was there the slightest sign of hope for the Phnom Penh Government. The main military hospital, which normally gets an average of about 200 wounded a day, had received more than 500 by 6 P.M. yesterday and the ambulances were still coming in every five minutes.

Inside the emergency reception center, a converted basketball court, people were bleeding, moaning, whimpering and dying.

A 12-year-old boy died of head wounds on a bed. Someone covered most of his body with a blue scarf. Then a soldier came in carrying his wife, bleeding from the head. There were no empty beds, so he pushed the dead boy to one side and placed his wife there as well.

Rivulets of blood flowed across the floor. A 13-year-old girl named Chan Ny, whose body was torn by shrapnel, lay on the floor yelling: "Help me! Help me! The pain is awful!"

Parents Are Slain

Many in this hospital were wounded children whose parents had been killed alongside them. The chief doctor tried, by questioning the children, to find out where the bodies had fallen so he could have the parents cremated.

Behind the receiving center are the operating rooms, where surgery must be quick. An 80-year-old woman whose right leg had just been amputated lay groaning on a wheeled bed outside the operating room.
