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'Cobra' Guerrillas Said to Harass

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Associated Press

BANGKOK, Aug. 20—Refugees from Cambodia say that several armed resistance groups are continuing to fight against the Communist-dominated Khmer Rouge government in at least four parts of the country.

They say that the resistance groups, operating in western Cambodia, have ambushed Khmer Rouge patrols, have captured weapons and have freed soldiers and officials of the former American-supported government.

For their part, Khmer Rouge troops continue to be a threat to refugees. Two Cambodians, who crossed into Thailand today said Khmer Rouge troops opened fire on their group of 37 while they were cooking rice, and as they fled they saw at least 12 of their companions lying apparently dead. The fate of the remaining 23 was unknown.

Hak Sum, 25, and Hak Saley, 25, said the shooting took place earlier in the day in a western district of Battambang Province near the Thai border as the refugee group was preparing to cross into Thailand.

One band of Cambodian rebels calls itself "cobra," after snakes that infest Cambodia's paddy fields and forests, the refugees say, and another band is reported to be led by a prince whose private army has been battling for autonomy against all comers since the 1950s.

The resistance reports cannot be positively authenticated, but they come independently from dozens of refugees living in camps along the Thai-Cambodian border.

Some refugees report that the Khmer Rouge look on former Cambodian Premier In Tam as leader of the resistance. In Tam himself, living in exile in the Thai border town of Aranyaprathet, denies this, however, and casts doubt on

how successful the resistance is.

"The United States has finished with Cambodia, and Thailand wants good relations with the Khmer Rouge government," In Tam said. "We would need arms and aid to succeed."

In Tam said the potential for a Cambodian resistance movement is reinforced by what he termed resentment at food shortages, forced labor, killings, harsh treatment and the forced exodus of civilians from the cities after the Khmer Rouge took over.

The newly arrived refugees all come from central and western Cambodia. Of the eastern half of the country, under insurgent domination for most of the five-year Cambodia civil war, nothing is known.

Refugees from several areas

reported hearing the crackling of rifle fire and the crump of mortars almost every night. Most said they had learned of the resistance from the Khmer Rouge themselves.

One refugee who said he slipped through to Thailand last week said a friend appeared in his village one night, clad in a black pajama-like uniform like Khmer Rouge clothing except for a "cobra" badge on his collar and white stripes down the sides of his trousers.

The friend was part of a "cobra" recruiting party, the refugee said, but the party melted into the darkness when some Khmer Rouge came around and were not seen afterward.

"They usually operate in small groups, of about 12 men each," the refugee said.

He said Khmer Rouge authorities talked a lot about the resistance forces, about "suicide squads" in the areas of Battambang and Siem Reap in northwest Cambodia and about attacks by night on Khmer Rouge outposts in lonely villages.

WASHINGTON POST Thursday, August 21, 1975 A 3

Khmer Rouge

Two refugees who said they were former sergeants who escaped across the Thai border Aug. 5, said they heard in a Khmer Rouge meeting that an hour-long firefight erupted during the last week of July between "cobra" and Khmer Rouge units near the ancient ruins of Angkor.

They said they had been working in the rice fields of a nearby forced-labor camp at the time and had heard gunfire and seen flames and smoke rising.

One group of eight refugees said they witnessed two daylight "cobra" raids, one at the end of July about 12 miles east of Sisoihon and a second, fiercer, battle 20 miles west of the rice capital of Battambang in early August.

In the Kirirom and Kompong Speu area southwest of Phnom Penh, Gen. Chan Rangsei, described as a relative of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, titular head of state in Cambodia, was reported still fighting for his ancestral lands.

Refugees said Khmer Rouge authorities told them during a public meeting that members of Chan Rangsei's 13th Brigade have been attacking highway outposts and ambushing truck convoys along Route 4, which links Phnom Penh,

the capital, with Kompong Son, the country's only deep-water seaport.

In the 1950s Chan Rangsei's base area in the Cardamom Mountains around Kirirom was virtually autonomous, and he defended it against the Vietminh, the French, the Khmer Rouge and Sihanouk's Free Khmers.

There had been rumors that he had been killed after the Khmer Rouge took Phnom Penh April 17.

Asian analysts agree that the diehards cannot hope for enough support and supplies to carry on much longer.

Communist-dominated Vietnam and Laos lie to the east and north, and Thailand, on the west, would risk North Vietnamese reaction if it helped the resistance.