

Cambodia a Success

By Kingsbury Smith

European Director and Chief Foreign Writer, The Hearst Newspapers

SAIGON — A job well done, but not fully exploited because of American anti-war pressure.

This is how the completion of the American troop withdrawal from Cambodia appeared to this writer on arrival in Saigon today with the Hearst journalistic Task Force, headed by William Randolph Hearst Jr., Editor-in-Chief of The Hearst Newspapers.

To meet the June 30 deadline set by President Nixon, the American troops were withdrawn — actually a day ahead of schedule — before they were able to complete the search for, and destruction of, all the supplies which intelligence reports indicated were in the Cambodian sanctuaries.

Nevertheless, the eight-week long, swiftly moving campaign of American troops in Cambodia was one of the most successful military operations conducted by U.S. forces since America became involved in the Vietnam conflict.

Confident

From a military standpoint, the mission was accomplished. Not only were vast stores of Communist military and food supplies found and destroyed, but nearly 5000 North Vietnam, Viet Cong and Cambodian Communist guerrillas were killed. America lost 339 killed and 1590 wounded. The South Vietnamese army, which claimed, with probable exaggeration, to have killed 9714 guerrillas, admitted the loss

of 866 killed and 3742 wounded.

Red Gains

The blow delivered to the Communist forces in the Cambodian sanctuary area should also lessen any danger that the Communists could inflict a Dien Bien Phu-type defeat on the reduced American forces remaining in South Vietnam, or cause them to flee in Dunkirk fashion.

Those who are determined to maintain — for partisan political reasons or otherwise — that President Nixon's move into Cambodia was a mistake, will probably blame him for the fact that the Communists, driven back from the sanctuary area, have extended their control over other parts of Cambodia, perhaps as much as half of it, and are in a position to threaten the capital, Phnom Penh.

Those who know what is going on out here in Indochina are convinced the Communists would have quickly gained control of most if not all of Cambodia if the American and South Vietnamese forces had not moved into the sanctuary area.

When the deposed former Cambodian Chief of State, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, became a puppet of Peking in April, it was a foregone conclusion that the Communist would attempt to reinstate him in Cambodia. North Vietnam started a military buildup in Cambodia that was intended to put a quick end to the anti-Communist regime of the new leader, General Lon Nol,

who led the coup d'etat that ousted Sihanouk while the latter was in Europe.

No Match

General Lon Nol's forces, mostly untrained and ill-equipped, would have been no match for the North Vietnamese regular troops and their Viet Cong and Cambodian guerrillas.

The American and South Vietnamese move into Cambodia threw the Communists off balance and gained time for Lon Nol as well as for the allies.

If, with the help of South Vietnamese and Thai forces, as well as American air support, the Cambodian rightist general can maintain his regime, the tiny Cambodian kingdom may become another partitioned country, with the Communists controlling at least the northeastern part of it.

Whether the Communists eventually control half or all of Cambodia, President Nixon

cannot justly be blamed for it. The Communists were there first, and they obviously intended to get rid of Lon Nol's regime once Sihanouk threw in his lot with them.

Indicative of the beneficial effects the American move in Cambodia has already had on the military situation is the fact that there has been

less enemy activity in the south in recent weeks than for many months. From midnight Saturday to midnight Sunday, not a single American soldier was killed in Vietnam. It was the first time since the Christmas truce that there was a 24-hour period without a fatal American casualty.