

Secret Cambodia Aid

SAIGON -- (CDN) -- The U.S. command here has secretly begun training members of the Cambodian general staff on how to run an army.

The training, in South Vietnam, is secret perhaps because of congressional sensitivity to military assistance for Cambodia.

U.S. military men are prohibited from setting foot on Cambodian soil and Congress has tried to keep a tight lid on military spending there.

However, large numbers of Cambodian troops have been trained at three bases in South Vietnam by members of the U.S. Special Forces.

Poorly Organized

Currently the Cambodian army, which in the last 23 months has grown from 35,000 to 180,000 men, is the most disorganized, poorly run military operation in Southeast Asia.

Rotten administrative procedures, sources said, are resulting in waste of

American military supplies and contributing to battlefield defeats.

The training is being conducted by a number of French-speaking officers who were recruited over the last several weeks for the project, U.S. command sources confirmed.

The Americans left their units saying they were going on a secret mission, a junior officer in one unit reported.

Security Reasons

"There is nothing clandestine about this," one command source insisted. "We are doing it at the request of the Cambodian government.

"But we cannot disclose the location of the training for security reasons."

The training program is expected to last six weeks.

Command spokesmen denied unofficial reports that the U.S. officers were going on a secret mission to Laos.

"Laos is not involved in this," a spokesman said.