

Stretch of Cambodian Highway Near Saigon Reported Seized

PNOMPENH, Cambodia, April 20 (AP)—Enemy troops reportedly seized a 50-mile stretch of Route 1 in southeastern Cambodia today, posing a potential threat to Saigon, 40 miles down the road.

Cambodian officers suggested that the enemy aim was to seize all of Svayrieng Province, thereby re-establishing border bases for joining the offensive in South Vietnam.

The collapse of a large part of Svayrieng Province apparently opened a new route for enemy forces to either threaten Saigon from the west or push southeastward into the Mekong delta.

50 Soldiers Escape

Much of this Cambodian sector was patrolled by South Vietnamese troops until March 30, when the North Vietnamese opened their general offensive, forcing the pullback of South Vietnamese forces.

At Kompong Trabek, one of the captured towns 45 miles from the border and 85 miles from Saigon, only 50 Cambodian soldiers were said to have escaped a frontal infantry assault backed by heavy fire.

Reports from the field said the rest of the 500-man 58th Cambodian Brigade, including its commander, was killed or captured.

Cambodian positions began to fall around 9 A.M., according to the Cambodian high command spokesman, Maj. Chhang Song, who added that as a result the provincial capital of Svayrieng was now under pressure from enemy forces.

"You could call it damned serious," he said of the situation.

The Cambodian spokesman listed the fallen positions as Preyphau, close to the point where Route 1, the highway connecting Pnompenh with Saigon, crosses into South Vietnam; Chphou; Svaytayean; Prasauth; Tunleang close to Svayrieng and Prasat, in addition to Kompong Trabek.

Fighting started at Kompong Trabek on Monday and the decisive assault was reportedly launched early yesterday. The town is built around an important bridge, and the highway, one of the Cambodian Government's main supply lines, may be blocked for some time.

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