

Cambodia President Safe
As Rebel Bombs Palace

Pilot Gets Away in Stolen Jet

PHNOM PENH — (AP) — A Cambodian air force captain stole a plane yesterday and bombed the presidential palace in a bloody but unsuccessful attempt to kill President Lon Nol.

Lon Nol, unscathed, declared a state of national emergency, suspended all civil liberties and declared a 9 p.m. curfew in Phnom Penh.

The renegade pilot, described as a flight school washout, missed the palace by 20 yards.

But his first bomb blew up the barracks of the palace guard, killing at least 20 persons and wounding 35 in a blast that leveled 100 square yards.

The government said the number of casualties is expected to climb as rescuers discover more bodies under the smoldering debris.

Many soldiers had their families living with them in the palace compound and the victims included women and children, but no members of the Lon Nol government.

A second bomb from the stolen T28 exploded at the northern gate to the palace grounds, blasting a huge crater in the roadway.

The Lon Nol government

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Lon Nol's Palace Bombed

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had announced Friday the creation of a special security police force to guard against any anti-government outburst.

Dissatisfaction

There have been signs of increasing dissatisfaction with Lon Nol's management of Cambodian affairs and the war against Communist-backed rebels. Students and teachers are striking to protest rising prices and soldiers are complaining their pay days often never come.

Yesterday's bombing attack came on the eve of the third anniversary of the Lon Nol's bloodless takeover from Prince Norodom Sihanouk, now in exile in Peking. But the pilot left no public indication of his motives.

He was identified as Capt. So Patra and Lon Nol claimed in a radio broadcast that he was "bribed by the enemy to kill me."

The government claimed that the 32-year-old So Patra is the common-law husband of Norodom Botum Bopha, daughter of Prince Sihanouk, but associates of So Patra at air force headquarters said he was single.

A colonel at air force headquarters said So Patra has been an air attache at the presidential palace for two years. He added that So Patra often frequented the military air base at Ponghenton Airport and was well known to airport security guards. He was waved through by the unsuspecting guards shortly before his bombing about 1:30 p.m.

The Information Ministry reported that after the bombing So Patra headed toward Krek in Kompong Cham Province near the South Vietnamese border and that his whereabouts was uncertain, though Lon Nol ordered three planes to chase him.

Ready for Mission

But informed sources in air force headquarters and the military high command said So Patra landed at the seaside city of Koh Kong, 220 miles southwest of Phnom Penh, near the Gulf of Siam.

Koh Kong's airstrip is only a few miles from rebel territory and security is practically nil.

The U.S. Embassy said it had reports that So Patra had been dropped from flight school because of lack of progress and "disciplinary reasons."

Government sources said the pilot dropped a third and fourth bomb on the outskirts of the city that exploded opposite an oil depot without causing damage or casualties.

The stolen plane was a U.S.-made propeller-driven T28 trainer used by the Cambodian air force to provide air support for government soldiers.