

Pilot Who Tried to Kill Lon Nol Tells Story in Peking

PEKING, April 20 (Reuters) — A Cambodian pilot who failed in an attempt to kill President Lon Nol by bombing his residence last month told a news conference today that he escaped by flying his American-built plane to China.

Capt. So Potra, 33 years old and a son-in-law of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, flew here today and was greeted by members of the Prince's Peking-based exile government. He said he had planned his assassination attempt and defection for several months.

Captain So Potra declined to explain how his aircraft, which bore Cambodian Air Force markings, was able to penetrate Chinese air defenses on Hainan Island, in the South China Sea.

Given a Desk Job

The two bombs dropped by the captain hit an army barracks on the grounds of the presidential residence, killing 40 people. President Lon Nol was not there during the attack.

Captain So Potra, a thick-set man dressed in a light-brown Western-style suit, said

he had been an air force pilot at the time of Prince Sihanouk's overthrow in March, 1970.

He said that after six weeks of flying daily missions against anti-Government forces he refused to fly any more and was given a desk job.

On March 17, he said, he entered the military base at Phnom Penh airport with the help of "many friends" there. He took off in a propeller-driven T-28 fighter-bomber that he said was fueled and armed for a combat mission.

Speaking through an inter-

preter, Captain So Potra said his bombs missed the main building because it had been a long time since he had flown a mission and also that a strong wind blew his bombs off course.

The captain said he then flew 560 miles across Laos, Vietnam and the Gulf of Tonkin to Hainan, making no radio contact.

Chinese military officers at the news conference were asked how the plane penetrated China's defenses. One of them smiled and replied, "This is his press conference."