

Attacks Near Phnom Penh Among Heaviest in Weeks

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KOMPONG KANTUOT, Cambodia, June 25 — Communist forces attacked Government positions in a wide arc around Phnom Penh today in some of the heaviest fighting that the country has seen in weeks.

The situation was especially serious in this important town, 15 miles southwest of the capital on Route 3. The town was nearly deserted except for soldiers defending it. The Communists were pressing so hard from all sides that the body of a Government officer who fell two days ago still lay unrecovered 300 yards up the road because of the withering fire.

Meanwhile in Phnom Penh, the United States Embassy has compiled during the last two days a list of Americans who would have to be evacuated in an emergency and has updated an evacuation plan. But an

official said that there was no urgency now and that he did not expect "the next phase" to go into effect for the time being.

There are approximately 75 Americans living here in other than official capacities. They include businessmen, missionaries and journalists.

Early today, a Communist demolition squad attacked a Government ammunition depot along Route 4 about 10 miles west of Phnom Penh, blowing up a bunker. The rest of the depot was not damaged and no casualties were reported.

The fighting on the east bank of the Mekong about 15 miles southeast of Phnom Penh has been so intense during the last two days that army ambulances now stand by constantly at a little riverfront park next to the former royal palace waiting for landing craft to bring in the casualties.

Success Is Reported

Government positions all along the east bank are reported under very heavy pressure, and the Government charged today that at one of them, Prah Prasap, the Communists had used poison gas. The Government also charged that in the last three days, five villages near Kompong Speu on Route 4 west of Phnom Penh had been burned down with the loss of 152 houses.

The Government also announced a success today, saying that late in the day its troops had cleared the last Communist opposition from Route 5, which, it added would soon be open to traffic again. Route 5 lead from Phnom Penh to a western rice-growing province, Battambang. After having



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Government troops were hard-pressed at Kompong Kantuot (1). Other units reopened supply road to rice-growing area (2).



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Refugees from areas around Phnom Penh have been pouring into the capital and building shacks wherever they can find space. Communist pressure on Kompong Kantuot, a market town of 30,000, has increased squatter problems.

been closed for several months the road was reopened three week ago and rice convoys had just begun to move when the Communists cut it again. The Communist force operating in the Kompong Kantuot area southwest of the capital appears to have been markedly stronger in the last three weeks. Throughout this period it has nearly surrounded Kompong Kantuot, which in normal times has been a prosperous market town with a population of about 30,000. The town's only access to Phnom Penh, by way of Route 3, is a narrow wooden bridge across which refugees have been pouring for weeks.

The Communists, besides firing mortar shells, rockets and machine gun rounds into the town, have occasionally sent in infantry for brief pitched street fights with the defenders. The buildings of Kompong Kantuot mostly substantial concrete structures, include restaurants, apartment buildings, stores, photographic studios and even a local handicrafts exposition. All are now abandoned and stripped of everything useful. A few stragglers were still carrying off corrugated iron roofing and construction lumber from houses today as projectiles ripped the outskirts of town. American jets were, mean-

while, dropping bombs and rockets as close as 500 yards to the main street, and what appeared to be a major Communist attack was beginning. A local garrison commander said grimly that the Communists were extremely strong, and expressed the opinion that there were never enough air strikes. He said that his men lacked medicine and that the supply of rice was growing short although they were getting enough ammunition. Government armored vehicles came to help only for a few hours a day, he added. Kompong Kantuot has little strategic importance, but refugees from it have greatly in-

creased Phnom Penh's problem of squatters. In the last two months Communist forces have been much closer to Phnom Penh than at present before falling back. But the renewed Communist offensive is serious in view of the assumptions made in some quarters that American air raids had hobbled the enemy's fighting potential.