

Big Rebel Gas Attack In Cambodia

Examiner News Services

PHNOM PENH — A large-scale rebel gas attack paralyzed 40 government soldiers yesterday on the southern edge of Phnom Penh's defense perimeter, the military command reported.

There was no immediate government response to the bombing halt order issued and then reversed in the United States, but military sources said the bombing continued unabated.

The Cambodian command spokesman said B40 rocket launchers were used to fire containers of the unidenti-

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fied gas into Cambodian troops at Prek Ho six miles from the capital.

Newsmen were not permitted to visit the area to verify the report.

1st Big Attack

Communist-led insurgents have been known to use gas as a weapon in the intensifying fighting around the capital, but never before in a massive attack.

"This is not tear gas," said Col. Am Rong, the chief Cambodian military spokesman, "but we have not yet been able to identify it. One breath is sufficient to knock a man out."

Am Rong said it was believed the gas had a paralyzing effect in moderate doses, but in heavy amounts could be fatal.

Cambodian Communist forces pressing forward on the outskirts of Phnom Penh yesterday may have captured Gen. Chhuon Chhoum, personal assistant to President Lon Nol, the military command said.

Cambodian troops, fighting with the support of U.S. warplanes and their own artillery, battled the Communists for the second consecutive day along Highway 1 three miles from the southeastern limits of the capital.

The Cambodian military command said Chhoum disappeared from his villa four miles from Phnom Penh off Highway 1 as the large force of insurgents battled government troops in the same area. A command spokesman said there was fear for his safety and that he may have been captured.

Worker in Capital

Other military sources said, however, that the general narrowly escaped capture by fleeing his home and now possibly was attempting to make contact with the government's front line. Chhoum normally works in Phnom Penh with Lon Nol, who resides in the capital.

The defense of the capital along the southeastern front was hampered by thousands of refugees streaming into the city from suburban

villages that have been turned into battlegrounds. Cambodian officials cancelled requests for American bombing along the front line of fighting because of the closeness of government troops, rebels and refugees.

Infiltration

Cambodian military officials and police feared that many rebel troops were infiltrating Phnom Penh along with the refugees.

All foreign diplomatic missions said they were making final plans for the evacuation of their staffs. Most diplomatic dependants already have left the city.

The Communists advanced 15 miles in two days on the southeastern front before yesterday, when Cambodian troops began using artillery in an attempt to make up for the loss of U.S. air strikes on the fighting line itself. Field reports said there was also close fighting by infantry troops.

Airborne reconnaissance pilots reported a concentration of rebel mortar and rocket fire from the village of Veal Sbov, 3.5 miles from the capital's city limits. Rebel infantrymen were at least one-half mile in front of their own artillery support.

Refugee Problem

American air support was substantial behind the rebel line, but the coordinators directing the strikes of B52 heavy bombers and F111 swing-wing jets were unable to bring them close to the front line because of the closeness of the two sides and the refugees darting across fields and along the highway.

The Cambodians have only 11 days left during which they can count on U.S. air support, and that time could be cut even further following a decision yesterday by U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas to reinstate a lower court order for an immediate halt to the bombing. President Nixon has accepted a compromise Aug. 15 date imposed by Congress to halt the bombing.