

U.S. Bombing Mistake Kills
Scores in Cambodian Town

River Port Blasted
Into Rubble

Phnom Penh

American planes mistakenly dumped tons of bombs on the Cambodian town of Neak Luong yesterday, blasting much of the Mekong river port into rubble and killing or wounding hundreds in the worst accidental air attack of the Indochina war.

Cambodian Air Force officers estimated the total dead and wounded in the thunderous pre-dawn bombing, which caught most of the town's residents in bed, at between 300 and 700 civilians and soldiers.

One officer who took part in rescue operations said it was too early to accurately break down casualties, but he estimated the toll might eventually run as high as 100 dead and 600 wounded.

Neak Luong, a garrison of about 3000 soldiers and marines who live there with their families, is 32 miles southeast of Phnom Penh.

It has been surrounded by Communist-led forces since last February, and U.S. planes have bombed the surrounding countryside since then.

(In Washington Pentagon spokesman Charles W. Bray termed reports of the bombing "very distressing.")

HALT

The tragedy took place ten days before the scheduled end to U.S. bombing raids in Cambodia and amid court attempts to halt the operations before then.

"I was asleep when the noise of the planes woke me," said Poch Thong, 35, lying on a cot alongside her husband and three children in a Phnom Penh hospital. "I didn't see the planes; I didn't know what happened."

There were conflicting reports about the number and type of U.S. aircraft involved in the bombing. One victim said four F-111 fighter-bombers took part in the

Back Page Col. 1

U.S. BOMBING

From Page 1

mistaken air attack, but the Pentagon claimed one big B-52 bomber dropped part of its payload "short of the intended target."

The wounded told newsmen the bombing flattened Neak Luong's town hall, hospital, army base, navy outpost and scores of houses.

A Cambodian Air Force officer who helped evacuate the victims said he counted at least 50 dead sprawled around the battered ferry town and estimated another 50 buried in the rubble. Other rescue workers calculated the wounded at from 300 to 600.

More than 200 of the wounded civilians and soldiers were taken by helicopters and boats to nine hospitals in Phnom Penh.

The river boats, packed with bandaged women and children crying for help, were still arriving in the capital last night, a half-day after the bombing.

"I heard the noise of the planes, but I didn't pay attention," one of the victims said after arriving by boat. "Suddenly, explosions broke my ears."

There were so many patients at the Khmer Russian Hospital, built by the Soviet Union, that the wounded were lined up in corridors to wait their turns in the operating room.

At one time, four surgeons at the hospital were working over a single victim, removing bomb fragments from his leg.

Another victim waited for his turn in the operating room, squirming in agony as a nurse tried to dress his leg wound.

A third victim, an elderly man with a head wound, lay on the floor of the hospital corridor with a vacant stare in his eyes.

"If we had only known this ahead of time," one of the victims said. "If we had

**More Indochina news
on Pages 10 and 11.**

known, the bombs could not have caused so many dead and wounded. We know that all American planes in Cambodia are supposed to bomb only the Communists."

U.S. Air Force General John Vogt, head of American air operations in Thailand, flew to Phnom Penh to discuss the bombing with Cambodian President Lon Nol, and then returned to his home base.

The deadly bombing mistake took place while Cambodian troops were trying to clear Communists from Highway 1 south of Phnom Penh in an attempt to crack a guerrilla ring around the capital.

Ironically, American planes have restricted air attacks during the current government drive because pilots said the chance of hitting civilian areas was too great.

United Press