

American Advises in Combat

By Elizabeth Becker
 Special to The Washington Post

KAMPOT, Cambodia—During the dark hours of dawn the Cambodian insurgents were lobbing mortars around the government's command post at Kampot. Inside, U.S. Maj. Lawrence W. Ondecker was showing the Cambodian officers how to mount a counterattack.

"I want you to respond very quickly he said. 'If even one mortar falls in your zone, you must answer back with fire immediately.'

While the American major was poring over maps with the Cambodian staff officers, the Cambodian general officially in command of the post

was writing in his diary, alone in an adjoining bunker.

The U.S. embassy in Phnom Penh has repeatedly denied reports that Americans are serving as military advisers in the field. Congress has passed a law that prohibits the U.S. mission here from direct involvement in the conduct of the war.

But the situation in this coastal town about 80 miles south of Phnom Penh is critical, and Maj. Ondecker was flown down Sunday. "He was loaned to us from the 3d Infantry Brigade," Lt. Col. Choeu Yeun said. "He is attached to the 3d and normally works in the field with them, but he is needed here.

I am surprised that you did not know him."

In the past month rebel troops have moved within one to four miles of Kampot, capturing the city's main water supply and the country's only cement factory. They regularly shell the town with 75-mm. recoilless rifles and 81-mm. mortars.

Although government intelligence officers warned of an impending offensive as early as January, the Kampot garrison made no defense preparations. Over the past week the Cambodian high command sent reinforcements—and they sent Maj. Ondecker.

"Protect this area immediately," he said.

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CAMBODIA, From A1

ately," Maj. Ondecker said while the 31 rounds were falling in and around the city Monday morning. "Good, perfect," he said as a Cambodian officer pointed on the map after accepting the American's proposal.

The day before rebel gunners shot down one of the two helicopter gunships stationed here, and the second one was recalled to Phnom Penh. Maj. Ondecker arranged with the U.S. embassy on the morning of the attack that additional gunships would be sent to Kampot to support the infantry.

A member of the U.S. military attache's staff in Phnom Penh, Ondecker, is in Kampot officially to gather information. Chuck Bernard, known as Monsieur Jacques, is the other U.S. representative in town. He has approximately the same official duties as Ondecker except that his area is civilian matters.

"Monsieur Jacques works with me," said Ker Sophay, director of political warfare. "He writes propaganda tracts with me. We have published and distributed 6,000 pamphlets in the three weeks he has been here."

While junior Cambodian officers say Americans advise in the field around Phnom Penh, it has never been confirmed. In Kampot, however, it is difficult to hide. Ondecker was in and out of the command post, openly recommending military maneuvers. Sometimes he prefaced his proposals with "I suggest and the general also suggests that you immediately fire in this direction."

The Cambodians were obviously pleased with the American's help. "Maj. Ondecker was very good with the 3d Brigade; he will be good with us," said Col. Choeu Yeun.

Changes were made quickly after Ondecker's arrival. Another infantry brigade was called in to bolster the 2,000-man government garrison, and the top command was replaced within 24 hours. The city's defense perimeter was stabilized for the first time throughout the siege.

Villagers are still leaving

the town — the population has dropped from 50,000 to less than 20,000 in a month. Though all private shops are closed, and mortars still land within the city, the city's small open-air market reopened Sunday with some fruit and fish offered for sale.

Cambodian Route Partially Cleared

From News Dispatches
 Cambodian government forces yesterday cleared insurgent troops from a five-mile stretch of Highway 4, opening the road from Phnom Penh to the provincial capital of Kompong Speu 30 miles to the west, the Cambodian command said.

The highway, Phnom Penh's only land route to the sea, remain cut by rebel troops between Kompong Speu and the port of Kompong Som.

Meanwhile political sources in Phnom Penh reported that four prominent Cambodians, all of them former or present government officials, had defected to the government-in-exile of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the deposed head of state.

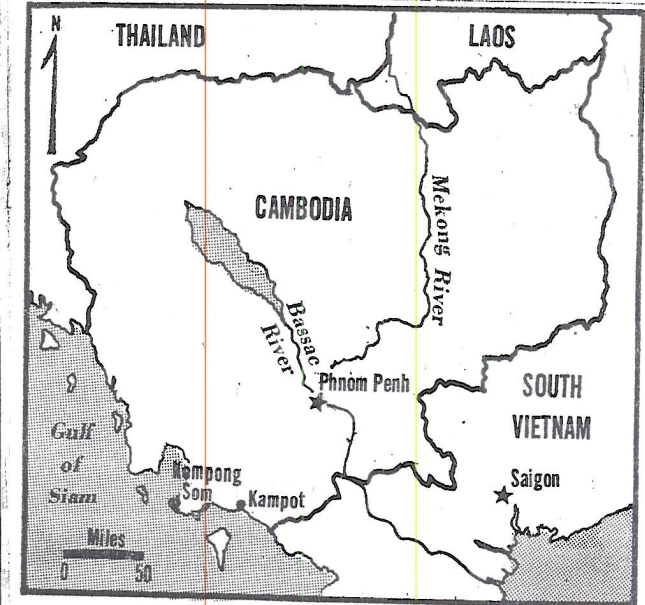
The most prominent figure among them was Ing Kiet, the minister of public works in Sihanouk's government before the later was ousted in March 1970.

The others were Khék Sisdá, onetime senior official in the Ministry of Commerce; Sieu Sophon, a magistrate in Takeo Province, and Siv Hak, an official in Tela Khmer, the government-owned petroleum complex.

All four had been in Paris on either private or official business, when they defected and began working for Sihanouk's government there, the sources said.

In Vientiane, the Laotian Foreign Ministry announced that North Vietnam's Ambassador Le Van Hien would return to his post today after an absence of nine years. Hien's return is seen by observers as an indication that a final agreement is imminent on a coalition government for Laos. Hien was last in Laos in 1965, departing in apparent protest over the collapse of an earlier attempt to form a coalition.

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By Joseph P. Mastrangelo—The Washington Post

Insurgent forces have been trying to tighten the noose around Kampot. Government troops yesterday said that they had cleared part of the highway linking Phnom Penh with the port of Kompong Som.