

A Big Training Program

Secret U.S. Support to Cambodia

Saigon, South Vietnam

In the last year, more than 20,000 Cambodians have received American military training and equipment through a highly secretive American program of support for the ailing Cambodian regime of Lon Nol.

Though a heavy blanket of security lies over the project, it has been learned that up to 3000 Cambodian soldiers have been transported each month to three sites in South Vietnam to train under the direction of American Special Forces.

In addition, selected Cambodian Air Force personnel have been flown into Vietnam for technical instruction given by both American airmen and civilians working for United States firms under contract to the Department of Defence.

The largest of these Army training bases is located at Long Hai on the South China Sea, where four battalions of Cambodians are stationed, just north of Vung Tau. American Green Berets, most of whom have served in Vietnam with the Fifth Special Forces Group, run a

training program which includes instruction in light weapons and close combat techniques.

A similar base at Lom Son in the Seven Mountains area, just over the Cambodian border, houses one Cambodian battalion. At Nha Trang on the south central coast of Vietnam an additional battalion is undergoing infantry leadership training in an effort to turn out capable noncommissioned officers.

In all these cases, the Cambodians arrive in Vietnam unarmed, but return to Phnom Penh's Pochentong airport aboard U.S. Air Force C-130 troop transports one month later with M-16 rifles, M-60 machine guns and mortars.

The Air Force training program, though on a smaller scale than its Army counterpart, also involves both American civilian and military personnel.

At Bien Hoa airbase north of Saigon, 20 Cambodians have been trained by American pilots to spot targets for American aircraft and to provide guidance for American and South Vietnamese air attacks over Cambodia.

Here at Vung Tau, technicians from Pacific Architects and Engineers have been instructing 40 Cambodians in airbase security and fire prevention.

Among officials here, this highly secretive program is seen privately not as a path out of Indochina, but as a further step down the road to long-term involvement in

Cambodian affairs.

Both the Army and the Air Force programs are expected to continue indefinitely—with the possibility of even greater civilian participation if the withdrawal of U.S. ground forces from Vietnam is not curtailed further by the present offensive.

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