

demonstrated the lack of training at every level and the poverty of logistic support.

As part of general mobilization, there was in each military region and military subdivision a recruiting station and a training center. Thus, there were created, day by day, new battalions, regiments, and brigades. The new recruits were given training in individual weapons and tactics for several weeks. The units departed for the battlefield in old requisitioned civilian trucks. In those days they were referred to as "24 hour soldiers."

There was a fourth way in which the strength of FANK was swelled. It was the practice of "unit doubling," whereby one-half the strength (officer and enlisted) was taken to form the framework of a new unit.³ The majority of the personnel of these units were hastily trained recruits. The decentralization of recruiting and the practice of doubling units in the ways described above did result in the organization of new units to support the military regions and military subdivisions which were directly menaced by Communist attacks. And while they were counted as successes by the FANK high command in those early days, the policies which led to their deployment could not avoid results which became more and more unfortunate for the FANK as time passed. These new units were routed, overrun, or completely destroyed by the enemy. The large number of new units not only posed problems of combat effectiveness but greatly taxed the logistic and financial resources of the government.

In step with the increase in strength in the three services of FANK, there appeared the practice of rapid promotion of officers and noncommissioned officers to the point of provoking more and more profound feelings of jealousy within the armed forces; and this says nothing of the inevitable and increasingly serious drain on the budget resulting therefrom. It can be said, however, that the Navy and the Air Force were less affected by these bastardized recruiting practices, as these two services were made up of greater numbers of technicians than the

³In French: *l'Opération de Doublement des Unités.*

ground forces. Nevertheless, their morale was not helped by seeing their Army friends the recipients of unjustifiably rapid promotions. The unfortunate consequences of all these early policies were not lost on the high-ranking military and civilian members of the government and the FANK high command. They made manifest their disapproval and tried more than once to guide military policy back to a more professional basis. Unfortunately, they met with little success.

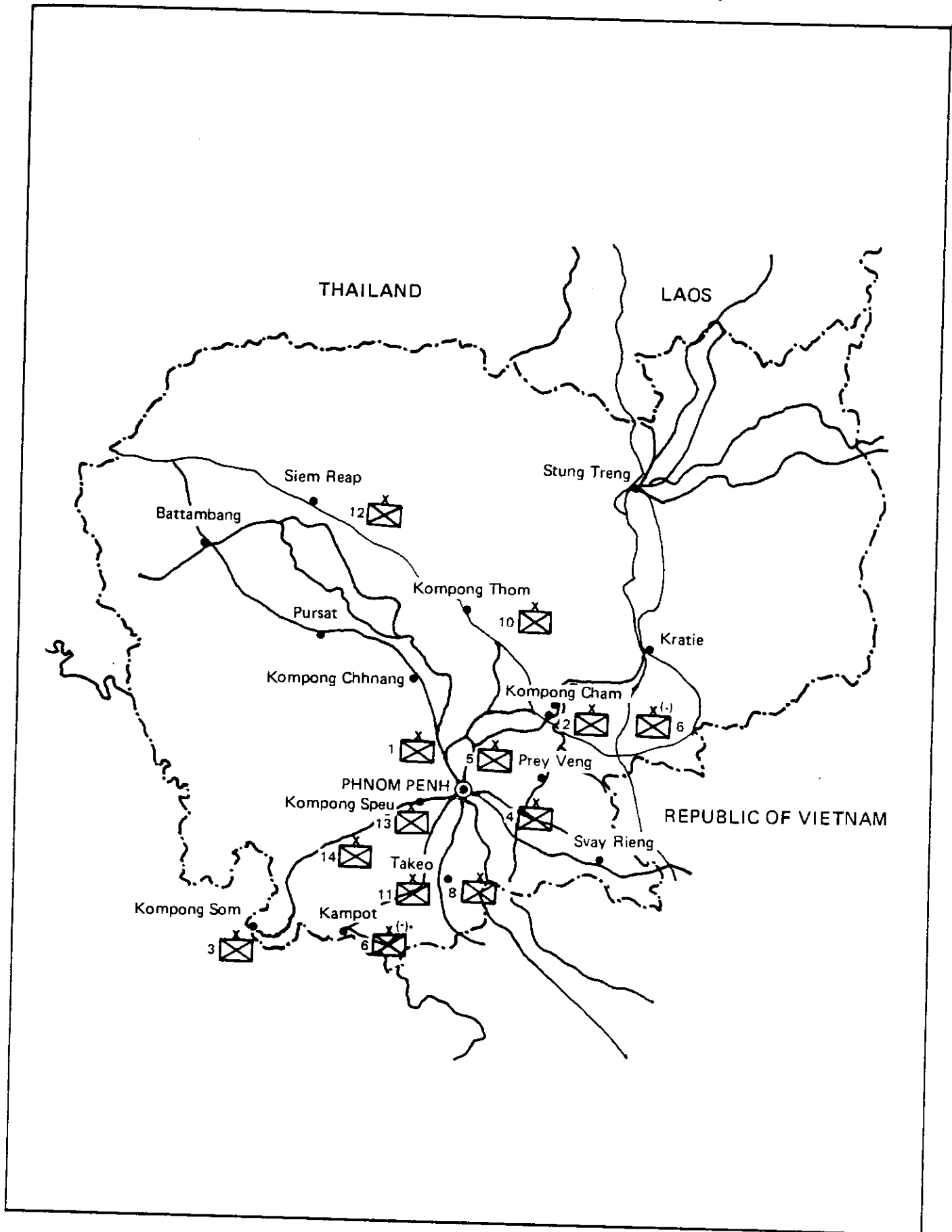
At the same time that the general reorganization of FANK structure was taking place—and always according to the concepts of General Lon Nol—there was carried out the organization of certain paramilitary units. The mission of these units was to ensure the defense of certain sensitive and strategic points designated by FANK. They were composed for the most part of students, civil servants, and local inhabitants who were not in the armed forces. Employed in this way, they would free the FANK from the static defense mission, ensure rear area security, and protect against an enemy fifth column. It must be granted that the appearance of this defense system, together with the surge of national awakening, gained for Cambodia both the admiration and the sympathy of foreign observers in general; but to the eyes of professional military observers, foreign and Khmer, the difficulties of all sorts which beset the FANK every day were more than clear.

Starting with 35,000, the FANK was expanded to 110,000 by June 1970, a level which was practicable and controllable. For his part, the initial force structure of 210,000 sought by General Lon Nol would have 200,000 for the Army and the remainder divided between the Navy and the Air Force. And he leaned on his own people in the General Staff and in the Military Regions to see that this higher level was reached by August 1970. Speaking now of the ground forces only, there would be two principal forces: the FANK General Reserve and the Territorial Forces. The latter were under the direct command of the military region commanders. At the same time, there were several changes to the organization of units; battalions were grouped into regiments; then the regiment was abolished in favor of a brigade consisting of several battalions. By 1 May 1970, twelve

infantry brigades had been activated and deployed as follows: (Map 5)

- 1st Inf. Brigade: headquartered in Phnom Penh and constituting the general reserve.
- 2d Inf. Brigade: based in Kompong Cham and the main force unit of the 1st MR.
- 3d Inf. Brigade: activated in the 2d MR and based in the Kompong Som area.
- 4th Inf. Brigade: activated in Prey Veng (MR-1). This brigade was assigned the mission of defending the special zone of the Mekong River. It operated in the areas of Prey Veng and Neak Luong.
- 5th Inf. Brigade: composed basically of Muslim Khmers and intended for future deployment in the north. Located in Phnom Penh, it served as a reserve unit.
- 6th Inf. Brigade: also composed basically of Muslim Khmers. Its units operated in the Kampot area (MR-2) and in Kompong Cham (MR-1).
- 8th Inf. Brigade: composed of volunteers from the provinces of Takeo and Kandal. It was based in the border area of Takeo and Chau Doc (MR-2).
- 10th Inf. Brigade: activated in Siem Reap, then deployed to Kompong Thom (MR-4). Its units were stationed in Oudar Meachchey.
- 11th Inf. Brigade: activated with units stationed in Takeo (MR-2) and reinforced with volunteers from Kandal and Takeo. It defended Takeo and Route No. 5.
- 12th Inf. Brigade: activated exclusively with volunteers from Battambang and Siem Reap (MR-4). It defended Siem Riep.
- 13th Inf. Brigade: activated at Kompong Speu (MR-2) during this period, this brigade participated in the operation for the defense of Takeo-Angtasom. Later, it was redeployed permanently to Kompong Speu for the defense and protection of Route No. 4.
- 14th Inf. Brigade: based at Tram Khnar (MR-2) along with elements of the antiaircraft artillery half-brigade. This brigade had been reconstituted after its defeat by enemy forces from Phuoc Long.

Map 5 – Locations of Principal FANK Infantry Units on 1 May 1970



From a military point of view -- and I do not speak here of political considerations -- one can criticize General Lon Nol, Commander-in-Chief and Chief of the General Staff, FANK (later Marshal of the Khmer Armed Forces, and President of the Khmer Republic). The problem was his fairyland ambition to see the FANK transformed overnight into a grand armed force made in the image of the RVNAF or even the U.S. forces, bypassing all of the fundamental principles of development and operation which animated those great institutions. This ambition was particularly apparent when, in 1971, General Lon Nol did not hesitate to present to the U.S., through CINCPAC, a plan for the development of the FANK which envisaged an eventual total strength of 600,000 for the three services. In addition, there was a request for assistance in equipping an additional 53,000 so-called paramilitary forces.

During the period 1970-1971, there was a distinct difference in outlook between the level of decision-makers on the one hand and that of implementers of decisions on the other. The decision-makers operated in what can best be described as a dream world where plans were based on unreality or interpretations of history. The implementers were guided by the facts of the world as it was. The decision-makers were General Lon Nol, his younger brother Lon Non, and a small inner circle of military personnel and civilian advisors. In the second group were found most of FANK, the civil servants, many private citizens, and members of the political parties in opposition to the party of Lon Nol. This second category saw themselves removed from key posts in the government or given foreign diplomatic assignments. There was general agreement as to the depth of this divergence and the resulting consequences for the war effort of the Khmer Republic.

The FANK was severely criticized, not only at home but by foreign observers as well, particularly those of the friendly countries giving military and political aid to Cambodia. It must be acknowledged without shame that during the war period there existed a class of Cambodians who exploited the situation, who pursued their personal interests without concern for the ill effects procured by their acts. The FANK suffered

not only from losses at the hands of the enemy but from the system of "stealing" personnel spaces or the use of "phantom" personnel in certain units, producing an effect on the capability of the FANK not unlike that of inflation or lack of productivity on an economy.⁴

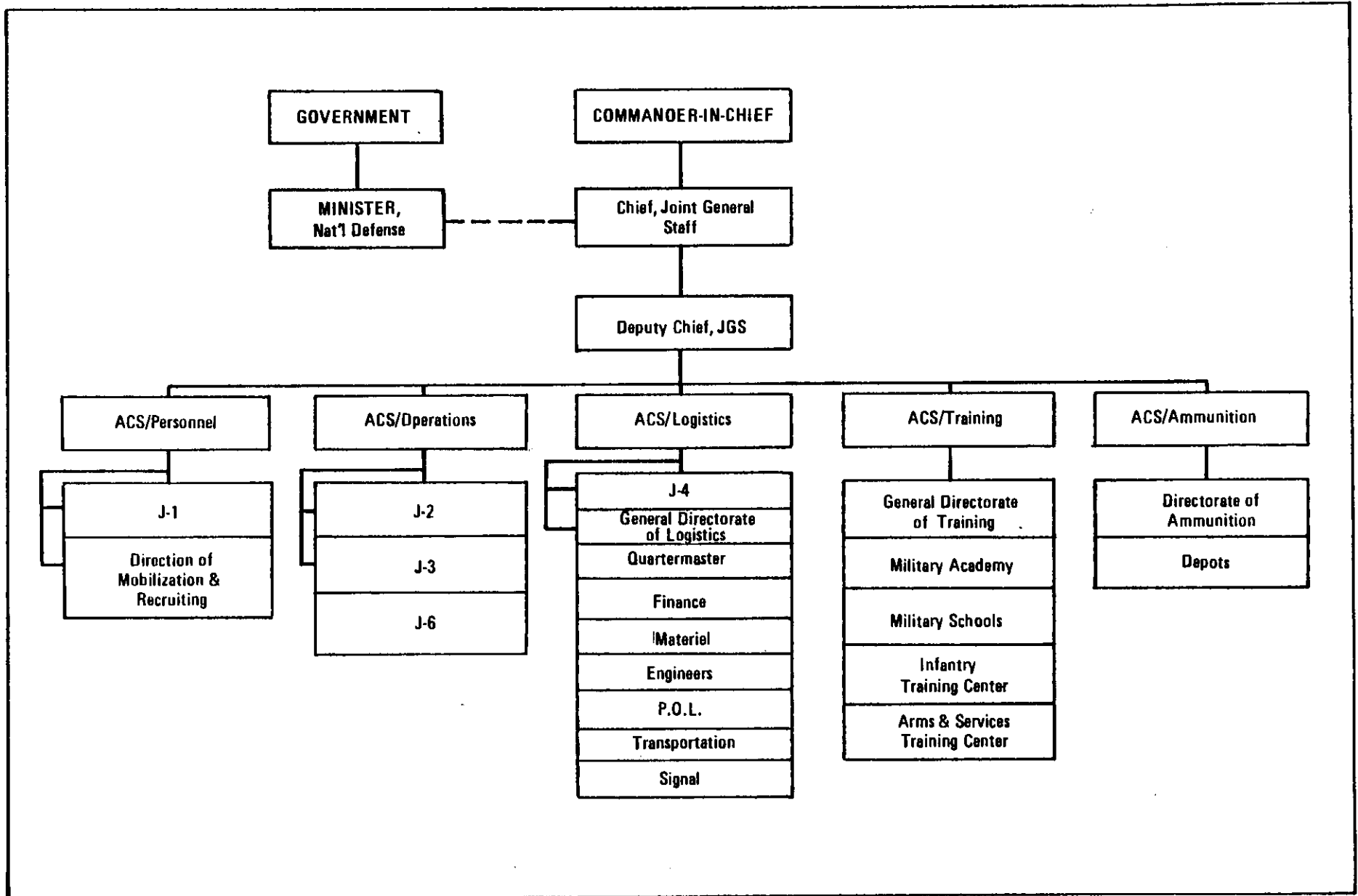
Military Organization

During the time of Sihanouk, the FARK General Staff was under the command and control of the Supreme Commander of the armed forces and the Chief of State, with Sihanouk holding both titles. Under the General Staff were most of the personnel and operational units of the FARK. This situation was complicated by the fact that the Ministry of National Defense, where the technical and administrative services of the FARK were located, was a part of the Government subject, in theory, to the Prime Minister and was not under the control of the General Staff. Differences in point of view between the Minister of National Defense and the Chief of the General Staff were the order of the day. At the time of Sihanouk's departure, Lt. General Lon Nol was Chief of the General Staff, and the developmental needs of the FARK presented the high command with the problem of carrying out a complete reorganization of a system which had long since reached the limits of its capacity. A new concept was needed and without delay.

In my position as Deputy Chief of the General Staff during this period, I repeatedly suggested a reorganization of our armed forces in accordance with current thinking in other countries. But it was not until March 1975 that Lon Nol, by now convinced but still not happy, gave his consent to the idea. The command arrangements of the RVNAF were used as a point of departure, and a profound reorganization of the levels of Ministry of National Defense and General Staff was carried out. The title of Supreme Commander was abolished, and from that time forward the Chief of General Staff of FANK reported to the Government and no longer to the President of the Republic. (*Chart 1*)

⁴In French: *Voler les effectifs or l'Effectif fantôme.*

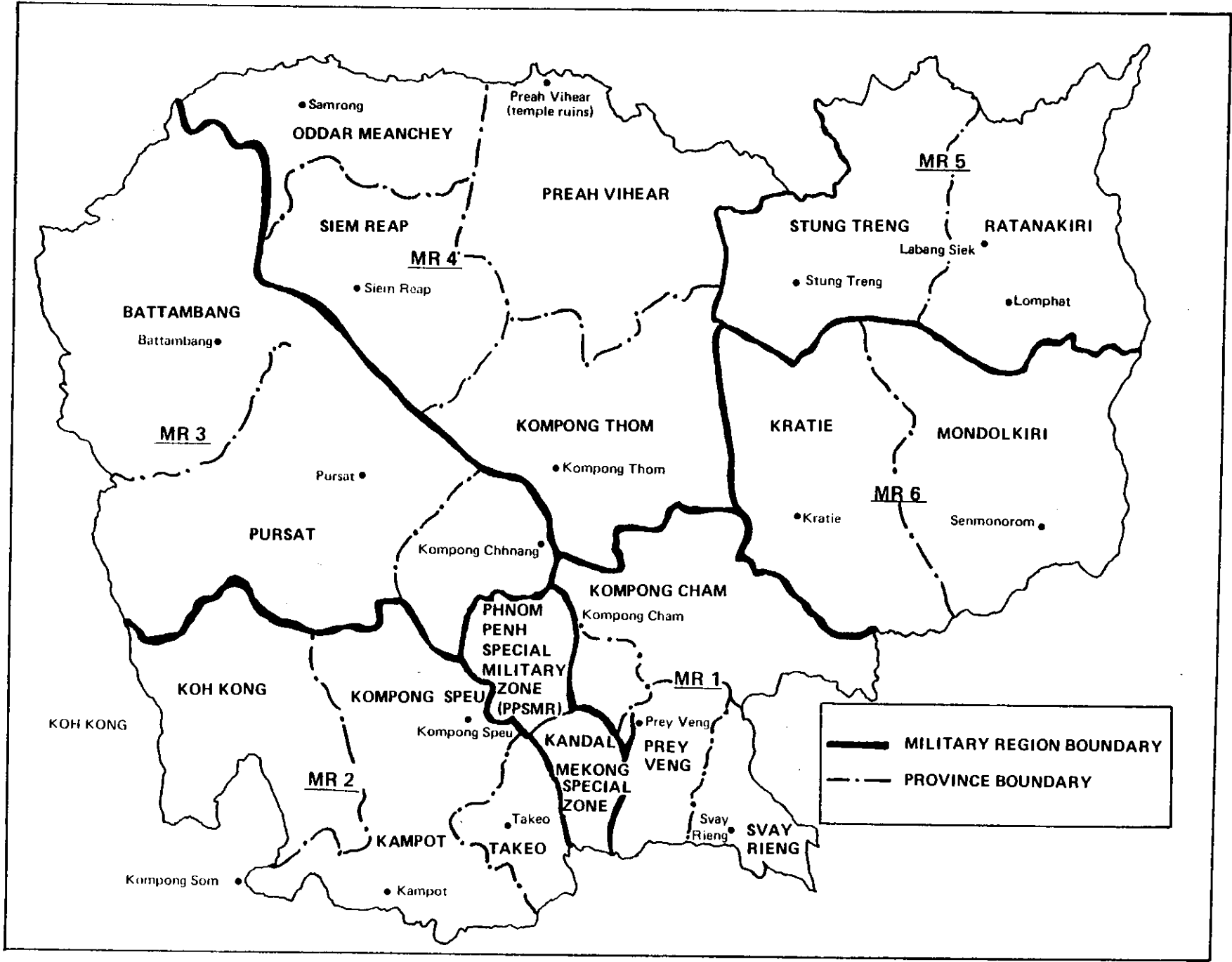
Chart 1 – FANK General Staff Organization After 1972



The General Staff controlled the three armed services: Army, Navy, and Air Force. The Navy and the Air Force had their own general headquarters (staff). The General Staff itself served as headquarters and staff for the Army. Before 1970, Cambodia was divided into six military regions (MR) each of them encompassing from two to five military subdivisions whose limits were essentially the territorial boundaries of provinces. These were:

	<u>Headquarters located in:</u>	<u>Provinces Making up Military Region</u>
1st MR:	Kompong Cham	Kompong Cham, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng and Kandal
2d MR:	Kompong Speu	Kompong Speu, Kampot, Takeo, Kompong Som and Koh Kong
3d MR:	Battambang	Battambang, Kompong Chhnang, Pursat
4th MR:	Siem Reap	Siem Reap, Kompong Thom, Oddar Meanchay, Preah Vihear
5th MR:	Stung Treng	Stung Treng, Ratanakiri
6th MR:	Kratie	(created in 1969) Kratie, Mondolkiri

In general, the MR commander commanded the infantry battalions and combat support companies deployed in his MR. As to technical service detachments, which were under the control of their parent Service Directorates, they were subordinate to the Military Region commander for operational control only. In addition to the FARK units and service detachments, the MR commander could in case of need also employ Royal Police forces which were subordinate to the local province governor. There was also a special zone around the capital having the status of a military region, and shortly after the start of the war a special defense zone for the Mekong River between the capital and the RVN border was established. (Map 6) By 1973, the exigencies of combat led to the creation of three additional MRs, some of which had operational zones



Map 6 — The Military Regions of the Khmer Armed Forces in 1971

independent of the MR commander and operating directly under the control of the high command. The subordination of major FANK units after 1972 is shown on (Chart 2).

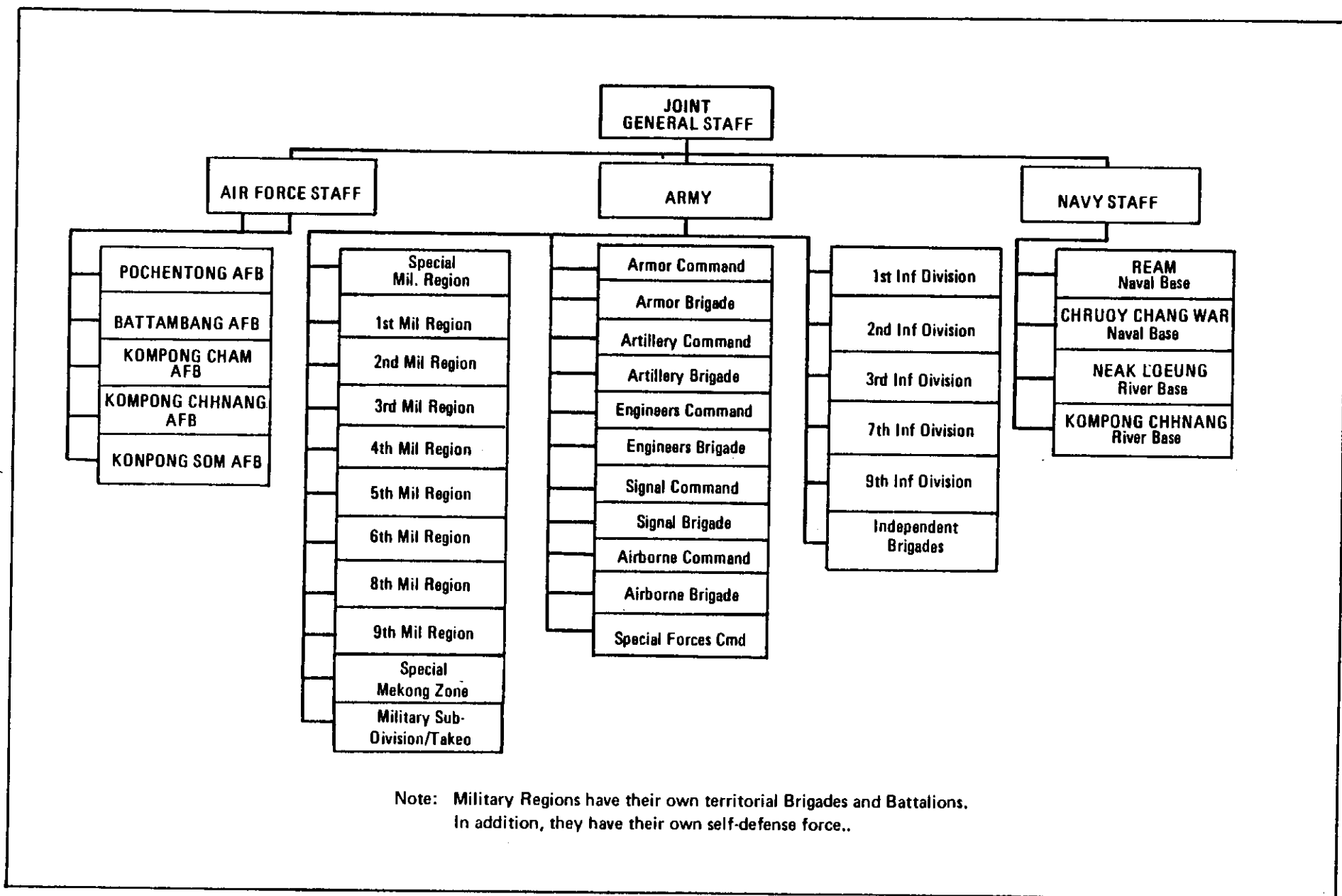
The U.S. Military Assistance Program

Without question, improvements in the material and financial situations of the FANK were due to the aid of friendly countries, of which I mention only the program of the U.S., the nation known as the great supporter of Cambodia during the hostilities in the same way that the great Communist China and its allies supported the cause of Sihanouk's GRUNK and the Khmer Rouge.

The U.S. military assistance program was initially carried out through the intermediary of South Vietnam or at least via that country. Proof of this is to be seen in the rapidity with which the special forces of Khmer Krom personnel were sent to the aid of their compatriots, then in difficulty on all fronts; and note that they were sent at the same time as the launching of the RVNAF/U.S. incursion into Cambodia, intended to destroy the VC/NVA sanctuaries, and described as an operation which would relieve the enemy pressure on that part of Cambodia. Early aid was provided for or arranged through the Politico/Military Section of the U.S. Embassy which, according to my knowledge, was always in direct contact with COMUSMACV. For purposes of intelligence exchange and operational coordination, the FANK established a liaison officer at the RVNAF JGS; as time went on, the duties of this liaison officer were extended to include the monitoring of instruction given to FANK personnel in the RVNAF and U.S. training centers in RVN.

Until the establishment of the Military Equipment Delivery Team, Cambodia (MEDTC) in the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh in 1971, there existed no real plans for U.S. military aid inasmuch as the U.S. Government and Congress were surprised by the abrupt change in the policies of the Cambodian government, following the events of 18 March 1970. Under those circumstances the first military aid, following President Nixon's decision to help Cambodia, were South Vietnamese air shipments of old model weapons, U.S. M-1 Garand, etc., and ammunition, doubtless no longer needed by the

Chart 2 -- FANK Organization After 1972



Note: Military Regions have their own territorial Brigades and Battalions. In addition, they have their own self-defense force..

RVNAF following its modernization. Similar old model U.S. weapons and ammunition were brought in from Laos by Khmer aircraft. These initial shipments were followed by plane loads of VC/NVA weapons and ammunition captured by the RVNAF and U.S., both during the Cambodian Incursion and in RVN. In addition, President Nixon authorized the use of some \$10,000,000 of his contingency funds for military assistance to FANK prior to 1 July 1970. Beginning with the U.S. fiscal year 1971, military assistance for FANK was formalized under the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act, becoming regular U.S. MAP.⁵

One of the first problems the FANK began to work on with MEDTC was the great disparity in equipment and weapons and the attendant problem of ammunition resupply. The training of FANK units in RVN was another step toward solution of these logistic problems. These units, whether trained at U.S. or RVNAF bases, returned to Cambodia completely and uniformly equipped and armed with U.S. materiel. A program and schedule for the standardization of arms and equipment in the three services of the FANK was discussed between FANK and MEDTC and was adopted. Implementation, however, was made difficult, if not impossible, by the necessity to replenish early heavy combat losses in certain units.

During July 1972, a force structure coordinating committee, made up of members from FANK and the U.S. Military Equipment Delivery Team, Cambodia (MEDTC), agreed on the following force structure for FANK ground units:

Infantry Brigades	32
Infantry Battalions:	202
Territorial Infantry Companies:	465

Within the above totals, 128 of the battalions formed the maneuver elements for the 32 brigades, of which 20 were independent and 12 were organized into 4 separate divisions with appropriate supporting arms, i.e., a 155-mm battery and an armored cavalry squadron. Each of the

⁵For a more detailed discussion of the origins of U.S. Military Assistance for FANK, see the appendix by Colonel H.O. Amos in The Cambodian Incursion, this series.

brigades was to have an organic 105-mm howitzer battery. In addition, a separate artillery and armored brigade rounded out the combat elements of the force structure. The bulk of the army's 202,000-man slice of the MAP-approved FANK force structure of 220,000 personnel was located within the above units.

While there was agreement that the headquarters above the battalion would be the brigade, FANK continued, after July 1972, to employ a variety of higher headquarters (regiments, groups, brigades, half-brigades, brigade groups) to control these battalions. MEDTC and the U.S. Embassy considered both the variety of headquarters and the FANK practice of continuing to add battalions to the force structure for which there was no equipment to be unwise. Thus, in December 1972, three directives were issued by FANK to bring the FANK ground units more in line with the agreed force structure. The first limited FANK strength for 1973 to 250,000, suspended individual unit recruitment programs, and directed a manpower reapportionment. The second promulgated a standard TO&E for both intervention and territorial battalions. The third specifically spelled out how manpower was to be reapportioned and abolished all regiments, "brigade group" headquarters and numerous ineffectual battalions.

The administration of the U.S. MAP for Cambodia was affected in a significant way by certain provisions of the U.S. military assistance legislation, which applied specifically to Cambodia. In January 1971, the Cooper-Church amendment prohibited the assignment of U.S. advisors to the FANK. The Symington-Case amendment, passed in February 1972, ordered that the total number of official U.S. personnel in Cambodia—military and civilian—should not exceed 200. In addition, there could be not to exceed 85 third-country nationals (TCN) present in Cambodia who were being paid directly or indirectly from U.S. MAP funds. It should be noted that the ceiling for both official U.S. personnel and TCNs included not only those permanently assigned but those on TDY as well. In late 1972, the military activities at the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh were allocated personnel as follows:

	<u>Cambodia</u>	<u>Saigon</u>
MEDTC	74	10
DAO	17	
Military Communications Facility	5	
Vinnel Corp. Contract	40	

In addition to the Vinnell Corporation contract, other TCN spaces were used to fill contracts with Air America, Bell Aircraft Company, AVCO-Lycoming Aircraft, and Helio Aircraft Corporation.

The interface between the U.S. MILSTRIP system and the FANK logistic system was the FANK Foreign Assistance Office (FAO) in Phnom Penh. To accomplish the actual handling of materiel and its distribution to the three services, two warehouse operations were established, one in Phnom Penh and the other at Kompong Som. Some of the TCN personnel were assigned to the FAO and to the warehouses, where they monitored title transfer of equipment and worked to familiarize FANK personnel with the MILSTRIP system. Prior to the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in 1973, the majority of MAP cargo arriving by sealift was processed and transshipped using the facilities at Newport, RVN. Likewise, retrograde cargo was processed through the same port. Airlift of general cargo was through the 8th Aerial Port at Tan Son Nhut, RVN. By March 1973, all logistic support activities for Cambodia MAP had been forced out of RVN by the provisions of the Paris Peace Accords and had been relocated to Thailand. MEDTC personnel previously located in Saigon were relocated to Camp Samae San, Thailand, and designated the Joint Liaison Office. Transshipping activities for MAP materiel arriving by sea were established at the port of Sattahip, Thailand, while aerial deliveries were usually by C-130 aircraft from Utapao, Thailand, to Phnom Penh. The Paris Peace Accords did not affect the supply of bulk POL to Cambodia through RVN, which continued to originate at Nha Be or Vung Tau, RVN, for movement to Phnom Penh via the Mekong.

Approximate dollar amounts in millions for MAP Cambodia were:

<u>FY71</u>	<u>FY72</u>	<u>FY73</u>	<u>FY74</u>	<u>FY75</u>
180	220	131	414	254

The greatest single-item expenditure was always for ammunition. In FY72, ammunition costs comprised about 37 percent of MAP funds; in FY73, ammunition costs had risen to 65 percent of MAP funds and to 87 percent in FY74. In Appendix C are shown densities of major U.S.-furnished equipment.

The Khmer Krom Units

"Khmer Krom" is a term used to designate ethnic Cambodians living in communities in certain provinces of South Vietnam (Chau Doc and Vinh Binh primarily) as Vietnamese citizens or Cambodians born in Vietnam. During the 1963-65 period, U.S. Special Forces in South Vietnam expanded their Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG), an indigenous paramilitary force composed mostly of Montagnards serving under U.S. control, by recruiting ethnic Cambodians to form additional light guerrilla companies. These "Khmer Krom" units were primarily deployed at border CIDG camps in the RVN's MR-3 and MR-4.

In the absence of documents, I cannot say whether the deployment to Cambodia of these Khmer Krom forces was carried out pursuant to a bilateral agreement, that is an agreement between the U.S. and Cambodia, or in accordance with a "tripartite" agreement between the U.S., Cambodia, and the RVN. What we knew at the time was that these "Special Forces" were under direct U.S. command in South Vietnam. In various ways the arrival of the Khmer Krom battalions was greeted with popular enthusiasm, while for the FANK authorities their arrival gave immediate help in reinforcing the combat units. Later there was a problem about how to integrate them into the FANK and to decide what rank their cadre would be given. A total of some 4,000 organized into eight battalions, were deployed to Cambodia during 1970.

Concerning the use of these units in combat, there were, without question, some problems at the start. These resulted from their need to adapt to the FANK system of command, to acquaint themselves with the Cambodian outlook, and the problems of their integration into the body of Khmer military institutions. The high command would have preferred to spread the personnel of the Khmer Krom units from South Vietnam -- that is those already trained by the U.S. Special Forces -- out among all FANK units. This was not possible because of problems of command. The final solution was to group the Khmer Krom personnel into separate units with their own Khmer Krom cadre.

Whatever the administrative problems may have been, I must pay homage, here and now, to the Khmer Krom units who fought so effectively by the side of their Cambodian brothers against the VC/NVA Communists. There was a spirit of great determination and a willingness to make the supreme sacrifice. According to information I have since received, these Khmer Krom units returned to South Vietnam after the fall of Cambodia on 17 April 1975. There, they continue the fight against the Communists with the few means at their disposal in order to regain the South Vietnam lands of their families and ancestors.



Ceremony at Phnom Penh in 1971 to Mark Return on FANK Special Forces Detachments from Training in Thailand. Identified are: (1) Maj. Gen. Fan Muong; (2) Lt. Gen. Sirik Matak; (3) Brig. Gen. Hou Hang Sin; (4) U.S. Ambassador E.C. Swank; (5) Thai Ambassador to the Khmer Republic; (6) Maj. Gen. Sak Sutsakhan; (7) Maj. Gen. Pok Sam An; (8) Mr. J.F. Ladd, Politico/Military Counselor at the U.S. Embassy, Phnom Penh



Khmer Krom Unit, Newly Arrived from South Vietnam and Armed
with the U.S. M-16 Rifle, Salutes 1st Military Region Commander
During a Visit to Tonle Bet, November 1970

CHAPTER IV

The First Two Years of the War

The Initial Communist Attacks

An unsuccessful attempt to deal with the NVA/VC had been made on 24 May 1969 when Prime Minister Lon Nol met officially for the first time with North Vietnam's representative, Nguyen Thuong, and the NLF delegate, Nguyen Van Hieu. The purpose of this meeting was to request the NVA/VC to desist from committing violations against Cambodian territory, violations which were frequent and becoming more and more serious. No positive result was obtained from this meeting; the enemy simply ignored Cambodia's request.

Since NVA/VC forces continued to exert pressure on the local Khmer population, the inhabitants of Svay Rieng began in early March 1970 to manifest their dissatisfaction toward the intruders. These popular manifestations met with retaliations from the enemy and resulted in casualties. This in turn provoked a widespread feeling of discontent among the population which culminated in destructive rampages against the North Vietnamese and PRG embassies in Phnom Penh on 11 and 12 March 1970.

Amidst the gravity of this explosive situation, which pitted the Khmer population against the NVA/VC, the Cambodian government, by a diplomatic note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, formally requested the NVA/VC to withdraw all of their troops from Cambodian territory. The deadline set was dusk 15 March 1970.

Once more, the NVA/VC did nothing to comply with the Cambodian request. NVA/VC representatives were therefore invited to participate in a working session with staff members of the Khmer Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 16 March 1970. Nothing positive was achieved, however. The

NVA/VC representatives not only cited reasons of their own for non-compliance with the Cambodian request; they also asked in return that their governments be paid for damages caused to their embassies. Thus ended the working session which was also the last meeting between the Cambodian government and the NVA/VC.

On 25 March 1970, however, the Polish Embassy sent a memorandum to the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs informing the latter among other things, of the availability of good office's concerning the evacuation of all North Vietnamese and PRG embassy personnel. On 27 March 1970, all North Vietnamese and PRG embassy personnel took off by ICC aircraft for Hanoi. This departure marked the end of diplomatic relations between Cambodia and North Vietnam and the PRG.

Well before the enemy launched attacks against Cambodia, he had initiated deceptive maneuvers aimed at creating a feeling of insecurity and internal crisis. This was to divide governmental forces in the first place, and then to isolate the government from popular support; finally it would lead both domestic and world opinion to believe that the war in Cambodia had been staged by Sihanouk followers against the new regime—in other words, that this war was only a civil war.

All of this deception was but common Communist fare to those who were familiar with Communist strategy in Asia. However, to those ill-informed of this Communist practice, as was the case with several foreign observers, the enemy bait was palatable and for a certain time, questions arose as to whether or not Cambodian protests against the armed and overt aggression by NVA/VC forces were in fact justified. How perfect the Communist screenplay was!

In fact, under the pretext of helping Sihanouk return to power, an eventuality rather warmly welcomed by the majority of illiterate (ill-informed common people who lived far from the nation's capital) the enemy was able to incite the civilian population to demonstrate against the legal government. On 26 March 1970, several bloody demonstrations erupted in the city of Kompong Cham; these were quelled only by the intervention of Khmer troops.

On 27 March 1970, a second demonstration, more violent still, took place in Kompong Cham; but this time the army was forced to open fire.

In Takeo, similar demonstrations also compelled the Khmer army to intervene. The same thing happened to the inhabitants of Prey Veng who were stopped by Khmer troops only 15 kilometers from Phnom Penh.

The question on the minds of many people at that time was whether or not these demonstrations had been organized by Sihanouk followers. To clarify the question, I think we should point out the fact that in its interventions, the Khmer forces had detained several NVA/VC cadre among the demonstrators; there was no doubt that it was they who had orchestrated the entire show. We may deduct with reasonable certainty that these cadres were members of the Vietnamese communist infrastructure because all of these demonstrations were staged in provinces adjacent to NVA/VC sanctuaries.

Following this stage play, the NVA/VC suddenly began on 29 March 1970 their overt aggression against Cambodia. These enemy forces were known to be NVA/VC regular units whose total strength was estimated at between 45,000 and 60,000. Meanwhile, the defending forces, our FANK, numbered merely 35,000.

It was a very sudden and widespread attack conducted along the eastern and southeastern boundaries and coming from the sanctuary areas. The suddenness of these attacks did not cause much of a surprise to the FANK command because it had expected them all along. But the time available for defense preparations was so short (just two days, from 27 to 29 March) that many isolated and weakly manned outposts succumbed under the violence of the first enemy assaults. From the very first days, therefore, the FANK was driven back by the enemy push. In rapid succession, the following towns and cities fell into enemy hands:

In MR-1: Snoul, Chup, Mimot, Krek, Saang, Koh Tham

In MR-2: Kompong Trach

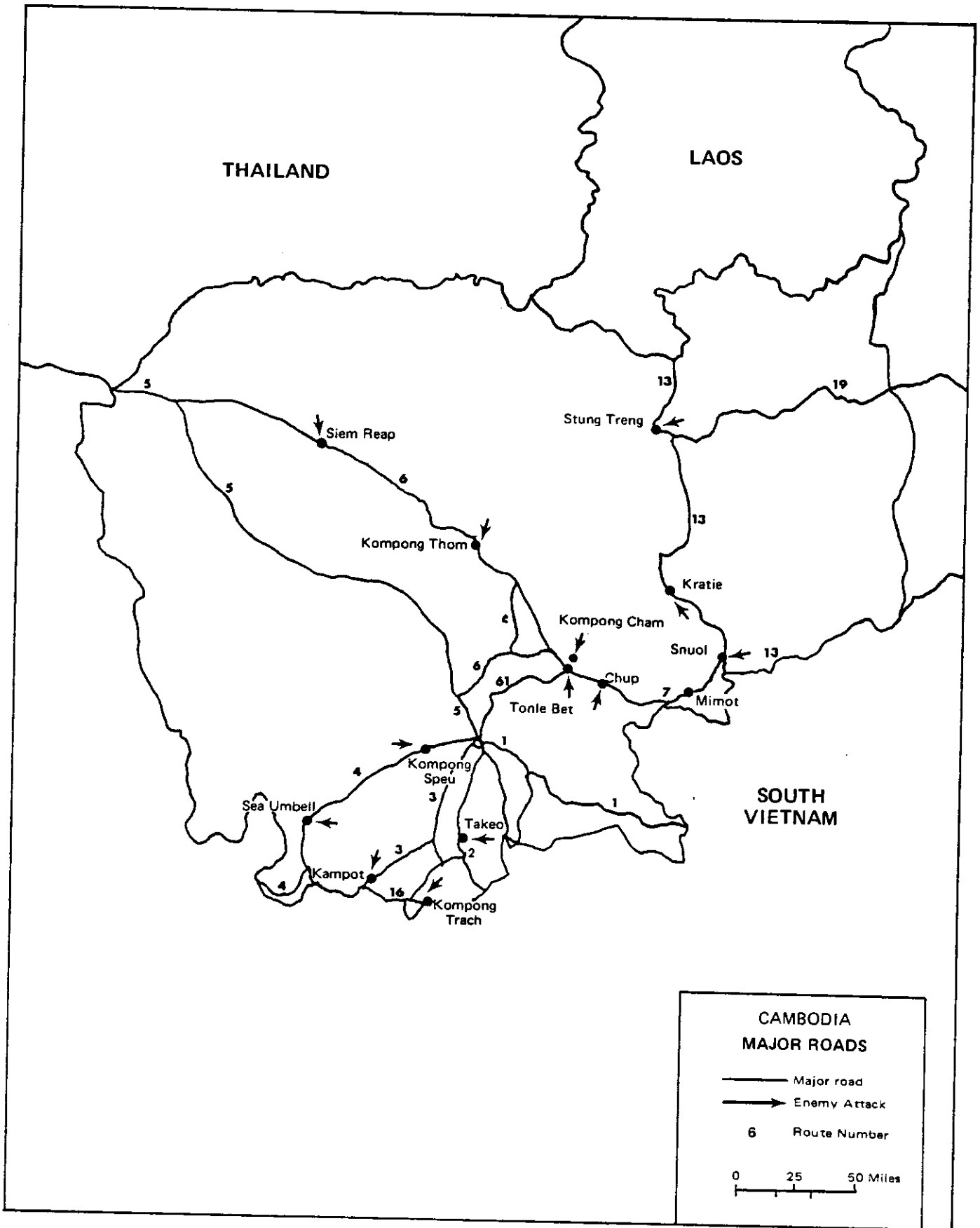
In MR-5: Stung Treng (which had been heavily threatened)

In MR-6: Mondulkiri, Kratie City

In addition, other important towns were attacked. (Map ?) The FANK units in Ratanakiri were cut off from Phnom Penh by the enemy capture of Stung Treng and Kratie.

During the month of August 1970, the situation stabilized a little but the enemy did not relent in his push. The FANK were found then holding

Map 7 – Initial Communist Attacks, March - April 1970



a shrinking area which extended on both sides of the Bassac River and the Tonle Sap Great Lake from the northwest to the southeast. (Map 8)

The Evacuation of the Ratanakiri Garrison

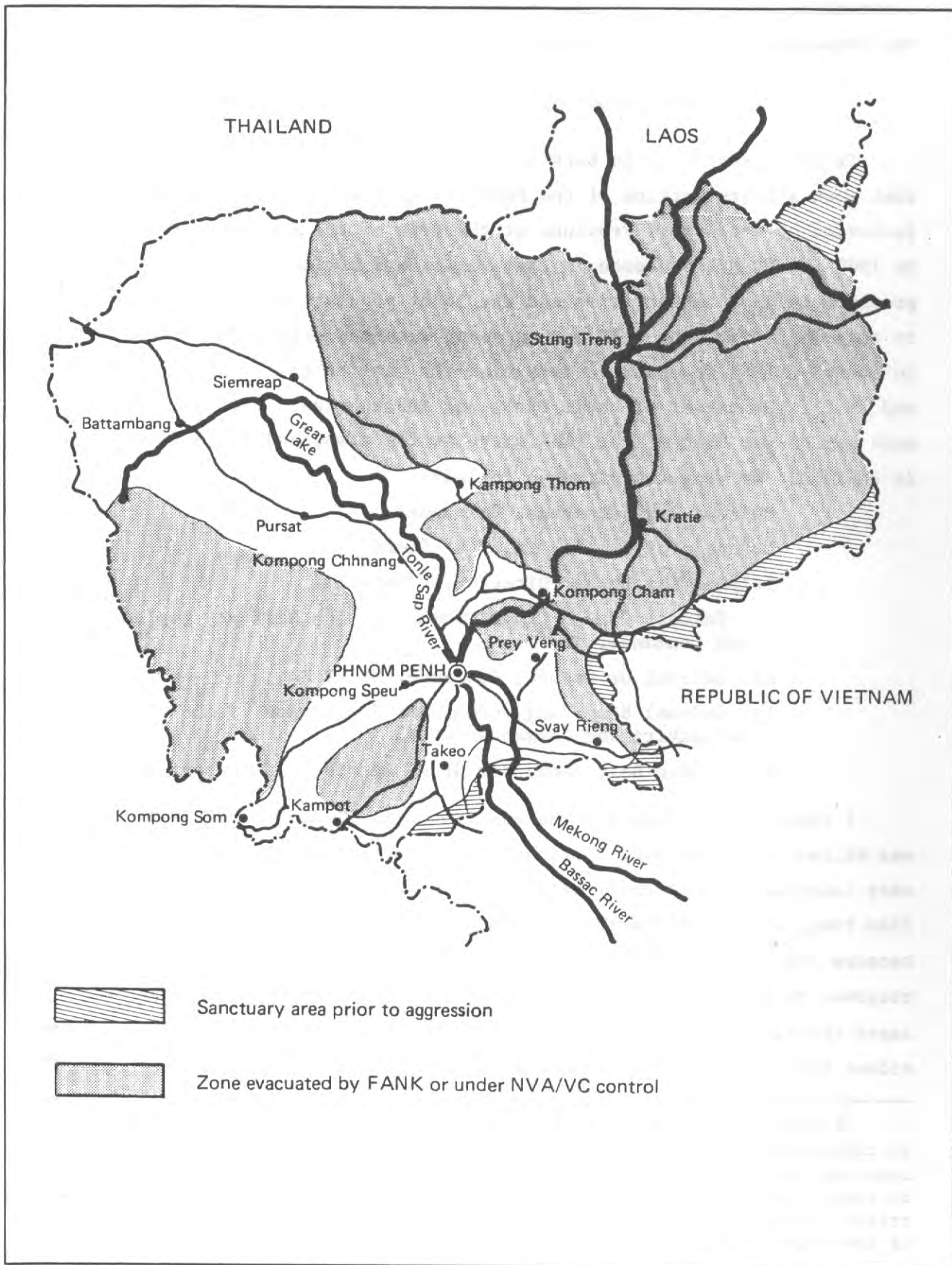
It is necessary to go back to 1969 in order to explain how it was that such a large portion of the FARK combat elements were in the relative isolation of Ratanakiri Province at the time of the Communist attacks. By 1969 the VC/NVA presence in that region was beginning to exert pressure on Khmer authorities and the local populations. Responding to this situation, the FARK high command launched OPERATION TEST VC/NVA in November 1969 in order to determine the size of the VC/NVA forces and to fix the extent of their bases and sanctuaries. (Map 9) It made use of the best of the FARK units at the time, and I was placed in command. We were organized as follows:

- Colonel Sak Sutsakhan, Commander
- Colonel Pok Sam An, Chief of Staff
- Colonel Lay Chhay, Director of Materiel
- Lt. Colonel Chhuon Chhum, Commander 5th Military Region and Commander GT #1
- Lt. Colonel Um Savuth, Commander GT #2
- Lt. Colonel Hong Yung, Commander Sub Region Ratanakiri and Commander GT #3
- Major Dien Del, Commander GT #4 Reserve and Support Troops

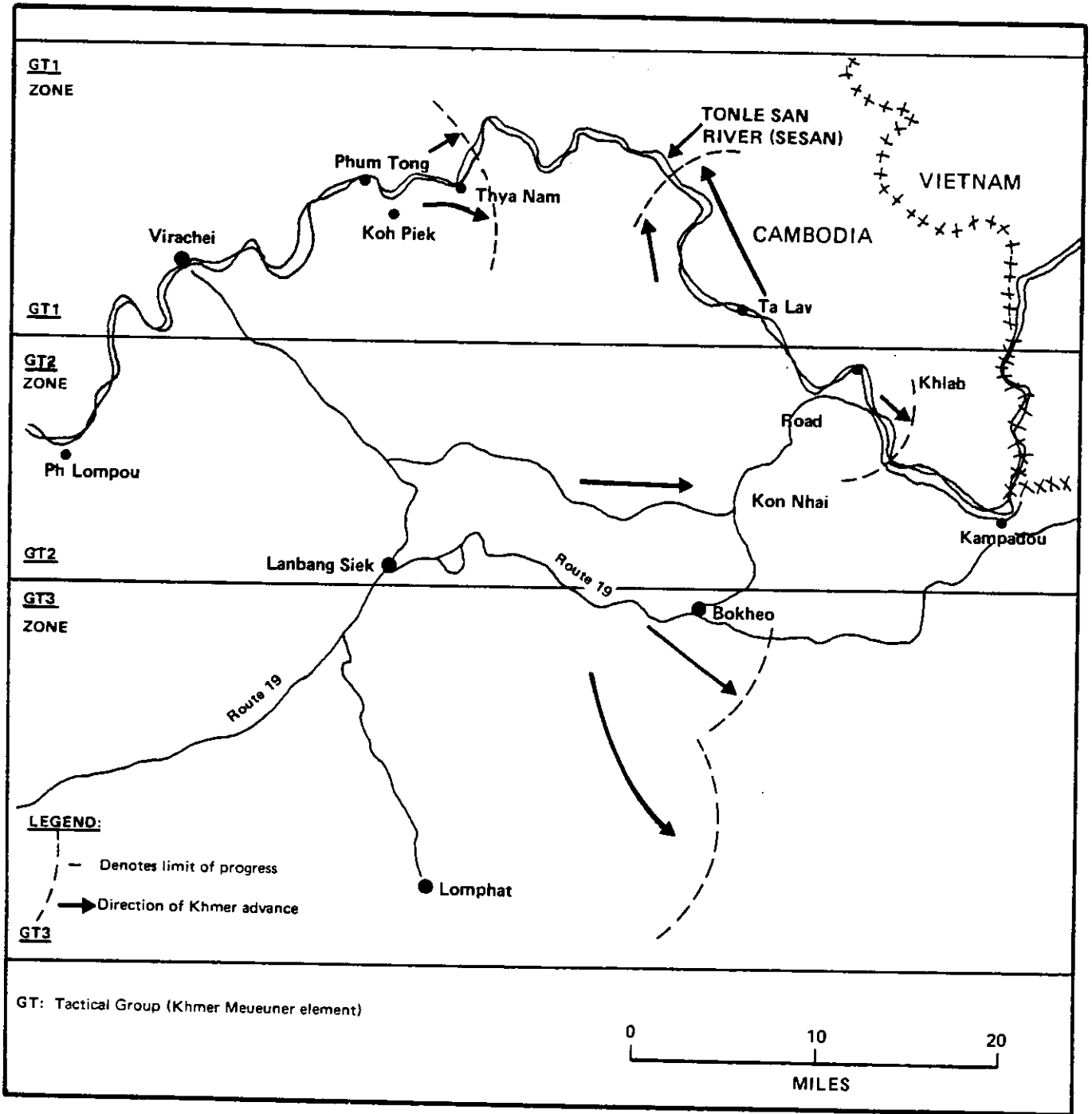
I remained in command in Ratanakiri until 11 March 1970, when I was called to Phnom Penh. During my stay there, a number of operations were launched against enemy base areas in the vicinity of Bokeo, Lomphat, Siem Pang, all in Ratanakiri Province. There was little success, however, because the VC/NVA units were under orders at that time, and for political reasons, to refuse direct combat with the FARK. They were content to leave the fighting for the moment to their auxiliary troops, the dissident *Khmer Loeu*¹. These auxiliaries were used either to slow

¹Literally, "Upper Khmer." Unlike the Khmer Krom or "Lower Khmer," so called because of their habitat in the lower Mekong valley, the Khmer Loeu are not ethnic Khmer. The term was developed during the Sihanouk era to facilitate the integration into Khmer society of the non-Khmer hill tribes living in northeast Cambodia. The Khmer Loeu were actually members of the same tribes found in the uplands of Vietnam, the Jarai, for example.

Map 8 – FANK - Held Areas in Cambodia in August 1970



Map 9 – Area of FARK OPERATION TEST VC/NVA, November 1969



the advance of FARK units or to divert them from the main centers of VC/NVA strength. However, the operations did permit the FARK to conclude that the VC/NVA presence on Cambodian soil was becoming greater and greater and moving toward the interior of the country.

Shortly before the 29th of March, the high command recalled two infantry battalions and one engineer battalion; these units were able to reach the capital by road. However, the attacks after the 29th of March isolated this major concentration of FARK units in Ratanakiri, and those in Kratie as well. The important question of how to evacuate these units was the subject of a meeting in Saigon in April 1970, and attended by representatives from FANK, RVNAF, and U.S. MACV, and presided over by General Abrams. On the Khmer side we gave our agreement in principle to the launching of such an operation, which was of interest to us in that some of our units might be saved for use in other areas of combat. We asked at the same time that the civil authorities and their families in the area be included in the evacuation. At the meeting it was decided that HQ MACV would take the lead in organizing and executing the evacuation, ensuring thereby the availability of both U.S. and RVNAF assets dedicated to the operation. On the FANK side we did not interest ourselves in the details, but in order to facilitate cooperation, particularly concerning the evacuation, the FANK established a liaison detachment in Saigon, directed by Brigadier General Pok Sam An, to stay in touch with U.S. and RVNAF authorities in Saigon, and the RVNAF II Corps commander. Pok Sam An also handled the liaison with Brigadier General Neak Sam, Commander, FANK 5th Military Region to designate and move FARK units toward a protected assembly point at Bokeo in preparation for the move. The evacuation itself was carried out according to plan; however, several of the units at great distance from the assembly point (Stung Treng, Sumpang, Voeun Sai, etc.) did not get out. They were either overrun in their locations or ambushed and destroyed en route to Bokeo.²

²For a description of the operation as carried out by the RVNAF and the part played by the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh, see Tran Dinh Tho, The Cambodian Incursion, this series.

It must be pointed out that this evacuation applied only to our forces in Ratanakiri. There was no similar opportunity to save the smaller garrisons in Mondolkiri and Kratie Provinces.

FANK Strategy

By about May 1970, following the initial enemy attacks, it was clear that the capital of Phnom Penh was in effect surrounded on three sides by territory in the hands of the enemy. Only the corridor along Route 5, running to Battambang and Thailand, was still under our control. Even the fall of Phnom Penh seemed possible. However, the U.S./RVNAF cross-border operations, and the combined FANK/RVNAF operations during May and June lead to a period of stability by the month of July. The enemy appeared to pause to recondition his units and receive reinforcements. The initial strategic concept developed for defense of the Khmer Republic took this situation into account. (*Map 10*) It was keyed to a line (A-B) running generally along Routes 6 and 7. The line came to be known as the Lon Nol line, and the strategy was to be executed in three phases:

1. Phase I: Survive south of the line
2. Phase II: Consolidate all territory south of the line
3. Phase III: Regain lost territory north of the line

As the war progressed, it was necessary to revise strategic priorities in order to meet the increasingly critical enemy threats to Cambodia. By late 1972, it was generally accepted that while trying to keep Route 5 open to Battambang, and Route 6 and Route 7 open to Kompong Cham, the priority of effort should go to the highly populated regions near and south of the capital, the area south of line C-D-E.

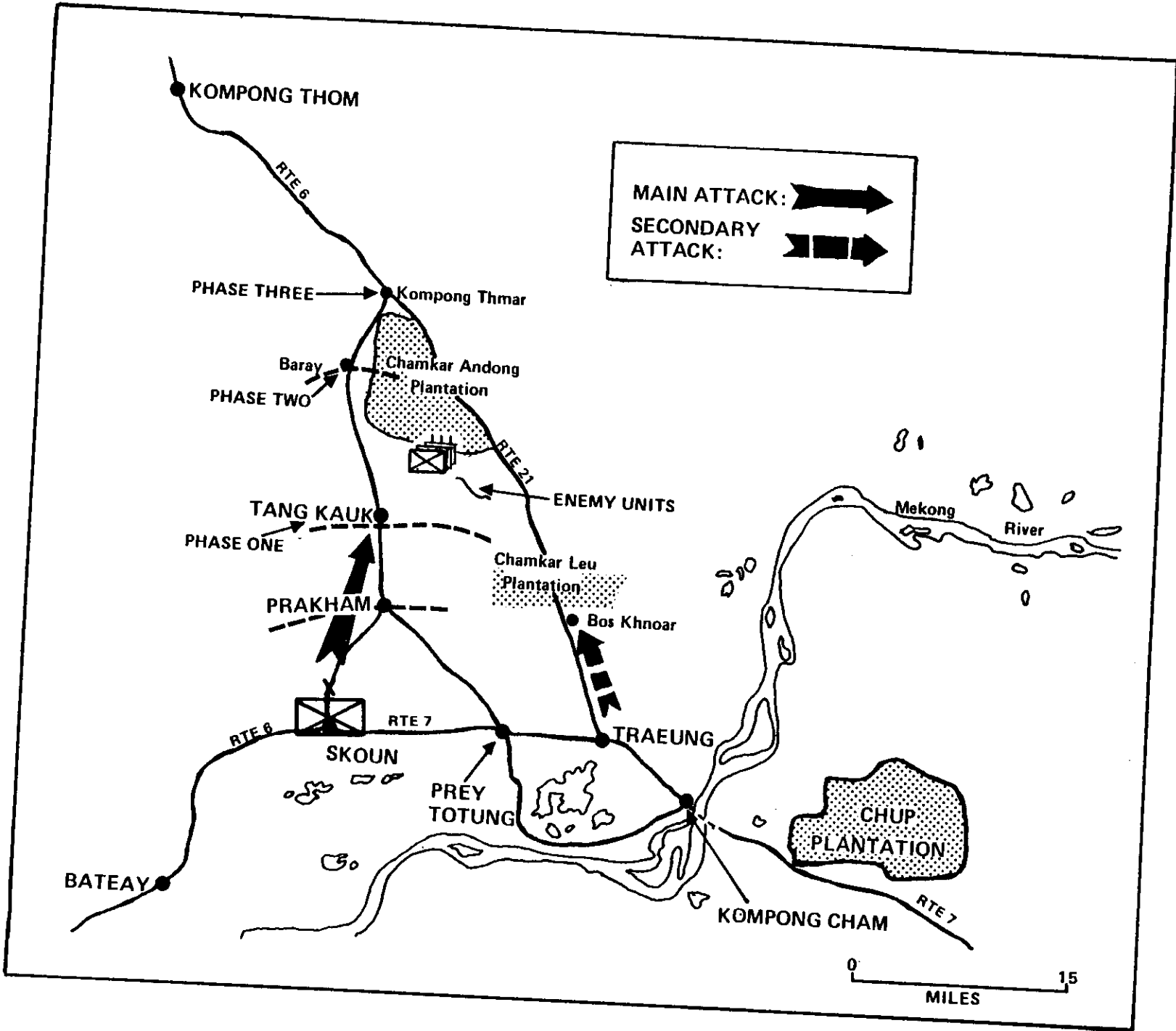
Returning to the period July-August 1970, there were a number of factors in addition to the lull in enemy activity which prompted the FANK to consider offensive action against the enemy for the first time. There was the acceleration of the formation of combat units, the re-organization of FANK, and the receipt of U.S. military aid. There was a need to regain the confidence of the public in the FANK and to raise the morale of the troops, themselves greatly shocked by the defeats of

the early days of the struggle. Another important consideration was the desire to retake areas rich in rice and fish which had fallen under enemy control. The economic situation had deteriorated rapidly, and there was no longer sufficient rice-growing area under friendly control, and what was needed was to bring some of this rich land back under FANK control without delay. This would not only ensure more adequate rice stocks, it would also provide places to settle the growing numbers of refugees, by then streaming from the areas of communist control toward the population centers, and whose care and feeding constituted an increasingly heavy burden for the government. The FANK initiatives in 1970 and 1971 which responded to these circumstances were primarily the operations known as CHENLA I and II, which I now discuss.

CHENLA I

The initial zone of operation for OPERATION CHENLA I was the triangle formed by the three villages Skoun - Kompong Thmar - Troeung the base of which was Route 7 connecting Skoun and Kompong Cham. (Map 11) Skoun had been repeatedly attacked during the initial fighting and had changed hands often. Just prior to this operation, it was under FANK control, and was developed as an advanced logistic base for CHENLA I, and for operations around Kompong Cham. All of the high command were in agreement that the final objective of CHENLA I should be Kompong Thmar, assuming that the U.S./RVNAF air support which we expected to have at FANK disposal would be able to neutralize a large part of the enemy combat power. The final objective of Kompong Thmar was to be achieved in three phases; however, any advance beyond the Phase One objective of Tang Kauk would depend on the enemy situation.

Some ten to twelve of the best FANK infantry battalions, with artillery and armor support were chosen for the operation, and all were placed under the command of Brigadier General Um Savuth. The operation was launched in late August 1970, and went entirely according to plan. Tang Kauk was retaken in early September without great difficulty and to the surprise of the enemy. This initial success was followed by a period of calm during which the civil and military authorities worked



Map 11 - OPERATION CHENLA I and Area of Operations

to revitalize the civilian communities around and south of Tang Kauk. Special efforts were made to resettle refugees, and to provide for their protection by the establishment of self-defense units, made up of local inhabitants, and cadred by active-duty personnel.

In conjunction with the main advance north along Route 6 from Skoun, there was a secondary attack from Traung to Bos Khnaor. Pressure from units of the 9th NVA Division located in the rubber plantations east of Route 6 prevented advance of the CHENLA I column beyond Tang Kauk during 1970.

While there was a general slowing of enemy attacks throughout the northern parts of the country following the recapture of Tang Kauk, the areas east of the Mekong, around Kompong Cham, and south of Phnom Penh were scenes of significant enemy initiative in November and December 1970. The enemy reaction to CHENLA I was not directed at the column itself; rather VC/NVA elements carried out a series of attacks against FANK posts along Route 7, between Prey Totung and Kompong Cham, which had the effect of cutting the Route 7 LOC to Kompong Cham. When it appeared in December that the enemy was preparing for a major attack on Kompong Cham, the RVNAF conducted an airmobile operation into the airfield in Kompong Cham. Several days of FANK/RVNAF operations to the north and west produced little contact with the enemy but permitted the FANK to reopen Route 7. FANK units received help from RVNAF units east of the Mekong, and there was a major combined operation to reopen Route 4 by clearing enemy units from the Pich Nil Pass.³ It should be noted that the enemy carried out these operations while at the same time appearing to displace many of his major units toward his front in South Vietnam.

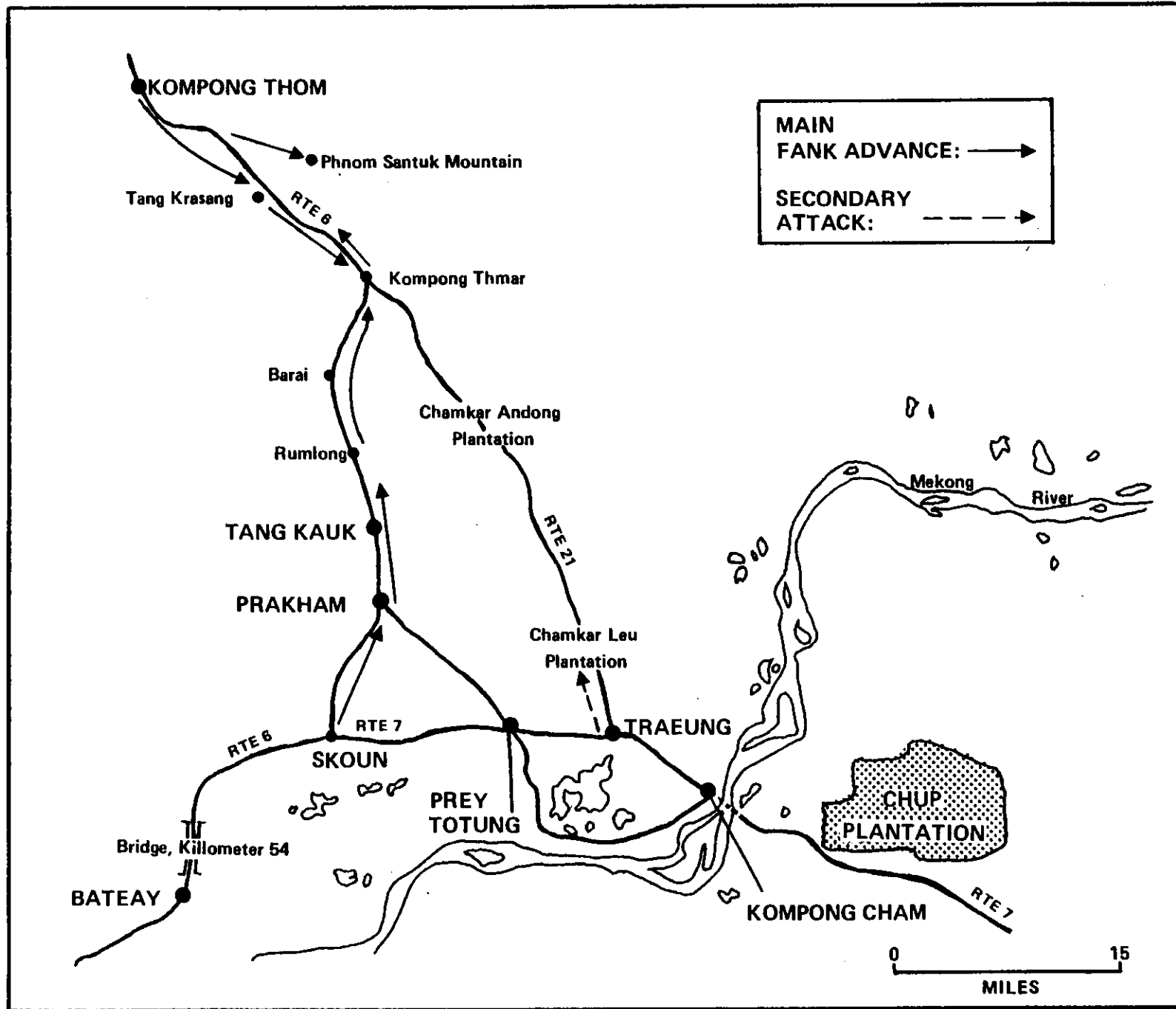
But for the high command the most remarkable and also the most depressing enemy action came in January 1971, when a group of perhaps

³For descriptions of the two operations at Kompong Cham and Pich Nil Pass, see Tran Dinh Tho, op cit.

100 VC/NVA commandos mounted a spectacular attack on the Khmer Air Force base at Pochentong airfield west of Phnom Penh. Carried out during the night of 21-22 January, it destroyed practically all of the aircraft, including all of the MIG fighters. The attack on the air base was accompanied by attacks on villages located to the west and northwest of Pochentong. In this situation it was necessary for the high command to withdraw some of the units from the CHENLA column at Tang Kauk to reinforce the outskirts of the capital. On 5 February, the "State of Emergency" was extended for another six months. General Lon Nol spent the entire day of 8 February at the National Assembly, answering the questions of the legislators concerning the attack on the air base and the defense of the country in general. That night he suffered a stroke which left him partially paralyzed and incapacitated. The following day the government announced that Lon Nol was incapacitated, and on 14 February he was evacuated by U.S. military aircraft to Tripler General Hospital in Honolulu for treatment.

CHENLA II

Lon Nol returned to Phnom Penh on 12 April 1971, after making good progress during his hospitalization. As he became active in military matters again, there was concern for regaining the initiative, and a desire to return the enemy's "blow for blow", to take "eye for eye" and "tooth for tooth". A reactivation of the operation on Route 6, stalled since October 1970, and to be known as CHENLA II was decided on. It would also serve the purposes of Lon Nol's program of general mobilization of the population (*Mobilization Générale*) by returning additional civilians to friendly control. The concept this time called for reopening Route 6 all the way to Kompong Thom. (Map 12) The garrison in this provincial capital had been isolated from all land contact with the remainder of the country for almost a year; further it was at the center of another very rich rice-producing area. The relative calm in the year previous had permitted the build-up of large stocks of rice which could only be utilized in the remainder of the country if Route 6 were opened again to friendly truck traffic.



Map 12 - Concept for OPERATION CHENLA II and Area of Operations

At this point I leave the narration of events in order to discuss the divergence of opinion between the decision-makers in the high command and the technicians of the General Staff concerning the operational concept for CHENLA II. The extent of this divergence is summarized in the following two points of view:

1. Lon Nol saw the need to rapidly liberate Route 6, join hands with the garrison at Kompong Thom, take certain key terrain features which controlled the road, organize these, and to operate from these points in order to extend the area under FANK control.

2. The technicians of the General Staff did not dispute the overall objective of the operation Lon Nol proposed that they accomplish; what they took issue with was the way the operation would be carried out, given the actual enemy situation in the operational area, and, based on FANK experience, the entirely predictable enemy reaction to the proposed FANK initiative. The General Staff favored, first of all, a series of moves which would lead or draw the enemy into areas where they could be destroyed by air or ground action; this would take into account the presence of enemy sanctuaries and command posts in the Chamker Andong rubber plantation. The rapidity with which Lon Nol would hurl the FANK units north along Route 6 would leave them highly vulnerable to fragmentation by flank attack and afterwards easy prey for the enemy. The technicians were guided as well by the principle of economy of force; for some time it had been the same units which did most of the fighting on the various battlefields. The same units would have to be used again for CHENLA II. They were understrength, lacking in certain skills, and required refitting.

Thus, the elaboration of concept into operational plan went forward with great difficulty, given these different points of view. But as always the final decision being with Lon Nol, the difficult birth of the CHENLA II plan was, in the end, carried out over the objections of these technicians who, for their part, watched with sinking hearts the launching of this operation on 20 August 1971.

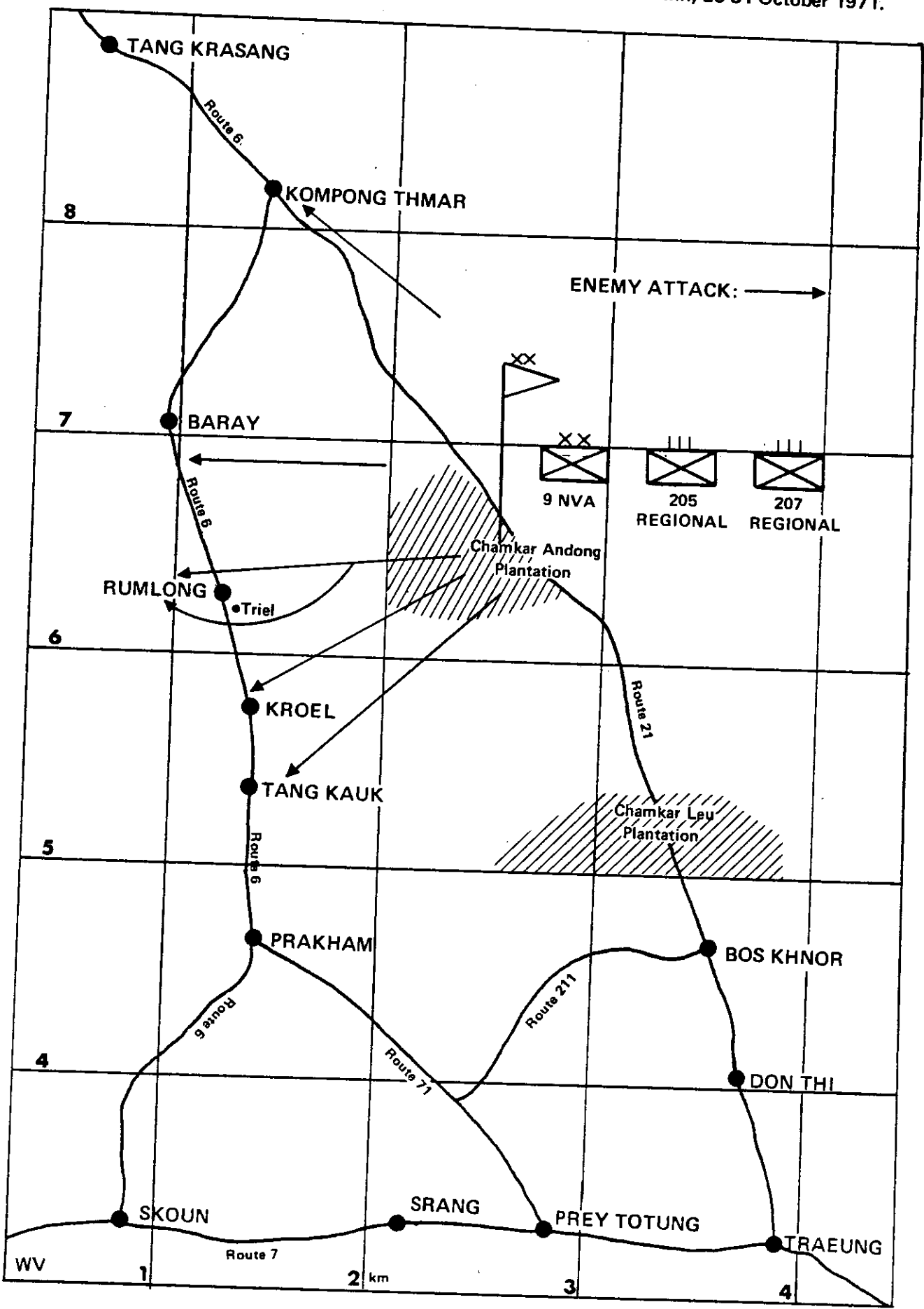
The first phase of the operation involved some hard fighting, but was a great success for the FANK. Again, the enemy was surprised. Prakham was retaken on the first day. By 24 August, FANK units were

attacking north of Rumlong and were able to retake Barai on 26 August. The recapture of Kompong Thmar on 1 September was followed by a period of rest and consolidation of the liberated zones south of Kompong Thmar. On 2 September, one brigade of the 5th Brigade Group attacked south from Kompong Thom along Route 6 and east toward Phnom Santuk. There was heavy fighting in these areas, and Tang Krasang was taken on 20 September. On 5 October FANK units advancing from north and south met in the vicinity of Kompong Thmar. On the same day, three brigades were committed to the capture of the key terrain of Phnom Santuk mountain from the south. The 8th Brigade was moved by helicopter to a position from which it could attack southeast. The fighting was intense, including hand-to-hand combat, as the enemy had time to prepare his defensive positions following FANK capture of Kompong Thmar. Phnom Santuk was taken, however, and on 25 October 1971, the first phase of CHENLA II was declared officially at an end. Marshal Lon Nol marked the junction of FANK units on Route 6 with an "Order of the Day", dated 5 October, and there were numerous religious and military ceremonies on 25 and 26 October to mark the victory.

The enemy gave our units little time to savor their accomplishments, however. Barely hours into the second phase of the operation, the enemy inflicted on the FANK the greatest catastrophe of the war, up to that time. On the night of 26 - 27 October 1971, enemy units, attacking out of the Chamkar Andong rubber plantation, launched a general assault on our positions along Route 6, particularly that portion between Tang Kauk and Rumlong. (*Map 13*) I quote here extracts from the after-action report of Brigadier General Hou Hang Sin, commander of the operation, which indicate the circumstances and the conditions of the combat of the two sides.

On the night of 26 - 27 October 1971, the 9th NVA Division, reinforced by the 205th and 207th regional regiments, launched a general attack against our static defense positions. About 0100, the enemy attacked in force the FANK 376th Battalion, located on Route 6 at WV115640, one km north of Rumlong. This greatly understrength unit was completely overrun at a single blow; about 20 were able to make their way to Barai, and some others got to Rumlong.

Map 13 - Enemy Attacks Against OPERATION CHENLA II Column, 26-31 October 1971.



Simultaneously with the above attack, the enemy was able to encircle and isolate Rumlong, held by the 14th FANK Battalion and the CP of 46th Infantry Brigade, reinforced by a platoon of 105-mm artillery. The bridge at Spean Dek at Kilometer Mark 54, Route 6 was blown by the enemy on the same night.

The 211th FANK Battalion at Damrei Slap (WU 134592) was heavily attacked on the night of 28 October 1971 by enemy units using toxic gas shells. The majority of the FANK were overcome by the gas and retreated to Kreul.

The 118th FANK Battalion at Kreul, after having suffered successive enemy attacks, retreated to Tang Kauk on 29 October 1971, in company with the 211th Battalion.

After having sustained successive attacks on 28 and 29 October, the 61st Infantry Brigade (composed of the 63d and 425th Battalions) located at Kiri Andeth (WU 157642) was ordered to withdraw to Treal, at that time held by the 22d Battalion.

Having also been attacked at the same time as the 211th Battalion, the 377th Battalion, at Neak Veang (WU 127608) retreated in turn on the night of 31 October to Tang Kauk.

During this critical period from 27 to 31 October 1971, our side suffered numerous dead, wounded, and missing, both military and their families.

From 28 to 31 October, the FANK counter attacks by two brigades to break the line of enemy resistance on Route 6 between Phum Svay and Rumlong did not produce the results hoped for. The combat was very difficult; at times our units arrived just at the line of the enemy, only to have to withdraw because of losses. The following day the same terrain had to be retaken. We were on very unfavorable terrain; there was water everywhere, in the rice fields, and bordering Route 6 north of Rumlong. During the first five days of the counter-attack, our air support was, for a variety of reasons, insufficient.

The troops were by this time very tired. Many of the cadre had been killed or wounded. The average FANK losses were estimated at 100 personnel put out of action per day. In spite of this, we tried to carry on; and orders were given to all those who continued to fight bravely to try to break through. But

we were not able to succeed, due to difficulties on the battle field, irregular arrival of resupply, the air drops being intended one day for the counter-attacking force, and the next day for the garrisons at Rumlong and Treal, which were surrounded. During this effort, our air support was reported to have strafed our own units, at the time in the process of infiltrating toward Rumlong. We do not know who called for this strike, but the incident led to the discouragement of our troops in their efforts to relieve Rumlong. In order to accelerate resupply, an air strip for light aircraft was established north of Barai, and put into service on 25 November 1971. We were not sufficiently mobile, due to insufficient helicopters and armor, which could have permitted us to move in force from one point to another.

In contrast, the enemy, expert in this type of warfare, dug deep trenches in which their drugged and chained soldiers waited to strike us, all of which was synchronized with the fire of heavy weapons located in the Chamkar Andong Plantation, and directed by observers located everywhere. We found it impossible to carry out effective counter-battery fire, due to lack of sufficient weapons.

In order to strike the enemy a heavy blow, we were able to obtain B-52 strikes in the Chamkar Andong area on the 1st and the 14th of November. We asked for additional strikes, but did not receive them.

We see, therefore that during a period of only 15 days, the counterattacks of the VC/NVA caused such heavy losses in men and materiel as to completely demoralize the FANK units participating in the operation. I remember traveling to Skoun during that critical period in order to see first-hand the condition of the troops who retreated toward that base; it was not surprising to find the young soldiers and cadre sleeping, a sign of their loss of all sense of combat responsibility. One could say that they were all pursued by the spectre of war ... reinforced in their minds, no doubt, by the spectacular atrocities and other horror which they had witnessed. Many waited for medical evacuation and air support to arrive from on high, which never arrived.

Certainly one cannot completely blame the high command insofar as reinforcements and resupply were concerned. At the same time that operation CHENLA II was in progress there were other places in the country where actions of the enemy required the attention of the FANK. It was a situation where everyone seemed to be trying to cover himself. In these circumstances Marshal Lon Nol presided at a conference on 14 November 1971 which was attended by the senior commanders of CHENLA II. In the course of this meeting, important modifications were made to the initial plan of operation, now more urgent in view of the heavy enemy action to the west of Phnom Penh along Route 4.

Another problem was that the CHENLA II column had been cut into several sections and all that they could do was to use their own means to escape from the grip of the VC/NVA. There was insufficient logistical support and what there was did not arrive in time. The large bridge on Route 6 southwest of Skoun (Kilometer Mark 54) had been blown; thus the logistic base for the operation which had been established in Skoun could not be resupplied except by aerial transport.

During the entire month of November and until 3 December 1971, the final date of operation CHENLA II, there were bloody combat actions the entire length of Route 6 from Prakham to Phnom Santuk. Several of our units took heavy losses, some of them simply vanishing into the countryside, and others fighting courageously to regain friendly lines as best they could. The commander of the operation was no longer in control of the situation and seemed to adopt the solution of "every man for himself". Marshal Lon Nol, with the officers of the general staff, traveled to the CHENLA II front on 30 November 1971 in order to survey the situation as it actually was. Faced with the sad spectacle caused by the collapse of his troops Lon Nol could do nothing more than to conclude the tragic story of operation CHENLA II. In this operation FANK lost some of its best units of infantry as well as a good part of its armor and a great deal of transport, both military and civil. There was never an exact count, but the estimate was on the order of ten battalions of personnel and equipment lost plus the equipment of an additional ten battalions.

*Cooperation and Coordination with the RVNAF
and the U.S.*

In early April 1970, General Lon Nol twice received very discreet, night visits by Nguyen Cao Ky, South Vietnam's Vice President. Though highly secret, these visits nevertheless can be seen as the first steps toward reestablishing diplomatic relations between South Vietnam and Cambodia on the one hand, and toward the initiation of military cooperation and assistance in the face of a common enemy on the other. It is not known exactly how the first of these visits was arranged. Very few people in Phnom Penh knew of them, and they were attended on the Khmer side by General Lon Nol and Prince Sirik Matak only. It is considered possible, however, that General Lon Nol's younger brother Lon Non played a part in the arrangements. Soon after the 18th of March, and before the reestablishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries, Lon Non was authorized to enter into liaison with South Vietnamese officials and with Son Ngoc Thanh, the anti-Sihanouk Khmer leader then living in South Vietnam. It is possible that the idea for such a meeting was discussed between Lon Non and Son Ngoc Thanh, and then presented to General Ky by one or the other.⁴

In conjunction with these activities, President Nixon also issued a warning to the enemy when, announcing the next increment of U.S. troop withdrawal from South Vietnam, he referred to the enemy's escalation in Laos and Cambodia and declared on 20 April 1970:

"The enemy would be taking grave risks if they attempted to use American withdrawals to jeopardize remaining U.S. forces in Vietnam by increased military action in Vietnam, in Cambodia, or in Laos; if they were to do so I shall not hesitate to take strong and effective measures to deal with that situation."

⁴ At the same time as these contacts, the Cambodian government was also approached by other countries of the Free World, first Thailand, then the Republic of China (Taiwan), followed by South Korea shortly after. All offered to help in some way.

Ten days after issuing this warning, President Nixon announced on 30 April 1970 that U.S. forces, in cooperation with the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) were going to launch immediate attacks to destroy enemy sanctuaries along the Khmer-Vietnamese border.

Toward the end of April 1970, simultaneously with an increase in military personnel attached to the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh, contacts between the FANK General Staff and the JGS, RVNAF, as well as MACV, became more regular and increasingly solid, even though diplomatic relations were not established between Phnom Penh and Saigon until a month later, on 27 May 1970.

At the same time, the FANK Command authorized the assignment of one RVNAF liaison officer to each Subdivision commander in the 1st and 2d Military Regions. The purpose of this arrangement was to exchange information and coordinate fire support.

In May 1970, a RVN delegation headed by Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, and including the GVN Minister of Defense, made an official visit to Phnom Penh. At the end of this visit, an agreement was concluded which created a 15-km deep zone on each side of the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border, in which Khmer and Vietnamese military authorities at the Province and District level could operate freely without prior clearance from either government. It was further understood that operations which might require a deeper penetration into Cambodia would be the object of special government agreement. However, the FANK never had the opportunity to make use of this agreement.

In the same spirit of cooperation, the Cambodian government also authorized South Vietnam to establish an operational base at Neak Luong, on the Mekong. This base even received a visit by President Nguyen Van Thieu in June 1970. During this visit, President Thieu met for the first time with H. E. Cheng Heng, then Cambodia's Chief of State, who was accompanied by General Lon Nol and Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak.

During the period of cross-border operations conducted by U.S./RVN forces, very little was known by the FANK General Staff except for the fact that these operations were designed to destroy NVA/VC sanctuaries and COSVN headquarters in Cambodia. To my knowledge, only General Lon Nol

had been informed to some extent of U.S. intentions concerning these operations. As to the FANK General Staff, the information it obtained was general and sketchy. It only knew that U.S. and RVN forces had been authorized to conduct a military operation across the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border during the period May-June 1970. The FANK had no detail whatsoever concerning the plans of this operation; it did not even know the size of forces committed. This lack of information extended equally to the results of these operations. No details of the results were ever communicated to the Cambodian government.

Nevertheless, the ties between the military authorities of Cambodia, South Vietnam, and the U.S. were becoming closer. These were strengthened by instituting regular Tripartite meetings, initially at MACV headquarters or the JGS in Saigon. Here FANK, RVNAF and MACV delegations met each month. Because of its lack of facilities and material resources, the FANK General Staff was not able to host tripartite meetings until 1972. The objectives of these tripartite meetings were to: (1) exchange information concerning South Vietnam, Cambodia and a part of Laos; (2) study and plan for current military operations which were to be conducted either by Khmer forces alone or by combined forces (FANK-RVNAF) with U.S. air support; (3) study and plan for logistic support, and; (4) study and plan for the training of Khmer military personnel.

In 1970, a liaison office was established by the RVNAF in Phnom Penh, following a parallel agreement to install a similar office by the FANK in Saigon.

As far as air support was concerned, cooperation was equally close. The Khmer Air Force, for example, installed an Air Support Coordination Detachment at Headquarters, U.S. 7th Air Force in Saigon, another at Tan Chau to accompany river convoys, and a detachment of observer-interpreters at Bien Hoa. In return, the Vietnam Air Force also installed an Air Support Coordination Detachment in Phnom Penh which dealt directly with the FANK General Staff in matters concerning air support. During this period of cooperation, the majority of daylight air support missions, especially reconnaissance support missions, were provided by the U.S. 7th Air Force and the VNAF, both of which also flew night support

missions that only they could provide. As to the Khmer Air Force, it was responsible for transport missions within Cambodia and close air support in medium-scale operations.



A Planning Session for OPERATION CHENLA II
Identified are: (1) Brig. Gen. So Sato; (2) Brig. Gen. Hou Hang Sin;
(3) Brig. Gen. Um Savuth; (4) Brig. Gen. It Sung



Brigadier General Fan Muong, Commander 1st Military Region,
Inspects a Squad in Kompong Cham Armed with the U.S. M-1 Carbine,
November 1970



FANK Recruits Move to the OPERATION CHENLA I Area on a Requisitioned Civilian Truck, Armed with the Communist Assault Rifle, AK-47; November 1970

CHAPTER V

The Politico/Military Situation in Cambodia, 1972-1974

The Political Situation

Before discussing the political situation itself, it is well to recall to mind the following dates and periods: 9 October 1970, date of the proclamation which transformed the Kingdom of Cambodia into the Khmer Republic; June to December 1971, the period during which the text of the constitution of the Khmer Republic was written; 10 March 1972, the date on which Mr. Cheng Heng, the Chief of State of Cambodia since the removal of Prince Sihanouk, resigned and transferred his powers to Marshal Lon Nol (the honor of "Marshal" was conferred on Lon Nol by the Khmer Parliament on 21 April 1971); 4 June 1972, the day on which Marshal Lon Nol was elected as the first President of the Khmer Republic after the text of the constitution had been adopted by a popular referendum on 30 April 1972.

The period from 1972 through 1974 saw both an intensification of military activities and internal political activities in Cambodia. If the efforts at fighting the war merited a certain amount of respect during those years, the internal political maneuvering diminished these accomplishments, while the enemy concerned himself with a struggle to the end on both the political and diplomatic fronts.

These internal political divergences grew not out of the proclamation of the Khmer Republic but rather during the time of the preparation and the putting into effect of the republican institutions themselves. With the promulgation of the constitution, the first signs of division were reflected in the political parties of which the three principal leaders of the events of 18 March 1970 (Lon Nol, Sirik Matak and In Tam) were also the founders. These three were never in agreement. Two principle

tendencies appeared from this discord. The first took as fundamental, the need for a respect for and strict application of the rules and principles announced in the new republican constitution. The second, while not opposed to these principles nevertheless insisted that certain of them were inadequate for a country at war and should be temporarily suspended, such as the prohibition against the participation of military personnel in elections, that is, the holding of political office, as came to pass in the election for President and for members of legislature. The second group also favored limitations on the formation of political parties during the period of hostilities. By means of maneuvering which was more or less shady and calculated, the second tendency gave way to the first and thus, there were three political parties which came into being during the course of these troubled years. Marshal Lon Nol created his Socio-Republican Party backed by his young brother Lon Non, a Lieutenant Colonel in the FANK at the time; Lieutenant General Sirik Matak, who no longer exercised military command in view of his frequent use on political and diplomatic missions, formed and directed his Republican Party; Brigadier General In Tam, having both military and civil functions (President of the National Assembly on 18 March 1970 and Commander of the 1st Military Region at Kompong Cham and later Prime Minister and member of the High Political Council) was also the Director of the Democrat Party, having as his own strong right arm Mr. Chau Sau who in his turn became leader of the party after In Tam retired from the post, provoked doubtless by a difference of opinion between In Tam and Chau Sau.

The years from 1972 on saw for these political parties an intensification of their individual political campaigns among which the mass of the population, the armed forces, the religious leaders, the civil servants and the young students. All of these, who had already suffered greatly from the war, and from its propaganda campaigns now had to express their support for one or the other of the political parties, or even to submit to intimidation or to illegal force. The violent politics and criticisms which the political parties attempted to hurl more or less openly at each other only contributed to widen the gap between the governing group and those who were being governed.

The waves produced by all of those ardent political campaigns shook the foundations of the FANK, already severely hurt by the enemy; and, if the foundation of the Armed Forces was not completely destroyed during this unhappy period of struggle for internal influence this was thanks to the conduct of the majority of the senior military leaders who placed their noble mission of "defense of the country in danger" above all personal and political ambition and above all other temptation. Unfortunately, and it must be admitted without shame, there were minorities, both civil and military, who let themselves be carried along more or less voluntarily and with enthusiasm by these currents of political evasion without actually realizing that by these acts they served only the interest of the enemy. Disruptions of the political, social, and economic order manifested themselves among the mass of students and against the regime of Lon Nol, certain of which manifestations lead to tragedy and death both among the demonstrators and on the side of the government. There were the tragic instances of the death of the Minister of National Education, Mr. Keo Sang Kim, and a well-known teacher, Mrs. Thach Chea. Certain of the student leaders were arrested, imprisoned and then brought before a military court. At the same time as these crises were being encountered there were other unhappy situations which intruded themselves into the arena of military command, such as the almost total dissatisfaction among the FANK because of the stoppage or slowing of the payment of salaries, the lack of sufficient rice, the totally unfair and partial way in which decorations and promotions were passed out to military personnel in combat.

In short, the seeds of democratization which had been thrown into the wind with such goodwill by the Khmer leaders returned for the Khmer Republic nothing but a poor harvest. The divisions among the republican leadership was a worse situation and the personal conflict between the leaders was irreconcilable at a time when the enemy had succeeded in uniting all of its forces into a single solid front and was marching toward the wide-swinging gates of the country.

Enemy Strategy

During the years 1972 to 1974, the strategy practiced by the VC/NVA enemy in Cambodia was marked by a movement toward "Khmerization" of the war, that is to say, the relief by Khmer communist forces, called *Khmer Rouge*, of VC/NVA units which had operated in Cambodia since 1970. This program to pass the military task to the Khmer Communist units was in line with decisions adopted at the Indochina Summit Conference, to which I have already referred. Within the space of two years the VC/NVA succeeded in forming the basis for a Khmer Communist armed force. There were created battalions, regiments, and even the beginning of establishment of divisions, these later observed shortly before the fall of the country. Within this Khmer Communist force, composed for the most part of Khmer, there existed nevertheless certain important Vietnamese Communist cadre, such as political counselors.

The process of deploying the Khmer Communist units took place progressively on the various fronts in coordination with what appeared to be a general movement by regular VC/NVA units from the interior of Cambodia toward Vietnam. A good number of the battles of war involved Khmer Communist units in action against the FANK while the VC/NVA limited their action to providing the support of their weapon units. Certain specialized VC/NVA units acted in concert with the Khmer Rouge in order carry out commando raids against important military objectives, as well as to carry out acts of terrorism, particularly in the interior centers of friendly control. An example was the commando raid carried out on the night of 7 October 1972 against the armored vehicle park situated in the north section of Phnom Penh. Two others were the big battle around Kompong Cham in September 1973 and the bombardment by rockets of the southeast suburbs of the capital, the latter causing several deaths and wounded among the civil population and the burning of more than 200 homes.

In short, the major thrust of the enemy strategy was achieved by two routes: on the political side there was the almost complete