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# Big Cambodian Force Slams Into Viet Cong

PHNOM PENH (UPI) — An eight-battalion Cambodian task force comprising the largest operation of the war met Viet Cong troops head-on Sunday in Tang Kauk City, 52 miles north of Phnom Penh.

Heavy fighting lasted all day Sunday.

The Cambodians had managed to work their way into the southern areas of the town supported by AC119 Shadow gunships firing miniguns.

Lead elements of the Cambodian force tried to enter Tang Kauk when it came under mortar, small arms, automatic weapons and B40 rocket fire.

The Cambodians had no supporting artillery and had to rely on strong aircraft support for the only indirect fire besides mortars.

Brig. Gen. Neak Sam, who commanded the entire operation, said five Cambodians were killed in the fighting and at least 25 were wounded. The Viet Cong losses were set at seven bodies counted on the ground and many others dead and wounded carried off, according to military officers.

As the Cambodians tried to enter the city, they were pinned down in open paddy area intermixed with a few houses by heavy Viet Cong fire which included 82mm mortars. The Cambodians trying to fight their way under a screen of gunfire soon began running short of ammunition and requested reinforcements.

The first Cambodian assault was blocked by the Viet Cong just inside the city limits of Tang Kauk. But the late afternoon assault following strong aircraft bombardments drove the Cambodians into the southern areas of the town and 700 yards short of the city center at nightfall.

A new aspect entered the Cambodian war as the first helicopters belonging to the Cambodian army were used to evacuate Cambodian casualties. Two of six U.S. "Huey" helicopters recently loaned by the United States flew in late Sunday afternoon on the medevac mission.

Lt. Col. Long Kim Am said the Viet Cong were dug in at the central pagoda fronting the Cambodian troops. Am said the Cambodians had been given permission to bomb the pagoda, despite the fact it was on sacred ground.

In Tang Kauk the Viet Cong had well-prepared positions with overhead cover consisting of sheet metal roofing, concrete blocks and mud for protection against airstrikes.