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Cambodian Drive Stalled; U.S. Air Strikes Reported

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SKOUN, Cambodia (AP) — Communist guerrillas lashed back Saturday at a Cambodian Army column as it was poised to resume the government's biggest offensive of the war.

Radio reports from forward elements of the Cambodian column said the task force was being attacked at a point roughly 10 miles north of Skoun, a small town some 50 miles north of the Cambodian capital. Reports gave no details of any casualties on either side.

Cambodian troops who are attempting to reopen Highway Six as far as the beleaguered city of Kompong Thom, about 40 miles to the north have been stalled for nearly one week outside township of Tang Kauk.

The government troops have been harassed at night by guer-

rillas who managed to halt the government advance by blowing up bridges behind the column.

Cambodian troops were reported Saturday to be ready to assault Tang Kauk, which was repeatedly hit by air strikes Friday. Under orders from the Cambodian high command, all reporters have been barred from entering the staging area for the renewed offensive.

Meanwhile, in Saigon American warplanes were reported Saturday launching raids in front of the Cambodian troops preparing to push through the North Vietnamese stronghold.

Officials in Saigon were watching closely what could shape up as one of the biggest battles of the war and said that once the Cambodians decided to launch their assault additional

air support would be available by the South Vietnamese and Cambodian air forces.

Officers at the rear headquarters in Skoun said it was not certain when the assault would begin. They said they had been told by the Cambodian high command that the attack would be preceded by massive U.S. air strikes considered necessary to dislodge an estimated 1,000 North Vietnamese troops reportedly dug in Tang Kauk.

Officials in Saigon monitoring the operation said they were not aware of any massive commitment by the U.S. Air Force, but added that a great deal depends on "exigencies."

The raids being carried out by the U.S. Air Force were at points along a 50-mile stretch of Highway Six leading to Kompong Thom.

Sources described the American air strikes as "interdiction missions," and said the highway was a well-known North Vietnamese supply line.

But the raids were seen by other observers as direct support for Cambodian troops since they were aimed at blocking North Vietnamese reinforcements and supplies moving down the highway.