

Marshal Lon Nol was personally very attached to this law; it was his masterpiece and he never informed himself of the difficulties and obstacles which presented themselves at every turn in our efforts to apply the law. His actions with respect to general mobilization were such as to create confusion both among the administrative authorities at various levels and between civil and military authorities. The confusion was less marked in those cases where the military chief exercised both civil administrative functions and his regular military responsibilities. On examination, it could be seen for example, that one person acting as chief of a group of 10 or a group of 50 houses would find himself the final authority in his group not only for matters of defense but for social well being, carrying out a census of refugees, collecting intelligence, feeding, and the distribution of food. And, to go further, this chief of group became himself a representative in his own sphere of various ministerial authorities in the central government. The decentralization and delegation of central powers to this extreme lead thus to the loss of authority on the part of the person responsible for general mobilization and it was unfortunately true that the chief of the Commissariat of General Mobilization did not know where to turn.

Day-by-day the events of war brought crisis after crisis to the social, economic, and political order and crisis after crisis in questions of defense, for which the responsible authorities sought always to place the blame on each other. It was not surprising that the post of Commissioner of General Mobilization changed hands frequently, passing from military to civilian incumbent and vice versa.

I remember how Marshal Lon Nol worked day and night for months to put his own ideas on general mobilization into the law. From my own knowledge I have the impression that Lon Nol's ideas were inspired by his own experiences while he was Royal Delegate for the province of Battambang during the "Crusade for Independence" of Prince Sihanouk in 1952, 1953. During this period he was the founder of the armed villagers of *chivapols* which I have mentioned earlier, in Chapter III.

It is recalled that the mission of these armed villagers was limited to the static defense of their village or to the participation in small combat actions in the rear areas or under the cover of regular units. Another source of inspiration for Lon Nol was doubtless the image he formed of the organization of the Chinese Communist communities and of their system of defense during his visit in the People's Republic of China. Finally, as soon as war itself came to Cambodia, the desires of Marshal Lon Nol were equally tempted by the mechanism of the pacification program which the South Vietnamese had organized in certain vital areas and called "strategic hamlets", these operating within the framework of a general regional defense plan. Another factor which should be mentioned as having had influence on Lon Nol's thinking was the doctrine of political warfare as developed by the Chinese on Taiwan, who were at that time considered expert in matters of anti-communist struggle. It seems to me therefore, that Marshal Lon Nol attempted to draw from all of these sources in the process of writing the law of general mobilization for Cambodia. All his efforts were devoted from the very first hours of the crisis to the establishment of the system. But unfortunately all of the problems, social attitudes, time required, the enemy, etc. all acted to prevent him from achieving his desire. Thus for this "General Mobilization" the chessboard was set out, the squares were drawn, certain pieces were set into place, but not all of them. The great handicap was that the game in all its aspects (art, rule, moves of the pieces) had to be played in the face of enemy action.

Condition of the FANK

We have seen in the preceding chapters how the morale of the FANK became more and more beat down by the defeats of such battles as CHENLA II on Route 6. The enthusiasm on 18 March 1970 and its spirit of determination to struggle was no longer held to the same degree by the time of 1972 to 1974. The successes which FANK had had in certain battles and the incentives and decorations of in-

dividuals and certain units were not sufficient to reverse the tide of ever-lowered morale.

The deployment of hastily formed FANK units, trained in South Vietnam or in Thailand and newly armed and equipped, the great increase in the level of U.S. military and economic aid had seemed to give some general comfort and encouragement if only for a short time, in a climate greatly agitated by the opening of numerous military fronts and also by the jolts to political, economic, financial and social order. The intensification of combat and the losses suffered by FANK affected the recruitment campaign to the point that it became more and more difficult to organize new units.

In all three services of the FANK, there were complaints about the lack of means, about the bankruptcy of efforts to improve social conditions, and about the injustice of the system itself. Whether true or not, there was no lack in either camp -- friendly or enemy -- of those willing to exploit these complaints. The shortages of food, particularly rice, and its improper distribution, the ever decreasing results from recruitment, the prolonged use of the same units in combat without relief, all gave yet another blow to the morale of the FANK.

If these internal conditions, mentioned briefly above, were instrumental in destroying the morale of the FANK, it would be unjust on my part not to mention the various events on the international scene which also influenced in one way or another the general morale of Khmer troops. The signing of the cease-fire agreement in Paris in January 1973 by the U.S. and Hanoi, followed shortly by a series of declarations, about both the unilateral cease-fire which Lon Nol ordered the FANK to carry out, and the often repeated peace initiatives of the Khmer Republic during 1973 and 1974, plus the rumors of a cessation of U.S.-aid, rumors which were embellished by less than favorable comment on the Lon Nol government, all worked to lower the morale of military personnel. These factors provoked in a certain poorly-informed part of the FANK a sort of hypnotic spell which locked them into an attitude of opportunistic, day-to-day wait and see, hoping always for a well-deserved peace.

In January 1973 the world opinion acclaimed the signing of the Paris Accords on a cease-fire in South Vietnam. And Cambodian opinion prepared itself for the shock of surprise which might create a disagreeable military consequence. Among the many measures which followed from the new policy of the United States, the cessation of U.S. air support in the Khmer theatre of operations provoked different reactions among different groups, both within the nation and among foreigners, the majority of which predicted the immediate collapse of the FANK and therefore the fall of the regime.

On 15 August 1973, the U.S. announced officially the end of all its aerial operations in support of FANK combat operations; thus all of these responsibilities fell on the shoulders of the Khmer Air Force (KAF). We remember that the KAF was almost completely destroyed by the VC/NVA commando attack on the January 21 - 22 1971. Following 1971 and until 1973 the KAF was progressively reconstituted with U.S. aid. The formation and training of personnel and the deployment of aircraft was carried out in record time. It should be said that at the end of two years the KAF possessed a full, though on small scale, infrastructure, capable of inspiring confidence in their colleagues in the ground forces. The challenge for the KAF after 15 August 1973, therefore, was to provide the very large number of missions required to support military operations and also be available and prepared to support our civil sectors as required. Speaking only of military support, the KAF achieved brilliant results in the support of operations at Kampot and Prey Veng, at Lovek and at Kompong Thom, during which the T-28s were able to achieve a rate of 80 sorties per day, excluding missions of reconnaissance, liaison, and support of other fronts with the C-47s. As for the helicopters and transport aircraft, they were able to successfully transport three brigades of infantry in order to save the situation at Kampot City, at a time when a part of the city was already occupied by communist forces. In addition to this direct support of troops in combat both day and night, the KAF carried out a large number of transport missions for the benefit of the civil sector.

From the 15th of August 1973 forward, both foreign and Khmer observers witnessed the growing war between the Khmer themselves, that is between the FANK of the Khmer Republic and the forces of the Khmer Communists. The land, the high seas, the rivers and lakes, the skies clear and cloudy were all criss-crossed by ships, vehicles, and aircraft flying the emblem of the Republic as they went in search of the enemy prey. It was also the date when the FANK began to operate independently of all assistance from foreign forces and it was for that reason that the date of 15 August was chosen as Armed Forces Day for the FANK, an occasion which the Khmer Republic celebrated for the first and last time on 15 August 1974 before the esplanade of the sacred Stoupa of the Great Teacher Buddha Sakhyamoui.²

²The Stoupa Sakhyamoui is located in Phnom Penh, in a large open square in front of the railroad station. It is considered by the Khmer to contain a relic of Buddha.



Marshal Lon Nol, President of the Khmer Republic, April 1972

Major Military Operations, 1972 through 1974

The three years of 1972 through 1974 were a period during which combat activity was more or less general throughout those portions of Cambodia which remained under friendly control at the end of 1970. (*Map 8*) It was also a period during which the overall initiative passed from the FANK to the VC/NVA and then to the Khmer Communist forces. As the initiative passed more and more firmly to the communist side, the FANK was concerned more and more with the defense of vital lines of communication, the population centers, and, finally and especially the capital of Phnom Penh itself. During this period the war became increasingly conventional in nature, with both sides learning to use increasingly sophisticated materiel and to deploy larger and more cohesive combat units, to the point that by the end of 1974 there were both FANK and Khmer Communist divisions in the field. The operations I have chosen to discuss in this chapter demonstrate these general trends. Once more I pay tribute to the valor and patriotism of the FANK as a whole. Despite all of the losses and difficulties, despite the ever-tightening circle, the forces of the Khmer Republic remained in the field to the end.

Following the high levels of combat activity that characterized the period of CHENLA II, the first three months of 1972 saw a decided lull in activity, as the VC/NVA carried out logistic activities in preparation for combat in SVN. During this three-month period, the FANK participated in operation PREK TA and ANGKOR CHEY. (*Map 14*) In eastern Kompong Cham Province, RVNAF withdrawal of its OPERATION TOAN THANG units prompted the FANK to withdraw the 22d Brigade from Krek on 10 January 1972, and redeploy it to the vicinity of Neak

Luong. These withdrawals left this part of the province in enemy hands, and it was never again reoccupied by the FANK. Operation PREK TA, a combined FANK/ARVN operation involving 11 battalions, was launched on 10 January south of Route 1, between the Mekong and the RVN border. In Siem Reap Province, OPERATION ANGKOR CHEY was launched on 29 January with the objective of encircling the Ankor Wat/Angkor Thom temple complex and ruins, and interdicting the flow of enemy supplies into the Angkor area. The enemy had been able to create a sort of sanctuary there because of our hesitation to risk damaging these national treasures. Initially the operation was marked by small-scale skirmishes along Route 6, east and west of Siem Reap. On 21 February FANK units ran into stiff resistance as they tried to route the enemy from fortified positions along the southern periphery of the temple complex.

*Operations in Military Regions 1 and 2,
and Against Phnom Penh, March-June 1972*

The three-month lull was broken on 20 March 1972 when the enemy directed attacks against Prey Veng City and Neak Luong. (Map 15) Friendly positions in and near Prey Veng City were subjected to heavy 60-mm, 82-mm mortar, 75-mm recoilless, and 120-mm rocket fire, followed by ground actions further south along Route 15 and approximately 20 km west of Prey Veng City. An allied POL and ammunition storage depot at Neak Luong was also destroyed by 122-mm rocket fire. Cumulative friendly casualties were 18 killed, 60 wounded, and ten missing, while enemy losses were 33 killed.

ARVN's operation TOAN THANG VIII, which began on 9 March north of Svay Rieng City, ended on 29 March with significant results. Enemy losses were reported as 764 killed (583 by air), 29 captured; 1,117 individual weapons and 37 crew served weapons captured. Additionally 871 tons rice, 49 tons salt, 73,000 meters of communication wire and 24,000 litres of gasoline were captured and other miscellaneous items destroyed. Friendly losses were nine killed and 67 wounded.

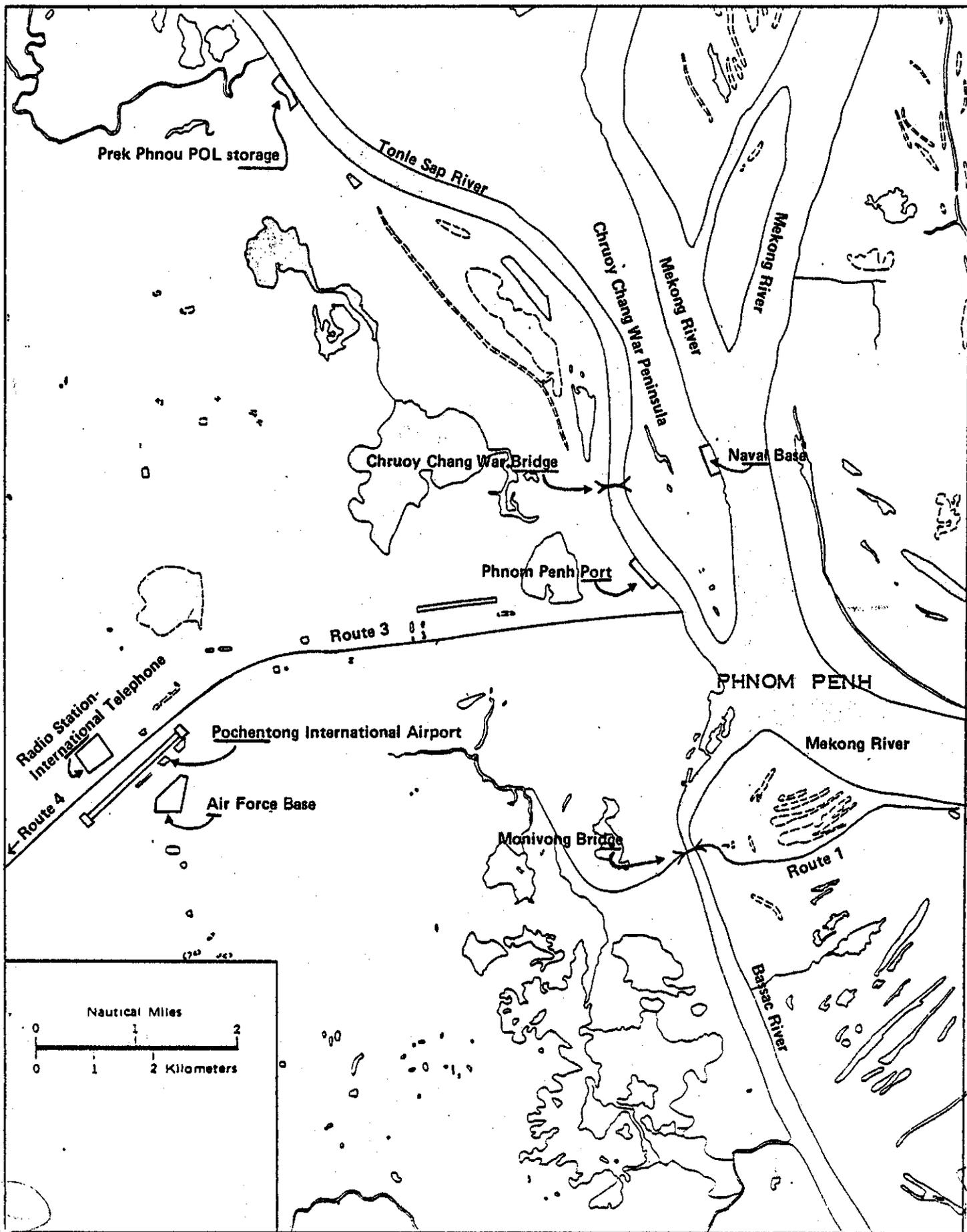
Combat action in Military Region 2 stepped up significantly on 23 March, following several months of only small scale enemy harassments. ARVN's 93d Ranger Battalion and 12th Armored Regiment were involved in several engagements in the vicinity of Kompong Trach, including at least three enemy ground assaults, while receiving over 500 rounds of mixed rocket and mortar fire from 23 to 31 March.

At the same time as the attacks at Prey Veng, the enemy launched what was to that date (March 20) its heaviest rocket and mortar attack against Phnom Penh. (*Map 16*) Seven separate areas within the city's west and northwest sector, as well as positions near Pochenton Airfield, received a total of about 200 rounds of 122-mm rocket fire and 75-mm recoilless rifle fire. The shellings, accompanied by a ground attack against the government's radio transmitting facility southwest of the city, left 102 friendly killed (mostly civilians), 208 wounded, and 400 families homeless; additionally, one light aircraft and more than 200 wooden homes were destroyed, while four small aircraft and the radio station were damaged. In response to the attack on Phnom Penh, several small-scale (two-four battalion) clearing operations were immediately launched by FANK on the capital's outer perimeter. Terrorist incidents also increased in the capital area. Grenade attacks against a military dependents' housing area on the 26th and against a bus carrying military personnel in Phnom Penh on the 28th left 11 persons dead and 66 others wounded.

Following the attacks of 21 March, the enemy conducted a series of terrorist and sabotage actions, mostly targeted against Cambodian shipping. On 23 March, a cargo vessel was sunk and another damaged on the Mekong near the Chruoy Chang War Naval Base. A few days later, two POL barges moored in the same area were damaged by floating mines. On the 24th, a span of the Chruoy Chang War Bridge was damaged when a vehicle containing an estimated 200 kilos of explosives was detonated at mid-point of the structure, killing four and wounding seven persons. The bridge was repaired with Bailey bridging and opened to traffic by the 27th.

About one month later, on 18-19 April, the enemy renewed attacks along Route 1 east of the Mekong. Within three days, a total of 22 government positions along the highway had been abandoned, leaving only

Map 16 - Points of Military Interest in Phnom Penh



Neak Luong, Svay Rieng and Bavet Village (near the border) in friendly hands. In response to the attacks, Neak Luong and Svay Rieng were reinforced and a route-clearing operation was launched toward Kompong Trabek. However, FANK forces had made little headway in reopening the roadway by the end of April. Five FANK battalions were withdrawn from training in the RVN to augment forces which were stalled about 6 km west of Kompong Trabek. Five FANK battalions previously stationed along Route 1 were unlocated. In a related activity, Prey Veng City received 17 separate rocket, mortar and recoilless rifle fire attacks during the month; casualties were light and no significant damage reported. The city was isolated on 7 April by an estimated two-battalion enemy force located on Route 15 midway between Banam and Prey Veng City. Attempts to reopen the roadway were halted when the 23d Brigade (originally from Pursat) was redeployed to Neak Luong for use along Route 1. Two battalions of the 15th Brigade were subsequently assigned to Prey Veng City to augment the garrison there in anticipation of increased enemy pressure. In Military Region 2, FANK/RVNAF forces continued to engage what were probably elements of the 1st NVA Division in the vicinity of Kompong Trach. The town was surrounded by the enemy in mid-April, creating a serious situation which was eased only after RVNAF reinforcements from Ha Tien arrived on 24 April.

On 6 May, the Phnom Penh area received its second major attack by fire in less than two months. This time the city, Pochenton airfield, and Chruoy Chang War Naval Base received attacks by rocket, mortar, and recoilless rifle fire, killing 28 persons and wounding 96 others (2/3 civilians). An aircraft was destroyed and four other planes and several houses were damaged. Enemy sapper raids, estimated at battalion strength, were conducted in the city's southern environs against the Monivong Bridge, electric power station, and the Caltex storage facility. The attackers were repulsed after causing only light damage. The city was lightly shelled again on 9, 10, and 11 May. Beginning 26 May, Svay Rieng City was subjected to enemy attacks by fire and small-scale ground assaults, with no major casualties or damage reported. This increased action was probably designed to keep FANK confined to the city's defense, thereby facilitating a new logistic push by the enemy in southeast

Cambodia. ARVN Ranger units, supported by artillery and tactical air strikes, reported killing 180 enemy southwest of Kompong Trabek on 31 May, while suffering 6 killed and 33 wounded. In Military Region 2, enemy forces further expanded their control over key terrain in southern Kampot and Takeo Provinces. Following the capture of Kompong Trach on 30 April, the enemy advanced north on Route 16, forcing FANK to abandon five outposts and burning several towns in the wake of their attacks. RVNAF units continued to conduct cross-border operations in the area east of Kompong Trach in an effort to curb the flow of enemy supplies and reinforcements into the delta region of RVN.

The month of June 1972 was marked by an attack by fire on the Phnom Penh area—the third since March—and the ambush of two FANK battalions. Phnom Penh was shelled by 18 rounds of 122-mm rocket fire, impacting in the vicinity of the water works, railroad station, Ministry of National Defense and Pochentong airbase. Positions at Takhmau, 10 km south of Phnom Penh, received 100 rounds of 75-mm RR fire, followed by enemy ground attacks in the vicinity. Pochentong airfield was again hit on 11 June, this time by three 122-mm rockets, with no damage or casualties reported. Also three 107-mm rockets were fired from a Volkswagen Microbus against the Ministry of National Defense building on 5 June. The situation near Svay Rieng eased substantially during the month as enemy forces directed efforts towards RVN. Southeast of Neak Luong, two battalions of the 48th Khmer Krom Brigade were ambushed on 25 June in the most significant action along Route 1 since its closure on 18-19 April. Only 13 soldiers returned to friendly lines while approximately 600 others were officially unaccounted for. A joint ARVN/FANK operation to retake Route 1, and scheduled to be launched on 24-25 June, was subsequently delayed until 4 July.

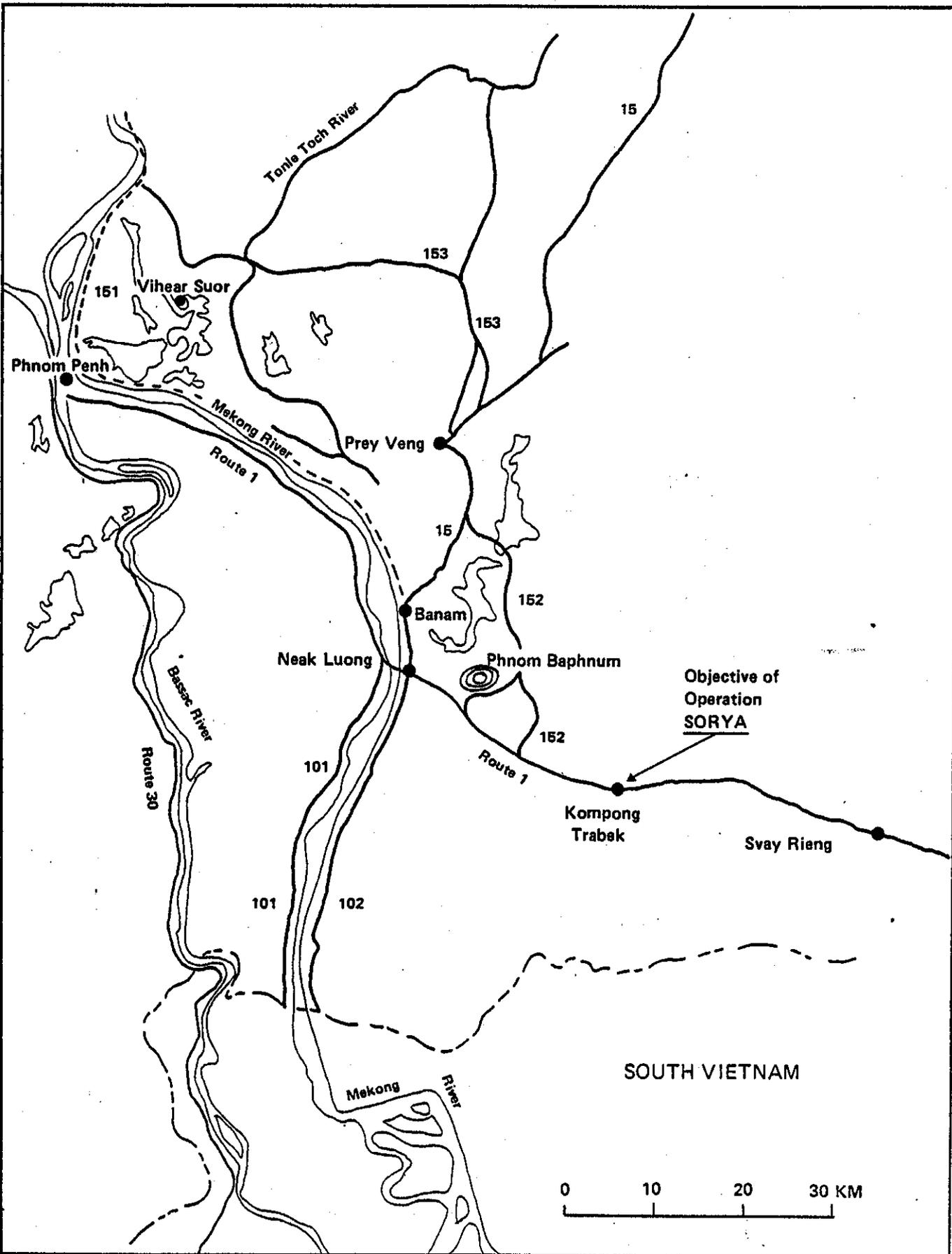
*FANK Efforts to Keep Lines of Communications Open,
July-December 1972*

During the first few days of July 1972, active military operations slowed markedly for the inauguration activities of President Lon Nol, and no enemy actions marred the 3-day holiday period. On 4 July, FANK.

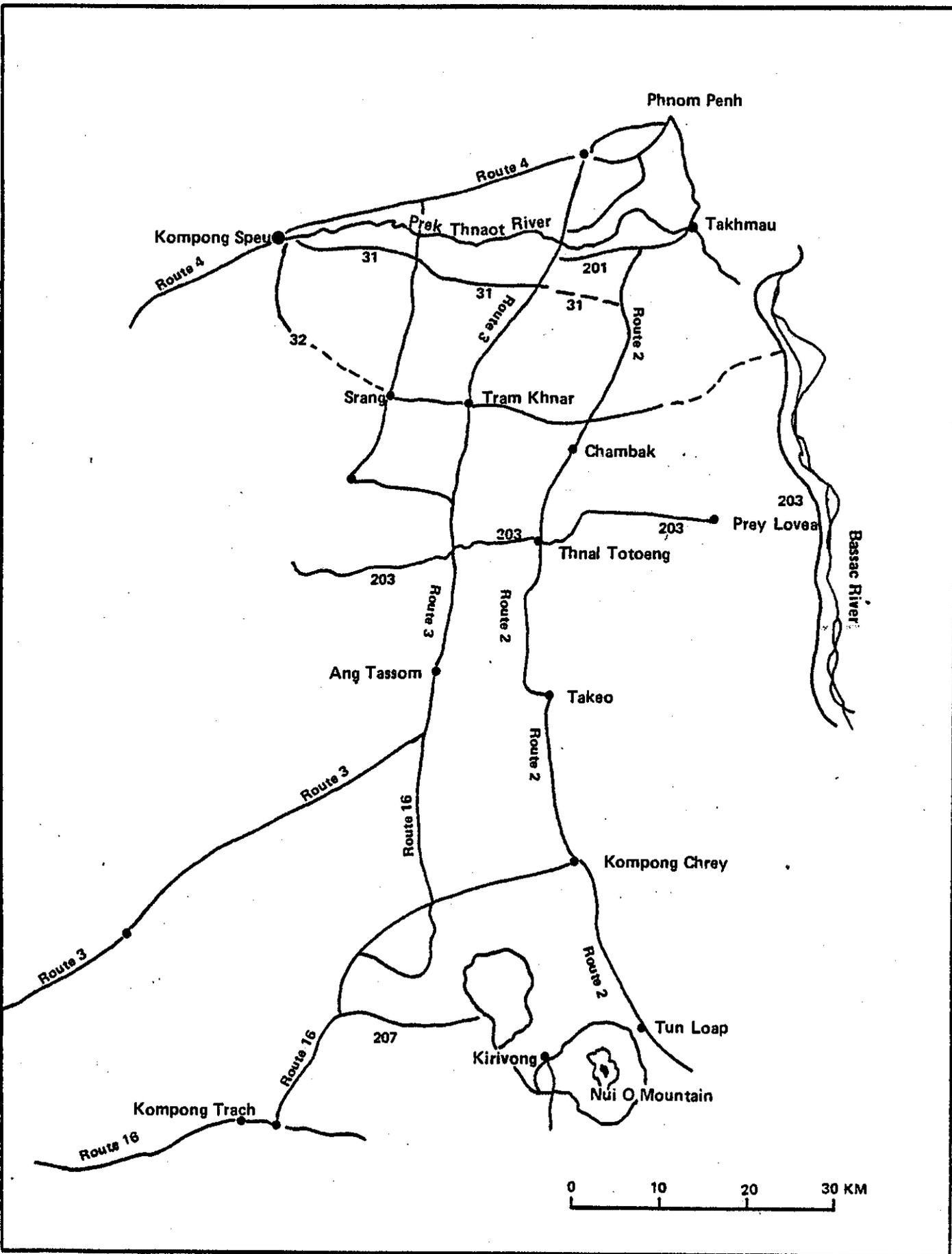
launched OPERATION SORYA, a combined operation with ARVN, to seize Kompong Trabek; this was accomplished on 24 July. (Map 17) Five battalions of the 11th FANK Brigade Group and three battalions of the FANK 66th Brigade were left to hold FANK positions on Route 1, pending phase II of OPERATION SORYA, planned for late August. In Military Region 2, the enemy encircled Ang Tassom. (Map 18) Ang Tassom was relieved on 11 July while funeral services were being held at Phnom Penh for Brigadier General Kong Chhaith, Takeo Province Governor, killed while leading the earlier relief efforts. In Military Region 3, Khmer Communist activities were instrumental in closing Route 5 to rice convoy traffic for about two weeks.

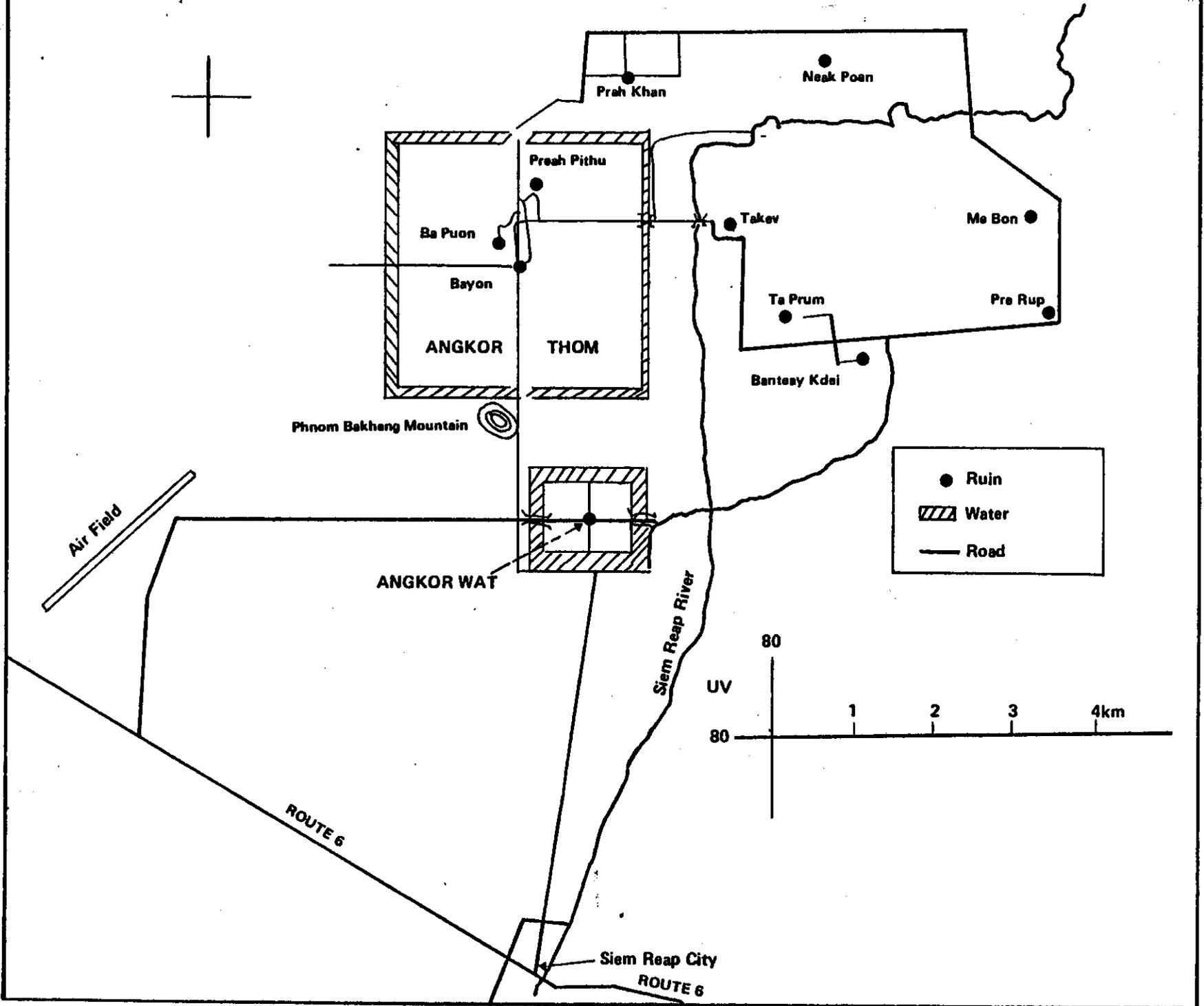
The enemy reacted to FANK/ARVN successes at Kompong Trabek by attacking friendly positions on Route 1 on 6 August. These attacks were supported by enemy armor and left him in control of a 7-km section of Route 1, isolating five battalions of the FANK 11th Brigade Group west of Kompong Trabek. This was the first use of enemy armor in the Cambodia conflict. An NVA prisoner captured at Kompong Trabek stated that the tanks came from the Chup Plantation and were to return there after completing their mission in the Route 1 area. As of 24 August, a total of 31 armored vehicles had been destroyed or damaged. OPERATION SORYA II was launched on 11 August with the objective of clearing the road and relieving the five surrounded FANK battalions. After 10 days of artillery and air strikes on enemy strongholds along the highway, allied forces (ARVN from Neak Luong and RVN) succeeded in linking up with 11th Brigade Group elements. A FANK garrison was established at Kompong Trabek. However, there was no immediate plan to push eastward toward Svay Rieng. South Vietnamese forces assumed positions south of Route 1 along the RVN-Cambodia border, and Route 15 between Neak Luong and Prey Veng City was reopened by government forces on 13 August. A FANK helicopter carrying refugees was shot down on the 8th by a SA-7 missile, killing 14 people. In Siem Riep, FANK OPERATION ANGKOR CHEY was dealt a serious blow when elements of the 203d VC/KC Regiment recaptured Phnom Bakheng mountain a key terrain feature which had been in FANK hands since May 19 (Map 19) Enemy control of this high ground left the Siem Reap airfield exposed to

Map 17 – Objective Area, OPERATION SORYA, July – August 1972



Map 18 – Area of Operation Along Route 2, July – December 1972





harassing fire and denied to friendly air operations. As a result, the FANK were forced to use the Tonle Sap Lake and the new airfield south of Siem Reap for supply deliveries.

After FANK's hard-won battle to relieve the garrison at Kompong Trabek in August, many of the FANK general reserve forces returned to Phnom Penh. The enemy then attacked Kompong Trabek in strength on 8 September, forcing three FANK battalions to evacuate to Neak Luong, with two 105-mm artillery pieces reported destroyed and two more captured. Three days later, the enemy attacked FANK territorial units on Phnom Baphnum, forcing a withdrawal from this important high ground north of Route 1. FANK reinforced with elements of Colonel Lon Non's 3d Brigade Group from Phnom Penh and after limited progress by the 3d Brigade Group, the enemy counterattacked in force on 16 September, using a riot control agent to disorganize the FANK forces. FANK managed to hold the southwest corner of the hill until 26 September, when it launched its own counterattack. The attack, relying on a frontal assault, bogged down quickly and FANK prepared for a new offensive after a realignment of troops. In Military Region 3, Route 5 remained closed during September despite the efforts of a FANK 17-battalion relief force. This interruption in the rice supply provoked a "rice crisis" in the capital and a two-day period (7 - 8 September) of rice looting and demonstrations in which FANK soldiers were involved. A number of stores were broken into and rice was taken or bought at low prices. The government acted decisively to reestablish order; leaves and passes for FANK personnel were cancelled; mixed patrols of FANK soldiers and MP's circulated in the city; announcements of extraordinary measures to solve the rice shortage were made. This was followed by the first rice shipments to Phnom Penh by air, and these stabilized the situation within 48 hours; Phnom Penh was essentially calm after 12 September. In the capital area, the Prek Phnou POL storage facility received 30 rounds of mixed 82-mm and 75-mm fire on 31 August. At the same time, enemy mortar and ground attacks against surprised FANK personnel guarding two brigades near Prek Phnou left 25 killed, 19 wounded and 6 missing. On 4 August, the cargo vessel *PACLOG DESPATCH* was sunk while at anchor in the Phnom Penh port. On 27 September,

unknown terrorists attempted assassination of Mr. Enders, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires; approximately 15 kilos of plastic were exploded near his car as he exited Independence Circle on the way to the U.S. Embassy. Mr. Enders escaped unharmed, although his car was destroyed by the explosion and subsequent fire. A security outrider and a passing cyclist were killed.

On 7 October, an enemy sapper force of about 100 infiltrated into the northern part of Phnom Penh and attacked the Chruoy Chang War Bridge and the M-113 APC parking area near the west end of the same bridge. A large cut was blown in the bridge, sufficient to prevent its use for the time being, and a total of seven M-113 APCs were destroyed. The FANK reaction force killed 83 of the attacking force and prevented the sappers from carrying out what appeared to be intended attacks on the Prek Phnou POL facility and the main municipal electrical power plant on Chruoy Chang War Peninsula. Again on 30 October, the enemy launched a series of attacks by fire against sensitive installations in the capital area. Ammunition in a storage facility near Pochentong airfield was destroyed, and the Komboul radio station was heavily damaged by enemy indirect fire. In Military Region 2, elements of the 1st NVA Division put heavy pressure on FANK positions south of Takeo, systematically overrunning or forcing evacuation of Kirivong, Tun Loap, Nui O Mountain, Kompong Chrey, Lovea, and Koh Andet. ARVN initiated cross-border operations on 11 October to break up what they viewed as a prelude to an important infiltration of troops and supplies, but the intervention was too late to save the FANK positions. The commander of the 15th Brigade Group, which had been operating in the area, was seriously wounded and the Brigade Group ceased to exist as an effective unit. FANK presence returned to the area following successful ARVN operations. In Military Region 3, despite strenuous efforts by the FANK, a five-km section of Route 5 remained in enemy hands during October, denying it to the movement of rice into the capital.

During November, FANK gradually overcame enemy resistance on Route 5 and a total of five convoys were able to make the trip (Battambang-Phnom Penh) without incident. At Takeo, strong enemy pressure built up against the town early in the month; several positions on the outer

defense belt fell between 5 and 8 November, thereby isolating Ang Tassom on Route 3 and Prey Sandek on Route 2. Nightly attacks by fire and probes against the town caused significant casualties among the civilian population. USAF units responded with daily air support as well as aerial resupply of ammunition. Beginning 16 November, the pressure on the town fell off gradually. Elements of three FANK battalions were helilifted into Takeo on KAF UH1s at intervals during the month and, on 30 November, FANK launched the first phase of an operation to clear the enemy from central Route 2.

During December, FANK units were able to open Route 4 after the enemy had closed it at the end of October. On Route 2, FANK units relieved the garrison at Prey Sandek on 4 December, breaking a six-week isolation. FANK engineers worked for several weeks to complete the repairs to Route 2, needed after the fighting on the road in October and November, and finished the task on 16 December. Repairs were also made on the roads from Takeo to Ang Tassom and to Prey Sandek, opening these villages to convoy resupply for the first time since October. FANK and ARVN forces then turned their attention to the last remaining section of Route 2 still under enemy control, the section from Prey Sandek to Tun Loap. In combined operations launched 21 December with an ARVN regiment, three Ranger battalions, armored cavalry support, and three FANK battalions and the Parachute brigade, the road was cleared by 23 December. Both FANK and ARVN Engineers began bridge reconstruction and road repair that day, while combat forces moved westward on 29 December to retake Kirivong. However, the major enemy offensive effort in December was directed against Kompong Thom, in Military Region 4, where an estimated 4,000-7,000 mixed KC and NVA troops attacked on 7 December. The 3,000-man FANK garrison suffered heavy losses in the first two days of fighting, giving up four defensive positions to the west and southwest of town, with over 400 listed as missing. USAF tactical air strikes helped to slow the offensive as FANK readjusted its defensive perimeter. FANK and USAF also reacted with aerial resupply of vitally needed ammunition. Enemy effort then shifted to light ground probes and

nightly mortar attacks. FANK Hq began to reinforce Kompong Thom on 19 December with 12th Brigade troops from Siem Reap. 77th Brigade troops from Phnom Penh were staged out of Kompong Chhnang in a helicopter shuttle. The enemy made another drive on 23-24 December but the attack was driven off by a strong defense with major assistance from USAF strikes. On 27 December, FANK shifted to the counterattack, expanding the Kompong Thom perimeter to the west and southwest and permitting the farmers to harvest rice along Route 6. At the end of the month, enemy pressure continued at a reduced level. On the Mekong, most significant was the increase of frogman activity in Phnom Penh Port, resulting in the sinking of the cargo ship *Bright Star* on 7 December (with all cargo still on board) and a POL barge on 15 December. The sinking of the ship resulted in the commander of the Khmer Navy being charged with responsibility for port security. The enemy harassed two of three scheduled northbound Mekong River convoys during December.

The Enemy Dry-Season Offensive, January-July 1973

We had hoped that the cease-fire in South Vietnam would also bring peace to Cambodia, that the enemy would respect the FANK unilateral suspension of offensive operations order by Marshal Lon Nol, effective 29 January 1973. But this was not to be. While the VC/NVA activities in January were clearly directed toward the RVN, Khmer Communist units supported the VC/NVA with initiatives throughout Cambodia in January. The most continuous enemy pressure was exerted on Kompong Thom, but without success. The KC and VC/NVA initially achieved gains on Route 1 and along the Mekong south of Neak Luong. Poor performance by FANK territorial units along the Mekong was compensated for somewhat by rapid and effective operations by two brigades of the 2d Division and the Khmer Navy, where working together, they quickly regained the lost position. FANK kept all major LOCs open during the month except for a two-day period during which one Mekong convoy was delayed. A major FANK operation was the relief of the battalion-size outpost at Romeas, southwest of Kompong Chhnang. An unidentified enemy force estimated at 2-3 battalions, encircled the battalion outpost on 6 January. Casualties

mounted steadily inside the camp from probes and shellings until 13 January when FANK committed some eleven battalions to the relief of the outpost. Two columns proceeding from Kompong Chhnang and Sala Lek Pram made slow progress against moderate resistance. Realizing relief would not arrive in time, FANK field commanders switched to an airmobile assault on 16 January. The 210 man force was intercepted and dispersed by the enemy prior to linkup with the camp. FANK then committed another 750 men by helicopter on 19 and 21 January, with the combined group reaching Romeas on 23 January. USAF tactical strikes and aerial delivery of ammunition played a vital role in the defense and linkup operation.

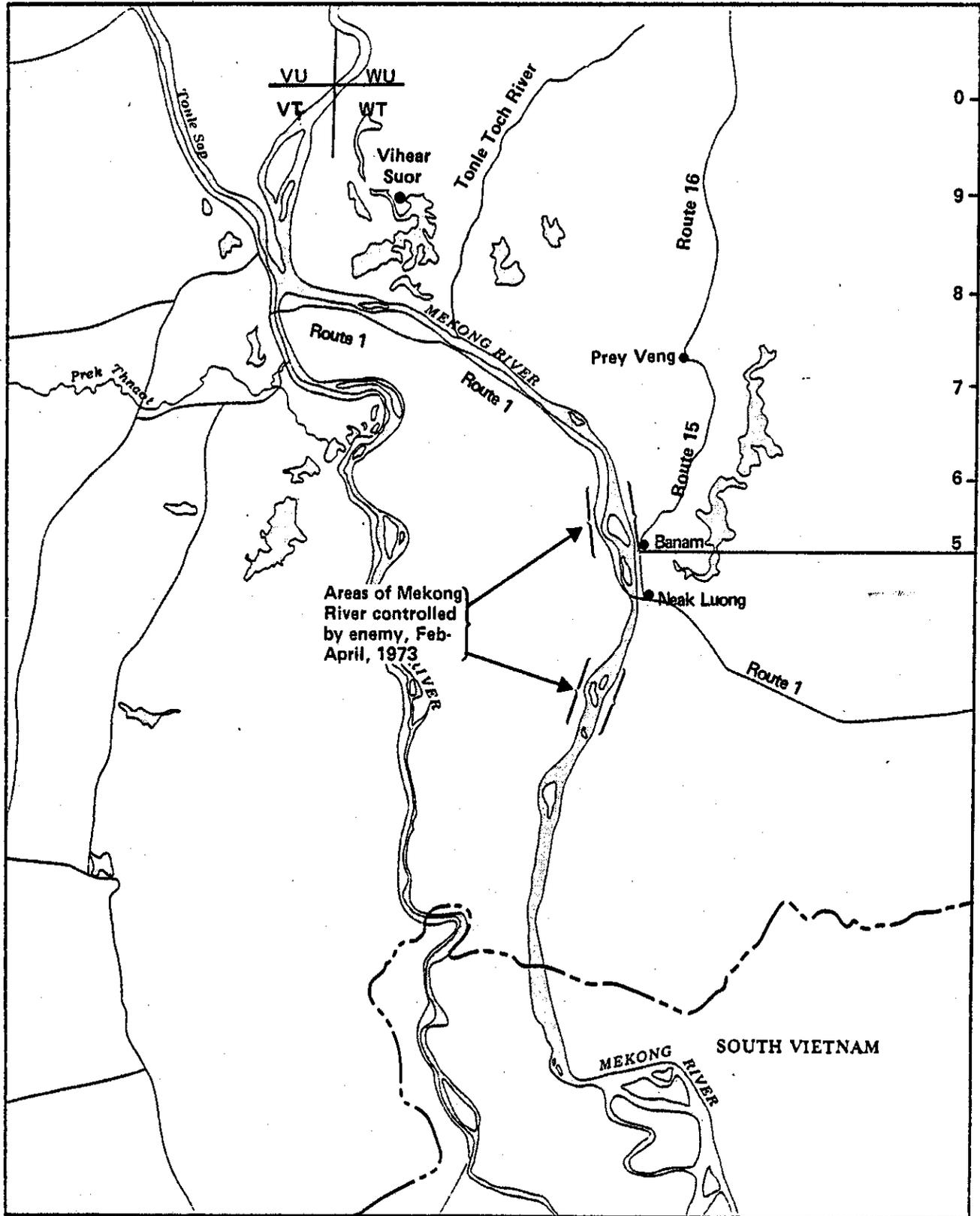
By early February, it was clear that the KC had no intention of accepting Lon Nol's call for a cease-fire. During February, KC units launched a major offensive along the Mekong and made secondary efforts on Routes 2 and 3 and at Kompong Thom. These initiatives appeared to be aimed at exploiting the unilateral suspension of offensive actions announced by President Lon Nol and the associated decrease in U.S. air operations in the Khmer Republic following 29 January. FANK reacted with effective U.S. air support, and contained the major enemy efforts. Active U.S. air support permitted the passage of two major convoys despite the presence of well over two KC regiments actively employed by the enemy on both banks of the Mekong. The major enemy effort of the month began 6 February with attacks on FANK positions in the Neak Luong-Banam-Prey Veng corridor. An early thrust made against Route 15 between Prey Veng and Banam was repulsed by units under control of the Prey Veng commander. The enemy then shifted his efforts southward between Banam and Neak Luong, seizing Banam itself on 10 February and cutting Route 15. FANK's counterattack was unproductive. Four battalions moved up Route 15 and halted in place two km outside Banam. Two battalions from the 78th Brigade, committed by MNK craft to the west and north of Banam, suffered heavy casualties from enemy fire. These battalions refused further combat and were returned to Phnom Penh. The 78th Brigade, to which these battalions belonged, was a rapidly assembled collection of companies, battalions and fillers, brought together for the newly created 2d Division. Enemy pressure against FANK positions along the east bank of the Mekong remained constant during the month.

As a result of this pressure a 13-km section of the river bank below Neak Luong was not under FANK control by the end of the month. Above Neak Luong, the river bank between parallels 50 and 56 remained under enemy control for the last three weeks of the month. (Map 20) Banam was retaken on 27 February by a volunteer force from the 43d Brigade, and the east bank was cleared by FANK on 29 February. USAF tactical sorties continued at a high level during February as a special USAF operation was mounted to break the enemy siege of Kompong Thom and to provide close air support for ground operations in the Route 15 and Routes 2 and 3 areas. Limited U.S. strategic air was used on pre-selected targets, generally in the Chup-Tapano Plantation area during one 24-hour period.

In March, the general military situation reached a critical stage for the FANK.¹ Enemy efforts continued at a high level throughout the country, directed primarily at the Takeo area and the Mekong-Route 1 corridor. Early in the month Prey Sandek, 9 km south of Takeo, was isolated. On 9-10 March, a two-company position east of Takeo was overrun, as were two positions on Route 2 north of Chambak. On 12 March, both Prey Sandek and Chambak were lost, and the three battalions at Chambak were dispersed. On 13 March, the 45th Brigade of the 7th Division was committed to attack east from Tram Khnar to retake Chambak and Samroang Yong. This mission was shared by elements of the 3d Division moving south along Route 2 from Phnom Penh. The 45th Brigade was stopped 6 km west of its objective with heavy casualties. On 16 March, Brigadier General Un Kauv, 7th Division commander took command of the operation and reinforced the 45th Brigade with the remaining elements of his division. His arrival, and four U.S. B-52 strikes, resulted in rapid progress against decreasing enemy resistance. The 7th Division reached Chambak on 18 March, followed by the 3d Division on 20 March, and the road was opened to Takeo on 23 March. On 31 March, the enemy renewed his offensive, this time against the 7th Division positions.

¹The situation was further complicated by an attempt on the life of President Lon Nol, carried out by a former Khmer pilot on 17 March, when he appropriated a T-28 and dropped two bombs near the Presidential Palace.

Map 20 - Areas of the Mekong Controlled by the Enemy, February - April 1973



CI-CB-13

The enemy's action, primarily attacks by fire plus a costly ambush, led to the withdrawal of the 7th Division forces to Chambak; substantial materiel losses were incurred, including five 105-mm howitzers.² In spite of significant FANK reinforcements north of Takeo, air drops to isolated units and substantial U.S. air support, the enemy retained control of Route 2 south of Takeo and much of Route 2 to the north of Takeo City.

In the Mekong-Route 1 corridor, meanwhile, after safe passage of a Mekong convoy on 29 March, the enemy launched heavy attacks on both sides of the river, overrunning several FANK territorial company positions and controlling some 25 km of the east bank of the Mekong. On the west bank of the Mekong, the enemy was also successful in overrunning six FANK positions along Route 1, leaving him in control of some 25 km of Route 1 north of Neak Luong. On 31 March, Brigadier General Dien Del, Commander of the 2d FANK Division was given overall responsibility for the clearing of Route 1.

During April, the enemy continued the offensive actions in southern Cambodia, begun in March, making his greatest sustained effort to take complete control of the Mekong and capture Takeo. Enemy forces approached to within artillery and mortar range of Phnom Penh, where rationing of gasoline and electricity impressed many with the gravity of the situation. Several foreign embassies evacuated non-essential personnel and the U.S. Embassy evacuated its dependents. After initial FANK success in deploying troops along the Mekong corridor in early April, enemy forces again cut Route 1 and had occupied substantial portions of both banks of the Mekong at month's end. 3d Division elements were driven back north on Route 2 to positions north of Siem Reap/Kandal, some 10 km from the outskirts of Phnom Penh. After Siem Reap was retaken, it was inexplicably abandoned by these same elements under no enemy pressure, thus opening the southern flank of the capital's defense. The high command ordered the town retaken and after a delay of two days, Siem Reap was occupied, once again with no resistance. Takeo continued to hold against heavy enemy attacks by fire and ground pressure, thanks to a very heavy application of air power, re-

²The 7th Division was pulled off line on 1 April and replaced in Chambak by the 37th Brigade. On 2 April, the 37th Brigade was routed and Chambak fell, leaving an 11 km stretch of road between Chambak and Thnal Totung under enemy control.

inforcement by several battalions, and U.S. aerial resupply of ammunition. At southern Kampot Province, the sea resort of Kep fell on 16 April. At the beginning of April, FANK controlled only some 30 percent of the Mekong River bank. The last April convoy was delayed 12 days as FANK reinforced with elements of more than two brigades and then conducted clearing operations on the east and west banks. As the security situation improved in the Cambodian portions of the Mekong, it deteriorated in South Vietnam in the vicinity of Tan Chau. Because of heavy harassment in RVN, the convoy was only able to penetrate the border in two sections on successive days. The final section was only able to close Phnom Penh on 15 April. FANK maintained security of the Mekong through the passage of the next convoy on 24 April which again suffered heavy enemy attacks in the vicinity of the SVN border. Towards the end of the month, FANK gave up important portions on the east bank and Route 1 was closed again north of Neak Luong. In spite of a declining security situation on the Mekong, the Khmer Navy was able to transit at night one tug pulling an important ammunition barge. Enemy efforts against Mekong shipping during April resulted in the loss of one POL and one munitions barge, two cargo ships, and the damage of eight ships. The crew of one POL ship refused to sail and had to be replaced. Commodore Vong Sarendy, Commander Khmer Navy, was formally designated commander of the Mekong Special Zone.

The enemy offensive continued into May, but slowed at month's end, due in part to high levels of U.S. air support. On the Mekong, the enemy continued to control portions of both banks. Six merchant convoys (three each way) received 56 major hits, causing the loss of one ship.

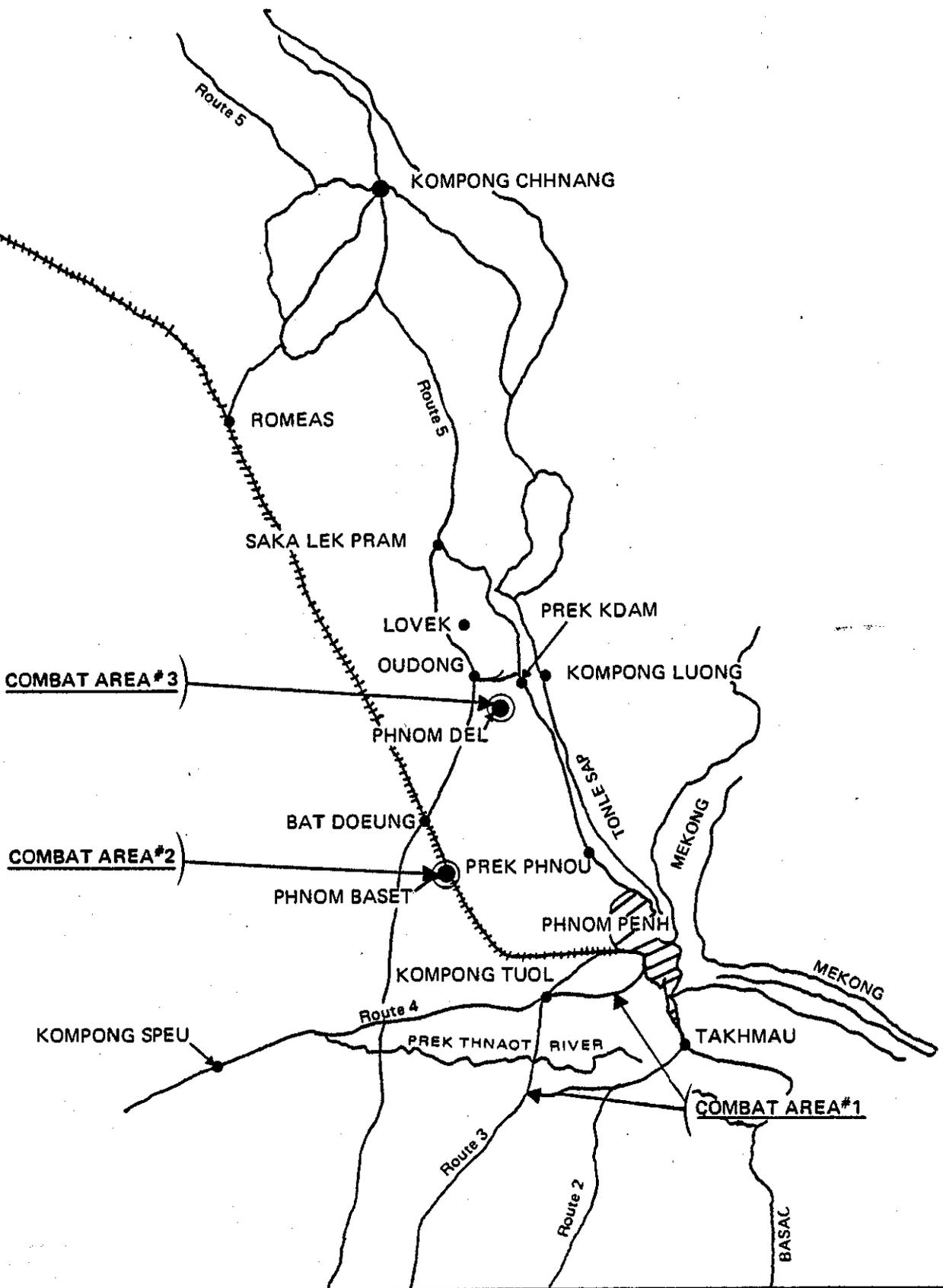
Relatively speaking, the month of June began on a positive note for the FANK, a carry-over from May. Route 5, which had been closed for two months, was reopened on 5 June. A Mekong convoy arrived in Phnom Penh without serious harassment. This breathing spell did not last, however, as the enemy launched an offensive on Route 4 only 25 km from Phnom Penh. FANK committed four brigades (7, 13, 28, 43), supported by two squadrons of M-113s and some 12 105-mm howitzers. Both U.S. and Khmer air units provided air support as weather permitted, and FANK's superior numbers and firepower -- due to U.S. air support --

forced the enemy to withdraw. A FANK night attack against the remaining enemy position on 19 June permitted convoys to move on Route 4 the following day. Route 5 was reopened to traffic on 7 June, and three rice convoys reached Phnom Penh before the enemy closed the road again on 16 June.

Although the military situation continued to deteriorate in July, the FANK were able to survive another month of the enemy offensive which had begun six months previously. The enemy appeared to shift from his earlier strategy of attacking major LOCs to one of more direct assault on the capital. As the month began, there were three active combat areas in the region of Phnom Penh: (*Map 21*)

1. Route 2 and 3. Originally an adjunct to Route 4 operations in June, this LOC became a major combat area in July as the enemy offensive spread from Route 4 east into the near regions of the capital. Early in June, the 3d Division (-) had initiated sweep operations south of the Prek Thnaot River which threatened the east flank of the enemy's Route 4 attack. Reacting sharply to the threat, the enemy drove the 3d Division units back 5 kms to Route 3, with over 100 casualties. Following that, the 3d Division (-) held to the road in a basically defensive posture, conducting only shallow sweeps away from the LOC. Two key positions held by the Division fell in mid and late June. Counterattacks proved ineffective but served to prevent the enemy from penetrating Phnom Penh's inner defenses. On 6 July, the enemy captured the Kompong Tuol Bridge, a district headquarters, and neighboring town, following a sharp attack. Casualties in the FANK 3d Division were high, and increased further as the 43d Brigade, cut off south of the Prek Thnaot River, exfiltrated to the north following an unsuccessful FANK airmobile operation to relieve it six days later. The 3d Division could not hold against subsequent attacks and fell back another four kms. U.S. air support stabilized the situation and the commander of the 3d Division was replaced. Despite U.S. air support on a 24-hour basis, FANK was not able to push its defense line south to the Prek Thnaot River during July.

2. The Phnom Baset approach. This area, northwest of Phnom Penh, was controlled by the FANK 7th Division. Despite strong efforts by



the enemy, which rendered ineffective the 72d Brigade (previously critically understrength), the 7th Division fought back aggressively and, in concert with U.S. air support, inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy and was in control by the end of July. Units from the 7th Division, as well as others from the Phnom Penh and 2d Military Region were committed hastily to counter enemy threats northwest of Pochentong during the prior week. With the general reserve fully committed, FANK was forced to withdraw sorely needed units from other battlefields, notably Route 3 and Phnom Baset, to counter this developing threat.

3. Phnom Del. The FANK were unable to hold on to its two remaining positions in the area north of the capital; they fell in quick succession on 6 and 9 July despite aerial resupply and reinforcement. The last chance to retain a friendly presence in this area disappeared when an airmobile operation by the Parachute Brigade was cancelled in order to send the parachutists to the more critical Route 3 area. On 13 July, the enemy captured the ferry site at Prek Kdam.

*The First Months Without U.S. Air Support,
August - December 1973*

The enemy dry-season offensive against Phnom Penh came to an end in August and the capital area entered a period of lessened activity which lasted into December. The 3d Division reestablished control of the north bank of the Prek Thnaot River, and the 1st Division was able to clear Route 1 south to Neak Luong.

However, north of Phnom Penh there was heavy fighting in the Route 6, Route 7, Kompong Cham areas. (Map 12) With the fall of Tang Kouk, Skoun, Prey Totung and Traeung, FANK lost eight 105-mm howitzers, two mortars, large stocks of ammunition, three battalions and 19 territorial companies to the enemy. By 16 August the enemy was able to direct all his efforts to capturing the first provincial capital of the war, Kompong Cham; a series of shelling attacks, followed by strong ground attacks caused the FANK defense line around Kompong Cham to be steadily threatened along with the loss of full use of the airfield.

FANK reinforced initially with the 79th Brigade, two battalions of the Parachute Brigade, two battalions of the 5th Brigade, and an additional battery of four 105-mm howitzers. Efforts to restore or expand the perimeter were unsuccessful. The enemy's main effort to take the city came on 1 September with heavy mortar and 105-mm fire, and multiple ground attacks which penetrated the FANK defensive line to within 1 km of the city. FANK forces were able to stop the enemy's momentum and stabilize the situation on 2 September. The two remaining battalions of the 5th Brigade and the Parachute Brigade, two Special Forces Detachments, and 12 Navy craft were designated as additional reinforcements for Kompong Cham. Major General Sar Hor, the commander, was given authority to give up the airfield in order to defend the city proper. The situation continued to deteriorate despite the arrival of the remainder of the 5th Brigade. On 7 September, following the exfiltration of two Parachute Battalions from the airfield to the city, and the arrival of a 16-ship naval task force, FANK contained the enemy's advance and slowly began to push him back from within the city. The 80th Brigade arrived by navy convoy on 10 September and was immediately inserted south of the city behind the enemy. By 14 September the enemy had been cleared from the city; link-up was made between the 80th Brigade elements and city defense forces, the university area had been reoccupied, and FANK had gained offensive momentum which continued throughout the month. As FANK advanced and regained control of lost territory, enemy efforts diminished to attacks by fire and ground probes of friendly positions at the airfield. As the month ended, FANK reoccupied and controlled Wat Angkor Knong, the village of Boeng Kok, the textile factory, and were effecting linkup with friendly forces at the airfield. During the last week of September, approximately 100 Air Force personnel were heli-lifted to Kompong Cham airfield to bolster defenses against enemy ground attacks.

During October there was again heavy fighting along the Prek Thnaot River. On 1 October the last elements of the 3d Division located south of the river were either withdrawn to the north bank or overrun. On 2 October, FANK was forced to abandon Kompong Toul and Kompong Kantout, suffering casualties of 26 killed, 51 wounded, and

30 missing. The 1st Division was ordered to reinforce on 3 October and committed its 1st Brigade in the zone of the 3d Division and its 48th Brigade, reinforced by one M-113 squadron, to move along Route 2. Between 4 and 20 October the FANK units conducted various maneuvers but no progress was made. Approximately two companies of enemy infiltrated north of the Prek Thnaot River in the 1st Brigade, 1st Division zone and remained lodged there as the month ended. A constant exchange of fire at long range and a lack of ground initiative by both forces characterized the combat action during October. During the last week, 3d Division elements moved south across the Prek Thnaot River at night and established a foothold on the southern banks. The continuous daily shelling of friendly positions by enemy indirect fire weapons caused casualties to already severely understrength FANK battalions which exceeded replacements received by the 1st and 3d Divisions.

The most significant activities in November were the losses of Tram Khnar, Srang, Tuk Laak, and Vihear Suor. The garrison at Vihear Suor was overrun and occupied by the enemy on 30 November. (*Map 20*) FANK attempts to link-up with Vihear Suor since 11 November had faltered for many reasons. Losses at Vihear Suor were: two 105-mm howitzers, two 75-mm howitzers, six 81-mm mortars, six 82-mm mortars and an unknown amount of ammunition.

December was highlighted by FANK efforts on Route 4. On 18 December units of the 13th Brigade, the 28th Brigade and one M-113 squadron demonstrated the ability to react rapidly when the enemy interdicted Route 4 between Kompong Speu and Phnom Penh. FANK troops cleared the enemy from the road after 12 hours of fighting. On 3 December, the 1st Division was committed to the task of clearing the month-old interdiction of Route 4, west of Kompong Speu, extending from Sre Khlong (VT240520) north to Moha Saing (VT380621). In contrast to the action mentioned above, the 1st Division did not effectively use its available combat power. When the battle was joined with the enemy the commander complained of lack of air and artillery support. These assets were made available to him on a priority basis and the 20th Brigade was also placed under the 1st Division operational control. During the last week of December, the 13th Brigade was assigned the task of securing the north flank of

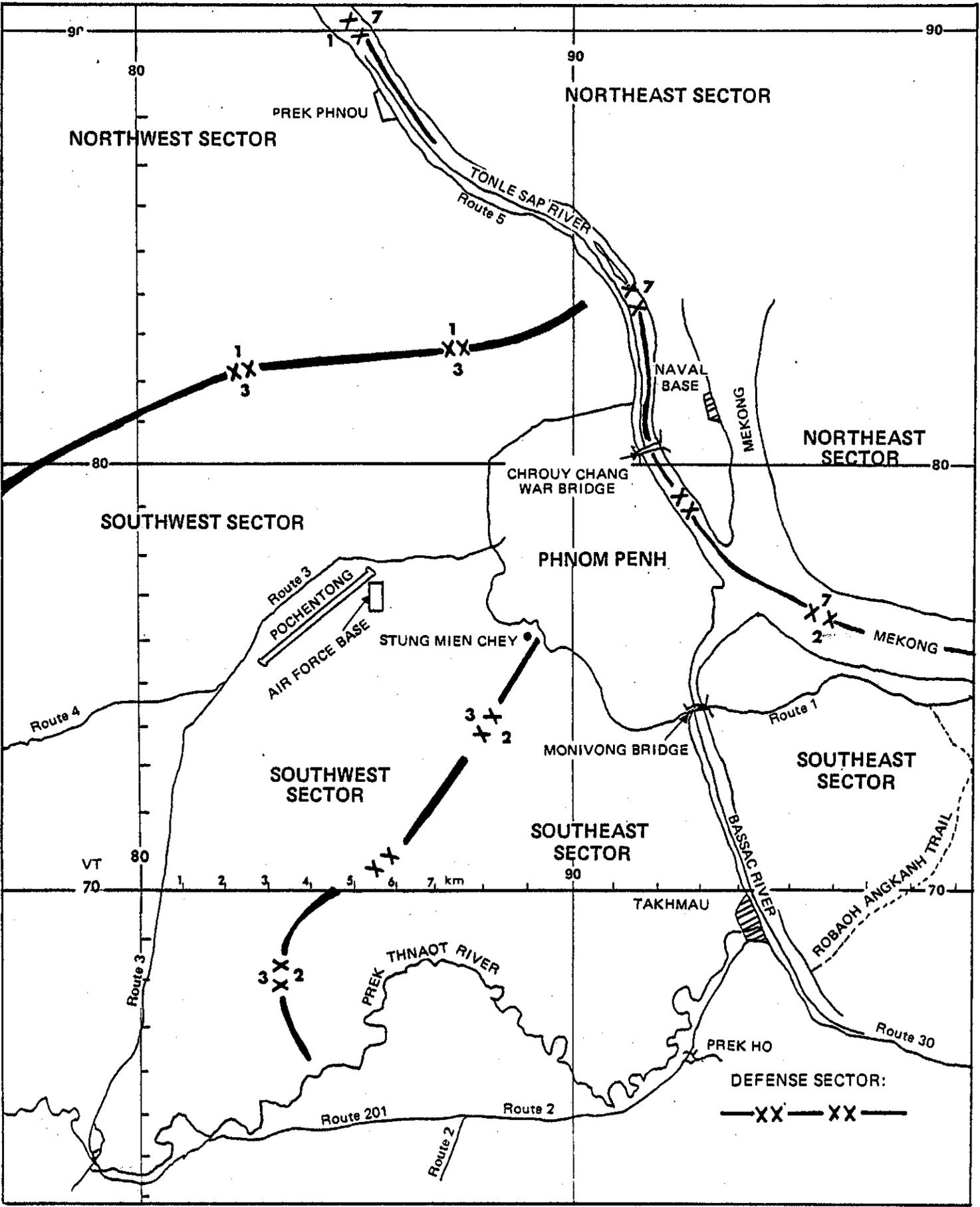
the 1st Division to allow the 1st Division to concentrate force on a more narrow front. The Assistant Chief of Staff, FANK Operations, Major General Mao Sum Khem, was appointed overall commander of the Route 4 clearing operation. However, on 29 December, front-line units of the 1st Division withdrew approximately 2 km, giving up key terrain features previously secured. The situation was so tenuous in the 1st Division that Marshal Lon Nol saw fit to visit the front himself on 30 December 1973. Four newly arrived 155-mm howitzers, assigned to the 1st Division, were also displaced to provide more firepower to the defense effort. A third M-113 squadron was committed on 30 December, and Route 4 was reopened on 6 January 1974.

Dry Season Operations, January-July 1974

Military operations during the period January through July 1974 were highlighted by heavy enemy attacks northwest and northeast of Phnom Penh and with major FANK reactions to restore the defenses of the capital in these sectors. In addition, there was significant combat along the Bassac River corridor, and a major enemy effort against the city of Kampot. By this time the defenses of Phnom Penh were organized generally into four sectors. (Map 22)

On the night of 5 January an estimated two enemy regiments moved into the northwest sector, approximately 5-6 km from Phnom Penh. FANK reacted on the morning of 6 January by committing the 28th Brigade, reinforced with two M-113 squadrons. Heavy fighting ensued on 6 and 7 January in the vicinity of VT8079 and 100 enemy were killed in action. On 8 January the 1st Division was committed to the operation as its subordinate units became available from the Route 4 clearing operation. By 10 January, over 300 enemy had been killed in action with friendly losses of 2 killed and 56 wounded. Eleven prisoners were captured and 13 KC soldiers rallied at Bek Chan (VT7271) on 10 January. Fighting continued for 12 more days as the 28th Brigade, moving from the south and the 1st Division moving from the east attempted to reduce the enemy penetration. One brigade of the 7th Division was also committed to the operation to move south toward VT7684 in an attempt to seal off the penetration. This force never

Map 22 - Defense Sectors for Phnom Penh, January 1974



joined battle with the enemy, nor did it succeed in sealing off the penetration. Using his penetration as a firing base, the enemy was able to fire approximately 20 rounds of 75-mm RR fire and five 122-mm rockets against targets in the northwest part of Phnom Penh and Pochentong Airport. Casualties were light and negligible damage was caused by these shellings. Supported by heavy air and artillery strikes, the 1st Division succeeded on 22 January in breaking through the shoulders of the penetration and the enemy withdrew to the west. Casualties from the northwest sector fighting in the 1st Division zone were: 31 friendly killed and 175 wounded; an estimated 200 enemy were killed, 26 POWs taken and 70 weapons captured. In the 28th Brigade zone casualties were: 35 friendly killed and 268 wounded; an estimated 300 enemy were killed and 121 weapons were captured.

Attention shifted from the northwest to the southwest capital defense sector on 19 January when enemy elements infiltrated the 3d Division's frontline positions, causing the 334th Battalion to withdraw without orders. Adjacent battalions then withdrew from the south of Route 201 along Grid Line 63 to positions north of the Prek Thnaot River. Within 24 hours, much of the 3d Division front had withdrawn to positions north of the Prek Thnaot River, despite the fact that very little enemy pressure had been exerted. At least two battalion commanders were absent during the initial action and a breakdown of command and control resulted in this withdrawal of units, composed mostly of inexperienced recruits. The battalions of the 51st Brigade, securing the Bak Bridge (VT9064) sustained several killed in action on 20 January, indicating that the enemy had been able to move a sizable force as far north as the Prek Thnaot River. The most threatened area during the initial enemy penetration was in the vicinity of Prey Veng (VT8266) where the 15th Brigade CP and four 105-mm howitzers were positioned. On 20 and 21 January, FANK high command reacted to the newly developed threat by attaching two additional battalions from the 1st Division to the 3d Division and directing the 20th Brigade to move from Route 4 to the southwest sector. Upon arrival, the 20th Brigade was committed to reinforce the weakened 51st Brigade from VT8768 east to VT 8967. On 27 January, the 20th Brigade had a significant engagement with enemy forces at VT8867 but held its

positions and inflicted losses of 39 killed on the enemy. Friendly losses were 17 killed and 25 wounded. An additional two battalions of the 81st Brigade, 1st Division were committed on 20 - 21 January to counterattack to the south and east of Prey Veng from VT8366 to VT8567. On 23 January the entire southwest sector was subdivided to significantly reduce the 3d Division's defensive sector and improve unity of command. The 1st Division was then committed to secure the Prek Thnaot from VT8466 east to VT9166. In an additional move to improve the command and control structure, FANK gave Brigadier General Yai Sindy responsibility for the area west of grid line 77 and formed a composite unit by placing the 12th, 23d and 28th Brigades under his command. On 30 January the situation had stabilized to the extent that the 20th Brigade was withdrawn from its positions on the Prek Thnaot River and moved to Prey Pring (West of Pochenton) in preparation for a new operation. On 1 February 74, the 1st Division's 1st Brigade replaced the 20th Brigade on the Prek Thnaot River and as January ended it appeared that FANK had contained the enemy in the southwest sector and reestablished control of its units.

The FANK seized the dry season initiative from the enemy in February, pushing back the enemy in both the northwest and southern sectors of Phnom Penh. The KC, their penetration stopped by FANK in early February, shifted to 105-mm howitzer attacks on the city. One attack, on 11 February, caused civilian casualties of over 200 killed and wounded, with some 10,000 rendered homeless. FANK counterattacks late in February forced out the enemy from his January gains.

The 80th Brigade was moved to Phnom Penh on 6 February and committed on 9 February to clear the northwest sector in conjunction with the armor brigade, the 23d Brigade, the 28th Brigade and units of the 7th Division. Enemy resistance was very determined from 9-14 February, until the 80th Brigade, reinforced with the M-113 squadron of the 7th Division, penetrated the enemy's primary defense lines. Once penetration occurred, the enemy effected an orderly withdrawal, while FANK units advanced methodically through the entire enemy-held area. Sweeps of the battle area after fighting ceased revealed that the enemy was equipped with M-72 light assault weapons (LAW), 75-mm RR and 57-mm RR

and that much of the equipment was either new or in excellent condition. Fighting decreased progressively until 26 February when FANK units linked up north of Tuol Leap (VT7379). FANK losses during the period 6 - 25 February were 66 killed and 515 wounded in the northwest sector of Phnom Penh defenses.

The enemy continued to attack and harass convoy shipping throughout February and two incidents of mining occurred on the Mekong. Nine attacks by fire were reported on convoys which resulted in two killed and seven wounded, with the most significant on 18 February when the tug Bannock and the ammunition barge *Mt. Hood* received 75-mm RR fire and 12.8-mm machine-gun fire at WT2121. This subsequently resulted in the loss of approximately 1.4 million dollars of munitions and severe damage to the barge. The tug *Saigon 240* with ammunition barge 108-1 sustained several hits from B41 rockets which destroyed an estimated 50.3 tons of munitions. A total of 11 convoys transited the Mekong during February (6 to Phnom Penh and 5 from Phnom Penh). Twelve new PBRs were delivered to the Navy under U.S. military assistance.

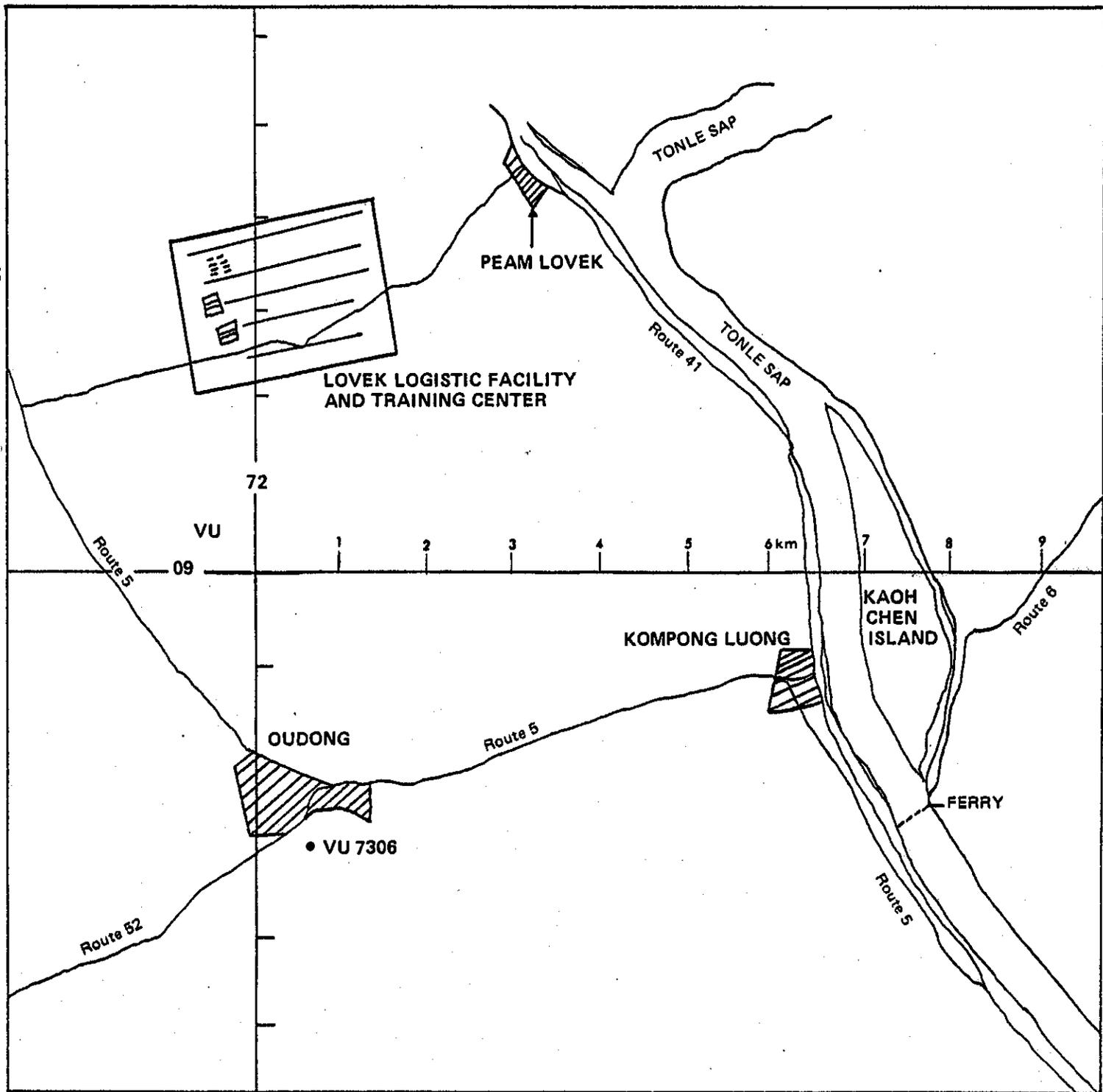
During March, the major military activity shifted away from Phnom Penh and to the provincial capitals of Oudong and Kampot. The enemy was able to overrun Oudong, but the defenses of Kampot held.

Enemy pressure on Kampot commenced on 26 February with attacks north of the city. During the first week of March, several territorial companies and units of the 12th Brigade and the 68th Battalion abandoned defensive positions without authority. These actions combined with a dwindling water supply (the enemy had captured the city water works) caused an exodus of over 50% of the civilian inhabitants from the city. Enemy directed 107-mm rockets, 120-mm mortars and other lower caliber attacks against both tactical units/facilities and the civilian populace in Kampot City also added to the rapidly deteriorating situation. The 210th and the 68th Battalions were deactivated after approximately 300 troops deserted during the period 26 February - 2 March 74; the remaining troops were reassigned to the 12th Battalion. Effective support from Navy, Air Force, and artillery units during this critical time provided the FANK high command enough time to reinforce. The 20th and 12th Brigades were deployed to Kampot and directed to attack northeast,

parallel to Route 3 to retake the Chakrei Ting Cement Factory (VT2080). Virtually no advance was made by either unit, however; rather, a defense posture developed once enemy strengths and dispositions were fully developed. During the period 2 - 10 March two more Army battalions, some Navy personnel, and six 105-mm howitzers were deployed to Kampot, and Major General Mhoul Khheng was sent to command all FANK units in Kampot. FANK/USAF aerial resupply operations increased appreciably; four new 105-mm howitzers were sent to Kampot to replace four older weapons. Early rain during mid-March somewhat alleviated the water problem (the Navy continued to resupply water regularly); and finally, KAF priorities (airlift and tactical air support) were realigned to help the beleaguered and dwindling enclave. As of 3 April FANK defensive positions near Hill 169 (VS076752), which dominates the Kampot Airfield, had been abandoned after the enemy effectively isolated the positions. The 20th and 12th Brigades sustained significant casualties during the month, and by 2 April their effective strengths had been reduced to 664 and 827 respectively. The FANK high command sent Major General Fan Moung, Assistant Chief of the General Staff for Operations, to Kampot on 2 April to assess the situation and immediately after his arrival it was decided to make an all out effort to further reinforce Kampot. FANK losses in fighting at Kampot during March were 158 killed, 828 wounded. The enemy suffered 282 killed, 3 captured, and 25 weapons captured.

But the most significant action during March was the fall of Udong, a place of religious and historical significance.³ The attack commenced in earnest at 3:00 A.M. on 3 March and by 8:00 A.M. that same day, the territorial battalions defending Oudong had been forced to withdraw from positions northwest and southwest of the city in order to establish a small perimeter generally southeast of Oudong at VU7306. (*Map 23*) Two 105-mm howitzers were reportedly destroyed by FANK on 16 March in a small position at VU7205; when these howitzers were destroyed the FANK units at this position

³Oudong was the Royal capital of Cambodia until the arrival of the French in the 19th Century.



also withdrew north to join the previously mentioned perimeter at VU7306. Total troop strength at this location was then estimated at 700 troops, plus approximately 1500 civilians. An unknown number of civilians were killed or captured by the enemy upon entering the city. FANK reacted by moving the 45th Brigade, 7th Division to Lovek (VU7212) on 16 March and the 80th Brigade up the Tonle Sap River to debark in the vicinity of VU7807 and attack from east to west to attempt to link up with the then encircled position east of Oudong. Several delays were encountered in moving the 80th Brigade and heavy casualties were sustained by the brigade during the initial debarkation efforts. This action had a marked effect of the fighting spirit, attitude and overall performance of the 80th Brigade in the subsequent linkup effort. Enemy forces were waiting at the debarkation site and placed well aimed 75-mm RR and B 40 rocket fire on the near-defenseless troops during debarkation (25 were killed, 86 wounded, and 13 drowned). One UH1G logistics helicopter was downed by enemy fire near Oudong on 16 March. After the initial units of the 80th Brigade debarked near VU7808 the remainder of the brigade did not close until 19 - 20 March 1974. Continued enemy presence was sufficient to cause FANK to reinforce the 80th Brigade during the period 20 - 28 March with three battalions of the 39th Brigade, one battalion from the 28th Brigade, four 105-mm howitzers and one M113 squadron. Priority for tactical air support was assigned to the overall operation. The 80th Brigade commander allowed the forwardmost attacking units to become overcommitted as the linkup effort progressed from east to west and was unable to reinforce them because he had committed three battalions to rear area security. The FANK attack faltered during the period 24 - 27 March and FANK was in the process of further reinforcements on 28 March when the encircled position was overrun by the enemy. The final collapse of the encircled position was accelerated when an enemy-fired 75-mm RR round which impacted directly the unprotected ammunition storage area near the northwest corner of the perimeter, and caused detonations of 81 and 105-mm ammunition. Other contributing factors were the arrival of approximately 2,500 refugees into the already overcrowded perimeter during the night of 27 - 28 March; there was inadequate food, water and medical

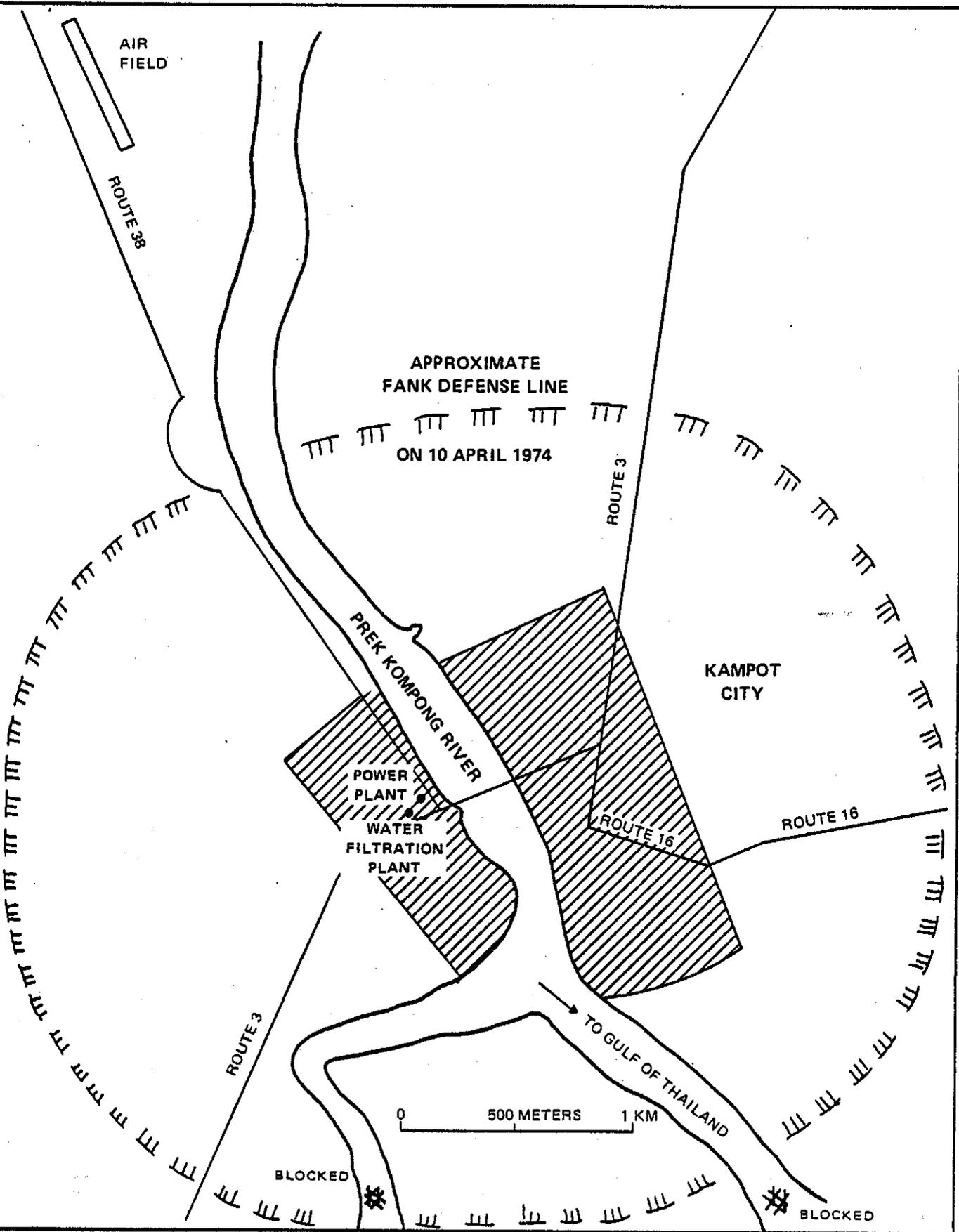
supplies and a general atmosphere of fear that a recurrence of previous enemy attacks was inevitable. When the ammunition exploded, uncontrollable panic ensued, the perimeter was ruptured, and, within 30 minutes, enemy ground attacks overwhelmed the defenders. A company commander, who escaped, related that as the enemy entered the perimeter, previously wounded FANK soldiers were machine gunned and several FANK soldiers killed their own families and then themselves to avoid being captured. The fate of 4,000 civilians was unknown; 650 military and civilian personnel returned to safety. Lon Nol ordered that Oudong be retaken. However, the pressure at Kampot at month's end caused conflicting priorities, and the enemy remained in control of the Oudong area on 31 March 1974. Results of fighting prior to 28 March were as follows: 328 enemy killed in action, 91 individual weapons and 15 crew served weapons captured; 50 FANK killed and 240 wounded.

During April, the enemy continued his attacks north of Phnom Penh, focusing on Kompong Luong. Following the capture of Oudong in March, FANK forces remaining along the river were directed to establish a defensive position on the Tonle Sap. On 20 April, enemy ground pressure along the river bank increased sharply and several positions fell back. Pressure continued. On 21 April enemy infiltrators overran key friendly positions along the Tonle Sap River bank, effectively encircling the Kompong Luong garrison. FANK forces withdrew and by 2:30 P.M. on 21 April the first elements linked up with the Lovek Garrison defenders. The defeat added valuable psychological momentum to the new provincial phase of the enemy's dry season offensive and represented his second significant military victory of the dry season. FANK troop and materiel losses along the Tonle Sap in April were heavy: approximately 600 military personnel were unaccounted for: four 105-mm howitzers were lost; all heavy weapons (mortars and machine guns); two M-113's, one bulldozer, one POL truck, and several other pieces of engineering equipment were abandoned. Three Navy river craft were beached. Kompong Luong and a sizeable stock of ammunition was abandoned and later bombed by the Air Force. Subsequently, the FANK high command decided to withdraw the civilian population and military garrison from

Sala Lek Pram to Lovek, consolidating assets into a single defensive position. Approximately 15,000 civilians and 2,000 military personnel moved into the Lovek garrison on 26 April. The month drew to a close with a highly vulnerable group of civilian and military personnel in that small isolated place. The population of 52,405 consisted of 5,260 military, 15,488 military dependents, 22,383 civilians, 8,383 refugees, and 891 para-military personnel. Heavy enemy shelling on Lovek (by 105-mm howitzer, 75-mm RR and 82-mm mortar fire) began on 30 April.

In Kampot, April opened with FANK forces being pushed deeper into the city, giving up approximately three km on the north and west of the city. (Map 24) By 10 April, the western perimeter had collapsed to within 1.5 kms of the heart of the city. The Naval Infantry had given up the southeast sector, and the enemy had stopped the flow of supplies and reinforcements by sea to Kampot. During the same period, enemy artillery struck the 105-mm howitzer positions ammunition storage area, destroying approximately 3,500 105-mm howitzer rounds and rendering eight 105-mm howitzers inoperable. Two battalions of reinforcements arrived and their immediate deployment in the southeast sector appeared to switch the offensive momentum from the enemy to FANK. After two days of heavy fighting on 8 and 9 April, the 28th Brigade reported 86 enemy killed, while the 20th Brigade in the west claimed another 100 enemy killed. Enemy initiatives diminished as fresh FANK ground forces began to slowly advance and push the enemy away from the city. The garrison military strength increased from 3,018 on 1 April to 4,006 on 9 April. The two remaining battalions of the 28th Brigade arrived, along with replacements for losses in other units. By 25 April, the Kampot military strength exceeded 4,561. Enemy mortar attacks diminished in intensity and frequency as advancing government forces reestablished the northern perimeter, pushed the west perimeter out 2.5 km from the city, and on 30 April, reoccupied Kbal Romeas on the east and reopened the river supply route. For the period 3 March to 3 May, in the Kampot area, FANK suffered 416 killed (25 civilians), 2,363 wounded (88 civilians) and 79 missing in action while the enemy suffered an estimated 2,363 killed in action.

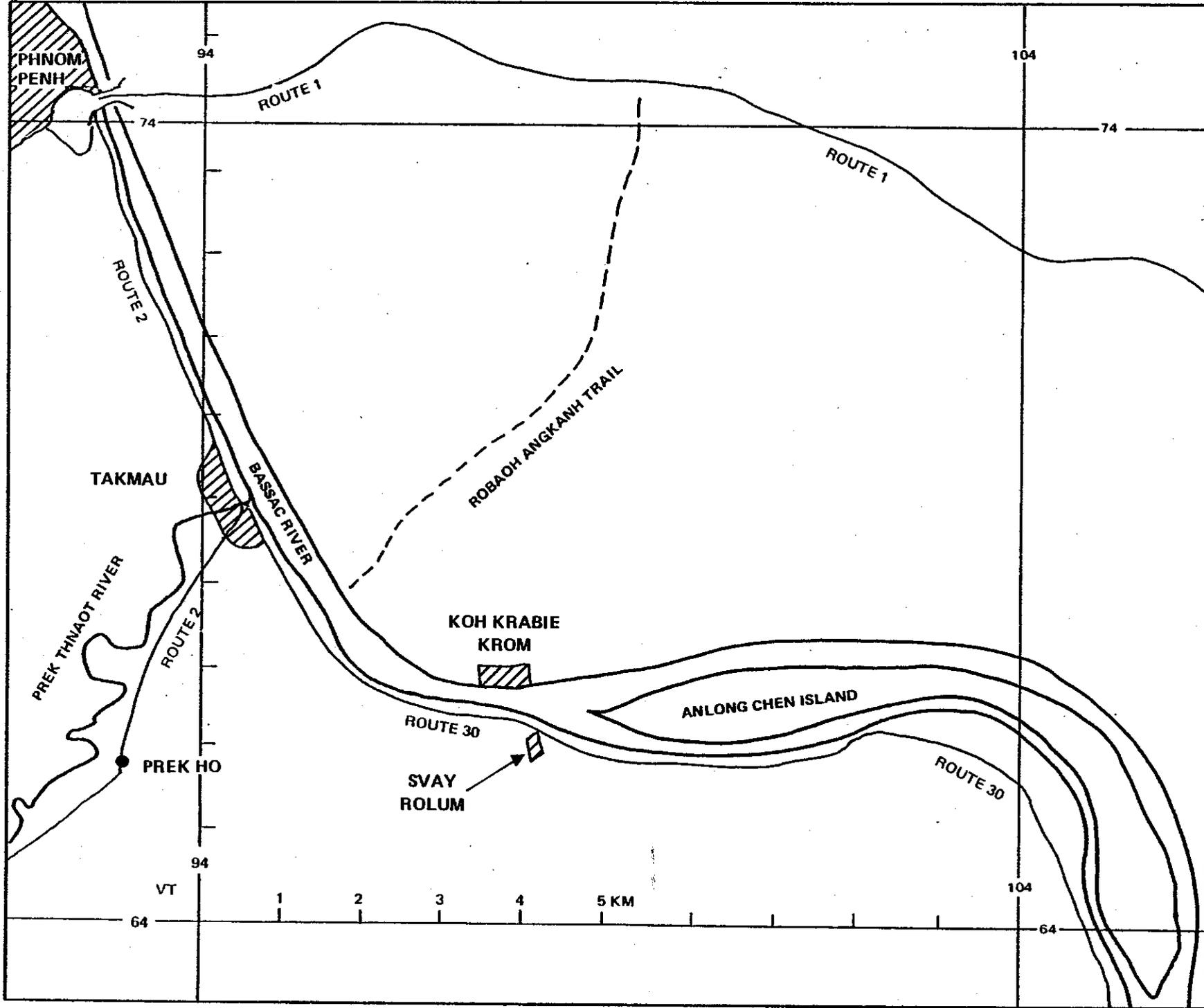
Map 24 – The Battle for Kampot, March-April 1974



After a lull of several months, enemy pressure increased sharply in April in the Bassac/Mekong corridor against units of the 2d Division and territorial forces of Kandal. (Map 25) The enemy forced FANK units out of Kbal Kaol and Prek Pau in the first week and by mid month, the enemy cleared Anlong Chen Island, occupied Svay Rolum on Route 30, and Koh Krabie Krom. There was heavy fighting and enemy gains allowed occupation of 75-mm RR and 107-mm rocket positions from which fires were delivered on Takhmau and Phnom Penh. The new year holiday festivities (13 - 15 April) were interrupted by 11 107-mm rockets impacting in the capital, resulting in four killed, and 20 wounded. Takhmau was shelled by 75-mm rocket fire on 29 April which resulted in 9 killed, and 37 civilians wounded. During this period (7 - 30 April) of intense combat, Kandal Province forces suffered 232 killed, and 354 wounded. The month ended with Kandal Province forces holding on the Bassac south bank and 2d Division forces beginning to advance slowly on the north bank.

The enemy operations begun during April in the Bassac/Mekong corridor continued into May. The 2d Division, reinforced by Kandal provincial units and three squadrons of M-113s, was forced to evacuate/abandon several positions along Robaoh Angkanh Trail, allowing the enemy to penetrate northwest of the trail to within five kms of Phnom Penh. From this point, enemy gunners fired 107-mm rockets into Takhmau and the southern and central portion of the capital. Fighting was intense throughout the month and FANK reported sustaining 39 killed and 389 wounded in the Bassac corridor. On 24 May, a small enemy element infiltrated behind FANK defensive positions and raided a village south of the Monivong Bridge, killing 12 civilians, wounding 23, and burning approximately 12 homes. By the end of the month, FANK forces had closed the gap and cleared the enemy from positions northwest of the Boraoh Angkanh Trail.

In other actions in the southeast sector, Route 1 was interdicted on 21 May by an estimated battalion-size force for a day and a night; by 22 May, traffic had returned to normal. The 43d Brigade of the 2d Division reported 3 killed and 30 wounded in the clearing operation. Brigadier General Dien Del, Commanding General 2d Division, became governor of Kandal Province, in addition to his other duties, effective 15 May.



Map 25 -- Operations Along the Bassac River, April-July 1974

North of Phnom Penh, FANK was able to stabilize the situation during a month of hard fighting in May. The primary action was the FANK initiative of the 7th Division/5th Brigade conducting operations toward the north, along Route 5 in order to relieve enemy pressure on the isolated garrison at Lovek. FANK attacks and enemy counterattacks resulted in a seesaw battle between Kruos and Prek Taten during most of the month. On 25 May, ground forces overcame enemy flank pressures, penetrated the enemy forward defensive lines, and overran an enemy battalion CP as they advanced 2.5 km north of Prek Taten. Fighting was intense throughout the month with FANK sustaining 10 killed, 107 wounded, while accounting for 144 enemy killed and 6 POWs.

The highly vulnerable and densely populated garrison at Lovek was at the mercy of enemy gunners who shelled the garrison both day and night throughout May. Enemy ground attacks, primarily in the south and northwest, attempted to gain an early victory. The training center was lost on 4 May and the southwest defensive line was faltering when the 80th Brigade counterattacked to halt the enemy's advance. Ten days later on 14 May the training center and southern perimeter had been retaken. Limited friendly ground operations were conducted during the month in the most critical area along the southern defensive line. The military strength of the garrison, 4,305 troops, precluded maintaining a firm defensive posture in the northwest and southwest, while at the same time attacking east with the 80th Brigade to establish a beachhead on the Tonle Sap. Evacuation of the 15,000 - 20,000 civilian refugees was dependent upon this operation; reinforcement of the 80th Brigade was planned by the FANK high command; however, execution was not successfully accomplished. The arrival of Brigadier General Mey Sichan on 3 May as the Lovek operation commander resulted in rapid stabilization of the situation and a strengthening of the garrison's defensive posture. Both friendly and enemy initiated activities during the month resulted in 50 FANK killed, 319 wounded, and about 100 enemy killed. The month closed with enemy pressure diminishing and FANK attempting limited offensive action to the south and east.

June saw continued FANK success north of the capital. In that area, the 5th Brigade, reinforced by the 7th Brigade, progressed slowly

north during the first 10 days of June. Between 10 and 14 June, ground forces moved north against decreasing enemy resistance with 50 enemy killed in action during the period and only light casualties reported by FANK. The high command dealt the enemy a decisive blow by reinforcing with the 15th Brigade on 15 June. On 19 June the 15th Brigade reoccupied Kompong Luong, leaving the enemy in disarray. The combined operations for the period 17 to 19 June netted FANK 314 enemy killed and, 21 POW's, while sustaining 21 killed and 47 wounded. During consolidation and reorganization, enemy reinforcements arrived and interdicted Route 5 on 28 June south of Kompong Luong in both the 15th and 7th Brigade zones. The 15th Brigade cleared the road on the same day, sustaining 5 killed and 14 wounded, and reporting 15 enemy killed. The major enemy force was located in the 7th Division zone and the high command again decided to mass combat power, reinforcing with two battalions and one M-113 squadron. FANK attacked on 28 June with elements from 3 brigades. Route 5 was cleared on 29 June, with an additional 114 enemy killed, 5 POW's and FANK units sustained a total of 4 killed, 13 wounded, and two M-113's damaged. A 5th Brigade operation on the Tonle Sap east bank at the same time accounted for 10 additional enemy killed. The month closed with FANK forces firmly entrenched on Route 5 and in Kompong Luong.

There was success as well at Lovek, whose garrison was able to end its isolation. A heavy enemy attack on 8 June against the northwest and southwest sections of the Lovek perimeter was repulsed by the counterattacking 80th Brigade. On 12 June, Lovek forces attempted to move east to link up with ground forces who had established a beachhead for the evacuation of the civilian population to Kompong Chhnang. After two and one-half days of no progress, they broke through and reached the Tonle Sap. Consolidation of the beachhead at Peam Lovek and evacuation of approximately 10,000 civilians was accomplished by 24 June.

FANK success north of the capital continued into July. The highlight of the month was the breakthrough by the 7th Division and 4th Brigade of the enemy's defensive line north of Phnum Chetares (VU7503) on 6 July and the successful link-up with the forces from Lovek in

Oudong on 9 July. Total enemy losses during the period 22 April to 9 July were 1,366 killed in action, 45 captured, 18 ralliers (to include the commander of the KC 114th Battalion and two of his lieutenants), 105 crew-served weapons and 308 individual weapons. Friendly losses were 104 killed and 786 wounded. The loss of Oudong was not only a tactical defeat for the enemy but a psychological defeat as well. Enemy reactions to this FANK victory were expected and FANK was prepared. On 16 July a major enemy force moved in behind two FANK battalions located southwest of Oudong and attempted to cut them off and destroy them. Fortunately, the 145th Brigade and the 2d M-113 Squadron were located in Oudong; they struck the enemy force from behind, causing it to flee the battle area. Friendly losses were 4 killed and 11 wounded, while enemy losses were 150 killed and 6 POW's and 43 weapons captured. During the period 16 - 23 July FANK forces along Route 5 were reinforced and consolidated their gains so that on 23 July an offensive west of Oudong could be launched in conjunction with the 80th Brigade and 8th M-113 Squadron attacking out of Lovek. On 23 - 24 July FANK forces moved more than 3 km west of Oudong against moderate enemy resistance. On 28 July, 2 battalions of the 28th Brigade moved by Navy craft to the east bank of the Tonle Sap River and secured a beachhead near Prek Kdam (VU7905). In conjunction with this move, forces from Lovek moved down the west bank of the Tonle Sap and linked up with the 36th Brigade, then sweeping north from Kompong Luong. No enemy contact was made.

The Wet Season, August - December 1974

The 1974 wet season was, relatively speaking, a period of lessened military activity throughout Cambodia as a whole, although there was some heavy fighting east and south of the capital.

The northeast sector was a very active sector in August as enemy attacks occurred in almost all areas. The month began with an enemy force holding part of Route 61 fifteen kms northeast of Phnom Penh, and a government force at Muk Kampul (VT9897) encircled. On 2 August,

the 23d Brigade and 1st M-113 Squadron conducted a forceful attack against enemy positions astride Route 61 and, aided by effective air and artillery support, broke through the enemy's main defenses and linked up with the besieged garrison at Muk Kampul on 3 August. Government losses in actions along Route 61 during the period 26 July to 3 August were 15 killed and 106 wounded, while enemy losses were 212 killed and 45 weapons captured. As FANK forces were mopping up along Route 61 on 4 August, an enemy force struck four outposts on the east bank of the Mekong River, manned by unprepared and poorly trained troops from Vihear Suor Military Subdivision. These attacks were supported by attacks against Prek Tamerk (WT0198) and Khnar Kar (WT0783). The four outposts fell apparently without much resistance, as a result of poor leadership and curtailed basic training of unit personnel. A counterattack on 5 August by reinforcements from the Parachute Brigade, 23rd and 84th Brigades retook the positions on 5 August with little or no enemy resistance. Friendly losses were: 39 killed, nine wounded, 105 missing and 175 weapons lost. Additionally, four heavy pieces of engineer equipment were damaged. No enemy casualties were reported. On 8 August, the enemy again attacked Muk Kampul and interdicted Route 61 south of this position. Quick reaction by elements of the 23rd Brigade, supported by M-113s, opened Route 61 that same day, leaving 121 enemy dead on the battlefield and capturing 16 weapons; friendly losses were only one killed and three wounded. Further enemy attacks against Route 61 and around Muk Kampul during the period 10 - 20 August were ineffective. After 20 August the enemy apparently gave up or postponed further offensive action against Muk Kampul and instead decided to attack Prek Tamerk on the east bank of the Mekong River northeast of Muk Kampul. FANK forces were well prepared and heavy enemy attacks against Prek Tamerk on the nights of 21 - 22, 26 - 27, and 30 - 31 August resulted in over 80 enemy killed and 71 weapons captured. Friendly losses were 11 killed and 29 wounded. Reportedly, the enemy penetrated the outer defensive perimeter around Prek Tamerk on the night of 21 - 22 August by claiming to be refugees who desired

sanctuary. As August ended, government forces in the northeast sector returned Route 61 to government control and successfully countered determined enemy efforts to extend KC control in that area.

August was also a very active month in the southeast sector, as both government and enemy forces launched offensives to secure control of key positions along the Bassac River and in the Bassac corridor. FANK objectives were to deny the enemy areas from which rocket attacks could be launched against the capital. On 7 August a joint 1st Division/2d Division operation was launched in the Bassac corridor. On 8 August, 1st Division units succeeded in moving south from Route 1 to Prek Thmei (WT0067), a key enemy position on the Bassac River. During the night of 8 - 9 August, enemy gunners fired 10 107-mm rockets from the Bassac corridor, but all landed far south of Phnom Penh. On 9 August the 1st Division units linked up with 2d Division units advancing along the east bank of the Bassac, but enemy harassing attacks against the rear and flank of 1st Division units caused nine killed and five wounded. On 12 August an enemy attack forced the 2d Division elements out of Prek Thmei, and on 15 August forced 2d Division units back as far as two kms. However, the 2d Division was able to reconstitute a defense line and keep 107-mm rockets from reaching Phnom Penh and disrupting armed forces day celebrations. Another enemy attack on the west bank of the Bassac on the night of 20 - 21 August forced a 2d Division unit back about one km.

FANK reinforcements moved into the area on 21 August for a major offensive along the Bassac River and stabilized the situation. This operation involved 17 infantry battalions and four M-113 squadrons from four divisions and was the first major FANK offensive action of the rainy season. The objective of the operation was to extend government control in the Bassac region and establish a new defensive line between Route 1 and the Bassac River further away from the capital. On 23 August, a brigade from the 1st Division established a beachhead on Anlong Chen Island in the Bassac River, against heavy enemy resistance. FANK forces on the island then made slow progress