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Cambodia's Lon Nol

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Became General —By Accident

UPI

PARIS, March 19—Gen. Lon Nol, who effectively holds power in Cambodia now that Prince Norodom Sihanouk has been stripped of his position as chief of state, is an accidental general.

He embarked on his military career late in life, because Vietnamese Communists were meddling in his country's affairs in an earlier era.

Sihanouk gave Lon Nol the second most powerful position in the country, that of Prime Minis-

ter and Armed Forces Commander.

Now that Sihanouk has been ousted from the top position, the most powerful man apparently is Lon Nol.

A magazine edited by Sihanouk once described Lon Nol as "a block, a rock, massive and weighty. He speaks little, with a low deep voice, and a minimum of gestures."

Sihanouk's magazine also said Lon Nol was not given to saber rattling, nor to attending cocktail parties.

"If he has to make war, it is with the obstinacy of a peasant who defends his family, his fields, his village."

It is perhaps only a coincidence that Lon Nol became the prime figure in an anti-Vietnamese movement when Viet Cong troops began to occupy his home province in strength.

Lon Nol was born in the Cambodian province of Prey Veng in 1913, and he knows his Vietnamese adversaries well. He attended school with them as a youth in Saigon, and later fought the Viet Minh (forerunners of the Viet Cong) during the Indo-China War.

Long before being thrust into the military, Lon Nol had a long and illustrious career, starting first in law, and working in various government posts concerned with agriculture, road construction, land reform, and finally police work.

At the close of World War II, he was the national police director, but Sihanouk made him a diplomat. He headed the Cambodian delegation which negotiated the return of Batambang Province to Cambodian control. He was then named governor of the province which had been seized by Thailand during World War II.