Symington Calls Viet Bombing Limits 'Unbelievable'

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By Bryce Nelson
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Sen. Stuart Symington criticized the Administration yesterday for the "almost unbelievable" target restrictions imposed on U.S. pilots bombing North Vietnam.

The Missouri Democrat, who served as Secretary of the Air Force from 1947 until 1950, said that these restrictions were one of the primary reasons why U.S. airpower was having so little effect against North Vietnamese targets when the bombing results were compared to the high cost in U.S. planes and lives.

Symington's comments were contained in a 122-page report describing his recent trip to Southeast Asia, which included ten days in South Vitenam. The report has been heavily censured by the Defense Department for security reasons —for instance, almost the whole section on Symington's trip to Thailand had been deleted.

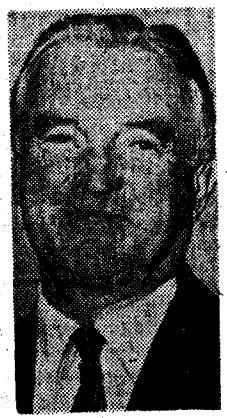
Symington reportedly objected to the extensive censorship and sent back his report to the Pentagon in an attempt to get portions restored.

In an interview yesterday, Symington emphasized that his criticism of target restrictions did not mean that he wanted civilian targets in North Vietnam bombed. Instead, he urged that the U.S. bomb "more meaningful military targets" such as power stations, petdoleum tanks, harbors and docks.

In a letter accompanying his report, Symington posed two alternatives for U. S. policy in Vietnam:

"If South Vietnam is not the right place to defend the Free World [illegible] aggression, we should retire from that country on the best terms possible" Symington said. He added that that choice would involve a high price but that the price "would not be catastrophic."

On the other hand, Symington said, "if South Vietnam is the right place to defend the Free World . . . then that fact should be recognized in a more practical fashion."



Associated Press

SEN. SYMINGTON
. . . assails air restrictions

Yesterday, Symington refused to choose between the alternatives. He said that this decision must be left to the President. Symington noted that "the time is approaching when we must decide . . . whether we will move forward or move out."

During his tour, Symington reported, U.S. military officials told him that North Vietnam could increase its infiltration of South Vietnam to a level of three regiments a month. Such an infiltration would represent a much greater influx of North Vietnamese troops than has prevailed in the past. Nine North Vietnamese regiments currently are believed to be operating in South Vietnam.

In his report, Symington noted that North Vietnamese pilots are being trained to fly MIG 21 fighters. Yesterday, he termed this a significant fact since "there is no better fighter interceptor in the world than the MIG 21." Symington said he was told that the present North Vietnamese air force consists of eight IL 28 bombers and 66 MIG 15 and MIG 17 fighter planes.

U.S. officials also told Symington that Chinese bombers from the Chinese island of Hainan could definitely hit the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon if Communist China enters the war.

Symington criticized other countries for not bearing more of the costs in Vietnam. "The United States is carrying this economic load with little assistance from any nation of the Free World, and no assistance from most" he noted.

For nine pages in his report, Symington described his visit to the Vung Tau Farm where 3200 South Vietnamese are being trained for political action. "During the course the students are given complete freedom to speak," Symington said, "In the beginning they generally resolutely criticize or accuse Americans, but then they are shown they have no substantial basis for their arguments."