

For the Record:

POW 1573

Pursuing Truth at Pentagon

On Dec. 27, 1972, Pentagon spokesman Jerry Freidheim was asked about reports that American bombers had struck a hospital on the outskirts of Hanoi. What follows are excerpts from notes taken on his exchange with reporters:

Q. Now that you know what targets have been hit, can you give us an estimate of any civilian damage which may accidentally or otherwise have occurred?

A. No, I don't have any report on any collateral damage.

Q. Over and over we have heard reports about a hospital being bombed . . . why is it that you are unable to give us information on this? . . .

A. I think if you take this very lengthy communique you will find what has been damaged in North Vietnam in the last week . . .

Q. Do you know for a fact that you haven't hit any hospitals?

A. We have no information that those sort of targets have been struck. We don't find it unusual that that sort of propaganda announcement is being made by Hanoi . . .

Q. Do you categorize that reports as being incorrect?

A. We have not struck a large 1,000-bed civilian hospital, no.

Q. Accidentally or otherwise? You're dismissing that as enemy propaganda? There's no truth to it?

A. I have no information that indicates that at all . . . There have been buildings damaged and destroyed . . .

the other side may have for propaganda reasons characterized those however they wish but they are military targets.

On Dec. 29, 1972, Mr. Freidheim was asked again about the reports involving a hospital:

Q. Can you tell us specifically if what is known as Bach Mai Hospital was hit by U.S. bombs?

A. I still have no information on that at all. I haven't seen anything on it. I don't know what the other side may refer to as the Bach Mai Hospital, if indeed there is one.

On Jan. 2, 1973, the following statement was issued by Mr. Freidheim:

"I would like to reiterate that our policy remains one of targeting only military targets in North Vietnam. We know, and have said many times, that from time to time accidental damage to other than military targets occurs, sometimes involving United States ordnance or aircraft and sometimes involving North Vietnamese ordnance or aircraft. We regret any such accidental damage from whatever source but we reiterate that our strikes have been targeted only at military targets.

"It appears that some limited accidental damage has occurred to some facilities at Giaham airport and at a hospital the enemy calls Bach Mai. The exact extent of this damage is uncertain, as is its cause. Our information does not square with Hanoi's propaganda claims of massive destruction at these sites."