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## A Cool Reception for a Bombing Report

ON CAPITOL HILL, military appropriations have been held sacred, and military men appearing before the House Appropriations Committee have always felt they were among friends. But the Vietnam experience has shaken the faith that the committee members once had in the Pentagon. No longer are they ready to approve millions for the military with no questions asked.

Admiral Thomas Moorer, the nation's No. 1 military man, used to dazzle the committee members with all his braid and brass. He wasn't treated with the customary reverence, however, when he delivered his last report to the committee on the Vietnam war last month. The doors were shut tight and the transcript was stamped "Top Secret" so he wouldn't feel inhibited. But instead of the former camaraderie, he encountered skepticism, cynicism and even hostility.

"I think most of us are somewhat skeptical about the productivity of the acceleration of the bombing . . ." snorted Chairman George Mahon (D-Tex.). "Was this the greatest devastation of the war?"

"I think in terms of compressed time," said Moorer, "yes, sir." He insisted, however, that the same targets had been hit earlier.

"How do you explain the surge of criticism throughout much of the world of this bombing if we had done the same thing in previous efforts?" demanded Mahon.

"I think that is difficult to explain, sir," said the Joint Chiefs chairman. "I think part of it is due, of course, to the high hopes that everyone had for terminating hostilities . . ."

"What," pressed Mahon, "was the objective of this accelerated bombing effort? I know you wanted to destroy military targets, but really, what good

was it going to do? What was the objective, really?"

Moorer began to squirm. "The objective," he said, "was to insure that North Vietnam did not have, in effect, a sanctuary in which they could rebuild all of their war-making potential . . ."

But the lanky Texan was not impressed. "It has been alleged," he grumped, "that this was just a senseless destruction of North Vietnamese installations, targets and people and a senseless expenditure of American lives and a senseless loss of military equipment. How do you react to that accusation?"

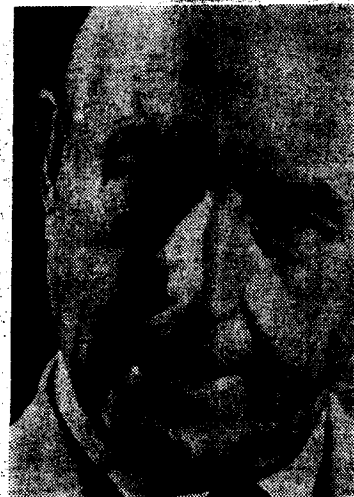
"Sir," pleaded Moorer, "this . . . is simply a replay of those that have been made over and over again, over a period of years. I don't know of any way of conducting military operations without effecting loss or suffering loss and effecting damage . . ."

"Admiral, this war has demonstrated that a relatively primitive people apparently cannot be bombed into submission . . ." shot back Mahon.

Moorer contended that Hanoi's main effort had been "seriously" hampered by the bombing, but he acknowledged that the North Vietnamese "can carry on various and sundry kinds of sabotage, sapper and guerrilla activity for a long time in that jungle environment."

Rep. Elford Cederberg (R-Mich.), noted that they were able to rebuild military facilities just about as fast as our bombers could destroy them. "I am amazed," he said, "that they can recover and repair these targets in two months. We can't get a plumber to repair anything here in a month . . ."

"In two months, they can fix a span and repair the bridge. We can't get the area around the Rayburn Building repaired here in three years."



Adm. Thomas Moorer

"If we had their politboro," suggested the admiral ruefully, "we could. Let's hope we never get it. The answer to your question is this, sir. They manufacture nothing. They produce nothing. The entire manpower effort is devoted to the war or support of the war. As a result, this is a manpower operation, almost unlimited manpower."

"Admiral" broke in Rep. Jamie Whitten (D-Miss.), "all this is very informative. However, the piano part is missing as to why. What do we hope to accomplish and why are we doing it? You carefully refrained from that. Even though you have been chosen as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, you haven't been taken in on the planning and given information as to why we are doing this?"

"I do not participate directly," replied Moorer.

Whitten kept trying to pin down the Joint Chiefs chairman on his role in shaping military policy and the reasons for some of the military moves in Vietnam. Moorer's guarded responses, however, annoyed Whitten.

"I think your failure to answer is kind of an answer in itself," snapped the quick-minded, quick-moving congressman from Mississippi. Another time, he told Moorer: "That is an answer that really doesn't answer, Admiral." But Whitten got nowhere with his questions.

Rep. Joseph Addabbo (D-N.Y.), had a complaint about all the secrecy. "The pictures you have shown us and the charts you have shown us this morning," he said, "have been marked secret, classified. What is secret and classified in those pictures as to sorties? Why can't pictures be made known to the public so we can (answer) the question of whether we are bombing hospitals or not?"

"Well, sir," shrugged Moorer, "the decision as to dissemination of information is, of course, always made by the Secretary of Defense . . ."

But it was left to Rep. Daniel Flood (D-Pa.), to offer the final summary of Vietnam war. "If ever I saw a military merry-go-round, this is it," he snorted, "military in the sense of the general spectre of the great United States of America just exhausting itself."