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U.S. AIDE DEFENDS BOMBING IN LAOS

Testifies It Is Not Major
Cause of War Refugees

By JOHN W. FINNEY

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WASHINGTON, April 22 — The State Department said today that American bombing was not a major cause of civilian refugees in Laos.

William H. Sullivan, former Ambassador to Laos and now Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, testified before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Refugees. He defended the State Department against charges made yesterday by Representative Paul N. McCloskey Jr., Republican of California.

Mr. McCloskey said that the United States had bombed thousands of villages in northern Laos, and that the State Department had deliberately concealed the extent of the bombing and its effect in creating refugees.

The freshman Representative has threatened to enter the primaries to challenge President Nixon's renomination in protest against Mr. Nixon's Vietnam policies.

North Vietnam Blamed

Mr. Sullivan contended that "the prime cause" of refugees was "the constant military pressure of the North Vietnamese," particularly during their offensive in 1969. He also said that American bombing had been carefully controlled to avoid populated areas, even in Communist-controlled regions in northern Laos.

The State Department's assertion was challenged by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, chairman of the subcommittee on refugees. He contended that

American bombing in Laos had "contributed to at least 75 per cent of the refugees" in that country.

In large measure, Mr. McCloskey's charges were based on a report in 1970 by the United States Information Service on a survey of attitudes among more than 200 refugees from 96 villages from the Plaines des Jarres area in northern Laos.

On the basis of the interviews with the refugees, the report concluded that bombing had clearly been the most compelling reason for their moving from their villages. The report said that 75 per cent of 190 Laotians interviewed had said that their homes had been damaged by bombing.

Support for Mr. McCloskey's charge was offered today by Fred Branfman, a former volunteer worker and free-lance writer in Laos.

Mr. Branfman, who was sitting in the audience, was called upon by Senator Kennedy before Mr. Sullivan could begin his prepared statement. In his four years in Laos, from 1967 to 1971, Mr. Branfman said, he interviewed thousands of Laotian refugees and "each one said his village was totally or partially destroyed by American bombing."

Conclusions Challenged

Mr. Sullivan replied that both Mr. McCloskey and Mr. Branfman were reaching unjustified conclusions by extrapolating from the experience of a relatively small group of refugees who were caught in the fighting around the Plaines de Jarres in 1969.

The U.S.I.S. survey, for example, he said, was taken because of the "most unusual" circumstances of finding that the refugees in one small camp were "sullen, hostile to the Government and not cooperative." It was found, he said, that the refugees all came from villages that were caught up in the fighting around the Plaines des Jarres.