

ALSO
FILED
POWS,
INDOCHINA

1 2 1973 SFChronicle JAN 12 1973
**B-52 Pilot Tells
Why He Balked**

By George Esper
Associated Press

Saigon

Saying "a man has to answer to himself first," a B-52 commander submitted his resignation yesterday after refusing to fly any more combat missions.

"The goals do not justify the mass destruction and killing. It was not specifically the bombing of the North," said Captain Michael J. Heck, 30, of Chula Vista, Calif.

"There is enough suffering just in South Vietnam to warrant a discontinuation of the war. But the massive bombing of the North might have been the last straw, and I think the step that specifically pushed me over the brink.

"After the cease-fire for Christmas, the massive bombardments resumed and I decided I had to take the step. I reached the decision December 26 and I went to see my wing commander and informed him of my decision. He advised me to seek legal assistance.

"I come to the decision that any war creates an evil far greater than anything it is trying to prevent, whatever the reasons, even for the self-determination of South Vietnam. The goals do not justify the mass destruction and killing. It's torn our own country apart.

"I'm just a tiny cog in a big wheel. I have no illusions that what I'm doing will shorten the war, but a man has to answer to himself first."

Heck said he hopes the Air

Force will release him without a court-martial, but that he could live with a prison term "easier than I can with taking part in the war."

He appeared yesterday before the military's equivalent of a grand jury for determination if he should face a court-martial for refusing to fly. Conviction could bring a two-year prison term.

The findings will not be known for several days, Heck said in an interview, but in the meantime he has submitted his resignation and also, as an alternative, is seeking noncombat status as a conscientious objector. That could result in immediate discharge rather than court-martial.

SERVICE

The seven-year Air Force veteran, a 1964 graduate of President Nixon's alma mater, Whittier College, has one more year to serve in the Air Force before he normally would be discharged.

By prior agreement, the circumstances under which Heck was interviewed could not be revealed.

Heck, with 175 B-52 missions, a rating as a flight commander, and 100 combat missions in a C-123 flare drop and forward air control plane, is currently assigned to administrative duties at this base in southern Thailand while the Air Force determines what action to take.

He is the first American pilot known to have refused to go into combat since air operations began in Southeast Asia 8½ years ago.

He flew his last mission on Christmas Eve, against the heavily defended Haiphong

region. There, during the December 18-30 attacks, the Air Force suffered its costliest aircraft and crew losses of the war.

Heck said his feelings about the war began to build up last September when he returned for his third B-52 tour but he was able to live with them because he believed peace was near and he could avoid facing the issue.

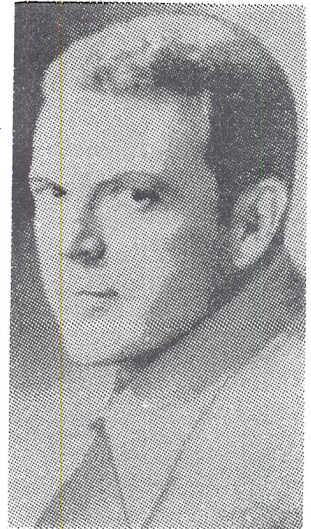
FEAR

Heck acknowledged that there is an element of fear in flying into the heavily defended regions where 16 B-52s have been lost and the scores of crewmen killed, captured or lost. But he said this was not really his reason for refusing to go into combat.

"Anybody who is not afraid is crazy," he said. "There is always a lot of adrenalin pumping up there. It was not really the element of fear that resulted in my decision. I've been afraid before this when I was flying C-123s and getting shot at. I could still function. I think most guys can.

"If they tell me now to go on milk runs, the B-52 targets over South Vietnam where nobody gets shot at, I would feel no different. I would even refuse a ground job supervising the loading of bombs or refueling aircraft. I can't be a participant."

Asked about the controversy over attacks reaching into civilian areas, he said: "Anytime you bomb on the massive scale we did up there, there's bound to be bombs off target, no question about it. I don't think we intentionally targeted ci-



AP Wirephoto

CAPT. MICHAEL HECK
Prison would be easier

vilian targets, but they inevitably become unintentional targets that are going to be hit.

"One possibility of going off target is maneuvering to avoid missiles. There are also certain inherent errors in any bombing equipment. You can't be exactly accurate. There are any number of human errors and the more planes the greater the possibility. There is no doubt that nonmilitary targets were hit, but I don't think it was intentional."

Discussing his conscientious objector status, Heck said he was "raised as a Protestant in the Methodist Church and I went to a Quaker college. My religion is of a very personal nature, it's sort of a conglomerate of my experiences to date."

He said he has not been harassed because of his refusal to fly and that most people, including senior officers, have been sympathetic to his views. The five crewmen he flew with for the past year have written a letter verifying that he had changed his views about the war and supporting his status as a conscientious objector, he said.