

Plan for atomic war considered by Nixon

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WASHINGTON — If the communist offensive should threaten the orderly withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam, President Nixon is prepared to use nuclear weapons against the attackers.

We reported on March 1, 1971, that contingency plans had been drafted for nuclear warfare in Indochina. Competent sources stressed that nuclear weapons would be used only as a last resort if the President concluded there were no other ways to save our boys.

We can now report that the contingency plans have been constantly revised and updated. Like pre-written newspaper obituaries, they are ready in case the dwindling U.S. forces should be pushed into a Dunkirklike corner.

The secret plans call for using "nukes" of different magnitude, depending on the targets. "An air blast or a ground blast" might be used, say our sources. This would be determined by how much we wanted to limit the destruction.

Our key sources, for their own protection, have asked us to withhold their identities. But a former sergeant, who worked on the contingency plans, not only has agreed to let us name him but has offered to testify before Congress on the nuclear targeting.

He is James Walkley, a former Air Force sergeant, who used to work on target planning at Hickman Field in Hawaii. His specialty was Laos.

Targeting Room

The nuclear targeting, he told us, is done in "a special little room. You have to have an SI (Special Intelligence) clearance to get inside."

"I worked with the people, so I knew what they were doing," Walkley said. "With a nuke, you'd have to drop a certain type on a certain type of target."

The plans were constantly worked over, he said, although it sometimes seemed to him that the Air Force merely "wanted to keep the guys busy."

Walkley said he had provided target information to the nuclear experts, although his main job was targeting conventional bombing.

He could name others who labored over the nuclear contingency plans, he said, but couldn't guarantee they would testify.

Footnote: The former sergeant was kicked out of his top-secret job in 1970 after he became distressed with his target-planning role and began to work against the Vietnam War. He was courtmartialed but acquitted, and then given an honorable discharge.