

Probe of a B-52 Pilot Who Balked at a Raid

Reuters

Omaha, Neb.

A 30-year-old B-52 pilot and crew commander is facing a possible court-martial because of his alleged refusal to fly a combat mission over North Vietnam, Strategic Air Command headquarters here said yesterday.

The command identified the officer as Captain Michael J. Heck, and said he is now in Thailand.

A command spokesman said Heck, who serving his fourth combat tour in Indochina, is permanently assigned to the SAC's Second Bomb Wing, a B-52 unit, and his normal duty station is Barksdale Air Force Base, Shreveport, La.

FIRST

The spokesman said Heck is "the first and only" B-52 crew member investigated on a charge of refusing to obey an order to fly a com-

bat mission since B-52s first went into action over Indochina in June, 1965.

A report that other B-52 crew members have been sent back to the United States for balking at flying missions over the heavily defended Hanoi area was denied by SAC. The report was contained in a dispatch filed from Guam, where many of the B-52s engaged in the war are based, by a New York Times correspondent.

"There is absolutely no truth to that," the SAC spokesman said.

LOSSES

The SAC provided the information on Heck in response to a query on whether members of B-52 crews had disobeyed orders to fly over the Hanoi area where, according to the U.S. command in Vietnam, 15 of the big bombers have been lost to antiaircraft missiles. Two other B-52s were downed after being hit by defense fire elsewhere over North Vietnam.

The SAC spokesman said Heck is being investigated

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under Article 32 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice for his "alleged failure" to obey orders "to fly a combat mission in Southeast Asia."

An investigation under Article 32 is normally conducted as a means of determining whether grounds for a court-martial exist, the

spokesman said.

Heck is the only member of the six-man crew he commanded who faces the investigation, the spokesman said.

The alleged refusal took place December 27, nine days after B-52s began massive raids against the Hanoi area. The heaviest loss of B-52s occurred earlier just before Christmas.

Heck is serving his third Southeast Asia tour as a member of a B-52 crew. He also spent a year ending in April, 1969, as a forward air controller, piloting a small plane over suspected Communist positions and troop concentrations or supply routes to direct bombing attacks.

The SAC said Heck flew 56

bombing missions during his first B-52 tour, 61 during his second and 106 missions as a forward air controller. Before December 27 he had flown 39 missions during his current tour.

The captain was residing at Whittier, Calif., when he was commissioned into the Air Force in 1966. He is married and has two children.