

# 'Mass Killing' Pushed B-52 Pilot Over Brink

By George Esper  
Associated Press

SAIGON, Jan. 11—Saying "a man has to answer to himself first," a much-decorated B-52 commander today asked the U.S. Air Force to accept his resignation 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 Capt. 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 Dec. 26 and I went to see my wing commander and informed him of my decision. He advised me to seek legal assistance," Heck said.

"I came 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."

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 he was interviewed cannot 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 his base in southern Thailand while the Air Force determines what action to take.

## First to Refuse

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 Hanoi-Haiphong region. There, during the Dec. 18-30 blitz, the Air Force suffered its costliest aircraft and crew losses of the war.

Asked about the controversy over attacks reaching into civilian areas, he replied: "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 civilian targets, but they inevitably become unintentional targets that are going to be hit.

"One possibility of going off target is maneuvering to avoid surface-to-air 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 non-military targets were hit, but I don't think it was intentional."

Capt. Heck said a very small number of airmen want to bomb civilians in North Vietnam.

"One man made the statement that he wanted to hit civilian targets in the North because it made him feel good to hurt them. That's the quote. But this is not typical. Most people here don't like what they are doing, but they follow orders."

Heck said his feelings about the war began to build up last September when he returned for his

## Faces Prison Term

Heck said he hoped the Air Force would 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 today before the military's equivalent of a grand jury to determine if he should face a court-martial 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.

The seven-year Air Force

third B-52 tour, but he believed peace was near and avoided facing the issue.

Heck acknowledged that there is an element of fear in flying into the heavily defended regions where 16 B-52 bombers—by U.S. count—have been lost and scores of crewmen killed, captured or are missing. But he said this was not 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."

There are other B-52 crewmen who feel as he does, he added.

#### Reluctant To Talk

"I don't want to say they are in the majority but there are some who are very reluctant to talk about it because they fear it will hurt their careers. So they don't talk openly. I don't have any family (aside from his parents and a brother) and I'm not making the Air Force a career. A lot of people don't agree with the bombing, but they honestly feel it is their duty and they are following orders even though they may disagree. Even I did it for some time."

In Chula Vista, the captain's father, John W. Heck, 62, a real estate broker commented: "He's been very, very much against it ever since they put him in B-52s about four years ago. He did not like any part of it.

"I am with him 100 per cent. So is his mother. I've been very anti-war, especially this war."

The heavy U.S. air losses Dec. 18-30 "made a lot of people think whether it was worthwhile," Capt. Heck said.

#### Only B-52 Lost

Before the campaign in the heavily defended northern region of North Vietnam, only one B-52 had been



MICHAEL J. HECK  
... "was creates evil."

acknowledged as shot down in 7½ years of operations in Indochina.

Heck said it is disturbing to walk by the trailer quarters of missing pilots.

"You walk by the trailers and you see them putting the personal effects into a box. Almost everyone had somebody they knew missing."

Heck disagreed with an unidentified B-52 navigator who complained in a letter to Sen. Charles McC. Mathias, R-Md., that the Strategic Air Command had planned the raids poorly, that the same targets were bombed twice and that the same exit routes were used even though it was known that new surface-to-air missile sites had been built along the routes. Because of failure to change the second routing, the navigator said, "the aircraft directly in front of us was shot down."

"Every time we went," said Heck, "the exit routes were different. I know his (the unidentified navigator's) gripe but I can't go into it for security reasons. A good attempt was made to correct the situation after the first couple of missions. A very honest and professional effort was made. The defenses were simply too heavy not to expect any losses." →

## Regretful Army Hero Getting Out

HONOLULU, Jan. 11 (UPI)—The Army is speeding up the discharge of a decorated Green Beret paratrooper who has called the Vietnam war "insane and brutal."

Army officials said Wednesday that they have started the final processing for the "expeditious discharge" of Sgt. Ernest R. Pounder, 28, on grounds that he was a conscientious objector.

Pounder, who served on the White House security staff of President John F. Kennedy and won 24 medals for gallantry in Vietnam, told the Army that he would not wear his uniform after Monday because it was dragging its feet in granting him a discharge.

Proclaiming a "personal victory and one for others in the service who wish to resist," Pounder said, "I am no longer an instrument of war. My rebirth into the peace movement has begun."

He said Army bureaucrats had been prodded into quick action by widespread publicity about the case.

The Army was also prodded by Rep. Patsy Mink, an anti-war Hawaii Democrat, who recently requested its "urgent attention" to Pounder's conscientious objector application.

Military officials said Pounder would be discharged "within a week," and the soldier said he would take his wife and six children "back home" to Peoria, Ill.

Pounder went to Vietnam in 1964 "100 per cent in favor" of America's role in the war. But, he said, he was quickly disillusioned after viewing "death and destruction" and corruption of South Vietnamese military officials.

The 6-foot, short-haired soldier is a veteran of almost 12 years in the Army. He returned his medals to the Army to protest the "horrible injustices to mankind which are being perpetuated by this insane war."