

## Cambodia Bombing

# Ex-Flyer's Story Of Fake Records On B-52 Raids

Washington

A former Air Force major has told the Senate Armed Services Committee that in early 1970 he participated in the widespread falsification of records to hide the fact that U.S. B-52s were bombing Cambodia, Senate sources said yesterday.

Hal M. Knight, now a graduate student in Memphis, is expected to testify today in an extraordinary public session of the committee.

"I'll be testifying because of Article 107 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice," he said last night while on route here.

"It says that an officer should not falsify military records. It also says that military records should not be ordered — and let me emphasize the word 'ordered' — falsified," Knight said.

The committee thus will open — at least tentatively — another phase into its investigation of the war. The investigation began last fall with three months of study and hearings into the unauthorized bombings and false reportings laid to now-retired Major General John D. Lavelle, the former commander of the Seventh Air Force.

Lavelle, who had been serving in the temporary grade of general, was retired two grades lower in his permanent grade of major general after admitting that he ordered more than 25 unauthorized raids of North Vietnam in 1971 and 1972 — nearly two years after incidents cited by Knight.

### NEUTRALITY

At the time of the falsifications Knight described,

the U.S. officially recognized the neutrality of the regime of Norodom Sihanouk, the Cambodian chief of state.

No public announcements of any B-52 raids in Cambodia were made until the invasion there began in May, 1970. On a number of occasions in 1969 and early 1970, American officials had apologized or in other ways expressed official regret at what were described as accidental violations of Cambodia air space.

Senate sources said that

Back Page Col. 1

### From Page 1

Knight's account of his involvement in the false reporting was first provided to Senator Harold E. Hughes (Dem-Iowa), a committee member instrumental in prompting last year's Lavelle investigations.

Hughes passed on the Knight accusations during a closed committee meeting Saturday with General George S. Brown, who was nominated July 3 by President Nixon to be the Air Force chief of staff. Brown directed the tactical air operations in Southeast Asia from 1968 until the fall of 1970, when he was replaced by Lavelle.

### RECORDS

In a telephone interview, Knight, 37, said that he began to falsify bombing records soon after he arrived in South Vietnam in February, 1970, and added that

other officers serving with him in the Strategic Air Command had said that the illegal procedures then in use had been in operation since the 1968 Tet offensive.

"I would estimate that I personally submitted at least two dozen falsified reports," the former major said. "Lavelle never found out that they had been doing exactly the same thing before he got there — only on a bigger scale — but they got away with it."

Knight said that the falsified bombing and reporting stopped with the invasion of Cambodia in May, 1970. He said that most of the illegal raids were concentrated in the fish hook section of Cambodia near the South Vietnamese border, an area widely considered by American military men to be a staging area or sanctuary for Viet Cong units and supplies.

"It was thoroughly justified bombing," the former officer said, "and that's why I argued and argued with these people. I said we got to do it legally, and they'd say, 'No — Senator Fulbright might find out about it.'"

### SUMMARY

In a declassified summary of air operations provided earlier this year to Hughes, the Air Force did not list any B-52 raids into Cambodia until May, 1970.

Knight confirmed that he had been requested to testify today before the Senate committee and said that he is ready to provide the names and addresses of other former Strategic Air Command officers who would be willing to testify. "We were all SAC," Knight said.

The former major, who said he joined the Air Force in 1958, served for varying times in Southeast Asia in 1967, 1968 and 1969, usually flying as a navigator for a KC-135 tanker jet.

### DUTIES

In February, 1970, he said, he was assigned to Operating Location 21 of the First Combat Evaluation Group, a Strategic Air Command radar outpost in Bien Hoa, South Vietnam, that served to guide B-52s from Guam and elsewhere to their targets as well as to compute

the correct time and angle of the bombing runs.

Knight said that he served as operations officer for the site. As such, he explained, his job was to ensure that the daily bombing orders for B-52 raids — known as "frags" — were properly relayed by radio and computer to the pilots as they flew overhead on their way to the target areas. Afterward, the post attack reports — which noted the coordinates of the target area and time of attacks, as well as results of the bombing — were filled out and forwarded to Seventh Air Force headquarters

in Saigon.

He said that the daily bombing orders for the B-52 missions were coordinated by three headquarters — the Seventh Air Force in Saigon; the Eighth Air Force on Guam, a Strategic Air Command unit and the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, headed in 1970 by General Creighton W. Abrams, now the Army chief of staff.

"As soon as I got there," Knight recalled, "the site commander (a lieutenant colonel) called me in and said, 'I've got to brief you on something. From time to

time we conduct special missions, and here's what will happen.

### ORDERS

"We will get a regular frag from Saigon," Knight quoted his superior as saying, and said that "regular frag" meant a list of target areas for B-52 raids inside South Vietnam. "And this fellow from Saigon will call, and all he will say on the phone is that a man is flying to see you. Meet the plane and this guy will get off and hand you an envelope."

That envelope, Knight continued, contained highly classified targeting instructions listing sites inside Cambodia that were to be bombed.

"These were the real targets," the former major said of the hand carried list, "and the regular frags (relayed to the radar site through normal communications) would become the cover targets and always be in South Vietnam."

Knight said that the hand delivered

ways arrived in the early evening and the subsequent raids were flown at night "because there wouldn't be anybody flying around to notice that the bombs didn't fall where the frags showed." He was referring to US. aircraft, he said.

He described the after-action reporting of the illegal raids this way:

"Okay — We had the cover targets, the real targets and ran the mission. What we would do is take the cover target information and work it up (as if the bombs actually had been dropped inside South Vietnam). Then we'd take the actual targets through the computers and get all that worked up. After the mission, we took the cover target's reports and sent it in to Saigon."

"As for the actual target material," Knight noted, "I was required to wait until daylight and then go outside and burn it."

"At 9 in the morning I had a number in Saigon to call and say that 'The ball game was complete' — which meant that I had burned the paperwork," he said. The officials in Saigon were highly sensitive about that aspect of his mission, the ex-major related.

#### SOURCE

Knight identified the source of the order as the Strategic Air Command's ADVON group, a coordinating agency in Saigon that relayed intelligence and target information between military assistance command officials and the Eighth Air Force on Guam.

"A friend of mine who worked in Saigon intelligence once told me that there were only a dozen people in MACV who knew about these runs," Knight said. He added that he was never able to learn where the orders for the Cambodian raids originated.

"I tried to find out once and was very brusquely told not to ask. Each guy got the same briefing when he arrived so he wouldn't know who authorized it," he said. "When you were replaced

you told your replacement the same story that you had been told."

Nonetheless, Knight said, he learned from colleagues that similar falsifications were carried out by officers at other secret Strategic Air Command radar sites in South Vietnam. One site, in the northern part of South Vietnam, he said, was responsible for unreported B-52 missions into Laos and North Vietnam.

Some of the B-52 raids in Laos, were made public, he added, "but we were doing a lot more there than they would tell they were doing."

On at least one occasion, Knight said, he was told that General Abrams was aware of the falsified missions.

Knight, who is studying for a master's degree in history at Memphis State University, said he was constantly in a "moral dilemma" while serving at the radar station.

"I wasn't a dove," he said. "I was all for what we were doing. This is what put me in such a moral dilemma. I knew the way we were doing it was wrong."

"I talked to other guys over there about it and it was very frustrating. They'd say, 'We gotta do it.' I began to wonder whether I was the only sane guy over there or else everybody else was crazy. I was just out of step."

*New York Times*