

Secret Bombing Of Laos Disclosed

Washington

At the same time secret bombing raids were being launched against neutralist Cambodia in 1969 and early 1970, Guam-based American B-52s were raiding Laos, and the missions were then being disguised to reflect attacks in South Vietnam, the Pentagon acknowledged yesterday.

As in the case of the Cambodian raids, which were first disclosed in detail before a congressional committee on Monday, the raids in Laos were hidden by the falsification of post-strike reports, Defense Department officials said.

In the aftermath of congressional disclosures of the bombing campaigns, Assistant Defense Secretary Jerry W. Friedheim acknowledged that details of a "major interdiction air campaign" were given to only a few members of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Friedheim said the bombing information was withheld from other members of the Senate committee, including members who opposed U.S. war policies at that time. That, he said, was "normal" Pentagon procedure.

According to congressional sources, the members of the Armed Services Committee who were notified were the chairman, Senator John C. Stennis (Dem-Miss.), and Senators Barry Goldwater (Rep-Ariz.) and Stuart Symington (Dem-Mo.), all of whom supported the Nixon administration's Vietnam policies.

Senator Harold E. Hughes

(Dem-Iowa), who was frequently critical of the war policies, said he was never notified of the raids or the military decision to file falsified post-strike reports which showed that the bombs had been dropped in South Vietnam.

REPORT

During an intensive, hour-long period of questioning by reporters at the Pentagon yesterday, Friedheim said the Cambodian bombing sorties were "deliberately not included" in the report requested by Hughes and furnished to him last month.

He said the decision to omit from the list the bombing raids across the Cambodian and Laotian borders was made by "senior military and civilian officials here." The reason, Friedheim said, was that "it was felt that it would not be particularly useful to include

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the information at that time."

Friedheim said that bombing operations in Laos began before March, 1970, but he declined to say how long before, or to what extent. In response to a question, he declined to comment on reports that those bombing missions began as early as 1968.

However, Friedheim said the Laotian bombing runs involved the "same kind of special security precautions" that were detailed Monday to the Armed Forces Committee by former Air Force Major Hal M. Knight, who was an operations officer of a radar guidance station in Bien Hoa, South Vietnam, when the covert raids were conducted.

STRIKES

Knight testified that he personally supervised two dozen B-52 raids into Cambodia at a time the U.S. offi-

cially recognized the neutrality of Cambodia under the regime of since-deposed Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

Friedheim said that the Air Force actually conducted "hundreds" of B-52 raids in Cambodia during the period between March, 1969, and April 30, 1970, after which the U.S. officially began what it called the "incursion" into Cambodia, characterized as necessary to facilitate a withdrawal of troops from South Vietnam.

He said the Cambodian sorties were conducted in such a manner that post-attack reports sent to Strategic Air Command officials in Saigon were "deliberately not completely accurate."

The purpose of that procedure, Friedheim said, was to assure secrecy in a "sensitive diplomatic and operational situation."

When asked what reporting procedures were used following the bombings in Laos, Friedheim said, "I'm sure there were some of the same situations there."

PHONY

As described Monday by Knight, the reporting procedures included the burning of Cambodian bombing mission reports and the substitution of phony "cover flight" records to account for the activities of B-52 squadrons stationed in Guam.

Knight said he was told to fake the bombing reports for "political reasons," adding that one superior officer specifically mentioned the possibility of criticism by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

When asked whether mounting anti-war sentiment in the U.S. was a factor in the decision to employ the false reporting scheme, Friedheim said:

"We thought that the American people would understand and support whatever steps were necessary to support a withdrawal, so I don't think that (political

consideration) was a factor in the decision."

LAIRD

Friedheim said he suspected that a visit to Southeast Asia in 1969 by then Defense Secretary Melvin D. Laird was a "major factor" in the decision to bomb Cambodia. He stressed that the bombing of the "Fish Hook" and "Parrot's Beak" sanctuaries was a device to guarantee the safe withdrawal of 500,000 American troops in South Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Symington said the Armed Services Committee will hold further hearings, if necessary, to determine who ordered the secret bombing and the false reporting practices.

Senator William B. Saxbe (Rep-Ohio), a member of the committee, said he thinks there are more grounds for impeachment of President Nixon for the secret air war in Cambodia than in the Watergate affair.

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