

Pentagon Admission on Fake Report

Washington

The Defense Department knowingly provided the Senate Armed Services Committee with a false report last month that did not reveal the secret Cambodian bombing, the Pentagon's chief spokesman acknowledged yesterday.

The spokesman, Jerry W. Friedheim, also conceded that he had authorized the distribution of the report — which he knew to be false — to the newsmen who regularly report on the Pentagon.

"Obviously, it was a blunder of some magnitude," Friedheim, who is the assistant secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, told reporters at yesterday's regular briefing. He added that "we weren't smart enough to foresee" the Senate testimony of former Major Hal M. Knight of the Air Force.

Knight, now a graduate student in history in Memphis, initiated a week-long series of revelations — including a Pentagon admission that it secretly authorized 3630 bombing raids by B-52s over Cambodia in 1969 and 1970 — by telling the Armed Services Committee Monday how he destroyed some official records and falsified others to help cover up the missions.

"I knew at the time it was wrong and I'm sorry."

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Friedheim said.

Five hours later, Friedheim's office provided newsmen with a "clarification" in which the Pentagon spokesmen said that, upon further recall, he had not realized that the B-52 bombing statistics were "incomplete" until the report had been distributed to the Armed Services Committee.

The revised chronology also contended that the decision, to release the statistics was made after the declassified report became available on Capitol Hill.

Friedheim described the top command of the Pentagon as being "in a state of flux" this May and June, when the decision was made to withhold information from the Senate and the press. At the time, he said, the then Secretary of Defense, Elliot L. Richardson, was in the process of transferring to the Justice Department to deal with the Watergate scandal, and James R. Schlesinger, the current defense secretary, had not been confirmed.

In effect, the Pentagon was being run during those months, Friedheim indicated, by William P. Clements Jr., the deputy secretary of defense. "In the deliberations at that time," Friedheim said, "it was determined that the bombing should not be revealed to the Senate."

Friedheim left the impres-

sion that he had been overruled at high levels when he attempted to get the correct information to the press. "I don't want to discuss any internal discussions in this building," he said in response to a question, "but you know I'm always interested in obtaining accurate information for you people."

Clements, who was said to be unavailable yesterday, refused earlier this week to discuss the Cambodian bombing.

Members of the Armed Services Committee are known to be disturbed by the falsification that was apparently ordered by high officials to help conceal the raids and by the Pentagon's decision not to list those raids in classified reports.

Officials said that Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, met briefly yesterday with Senator Stuart Symington, the acting chairman of the Armed Services Committee, in an attempt to resolve the deepening dispute.

No details of that meeting were immediately made known, but it was learned that the committee has tentatively decided to proceed with full-scale hearings into the secret bombing of Cambodia as early as next week, with retired Army General Earle G. Wheeler, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs, scheduled to be the first witness.

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