

Symington Charges Pentagon Deception

By Michael Getler

Washington Post Staff Writer

Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), acting chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, yesterday accused the Nixon administration of obtaining millions of dollars from Congress "under false pretenses" to support the secret air war in Cambodia during 1969 and 1970.

Symington, whose committee is about to launch expanded hearings into the now officially acknowledged Cambodian bombing campaign, told newsmen yesterday that "it is becoming increasingly clear that the Senate Armed Services Committee has been deceived about actual operations over Cambodia for a period of years. We have authorized money without knowing what was going on."

The Pentagon, on the heels of charges made by Sen. Harold Hughes (D-Iowa), and a former Air Force officer, admitted last week that some 3,630 B-52 strikes were made over Cambodia during the 14 months preceding the May, 1970, U.S.-South Vietnam invasion of Cambodia. All of those air strikes were publicly being reported as taking place inside South Vietnam.

Hughes joined Symington yesterday in sharply criticizing not only the false reporting of these raids but the subversion of the congressional budgeting and debating process in terms of knowing what military funds are being used for.



SEN. STUART SYMINGTON
... cites secret air war

Committee sources estimate that, at an average of \$40,000 per B-52 flight, the total cost of the pre-May, 1970, raids was about \$150 million.

"The fact that these massive military operations and widespread falsifications of official reports could be kept secret so long," Hughes said, "convince me that in this jungle of secret warfare and official deceit, there are uncharted depths perhaps more frightening than what has yet been disclosed, to be brought to light."

Behind the Hughes hint that new disclosures may be forthcoming are as yet unproven allegations that, aside from B-52 strikes, smaller U.S. fighter-bombers may also have

See BOMBING, A4, Col. 1

BOMBING, From A1

been under orders to bomb in Cambodia and file falsified reports about where their targets were located.

Hughes and Symington met with newsmen briefly yesterday after a closed-door session with chief Pentagon spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim. Friedheim, was at the center of the Pentagon's frequently revised recollections last week of how the falsified reporting system got started and why incorrect official reports were sent to Congress.

Friedheim was described by Symington as a cooperative witness; many of the unanswered questions about administration actions lie beyond Friedheim's responsibilities.

Friedheim, according to Hughes, told the committee one reason why an official classified report to Congress several months ago did not show the Cambodian bombing: persons who reviewed the report were not among the very small circle who knew of the details of the secret air campaign, and thus did not know the report needed correcting.

But Hughes said: "To me, it was not a mistake." The senator charged that the "intent was to keep information from the committee, the Congress and the American people."

Symington indicated the committee, in an attempt to find out exactly who ordered the falsified reports to cover-up the pre-invasion bombing and who was responsible for sending Congress an incorrect yet official document, will call the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Earle Wheeler, to testify next Monday. Wheeler was the nation's top military officer during the 1969-1970 period in question.

Also to be called will be the current JCS chairman, Adm. Thomas H. Moorer. Some Pentagon sources suggest that the actual false reporting system was developed within the joint staff of the JCS after it was made clear by civilian officials

that the raids were to be covered up in some fashion because of their sensitivity.

Friedheim has said that some key lawmakers were told about the otherwise secret raids at the time. But yesterday Symington said he was never told, and Hughes said the same thing.

Furthermore, Hughes said, "it is my personal opinion that no one was ever fully briefed or knew what was going on at the time. If they were, I wish they'd step forward."

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield said yesterday that he was "very much disturbed by such an operation because I think what it tends to do is break down the equality which should prevail in this body among all members, and no confidential information of this nature should be given to members of committees in private and not to the full membership."

Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger, on his way to a House hearing, said he believed the Pentagon's falsification of the bombing reports "was a little less than perfect." He did not elaborate.

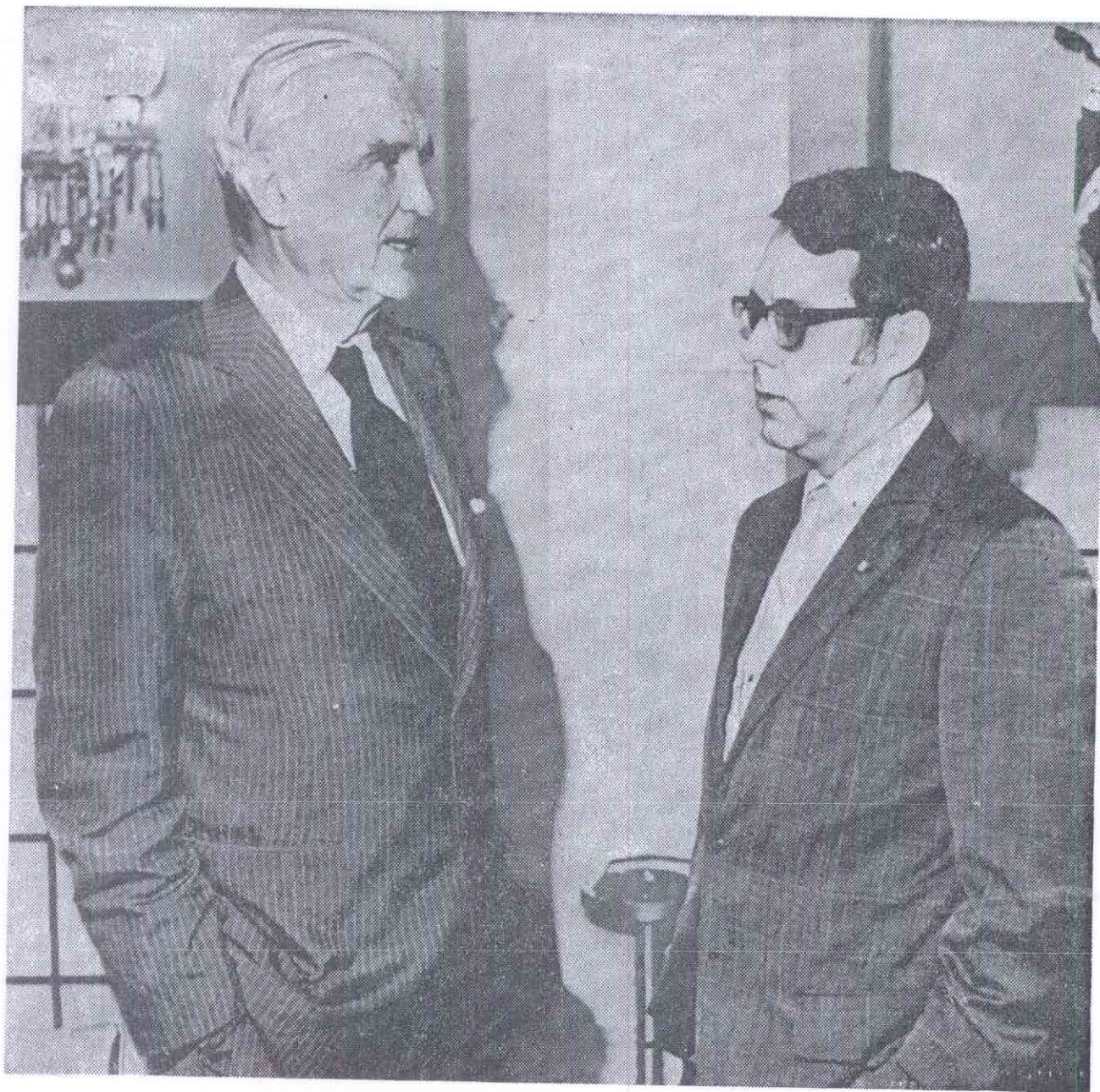
AF Probes Claim

Hospital Was Bombed

U.S. Air Force investigators are inquiring into claims by a former pilot that hospitals in Vietnam were targeted for attacks but were described in strike reports as bunker complexes or supply areas, the Defense Department said yesterday.

The charge that hospitals were bombed by U.S. planes was made in a letter by former Air Force Forward Air Controller Gerald Greven of Miami to Sen. Harold Hughes (D-Iowa).

Greven said hospitals were never designated by name as targets for air strikes, but were called by other names. He said he had once been reprimanded for using the word "hospital" in his strike report.



Symington, left, meets with Pentagon chief spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim before closed committee session.

Associated Press