

Wallow Words

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

"Let others wallow in Watergate," quoth the leader, but where shall he wallow? In Cambodia, perhaps. The B-52s are yet out, as they have been for four years, clobbering that once happy land.

But if you do wallow out of Watergate and wallow over into Cambodia, Watergate wallows and follows directly after you. For we have, among all the other cover-ups, a Cambodian cover-up under which more than 3,600 bombing raids were carried out while Nixon lied about our policy "to scrupulously respect the neutrality of the Cambodian people." Or don't you remember President Truthful's wallow words about the beastly Vietcong hiding in the "Cambodian sanctuaries" where our Boy Scouts couldn't get at them because of our reverent awe of international law.

The whole lie of the Cambodian invasion was built on the assertion that we could no longer tolerate the other side using neutral territory as a base from which to strike against us. Now we learn there was no neutral territory, no sanctuaries, and that it may have been our depredations which have led to the present Communist power in that nation.

To bring this lie off, resort was made to massive forgery of military records to fool the public at large and Congress in particular. That should not enrage us too much. We should be used to official forgery by this time because it appears to have been practiced by Nixon's moral thalidomide babies on such a scale that it will take the next administration years to authenticate the written records of this one.

Again, those who believed the lies, inside of Congress and out, are those who were disposed to out of misguided, if laudable, respect for the words of men in authority. Many published unofficial sources told us about the American bloodletting in Cambodia, but we still have a lot of people who won't believe such things unless the Pentagon's Ziegliar, Jerry W. Fraudheim, tells them so.

What makes the forgery of records so bad is that there are yet many people who have been brought up in the belief that you can trust the word of an American government official. They can't get the enormity of contemporary reality through their heads, which is that any official spokesman must be presumed to be a liar until proved otherwise, and that is not an indictment of "the system" or any other such silliness, but an accusation against the spiritually deformed gnomes they have running it.

That's past and the picking of a few stars off the Air Force generals' shoulders who disgraced their uniforms by collaborating in these acts won't bring back the dead. What's current is the question of whether they will do it again.

By lawful act of Congress on Aug. 14 they must cease their bombardment, but will they? Obviously there will be no peace agreement by that date and already the Cambodian faction we are backing is asking us to continue bombing its enemies. Having once conducted 3,600 clandestine air raids we're entitled to ask if Nixon and the Air Force are about to order 3,600 more.

It is also possible that Nixon now lacks the necessary shame to do these things in private. He may simply tell Congress to love off on Aug. 15 and announce the bombing will continue, law or no law. He's already set the groundwork for it.

The White House has been saying that it will veto the bill that will shortly be sent to it limiting the duration of time the President may wage war without congressional approval. The justification for the veto is the President's constitutionally mandated powers as commander-in-chief. Never mind the provision in the same much argued-over document giving Congress the sole power to declare war, President Truthful's position is that if you're the boss of the Army you can legally go to war wherever and whenever and against whomever you choose.

If you buy that then it follows Congress has no power to cut off Nixon's water on Aug. 15 in Cambodia. We'll see soon enough whether they push that argument.

In the meantime, New Zealand gets this week's award for trying to stop armed lunacy. The brave crew of a New Zealand frigate stationed itself a mere 20 miles from the French atomic test on the atoll of Mururoa last week. In a gesture that would be unthinkable in America, Fraser M. Coleman, a New Zealand cabinet minister, sailed aboard the frigate, Otago.

What a pity we didn't load Mr. James R. Schlesinger, our Secretary of Defense, on a passenger boat and send him out to join the Otago in peaceful reproach. He might have been joined by some of those Air Force generals who would have had the bracing experience of risking their own lives as they have risked so many others.

© 1973, The Washington Post/King Features Syndicate

See also Tom Wicker, NYTimes 24 Jul 73, filed Watergate