

Ex-AF Chief Says He Was Deceived

Washington

Former Air Force Secretary Robert C. Seamans sharply criticized yesterday the existing military organization system that keeps the top civilian officials in each service from knowing about certain major activities being carried out by their services.

The criticism came after Seamans told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he never knew that 3630 raids by B-52 heavy bombers had been secretly carried out over Cambodia for 14 months in 1969 and early 1970 while he was the Air Force's civilian chief.

Noting that under existing congressional approved authorities the service secretaries are not in the chain of command for operational matters, Seamans nevertheless told newsmen he has "said in the past that the service secretaries should be more involved in operational matters" and that "it just doesn't make sense to have the title but not know what the Air Force is doing."

'FLAW'

Senator Harold Hughes (Dem-Iowa) called it "almost unbelievable" that the secretary of the Air Force didn't know about clandestine raids of such magnitude and viewed it as a serious "flaw" in the existing chain of command setup that runs from the President to the secretary of defense to the uniformed military chiefs.

Seamans implied that had he known of the secret bombing campaign—disclosure of which by a

former Air Force major two weeks ago has caused a furor in Congress — he might have challenged it.

However, when asked why he had not inquired about bombing in Cambodia after several press reports in 1969 and early 1970 alleged it was being carried out, Seamans said "I can't really answer that question. I don't remember."

EMBARRASSING

For the 53-year-old Seamans, an ex-professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology who left the Air Force in mid-May, it was the second time in 18 months that he had been embarrassed by being kept out of crucial and highly controversial military decisions on the war.

In January, 1972, it was disclosed that Seamans learned only by watching television of what was then the most intensive five-day bombing raids launched against North Vietnam.

The Air Force chief of staff, General John D. Ryan,

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also told the committee that while he was vice chief of staff at the time the secret White House-ordered bombing began, he too was not among those "few personnel who had an absolute need to know" about the secret air war.

SYSTEM

Ryan said he learned of a "special security system," which involved a set of cover-up targets inside South Vietnam, when he became chief of staff in 1969, but never personally reviewed the cover-up statistics that were sent to Congress initially in March, 1971. No one else on the air staff who did see them knew about the real targets, he said.

Seamans said he could well understand the concern of Congress and the people over the secrecy and the false reporting.

Claiming "no personal knowledge of these particular missions" and therefore no reason to question false statistics sent to Congress, Seamans told newsmen "I don't like to be in the position of supplying inaccurate information to the committee, but I did and would like to explain what I know is hardly credible."

ROGERS

Meanwhile, the State Department sought yesterday to absolve Secretary of State William P. Rogers of any responsibility for withholding information about the B-52 bombings from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in April, 1970. But Rogers never told the committee the magnitude or duration of the bombing.

Rogers mentioned to the

committee in two executive sessions, on April 2 and April 27, 1970, that the U.S. had bombed in Cambodia, spokesman Charles W. Bray said yesterday.

"There was every opportunity, which the Senators present let go by," Bray said, "to discuss the nature and extent of the bombing."

Committee sources countered that Rogers, in substance, finessed the committee by making "passing references" to bombing in Cambodia, which they construed was only what they had heard about—intermittent, occasional runs across the Cambodian border.

There would have been "a terrible ruckus," one Senate source said, if the Senators had known that while they were expressing to Rogers deep concern about American involvement in Cambodia, for 14 months the U.S. had engaged in sustained B-52 raids on Communist "sanctuaries" there.

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