

WXPost (NDO) JUL 26 1973 1973

AF Secretary Not Told of Bombings

By Michael Getler
and Murrey Marder

Washington Post Staff Writers

Former Air Force Secretary Robert C. Seamans said yesterday that he never knew that 3,630 raids by Air Force B-52s had been secretly carried out over Cambodia between March, 1969, and May, 1970, while he served as the service's top civilian official.

On the heels of this admission, both Seamans and Sen. Harold Hughes (D-Iowa) challenged the existing military organization system that can keep the top civilian official in each service ignorant of major and controversial activities be-

ing carried out by his own service.

Seamans explained that under congressional authorities dating back to 1958 the service secretaries are not in the chain of command on operations. But he told newsmen that he has "said in the past that the service secretaries should be more involved in operational matters. It just doesn't make sense to have the title but not know what the Air Force is doing."

Hughes called it "almost unbelievable" that the Secretary of the Air Force didn't know about the clandestine raids of such magnitude, and said he

viewed it as a serious flaw in the existing chain of command that runs from the President to the Secretary of Defense to the uniformed military chiefs. The secret bombing campaign was disclosed by a former Air Force major two weeks ago.

Seamans said if he had known of the bombing, he might have challenged it.

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

It was the second time in 18 months that Seamans has

been embarrassed by being kept out of crucial and controversial military decisions on the war.

In January, 1972, it was disclosed that Seamans learned from his television set about what was then the most intensive five-day bombing raids ever launched against North Vietnam.

Seamans and the Air Force chief of staff, Gen. John D. Ryan, both testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in closed session yesterday. Afterward, Seamans

See **CAMBODIA, A10, Col. 1**

CAMBODIA, From A1

and Senator Hughes talked to newsmen.

Ryan was quoted as telling 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.

Ryan said that when he became chief of staff in 1969, he learned of a "special security system" which involved a set of cover-up targets inside South Vietnam. But he never personally reviewed the cover-up statistics that were sent to Congress initially in March, 1971, and no one on the air staff who saw 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."

Meanwhile, another irritant to many lawmakers — allegations by the Nixon administration that some "selected" or "key" legislators were in fact privately told about the otherwise secret Cambodian bombing — escalated still further.

Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.), a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and President Nixon's would-be first choice for Secretary of Defense in 1969, told newsmen he was never informed of the bombing.

Jackson asked the committee to find out from the White House or Pentagon exactly who was told, as well as when and whether the full magnitude of the operation was disclosed.

Meanwhile, at the State Department, a spokesman sought to absolve Secretary of State

William P. Rogers of any responsibility for failing to tell the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in April, 1970, about the magnitude or duration of the bombing.

Spokesman Charles W. Bray said Rogers mentioned that the United States had bombed in Cambodia. "There was every opportunity, which the senators present let go by," Bray said, "to discuss the nature and extent of the bombing." Bray conceded that Rogers volunteered no information.

Committee sources familiar with Rogers' closed-door testimony on April 2 and 27 countered that the senators assumed the bombing to which the Secretary made "passing references" only involved intermittent, occasional runs across the Cambodian border.

If the senators had known that the United States had been staging sustained B-52 raids for 14 months, one Senate source said, there would have been a "terrible ruckus" in the committee.

"Now it's quite clear that we were misled," Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) told reporters.

On the other side of the Capitol, however, House Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Thomas E. Morgan (D-Pa.) told reporters his group had been informed about bombing raids at the time.

"We knew they were bombing sanctuaries over there at Sihanouk's invitation," he said.

Bray also defended Rogers' testimony about U.S. respect for Cambodia's neutrality.

He said the record shows that Rogers told the committee that "from time to time the Cambodian government had made statements which made it clear that it did not object to bombings by the United States in Cambodia so long as there were no Cambodians in the area."

Rogers also referred to bombings "in the sanctuaries" held by North Vietnamese troops, Bray said.

A State Department official said that on Jan. 10, 1968, in a

meeting with special envoy Chester W. Bowles, Cambodian Prince Norodom Sihanouk—then the chief of state—said privately that he did not want the North Vietnamese in Cambodia and that the United States could engage in "hot pursuit" of them.

Although Sihanouk could not say so openly, this official said, he told Bowles he would be glad if the United States "solved this problem" of North Vietnamese troops so long as it avoided areas populated by Cambodians.

In a closed briefing for 200 House members, Rogers was quoted as going even further than this version of Sihanouk's attitude.

Rogers told the congressmen, according to Rep. John Brademas (D-Ind.), that Sihanouk had actually requested the raids—not just sanctioned them.

In yesterday's editions, The New York Times reported that it had received a cable from Sihanouk—who has been living in Peking since his overthrow—denying that he authorized the secret bombing raids.

State Department spokesman Bray also underlined a point Rogers had made at the April, 1970, Senate Foreign Relations Committee sessions—that Sihanouk hadn't protested the raids. Bray said the only protests came on "relatively few occasions when there was accidental danger" to Cambodian property or loss of Cambodian lives, and never because of the bombing of North Vietnamese sanctuaries.

Bray said:

"When a government solicits the assistance of another government to rid its territory of what it regards as hostile forces; when that government closes its eyes to the subsequent actions to that end . . . and when that government is prepared to enter into diplomatic relations with us despite the bombing of its territory, it is difficult to argue that there was a violation of neutrality, and certainly not a violation which the other government took seriously."