

Nixon Order 'Kept Raids A Secret'

Washington

General Earle G. Wheeler, retired chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a Senate committee yesterday that President Nixon personally ordered the secret bombing of Cambodia to be conducted under the tightest security measures possible.

"His instructions were of a general nature," the General testified, "but very emphatic. He wanted the matter held with the greatest secrecy."

Wheeler said that it was after that presidential directive — given "at least a half a dozen times" during various high-level meetings before the bombing — that the Joint Chiefs instituted the system of dual reports.

Under that system, now being investigated by the Senate Armed Services Committee, the 3630 secret B-52 sorties over Cambodia in 1969 and 1970 were officially described through the military's own reporting channels as having taken

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place in South Vietnam.

Under repeated questioning about Mr. Nixon's relationship to the falsification, Wheeler said that the military devised the mechanics of the dual reporting system. "The President didn't order this particular procedure," he said at one point.

MECHANICS

"What he wanted was security."

But the retired officer did add that "the dual reporting system was something that grew because we couldn't support our presidential directives."

Wheeler said he did not think that any mention of the specific reporting mechanisms was made during planning sessions with the National Security Council early in 1969.

LAIRD

Those details were included, however, in memorandums on the secret bombing that were sent to Melvin R. Laird, then Secretary of Defense, Wheeler noted.

"But whether these were sent to the White House, I can't say," he added.

Nonetheless, the General testified, the President was pleased by the success of the security measures. "Everybody seemed to be satisfied.

At one point I received a letter from the President congratulating me for the



UPI Telephoto
GEN. WHEELER
GIs' lives 'in danger'

good job of maintaining secrecy."

The bombings, which lasted over a 14-month period, were not officially revealed until two weeks ago.

During a meeting with newsmen last week, Laird, now a White House adviser on domestic affairs, specifically asserted that details of the special reporting mechanisms were known to, and approved by, the National Security Council.

KISSINGER

He did not mention names, but sources close to him said later that Henry Kissinger,

the President's adviser on national security, and General Alexander H. Haig Jr., who was an aide to Kissinger in 1969, "must have known" about the double-reporting system.

Wheeler said requests for the attacks came from field and theater commanders because of the threat of 25,000

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to 30,000 enemy combat forces attacking in the areas bordering Cambodia.

"American lives were in danger and the diplomatic efforts which had for several years been pursued to encourage Prince Sihanouk to expel the NVA (North Vietnamese) forces from his country were ineffective," Wheeler testified.

The official justification for the secret bombing campaign was challenged by Senator Harold E. Hughes (Dem-Iowa) who initiated the current hearings.

The real diplomatic considerations behind the secret bombings, Hughes charged, were the concern of the White House to keep the news of the bombings "away from the anti-war movement and the Congress of the United States."

New York Times