## Wheeler Says Nixon Stressed Secrecy on Cambodia Air War

By Michael Getler Washington Post Staff Writer

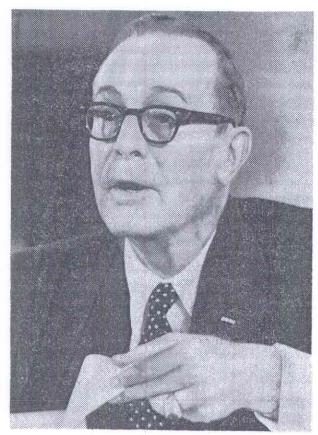
The nation's top military officer during the time a massive secret air war was being carried out over Cambodia testified yesterday that President Nixon personally told him "at least half a dozen times" to "make sure the tightest security is maintained" on the raids to keep them secret.

Retired Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, appearing before a Senate Arms Service Committee hearing on the raids, said he recalled "a number of admonishments both by the President and the Secretary of Defense for using extra secure means to make sure we did not have a diplomatic explosion" if word of bombing a supposedly neutral country got out.

At one point, Wheeler told the senators under questioning that the "special reporting procedures and the extra security measures both came from the President."

But later he divorced Mr. Nixon specifically from ordering the dual-reporting system which was used to cover up the raids by reporting them through normal channels as having taken place in South Vietnam rather than Cambo-

The concealing of the Cambodia bombing campaign has caused a major outcry on Cap- United States didn't order military." itol Hill, since Congress for se-those particular procedures."



United Press International

Wheeler: Nixon told him "at least half a dozen times."

veral years was provided offi- He described the dual reportcial false information on ing system as something "that where the air war was being just grew up." Asked by Sen. fought.

Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) who Wheeler, under questioning, said that "the President of the Wheeler said: "We did; the

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leased yesterday a letter from tions submitted by Sen. Har-military. old Hughes (D-Iowa).

Wheeler testified he believed ply routes. The bombing in been maintained." about 149 such attacks had been Northern Laos was generally

who served as JSC chairman for ment forces in their battle

Again, he said the reason for Air Force Chief of Staff John not disclosing the information D. Ryan, responding to ques- was for "diplomatic" rather than

Ryan said the raids were Gen. Ryan confirmed that covered up, for all but those B-52 attacks in northern Laos few people who had a "need between Feb. 17, 1970 and to know," by being reported Melvin R. Laird about them, April 26, 1972, also had "spe- as having taken place in south cial reporting procedures" in ern Laos where the U.S. was effect "to restrict widespread acknowledging bombing knowledge of those strikes." against North Vietnamese supmade by May, 1970. Wheeler, in support of Laotian govern-

The committee also re- six years, left office in July, with Pathet Laos Communis forces.

> Wheeler, under questioning, said he assumed the White House was informed of the specific dual reporting procedures being used, since he had told former Defense Secretary and since he received a subsequent message from the President praising him (Wheeler) "for the high security that has

> Wheeler's heavy emphasis on the President's demand for secrecy tends to back up an assertion by Laird last week that the National Security Council, which is headed by the President, recommended that the "special reporting procedures" be established.

Presidential national security adviser Henry A. Kissinger, a member of the National Security Council, however, has been quoted in the press as saying that the White House "neither ordered nor was it aware of any falsification of records" on the secret bombing.

The answer may lie in official semantics. Wheeler yesterday said he didn't believe "falsified" was a proper description of what had happened, since all those with the need to know had the accurate information, and the official records were intentionally inaccurate to keep the real information from getting out.

Wheeler said that the "diplomatic explosion" which the administration stemmed from Cambodian Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who had "acquiesced" in the secret U.S. bombing and "had a very difficult course to follow to deal with the North Vietnamese, Chinese and his own people. He didn't want to have to acknowledge that we are bombing with his approval."