



By Ellsworth Davis—The Washington Post

Gen. Abrams: "I couldn't keep these things straight."

Bombing Report System Confusing, Abrams Says

By Michael Getler
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The former top U.S. field commander in Vietnam, Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, said yesterday that at one point so many different authorizations and reporting systems were being applied to secret bombing operations in Cambodia that he had trouble keeping things straight himself.

The four-star general, who is now Army Chief of Staff, appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee investigating clandestine U.S. air and ground activities in Laos and Cambodia.

Over almost a month of hearings, the panel has uncovered numerous examples of falsified reporting to hide diplomatically or politically sensitive bombing by American planes in Cambodia and Laos. But it has yet to determine precisely who ordered these specific dual-reporting procedures to be used as part of the cover-up.

Asked by Sen. Harold Hughes (D-Iowa) why the U.S. had to "phony-up" reports about exactly where in Cambodia U.S. fighter-bombers were striking during the summer of 1970, Abrams said: "I just don't know. From a purely administrative viewpoint, this whole thing had become so complicated that I couldn't keep these things straight in my own mind. We had to have specialists to keep track of this thing and that thing."

Abrams' testimony before the committee tended to corroborate statements made the day before by a former Air Force captain who said mid-1970 air strikes into Cambodia went much farther west than the public knew.

The general told of operation "Freedom Deal" in which authority, presumably from the White House was granted to use B-52s and fighter-bombers to hit targets inside Cambodia but only as far west as the Mekong River.

This took effect on June 30, 1970, after the last U.S. troops had pulled out of Cambodia following the two-month invasion in May and June.

This authority was then extended southward, and on Aug. 25, 1970, additional authority was granted in project "Freedom Deal Alpha" to send fighter-bombers west beyond the river for the first time.

But Abrams said that before this Aug. 25 authority was granted, he issued other specific requests for permission to hit some "special" targets west of the river. Only the U.S. Pacific chief and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff saw his requests, Abrams said.

The senators did not ask

whether the President or Secretary of Defense actually approved these early raids west of the river.

Abrams told the committee he thought the filing of false coordinates to show these raids as taking place much closer to the Cambodia border only applied to these special strikes. But he still could not say who ordered the false reports.

The intelligence officers have said the order came from the Seventh Air Force in Saigon. But the former commander there, Gen. George S. Brown who is Chief of Staff, denied in an interview on Tuesday that he ordered such falsification.

Abrams had mostly short, blunt answers for the three senators at the hearings. His voice rose noticeably, however, in defending the need for massive yet top-secret B-52 bombing in Cambodia for 14 months in 1969 and 1970. He said the raids were not only to save lives but to keep the morale and determination of the entire allied force in Vietnam from coming apart during the early phases of troop withdrawal from Vietnam that he said very few commanders agreed with.

Earlier in the day, the committee heard the former pilot of a U.S. forward air control plane testify that he was given the location of a "suspected hospital" as he went out on a strike mission. Former Capt. Gerald J. Greven told the committee that he directed the strikes into the specified area but that he could see no hospitals—which are usually unmarked and underground—and didn't believe one was hit. He said he wasn't sure where the target data came from originally.

The Air Force has reacted sharply to previously publicized statements by Greven that enemy hospitals in Vietnam were targeted, and yesterday it surprised the committee with a long statement saying there were no orders to do such things and it was not U.S. policy.

Greven agreed he was not "ordered" to bomb a hospital and that it was not U.S. policy. His point, however, was that it was at least a practice to "look for hospitals as targets" among various enemy installations.

Sen. Hughes also produced a letter from a former helicopter crew chief, Daniel T. Eismann of Caldwell, Idaho, who said he personally participated in gunship attacks on a Vietcong hospital in Gocong province in December, 8.