

## Cambodia Bombing Report

# Laird's System for Hiding B-52 Raids

## Top-Secret Memo Is Revealed

Washington

Former Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird specifically approved falsified reporting of the Nixon administration's secret B-52 raids in Cambodia in 1969, a highly classified Pentagon memorandum showed yesterday.

The memorandum, released at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing into the falsification of reports, was written by General Earle G. Wheeler — who was then chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and who is now retired — and approved by Laird, now a White House domestic adviser, in his own handwriting.

Laird and General Wheeler have repeatedly insisted that they did not personally authorize any falsified reporting but, instead, were carrying out the orders of superiors.\*

### PROVISIONS

The document was dated Nov. 20, 1969, seven months after the B-52 missions began, and provided for 41-plane force of B-52s to strike clandestine targets inside Cambodia while other B-52s attacked normally assigned targets in South Vietnam and Laos.

"Strikes on these latter targets," the memorandum said, "will provide a resemblance to normal operations, thereby providing a credible story for replies to press inquiries."

The memorandum added:

"All sorties against targets in Cambodia will be programmed against pre-planned alternate targets in RVN (the Republic of Vietnam) and strike request messages will so indicate. In the event the operations should be canceled, release would be made on these alternate targets."

Military witnesses before the committee have denied

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that any false reporting was involved, because, they said, those few officials with an official "need to know" were provided with the true results of the raids. But falsified statistics, which did not show any bombing over Cambodia in 1969 and 1970, were also provided to the Senate committee with a "secret" classification in 1971 and 1973, and thus

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brought about the current hearings.

The tight security surrounding the bombing was made apparent by the classification of the Wheeler memorandum, which was marked: "Top secret-sensitive-NOFORN — eyes

only — absolutely for eyes of addressee only."

NOFORN stands for "not releasable to foreign nationals."

### RAIDS

A total of 3630 B-52 sorties were made in secret over Cambodia between March, 1969, and May, 1970, and more than 100,000 tons of bombs were dropped.

After the first newspaper accounts of the B-52 missions were published last month, both Laird and General Wheeler initially denied any knowledge of falsified reports.

\*Laird subsequently said that the orders for the falsification of records came from the National Security Council, headed by Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's adviser on national security. Last week, Wheeler told the armed services committee that Mr. Nixon had personally ordered that the raids were to be held "with the greatest secrecy."

Kissinger, in an interview last month, declared that the White House had "neither ordered nor was it aware of any falsification of records" in connection with the bombing.

### REACTION

Senator Harold E. Hughes (Dem-Iowa), who was largely responsible for exposing the secret 14-month bombing of Cambodia, hailed the release of the document as the first big breakthrough in the committee's efforts to pinpoint responsibility for the false reporting of the bombing campaign.

"It demonstrates to me," Hughes said of the document, "that the deception came at least from the Secretary of Defense, who said he had nothing to do with the deception."

Hughes also said he was convinced the deception carried "into the White House but there just isn't written evidence to prove it."

### SOURCE

The Wheeler memorandum was provided by the final witnesses in this phase

of the committee hearings, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, and William P. Clements Jr., the deputy secretary of defense.

The two Pentagon officials, who often clashed angrily with Hughes and Senator Stuart Symington, the acting committee chairman, also provided a 1967 Pentagon memorandum that they said had authorized the use of cover strikes similar to those in Cambodia.

That memorandum, approved by the late John T. McNaughton, as assistant secretary of defense under Robert S. McNamara, provided for B-52 strikes in Laos with strikes against nearby targets in South Vietnam to "be conducted within the same time frames to serve as press cover."

Clements declared that the Nixon administration had relied on the "precedent" outlined in the McNaughton memorandum in approving details for the secret bombing of Cambodia.

New York Times