

Laird Denies 'Falsification'

Chicago

Former Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird said yesterday he authorized "a separate reporting procedure" for the Nixon administration's secret B-52 bombing raids in Cambodia in 1969.

But he insisted he did not sanction "the falsification of any Air Force, Navy or Defense Department records."

At a news conference, Laird was asked about a highly classified Pentagon memorandum made public Thursday in Washington that discussed a method of hiding from the press clandestine bombing operations in Cambodia in 1969 and 1970.

Laird, now the President's counselor for domestic affairs, said several times at the news briefing that it was 1969 when he last saw the memorandum, initialed in his own handwriting and dated Nov. 20, 1969. He rebuffed attempts to have

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AP Wirephoto

MELVIN LAIRD
Comment on bombing

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parts of it read to him from the morning newspapers.

The "eyes only" memorandum, released at a Senate Armed Services committee hearing investigating the falsification of reports, was written by now retired General Earle G. Wheeler, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

TARGETS

It provided for a 41-plane force of B-52s to strike targets in Cambodia while other B-52s attacked normally assigned targets in South Vietnam and Laos.

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

The procedure outlined in the memorandum called for the Cambodian raids to be officially recorded in the military's classified data system as having taken

place over South Vietnam.

CONFIRM

"I confirm completely that I recommended the strikes," Laird said of the Cambodian raids. He added that he was convinced it was necessary to attack the "sanctuaries" of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers to reduce American casualties.

The operations were conducted in secret more for diplomatic than military reasons, he said, because the Cambodian government had told the State Department it

would have to condemn them if they were made public but would support the raids if they "remained out of public knowledge."

APPROVE

"I did approve the separate reporting procedure on the Cambodian strikes," he continued, but "I did not approve at any time of the falsification of any Air Force, Navy or Defense Department records."

As to any "falsification of reports," Laird said, "I cannot justify that. I did not order that. The only thing I ordered was a separate reporting procedure."

Laird was vague on how the "separate reporting procedure" operated, saying that it functioned "directly to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to me, and then to the President of the United States."

New York Times