

Unanswered Questions on Raids

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The Pentagon's paper yesterday on the bombing of Cambodia provided more details but—to the disappointment of some Senators—did not answer the crucial questions left over from the Senate Armed Services Committee hearings last month into the

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secret air war. The Senators wanted to know who authorized the falsified reporting system, who designed it and who put it into effect. Instead of being provided with names such as those of President Nixon, Henry A. Kissinger, his adviser on national security, or Melvin R. Laird, the former Secretary of Defense, the statement gave the Senate a list of acronyms.

For example, the 32-page document noted that "the necessity to minimize the likelihood of public speculation or disclosure [of the bombing raids] was established within the N.S.C."—the National Security Council. At a later point, the paper said that "responsibility for development" of the falsified reporting procedures "was delegated to the levels in D.O.D. [Department of Defense] that normally controlled these procedures."

The lack of specific names and places was inevitable in light of the Pentagon's decision not to include any documents. One document particularly sought by the Senate was a copy of the first high-level White House authorization for the secret strikes that was issued a few days before the raids began on March 18, 1969.

Raids Approved by Laird

The only document released thus far was dated Nov. 20, 1969, seven months after the B-52 raids began, and showed that Mr. Laird, now a White House adviser on domestic affairs, specifically approved the reporting procedures for the raids. That document was provided to the Senate during last month's hearing by William P. Clements Jr., the Deputy Secretary of Defense. Pentagon officials said later they were unable to find any earlier copies of the secret strike orders.

Staff members for Senator Harold E. Hughes, the Iowa Democrat who was the moving force behind the committee's investigations into the secret air war, said today they had identified a total of 19 demands for documents or specific information that were not included in the Pentagon's paper.

Among the items of infor-

mation not included were the following:

¶ Copies of the high-level orders calling for the Marines to begin operations across the border into Laos in early 1969.

¶ Details of the alleged defoliation in early 1969 of French rubber plantations in the Cambodian areas used as sanctuaries by Vietnamese Communist forces.

¶ Data on alleged falsified reporting by the Navy in its bombing operations.

¶ A full analysis of the charges by former military men that Vietcong hospitals were systematically targeted and bombed.

¶ Documentation for the Pentagon's repeated assertion that Prince Norodom Sihanouk, then the Cambodian chief of state, knew of and "acquiesced" in the bombing before it began.

Hughes Is Critical

"Unless we get these materials," Senator Hughes said in a statement, "this whole matter is open for investigation, and I remain full of suspicions."

No attempt was made in the Defense Department document to address some of the underlying questions implicit in the Senate committee's concern over the secret bombing: Was it ethical to deceive the military's own reporting system? What effect does such falsification have on the integrity and morale of the participating officer?

The first witness before the committee, Hal M. Knight of Memphis, a former Air Force major, told of having participated in the widespread falsification or destruction of records. "I knew the way we were doing it was wrong," he had said in an earlier interview. "This is what put me in such a moral dilemma."

Conflicting Information

Mr. Knight, now a graduate student, said he routinely reported to higher commands that B-52 strikes he knew to have taken place in Cambodia had actually been in South Vietnam. The procedure was the crux of the system set up by the Nixon Administration to prevent leaks to the press.

The false reports relayed by Mr. Knight and others were eventually stored in the Pentagon's classified data banks. When the Armed Services Committee requested statistics on B-52 raids in Southeast Asia, the Cambodian operations were listed as having taken place in South Vietnam.

The Pentagon paper, however, declared that "no one was required to make any input to this formal reporting system

that the individual knew, or should have known, to be incorrect."

"The procedures permitted only correct, formal reporting," the document said—an assertion obviously at odds with the information provided by Mr. Knight.

Throughout the public hearings, witnesses from the Defense Department maintained that there had been no falsification of records because none of those officials who had a "need to know" about the secret B-52 bombing missions were misled about them. That argument, ignoring the misleading of Members of Congress and the public, was repeated in the paper.

The document described a dual system of reporting that it justified this way: "Those who had a need to know about operations submitted and received reports that were consistent with their knowledge. Those who did not have a need to know could not perceive a difference between [the reports they received] and normal operations."

Reports Termed 'Complete'

"Each of the operation reports submitted provided complete and accurate information to those who required it," the paper said.

At one point, in what seemed an attempt to minimize the amount of deception involved, the Defense Department paper noted that crew members aboard the B-52's that actually dropped the bombs were not told they were bombing Cambodian territory. "This procedure was adequate," the document said, "since the geographical location of the targets were proximate to the South Vietnam targets, and since the headings for the final bomb runs took the crews close to the South Vietnam targets."

"The only variance from the routine required for the missions," the paper said, "would be to slightly extend the release point of the bombload as the plane flew on its final heading, and in some cases a minor correction to the heading itself."

Although the "variances" were slight, the fact is that the bombs fell on a professedly neutral nation at a time when the United States was publicly declaring respect for that country's international borders.

During a number of 24-hour periods in 1969 and 1970, the paper said, the number of secret missions made up as much as 60 per cent of all B-52 operations in Southeast Asia. Thus, some combat days produced more falsified than honest combat reports.