

8/30 early a.m. radio reported Congressional charges of official and Congressional whitewash, unreported in Post.

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## ARMED FORCES

### Where's Abe?

When President Nixon nominated General Creighton Abrams to take over as Army Chief of Staff, military experts praised Nixon's choice and predicted that Abrams would win quick Senate approval and get on with the job. At 57, after a long and distinguished Army career, Abrams might normally have had the post almost by acclamation. But now, his appointment may have run afoul of election-year politics.

The snag came after Air Force General John Lavelle admitted to the House Armed Services Committee that he ordered the falsification of records of unauthorized bombing missions while under Abrams' command in Viet Nam. Lavelle was demoted to lieutenant general and forced to retire for his cavalier transgressions. In testimony given before the committee, he told Congress-

men that he thought Abrams might have known about at least some of the illegal air strikes (TIME, June 26). But he added that he was "positive" Abrams knew nothing of the false reports that Lavelle ordered filed by airmen who took part in the missions. Most Pentagon military men contend that Abrams indeed knew nothing of the false reports and of only one or two of the illegal North Viet Nam strikes, which he considered unfortunate mistakes.

Iowa's Democratic Senator Harold Hughes, however, has been pressing for a fuller investigation. "The primary issue is not General Lavelle," Hughes told the Senate, "but the command and control system which permitted—and then allowed to be concealed—the unauthorized attacks against North Viet Nam. Nor should General Lavelle be made the lone scapegoat if it turns out that others in the chain of command are also responsible."

Abrams arrived in Washington on

July 16 and began Pentagon briefings meant to prepare him for the normally amiable question-and-answer ritual that usually precedes confirmation of presidential military appointees. But furor over the Lavelle affair has made the issue politically sticky, and a final date for Abrams' hearing has been repeatedly pushed back. Democrats would like to have the Lavelle-Abrams issue argued before the Senate and the public later in the campaign, preferably in October; Republicans want to get the case out of the way well before the election, but also wished to avoid conflict with their convention last week. Meantime, General William Westmoreland has retired from the top job, and Army Vice Chief of Staff General Bruce C. Palmer Jr. has been serving as chief, waiting for the announcement. "It's an unprecedented case," says one angry Army general. "It's hard on Abe and it's goddam hard on the Army that's been waiting for him and needs him."