

SEP 9 1972

SFChronicle

GIs' Report A Bombing Coverup

Washington

Senator William Proxmire made public yesterday a letter from four Air Force intelligence sergeants who asserted that officers of the Seventh Air Force made "a concerted effort" early this year "to cover up all traces" of an accidental bombing of civilian targets in Cambodia.

In a letter dated June 27, the sergeants wrote that permanent files had been destroyed and reconnaissance film had been diverted from shipment to higher headquarters by officers who were attached to General John D. Lavelle's Seventh Air Force headquarters in Saigon.

They added that although they did not know specifically who had ordered the coverup, "the results of this bombing mission were known to the Saigon command because two high-ranking general officers from Seventh Air Force reviewed enlarged photography of the area."

DATE

The letter said that the accidental bombing and subsequent concealment took place on March 9 or March 10. On March 8 high Air Force officials in Washington began a secret investigation into unauthorized bombing of North Vietnam in the guise of "protective - reaction" that resulted in the dismissal two weeks later of Lavelle.

An Air Force spokesman, told of the letter, said that the sergeants "could write almost anything but we don't know if it's true or not."

Proxmire, a Wisconsin Democrat, said he decided

to turn over the letter to the New York Times rather than ask the Air Force to investigate and thus "jeopardize" the future of the sergeants, who are still on active duty.

The sergeants, who requested that their names not be disclosed, said that the attack took place near Minot Air Field in the Parrot's Beak section of eastern Cambodia. An Air Force spokesman confirmed yesterday that 30 missions were flown by American aircraft over eastern Cambodia that day.

"During this strike," the letter said, "numerous civilian buildings and at least one school bus was damaged or destroyed due to pilot bombing error."

"That is in itself a terrible thing," the letter added "but recently acquired information indicates that this incident was covered up here in Saigon and never forwarded up the chain of command to Washington as it should have been."

N.Y. Times Service