

# B-52 Flyer's Bitter Complaint

## Washington

B-52 bomber crews raiding Hanoi have been subjected to unnecessary risks because of "the stupidity and laxity of the Strategic Air Command," according to a copy of a letter obtained by the Los Angeles Times.

The letter, written by a B-52 flyer, complained that B-52s hit the same target on three successive nights and followed identical routes to and from the target.

"Because of these failings," the flyer wrote, "the aircraft directly in front of us was shot down."

## SENATORS

The flyer's letter was sent to Senator Charles Mathias Jr. (Rep-Md.) Mathias sent copies to Senator John C. Stennis (D-Miss.), chairman

of the Senate Armed Services Committee and other Committee members after deleting the flyer's name.

Mathias' office confirmed the authenticity of the letter obtained by the Times.

In a covering letter to Stennis, Mathias called the flyer's charges "a disturbing situation" and said if they did occur, "they deserve, in my view, further investigation."

Mathias said further:

"As you know, there have been reports in the press that a number of Strategic Air Command pilots and crew have been captured. It has been suggested that their capture has compromised the effectiveness of the SAC portion of our nuclear deterrent. These reports

presume that the crew members have information about targeting of the Soviet Union and China, evasion tactics, attack routes, and other related matters which might now be in possession of the enemy."

## LETTER

The letter to Mathias from the B-52 flyer began this way:

"I may be dead, Sir, by the time that you get this letter — as much because of the stupidity and the laxity of the Strategic Air Command in the planning of the saturation bombing missions over Hanoi as for any other reason."

In discussing the B-52 raids on the identical target for three successive nights, the flyer wrote:

"On the first night, the

North did not know our path and the majority of the SAMs (antiaircraft missiles) fired at us were in the vicinity of the target. By the third night, however, having used the same exit three nights in a row, the North not only knew our tactics, but they also knew the route.

"Prior to the flight on the third night, we were briefed that a new (missile) site had been erected directly along our target exit route. The exit route was not changed. . . I cannot explain the failure to change the mission. However, it suggests to me a total lack of comprehension on the part of the Strategic Air Command."

The flyer also complained that the B-52s raiding Hanoi were not protected by fighter escorts.

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