

Navy Criticized on Florida Bombing

By Jack Anderson

The Navy bombed and burned more than 1,200 acres of the Ocala National Forest in Florida and then, Cambodia-style, falsified the reports.

Despite the disastrous fires, the Navy continued to explode live bombs in a preserve which the U.S. Forest Service describes as the biggest recreation attraction of any national forest in the East.

A confidential General Accounting Office field investigation found that during March, 1972, the Navy dropped 421 live 500-pound bombs on its Pinecastle test range in the Ocala forest.

On March 25, a hail of 56 bombs ignited a fire that burned 600 acres of the national forest. Two days later, 24 more bombs started another fire which spread from the testing grounds into the park, destroying 620 additional acres.

The Navy claimed in its environmental report that "permission was granted by the appropriate officials as the fire potential index was not at a level sufficiently high to halt operations."

This is disputed by the GAO, which found the fire potential index wasn't developed until after the March fires.

Again, the Navy's May, 1973, environmental impact statement claimed that "after the fires, the use of live ordnance was discontinued." On the contrary, the GAO will charge that 655 live 500-pound bombs and 242 250-pound bombs were dropped on the test range between April, 1972, and May, 1973.

In Jacksonville, Fla., Navy Capt. E. W. Ingley confirmed to us that live ordnance "certainly" was used but insisted that it amounted to no more than "two or three per cent of the total practice ordnance." He also stressed that the Navy takes "elaborate safety precautions" when using live ordnance. "Naval aviation is national security," he added.

As late as last month, however, Rep. Bill Gunter (D-Fla.) protested that bomb drops on July 18 had "needlessly frightened 250 youngsters at one children's camp in the forest."

The freshman from Florida called for the GAO probe after he had a personal experience with the falling bombs. While he was delivering a speech in the Eustis Civic Center near the forest, the building began to shake from the shock waves of the exploding bombs.

Tapes Stalemate?—Sources close to the Supreme Court suggest that the vote on the controversial White House tapes could end in a tie. Justice William Rehnquist, whose vote might break the tie, may have to disqualify himself, they say.

The Supreme Court is expected to rule, in the end, on whether President Nixon must surrender his secret White House tapes to special prosecutor Archibald Cox and the Senate Watergate Committee. The case is now awaiting action in the lower courts.

Rehnquist's law clerk, Robert Wild, conceded to us that "there definitely will be a question" whether the Justice should participate in the decision. "He hasn't said a word about it," said Wild. "I'm not sure whether he's even looked into it, so there's no decision one way or the other."

The aide stressed it would be "a personal decision." Rehnquist would have to consider his past national security activities as a Justice Department official and his close association with key figures involved in the case.

During his Senate confirmation hearings, he said: "My client, in my position as the Assistant Attorney General for

the Office of the Legal Counsel, is the Attorney General and the President."

Supreme Court sources say the case of the White House tapes involved not only eavesdropping but executive privilege. Rehnquist worked on both questions while he was at the Justice Department.

Indeed, he assured the Senate that he would likely disqualify himself on a case involving national security wiretapping.

Vesco's Yacht—Robert Vesco, the international financier indicted with former Attorney General John Mitchell in a swindle and cover-up case, is now a fugitive from the FBI. But U.S. Customs agents have cut off one means of flight by seizing his fabulous yacht, the Patricia III, formerly the Romanica, in a Miami boatyard.

Vesco was not aboard when the Customs men struck, but the yacht is being held until the U.S. can decide whether Vesco owes customs duties on the English-built craft.

Nor is this the first time Vesco has had trouble with yachts. In June, we reported how his yacht sliced the anchor cable of another vessel, then sailed off to the Bahamas with Vesco calling: "You know my address. Send me the bill."

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