

'They Were Needed to Protect GIs'

New Orleans

President Nixon acknowledged for the first time publicly yesterday that he approved secret bombing raids in Cambodia and he vigorously justified them as being necessary to protect American lives.

Mr. Nixon spoke to the Veterans of Foreign Wars here after switching his motorcade route, in downtown New Orleans because the Secret Service said it had uncovered a "possible conspiracy" to assassinate him.

Mr. Nixon, in his speech, gave the following explanation of why the U.S. bombings in Cambodia were kept secret:

"Had we announced the air strikes, the Cambodian government would have been compelled to protest the bombing would have had to stop, and American soldiers would have paid for the disclosure with their lives."

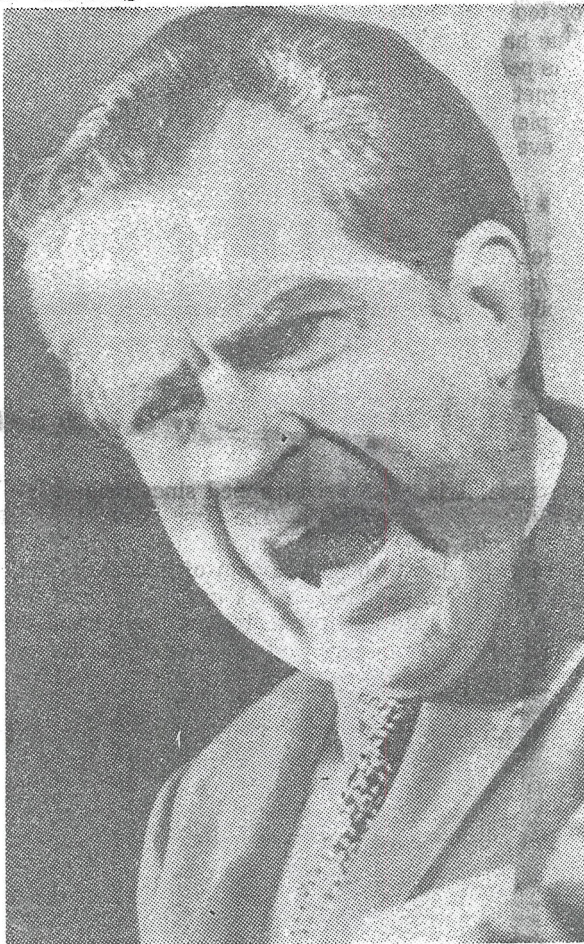
He said, however, that the bombing was disclosed to unspecified government and congressional leaders.

Then he read a letter he said he had received from the father of a soldier who served along the Cambodian border in 1969.

SON

The father, who was not identified, wrote that when his son was killed on March 1 of that year, "I felt you let him down" by not ordering the bombing of supply lines. On reading a few days ago that the President had approved such bombing, the man wrote, "I now believe the Lord led you to make a proper decision in this manner, and I sincerely feel your action saved many lives and shortened that dreadful war."

Mr. Nixon attacked, in
Back Page Col. 4



AP Wirephoto

President Nixon assailed critics of his Indochina policies in a VFW speech.

From Page 1

harsher terms than usual, the critics of his overall war policies.

"We find that some of the politicians and some of the members of the press who enthusiastically supported the administration which got us into Vietnam ten years ago, or were silent when the decisions were made that got us in, now are criticizing what I did to get us out," he said. "Well, let me say getting us out of the war took a lot of doing and I am proud of what we have done."

The secret raids were revealed last month after a former Air Force officer described how they were camouflaged in official reports. Administration officials indicated they had been approved by the National Security Council, but yesterday's speech was the first official acknowledgement that Mr. Nixon had ordered the raids.

TROOPS

The President described the situation in Indochina at

the time he took office in January 1969. He said that 40,000 North Vietnamese

troops had taken over a ten-mile-wide stretch in Cambodia alongside the South Vietnamese border.

"The Communists had made a mockery of the neutrality of those border regions," the President said. "The United States was under no moral obligation to respect the sham."

He said that there were no complaints from Prince Sihanouk, who was head of state in Cambodia at the time of the bombings.

"In fact," the President said, "while strikes were in progress Prince Sihanouk invited me to make a state visit to the Cambodian capital."

Mr. Nixon was received attentively by the 4500 VFW members and their wives in the steamy Rivergate convention center here and he was interrupted with a burst of applause when he delivered an off-repeated line:

"No future American President should ever send American boys into battle with one hand tied behind their back."

The President showed a rare public sign of strain when a jam-up at the entrance of the convention center accidentally caused press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler to bump into him.

Apparently noticing that reporters were trying to get into the same entrance, Mr. Nixon turned, placed his hands on Ziegler's shoulders and said with obvious irritation: "I don't want any press with me — and you take care of it." The reporters were then directed into another entrance of the convention center.

Washington Post



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As President Nixon was entering New Orleans Convention center, he turned, gave aide Ronald Ziegler a push toward newsmen, and said "the press should not come this way."