

U.S. Admits Secret Cambodia Bombing

By William Claiborne
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The Nixon administration admitted for the first time yesterday that it conducted secret B-52 bombing raids in Cambodia as early as 1969, and then falsified records to make it appear that the attacks occurred in South Vietnam.

The bombing raids and the subsequent coverup were "fully authorized" by senior military and civilian authorities in Washington at a time when the U.S. government officially recognized the neutrality of Cambodia under the regime of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, administration officials said.

The decision probably was approved by the National Security Council, a Pentagon spokesman said.

Because of the sensitive diplomatic situation at the time, "special security precautions" were taken to avoid public disclosure of the bombing raids, Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger acknowledged.

The security precautions, administration officials conceded, included the burning of Cambodian bombing mission reports and the substitution of phony "cover flight" records to account for the activities of B-52 squadrons stationed in Guam.

The Pentagon's admissions
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Associated Press

Former Air Force Maj. Hal M. Knight tells of false reporting on Cambodia raids.

Pentagon Admits Secret Bombing in Cambodia

BOMBING, From A1

of covert strategic bombing missions over Cambodia surfaced yesterday as a 37-year-old former Air Force operations officer testified before a congressional committee about his part in the cover-up.

Former Maj. Hal M. Knight told the Senate Armed Services Committee that in March and April, 1970—before the U.S. government's "incursion" into Cambodia—he helped direct B-52 missions to Cambodian targets on about two dozen occasions.

Knight who now is a graduate student in Memphis, Tenn., spelled out an elaborate system of falsely reporting those missions in which instructions were secretly flown to his radar tracking base in Bien Hoa, South Vietnam, and then were burned early in the morning after each raid.

Knight said he was told to fake the bombing reports for "political reasons," adding that one superior officer specifically mentioned the possibility of criticism by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

All of the raids that he helped direct into Cambodia were made on targets in the "Fish Hook" and "Parrot's Beak" areas of Cambodia on the South Vietnamese border, Knight said. Those areas were regarded by the military as notorious sanctuaries for North Vietnamese troops who conducted periodic attacks on nearby U.S. defense outposts.

The raids he helped direct occurred 5 to 10 kilometers inside the Cambodian border, Knight said.

Nervously shifting in his seat and chain-smoking, Knight told the committee of his indoctrination of the secret bombing immediately upon his arrival at a "Skyspot" radar guidance base in Bien Hoa late in February, 1970.

He said he was told that each covert bombing mission would be "covered" with orders for a bombing raid in South Vietnam, and that falsified details of grid coordinates, bomb drop times, aircraft speed and other information would be sent to the Military Assistance Command in Saigon, headed in 1970 by Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, who now is the Army Chief of staff.

In practice, Knight said, the falsifying of records worked this way:

On the morning of a Cambodian bombing raid, he would receive a telephone call from



By Douglas Chevalier—The Washington Post
Sen. Hughes questions ex-Maj. Hal Knight on Cambodia raids.

the Strategic Air Command's ADVON group in Saigon, an intelligence conduit between the Military Assistance Command and the Eighth Air Force on Guam.

The duty officer calling, Knight said, invariably would tell him to meet an airplane at the Bien Hoa airfield at 3:15 p.m. "We'd get the call, and a fellow would say, 'a man is coming to see you,'" Knight recalled.

Knight said he would go to a remote part of the airfield and that a light, propeller-driven Army plane would taxi to him and a courier would give him a plain, unmarked envelope. Knight said his instructions were to take the envelope to his office and lock it up until that evening.

All of the Cambodian B-52 raids then were conducted at night, Knight said, to avoid detection by other U.S. aircraft flying in the vicinity.

On the basis of the data from Saigon, Knight said, detailed orders—known as "frags"—were drawn up so they could be relayed by radio and computer to the pilots on their way from Guam to Cambodia. The radar "Skyspot" station computed the correct time and angle of the bombing run and actually told the bombardiers the precise moment to drop the bombs, he said.

Following the Cambodian missions, Knight said, the staff would prepare a routine "frag" for a fictional site in South Vietnam, writing in coordinates and bombing times,

and then send the documents to Saigon.

Knight said he would then wait until daylight and burn the orders for the real bombing runs in a barrel outside his office. He said he was ordered to wait until daylight to avoid the possibility of losing even a small scrap of paper in the darkness.

Then, Knight said, he would call Saigon and simply say to the ADVON duty officer, "The ballgame is over."

Knight said the procedure seemed "unorthodox" to him, but that when he asked the radar site commander, a lieutenant colonel, who authorized the raids, he was told "not to ask that." Knight repeatedly told the committee he was not opposed to bombing Cambo-

dia, but that he later became concerned because records were being falsified in violation of the military code of justice.

Knight said Air Force officers at at least two other radar guidance sites told him they were engaged in the same type of covert bombing mission to Cambodia. Moreover, Knight said, one officer said the practice had been going on since the Communist Tet offensive early in 1968.

Some committee members, particularly Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.), challenged Knight's motives for writing about the raids to Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wisc.) and, later, Sen. Harold E. Hughes (D-Iowa).

Thurmond elicited from Knight an admission that he was forced to resign his Air Force commission in October, 1972, because he had, twice been passed over for promotion as a result of inadequate proficiency ratings. In response to questions by Thurmond, Knight also said he was not concerned that information about the raids was being kept from the military hierarchy, but that it was not available to members of Congress and the public.

Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) also challenged Knight's testimony, saying, "I was one of many who knew there were raids going on." He said the missions were conducted at the request of Prince Sihanouk.

However, Hughes pointed out that the committee recently was given a "year-by-year and country-by-country" Defense Department accounting of bombing in Southeast Asia and that Cambodia does not appear on the list until after the "incursion" of May, 1970.

"To me, that seems to be official deception," said Hughes, who added he would continue the inquiry to find out who originated the orders for falsifying the records.

In his letter to the committee, Defense Secretary Schlesinger said only that "prior to May, 1970," B-52 strikes occurred in Cambodia. He said the raids had been "conducted for some period of time and were fully authorized."

Authorization for the raids, Schlesinger said, was made "after careful consideration" on the basis of protecting the lives of 500,000 American servicemen in South Vietnam.

"Because of the sensitive operational and diplomatic situation, special security precau-

tions were taken to ensure that the operations would not be compromised," he said.

Later, Jerry W. Friedheim, assistant defense secretary for public affairs, said in an interview that the raids coincided with the beginning of the U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam, and that Gen. Abrams was concerned that the pull-out could not be achieved safely with the Communist sanctuaries intact.

"From where he sat, he wanted to do it (withdraw) the safest way possible, and the civilian leadership agreed," said Friedheim.

He said the raids were ordered in March, 1969, to "start getting things in position to send people home."

Asked at what civilian level the raids were approved, Friedheim said, "Those sort of things don't happen unless they get discussed at the NSC (National Security Council)."

Administration sources also observed that Sihanouk was "playing both sides" then and did not want the raids publicized. Cambodia, they pointed out, was letting the Communists bring in supplies through the port of Sihanoukville while, at the same time, letting the U.S. bomb the border areas, which the Cambodian government did not control anyway.

Pentagon officials claimed there is no comparison between the raids described by Knight and 25 unauthorized bombing raids carried out in North Vietnam in 1971 by Maj. Gen. John D. Lavelle, former Seventh Air Force commander, who retired after being demoted two ranks.

"These raids were approved up and down the line. Lavelle was doing his own thing," said one administration source.

Gen. George S. Brown, who was confirmed by the Senate last week as Air Force chief of staff, said in a letter yesterday to Senate Armed Forces Committee Acting Chairman Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) that it is inaccurate to call the B-52 bombing reports "false" as long as "they were not intended to deceive those with a security need-to-know."

In response to a written question submitted to Hughes, Brown said, "Only those who had a need to know were familiar with each operation. There were probably other operations in the course of the war unknown to me. I do not know and cannot judge whether there were operations that should be told about."