

Pentagon Knew of Unauthorized Lavelle Raid in '71

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 7—Congressional sources reported today that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had detected at least one of Gen. John D. Lavelle's unauthorized bombing missions against North Vietnam in 1971, well before the series of raids ended.

The report was the first indication that Pentagon officials were aware of any improper activities in the Seventh Air Force before March, 1972, when they received a letter of complaint from a sergeant stationed in Thailand. The unauthorized "protective reaction raids" on North Vietnam airfields, truck depots and oil-storage areas began in November, 1971.

The Congressional sources said that in December, Pentagon officers monitored an Air Force attack on an off-limit radar site 30 miles inside North Vietnam. The mission was officially reported as "protective reaction" by the Seventh Air Force.

Laird Reviewed Incident

General Lavelle was ordered to halt attacks on the radar, the sources said, pending a review of the incident by Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird. On Jan. 26, 1972, more than a month later, the radar sites, which helped guide North Vietnamese MIG fighters, were removed from the restricted list and the Air Force was permitted to resume its attacks.

General Lavelle was relieved as commander of the Seventh Air Force and retired in April after an official investigation disclosed that the unauthorized bombings on North Vietnam had extended from November through March 8, involving at least 20 such missions.

Today a spokesman for Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, refused comment when asked why, if the Pentagon investigation had immediately detected the unauthorized radar attacks, it was unable to learn of the other unauthorized raids.

Meanwhile, the Senate Armed Services Committee announced that it would hold closed hearings next week into the Lavelle matter, with the general appearing Monday as the first witness.

The chairman, Senator John C. Stennis, Democrat of Mississippi, earlier had promised public hearings, but said in a statement today that he had changed his mind because of the high security classification of the material involved. A similar hearing in June by the House of Representatives was held in public.

Senator Harold E. Hughes, Democrat of Iowa, responding to a report published in The New York Times today alleging

that 200 officers and men were involved in a cover-up of General Lavelle's unauthorized bombing raids, called on the Air Force to reopen its investigation of the incident.

"These news reports," the Senator said in a statement issued in Amsterdam, where he is attending an international conference on alcoholism, "suggest that there was an organized network of deception which remained concealed while men who apparently knew of

Congressional sources said that the first account of the Joint Chiefs' action in ordering a halt to the attacks on the North Vietnamese radar, known as ground control interceptors' came from General Lavelle during his still-classified testimony in June before a secret session of the House Armed Services Committee.

According to the Congressional sources, General Lavelle explained that when he was initially queried by the Joint Chiefs about his authority for attacking the radars, he replied that he had none but had stretched the rules in order to protect his pilots. He was subsequently ordered to stop the attacks.

In June Admiral Moorer, testifying on his reappointment as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, described the incident in full to the Senate Armed Services Committee—after the Lavelle affair became publicly known. But the admiral did not tell the Senators it involved General Lavelle. Pentagon sources subsequently confirmed that the admiral had been referring to the general.

'Minor' Misrepresentation

"I am bringing this up," the admiral said, according to the published Senate transcript, "because I wanted to show you that we had picked this firing incident up immediately. He called the field commander's attention to it."

"I only mention this to show you and to answer your question that we do review the reports and that we did pick up immediately from the reports, and in this case that there was a misinterpretation, but it was a minor one and was corrected right away," Admiral Moorer added.

Asked why the other viola-

tions were not discovered, Admiral Moorer testified that the destruction of a radar site had been mentioned in a report forwarded from the Seventh Air Force, but that there was nothing in the other reports that "would cause me to have any suspicion."

In a lengthy interview yesterday in Orlando, Fla., Sgt. Lonnie D. Franks, an intelligence specialist whose letter of complaints led to the dismissal of General Lavelle, said that he first began to falsify after-action reports on Jan. 25—the day before Secretary Laird placed the radars on the officially sanctioned target list.

Before that day, Sergeant Franks said, the pilot reports, showing that airfields and other unauthorized targets

were attacked, were routinely processed and sent to higher headquarters.

The sergeant was unable to explain why the earlier reports did not alter higher commands of the activities, nor did he know why the intricate falsification of reports—often involving three hours of work—was ordered to begin on Jan. 25.

The Air Force has acknowledged that the first of General Lavelle's "protective reaction" missions involved the bombing and strafing of three North Vietnamese airfields on Nov. 8, 1971, during the secret peace talks between Henry A. Kissinger, the President's national security adviser, and Le Duc Tho, a senior North Vietnamese official.