

SEP 13 1972

Lavelle Testifies Superiors Gave Permission for Raids

NYTimes
Says Moorer and Abrams Approved — Stennis Summons Abrams

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 12—Lieut. Gen. John D. Lavelle has told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he received permission from Adm. Thomas H. Moorer and Gen. Creighton W. Abrams before ordering a series of attacks on North Vietnamese airfields in November, 1971, well-placed sources said today.

Admiral Moorer is Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and General Abrams, who has been nominated as Army Chief of Staff, was then commander of United States forces in South Vietnam.

The missions, later reported as "protective reaction" strikes—that is, raids against targets posing an immediate threat to pilots—were the first of at least 20 strikes against North Vietnam by General Lavelle's Seventh Air Force at a time before renewed heavy bombing of the north was authorized.

The seriousness of General Lavelle's accusations was underscored by Senator John C. Stennis, Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, when he told reporters this evening that he had summoned General Abrams to appear before another closed session of the committee tomorrow.

Senator Stennis said the committee, which heard more than four hours of testimony from General Lavelle today, would not proceed with consideration of the nomination of General Abrams as Army Chief of Staff until the Lavelle matter was cleared up. He refused to say how long that would take.

In response to a question, Senator Stennis acknowledged that the closed hearings had



Associated Press
Gen. Creighton W. Abrams



The New York Times
Adm. Thomas H. Moorer

raised an issue of: "What was Abrams's duty and what should he have done?"

General Lavelle was relieved of his command and demoted from full general last March after an Air Force sergeant wrote a letter of complaint about the raids. The unauthorized raids ended on March 8, less than a month before President Nixon ordered the sustained bombing of North Vietnam.

Congressional sources said today that they did not know whether General Abrams's or Admiral Moorer's alleged

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RAIDS APPROVED, LAVELLE ASSERTS

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knowledge of the unauthorized attacks was limited to the early November raids.

General Abrams could not be reached for comment today, but an aide said none was likely in view of the Senate hearings. An aide to Admiral Moorer confirmed that the admiral was in Saigon on Nov. 8, the day of the first raid, and also acknowledged that he had been briefed by General Lavelle.

But the aide quoted Admiral Moorer as saying that "there was no indication of anything that did not conform" with the rules of engagement during the Lavelle briefing.

Earlier this summer, Admiral Moorer testified on his reappointment as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, during confirmation hearings that his staff had noticed an Air Force attack on an unauthorized radar site sometime in December, and had ordered General Lavelle to stop such raids.

According to Congressional sources, Admiral Moorer told the Senate Armed Services Committee that after a review by Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, it was decided to place radar sites on the list of approved targets. The radar controlled North Vietnamese aircraft.

General Lavelle returned to the Capitol today for another closed session with the committee.

At one point during the afternoon, Senator Stuart Symington, Democrat of Missouri, stepped out of the hearing room briefly and told reporters: "I'm convinced that a lot of people below him and a lot of people above him knew of the attacks."

Senator Symington added, in response to a question, that higher commanders "knew of the nature of the raids" and "knew what he was doing." He declined to elaborate.

Congressional sources said that General Lavelle, in his testimony before the Senate Committee, contended he had received permission for the strikes from General Abrams and Admiral Moorer at a meeting in Saigon.

One target — Quanglang airfield, some 180 miles north of the demilitarized zone—was in an area of North Vietnam usually attacked by Navy planes stationed on aircraft carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin. Congressional sources said General Lavelle told the Senate committee that Admiral Moorer had personally assured him that he would get permission for the Air Force to stage the raids.

General Lavelle was quoted by Congressional sources as testifying that on the next morning, as the admiral was preparing to board a flight at Tansonnhut airfield in Saigon, he presented Admiral Moorer with a series of poststrike reconnaissance photographs.

General Lavelle is known to have told others, a source close to the general said today, that during a visit in mid-November to Honolulu he also discussed the mission with Adm. S. McCain, who was then commander in chief of the Pacific Forces. Admiral McCain retired this month.

The airfield attacks were considered necessary, one military source said, because in November North Vietnam began to shift a number of MIG fighters and some of its best pilots to airfields farther south. A well-known North Vietnam jet ace was among the pilots believed to have been shifted, they said.

Congressional sources said that details of General Lavelle's testimony to the Armed Services Committee were made known to Pentagon officials today.

Yesterday, after General Lavelle's three-hour secret appearance Senator Stennis told reporters that the officer had maintained he "committed no wrong" in connection with the unauthorized bombing of North Vietnam.

Senator Stennis further quoted the General as saying that "he considers he was authorized" to make the attacks for which he was punished.

That testimony contradicted General Lavelle's public assertion before the House Armed Services Committee on June 12 that "in certain instances, I made interpretations that were probably beyond the literal intention of the rules."

Today Senator Symington said that, at his suggestion, General Lavelle and other witnesses before the committee would be placed under oath for their testimony.

A civilian source close to General Lavelle said today that his testimony before the Senate committee was more candid than his House statement.

The source added that the Senate statement reflected the general's own view of his innocence. "I think the general had some bad advice at the outset of this thing," the source said.

"It looks to me," he added, "that the Air Force is trying to make a patsy out of him on these things."

Congressional sources said that General Lavelle, in his classified House testimony in June, made no mention of discussing specific missions in advance with higher-ranking officers.

Since the incident was first made public, other military sources familiar with the general's thinking have maintained that there were two sides to the story.