

# Bombing Inquiry on 'Dead-End Trail,' Senator Says

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 14—The Senate investigation into unauthorized bombing of North Vietnam reached today what one key Senator called "a dead-end trail" in an attempt to determine whether the Lieut. Gen. John D. Lavelle was under higher orders when he initiated the raids.

At issue is the sharply conflicting testimony given this week before the Senate Armed Services Committee by General Lavelle and on of his immediate superiors, Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, who until June was commander of United States forces in South Vietnam.

During secret testimony yesterday, General Abrams—whose confirmation as Army Chief of Staff has been delayed by the hearings—was reported to have bluntly denied General Lavelle's contention that he, along with Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had given permission for the first of more than 20 missions now in dispute.

General Lavelle was relieved as commander of the Seventh Air Force as a full general and was demoted and retired in April after an investigation determined that he had violated the rules of engagement by ordering the missions. The attacks began on Nov. 8, 1971, and ended early in March, less than a month before President Nixon approved the renewal of heavy bombing of North Vietnam.

On Wednesday, The New York Times, quoting well-placed sources, reported that General Lavelle had told the committee during secret hearings that during a meeting with General Abrams and Admiral Moorer in Saigon he had received approval

for the first raid, in November.

One Senator, asked about General Lavelle's testimony again today, said the general "had made it abundantly clear that he was positive that General Abrams and everyone else knew what was going on."

The problem, the Senator said, is "that we have no proof at all about who's telling the truth." He described the two generals' testimony as "a direct contradiction."

"We're at a dead-end trail," the Senator added. He said the only way General Lavelle could prove what he says is if he has a witness, somebody else, who could corroborate the meeting with the superior officers.

Today the committee heard more than three hours of testimony from Lonnie B. Franks, the 23-year-old Air Force sergeant who first reported the Seventh Air Force violations.

Sergeant Franks, according to Congressional sources, repeated his contention—first published in The New York Times last week—that more than 200 pilots and officers of the Seventh Air Force in Thailand had falsified after-action reports after staging planned bombing missions against unauthorized North Vietnamese targets.

### 'Breakdown on Command'

After his testimony, Senator Harold E. Hughes, Democrat of Iowa, to whom Sergeant Franks initially sent his complaint, told reporters that "the evidence has proven beyond a doubt that there was knowledge from top to bottom" in the Seventh Air Force of falsification of reports.

Senator Hughes, who first urged the current hearings more than three months ago, said Sergeant Franks's testi-

mony demonstrated that there was "an entire breakdown in the command structure of the Seventh Air Force."

In the interview last week Sergeant Franks said that most of the senior commanders in his unit were involved in the falsification of reports.

After the sergeant's testimony Senator John C. Stennis, the committee chairman, told reporters that the committee would "pursue this further to see who originated the order

for the false reports."

He announced that two of Sergeant Franks's immediate superiors in Thailand, Capt. Douglas J. Murary, an intelligence officer, and Col. Charles Gabriel, commander of the 434th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, would testify tomorrow.

Testimony from Gen. John D. Ryan, the Air Force Chief of Staff, who relieved General Lavelle in March, will be delayed until next week, Senator Stennis said.



Associated Press

Air Force Sgt. Lonnie D. Franks and Senator Howard E. Hughes, Democrat of Iowa, in the doorway of the hearing room before yesterday's closed session of the Armed Services Committee. Sergeant Franks first reported the unauthorized bombings of North Vietnam.