

Lavelle Charges Backed by Colonel

WASHINGTON — (UPI) —An Air Force colonel testified today that his air wing flew 25 to 30 bombing missions over North Vietnam early this year at a time when such attacks were prohibited.

Col. Charles Gabriel, commander of the 432nd Air Wing of the 7th Air Force operating out of Udorn AFB in Thailand, also told senators that false reports were written about the missions

to make it appear they were not outside the rules.

Backed Charges

Gabriel backed accusations by an enlisted man in his outfit, Sgt. Lonnie Franks, whose letter to Sen. Harold Hughes (D-Iowa) about irregularities in raids resulted in the forced retirement of Gen. John Lavelle, commander of the 7th Air Force, who allegedly ordered the attacks, and a delay in confirmation of Gen.

Creighton Abrams to be Army Chief of Staff.

Gabriel testified at a closed session of the Senate Armed Services Committee, which is looking into the matter.

Chairman John Stennis told reporters Gabriel's testimony afterward. Also called for secret testimony today was Franks' immediate superior officer, Capt. Douglas Murray.

Lavelle admitted "stretching the rules" in ordering bombing beyond the limits set by Washington but denied personal knowledge of the false reports.

Franks set the Senate investigators scurrying for new information when he testified yesterday that there were two reports written about the raids: one false and one true.

Both reports, Franks said, went as far as Lavelle's Seventh Air Force headquarters.

This meant that many intervening officers read both the true and false accounts of the raids.

Franks said he complained to both his immediate enlisted and commissioned superiors about having to write lies, and was told "that's the way it's done."

"The evidence proves beyond doubt that there were preplanned strikes (illegal under the rules) and in the Seventh Air Force there was knowledge from top to bottom about the falsification of reports," Hughes said.

"I'm convinced there was a pattern of planned falsification. I believe it goes up to Lavelle. I don't believe it goes higher than Lavelle. I think he exceeded his authority and I think he knew he exceeded it," said Sen. Richard Schweiker (R-Pa.).

An Air Force investigation showed there were 28 unauthorized raids involving 147 aircraft. Franks, however, estimated the raids as high as 75 and involving many more aircraft.