

Sgt. Tells Of Raid

Planning False Reports Were Backup, He Testifies

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U.S. Seventh Air Force commanders picked targets to bomb in North Vietnam long before their warplanes ever took off and then reported enemy fire whether there was any or not, the sergeant who blew the whistle on Gen. John D. Lavelle testified yesterday.

Sgt. Lonnie Franks thus portrayed the illegal raids as premeditated, not cases of pilots on reconnaissance missions over the North suddenly spotting inviting military targets and dropping their bombs.

Sen. Harold E. Hughes (D-Iowa), after hearing Franks testify to this in yesterday's closed session of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the situation represented "an entire breakdown in the command structure of the Seventh Air Force."

Hughes said this breakdown carried grave implications for the country, declaring that "pre-planned strikes" against North Vietnam from November, 1971, to March, 1972 resulted in a stepped-up air war at the very time presidential aide Henry Kissinger was trying to negotiate a peace with Hanoi. Lavelle was commander of the Seventh Air Force during this period.

The senator, who triggered the Lavelle investigation after receiving Franks' Feb. 25 letter describing the violations, said the unauthorized bombing put the U.S. government in the position of "the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing."

"The evidence" presented by Franks and others, Hughes said, "supported beyond a shadow of a doubt that there were pre-planned strikes" in violation of the rules of engagement existing at the time.

Franks, 23, a reddish-haired sergeant who appeared uncomfortable but determined as he spoke to reporters after appearing before the senators in closed session, said that he felt the "fantastic increase of missions over a short period of time" should have alerted officers above Lavelle in the chain of command that something irregular was happening within the Seventh Air Force.

The period he referred to, Franks said, was from Jan. 25, 1972, when he first started writing false reports as or-

See LAVELLE, A12, Col. 1

LAVELLE, From A1

dered by his superiors, to March 9, 1972.

Frank's testimony yesterday made the premeditated nature of the unauthorized raids, as distinguished from conflicting interpretations on what the former rules of engagement covering North Viet-

nam bombing allowed, a key point in the Senate investigation, according to Senate sources.

Committee Chairman John C. Stennis (D-Miss.) announced that other officers in Frank's outfit, the 432d Tactical Reconnaissance Wing at Udorn Air Force Base in Thailand, will be called at witnesses today. They are in position to discuss the premeditation point that Franks raised yesterday.

The witnesses are Col. Charles Gabriel, commander of the 432d Wing, and Capt. Douglas Murray, Frank's immediate superior at Udorn when the sergeant said he was told to write false reports.

Franks said yesterday that two sets of reports went from his office, false ones to put the bombings within the existing rules of protective reaction, and the accurate ones. He said the accurate ones went to the higher commands of the Seventh Air Force from Udorn. He said he did not know if that included Lavelle's own office, or what happened to the reports once they reached the Seventh Air Force headquarters in Saigon. The false ones, he said, went beyond Seventh Air Force—presumably right up the chain of command to the Secretary of Defense.

Hughes said yesterday that there are "obvious differences" between the testimony of La-

velle and that of Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, President Nixon's nominee for Army Chief of Staff, which must be explored further before he is ready to vote on Abrams' nomination.

Sen. Richard S. Schweiker (R-Pa.), a member of the committee, said that nothing he has heard in the hearings so far impels him to vote against Abrams' nomination.

The following excerpts from the hearing record, expected to be released today, shows how one senator explored the question of whether Abrams knew about the illegal raids ordered by Lavelle.

Sen. Harry F. Byrd Jr. (Ind.-Va.), after listening to Lavelle, asked if the general would agree:

- That Lavelle had made a reasonable but liberal interpretation of the rules of engagement.

- That some reports falsified by subordinates were due to a misunderstanding of Lavelle's instructions.

- That Lavelle had no knowledge of these false records.

"Yes sir," Lavelle agreed, "that is correct."

Earlier in his testimony, Lavelle had told the committee, "If I had it to do over again, I would of course take greater care to insure my guidance and direction was clearly understood at all echelons."