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PILOT SAID TALKS PRECEDED INQUIRY

Told 'To Tell Truth,' in the
Lavelle Case, He Testified

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 10—The young pilot whose testimony was pivotal to the Navy's denial of unauthorized bombing of North Vietnam told a Senate committee, in testimony released today, that he had had a series of meetings with high-ranking Pentagon officials before appearing before the committee.

Lieut. Charles W. Moore Jr. said that he had talked with Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Adm. Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr., Chief of Naval operations, on the day preceding appearance before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

In his testimony, Lieutenant Moore flatly contradicted an assertion by a fellow pilot, William G. Groepper, a former Lieutenant, that his squadron had participated, under the guise of "protective reaction," in a number of raids of North Vietnamese airfields.

Asked whether he had met with senior officers before his Senate appearance, Lieutenant Moore initially named two immediate superiors and added, "I have talked with some other officers in the Pentagon."

Discussions Are Described

He acknowledged the meetings with the admirals under further questioning, but insisted—to the Senators and in an interview today—that he was merely urged "to tell the truth" by the high-ranking officers. In all, he said, he had discussed the alleged unauthorized bombing with about 20 senior Navy officers.

The Senate leadership, meanwhile, set debate for tomorrow afternoon on the pending nomination of Gen. Creighton W. Abrams to be Army Chief of Staff. The nomination has been delayed four months by the Armed Services Committee hearings into the bombing ordered by Maj. Gen. John D. Lavelle, of the Air Force.

Last week the committee concluded its hearings by voting both to strip another star from General Lavelle, previously reduced from full general to lieutenant general and retired, and unanimously to approve the Abrams nomination. General Abrams was the direct superior of General Lavelle at the time of the controversial bombing missions.

The testimony showed that both Lieut. Moore and one of his superiors at the time of the questioned mission, Comdr. John A. Miller, had specifically recalled being told beforehand that the aircraft were not to attack in case the North Vietnamese did not respond.

The two officers also made clear that they fully expected the enemy to respond to the "protective reaction" mission, which involved the commitment of about 12 aircraft escorting an unarmed reconnaissance plane last December.

But Admiral Moorer, in his testimony, declared that under the rules of engagement, a "pilot could not assume in advance that he was going to get fired on at Point A, for instance, and then go up there and attack Point A."

Five former colleagues of Lieutenant Moore declared in interviews published in The New York Times today that their squadron, stationed aboard the aircraft carrier Constellation, made three planned assaults on a North Vietnamese airfield that were later officially reported as "protective reaction"—that is, in permitted response to hostile fire.

A Pentagon spokesman today described the Times report as nothing "particularly new" and said that the accusations had already been investigated and found invalid.

In their Senate testimony, both Lieutenant Moore and Commander Miller acknowledged that the reconnaissance plane accompanying the mission had taken photographs after the bombs were dropped—but said that the craft was only a few seconds behind the strike.

The two men also testified that two "protective-reaction" missions were flown to Quanglang Airfield, then a forward base for MIG's. A third mission, they said, was scheduled but canceled.

In his testimony, Admiral Moorer denied that he had agreed—as asserted by Maj. Gen. John D. Lavelle—to get Navy permission for the first of the Air Force general's controversial strikes, also at Quanglang last November.

Admiral Moorer also said that he believed the Air Force's decision to punish General Lavelle by relieving him of duty "was a pretty stiff punishment for a man who has been in the service as long as he has been in it."