

Laird Tells of Moves to Bar Disobedient Military Acts

Answers Stennis, but Says Bombings by Lavelle Didn't Represent Breakdown in Civilian Control of Armed Forces

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By WILLIAM BEECHER
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WASHINGTON, Oct. 19—Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, insisting that the documented instances of unauthorized bombing of North Vietnam did not represent a breakdown of civilian control of the military forces, outlined today a series of steps that he said were aimed at "further strengthening" civilian authority.

These moves, he declared, should prevent a recurrence of the unauthorized air raids that Maj. Gen. John D. Lavelle ordered against North Vietnam from November, 1971, to April, 1972, and false reporting of the circumstances of the strikes.

The general was subsequently removed from his post as Air Force commander for Southeast Asia, reduced two grades, and retired.

In an informal meeting with reporters at the Pentagon, Mr. Laird released copies of a letter to Senator John C. Stennis, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, which conducted extensive hearings on

the Lavelle case. Earlier this week, the Mississippi Democrat called on Mr. Laird to explain how he intended to prevent a repetition of such conduct.

The steps outlined by Mr. Laird today were these:

¶Creation of a new group of inspector generals in unified command headquarters, such as the Pacific Command in Hawaii, to conduct regular checks of procedures to insure orders from Washington are being scrupulously carried out. They will report to the Defense Secretary through the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

¶Existing Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine inspector generals will henceforth report to their civilian service secretaries, in addition to their respective military chiefs.

¶A second Deputy Secretary of Defense—the post has just been authorized by Congress—will be directed to concentrate on maintaining operational con-

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trol of forces in the field.

¶The newly established Defense Investigative Service, a single agency centralizing the security investigative bodies of each of the armed forces, will work under the direct orders of the Defense Secretary rather than individual services.

¶All echelons have been ordered to give closer scrutiny to the "accuracy and completeness" of operational reports.

Further, Mr. Laird said, a study is under way to determine whether changes should be made in the military retirement system. There has been considerable Congressional criticism of permitting General Lavelle to retire on a full general's pension, despite his demotion to major general. Further, he was granted a 70 per cent disability even though he had been drawing flight pay until shortly before leaving active duty. This provides him with a pension of \$27,000 a year, all but \$2,900 of it tax free.

Repetition Called 'Unlikely'

Mr. Laird said that with the Pentagon's changes, he was "confident that any deviation from operating authorities or false reporting will be promptly detected, and that, indeed, a recurrence of the type of incidents" brought out in the Lavelle hearings "is highly unlikely."

Mr. Laird attempted to blame a failure in military command control in the Lavelle case. "There were violations within the military command and control system in that commands within the military chain were violated and in that reports within the military chain of command were falsified," he said.

Pentagon officials said that had the Joint Chiefs of Staff or General Creighton W. Abrams, who at the time was commander in Vietnam and General Lavelle's superior, joined with him in violating orders, that would have been considered a breakdown in civilian control. But since the joint chiefs and General Abrams were found to have been unaware of the bombings, despite General Lavelle's testimony to the contrary, the control failure was considered a military one.

'Integrity' Called Vital

One ranking defense official commented: "We can have new layers of investigators and supervision, but ultimately the system, to work, requires the integrity of top commanders in following orders. Without that, no system will work properly, no matter how many gunshoes we have."

Mr. Laird described the actions taken in the case of General Lavelle as "administrative" rather than disciplinary.

But he defended the disposition of the case, saying: "The effects on General Lavelle may well have been as severe as may have resulted from disciplinary action."

Formal charges have been filed by an Air Force officer against General Lavelle. Mr. Laird said these were still under consideration by the Secretary of the Air Force.