

Senate Unit to End Promotions Delay

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The Senate Armed Services Committee agreed today to delay for one more week the pending promotions of more than 4,800 Air Force officers. This seemed to end a Senate impasse stemming from last year's hearings on the unauthorized bombing of North Vietnam.

Senator Harold E. Hughes, Democrat of Iowa, had delayed the promotions in an attempt to force the Pentagon to begin a full inquiry into what he termed the basic command and control issues raised by the bombing missions.

More than 25 unauthorized missions were conducted by the Seventh Air Force between November, 1971, and March, 1972, under the guise of protective reaction. Gen. John D. Lavelle, then head of the Seventh Air Force, was relieved of his command, demoted two ranks and retired after investigations by the Air Force and a four-week hearing last fall by the Armed Services Committee.

Under the military rules of engagement in 1971, Air Force and Navy planes were permitted to attack North Vietnamese targets in response to enemy fire or electronic indications that fire was coming.

Hughes's Initial Goal

General Lavelle was accused of attacking first and officially reporting the missions as being in response to North Vietnamese provocations.

After a closed committee

meeting this afternoon with Air Force Secretary Robert C. Seamans Jr., and other top officials, however, Senator Hughes acknowledged that there was no support among his colleagues for a full-scale review of the Lavelle matter.

Mr. Hughes initially had sought to delay only the promotions of those officers who directly served with General Lavelle at the time of the unauthorized mission—about 160

men. But the Air Force insisted on delaying the advancement of all of the men whose names were on the same promotion lists with General Lavelle's former subordinates. By this week, therefore, a total of 4,897 promotions had been delayed.

Senator Hughes told newsmen after the hearings that he had sought a week's further delay of the promotions "in order to secure further information about people who were involved in the illegal bombing operations." He added in response to a question—that he "doubted" if he could accomplish much in one week.

"I've got to really review what the power of one Senator is in relationship to the pressure of the Pentagon and thousands of names on a promotion list," Mr. Hughes said. "Apparently, everyone but me wishes that this would die. If that's the case, I guess we'd better have the funeral and get it over with."

The Iowa Senator had been instrumental in initially exposing the Lavelle incident and prompting the Armed Services Committee to begin its full investigation.

By his actions thus far this year, Senator Hughes was carrying out a threat he made after the hearings last year when he warned the Pentagon that he would delay promotion of top officials there chose not to conduct a full investigation of the circumstances surrounding the general's unauthorized attacks.

During the Senate hearings, there was testimony to the effect that more than 200 men serving under General Lavelle had participated almost daily in elaborate falsification—often taking two hours or more of the unauthorized strikes.