

Lavelle Would Give Bombing Order Again

Former General John D. Lavelle, removed as commander of the Seventh Air Force last year for ordering unauthorized bombing of North Vietnam, in 1971, told Frederick Rotarians Wednesday he would give the same orders today if he had it to do over again. He only regretted the attempted cover-up, which he said was done without his knowledge.

He said he had to make the decision to bomb to protect his men. Sometimes a commander in the field must give orders that he doesn't have specific authorization for when the combat situation demands it.

He would not go into details on the bombing, except to say that he knew nothing of the false reports to his superiors covering up the unauthorized bombing. He said that as the commanding officer, however, he had to accept the responsibility for what his subordinates had done to misinform his superiors.

When Lavelle was ordered home, he said he was about to attend a party to be thrown in Thailand by Thanom Kittikatchorn, some of the former Thai premier, for the Seventh Air Force bombing crews who had knocked out 12 of the 16 Communist 130 millimeter cannon then being used in Cambodia. The Soviet-built field pieces were larger than anything the U.S. had supplied Lon Nol's

forces, and the commander of the Thai volunteers in Cambodia wanted the guns knocked out to continue the Thai effort.

Lavelle was about to depart for the party when he got his orders to come home. He was subsequently relieved of his command by Congress for his unauthorized bombing of the North.

The bombing violated a secret agreement the U.S. had made with North Vietnamese diplomats at the Paris peace negotiations.

When Lavelle finished his 25-minute speech, retired Colonel Lester Holmes told a story of his experiences in Europe during World War II. He was told by his field commander to make whatever decisions he had to make, and, in effect, that he couldn't worry about authorization in the heat of battle. The packed audience, many of them former military men, gave Lavelle a hearty round of applause.