

# A Businesslike General

John Daniel Lavelle

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WASHINGTON, June 13—For most of his 32 years in the Air Force, John Daniel Lavelle managed to avoid the public eye, moving quietly and efficiently through a number of managerial jobs on his way to a four-star general's assignment last year as commander of all

**Man in the News** Air Force units in Southeast Asia. The general has burst into prominence in the last few days with the disclosure that he had taken it upon himself to stretch the rules and order the bombing of unauthorized targets in North Vietnam, later reporting the assaults as "protective reaction" strikes.

General Lavelle was relieved of his post in March, retired and demoted. The last general officer to suffer a fate even roughly similar was Gen. Douglas MacArthur, who was dismissed by President Harry S. Truman in 1951.

General Lavelle was born on Sept. 9, 1916, in Cleveland, where he attended high school and where he was graduated from John Carroll University in 1938 with a degree in science. He enlisted as an aviation cadet in 1939 and later flew combat missions during World War II.

In the postwar years, in an era of delayed promotions, General Lavelle's rise was meteoric. One of his important jobs involved complex negotiations with seven Army technical services to reach agreement on the division of assets between the Army and the Air Force when the two services were separated. By 1951 he was a full colonel.

### Held Aerospace Post

After years spent in supply and management jobs, he was promoted to brigadier general in 1962 and immediately began receiving more important assignments.



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In 1964, General Lavelle was named director of aerospace programs for the Air Force, a post in which he had to spend hours before various Congressional committees testifying in favor of Air Force programs.

After a tour as commander of the 17th Air Force in West Germany, which ended in 1967, the general was named director of the secret Defense Communications Planning Group in the Pentagon. The agency later was credited with many of the technical developments that led to what is known as the electronic battlefield in Vietnam.

"He was a very sharp guy," one of the men who worked with him in the Pentagon said today. "He stuck pretty much to business — always got to the crux of things."

"His approach," the man added, "was to sit back and digest it all. He wasn't given to interrupting, like some four-star generals."

### Spent Less Than His Budget

The general became involved in a controversy—although not in public—while working on the communications program. At the end of one fiscal year he returned to the Treasury some \$700-million that remained unspent out of his budget of \$2.3-billion.

"It created quite a furor," one source said, noting that most military officers went to great lengths to spend all their authorized funds annually. A former Pentagon official explained that "Lavelle was committed, and didn't see spending the money just to spend it."

It was this sense of commitment, apparently, that got the general into hot water eight months after taking over as commander of the Seventh Air Force in July, 1971.

General Lavelle told Congress yesterday that he had ordered the unauthorized attacks in North Vietnam because of a military build-up that he was not allowed to attack. "As the commander on the spot concerned with the safety of the crews, I felt that these were justifiable actions," he said.

### Calm in Witness Chair

General Lavelle was married in 1940 to the former Mary McEllin. He and his wife have four sons and three daughters and make their home in the Washington area.

During his appearance in Congress, the general seemed calm, almost blandly so—although he chain-smoked and occasionally slumped over in his witness chair to rest his chin on his arms folded in front of him. At all times he seemed alert, intently watching the Congressional committee members.

Crinkly faced, with a slightly florid complexion, General Lavelle is of medium height with a nearly full head of black, curly hair that is graying only slightly. He wore a blue suit that nearly matched the official Air Force blue, but he set it off with a flowered tie.

The general's favorite hobby now is golf, one that he has been able to pursue at golf courses around the world. Associates say, however, that General Lavelle is at best an average player, with a handicap of 16. He is known to be looking forward to the opportunity to spend more time with his family, now that he has retired from service, and he is said to be seeking to interest two of his sons in golf.