

'REACTION' STRIKES CALLED COVER-UP

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Ex-Intelligence Aide Says His Unit Planned Such Raids on North in '70
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WASHINGTON, June 14 — A former photo-intelligence specialist for the Seventh Air Force in Vietnam said today that in 1970 his top-secret unit planned a number of bombing strikes into North Vietnam that a few days later were publicly described by the Air Force as "protective reaction."

Michael A. Lewis, 25 years old, of Ann Arbor, Mich., who spent nearly four years in the Air Force—one year at Seventh Air Force headquarters in Saigon—said in a telephone interview that "we knew we weren't supposed to do it, except we were told that orders had come from the Pentagon."

Mr. Lewis, a former sergeant, is now a student at the University of Michigan. He said he served as a photo interpreter with the 12th Reconnaissance Intelligence Technical Squadron at Tansonnhut air field from June, 1969, to June, 1970.

Mr. Lewis's name and address were supplied to The New York Times by a military source who formerly worked with the 432d Photo Intelligence Squadron stationed at Udon Air Force Base in Thailand.

Another intelligence sergeant

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from that Squadron reported last February that he had been ordered to falsify documents concerning air strikes over North Vietnam. That led to the dismissal in March of Gen. John D. Lavelle as commander of the Seventh Air Force.

Spokesman Won't Comment

A Pentagon spokesman, when asked about Mr. Lewis's statements, declined official comment. One military officer said, however: "The guy is out of the service and he may or may not be correct. If there is enough evidence that warrants an investigation, I'm sure the Air Force will begin one."

General Lavelle was retired and demoted after an Air Force investigator concluded that he ordered at least 20 unauthorized strikes into North Vietnam from November, 1971, to March of this year. The strikes were officially reported as "protective reaction" raids—that is, raids initiated by United States aircraft in response to enemy actions. Such raids have been conducted over North Vietnam since late 1969.

Mr. Lewis, in discussing the planning of bombing strikes, said he had never been approached by military investigators although he once wrote to a Senator about the matter. He declined to identify the Senator.

He said his duties with the 12th Reconnaissance Squadron involved secondary processing and analysis of all reconnaissance films made over North Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

In the case of those strikes ordered directly by the Seventh Air Force command, Mr. Lewis said, he would provide first-hand target selection—that is, he would cull from the photographs likely targets for United States bombers. As such, his work required the highest security clearances.

Incidents 'Ever So Often'

"I know for a fact that before I left in 1970 we were preplanning targets inside North Vietnam," Mr. Lewis said. "That means we got an order from the generals at the Seventh Air Force to plan targets in North Vietnam. Later we would read about it in the press as 'protective reaction' strikes. It was the same thing they say General Lavelle did."

Mr. Lewis said such incidents "would happen ever so often" and added that he personally

had planned for two strikes.

"The targets were up on Route 15A and 15B that run into North Vietnam from Mugia Pass," he said, adding that they had included suspected enemy storage areas 5 to 20 miles inside North Vietnam near the demilitarized zone.

"In practice," Mr. Lewis said, "protective reaction normally meant dropping bombs to protect an aircraft that was fired upon, but in effect it was used to cover up preplanned bombing strikes in North Vietnam."

'We Knew It Was Wrong'

"We knew it was wrong," the former sergeant, now a prelaw student, said. "We just assumed it was something they weren't telling epopel about."

Mr. Lewis spoke with reluctance during the interview. All Air Force photo intelligence personnel are expressly warned before leaving the armed services of the possible Federal penalties for disclosing classified information.

A similar account of the so-called protective reaction raids was provided today, also in a telephone interview, by a former Air Force Captain Gary H. Mundt of Denver.

Mr. Mundt, now an antiwar activist and a Democratic candidate for the Colorado legislature, said he served as photographic service officer with the 432d Squadron at Udon in 1969 and 1970.

"Protective reaction, especially among the pilots, was very much of a joke," the former captain said. "It was very much a set-up thing. It was one of the outs that allowed us to go out and bomb North Vietnam all of the time."

'Like a Chess Game'

"To me, it was like a chess game," said Mr. Mundt, who also is a delegate for Senator George McGovern to the Democratic convention next month. "We picked the time. If we decided we should show a little strength, we'd come around with a protective reaction strike."

Mr. Mundt specifically cited one incident he said had been related to him by pilots, involving an attack by six fighter-bombers on a surface-to-air missile site in North Vietnam.

"The fighters were circling over Laos," he said. "The unarmed reconnaissance plane went in and overflew a SAM site. It was obvious that they knew a missile would be fired. As soon as it was, the recon-

naissance plane flew out and the bombers went in. Of course, several days later the newspaper described it as protective reaction strike."

Mr. Mundt, who left the Air Force with an honorable discharge late in 1970, is now a regional coordinator for Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Edward L. Hancock, another former Air Force officer who was stationed at Udon in 1970, was interviewed by telephone at Kansas City, Mo.

"To men," Mr. Hancock, a former captain, said, "protective reaction was just a euphemism for the F-4's to stage raids over Laos and North Vietnam and bomb the hell out of them."

The Official Air Force Register lists both Mr. Mundt and Mr. Hancock. Air Force officials were unable to immediately confirm today that Mr. Lewis had served on active duty, but the former sergeant said he had his honorable discharge papers.

Both Mr. Mundt and Mr. Lewis were critical of the overall efficiency of the intelligence operations they described.

"We used to just inflate all of the statistics all the time," Mr. Lewis said. Speaking of pilots, he said: "They would report destroying a certain number of trucks or a certain amount of supplies. We knew it wasn't accurate but we really didn't care."