

Ex-Airmen Tell of 20 Planned Raids a Month in '70-71

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 15 — Three former members of a photo-intelligence team assigned to Pacific Air Force headquarters in Hawaii said in an interview today that at least 20 to 25 planned bombing raids later described as "protective reaction" strikes were flown each month by Air Force planes over North Vietnam throughout 1970 and 1971. This number would be more than three times the total of "protective-reaction" raids officially announced by the Pentagon.

One of the former airmen, James A. Walkley of Honolulu, said that briefings on planned "protective-reaction" bombing missions were routinely provided to Adm. John S. McCain, commander of the United States Pacific Command and the officer in the chain of command between Saigon and Washington.

The controversy over protective reaction has spread since it was revealed Sunday that Gen. John D. Lavelle was dismissed as commander of all Air Force units in Southeast Asia and demoted after ordering unauthorized bombing raids into North Vietnam. Those raids were publicly described as "protective-reaction" strikes—that is, responses to direct threats to American planes.

The three airmen interviewed today, however, were discussing a period largely before General Lavelle took over his command in July, 1971.

On Monday, General Lavelle told a House of Representatives subcommittee hearing that he had ordered "in the neighborhood" of 20 such raids between Nov. 8, 1971, and March 8, 1972. A subsequent Air Force investigation concluded that he had also filed at least three falsified reports in connection with the raids.

'A Constant Joke'

All three airmen interviewed today agreed that the concept of "protective reaction" was widely considered throughout the Pacific Air Force command as simply another way of describing bombing raids. None of the three had any direct knowledge of General Lavelle's activities between November, 1971, and March, 1972.

Former Sgt. Bradley V. Ochanber of Honolulu, who was honorably discharged from the Air Force in May, said that "protective-reaction" raids had averaged at least 25 a month and added: "We were constantly hitting truck depots and storage areas and describing them as P.R. strikes."

"It was a constant joke," said Mr. Ochanber, who is 24 years old and spent four years in the Air Force in intelligence work. "After we'd bomb, we always used to go down to read the papers and see what kind of information the Air Force released on it."

The Pentagon has officially

reported that Navy and Air Force planes staged a total of 25 "protective-reaction" raids in 1971.

A Pentagon spokesman, asked to comment on the allegations concerning the number of "protective-reaction" missions, said: "We have reported all protective-reaction strikes here as given to us by MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam]. If those men say whatever they say, that's their problem."

4 Senators Join Debate

Meanwhile, four Senators joined the debate, including Senator George McGovern of South Dakota, the leading candidate for the Democratic nomination for President. The other Senators are John C. Stennis, Democrat of Mississippi; William Proxmire, Democrat of Wisconsin, and Clifford P. Case, Republican of New Jersey.

Yesterday, The New York Times published a series of interviews with two former Air Force photo-intelligence specialists who had been stationed in Saigon and Thailand. They indicated that abuses of the "protective-reaction" policy were widespread as early as 1970.

The interviews today with the former Hawaii-based intelligence sergeant stemmed from an investigation by The New York Times into the extent of unauthorized bombing mis-

sions. More than 10 former intelligence and present photo-intelligence specialists—officers and enlisted men—have been reached by telephone.

Some, despite the high degree of classification of all photo-reconnaissance matters, have talked freely. Others have refused to talk on grounds of security. Still others said they had no first-hand knowledge of "protective reaction." None of those contacted, however, denied that serious abuses exist and had gone uncorrected.

Mr. Walkley, who is now associated with a nantiwar counseling service in Honolulu, said he had spent more than three years as a photo interpreter at Hickam Air Force Base. Since leaving the service, he also has been active with Project Air War, an antiwar organization in Washington headed by Fred Branfman. Mr. Branfman is a freelance journalist and a former volunteer with the International Volunteers Service in Laos.

In his job with the 548th Squadron, Mr. Walkley said, he saw all of the after-action reports filed by pilots in the Seventh Air Force, as well as much of the reconnaissance film.

In 1970, the Seventh Air Force was staging "at least one" of the "protective-reaction" raids a day, he said. He added that "just before they called limited-duration strikes, they had three to five a day."

There were eight publicly announced "limited-duration" bombing assaults—often lasting more than one day—on North Vietnam in 1970, according to Pentagon records.

Mr. Yoshida, who left the Air Force in December, 1971, said he came across at least four "protective-reaction" strikes during each working week, and he described them as "a joke."

He added that he thought that "maybe once in a while" the pilots had had a legitimate reason for staging the "protective-reaction" strikes. The former intelligence specialist described as "inflated" the pilots' reports after the bombing raids. "They'd inflate badly on kills," he said, referring to targets hit. "Sometime they'd count trucks that were hit the day before."

Mr. Walkley said that many of the "protective-reaction" raids had been planned in advance. The process worked this way, he said:

"We'd get reconnaissance reports covering an area of North Vietnam, and if there was a large build-up of supplies, they were referred both to the target-development division and to the contingency-targeting division [at the 548th Squadron]."

Target Folders for Future

"Both divisions made up target folders for strikes in the area for sometime in the future," Mr. Walkley said. "Then in the next few days it was briefed to the Pacific Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence and then to CINCPAC Air Force and then to Admiral McCain."

"Within two or three days the target folders, which were already made up, would be pulled and the message relayed to the Seventh Air Force and they would carry out the strike, and then the strike would later be announced as protective reaction."

Mr. Walkley said that while he was in the Air Force, "I saw all of the pilot reports for Seventh Air Force missions flown in Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam." He said that invariably, after such missions as outlined above, the pilots would enter "protective reaction" on their reports.

Terminology in Air War

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 15— The phrase "protective reaction" was first used on Oct. 9, 1969, by Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, but the practice that it represents had been carried on for almost a year before that.

Under "protective reaction," American commanders were authorized to seek out and attack enemy troops or planes or missiles that threatened them. The use of the phrase by Mr. Laird at the 1969 news conference marked a shift from previous American military orders in which United States ground forces were to put "maximum pressure" on the enemy.

In the air over North Vietnam, American planes had been following such a practice, even though it was not announced, since the suspension of the full-scale bombing of the North on Nov. 1, 1968. Reconnaissance missions, usually consisting of an unarmed reconnaissance plane and three armed jets, were authorized to fire on radars and surface-to-air missiles that

had "locked on" them and were about to fire.

In addition to "protective reaction," American pilots were authorized to use what was termed "suppressive fire" — attacking whenever fired upon.

Beginning March 27, 1970, the United States began what were called "reinforced protective reaction strikes" in which large numbers of American fighters hit North Vietnamese anti-aircraft and surface-to-air missiles that were judged to be a threat.

A Pentagon spokesman said today that there had been 20 "protective reaction" strikes in the last two months of 1968, and 75 during 1969, then 25 during 1970 and 121 during 1971. In the first three months of this year there were 128 such strikes, he said.

On April 4 of this year, the policy of "protective reaction" was suspended with the resumption of full-scale bombing of North Vietnam, after the start of the North Vietnamese offensive.