

RAIDS APPROVED, LAVELLE INSISTS

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General Tells Senators He
Was Criticized Because
Targets Were Missed

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 15—Lieut. Gen. John D. Lavelle told the Senate Armed Services Committee during testimony this week that one month after staging his first unauthorized bombing raids on North Vietnam, he was criticized by higher-ranking officers—not for a violation of rules, but because his planes missed their targets.

A censored transcript of the testimony before the committee, made public tonight, also showed that General Lavelle claimed that he had received authority from Gen. Creighton W. Abrams and Adm. Thomas H. Moorer for at least a few of the raids. In all, more than 20 raids were carried out before President Nixon ordered systematic bombing of North Vietnam.

General Abrams' confirmation as Army Chief of Staff has been delayed by the committee pending the outcome of the Lavelle hearings. The testimony released today shows that he repeatedly and firmly denied any knowledge of unauthorized raids.

General Lavelle was retired and demoted from full general in April after an investigation determined that the Seventh Air Force, which he commanded, had carried out the unauthorized raids on military

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targets in North Vietnam and had reported them as "protective reaction"—that is, strikes in response to enemy fire.

The first of the contested raids was flown on Nov. 7 and 8 and involved strikes against three North Vietnamese airfields. The last unauthorized mission was on March 8, less than a month before President Nixon's authorization.

In his testimony, General Lavelle described a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that took place in Honolulu in early December. At that time, he testified, the Seventh Air Force was urged to be more aggressive and to increase the number of aircraft accompanying reconnaissance planes, in order to increase the punishment to an enemy attacker.

Under the rules of protective reaction, United States planes could attack if the enemy fired missiles or indicated an intent to do so by "licking on" the planes with missile-guiding radar systems.

General Lavelle was asked by Sen. John C. Stennis, the committee chairman, whether he had ever had any indication during the period of the illegal strikes that "it was known in Washington among the high officials."

"I knew that in Washington they wanted us to be more aggressive, to make the best use we could of our interpretation of the rules," General Lavelle replied.

Tells of Weashington Call

General Lavelle testified that at some point after the December meeting—but before the bulk of unauthorized missions had taken place—received a message from the Joint Chiefs urging him to fly more reconnaissance missions over North Vietnamese airfields.

Still later, the general said, a key deputy to Adm. John S. McCain Jr., commander in chief of the Pacific forces, phoned him to say that "he had been called from Washington and Washington didn't believe that we had done a good job on hitting that airfield." Later, General Lavelle said, he received a cable outlining details of the complaint.

"I resolved, then," General Lavelle said, "if we were going back to any more of these, and if we were going to be questioned, we had to plan them more precisely to be sure that we did do a good job."

Photographs Are Cited

"This was also the strike that I gave Admiral Moorer the photographs of the following day," General Lavelle testified.

He said that he had discussed aspects of the raids—against airfields at Vinh, Donghai and Quanglang in North Vietnam—with both General Abrams, who was commander of United States forces in South Vietnam until last June, and Admiral Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Both men had approved the mission, General Lavelle testified.

The raids, which had been carefully planned and included a special effort to destroy a MIG fighter on the ground at one field, were subsequently reported to the press as "protective reaction."

At one point, General Lavelle had this specific exchange with Senator Harold E. Hughes, Democrat of Iowa, about the granting of permission by Admiral Moorer to attack the airfield:

SENATOR HUGHES: You planned it in order to get the Mig—you understood that was your mission?

GENERAL LAVELLE: Yes, sir.

SENATOR HUGHES: And you understood you had been cleared to do it?

GENERAL LAVELLE: Yes, sir.

General Lavelle also testified that he had discussed his plan to destroy the MIG with General Abrams. Much of the testimony regarding the importance of that particular MIG was censored, but Senate sources said that the plane had apparently been threatening a number of B-52 bombing missions during the fall in both Laos and South Vietnam.

'Aware in Advance'

According to the transcript of the hearing, Senator Hughes asked:

"Then it seems in the instance of both General Abrams and Admiral Moorer at least in the strike of the two airbases at Quang lang and Dong hoi, they had been aware in advance of the instance that it was going to be made . . . and in neither instance did they tell you not to make the strike without clearance?"

General Lavelle answered, "Yes."

Admiral Moorer has denied any knowledge of unauthorized raids, though he has confirmed, through a spokesman, that he met with General Lavelle in Saigon the day before the mission.

According to the Senate testimony, General Lavelle did not link the admiral to the later series of unauthorized raids, which began on Jan. 23, 1972. But he did repeatedly indicate that he thought that General Abrams knew of the missions.

Ive Said to Use New Radar

As General Lavelle described it, an extensive series of attacks on North Vietnamese military targets was begun in late January because the North Viet-

namese had started using an improved radar system that, in effect, made it difficult for American pilots to determine that enemy radars were "locking on"—one of the grounds for an authorized "protective reaction" strike.

The activation of the new radars, the general explained, was viewed by him as enemy action that called for "protective reaction." Such radar use was widespread during the attacks from late January to March, when the unauthorized missions were halted because of an Air Force investigation that led to his dismissal as commander of the Seventh Air Force.

Asked if he thought that General Abrams agreed with his interpretation at the time the missions were being staged, General Lavelle replied, according to the transcript, "Yes, I believe he agrees with my position."

The general added, "I did point out and did discuss with him and we did agree that the system was activated against us and that crews that were

going in there had to be protected and couldn't just stand around and wait until somebody shot one down before we could attack."

Others Said to Testify

Senate sources said, however, that other members of the Seventh Air Force testified, yesterday and today, that most of the missions in the January-March period were planned in advance against truck depots, oil stockpiles, and similar targets that apparently had little to do with the new North Vietnamese radar.

At another point, while discussing another raid whose precise date was impossible to determine because of heavy censoring, General Lavelle was asked if he thought he had cleared the mission completely with General Abrams. Yes, he replied, and added that he had told General Abrams that he had put his forces "on alert and we were going to try to get them and he agreed."

"I don't know that he told me to do it but he was well aware of it," General Lavelle testified.