

Bombing Order

Colonel Links 2nd AF General To Illegal Raids

Washington

A major general in the U.S. Seventh Air Force in Vietnam went to a telephone reserved for secret messages and directly ordered wing commanders to disregard civilian-imposed restrictions and bomb a series of targets in North Vietnam, according to testimony given in a closed-door session of the Senate Armed Services Committee yesterday.

Colonel Charles Gabriel, commander of the 432nd Wing at Udorn Air Base in Thailand, told the committee that the major general who passed the bombing orders is Alton D. Slay, formerly deputy for operations in the Seventh Air Force and now commander of the Technical Training Center at Lowry AFB in Denver.

Committee Chairman John C. Stennis (Dem-Miss.), in relaying Gabriel's testimony to newsmen, said Slay will be called as the next witness. But no date has been set because Slay, 47, is recovering from surgery.

Slay worked for the then General John D. Lavelle, the Seventh Air Force commander who was relieved and demoted for conducting 28 bombing raids which violated the restrictions existing at the time. The illegal raids were carried out between Nov. 8, 1971 and March 8, 1972.

Officials said the bombing of the North Vietnam — except for brief exceptions — was done only when the North Vietnamese fired at or otherwise endangered U.S. reconnaissance planes through such acts as training gun or missile radar on them. The policy was called "protective reaction."

Stennis said this unauthorized bombing went all the way back to November, but most of the attacks were after January 25 when a sheaf of false reports were written to cover up the violations of protective reaction rules.

General Creighton W. Abrams, President Nixon's nominee for Army chief of staff and Lavelle's former boss in Vietnam, and Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, both have denied that they authorized any raids that broke these "protective reaction" restrictions.

FLIGHT

Lavelle, in the partial transcript of the closed hearings the committee released yesterday, said on Tuesday that he discussed with Moorer a proposed armed reconnaissance flight over Quang Lang air field, identified as a MIG base in North Vietnam about 165 miles north of the demilitarized zone. He had to clear the mission with Moorer because it was in an area normally covered by Navy planes, not Air Force.

TESTIMONY
Yesterday's testimony means that two top generals in the U.S. Air Force in Vietnam have been identified as playing a direct role in ignoring restrictions and ordering North Vietnamese targets bombed.

They acted at a time that Nixon administration offi-

cause there was a MIG on the (Quang Lang) field, and when we were fired on we were going to try to get the MIG on the field as well as the defenses around the field."

Hughes — "... I want to know this, then, why the inspector general listed this as an unauthorized strike when you had clearance from the Joint Chiefs of Staff in advance to make it?"

Lavelle — "Sir, he has several of his strikes on the original list that are, I think, quite inaccurate. We now have a revised list that I have seen and I question some of those, too."

Hughes — "But you don't have any explanation for it?"

Lavelle — "No, Sir."

One explanation came yesterday when Gabriel, according to informed sources, told the committee that the secret orders given on November 8, 1971, were to bomb Quang Lang, whether the North Vietnamese shot at the reconnaissance planes or not.

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This exchange between Senator Harold E. Hughes (Dem-Iowa) and Lavelle indicates that Moorer approved a raid within the existing protective reaction rules. Moorer did not approve breaking the rules, however.

Hughes — "Was this clearance (from Moorer) for a strike or for reconnaissance mission?"

Lavelle — "Sir, it was clearance for an escorted reconnaissance mission be-