

Colonel Links 2d General to Illegal Raids

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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.



MAJ. GEN. ALTON D. SLAY
... named in bombings

Col. Charles Gabriel, commander of the 432d 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 Air Force Base in Denver.

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

Slay worked for Gen. John D. Lavelle, the Seventh Air Force commander who was fired 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.

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

They acted at a time that Nixon administration officials said the bombing of 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 it was after Jan. 25 when a sheaf of false reports was written to coverup the violations of protective reactions rules.

Both Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, President Nixon's nominee for Army Chief of staff and Lavelle's former boss in Vietnam where Abrams was field commander, and Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have denied that they authorized any raids that broke these "protective reaction" restrictions.

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 Quanglang air field, a Mig base in North Vietnam about 165 miles north of the demilitarized zone. The reason he had to clear the mission with Moorer was because it was in an area normally covered by Navy planes, not Air Force.

This exchange between Sen. Harold E. Hughes (D-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 because

See LAVELLE, A4, Col. 1

LAVELLE, From A1

there was a Mig on (Quanglang) 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 Nov 8, 1971, were to bomb Quanglang, whether the North Vietnamese shot at the reconnaissance planes or not.

Those "bomb regardless" orders are what put the Quanglang raid on the unauthorized list. As it turned out, the orders to ignore the "protective reaction" restrictions need not have been given by Lavelle's command since the North Vietnamese fired back as the armed reconnaissance force swept over Quanglang.

Gabriel told the committee yesterday that the North Vietnamese opened up on the U.S. planes with 23-millimeter guns. The F-4s dropped their bombs at that point, but inflicted relatively little damage, missing the guns protecting the field.

Stennis committee investigators, the Air Force Inspector General and a special Pentagon investigation ordered by Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird dug up the evidence that the pilots were told to bomb Quanglang whether the North Vietnamese fired at the reconnaissance aircraft or not. The partial transcript released yesterday includes this exchange on that point between R. James Woolsey, general counsel of the committee, and Lavelle:

Woolsey: What instructions would the pilots have had if it should have happened that they were not fired on at Quanglang?

Lavelle: I don't know. I don't believe they had any.

Woolsey: Did you discuss with Adm. Moorer this possibility that they might not be fired on?

Lavelle: I don't remember that we did.

Another exchange between the two indicates that the staff investigation aroused suspicions that Lavelle had taken a direct role in ordering pilots to falsify reports. The general had told the House Armed Services Committee in an open hearing on June 12 that he inspired the false reports, as distinguished from directly ordering them, by telling his command that there could not be reports showing bombing not triggered by hostile reaction.

Woolsey: Do you recall at any time criticizing Col. Gabriel at that commander's conference (in early February) for having permitted a pilot to report 'no reaction' on that Jan. 23 raid?

Lavelle: No, I don't remember that.

Several senators bore in on the question of whether Abrams gave his blessing to ignoring protective reaction rules and striking targets considered vital by Lavelle.

Lavelle, in the censored testimony released yesterday, stopped short of asserting that Abrams authorized him to break the rules. But at one point he testified that he felt he had stayed within the spirit of the U.S. command in Saigon headed by Abrams.

Hughes: Do you feel that you did anything differently than Gen. Abrams had implied to you or given full authorization for you to do in your command under him?

Lavelle: No, sir, I do not believe I did.

When it came Abrams' turn to testify about whether he had authorized Lavelle to bend or break the protective reaction rules, the Army general said:

"I do not recall Gen. Lavelle ever discussing with me, except in this one instance that we have already covered, stretching the rules, breaking the rules, liberal interpretation of the rules—none of that."

(The one instance was Abrams' authorization of a strike against the Mocchau

radar station in North Vietnam near the Laotian border. The Joint Chiefs of Staff notified Abrams afterwards that it went beyond the rules of protective reaction.)

Continued Abrams: "In this whole period of January, February, March, we were sending reconnaissance planes into North Vietnam south of 20 degrees, taking pictures; we were authorized and encouraged to provide them with the support that would protect them, so the support went up and up on some of these missions. It was also authorized and encouraged that when fired at or when attacked that the whole mission would respond to it and try to destroy the weapons and the complex that was doing it.

"So this was what we were doing, and we all—I think we all knew that; my staff knew it; Lavelle's staff knew it, and he knew it. But what we didn't know is that the strikes were being executed without any firing, without any reaction by the enemy."

Lavelle, while conceding that he might have made "possibly a liberal interpretation" of the rules of engagement, told the committee he did it to protect his men. He added, "I am profoundly disturbed that any of my actions should raise questions with regard to the capacity of our military leaders to fully accept our time-tested principles of the subordination of military to civilian authority.

"No one knows better than I," said Lavelle, "that the operations of our military forces must be responsible to national objectives and that one of the primary cornerstones of our Constitution is the concept of firm civilian control of the military establish-