

PIKE RAISES ISSUE OF RAID PICTURES

He Believes Lavelle-Mission

Photos Went to Command
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WASHINGTON, Sept. 20— Representative Otis G. Pike said today that he had reason to believe that reconnaissance photographs of most of the Gen. John D. Lavelle's unauthorized bombing missions over North Vietnam had been available, to the military chain of command.

"I believe that photographs were taken of every target or at least most of the targets that General Lavelle ever hit," the Long Island Democrat said in an interview. The photographs were then "forwarded up the chain of command to higher echelons," he said.

"If nobody looked at them," M. Pike added caustically, "then we're sure wasting a hell of a lot of taxpayer's money taking pictures out there."

He Questioned Retirement

Representative Pike, the sixth-ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, first became interested in the Lavelle case in April, when he began raising questions about the Air Force's retirement of the general. At the time, an official statement said only that he had retired for "personal" reasons.

An investigation by the Senate Armed Services Committee into the matter has shown that most of the official reports on the unauthorized missions were falsified, presumably making it difficult for higher headquarters to learn what was going on.

But the Senate testimony, released last week, also shows that General Lavelle's pilots were planning and then attacking such unauthorized military targets as oil stockpiles and truck depots. Reconnaissance photographs of those strikes would be evidence, Mr. Pike said, that unauthorized bombings had been conducted.

Controversy Acknowledged

Mr. Pike acknowledged that his new accusations would be controversial, but he refused to provide more specific information. Asked to name his sources, he said, "I'll stick with my statement."

"Obviously," he added, "one of the things I'd like to see done now is to find out what photographs were taken and find out what was done with them."

The congressman, now in his sixth term, is known for his investigations into military cost overruns and questions of command and control. In 1969, he headed a special armed services subcommittee that investigated the seizure of the Navy intelligence-gathering vessel Pueblo by the North Koreans.

General Lavelle was relieved in March and demoted to Lieutenant General after an Air Force investigation — spurred by an enlisted man's letter — concluded that he had ordered the unauthorized missions and had subordinates file official poststrike reports falsified to state that the missions were "protective reaction" — that is, that the United States pilots had bombed in response to enemy threats to pilots.

Lavelle Reported Approval

General Lavelle, after initially assuming responsibility during a House hearing in June, told the Senators last week that he had not been involved in the planning of such raids and denied any direct responsibility for the falsification of reports. But he also said that his superiors, including Gen. Creighton W. Abrams then the military commander in Vietnam, knew what he was doing and approved of it.

A number of General Lavelle's former subordinates have contradicted his testimony, and the Senate committee is known to believe that the general's credibility has been seriously damaged — including his claims of approval by superiors. General Abrams has denied any knowledge of unauthorized raids.

Senate sources said today that the committee would quickly confirm the nomination of General Abrams to be Army Chief of Staff, an action that had been delayed by the Lavelle hearings. The sources also predicted that General Lavelle's pending nomination to retire at three-star rank would be denied and that he would be reduced further to major general.

Cover-up Charged

Despite those expectations, a source close to the committee said that Senator John C. Stennis, the chairman, was concerned by evidence that military and civilian leaders at the Pentagon attempted to cover up the real reason for General Lavelle's dismissal. The sources said that Gen. John D. Ryan, the Air Force chief of staff who dismissed General Lavelle, testified earlier this week that the Air Force sought high-level permission to brief Mr. Stennis and other key members of Congress on the matter, but was refused.

Mr. Stennis also is known to be concerned about the failure of the military command and control system to detect General Lavelle's unauthorized activities. Another area of concern, one senator said, was the ready acceptance by key personnel in the Seventh Air Force of the unauthorized orders to bomb North Vietnam.