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SFChronicle

Lavelle

Gets All

Raid Blame

Washington

Air Force Chief of Staff John D. Ryan singled out General John D. Lavelle as the sole instigator of unauthorized air attacks against North Vietnam in Senate testimony released yesterday.

In response to remarks by Senator Harold Hughes (Dem-Iowa) Ryan said: "We found others who were exposed to it, but in your words, the bad apple was the head apple."

Despite that assessment, Ryan said relief of command was adequate punishment for Lavelle. He said he did not think a court-martial would be appropriate and that he thought no one else should be punished.

RAIDS

Lavelle was fired as Seventh Air Force commander for conducting 28 raids before the White House renewed heavy bombing. At the time, Major General Alton Slay was Lavelle's chief of air operations.

"My belief at the time," said Slay, "was that General Lavelle was perfectly, in fact, my absolute conviction was that General Lavelle was completely cognizant of what he was doing. He knew the rules."

Slay testified in a Denver hospital in the hearings by the Senate Armed Services Committee into civilian control of the military. Also under examination is Lavelle's proposed promotion from major general to lieutenant general and his retirement at that rank.

Lavelle, in his two days of testimony released September 15, said he may have

stretched the rules for "protective reaction," the term used for the allowable strikes in the period from last November through March.

Lavelle said he thought such instructions as "be more aggressive" meant he could do it.

But Ryan and General Creighton Abrams, whose nomination as Army chief of staff has been held up by the inquiry, said they had no impression that the rules could be so stretched or broken.

PRESSURE

Slay told the committee members who visited him that he, like Lavelle, was aware of certain pressures.

"We were getting wires that said 'you didn't do such a hot job on the bombing attack at Quang Lang, do better next time.'"

Committee chairman John Stennis said: "... Just a minute now, you got the idea that he had special instructions or encouragement, or had some contact with someone that made this thing all right, is that what you are saying you had."

Slay: "Sir, I would say that — no disrespect, sir — it is an overstatement of my feeling, however..."

"However I accepted the fact that General Lavelle would not be such a damned fool to go about this on his own."

Slay said then that the messages "bulwarked" this thinking, adding:

"I am not sure that General Lavelle thought he had a full clearance, but I just think that he was under the impression that you could press these rules a long way as long as you stayed somewhere within bounds of reasonableness." *Associated Press*