

# Lavelle Blamed By Aide

SF Examiner

WASHINGTON — (UPI)

— According to his deputy commander, Gen. John D. Lavelle declared, "God damn it, we can't have that; it's got to be 'reaction'" when his pilots reported no reaction — no hostile ground fire — after reconnaissance missions over North Vietnam.

And thus, says Maj. Gen. Alton D. Slay, for five months American pilots falsely reported drawing ground fire and bombed targets selected by Lavelle in violation of President Nixon's orders and in a period of sensitive diplomatic explorations toward a settlement of the war.

Secret testimony by Slay, former deputy chief of staff of Lavelle's Seventh Air Force in Vietnam, and other witnesses was published yesterday by the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Lavelle's decision to overrule the Joint Chiefs of Staff and take bombing decisions in his own hands is considered a serious breach of civilian control over the military. The general has been relieved of command and ordered retired with three-star status on a pension of \$25,000 a year.

Questioned last Tuesday from a bed in Fitzsimmons Army Hospital in Aurora, Colo., where he was recovering from minor surgery, Slay disclosed that "probably a couple hundred, 300" officers and men knew that the rules of engagement were violated and reports falsified to hide the violations from the Pentagon.

An Air Force sergeant, Lonnie D. Franks, 23, finally wrote the letter to Sen. Harold E. Hughes (D-Iowa) which led to Lavelle's recall. Franks had been instructed to write falsified reports.

Slay said he considered himself an "expert" on the rules and they were explicitly clear.

But he thought Lavelle must have gotten permission from higher up to bomb nonetheless.

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

"If you want to know the honest-to-God truth, I thought somebody was holding his hand."

But Gen. John D. Ryan, Air Force chief of staff, testified that neither he nor any other commander gave Lavelle authority to exceed the rules of engagement.

Ryan said he considered ordering a court-martial but "relief of command is a blow to a man's pride, to his high prestige . . . I thought it was adequate punishment."

## Abrams

Slay said he never thought of bringing the situation to Gen. Creighton Abrams, the Vietnam commander in Saigon.

"General Lavelle would have chopped my head off," he said. "I was not authorized to talk to General Abrams except through him, which was proper."

But he said he would not unhesitatingly carry out any order from Lavelle.

"If he said, 'Go out and bash this village,' I would say 'get yourself another man, Buster; I am not about to do that.'

"But when he is talking about hitting missile transporters and when friends of mine are getting shot down by these same missile transmitters . . . I would say, 'Boss, you understand we are a little bit shady on the rules side' and he said, 'Fine, but I am taking care of that' I go out and do it and I would do it again."

## Written Orders

In retrospect, Slay said, he would get the order in writing, not verbally, but "chaos, absolute chaos" would result if soldiers disobeyed commanders' orders. His code requires that he "salute smartly and do it" when a commander speaks.

Many pilots knew the rules were violated when they bombed without provocation, but "no big thing was made of it," he said.

"If I were, say, a young second lieutenant in the front seat of an F4 and my wing commander briefed me that we were going to hit Dong Hoi Airfield, I would say, 'Hot dog, let's go'" the General said.