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Navy Role In Raids Probed

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Planes Lured Enemy Gunfire, Hearing Told

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The Senate has received fresh evidence that the Navy as well as the Air Force may have conducted bombing raids against North Vietnam that went beyond civilian-imposed restrictions.

Chairman John C. Stennis (D-Miss.) of the Senate Armed Services Committee announced yesterday that he was broadening his investigation of Air Force Gen. John D. Lavelle to include Navy bombing operations in Vietnam because of a letter he just received.

While Stennis did not disclose details of the letter, there has been allegations during the Lavelle inquiry that the Navy stretched, if not broke, the bombing rules with a tactic known as "trolling."

Trolling amounts to sending an unarmed reconnaissance plane over a target to draw fire from North Vietnamese gunners. Then, once the gunners open up, fighter-bombers out of sight of the gun crew roar over and drop their bombs and fire their rockets.

The reason for doing that, according to military sources, was to stay within the letter if not the spirit of the protective reaction rules, which required pilots to receive a hostile enemy response before they could drop bombs on North Vietnam.

The hostile responses could be anti-aircraft fire or the signal that North Vietnamese missile or gun radar had focused on the planes. Those restrictions were lifted in April when President Nixon ordered heavy bombing of the North.

Lavelle himself told the committee that he decided to interpret the protective reaction rules liberally rather than risk his pilots' lives in such trolling tactics.

The Navy had a natural advantage if it wanted to engage in trolling because its fighter-bombers could fly low over the sea from carriers toward targets in North Vietnam. The North Vietnamese early-warning radar could not detect such low-level flights. But the reconnaissance plane could fly high in full radar and, eventually, visual view. The fighter-bombers would be in position to fly the "pop-up" pattern—zoom up suddenly from low al-

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Navy's Role In Bombing Is Probed

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titude and then dive-bomb the target in a surprise swoop.

Two pilots from the aircraft carrier Constellation are scheduled to testify on Navy bombing practices in a closed hearing of the Stennis committee today. Stennis identified them as William Gregg Groepper, now out of the Navy, and Lt. William Charles Moore Jr.

They will be asked about air strikes conducted between November, 1971 and April, 1972—the period when Lavelle, as commander of the 7th Air Force in Vietnam, is accused of ordering 28 bombing strikes against North Vietnam without regard to the protective reaction rules.

In another development in the Lavelle case yesterday, the argument heated up on whether the Pentagon had suppressed information about Lavelle's unauthorized bombings of North Vietnam.

Gen. John D. Ryan, Air Force Chief of Staff, has testified that Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird forbade him to brief the chairman of the House and Senate Armed Services committees about Lavelle's actions.

Yesterday, on the CBS-radio program "Capitol Cloakroom," Laird said that on April 6 he had told Sens. Clifford P. Case (R-N.J.) and Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) about "the fact that reports had been falsified under orders of Gen. Lavelle."

Last night, Case and Symington drafted a joint letter to Laird denying that he had informed them that the false reports had been written in Lavelle's command.