

See also Jack Anderson, this file, 16 Jun 72.

23 June 72

Did demoted general bomb Kissinger's secret talks?

WASHINGTON — A review of the secret record has persuaded Henry Kissinger's aides that Gen. John Lavelle's private air war against North Vietnam may well have upset the peace prospects last fall.

President Nixon had limited the air strikes against North Vietnam to "protective reaction." Our planes weren't supposed to bomb above the demilitarized zone, in other words, unless they were provoked by enemy action.

The general instructed his pilots not to report after these raids that there had been "no enemy action." Washington, therefore, didn't know from reading the reports that the raids had been unprovoked.

Lavelle, for his part, was understandably upset over reconnaissance photos, which showed a Communist military buildup across the demilitarized zone. He took the authority upon himself to send planes against the most tempting targets.

If he had it to do all over again, he has now told congressmen, he would take the same action but would not falsify the reports. He assumed that he knew better than the President how to run the war. What Lavelle didn't know, however, was that the President was trying to end the war through delicate secret negotiations.

Raids and talks

While Lavelle's unauthorized bombing was going on, Henry Kissinger was talking secretly with Le Duc Tho in Paris about a settlement. Kissinger assured the Hanoi leader that the United States was attacking North Vietnam only when its planes were attacked.

Le Duc Tho angrily insisted that the bombing went beyond "protective reaction."

Finally, in mid-November, he broke off the secret talks after more than a year of sporadic negotiating.

Kissinger had reason to know how sensitive the North Vietnamese were about negotiation under the gun. Back in 1967, he tried to get a dialogue going with the North Vietnamese. He sent two French friends, Herbert Marcovitch and Raymond Aubra, to Hanoi with a peace offering.

Coincided with bombing

On their return to Paris, they stayed in

regular contact for several months with North Vietnam's Mai Van Bo. But they couldn't persuade Bo to sit down with Kis-

Jack Anderson

singer, because the peace offer had coincided with the bombing of Hanoi.

As a gesture, the United States suspended the bombing temporarily. But Bo handed the two French emissaries a note declaring: "The bombing of Hanoi at the same time as the sending of the (peace) message constitutes a pressure. Stopping of the bombing along with the threat of a renewal has the character of an ultimatum."

Kissinger rebuffed

When the Frenchmen pleaded, Bo stated firmly: "Because of the continued threat of bombing Hanoi, which has the character of an ultimatum, a direct meeting with Kissinger cannot take place."

Later, the Frenchmen urged Bo at least to have coffee with Kissinger at a private residence. "Let me think about how best to arrange a meeting," replied Bo, "and I will let you know."

But Bo finally explained, according to the secret record, that Hanoi is reluctant to talk under duress with any officially connected American.

As Bo put it sharply: "The Americans are playing a double game. On the one hand, they are offering us peace. On the other, they increase their bombing."

Other overtures finally brought another written message from Bo, repeating: "I accept your expression of confidence in Kissinger, but at the moment when U.S. is increasing its escalation, it was not possible for me to see him."

Kissinger never was able to talk with Bo and the intermediaries finally gave up. This peace approach, known by the secret code name "Pennsylvania," failed in 1967.

Finally, in 1970, Kissinger held a series of secret meetings with Le Duc Tho. But these, too, were broken off after Lavelle's unauthorized bombing raids.