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Subject: Today in SEA History, 31 March 1972
Attachments: Gen John D. Lavelle - An Affair to Remember.doc



Today in SEA History 31 March 1972

Thursday, 29 July 1971: General John D. "Jack" Lavelle <http://www.af.mil/bios/bio.asp?bioID=6157> assumes command of 7th Air Force and was dual-hatted as deputy commander for air, USMACV under US Army General Creighton W. Abrams, Jr., COMUSMACV.

Thursday, 23 March 1972: Lt Gen Louis L. Wilson Jr., USAF/IG <http://www.af.mil/bios/bio.asp?bioID=7618> confirmed to Gen John D. Ryan, CSAF <http://www.af.mil/bios/bio.asp?bioID=7005> that "some missions had not been flown in accordance with the Rules of Engagement and there were irregularities in the operational reports." That same day, Ryan "summoned General Lavelle to Washington."

Gen John D. "Jack" Lavelle was off-station in Hong Kong when Lt Col Jack Lee, Scatback Ops Officer received a call from Maj Gen Winton W. Marshall, 7th AF/CV <http://www.af.mil/bios/bio.asp?bioID=6309> who stated that Gen Lavelle was being recalled by HAF. Lee called the Scatback VC-118A aircraft commander in Hong Kong and directed him to airlift the general back to TSN "ASAP", where Lavelle boarded a awaiting KC-135 to the CONUS, and his meeting with CSAF Gen Ryan in the Pentagon.

Thursday, 23 March 1972: The United States broke off the negotiations with North Vietnam in Paris, as increased evidence of an incipient North Vietnamese offensive was being gathered and as the Paris Peace Talks were stalemated.

Sunday, 26 March 1972: Gen Lavelle arrived at HAF, the Pentagon, and discussed the

Franks would counsel them. When he asked for access to classified information to prepare his testimony before the Senate, his request was denied, and he was taken out of the coffee shop and made a clerk-typist in the social actions office proper. He returned to the States on 28 August for McCoy Air Force Base in Florida, where he was also put to work as a clerk-typist.

GLOSSARY

"AAA" "anti-aircraft artillery"; also known as "triple A"
"AF/IG" "Air Force Inspector General"
"Brief" "to give information to"
"CINCPAC" "Commander in Chief, Pacific"
"CINCPACAF" "Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Forces" (works for CNCPAC)
"Debrief" "to get information from"
"DMZ" "demilitarized zone" between North and South Vietnam
"GCI" "ground control intercept" radars; used primarily for air traffic control"
"HASC" "House Armed Services Committee"
"IG" "Inspector General"
"JCS" "Joint Chiefs of Staff"
"Mig" type of Sino-Soviet aircraft
"NVN" "North Vietnam"
"OIC" "Officer in Charge"
"Recce" "reconnaissance"
"RHAW" "Radar Homing and Warning"
"ROE" "Rules of Engagement"
"SAM" "Surface-to-air missile"
"SASC" "Senate Armed Surfaces Committee"
"Seance" "intelligence briefing"
"Standup" "staff meeting"; personnel come to attention (stand up) as commander enters
"Triple A" see "AAA"
"TSgt" "Technical Sergeant"

ENDNOTES

1. General officers carry a "temporary" and "permanent" rank. The temporary rank is the rank in which they serve. The permanent rank is the rank at which they retire, unless Congress promotes them to a higher rank at the time of their retirement. General Lavelle's temporary rank was "General" (= four stars), but his permanent rank was "Major General" (= two stars).

General Slay. *Lavelle knew, sir, that regardless of whether there was reaction or not, it would be reported that there would be reaction. He knew that because he directed it.*

The Chairman. *That came from him; correct?*

General Slay. *That came from him.*

The Chairman. *That came from him, correct?*

General Slay. *That to me is the falsification of the reports, if that is the right word.*

The Chairman. *Yes.*

General Slay. *And, again, I don't know how many of those there were. He knew that the specific reports, the so-called specats, came to me because he was briefed on each one of them.*

The Chairman. *That was the true report that came to you?*

General Slay. *Whether you call it the true report, all I asked General Gabriel was to send me the—exactly what happened on that mission in clear text.*

Did Lavelle also see the OPREP 4s? Slay doubted that “anyone above the rank of sergeant or so whoever, at headquarters, whoever looks at the OPREP 4.”

Given all of this, why didn't Slay challenge Lavelle outright about this operation? While Slay did raise the subject of the protective reaction strikes, he did not challenge Lavelle directly: “if you want to know the honest-to-God truth, I thought somebody was holding his hand.” As he put it elsewhere in his testimony: “I accepted the fact that General Lavelle would not be such a damned fool to go about this on his own.”

On 6 October the SASC voted on General Lavelle's nomination to be retired as a Lieutenant General.

“C” CASE: THE AFTERMATH

General John D. Lavelle's nomination to be retired as a Lieutenant General (= three stars) was disapproved by the SASC on 6 October 1972. He retained his rank as a Major General (= two stars).

On 5 April 1974, Senator Hughes wrote a letter to every member of the Senate, and that letter was entered into the record on 24 April. The opening paragraph notes that the Senate will soon act on “Air Force promotion list 91,” and it urges the Senate to “decline to consent to the proposed nominations of

that he had received instructions from his boss, Lt Col Glendenning, about the dual-track reporting system. He admitted that Franks questioned the procedure, but he did not understand this questioning to be the equivalent of a moral objection or that he didn't want to do it.

However, the committee was especially interested in why "some alarm didn't go off when someone questioned filing false reports." Captain Murray's response to this question was the following:

Sir, let me describe it this way: I think you have to look at the framework of thought here.

First of all, and these are all facts that should be considered together, at the wing level we were not involved in planning and policy decisions. Likewise we were not involved—particularly in the intelligence division and particularly the sections of that division which I was responsible for—we were not involved in the determination of the rules of engagement, what those rules should be and how they should be not only developed but also interpreted.

Then you have got to consider the fact that they are rather complex; it is not a simple black and white decision, issue, so far as we are concerned.

Third, you have got to consider—and this is a factor that I would consider—that the targets that were being hit were in fact military targets; they were targets that you hit earlier—that type, I mean, that type of target—hit previously in missions that were authorized and this entered into it.

The fourth factor would be the idea of the reports themselves. Yes, the reporting procedure was different; we have had different reporting procedures before. The report that went out for general dissemination did not have all the information that the report had—the special report—that went out and in fact had protective reactions included in it. But at the same time there was a special, specat report that had the actual information in it and that information was going to the 7th Air Force level of command.

The next factor that should be considered is that, taking all of this into consideration, you operate under a concept or an assumption of legitimacy and that is not to question orders unless you feel there is some illegality in the orders and in the system of trust.

Lavelle was a very powerful Air Force commander who had earned the respect of his subordinates. As the misunderstanding was passed from echelon to echelon it became amplified and acquired the imprimatur of rationally grounded accepted practice. Because Lavelle never read the OPREP 4s, he had no way of telling that the falsification was occurring, and no one told him that they were doing what they believed he had ordered.

There was thus a single lingering question: Who was the highest ranking person to know that falsification was occurring?

Senator Bentsen. *Who do you think was the—do you know—who the highest subordinate was that you had under you who knew of the falsification of the reports at a time when you did not yet know of them? Did General Slay know of the falsification of the reports?*

General Lavelle: *Sir, I would rather not say who I think because I am not sure that I know.*

Senator Bentsen. *All right. Do you know?*

General Lavelle. *No, sir.*

Following General Lavelle's testimony on 11 and 12 September, General Lavelle's boss, General Abrams, appeared on 13 September, and Sergeant Franks appeared on Thursday, 14 September. General Abrams essentially confirmed that he and General Lavelle had attempted to receive increased authority from Washington, but he denied any knowledge of Lavelle's, "liberal" interpretation of the rules, and he was certainly unaware of any false reporting. Sergeant Franks' testimony is summarized in the "A" case.

On Friday, 15 September, the SASC received testimony from two more key players: Colonel Charles A. Gabriel, Commander of the 432d Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, and Captain Douglas Murray, Sergeant Franks' OIC.

COLONEL GABRIEL'S TESTIMONY³

Colonel Gabriel was asked a sequence of questions clearly designed to confirm or infirm the testimony of previous witnesses. For example, he immediately confirmed that on perhaps "25 to 30" missions, his wing "was given instructions from Seventh Air Force to conduct a planned strike against specific targets regardless of whether or not there was a reaction from the air defenses in North Vietnam." However, while he believed that most of these missions were flown in February and March 1972, it was his recollection that the first such mission was

engagement. This was a clear case involving GCI radars—the kind that were netted with the Fan Song missile radar—and the JCS balked about attacking them. But, as Lavelle pointed out in his testimony, he received approval to attack them “approximately 3 weeks later,” *i.e.*, before the end of January.

Of course, this still does not address Lavelle’s failure to brief higher ups about his liberal interpretation of the rules of engagement. If one boils down the testimony, this lapse was largely due to missed opportunity or geographic separation. Given the frantic pace at which things were happening, General Lavelle didn’t have the time to travel to Honolulu or Washington to explain things to his bosses, and he fully believed that he was operating within his sphere of proper authority as the Seventh Air Force commander.

The second set of lingering questions was also an important question for Sergeant Franks: How is it that some of the OPREP 4s came to be falsified? Was Lavelle the mastermind of a plot to hide his liberal interpretation of the rules of engagement from his superiors and the American people? Did he orchestrate a concerted effort to fabricate classified official reports?

At no time did I intend to mislead my superiors concerning these missions. I did not lie about what I was doing, nor did I order any of my subordinates to misrepresent the truth. It is true that some reports were falsified at a lower echelon of command, which probably resulted from my failure to make clear my objectives and my interpretation of the pertinent rule of judgment.

In other words, Lavelle believed that the falsification was instigated as a result of a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of a remark Lavelle made:

Senator Schweiker. *It must have been something specific that caused the misunderstanding.*

General Lavelle. *Yes, sir. On the strike at Dong Hoi airfield on the 23rd of January, I was in the command and control center monitoring that strike, watching it very carefully. There was our [deleted] to Dong Hoi.*

Senator Schweiker. *Yes, I saw that part of it in here.*

General Lavelle. *When the strike aircraft pulled off the target they reported [deleted] they hit Dong Hoi, they were successful, all ammunition was expended, no reaction. At that time I told my Director of Operations we could not report “no reaction. We*

Between late January and the 9th of March, we attacked missiles and supporting equipment near the border on several occasions. We had no further missile firings from the Ho Chi Minh Trail between mid-January and the 29th of March, which was a few weeks after we stopped hitting these missiles trying to enter Laos.

This same sense of moral obligation to his subordinates also prevented Lavelle from authorizing a practice known as "trolling." To ensure that the rules of engagement were technically satisfied, the Navy had adopted the tactic of sending "bait" aircraft into hostile areas in order to provoke a hostile response from the enemy. In a final statement submitted after his testimony was complete, Lavelle said the following:

It was brought out during the testimony that had I elected to "troll," i.e., send an aircraft and crew into the area as bait to draw fire, the strikes would then have been considered authorized under the pertinent rule of engagement. Mr. Chairman, I just couldn't do this in the environment in which my crews were flying. Even if a tactic of trolling would have made these strikes legal with respect to the enemy, it would not have been morally right in that hazardous area, with respect to my crews. Quite apart from that, it should be remembered that in the final analysis, the practice of provoking enemy fire through trolling was done in order to execute air strikes involving precisely [sic] the same degree of pre-planning as those which I directed. Consequently, as regards the pre-planned aspects of the strikes, I respectfully submit that this tactic cannot be fairly differentiated.

General Lavelle's moment of truth arrived on 23 January 1972, when he personally supervised the raid on Dong Hoi Air field in North Vietnam. This was the first of the so-called "pre-planned" protective reaction missions (what Sergeant Franks called a "strike" mission). Because Lavelle wanted no repeat of the Quang Lang mission on 8 November, things were carefully planned, thus ensuring execution of the plan would be as effective as possible. Moreover, Lavelle was for the first time applying his "liberal interpretation" of the rules of engagement: The aircraft could expend their ordnance without first being fired upon because they were flying over North Vietnam, where the radars were always activated against them. The mission was an unabashed success; the aircraft so surprised the enemy that the latter had no time at all to open fire upon the aircraft.

heavy radars were netted with the surface-to-air radars and missiles to form a sophisticated, integrated system, allowing either the GCI radars or the missile radars to pass target tracks to the missile firing units.

This development caused a very real problem for U.S. airmen: How do we know when a SAM missile battery is tracking us and is ready to fire? Apparently, when the normal SAM radars were activated, U.S. pilots could discern that fact in their cockpits, but under the new system, pilots were "deprived of radar warning":

The normal North Vietnamese tactic was to employ the two Fan Song radars of the SAM battalion for tracking our aircraft and controlling the missile. When the tracking Fan Song radar picked up a U.S. aircraft and began to track it, the Radar Homing and Warning—RHAW—gear in the cockpit was activated and alerted the crew that they were being tracked by a missile unit. [Deleted.] This, of course, alerted the crew and, depending on the type of aircraft and the mission, they would maneuver out of the area or be prepared to take evasive action if a missile were fired. [Deleted.]

As a consequence of having netted their air defense control and surveillance radars with their missile units, the North Vietnamese were able this year to vary their tactics. Starting, I believe, in mid-December they often used the long-range Barlock or Whiff air defense radar which always tracked our aircraft to pass target information to the missile fire control radar. [Deleted.]

Being deprived of radar warning, perhaps one could make the judgment that you could no longer determine when the system was activated against U.S. aircraft.

In the face of the new tactics, however, a more logical judgment appeared to be that since U.S. aircraft were under constant surveillance by the air defense radars netted with the missile units, the system was constantly activated against us.

In other words, whenever aircraft flew into North Vietnamese air space, the system was constantly activated against them and that meant the 1968 rule of engagement was satisfied. Obviously, the 1968 rule of engagement meant to say that whenever Fan Song radars were activated against American aircraft, those aircraft could fire on the missile sites associated with the activated Fan Song radars. But this new technology—this country-wide radar net—allowed

I resolved then if we were going back to any more of these, and if we were going to be questioned about how effective we were, we had to plan them more precisely to be sure that we did do a good job.

Even more obvious was the pressure conveyed from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) during a conference hosted in Honolulu by the Director of the Joint Staff on 4 and 5 December:

During the conference, as reported to me by my representative, the Director, JCS, indicated:

- (1) Field commanders should be more aggressive.
- (2) Field commanders had not been flexible enough in the use of existing authorities.
- (3) Fighter escorts for reconnaissance aircraft should be increased to 8 or 16 to insure adequate damage on protective reaction strikes.
- (4) When intelligence indicates MIG presence on Southern airfields, schedule maximum escorts.
- (5) JCS would not question our aiming points (targets) on protective reaction strikes.
- (6) In the advent of adverse publicity we could expect full backing from the JCS.

This also seemed to be reiterated by Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird when he met with Lavelle for about 10 minutes during the farmer's visit to Saigon in early December. Although he could not remember verbatim what Secretary Laird had said, Lavelle recalled the gist of the conversation as "don't come into Washington requesting new authorities, it was an inopportune time; make maximum use of the authorities we had and he would support us in Washington."

Obviously, Washington wanted something done about the increasingly hostile enemy massing forces just over the border. As proof of this, Lavelle pointed to the three mass raids they were directed to carry out in September, December, and February. The December raid he mentions is the same raid discussed in the *Washington Post* story of 25 January:

Late in September we were directed two days of mass raids below 17 degrees. In December we had

Increasing Enemy Aggression. The first of these principles began to play a part in his decision-making from almost the instant he assumed command of Seventh Air Force and its influence continued and grew over the next seven months:

This was not by any means a routine period. This was, as we well recognize, a critical period of tremendous enemy buildup in preparation for the invasion of South Vietnam. To protect this buildup, the North Vietnamese had moved into the area north of the DMZ the largest concentration of missiles, antiaircraft artillery and radars we had ever seen in Southeast Asia.

Lavelle made it clear that the enemy's increasing aggression was a multifaceted phenomenon whose growth followed a steep upward curve:

Considering the air war alone, from the start of the dry season, which ran from November 1 through the end of February of this year [1972], a period of 4 months, there were 72 incursions by North Vietnamese Mig's² into Laos or Northern South Vietnam as compared with only four the previous year.

During the same period there were over 200 surface-to-air missiles fired at U.S. aircraft, as compared to approximately 20 for that period the previous year.

Another indication of the aggressiveness of the North Vietnamese was on the day that their forces launched their attacks in the Plain of Jars, which as you recall was on the 18th of December, over 25 enemy Mig's were airborne and several of them crossed into Laotian territory.

And in response to written questions from Senator Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME), he developed this point even more explicitly:

During January and February, the NVN were steadily step stoning their missile sites closer and closer to the DMZ to protect their pre-invasion build-up. The last site they attempted to build was right on the northern edge of the DMZ. They moved a large ground force into the area between the DMZ and Bat Lake and set up what appeared to be a communications center for a headquarters complex. Reconnaissance aircraft had photographed about 60 tanks in this same Bat

commanders, intelligence and operations officers and ordinary airmen were caught up in the plot. The existence of such a widespread conspiracy dredged up Strangelovian fears that if a four-star general could so easily circumvent conventional bombing directives, he might also be able to launch a nuclear war. And although the Pentagon insisted that virtually foolproof command-and-control safeguards protected America's nuclear arsenal from seizure by a crackpot, this did not put everyone's mind at rest.

The SASC scheduled hearings for September to review Lavelle's nomination to be promoted to Lieutenant General on the retired list. Sergeant Franks got wind of these hearings and sent a letter to Senator Hughes requesting a chance to testify. Among the portions of the letter published in the Congressional Record were the following paragraphs:

The actions taken by the military against General Lavelle and the other people involved have shown that a military member can exceed the limitations placed on him by civilian authorities with relative safety. Further, the apparent lack of any action against General Lavelle's subordinates has shown that it is safer and in many ways even preferable to obey illegal and immoral orders.

The events of these past weeks have made it obvious to me that definite civilian control must be placed over the military. In my own case, I had very few alternatives of whom I could go to in order to reveal my information. It seemed impossible for me to contact either my Wing Commander or the base Inspector General, since both were involved in the air strikes. It would also have been difficult for me to contact anyone at higher headquarters.

At the time I wrote the letter, the Paris peace talks had deteriorated to the point that the U.S. refused to continue negotiations, alleging that the North Vietnamese were using the talks as a forum to disseminate untruthful propaganda concerning our indiscriminate bombing of North Vietnam. It was for this reason that I was compelled to write to you, you in turn having no other course but to release my letter to military authorities for them to investigate. The military investigating itself negates any check or balance civilian authorities might exercise over the military. It is apparent that Congress should establish

The unexpectedness of the move was also dramatized by the appointment on the same day of Air Force Gen. John W. Vogt to replace Lavelle. Vogt, until the previous day was slated to become chief of staff for allied headquarters in Europe.

The retirement of Lavelle has been handled in an unusual fashion since it was first announced. Normally the announcement of retirement for high-ranking generals is accompanied by the White House nomination for retirement rank. In Lavelle's case, the nomination came several weeks later.

Technically, all active-duty three- and four- star generals at the instant of retirement revert to a permanent two-star rank which is the highest allowed by law. But the President then nominates them, subject to Senate confirmation, to advancement to higher rank as retired officers.

Spokesmen for the Army and Navy say that to the best of their services' knowledge, no four-star general or admiral has ever been retired at a lesser grade. The Air Force declined to answer a similar query, but Defense Department officials say they also know of no precedent for the current situation.

Representative Otis Pike (D-NY) picked up on the story and said the following on the floor of the House on 15 May:

Mr. Speaker, it is time the Air Force and the Pentagon told the American people the truth about the so-called retirement of a four-star general who was removed as the head of all of our Air Force operations in Vietnam just 1 week after the Communist offensive was launched.

The Air Force put out a little story that the general had retired "for personal and health reasons." The Air Force did not tell the truth. I believe there is a major issue here, important to our Air Force, and important to our Nation.

Perhaps the most major issue is the credibility of our military. The military complains that it is misunderstood and mistrusted. It cannot be understood and it cannot be trusted as long as it tries to sweep its scandals under the rug and as long as it persists in trying to obscure the truth instead of telling the truth.

clandestine operation, wouldn't Franks get into trouble by complaining to the Air Force Inspector General?) Any complaint inside the Air Force could invite recrimination, but what else could Franks do? He could go to the press, but he didn't want to compromise classified information. What other options did he have?

"B" CASE: THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

WHAT THE SERGEANT DID

On either 25 or 26 February, Sergeant Franks sent a letter to his Senator, Harold E. Hughes (D-IA), who was a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee or "SASC." Hughes received the letter in early March and immediately referred it to Senator Stuart Symington, another SASC Democrat and former Secretary of the Air Force, for evaluation and possible action. On 8 March, Senator Symington transmitted a sanitized version of the letter to General John D. Ryan, Chief of Staff of the Air Force:

Senator Harold Hughes
Capitol Building,
U.S. Senate,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senator Hughes:

I am an intelligence specialist _____ (for the Air Force).

I and other members of _____ have been falsifying classified reports for missions into North Viet Nam. That is, we have been reporting that our planes have received hostile reactions such as AAA and SAM firings whether they have or not. We have also been falsifying targets struck and bomb damage assessments.

I have been informed by my immediate OIC, _____ that authorization for this falsification of classified documents comes from secure telephone communications from the Deputy of Operations, 7th Air Force.

I do not know where the original authorization comes from and this is my major concern. This same

specialist would have to run from table to table to ensure the internal consistency of the fabrications being recorded on the different debrief forms.

There were four very specific areas requiring fabrication: target type, target coordinates, timing, and bomb damage assessment. With respect to target type, for example, they could not truthfully report the bombing of a fuel depot or truck farm because those targets were not permitted under the ROE. Rather, they could report as targets only those things that were capable of firing at the reconnaissance planes—in other words, offensive weapons such as anti-aircraft artillery. Likewise, they couldn't report that the fighters had bombed a target 20 miles away from the recorded flight of the reconnaissance aircraft since such a distant target could not be a threat to the recce plane. Thus, regardless of where the bombs actually fell, the specialists had to be sure that the target coordinates actually reported on the OPREP 4 had to be close to the reported flight path of the reconnaissance plane.

Timing was just as sensitive. Because the ROE stated that fighters could bomb only in reaction to attacks on the reconnaissance mission, the intelligence specialists could never report that the fighters had entered the area of operations ahead of the recce planes or bombed the targets before the recce aircraft had crossed into North Vietnamese air space. They would only report what the ROE allowed and nothing more.

Finally, to solve the problem of bomb damage assessment, they always reported that "the targets were not observed because of smoke and foliage." Thus, what the OPREP 4 may have represented as a protective reaction strike with unknown results against an emplacement of anti-aircraft artillery that had fired on a pair of reconnaissance aircrafts could actually have been a very successful strike against a fuel storage area 1 hour and 20 miles from when and where the recce birds flew their mission.

Before too long it became apparent to someone up the chain of command that some effort should be made to segregate the actual facts about a strike mission from the lies fabricated about it. Thus, on or about 18 February (the day Nixon left for China), Captain Murray directed Sergeant Franks to record the correct and incorrect information in separate columns on the debrief sheets. The incorrect information would still be used to write the OPREP 4, but Captain Murray would collect the correct information and send it up-channel to Seventh Air Force at Tan Son Nhut.

Headquarters Seventh Air Force was responsible for all Air Force operations in Southeast Asia. Its commander, General John D. Lavelle, was also the "Deputy for Air" to General Creighton Abrams, who had overall responsibility for in-theater operations. The person on General Lavelle's staff responsible for tracking day-to-day flying operations in Southeast Asia was Major General Alton Slay. Sergeant Franks believed it was to Major General Slay that Captain

dropped any bombs on this mission. Nevertheless, Franks was instructed to report that they had received anti-aircraft fire so that if they had dropped their bombs, they would have been justified in doing so under the ROE.

Franks was upset at the suggestion that he should falsify the debrief forms and subsequently lie on the OPREP 4, so he kept the aircrew waiting while he went to check this out with his immediate supervisor—a Technical Sergeant (TSgt) by the name of Voichita. TSgt Voichita told Franks to do as the recce crew instructed—"make it look real; just make up some sort of hostile reaction." This response from his immediate boss was unsatisfactory, so Franks approached the next person in the chain of command—the officer in charge (OIC) of Current Intelligence, a Captain by the name of Murray. Again, Franks was told to follow the orders given him by the aircrew.

At this point Franks decided to take the matter no further (his next step would have been to speak to Lieutenant Colonel Glendenning, the Director of Intelligence for the 432d Tactical Reconnaissance Wing). Instead, he returned to the debriefing table and undertook the task of falsifying the debrief data. Franks decided to report that the crew had received "10 to 15 rounds of 23-millimeter," but he couldn't simply write a sentence to that effect on the debrief form. Rather, he had to write it as though it had actually occurred, and that meant fabricating a complete and believable real world context: Where was the gun that was doing the firing? What altitude and direction was the plane flying when attacked? What evasive maneuvers were taken by the pilot? and so on. Even the rate of fire of the 23-mm gun had to be accounted for: "You couldn't have an airburst every 3 seconds when it shoots at a half-second interval; you should have an airburst every half a second." After considerable effort, the debrief forms were completed, the aircrew initialed them, and a false OPREP 4 was placed into official channels.

In other words, on the very same day the *Washington Post* carried a story in which unnamed "military planners" were said to have experienced "some bitterness" because of their perception that "White House restrictions imposed on the bombing were so tight that it was impossible to get the job done," Sergeant Lonnie Franks found himself falsifying an official classified report so that, had they wished to do so, fighter-bomber crews could have gotten around one of Nixon's rules of engagement. On the very same day that Nixon appeared on national television and accused the North Vietnamese of being the prime obstacle to peace, Sergeant Lonnie Douglas Franks found himself involved in an enterprise whose *raison d'être* seemed to be to increase the level of US aggression against North Vietnam.

It was not long before Franks found himself beset by serious questions. He wondered, for example, "where the false reports were going and whom we were trying to fool"; and he was equally concerned that no one seemed to be keeping track of the accurate data. When he falsified the report on 25 January,

battery of anti-aircraft artillery, also known as "AAA" or "triple-A"). The release of ordnance under these circumstances was called a "protective reaction strike"—the kind of strike that played a role in the story that appeared on the front page of the *Washington Post* on 25 January.

Lonnie Franks very firmly believed that the rules governing protective reaction strikes were strict and subject to little, if any, interpretation. The rules of engagement (ROE) prohibited an attack on a ground target unless that target was an immediate threat to the mission. That is, the target had to be engaged in offensive action against the reconnaissance plane or its escorts. The reaction could only be directed at the source of hostile fire on the ground—they could not start bombing any or all targets of opportunity in the area. The sole purpose for the fighter-bombers was to protect the recce aircraft—and that meant they could only drop their bombs in response to a confirmed hostile threat on the ground. One official source gives the following brief history of these flights:

Since the bombing halt pause began in November of 1968, the United States has been conducting manned tactical reconnaissance over the southern portion of North Vietnam. Very shortly after the bombing pause began the North Vietnamese attacked one of our unarmed reconnaissance aircraft and we began to escort the reconnaissance aircraft with armed fighters. During 3 1/2 years between November 1968, and March 1972, these escort aircrafts were authorized to retaliate if fired upon.

Despite the importance of his targeting job, Franks' talents were needed more in the Current Intelligence Division, and so he returned there during the first week of January 1972. As in the past, Franks went about the business of preparing maps and slides to be used in the wing commander's daily standup, and he continued to brief crews who were about to fly missions over Laos and North Vietnam. But he was also asked to learn something entirely new—he was asked to become a "debriefing," a person who meets aircrews as they return from a mission and picks their brains for every scrap of information having possible value to those who plan, fly, or assess the value of operational missions.

As practiced by Sergeant Franks, "debriefing" was actually a two-stage process. It involved, first, the conscientious writing down on a sequence of preprinted forms a multitude of facts about what the crew encountered and what the crew accomplished. Once these forms were completed, the second stage of the debriefing began: the writing of an operational report that was sent to a host of organizations who had a need to know about the mission and its particulars. In Sergeant Franks' case, the report written was called an "operational report-4" (OPREP 4), which became the official record of the mission once it was transmitted. Obviously, the integrity of the OPREP 4 was of crucial importance;

North Vietnamese negotiator Nguyen Thanh Le continued this charge of duplicity after the members of his delegation walked out of the Paris peace talks on February 24:

[Le] hammered home the theme by quoting from President Nixon's speeches in Peking—without directly identifying them—to suggest the “hypocrisy” of the President's words of concern for peace and children while the administration continued “its acts of war.”

Over the course of the next few days, it appeared as though any misgivings over a Sino-American agreement or informal alliance might be premature. Despite the optimism and good will of the opening banquet, Nixon and Chou seemed to be deadlocked after five days of candid talks. The sticking point seemed to be U.S. reluctance to withdraw American forces from Taiwan and recognize Peking's right to the island. Late on the night of February 25, however, the two sides broke the deadlock and on the 26th announced “a ‘basic agreement’ on major agenda points.” Nixon had opened the door to China and had found a way, at least temporarily, to keep it open.

LONNIE DOUGLAS FRANKS

Not entirely coincidentally, the period from 25 January to 26 February 1972 probably was the most dramatic month in the Air Force career of Lonnie Douglas Franks. Born on October 8, 1948, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Franks was graduated from Washington Senior High School in Cedar Rapids and had three years of college under his belt when he enlisted in the Air Force in 1969 and then trained as an intelligence specialist.

In August 1971, Sergeant Franks was transferred to Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, where he was assigned to the Directorate of Operational Intelligence of the 432d Tactical Reconnaissance Wing. Although he had completed just two years of his first enlistment at the time of his assignment to Udorn, Sergeant Franks was no stranger to the wartime intelligence mission or to Thailand. He already had served a tour of duty at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base and had there performed some of the same duties he would perform at Udorn.

Over the course of the next year (August 1971 to September 1972), Sergeant Franks was assigned to two different divisions within the Directorate of Operational Intelligence. He originally was assigned to the Current Intelligence Division, where his primary duties included updating maps and slides with information useful to two distinct groups of people. The first group he was responsible for briefing consisted in aircrews on their way to fly missions over Laos and North Vietnam: his maps and slides would indicate the location of friendly and enemy units, orders of battle, the nature of enemy units, the

Vietnamese. In addition to revealing his eight-point peace plan, Nixon made a distinct point of saying he was making this announcement to "prove beyond doubt which side has made every effort to make these negotiations succeed. It will show unmistakably that Hanoi—not Washington or Saigon—has made the war go on."

The point later was made even more forcefully by an anonymous source:

A White House official, asked why this time was chosen to announce the President's offers in the secret talks, said there were three reasons: (1) an attempt to trigger a response from Hanoi; (2) the development of a situation "where our public and private positions diverged" to the point where administration credibility was undermined; (3) the knowledge that there may be a Communist military offensive and that the American people should know who is responsible for increased fighting.

Nixon's speech certainly triggered a response. On January 27, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong delegates to the Paris peace talks "denounced [his] new peace plan in every conceivable way, but refrained from rejecting it outright." On the 29th, the Chinese were reported as saying "the Nixon plan was 'absolutely preposterous' and that Nixon should never expect Hanoi and the Viet Cong to accept it." On February 2, Senator Muskie denounced the plan, and on February 4, three analysts associated with the Institute for Defense Analyses expressed fears that Nixon would soon renew a bombing campaign against North Vietnam. Two days later, Hanoi formally rejected Nixon's eight-part proposal, and on February 14, the *Washington Post* carried a front-page, above-the-fold story detailing increased U.S. air attacks in South Vietnam. This story resonated with a *Post* story that appeared on February 17, which stated that concerned analysts had been tracking a very heavy buildup of North Vietnamese forces in the vicinity of the so-called Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

These developments formed the international context for Nixon's first trip to China, which began on February 18. Some 8,000 well-wishers gathered on the White House lawn to hear Nixon's pre-departure speech, which the *Washington Post* cast as displaying an unmistakable optimism about the trip's significance:

He said it was his wish that history would describe his trip in "the words on the plaque which was left on the moon by our first astronauts when they landed there: 'We came in peace for all mankind'."

Mr. Nixon quoted from the toast Premier Chou En-Lai proposed at a dinner he gave in October for