

**General John D. Lavelle, USAF
1916 – 1979**

**Transcript of audio-taped conversations of
June 14, 1972 (11:15 A.M.) of
President Richard M. Nixon &
Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman
and
President Richard M. Nixon &
National Security Advisor to the President
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger**

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14 June 1972, Wednesday
White House
Oval Office

11:15 am
733-4

Discussion between the President and H. R. Haldeman

2:41

RN Bob, when you've got a minute I want to talk to you about that Lavelle thing. I didn't know it was going to come up this morning.

733-6

Meeting between Henry Kissinger and the President.

RN Well, let me ask you about Lavelle. I was, I had it on my list this morning. I just don't want him to be made a goat, goddamnit.

HK Right, I'll tell you what.

RN We all know what protective reaction is, this damn Laird a playing games . . .

HK What happened with Lavelle was he had reason to believe that we wanted him to aggressive steps.

RN Right, that's right.

HK A, then he did it. And then suddenly Laird came down on him like a ton of bricks. And he had him already removed by the time I even learned about it. By that time the damage was done.

RN Why did he even remove him? You, you destroy a man's career?

HK Well. I'm gonna tell you Mr. President, Laird is getting to be almost unbearable for this government. I mean we've, we've got to carry him until the election. But you outta talk to Shultz sometime or

RN I know.

HK There is no issue that is come down where he doesn't willfully and deliberately. I mean, Rogers is sort of like an old woman, he hits out every once in a while, but basically, Rogers has set a certain limit he will not openly defy you.

RN No.

HK He'll wail and cry, and he'll be nasty, and he'll occasionally get his people to leave. But when you give him an unambiguous order, that he is enough of a lawyer, that for his client, he will not defy his client. That goddamn Laird, take that five billion dollar figure he got out on the budget. He promised us he wouldn't do it, I talked to him, Shultz talked to him. We told him that he could say that the supplementary . . .

RN I remember that in round two or something like that.

HK But besides Mr. President, if we, it's a totally irresponsible figure. When ever has one ever submitted a supplementary before the budget had been voted?

RN That's right.

HK A, this is projecting the present . . .

RN We have got to get, we've got to get that knocked out of the box. I hope you can go tomorrow. . .

HK Well, this is the present rate of expenditure projected over a year.

RN I know. Assuming no action in Vietnam . . .

HK Assuming that there will be no negotiations. . .

RN Assuming sorties at the present rate . . .

HK For the whole year.

RN I know. I know. We know they're not going to be that angry.

HK But, he shouldn't force us into making that clear because must let the North Vietnamese believe. . .

RN North Vietnamese we must plan. The lack of it is shocking.

RN But, come back to Lavelle, I don't want a man persecuted for doing what he thought was right. I just don't want it done. And this goddamn sergeant who wrote the letter to the senator. That sounds like another Ellsberg case to me. You know I don't like that worth a damn. Now, what is this situation? Is this, this, this, this sounds, connects the feelings with making the guy a goat now. It's just not right!

HK And basically. Of course the military are impossible too. It's a. . .

RN Well, they all turn on each other like rats.

HK They turn on each other like rats. That's so selfish. When I ordered Moorer yesterday to stop bombing for three days, you would have thought that I had asked him to, to scrap the B-52s or something like that. Here we are, if it weren't for you they wouldn't be doing any goddamn bombing. A, if when, when the ceiling is a little bit below minimums you can't get them to fly for a week on end. So how the hell can three days make that much difference?

RN It doesn't change. It doesn't and they know it.

HK And a. . . . I mean I think we owe this to the Russians of not humiliating them.

RN We're not gonna do it.

HK I mean, we're not gonna do it. But it is an understanding.

RN Yea.

HK That it is bad enough that we are bombing the rest of the country. I

mean that's a humiliation enough for them. That, that they can't get the rest of the country. So.

RN Come back to Lavelle now. I just a . . . can't somebody. Can we do anything now to stop this damn thing, or? Why'd he even remove 'em?

HK No. If they hadn't removed, well. They kept John Vogt instead who is probably better, but. Because he understands us better. But, Lavelle was actually moved before Vogt went out there. Lavelle was removed at the end of March.

RN Because of this?

HK Yea.

RN Why the hell did this happen!? A decision of that magnitude without? I should have known about it Henry, because this is a

HK Well, Mr. President, the point was

RN Because this is something we told. You remember we, we, we told Laird keep pressure on there in March!

HK By the time I knew about it, it had already been done. There was no point in

RN I see.

HK . . . involving you anymore. Because he ratified me after the guy had already been removed. How we managed to get to this point with this goddamn cabinet is beyond my belief.

RN Well, come back to Lavelle. How is it going to a . . . ?

HK Let me talk to

RN In other words, how do we handle it public relations wise? Bill seemed to be very concerned about it. What do you think?

HK I think this will go away. I think we should just say a . . . after all we took corrective steps. We could have easily hidden it. I think you might as well make a virtue of a necessity.

RN I know, I don't want the... Well, I don't think anybody gives a damn that we went in and bombed. I think they probably favored it. I

don't want to a . . .

HK I think

RN I don't like to have the feeling though that the military can get out of control. Well, maybe this censures that. This says we do something when they... It's just a hell of a damn. And it's a bad rap for him Henry.

HK It's a bad rap for him under his com. The way this press plays things a is really.

RN Yea. Like what?

HK Well, now they're making a huge affair out of, out of this thing. Now, they say twenty three unauthorized bombing attacks. I'm going to get a record of them. I'm sure that each one of them was maybe two bombs on an airfield. They weren't mad raids. They were raids on by two or three airplanes. There weren't any big raids.

RN In March or not? Do you know the? We didn't start that 'til after, until April. Until the invasion.

HK No, no I mean the unauthorized strikes that Lavelle did. Were very few; were very small. And a all directed at air defenses. So they a . . .

RN Of course it's what the Air Force always wants to hit. Let me ask again, but a, when you say you think it will go away, how will the Press let it go away. Or are they just eager to get at us on Vietnam, isn't that it?

HK Well, they're eager to find something on Vietnam, Mr. President. What I think now, today, we've got that China announcement which I'm told went very well.

RN Did it?

HK Yeah.

HK I haven't heard the statement

RN Yeah, let me ask you this... back again

HK See I think everyone is, see everyone.

RN I mean this China announcement comes at a good time because I noticed Mansfield would warn them yesterday that China would not stand by with troops too close to its border. It's a little (writing on the wall), I guess.

RN But Mike, Mike is, do you know what I mean? He's ambivalent; he is political

HK Yeah, but now that get at all of next week people have to shut up because we.. they won't know.. Podgorny there.. uh

RN Do you think it will become known Podgorny's there

HK Oh yeah, that's out now

RN Oh, that he did get there?

HK It was on every television this morning that, uh, that Podgorny was on his way to Hanoi starting at Delhi and the delay no one knew about it.

RN Come again a. First of all. On Lavelle, there's nothing we can do, ha?

HK Twenty second.

RN There's a, there's a hearing.

HK There's a hearing. Yea. And a we shouldn't have permitted the guy to be a. Well we shouldn't have permitted; we should have been told that he was being removed, we could have prevented it.

RN Second point. What about Laird? What are we going to do about him?

HK I think we have to con him along. Let's hope a. You know yesterday for example I called Moorer about getting the raids getting called off. Moorer. . .

RN Told Mel Laird.

HK Of course immediately. I thought Moorer would keep it in military channels and not have any strife. On some pretext, of course Moorer immediately told Laird. When he gets an order he doesn't like, he plays Laird against us, and Laird blew his top. I said it's now gonna become public and we're doing what Johnson did.

RN Well damn him. Why didn't he support the money then?

HK We're letting the Russians dictate our policy. He said all they have to from now on is send an emissary to Hanoi. Total baloney.

RN I went into that (with pressure), remember, I said how long is he going to be there, three weeks? and I said. He said, no, three days.

HK It's total baloney, Mr. President, because, a, it's one thing for them to send an emissary on other business. It's another thing to send an emissary carrying our messages.

RN I suppose Rogers will not say anything about the fact that Podgorny is going there....

HK Well, no, now that he's there now. What we don't know is what he's doing there.

RN ...Carrying a message. Well, and ()...

HK People will see the pattern, Podgorny in Hanoi, Kissinger in Peking. Uh, I mean, we.. It looks like it could...

(SECTION REDACTED)

RN It's a (bit of mystery) that the (). that's probably the best summary of the kind of thing we want to say.

HK Yeah... beautiful

RN It's well said, isn't it. It got it all out

HK What's funny is that he didn't have the courage to () until that last paragraph () about the courage.

RN Yeah, that's what gets me about Laird. Goddamn him, he talks about we're gonna, we're playing with the Russian side. (Bill), you say, why are we sellin' for the Russians and all this? For christsakes. Where the hell were they when we had em mined. Where were both of them?

(Simultaneously)

HK Where were they when we had a mine (waiting for them) in Cambodia (or Laos)

RN When were they in Cambodia!?!?

RN Where were they then?

RN This action should have to damage the relations for ()...

RN Let's go back the courage to assume risks.

RN Well you see, deep down, the thing that I'm gettin' at is this. That a, with Laird, I just don't like him to make a goat of this fella. Because Laird knows goddamn well, that a, I told him, I said it's protective reaction. He winks, he says, 'oh I understand.'

HK Yea, but Laird is pretty ambitious. See Laird is actively. The only thing Laird is now positioning himself for is

RN he can't

HK Is he's mad to be the viable candidate for '76. And a . . .

(SECTION REDACTED)

RN Uh, well, on Lavelle, I don't know how the hell we can get off this? We can, Who is, whose spinning it? Who, who ...

HK Let me, let me give you.

RN I don't want to get you involved. Why'nch ya get Haig involved.

HK Yes. That's what I want to do.

RN Lead with Haig. 'Cause I'd like you to do something today; or Haig if you're gonna be gone. You leave tomorrow night?

HK I think I'll leave Friday morning Mr. President.