

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

**Letter from Otis G. Pike
April 19, 2008**

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April 19th, 2008

Dear Mr. Dempsey,

You have touched a nerve. The case of General Lavelle occupied much of my time and my thinking in 1972. Some of my memories are so vivid that it is difficult to believe that it was 36 years ago.

In going through my files I find three columns I wrote on the subject, all in the year 1972 and starting on May 18th. You will find them enclosed. They will not be particularly helpful to you because the Air Force, the Pentagon in general, and the White House were making every effort to be unhelpful. I stated in the column of June 22nd that General Lavelle "went beyond the rules and attacked." This is unhelpful to your cause, although it is obvious from the column that I thought he was justified.

Perhaps the most useful thing you will find is in the last one, where I conclude by saying basically that the Pentagon wouldn't produce the rules of engagement because they didn't have anything comprehensible to produce, just a hodgepodge of "hundreds of changing, contradictory, evolving, confused cables and letters, conversations and hints, photographs and target assignments."

I was angry at the Pentagon for stonewalling me and the Armed Services Committee. I was angry at the Armed Services Committee for being the Pentagon's lapdog and letting itself be stonewalled. If I had had the White House tapes at the time I would have been even angrier at President Nixon and Secretary Kissinger for turning General Lavelle loose and then hanging him out to dry by denying they had done so. At least Mr. Nixon felt guilty about it.

The vivid memories I have include the following:

- (1) Eddie Hebert, the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee (?), coming up to me as we walked back from the floor and telling me

that the Secretary of Defense (Mel Laird) was in his office and wanted to talk to me. Questions I was asking about General Lavelle, said Hebert, could affect the next election.

- (2) Mel Laird, in Mr. Hebert's office, told me he would give me all the details on the Lavelle case if I would promise not to talk about it any more. I declined.

- (3) General Lavelle came, not to my office, but to my home, a rather dingy apartment located over a liquor store within walking distance of the Capitol. He impressed me very favorably. I believe he was a wholly honest and honorable man. I am convinced that he at least believed he had been authorized to strike all the targets that were struck and that he had been further ordered to report them as defensive in nature.

- (4) I remember specifically asking General Lavelle whether his orders were given with "a wink and a nod" and he said "No, they were very direct and specific." I do not remember if he said who had given him the orders. Probably not, as the approval of more attacks was to be kept a complete secret and in fact, was to be denied. They sacrificed him to cover the lie.

When you called me regarding this case, I believe that my first words about General Lavelle were "He got screwed." They will also do for my last.

My respects to Mrs. Lavelle.

Sincerely,


Otis G. Pike