

U.S. Withdraws Report of Viet Cong Atrocities

Uniforms Filled With Straw May Have Led to Stories of Humans Impaled on Stakes

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SAIGON — A series of American military reports that Viet Cong forces impaled defenders and civilians on stakes in upright positions were probably just a lot of straw, U.S. spokesmen admitted Saturday.

And, pictures taken from a plane showing the supposed horror may have been misleading, the American spokesmen said.

What the camera may have recorded, they explained, was straw stuffed in Vietnamese uniforms and civilian clothing by sick-humored Viet Cong.

The pictures furnished the world press by American military information officers were "killed" by wire agencies when it was learned that the atrocity story could not be verified.

Found No Evidence

Col. Ben Legare, top military information officer here, admitted, after probing questioning by correspondents, that when "friendly forces" checked out the story on the ground they could find no evidence of the atrocity story earlier released by his office.

"As the captions on the pictures clearly stated, they showed what appeared to be impaled bodies," Col. Legare said. "But when we checked on the ground we could find nothing."

The report, released Wednesday, said a large Viet Cong force stole into Hiep Duc, Quang Tin Province, knocked out its communication facilities and overwhelmed the defending multi-company group of Vietnamese regional force and pop-

ular force units.

Chief Circled Town

The province chief circled the town in a spotter plane with a U.S. adviser and saw and photographed the havoc wrought on the buildings and evidences of the bloody massacre.

Several defenders and civilians were seen impaled on stakes in upright positions around the outposts, the reports said. At the fort, seven or eight persons had met death the same agonized way the report continued.

Hiep Duc was a key government stronghold along a major Viet Cong invasion route into the central coast. At least six major enemy attacks have been defeated or held to a stalemate there.

Embarrassed officials Saturday admitted that the atrocity story may have been premature, but the admission did not come until correspondents asked about it.

Lt. Col. George Brown, briefing officer in Saigon, told correspondents Saturday that he had "heard reports" that the "victims" may have been straw stuffed in clothing.

Hard to Understand

"It's hard to understand why they did it," he said. "Maybe it was a warning to villagers of what could happen to them. At any rate we found nothing on the ground to verify the impaling story."

Ironically, the admission came after correspondents had earlier been lectured on the evils of "jumping to conclusions" in stories.

Lately, jumpy information officers, understandably disturbed by rising American casualties, have gone out of their way to criticize correspondents' work.

"For heaven's sake, before you guys print something check it out thoroughly," an information officer told correspondents recently. "Don't rush into print before you know all the facts."

Information officers would not comment Saturday on why the military did not check out the atrocity story more carefully before it was released with pictures that now apparently were of straw and not impaled human beings. **END**

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