



By JACK ANDERSON

WASHINGTON — We have received troubling reports that Air Force jets, guided by faulty intelligence, have caused 10-second massacres in Vietnam more devastating than what happened at My Lai.

Villages of friendly Montagnard tribesmen, it's rumored, have been wiped out by mistake. The stories are difficult to verify, because the villages are remote and the Montagnards bear their sorrows in silence.

We have spent several weeks, for example, trying to find out what happened to a straw-hut village in the Song Re river valley in the central highlands.

On August 9, 1970, the village was ripped apart by anti-personnel bombs dropped by screaming Air Force Phantom jets. Several F4 Phantoms flashed over the village around 8 or 9 a.m.

They laid down "maximum suppressive fire" — a saturation pattern of cluster bombs — intended to kill any Viet Cong who might be lurking in the area. This was supposed to clear the way for three slow C-123 spray planes to dust the rice paddies with defoliants.

A 100 per cent pattern — spacing the cluster bombs, in other words, so the entire area is covered by flying shrapnel — is supposed to be enough to kill anyone standing who isn't protected by heavy armor or a brick wall. The Phantoms used a 300 per cent pattern over Song Re.

**SATURATION RAID** — This triple-strength saturation would easily have ripped and riddled the frail straw walls of the native hootches, killing or maiming nearly everyone.

Moments after the Phantoms had dropped their deadly protective barrage, the three C-123s lumbered over the valley, spraying an arsenic compound called Agent Blue to destroy the terraced rice paddies below.

Lt. Col. Gary L. Gallier, the Army Chemical Corps officer who approved what he called this "model food destruction mission," maintains there were only a handful of Viet Cong in the area.

The U.S. Command in Saigon, in a memo we have obtained, also says it "believes" no "friendly" civilians were in the Song Re river valley.

Yet military maps, prepared in 1965, clearly show a Montagnard

village in the valley. Air photos taken two weeks after the spraying show about 900 hootches.

Gallier now claims that the hootches were abandoned and that "VC production units" slipped into the valley at night to plant and tend some 2,000 acres of rice.

But Dr. Matthew S. Meselson, and Dr. John D. Constable, both of Harvard, who were flown over the valley by Gallier on a herbicide assessment mission, say that Gallier told them there were no huts below.

And Dr. Gerald Hickey, an anthropologist with the RAND Corporation, who has worked in Vietnam for years, says the idea of nocturnal farming is ridiculous.

"The VC can dun the villagers for food or the people give it voluntarily, so why would the VC grow anything at night? Why would they grow anything at all?" asked Hickey.

**FRIENDS OR ENEMIES** — The military also claims that because the C-123 spray planes were hit three times on the August mission and 37 times on an April mission, the inhabitants of the valley "are largely enemy forces."

Contradicts Hickey: "Everyone in the highlands knows that it is an old VC tactic to enter the villages and shoot at U.S. planes and helicopters in the hope that the Americans will bomb or strafe the villages and, thereby, alienate the people."

Sources familiar with the area believe the village was occupied by friendly Montagnards, including women, children and the aged, who would have been massacred by the August 9 raid.

These sources also say the rice paddies were cultivated by the tribesmen, not the Viet Cong. No doubt the Viet Cong, who infest the area, frequently entered the village and demanded rice. But most of the crop, it is believed, was used to feed the villagers.

The Army's own field manual of land warfare declares that herbicides should be used only when crops are intended solely for consumption by enemy forces. The bombing and spraying of civilian food crops, whether the civilians are friendly or unfriendly, violates the 1907 Hague Convention which the U.S. has ratified.

Colonel Gallier insists, however, that "if I had known or

even suspected that there were people in this valley, I would have told the Air Force to cancel."

Footnote: We placed several telephone calls to Vietnam in an attempt to reach intelligence officers and pilots who had participated in the Song Re raid. However, we were able to talk only to second-hand sources who said the pilots were told there were no native hootches in the valley. When they spotted hootches on their bombing run, according to these sources, the pilots tried to avoid them. Missionaries also offered to hike to the valley to verify for us what happened at Song Re. But we were warned that going through Viet Cong country would be too dangerous.

**SECRET PROTEST** — Shortly before U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker left Vietnam to confer in Washington with President Nixon, he sent a diplomatic "aide-memoire" to South Vietnamese President Thieu.

Bunker privately told Thieu he must dry up the heroin market which is addicting tens of thousands of American GIs in Vietnam.

Thieu himself is willing to make the effort, but the corruption in his customs agency and national police make solution of the drug-peddling problem in South Vietnam almost impossible.