

EX G.I.'S LETTER ACCUSED OFFICER

Army Started Inquiry Into Murders a Year Later

By Robert M. Smith
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Washington, Nov. 13 - An investigation into whether American soldiers murdered a large number of Vietnamese civilians in an operation in March, 1968, was begun by the Army more than a year later after it received a letter from a former serviceman who made the charge.

Informed sources said today that the letter had

informed sources said today that the letter had been sent by the former serviceman to the Secretary of Defense and to four or five Congressmen.

The Army has declined to discuss the investigation or the details of a murder charge already lodged against a first lieutenant on the ground that doing so might prejudice the rights of those under investigation or any courts-martial that might result.

But the Army did send today a confidential file to some Congressmen—it would not say whom—dealing with the case of First Lieut. William Laws Calley Jr., who has been charged with murder. A letter accompanying the file disclosed that the Army was investigating other soldiers in connection with the case.

A Second Charge

One source said that the Army had already either filed a charge of murder against a second soldier or would do so shortly. The Army Information Office at the Pentagon was unable to establish tonight whether the charge had yet been filed. "We are having communications problems," Lieut. Col. Eric Johnson explained.

Army sources said, however, that the object of the murder charge would be a soldier in the unit commanded by Lieutenant Calley and that the charge would involve an act, or acts, allegedly committed during the same incident that led to the charges against the lieutenant.

The Army has retained Lieutenant Calley at Fort Benning,

Ga., for two and a half months beyond his term of service while it investigates charges that he shot "quite a number" of Vietnamese civilians in 1968. Army officials are trying to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to convene a court-martial to try the lieutenant.

Pentagon officials have said the investigation has reached the stage where the lieutenant's commander at Fort Benning now had to decide whether he should recommend the convening of a court-martial.

While the Army will not discuss the specific allegations, the lieutenant's civilian attorney, George W. Latimer, has said there was six specifications against the lieutenant and that they allege he killed "quite a number of people."

109 Possible Figure

Pressed about the number of people allegedly killed, Mr. Latimer has said, "I would guess that if all the specifications were added together, the number might reach 109."

Mr. Latimer said, however, that, in any case, some were vague. "Some of them say he killed 'not less than' so many," he said.

As Mr. Latimer has related the specifications, Lieutenant Calley is alleged to have killed "a multiple number" of civilians with his rifle when his platoon of 23d Infantry Division troops advanced into a village six miles northeast of Quangai in an area considered a Vietcong stronghold.

In an interview today, Mr. Latimer again said that the lieutenant was not guilty. "It was a free-fire area," he said. "Everyone in there was presumed to be Vietcong and, as a matter of fact, they were."