

Accused G.I. Found Home In the Army

By JON NORDHEIMER

Special to The New York Times

FORT HOOD, Tex., Nov. 16 — Staff Sgt. David Mitchell, relaxed and smiling, was asked this weekend to describe himself as a person and replied without hesitation: "I am a hell of a soldier. I'm an excellent soldier."

The 29-year-old sergeant, a nine-year veteran of the Army, was a squad leader in a platoon of American soldiers in March of 1968 as it moved into a South Vietnamese village mostly under the control of the enemy.

Sergeant Mitchell has been formally charged by the Army with assault with intent to murder 30 South Vietnamese civilians in the village.

His platoon leader, First Lieut. William L. Calley Jr., has been charged with the murder of "quite a number" of villagers.

Both men are awaiting the outcome of the Army's investigation of the case, when a decision will be made as to whether courts-martial are warranted.

Describes Army Service

If tried and convicted, Lieutenant Calley could face a maximum sentence of death and Sergeant Mitchell could be imprisoned for 20 years.

Sergeant Mitchell, a tall muscular man, sat on a sofa in the home of his Army counsel, Capt. James Bowdish, and talked briefly about himself.

He wore a short-sleeved shirt and slacks, and he toyed with a gold key ring as he talked, his only overt indication of tension.

On the advice of his attorney, Sergeant Mitchell would not

discuss the charge against him or any aspects of his service in Vietnam. He said he would only answer direct questions about his background.

He said he was born in a rural Louisiana town named Hardwood, some 40 miles east of Baton Rouge, on Aug. 16, 1940. A Negro, he attended segregated schools and was graduated from high school in St. Francisville, La.

He said that he enlisted in the Army in November, 1960 (his Army record shows that he was in a reserve unit called to active duty, according to Lieut. Col. W. J. McNally, the Fort Hood information officer), and served tours of duty in Germany, Korea and Hawaii before going to Vietnam in December, 1967.

'At Home' in the Army

As has been the experience of many Negroes from the rural South, he found that the integrated Army offered career opportunities that he could not find in civilian life.

Sergeant Mitchell said he felt "at home" in the Army, and had planned to remain in the service until retirement.

"I was a drill instructor at Fort Jackson in South Carolina," he said with pride. "I trained recruits. A lot of them were going to Vietnam, and I was training them."

For his service in Vietnam, Sergeant Mitchell was awarded the Bronze Star.

"I think this man has demonstrated that he is a good soldier," Captain Bowdish said.

The sergeant shifted his weight on the sofa and twirled the gold key ring in one hand while with the other he carefully smoothed his small, thin moustache. The smile that had lingered for most of the conversation was now gone.

"My wife, her name is Rosa, is supposed to have our first baby this month," he said. "She's already late, you know, and it can come any time."

He looked up from his key ring. "It's not easy for her, you know," he said.

Ex-G.I. Says He Stirred Army Into Action on Alleged Slayings

Special to The New York Times

CLAREMONT, Calif., Nov. 15 — A former soldier said Saturday that he was the man who prompted the Army inquiry into alleged mass killings of civilians in a Vietnamese village.

Ronald Lee Ridenhour, a 23-year-old student at Claremont Men's College, said that he had heard the story from a friend at a base in Vietnam, pieced it together in later interviews with other soldiers, then sent letters about it to Government officials.

Information officers at the Pentagon in Washington were unable to confirm or deny immediately whether it was Mr. Ridenhour's letters that brought about the investigation.

So far, murder charges have been brought against a lieutenant and charges of assault with intent to murder against a staff sergeant.

Someone higher up must have approved, Mr. Ridenhour said. "The important thing is there are a lot of bigger fish in this

kettle and they aren't being caught," he said.

As an Army specialist in Vietnam last year, he said, he had heard about two infantry companies cordoning off a village while another moved through, shooting the villagers.

"You know, I didn't believe it, I was so shocked," he said as he talked briefly before dressing to play defensive tackle in Claremont's football game against Whittier College.

"So I thought I'd ask other guys I knew," he went on. "The more guys I talked to, the more convinced I became that it had happened."

He filled out the story in conversations with friends who had been in the infantry company, he said, and after he got out of the Army earlier this year, he sent off 30 letters to Government officials.

As far as he knows, the former soldier said, it was these letters that started the inquiry.

First Lieut. William Laws Cal-

ley Jr. was arrested the day before his scheduled discharge on Sept. 5. The lieutenant's civilian lawyer said later that his client was innocent of the charge that he killed "quite a number of people."

On Friday, charges of assault with intent to murder were announced against Staff Sgt. David Mitchell, who had been a squad leader in Lieutenant Calley's platoon.