

FOE OF THIEU SETS MASSACRE INQUIRY

But Saigon Insists Songmy
Matter Is Closed—Hanoi
Lays Genocide to U.S.

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Nov. 25—Senator Tran Van Don, an opposition leader who is chairman of the Senate Defense Committee, said today that he would send an investigating panel to Quangnai Province to gather evidence on the alleged massacre of civilians by American troops in March, 1968.

But President Nguyen Van Thieu's spokesman reaffirmed that as far as the Government was concerned the case was closed. "We have classified it as an act of war," the spokesman, Hong Xuan Nha, said.

Mr. Nha commented on the decision by the United States Army, following a preliminary investigation, to try First Lieut. William L. Calley Jr. on murder charges involving 109 civilians. Staff Sgt. David Mitchell faces a possible court-martial on charges of assault with intent to murder. A number of other present or former soldiers are under investigation.

[The North Vietnamese Foreign Ministry accused the United States of genocide in connection with the incident at Songmy.]

In a communiqué last Saturday, the Saigon Government

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Saigon Opposition Leader Maps Inquiry Into Alleged Massacre

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dismissed the massacre charges as "totally false" and said that the dead in the village of Songmy were 125 Vietcong and 20 civilians killed, all by aerial bombardment. Reports have put the massacre toll as high as 567.

The Government acted in the face of a number of statements to the press by Vietnamese who said they had survived the slayings and by Americans who said they had observed them. According to the accounts, the victims, among them women and children died as a result of point-blank small-arms fire.

Senator Don, a retired general and a former chief of staff and Defense Minister, said the Government statement merely proved that President Thieu was "the valet of the Americans, who are his sole support."

The Senator said that he was as reluctant as the Government to furnish propaganda assistance to the Communists but that the Government should have refrained from saying anything until sufficient evidence was in hand.

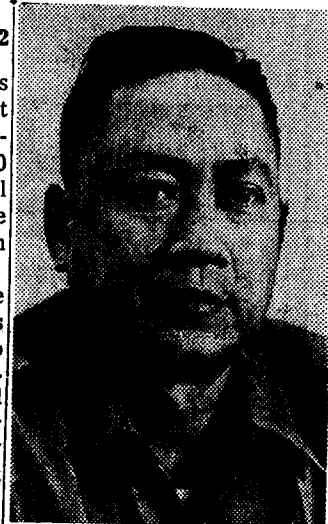
For that reason, he said, he will ask the Defense Committee at its next meeting, on Thursday, to appoint one or two members to conduct an independent investigation. He said he would accept the mission himself if other duties permitted.

Senator Don's hold over the committee is such that approval of his requests is considered certain.

He disclosed in an interview that he requested the files on the case from the Defense Department yesterday. Moreover, he said that he had sent an official of the National Salvation Front, an opposition group of which he is chairman, to Quangnai to look into the case.

Officials of the organizing committee for the National Buddhist Convention, to be held here later this week, said that both the American troops and the Thieu Government would be strongly criticized at the opposition meeting.

A feeling is widespread in



Keystone

Tran Van Don

South Vietnamese circles that President Thieu acted precipitately in denying the massacre charges in toto. Political figures find it absurd that the United States is prosecuting Lieutenant Calley in the murder of Vietnamese citizens in Vietnam while the Saigon Government asserts that no murder has been committed.

There is a suspicion also that the Government statement was based not on any investigation adequate to the gravity of the accusations but on the reiteration by Maj. Gen. Hoang Xuan Lam, commander of the region concerned, of his assesment of the case.

A number of members of the House of Representatives also expressed dissatisfaction with the Government's attitude, but their views have not been voiced on the floor of either house of the legislature.

The apparent lack of urgency in rising to the challenge of the atrocity charge corresponds, in the view of some Vietnamese politicians and foreign observers, to a fatalistic attitude, born of the war, toward loss of life. The Vietnamese explain it, regretfully, as a diminished capacity for moral outrage on the part of a population that has endured a quarter of a century of fighting in which neither side has made much distinction between combatant and civilian.