

Some Reap Financial Returns From Alleged Massacre at Songmy

By ALBIN KREBS

The alleged Songmy massacre in South Vietnam has brought financial returns to some of its eyewitnesses and others.

A former combat photographer who took pictures of victims of the alleged massacre has sold them for an estimated \$40,000, although he originally sought \$100,000.

A small news service based in Washington has sold the exclusive story of a former soldier, who said he had killed many of the civilian victims, to a television network for a sum "in five figures," reported to be \$10,000.

Some of the survivors of Company C, First Battalion, 20th Infantry of the Americal Division's 11th Infantry Brigade, the outfit said to have been involved in the alleged mass killings in March, 1968, originally told their stories without being paid but are now demanding money for interviews.

One who has received payment is Ronald L. Haeberle, a 28-year-old Cleveland businessman who was assigned to Company C as a public information sergeant at the time of the incident.

Used Two Cameras

Mr. Haeberle said that, as the village of Songmy was attacked, he took four rolls of black-and-white 35-mm. film, using his Army camera, and then, using his own camera, a 35-mm. color film took one and a half rolls of pictures for himself. He said he had turned the black-and-white film over to his superiors and that he had no idea what happened to the film.

After his discharge, Mr. Haeberle showed color slides taken from his film rolls at civic meetings in the Cleveland area, but "they caused no commotion," he said. After the funeral over the Songmy incident



Ronald L. Haeberle as he told of photographing scenes at Songmy during alleged slayings. He was then in the Army.

he took his pictures to Joseph Eszterhas, a reporter for the Cleveland Plain Dealer whom he met while both at Plain Dealer printed eight of his pictures on Nov. 20. A spokesman for the newspaper said that Mr. Haeberle had not been paid for the pictures but that the newspaper had agreed to copyright them in his name.

Set Up Headquarters

On the night of Nov. 20 Mr. Haeberle and Mr. Eszterhas flew to New York and set up headquarters in Room 801 of the Gotham Hotel. They invited bids for 18 color slides and, for the next three days, bargained with representatives of magazines, newspapers and syndicates.

were among those that discussed the possible purchase of the rights to the pictures. The Times decided Nov. 20 that it did not wish to participate in any arrangement that involved the resale of the pictures to other publications. The next day The Times made the decision to print a picture as a matter of public interest and reprinted one picture last Saturday from The Cleveland Plain Dealer.

At one point, a consortium representing interests in the United Kingdom, the United States, France, West Germany and Italy was about ready to offer \$125,000 but, because of legal doubts over ownership of the pictures, did not make a firm offer.

"There was a question, which remains, as to whether Haeberle actually owns the pictures, since he took them while a soldier," one bidder said.

"Also, there was some hesitation on the part of some negotiators as to the propriety of selling world rights to atrocity pictures."

Life, for example, bought North American magazine rights but declined to buy world rights because this would have involved resale to other publications.

Photographs Are Printed

On Nov. 21, The New York Post, on legal advice, also decided that a combat picture taken by an Army photographer was public property, and printed pictures from The Plain Dealer.

"Less than \$25,000," according to an authoritative source. Included in the package were Mr. Eszterhas's services in the preparation of Life's 10-page layout on the Songmy incident, which will appear in the issue that comes out next Monday.

Mr. Haeberle made separate deals with Stern, a West German magazine, reportedly for \$7,000, and the Sunday Times of London, for a much smaller amount of money, and continue, a small Washington agent, small negotiations with other potential buyers.

Seymour M. Hersh, a principal in Dispatch News Service, has written three articles based on interviews with veterans of Company C, which Dispatch has syndicated to about 35 newspapers for about \$100 an article, it was reliably learned. European rights were sold to The Times of London for an undisclosed sum.

Sum 'In Five Figures'

One of Mr. Hersh's interview articles was with Paul David Meadlo, who was interviewed on C.B.S. television and radio the night of Nov. 19. A spokesman for Mr. Hersh said that C.B.S. had paid Dispatch a sum "in five figures," but Mr. Hersh's lawyers refused comment on reports that the amount was \$10,000.

A spokesman for C.B.S. said that, by written agreement with Dispatch, Mr. Meadlo was to receive no money for the interview. Mr. Hersh said, "Of course we didn't pay Meadlo for the interview—he wanted to get a burden off his conscience, and we arranged for him to do so, after warning him that anything he said could be used against him later."

Mr. Meadlo confirmed he had received no money for the interview, but he then told a prospective interviewer, "I ain't talking to nobody now unless they pay."