

Songmy Recalls Nazi Massacres to German Press

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BONN, Nov. 28—Editorials in four major West German newspapers today discussed the alleged massacre of Vietnamese civilians in Songmy by American soldiers, and two of them made strong distinctions between the genocide practiced by the Nazi state and the actions of members of Company C, First Battalion of the United States, 20th Infantry, 11th Infantry Brigade, the unit involved in the Songmy situation.

The Rheinische Post commented: "What happened in Mylai and probably in other parts of Vietnam cannot be compared with the mass murders of the National Socialists. The one was personal failure, the other was the policy of a German government."

The Stuttgarter Zeitung said that what happened in the Auschwitz and Maidanek extermination camps "cannot be put on the same plane with Mylai. There, crimes against mankind, deliberate genocide on highest orders, was practiced by Germans out of ideological motives. The massacre by the American soldiers in Vietnam is more to be compared with Oradour or Filetto as equally reprehensible reprisals in partisan war."

Oradour-sur-Glane in France was the scene of the massacre of 1,100 people by the Germans during World War II, and in Filetto di Camarda in Italy 17 civilians were executed in 1944 as a reprisal for the killing of German soldiers by Italian partisans.

Comment by Brandt

Chancellor Willy Brandt was asked today to comment on the editorials and the issue at his first news conference since taking over the federal Government. He replied:

"If I were still a private citizen or a newspaperman I know what I would say. I can see how heavily the burden weighs on the American people itself and I feel it is inappropriate for me to comment as if to put two things in the same pot that do not belong together."

The Stuttgarter Zeitung expressed what appears to be widespread concern among Germans that former Nazis might see in the alleged massacre at Songmy an after-the-fact excuse for the crimes committed under Hitler. The newspaper said: "As misunderstood as the comparison might be because it could be used as a basis for the incorrigibles in our country as a welcome easing of their own bad consciences — nevertheless, the accusers at the Nuremberg tribunal must now sit before a court for mass murder."

Consolation Found

The Süddeutsche Zeitung in Munich found some consolation in the fact that the United States meant to bring its war criminals to justice, writings:

"The system of government, already occasionally put in question, appears not to be

willing to tolerate putrescent boils — now as before they are cut open. But the concern remains what will become of the self-confidence of that great and victory-accustomed nation that felt that it could live politically in internal guiltlessness."

A fourth newspaper, the Frankfurter Rundschau, took up the consequences of an "orders are orders" mentality, saying that the United States were "perhaps ripe now for a discussion of the question what military orders can bring about. Naturally, that cannot be easily answered in Hollywood films and moral settling of accounts with other nations."

Ever since the Nuremberg war crimes trials of the late

nineteen-forties, the Germans have tried without conclusive results either in the courts or in the public conscience to arrive at a practicable definition of what should and should not be done under military orders. However, the overwhelming majority of Germans now condemn what they term the "cavalier obedience" of the Nazi system.

Communist East Germany has launched a widespread propaganda campaign on the basis of the alleged massacres against "American imperialism." However, speakers have avoided the comparison between Songmy and the Nazi extermination camps.

In Kiel this morning, a former SS or Elite Guard, Sergeant Heinz Schlechte, was acquitted by the court of Assizes on a charge of having participated in the gassing of 2,550 Jews in Mogilev, Byelorussia, in 1942. The court accepted as an exonerating factor his argument that he had followed orders in the killings because he did not know what else to do. The court chairman said that the defendant feared that he would be sent to a concentration camp if he did not follow orders. Two of his SS commanders had previously been sentenced to terms of seven and five years in prison for their role in the gassings.

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