

Senators Told G.I.'s in Songmy Unit Smoked

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WASHINGTON, March 24 —

A former Army squad leader told a Senate subcommittee today that five of the 12 members of his squad were smoking marijuana as late as 11 o'clock the night before the unit was involved in the alleged Songmy massacre.

The witness, Charles West, was a specialist Fourth class in Company C of the First Battalion, 20th Infantry, at the time of the alleged mass killing of South Vietnamese civilians by American troops on March 16, 1968.

Appearing today before the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, Mr. West said that about 60 per cent of the men he knew in Company C had smoked marijuana. However, he said that he did not see anyone smoking marijuana during the Songmy operation, which began between 5 and 6 A.M.

Psychiatrist on Stand

Mr. West testified after Dr. Joel H. Kaplan, a psychiatrist from Woodmere, L. I., who served in Vietnam, told the subcommittee, "The use of marijuana is a serious and a chronic problem among the G.I.'s in Vietnam."

"Contrary to many popular opinions held here in the States, the drug could cause people to become fearful, paranoid, extremely angry, and led, in a number of cases, to acts of murder, rape and aggravated assault," he testified.

Dr. Kaplan said that he thought marijuana smoking "could have contributed" to the alleged killings at Songmy if it could be shown that the American soldiers were "chronic pot-heads."

Effects Tied to Dosage

Later, Dr. Louis Lasagna, associate professor of medicine and pharmacology at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, questioned in a telephone interview about the effects of marijuana, said, "As with most drugs, the duration of the effects of marijuana is related to the dose you take, and the dose is related to the quality of the marijuana."

He said that the effects of smoking marijuana available in the United States would last "from a few minutes to a few hours."

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Marijuana Night Before Incident

"It is unlikely," Dr. Lasagna continued, "that the effects would last longer than that." The pharmacologist added it was "not clear" how long-lasting would be the effects of a stronger type of marijuana than that usually available here.

Senator Thomas J. Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut, told the hearing that "Vietnam's marijuana is much more potent than that usually available in the United States."

Mr. West is now a mechanical engineer in Chicago. The Army has mailed him a restraining order directing him not to discuss what happened at Songmy with anyone except the lawyers in the case. He said that his own lawyer told him that he could testify about the incident before the subcommittee.

Disputed by Dodd

Senator Marlow W. Cook, Republican of Kentucky, interrupted the hearing several times to make sure the 23-year-old veteran had received the restraining order. The Senator said that Mr. West might be liable to court action for ignoring it.

Nevertheless, Senator Thomas J. Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut, chairman of the subcommittee, continued to question Mr. West about whether marijuana might have played a role in the alleged massacre.

"I've never heard of a letter having the effect of a restraining order," Mr. Dodd said, "and especially a restraining

order issued by the military to a civilian. If that's the law of the land, it ought to be repealed. You've been discharged more than a year — that's ridiculous!"

Senator Dodd said that an Army colonel delivered a copy of the restraining order to the subcommittee five minutes before the hearing began. "I've had the impression," the Senator said, "that there are those who didn't want this hearing to take place."

'Large Quantity' Available

Mr. West testified that "from the time we arrived" he found "there was access to a large quantity of marijuana available in Vietnam."

He said that the men on the Songmy mission had included "chronic users" of marijuana.

After he answered a few more of Senator Dodd's questions, the Senator asked Mr. West whether it would be fair to summarize his testimony as meaning: "A majority of those shooting were marijuana smokers, but not all the marijuana smokers were shooting." Mr. West said that was correct.

There was no testimony as to the activities of the unit at Songmy.

Mr. West told the Senators that, so far as he knew, none of the officers in the company had smoked marijuana.

"Everyone was aware that smoking was going on within the company," he asserted, but he said he did not know whether the commissioned or non-commissioned officers had

known men were smoking the night before the Songmy incident.

Songmy was the first combat assault mission for the unit, which had been on combat reconnaissance missions since arriving in Vietnam, Mr. West said. On the reconnaissance missions, he said, "it was not unusual for the men to smoke."

Remarking that he was "just as curious as anyone else," Mr. West said he twice tried smoking marijuana. The first time, he recalled, "I just took a puff. It didn't do much for me."

The second time, he said, he smoked marijuana and drank a little alcohol and then went on guard duty. He said, "It seemed to me the vegetation was moving. I thought it was people."

Mr. West said it was his impression that the Army was not actively trying to stop American soldiers from smoking marijuana.

Says Many Used Drugs

Mr. West said that although "everyone must have known" large amounts of marijuana were being smoked, he had heard of only one criminal investigation and his unit had never received any orientation briefings on the danger of drugs.

Dr. Kaplan, who was commander of an Army neuro-psychiatric team at Nhatrang, Vietnam, in 1968 and 1969, said that 3,000 soldiers, or 70 per cent of those his unit saw in its outpatient clinic, had used drugs "heavily day in and day out."

On the basis of interviews

"with many service personnel," he estimated that "between 50 and 80 per cent of all Army personnel in Vietnam had used marijuana on at least one occasion."

The 33-year-old psychiatrist said that before going to Vietnam he did not consider marijuana a dangerous drug.

"Before I went," he said, "if I had heard someone saying what I'm saying today, I would have laughed."

He acknowledged that most psychiatrists would call marijuana "an innocuous substance."

General Reassigned

HEIDELBERG, Germany, March 24 (UPI) — Brig. Gen. George H. Young Jr., charged with suppressing information about the Songmy incident, has been relieved of command of the 24th Infantry Division at Augsburg and has been re-

assigned to first Army headquarters at Fort Meade, Md., the United States Army announced today.

Hearings Completed

ATLANTA, March 24 (AP)—Hearings for three soldiers charged in the alleged Songmy massacre were concluded today at Ft. McPherson here. The hearings will determine whether the three will be tried before a court-martial.