

Helicopter Chief Says He Told Henderson of Killings at Mylai

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FORT MEADE, Md., Sept. 15 —The commander of a helicopter unit during the assault on Mylai 4 testified today that he had told Col. Oran K. Henderson of reports by his pilots that some 125 noncombatants had been killed by American soldiers.

The officer, Lieut. Col. Fredric W. Watke, told the court-martial of Colonel Henderson that he had reported the allegations of his pilots to high-ranking officers the afternoon of the assault and had repeated them to Colonel Henderson two days later on March 18, 1968.

The testimony by Colonel Watke was the strongest yet presented by the Government in its efforts to prove that Colonel Henderson failed to carry out an adequate investigation of the Mylai incident.

In an informal two-page report made by Colonel Henderson on April 24, 1968, to Maj. Gen. Samuel W. Koster, the commander of the Americal Division, he reported that 20 civilians had been killed at Mylai.

Cross-Fire Alleged

The Henderson report, which was mentioned in a Congressional inquiry into the Mylai atrocity, concluded that the deaths of civilians resulted when they were inadvertently caught in preparatory artillery fire and in cross-fire between American troops and enemy forces.

United States soldiers who participated in the assault on Mylai have testified at this court-martial and at others that the American forces faced no hostile fire during the operation.

In his day-long appearance on the witness stand Colonel Watke, who was a major at the time of the incident, related that several of his pilots and complained to him of unnecessary killing of civilians on the day of the attack.

One of the pilots, Warrant Officer Hugh C. Thompson, now a captain, told him that he had landed on the eastern side of the village and had told an infantry lieutenant of eight or 10 noncombatants huddled in a bunker in the way of a continued advance.

Danga Was Reported

Colonel Watke told the court that Mr. Thompson had informed the officer that further advance endangered the lives of these people and that he (Thompson) was going to evacuate the civilians by helicopter.

"He said he told the officer that if his men fired on him he would fire back," the witness said.

Colonel Watke testified that after listening to his pilots, he had wiked to the operation center of the task force commander, Lieut. Col. Frank A. Barker. "I told him he had to stop the unnecessary killing," the helicopter officer said.

"Colonel Barker went to the radio and told Major Calhoun [Charles C. Calhoun, the task force executive officer] to have his men cease-fire and hold their positions," Colonel Watke told the court.

That night, he went on, he went to the quarters of commanding officer, Lieut. Col. John Holladay, and informed him of the pilots' allegations. On the basis of that conversation, a meeting was set up the following day among the two officers and Brig. Gen. George Young, the assistant commander of the Americal Division.

Colonel Watke said that General Young, after hearing the complaints of the helicopter pilots, indicated that he would inform General Koster of the charges.

A Meeting Was Held

On March 18, Colonel Watke continued, a meeting was held in a crimped truck van that served as the headquarters for Colonel Barker at Landing Zone Dottie, the home base for the infantry force.

The witness said that at the meeting, which was attended by General Young, Colonel Henderson, Colonel Holladay, Colonel Barker and himself, he again related the allegations of the pilots. At the conclusion of his recital, he said, General Young instructed Colonel Henderson to make an investigation.

The testimony was in sharp contrast to that given by General Young before the hearing held by a House subcommittee. In that appearance, General Young, who has since been censured by the army for failing to conduct an adequate investigation of the incident, said he had left the meeting after five or 10 minutes and said that there was no mention of civilian deaths at Mylai.

General Young, in his subcommittee testimony, however, did recall ordering Colonel Henderson to make an investigation.