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CAPT. MEDINA
He criticized Calley

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Capt. Medina Takes Stand, Denies Guilt

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Captain Ernest L. Medina took the witness stand yesterday and repeatedly denied ordering, or even knowing about, a massacre at My Lai.

Medina, who is accused of prompting 102 murders in the Vietnamese village, spent nearly 3½ hours on the stand defending himself and portraying First Lieutenant William L. Calley Jr. as an inept officer who had trouble grasping orders.

After Medina stepped down, the defense called five character witnesses, and then announced: "We have no further witnesses at this time."

"May I take it that the defense rests?" the military

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judge, Colonel Kenneth A. Howard asked.

"May we defer that to the morning hour, your honor," one of the defense attorneys, John Johnson replied.

Defense attorneys later told newsmen Medina may be put back on the stand today.

CONTROL

Medina, of Montrose, Colo., appeared calm and sure of himself throughout most of his testimony, but became a bit flustered when the prosecutor, Major William D. Eckhardt, began questioning him about whether he lost control of his troops during the March 16, 1968, infantry sweep that his company made through My Lai.

"Reflecting back, I know I lost control because there were noncombatants killed by my company," Medina said. "If I had been aware of it that day, I would have stopped it," he told Eckhardt.

Medina said he did not accompany his troops into the village because he had received last-minute orders to pick up weapons at another spot.

While carrying out this order, he said, he shot and killed a woman he thought was about to hurl a hand grenade at him.

En route back to My Lai, he said, he saw about 20 or 25 bodies at the intersection of two trails, but at first believed they were victims of fire from helicopter gunships, or an artillery barrage.

AWARENESS

Medina conceded on cross-examination that he had "a growing awareness" as he made his way through the village that the deaths of the civilians "could have been caused by elements of the First Platoon, which Calley commanded.

The captain said he never saw the ditch where about 75 civilians allegedly were slain, and said it wasn't until a year later, when the story of My Lai exploded in print, that he realized the full extent of the massacre.

Medina said that a helicopter pilot reported to him that civilians had been killed in the village, and that he later questioned Calley.

"He hemmed and hawed and wouldn't give me a direct answer," Medina said, but eventually Calley told him he guessed that more than 50 civilians had been slain.

Medina also testified — but at this point the jury was excused — that Calley told him

two days after the sweep, "I can still hear them screaming."

"I told him, 'If you killed noncombatants, you're in trouble,'" Medina recalled.

"Lieutenant Calley told me, 'If there's an investigation you don't have to worry about it. You were not responsible. I'll take the blame,' or words to that effect," Medina told the court.

Howard disallowed the jury to hear this portion of Medina's testimony.

In the presence of the jury, Medina recalled that his was a company of inexperienced soldiers, that the enemy had previously inflicted heavy casualties on U.S. troops in the My Lai area; that the crack 48th Viet Cong Battalion was believed headquartered in the area, and that he gave his troops a pep talk the night before the operation to "jack them up."

Medina said during the pep talk one of his men, whom he did not identify, asked: "Do we shoot women and children?"

"No, use common sense," Medina said he replied. "If an individual is trying to hurt you, then shoot. If he is evading, (running away), fire a warning shot. If he doesn't stop, shoot to wound or kill."

He said Calley, who served him as a platoon leader at My Lai, "did not possess leadership ability."

Calley, who was convicted earlier of 22 murders at My Lai, contended throughout his court-martial that he was merely following Medina's instructions when more than 300 civilians allegedly were killed in the village.