

His My Lai Report

Henderson Said Reds Made It Up

Fort Meade, Md.

Five weeks after the My Lai massacre Colonel Oran K. Henderson wrote that allegations his troops slaughtered civilians at the Vietnamese hamlet were the product of Viet Cong propaganda, Henderson's court-martial was told yesterday.

"No civilians were gathered together and killed," Henderson wrote in a letter April 24, 1968, to Brigadier General Samuel Koster, then commander of the Americal Division. Henderson said in the letter he had conducted an investigation of the My Lai operation.

Henderson, who commanded the division's 11th Infantry Brigade, told Koster that 20 civilians had died accidentally from artillery and cross-fire as U.S. troops killed 128 Viet Cong at My Lai March 16, 1968.

"The allegation that 450 to 500 civilians were killed is obviously a Viet Cong propaganda move to discredit United States troops," Henderson wrote.

The letter was read to Henderson's My Lai coverup trial by Colonel William V. Wilson, the officer who con-

ducted the initial Army investigation of atrocity reports reaching Washington slightly more than a year after the massacre.

The document — the only written report on My Lai to surface during the trial — said the allegations were made by the village chief in the My Lai area but were given no credence by the chief of Son Tinh district.

Henderson, who enclosed a copy of a translated Viet Cong tract saying U.S. soldiers "went crazy" at My Lai, suggested to Koster that a counterpropaganda campaign be initiated.

Wilson, now stationed in Spain, said that at the conclusion of his 3½-month investigation in 1969 he "didn't feel Colonel Henderson had done anything wrong."

Earlier yesterday, another government witness said he could not recall ever being asked by Henderson to survey helicopter pilots about whether they had seen wild shooting or killing of civilians at My Lai.

The testimony by Lieutenant Colonel Glen D. Gibson, who commanded a helicopter company supporting the My Lai operation, was important

to one of the four charges against the 51-year-old defendant.

The government contends that Henderson knowingly lied to a Pentagon inquiry Dec. 2, 1969, when he said he requested Gibson two days after My Lai to question his aviators about the assault on the Vietnamese hamlet.

Gibson also said that despite another Henderson statement to the inquiry, he did not recall ever informing the defendant he had surveyed his men and that none of them reported anything unusual during the March 16, 1968 operation by units of Henderson's Brigade.

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