

# Secret Report Confirms

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH

©, 1972, New York Times Service

WASHINGTON — The Army's official secret report on the My Lai massacre has revealed that a second massacre, involving the killing of as many as 90 civilians, "did in fact" take place less than two miles away on the same morning—March 16, 1968.

The still-classified summary of the four-month inquiry into the My Lai incident said that troops from Bravo Company — a sister unit of Charlie Company — in Task Force Barker — stormed into the hamlet of My Khe 4 near the South China Sea and began shooting indiscriminately at civilians.

"It appears ... that the number of noncombatants killed (by the company) on 16 March 1968 may have been as high as 90," the report said. "The company reported a total of 38 VC KIA (Viet Cong killed in action) on 16 March, but it is likely that few if any were Viet Cong."

THE ARMY investigating team was headed by Lt.

Gen. William R. Peers, who was personally picked by high Pentagon officials in November 1969 to head the inquiry. A complete copy of the final one-volume report has been provided to The New York Times.

No details about the second massacre were made available to the public when the Peers panel publicly announced some of its findings on March 17, 1970, and Peers told a news conference at the time that he had "no knowledge" of any incidents similar to the My Lai 4 massacre.

The official report of the Peers inquiry said that Bravo Company's mission March 16 was to assault what was depicted as the headquarters area for Viet Cong battalion at My Lai I, another hamlet in the village of Son My in the north-central area of South Vietnam. The company's airborne assault began about 45 minutes after the men of Charlie Company had initiated their assault on My Lai 4, 1½ miles to the west, prompting an irony that was described without comment in the Peers

report.

"Some member of B (Bravo) Company believed that sniper fire was received from the west as the company moved out from LZ (landing zone), but it is possible that these individuals mistook for hostile fire some occasional rounds landing in the area which had been fired by C (Charlie) Company as it advanced in their direction ... to the west."

THERE WAS NO opposition at Bravo Company's landing zone, according to the Peers report, and the company began proceeding to My Lai I. The mission was suddenly shifted, however, after the unit took a number of casualties from enemy boobytraps and, the report said, "B Company made no further attempts to enter My Lai I during the operation."

The First Platoon, commanded by 1st Lt. Thomas K. Willingham, moved south across a small bridge to the hamlet of My Khe 4, a few hundred yards from My Lai I. The Peers report notes that

the belief that the area was a support base area for the Viet Cong coupled with the loss of men because of boobytraps, left the infantrymen extremely wary as they crossed the bridge.

After crossing the bridge, the report continues, about a dozen men attached to the First Platoon approached to within 75 meters of My Khe 4, at which time they "opened fire on the hamlet."

The report said it was not possible to establish whether the lead elements of the platoon opened fire on the villagers in accordance with a previously outlined plan, in response to sniper fire (a few soldiers testified they had "heard" some snipers), or simply spontaneously.

"IN ANY CASE," the report said, "an intense volume of fire from M-16 rifles and the M-60 machine gun attached to the First Squad was directed into and around the hamlet for four or five minutes."

"Inhabitants of the hamlet," the report added, "mostly women and children, were cut down as they ran for shelter or attempted to flee over the ridge of higher ground toward the beach." After the firing, the report said, "Lt. Willingham gave the order to cease fire, and the (soldiers) moved south along the trail into the hamlet."

Later, the report noted, the commander of Bravo Company, the late Capt. Earl R. Michles, ordered Willingham by radio to "insure that women and children were not killed."

The killings had not yet ended, the Peers report said. After the shootings, the full platoon began a search and destroy operation in the hamlet, "burning the houses and destroying the bunkers of shelters which each family had constructed in or near their homes."

THE REPORT noted that "elements of the platoon searching the hamlet killed an undetermined number of non-combatants in the process." TNT charges were used to destroy most of the bunkers or shelters, the report said, adding that "some witnesses alleged that members of the (platoon) made no attempt to determine if shelters were occupied before throwing explosives into the entrances, and that in some cases unarmed Vietnamese were shot down as they exited from their shelters."

The Peers panel revealed that most of the members of Bravo Company who participated in the assault "have either refused to testify about the event or disclaimed any recollections of their observations." The report added: "For this reason, it has not been possible to establish the facts with any degree of certainty." But the report said that "both testimony and circumstantial evidence strongly suggest that a large number of noncombatants were killed during the search of the hamlet."

Concluding a separate chapter chapter with Bravo Company, the Peers report said

THE STATES-ITEM

NEW ORLEANS

# Second My Lai Massacre

that "it should be noted that, although 39 VC KIA were reported (during four days of operation), no weapons were reported, captured, no casualties were suffered (by the platoon) and there were no indications that the First Platoon was engaging an armed force."

"These circumstances," the report continued, "should have prompted inquiries from higher headquarters, but apparently none was made."

THE FACT THAT a second massacre took place has been widely reported since early 1970, when the army investigating panel began interrogating members of Bravo Company during its secret hearings in the Pentagon. The final report issued by the Peers panel repeatedly referred to the "incidents at Son My village," and did not limit its discussion to My Lai 4.

Yet, at a news conference March 17, 1970, at which charges against 14 officers —

in connection with the cover-up of My Lai 4 were announced, Peers specifically denied having any personal knowledge of a similar massacre.

Asked by a reporter at the time whether there was "any evidence that the type of evidence that the charges (against the 14 officers) are based on was more widespread than March 16, Peers replied:

"If there is, I have no knowledge of it. It was not brought out to me in the evidence and I, personally, from my roughly 30 months in South Vietnam, had no knowledge of anything that would approximate this."

THE FINAL PEERS report in a chapter summarizing the findings of the inquiry, stated that on March 16, 1968 "United States Army troops of (Task Force Barker) massacred a large number of non-combatants in two hamlets of Son My village."

The panel was set up by the then secretary of the army, Stanley R. Resor, and Gen. William C. Westmoreland, army chief of staff, a few weeks after the first reports of the My Lai massacre were published and more than 16 months after the incident occurred.

Peers eventually assembled a staff of more than 90, including 34 officers, and conducted nearly 400 interviews in Washington and in South Vietnam — about 50 of them with members of Bravo Company — before completing the report on the incident.

The Peers report was the basis of criminal charges by the army against 14 American Division officers in connection with the suppression of the massacre.

THE FINAL PEERS report, while noting that "it has not been possible to establish either the full circumstances or the number of victims of this incident," also made

clear that it was a foregone conclusion that further investigations and some prosecutions would take place.

Summarizing its findings, the Peers report said that "the full story (of Bravo Company's activities) must await the completion of ongoing criminal investigations and resulting prosecutions."