

Newsman Calls for U.S. War Crime Quiz

NEW YORK —(UPI)— A New York Times correspondent who spent three years in Vietnam said yesterday that increasing documentation of alleged war crimes by the U.S. military and their civilian superiors should induce congress to undertake a full-scale investigation that might prevent such incidents in the future

The correspondent, Neil Sheehan of the Times Washington Bureau, wrote in the Sunday Book Review section that if only a fraction of the information in 33 recently published books on the conduct of the U.S. military in Vietnam is factual, "then the leaders of the United States for the past six years at least... may well be guilty of war crimes." He said this would include President Nixon.

Sheehan said he was not suggesting war crimes trials with prison sentences and executions but "sober judgments arrived at so that if these acts are war crimes, future American leaders will not repeat them."

He said if congress does not undertake an inquiry, the hypocrisy will be added to our sins.

Evidence

Sheehan said there is mounting evidence of wholesale violations of the Hague and Geneva Convention, which are U.S. law though Senate ratification, the broad principles laid down by the Nuremberg and Tokyo War Crimes Tribunals, and the Army's Field Manual.

One of the early violations of the manual was the U.S. bombing of hospitals in North Vietnam which were routinely reported at military press briefings, he said.

"President Johnson kept two wire-service teletypes in his office and he read the newspapers like a bear, Sheehan said. "There are thus grounds to believe that he may have known his air force and artillery were blowing up enemy hospitals... did his knowledge make him a war criminal?"

Sheehan said a minimum of 150,000 Vietnamese civilians

have been killed and at least 350,000 civilians have been wounded or permanently maimed in South Vietnam, mostly by air and artillery bombardments of hamlets that were not military targets, constituting another violation of the rules of war. He said there is ample documentation that it was a campaign of terror to "empty the countryside."

'Not Necessity'

"If you destroyed the rural society, you destroyed the resources the enemy needed to fight," he wrote. "You deprived him of recruits in the South, of the food and the intelligence the peasantry provide; you reversed Mao Tse-tung's axiom by drying up the sea (peasantry) in which the guerrillas swam."

Sheehan said there are grounds for believing the use of the air weapon in the South was not a military necessity but "a political convenience, a substitute for sufficient infantrymen to hold the countryside."

He said President Johnson's Defense Secretary, Robert

McNamara, repeatedly said the United States was trading firepower for men.

"If the generals did commit war crimes in Vietnam, they did so with the knowledge and consent of the civilians," Sheehan charged.

Current Climate

For this reason, he said, the Nixon Administration cannot be expected to institute any meaningful inquiry into war crimes. Nor can the Army be expected to sit in judgement on its own conduct, especially when they are apt to become the scapegoats of any public witchhunt for war criminals.

The current climate in the Nation tends to limit prosecution for war crimes to lesser officers.

"There are Calleys in every army," said Sheehan. "What makes them dangerous is a set of circumstances in which their homicidal aberrations can run amok. The laws of war say that it is the responsibility of all the highest leadership to do all in its power to prevent such circumstances from occurring."