

# General Won't Punish G.I.'s for Refusing Orders

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By The Associated Press

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KHESANH, South Vietnam, March 22 — A commanding general said today he did not plan to take disciplinary action against 53 of his men who refused an order to move forward to secure a damaged helicopter and their commanding officer's armored vehicle.

"I suppose if I went by the book, we could take them out and shoot them for refusing an order in the face of the enemy," said Brig. Gen. John G. Hill Jr., "but they're back in the field, doing their duty. I don't think it should be blown out of proportion."

The commander of the reluctant armored cavalry troop, Capt. Carlos A. Poveda, was relieved of his command. General Hill, commander of the First Brigade, Fifth Infantry

Division (Mechanized) said the captain "made an error in tactics" that resulted in his losing control of his unit when he became separated from it.

The men who refused to carry out the order were members of two platoons of Troop B, First Squadron, First Cavalry, Americal Division. They are temporarily assigned to General Hill's division in the northwest corner of South Vietnam, supporting the South Vietnamese invasion of Laos.

A similar incident occurred in the Americal Division in August, 1969, when an infantry company refused to go forward after five days of heavy casualties on a mountain held by the North Vietnamese.

General Hill told newsmen



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Brig. Gen. John G. Hill Jr.

Continued on Page 5, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

the incident occurred late Saturday night. Informed sources gave this account:

The armored unit had tried for several hours to move forward and dislodge an enemy ambush force on Route 9 between Langvei and the Laotian border nearby. Three times the two platoons of Troop B moved up, ran into heavy resistance and pulled back to wait for their heavy weapons and air support to weaken the enemy.

On the third move forward, the troop commander's armored personnel carrier hit a mine as the unit was pulling back, and the platoons became separated and disorganized. Just before dark, two other armored personnel carriers moved up the highway and picked up the troop commander and his crew, including one wounded man. Shortly afterward, a helicopter made a forced landing behind the abandoned command vehicle, but the crew of the helicopter moved out safely.

## Order to Move in Again

At about 8:30 P.M., Troop B was ordered to move forward again to obtain the helicopter and the command vehicle, but the men refused to go. General Hill was informed and sent the squadron commander, Lieut. Col. Gene L. Breeding, to talk to them. The colonel spoke with the men of the two platoons, but 53 of them—not including their officers or platoon sergeants—still refused to go forward.

Colonel Breeding decided not to take further action at that time. Another armored unit was sent out yesterday morning, and it secured the armored personnel carrier and the helicopter. Troop B remained in the field yesterday, but General Hill replaced Captain Poveda with one of his own officers.

Troop B later was pulled back and attached to a unit of the Fifth Mechanized Division. The rest of Colonel Breeding's squadron from the American Division was pulled back for refitting to give the colonel a chance to strengthen his control over the unit. He took over the squadron 12 days ago.

One of the men who refused the order to move forward was Specialist 4 Randy Thompson of Evansville, Ind., who had volunteered for the earlier mission to rescue the captain and crew from the disabled armored personnel carrier. He said he refused to go back because "the reason given wasn't a very good one."

"It was after a piece of machinery that could have been replaced," he said. "I didn't see any sense in risking any more lives."