

Lieutenant Accuses Two Generals of War Crimes

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 21—A 24-year-old West Point graduate is carrying dissent within the Army over the Vietnam war to new lengths. His tactics have forced the Army leadership into public test of its ability to deal with this kind of dissatisfaction.

First Lieut. Louis P. Font, who graduated in the upper 5 per cent of his West Point class in 1968, filed charges of war crimes on Wednesday against two generals.

Army officials have been clearly irritated and frustrated by the lieutenant's technique, regardless of whatever substance his accusations may have. One reason for the reaction seems to be that he couches the accusations in the language and bureaucratic form of the Army.

Lieutenant Font's action was the latest move in the miniature psychological war he has been waging with the brass since last fall, because of the Army's refusal to discharge him on grounds of moral and political objections to the Vietnam war. Under current American law, a conscientious objector must oppose all wars, not just one.

Transcript of Atrocities

Lieutenant Font has never been to Vietnam to witness war crimes, but any member of the Army has a right to make court-martial charges.

Last Thursday, at a Capitol Hill news conference in the office of Representative Ronald V. Dellums, Democrat of California, the lieutenant presented his evidence—a 300-page transcript of statements on alleged atrocities made by Vietnam veterans at a public meeting of an anti-war group here last December.

Among knowledgeable military observers, these is no expectation that either of the generals will be court-martialed.

One, Maj. Gen. Samuel W. Koster, the former superintendent of West Point, was recently cleared of court-martial charges leveled by a special army commission that investigated the killings of civilians at My Lai. General Koster was the division commander of the troops who committed the killings in 1968.

The second general is the man who dismissed the charges against General Koster and most of the other senior officers accused after My Lai. He is Lieut. Gen. Jonathan P. Seaman, commanding general of the First United States Army at nearby Fort Meade, Md., where Lieutenant Font is also stationed while he continues his fight for discharge in the civilian courts.

"I learned two things at the

academy," Lieutenant Font said at his news conference. "A commander is responsible for everyone under his command and that the truth makes no exception of military rank, that what holds true for privates or sergeants also holds true for generals."

To sustain his case, Lieutenant Font quoted Army scripture—a statement by General of the Army Douglas MacArthur in condemning to death for war crimes a Japanese general who was in command in the Philippines at the time of the Bataan death march.

"Soldiers of an army invariably reflect the attitude of their general," General MacArthur was quoted as saying. "The leader is the essence. Isolated cases of raping may well be exceptional, but widespread and continuing abuse can only be a fixed responsibility of highest field authorities."

The transcript of statements by the Vietnam veterans alleges widespread and extensive atrocities beyond Mylai.

A spokesman for Generals Koster and Seaman said they had no comment to make.

Last October, the lieutenant was made an inspector of the World War II barracks at Fort Meade. He wrote several reports stating the barracks were so dilapidated that they were unfit for human habitation and got the contents of the reports into the local Maryland newspapers.

Dispute With General

On Jan. 21, Lieutenant Font went to the First Army headquarters building at Fort Meade. He says he went there to give copies of his barracks report and 86 supporting affidavits to Generals Seaman and Koster and to Maj. Gen. Richard G. Ciccololla, the First Army chief of staff, and the post commandant, Col. Arnold W. Alexander.

General Ciccololla had Lieutenant Font taken into custody by the military police and then wrote a letter to Colonel Alexander accusing Lieutenant Font of refusing to obey an order from General Ciccololla to leave the headquarters building.

Four days later, while Colonel Alexander was having Lieutenant Font investigated for court-martial charges, the lieutenant swore out charges of dereliction of duty against the colonel for allegedly failing to maintain the barracks. A spokesman for the colonel says he has tried to keep the barracks in repair but that they were continually vandalized by soldiers housed in them while awaiting court-martial or administrative discharge.

Lieutenant Font's 86 supporting statements are from enlisted men, noncommissioned officers and another first lieutenant

who dispute the contention that indiscipline is to blame. The other lieutenant, Frank G. Solecki, the deputy of the principal unit involved, charged "insensitivity of the chain of command" to the men's living conditions and attacked the allegation of indiscipline as "an obvious cover-up."

On Jan. 28, Colonel Alexander filed general court-martial charges against Lieutenant Font—five counts of alleged disobedience to direct orders. Each count could carry a maximum sentence of five years.

This week, in a petition asking the Court of Military Appeals here to dismiss the charges, Lieutenant Font accused General Ciccololla of physically preventing him from obeying the order to leave the headquarters, of committing "assault and battery" on him

and of "conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman."

The petition contended that when Lieutenant Font asked if he could leave his report and the 86 affidavits at the headquarters, General Ciccololla "became enraged and screamed at petitioner, 'get the hell out of here,' grabbed petitioner by the arm and pulled and pushed petitioner toward the door." As soon as he was "released from General Ciccololla's grip," the petition claimed, Lieutenant Font sought to leave but was arrested and held under armed guard for four hours.

The petition has resulted in a postponement of a formal pretrial investigation of the charges that was to begin tomorrow.

A spokesman for General Ciccololla said the general had no comment to make.