

50 G.I.'s in Vietnam Refuse Patrol Duty, Then Agree to Go

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By United Press International

PHUBAI, South Vietnam, April 12 — About 50 United States infantrymen of a 142-man company refused to move for an hour and a half today when ordered to go out and patrol the rolling hills around Phubai, 42 miles south of the demilitarized zone.

"We're not going!" some shouted. "This isn't our war! We're not going out in the bush. Why should we fight if nobody back home gives a damn about us?"

In the end, however, all 142 men of the company, under the command of their battalion head, Lieut. Col. Frederick P. Mitchell, reluctantly joined the truck convoy to the hills southwest of the city.

The incident — involving Company C of the Second Battalion, First Infantry, a unit of the 196th Infantry Brigade — began with the usual grumbling of frustrated American soldiers fighting an unpopular war. All afternoon, the soldiers complained to one another.

"Man, the war stinks," one said. "It's a damn waste of time. Why the hell are we

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fighting for something we don't believe in?"

The Americans, with the knowledge that at least three North Vietnamese divisions were within one day's march, with mounting frustration and with the hot sun beating down on them, turned their pent-up anger on their company commander. But they relented.

They joined the 138 men of a sister unit, Company A, who reluctantly flew into an adjacent area during the morning. Dozens of Company A soldiers also complained bitterly about going out on patrol, but went no further than complaints.

Why did the men of Company C balk at going out into the field?

"I've been here too long," said Pfc. London Davis, 20 years old, of Bakersfield, Calif., his thumbs stuck between a bandoleer of bullets wrapped around his waist. "I'm too short [close to leaving Vietnam] for this kind of stuff. Man, I don't want to get killed now."

Pfc. William Bowlin, 20, of Walton, Ky., said: "Why should I go out there and do the fighting for the Vietnamese?"

"We're supposed to be doing defense, nothing else, not offensive," Private Bowlin said. "Going out on patrol—that's defense?"

Spec. 4 Keith Kohujek, 18, of Houston, said, "I don't want to go out and step on any booby traps and get killed. There are supposed to be booby traps all over that place. Nobody ever tells me what's going on."

The Second Battalion, First Infantry, which includes Companies A and C, is part of the 196th Brigade, which flew to Phubai Tuesday to protect some 2,500 American soldiers still below the demilitarized zone, which straddles the border between North and South Vietnam.

Colonel Assails Newsmen

PHUBAI, April 12 (AP)—Lieut. Col. Frederick P. Mitchell today assailed television newsmen and other journalists who were present when American infantrymen refused orders to go out on patrol.

"All you press are bastards. I blame you for this and you can quote me on it," he said to the correspondents.

In Saigon, the United States command said, "A rumor to the effect that the area was an ambush site loaded with booby

traps circulated among some members."

The command statement, without offering any direct criticism of newsmen, said: "Numerous correspondents were in the area interviewing soldiers. Several soldiers told correspondents that they did not want to go into the field."

No soldier actually disobeyed orders or refused to go into the field, the command said. No disciplinary action was taken. So-called combat refusals have not been infrequent among United States troops in Vietnam in the past 2½ years, especially since the American withdrawal began.

The United States command has adopted a policy of trying in most cases to reason with soldiers who refuse such orders, rather than invoking punitive measures. Usually, the soldiers eventually agree to carry out the orders, officers have said.

The most famous incident of the kind occurred in August, 1969, when troops of another battalion of the 196th Brigade—then part of the Americal Division—refused orders to move forward during an operation aimed at reaching the site of a helicopter crash some 30 miles south of Danang.