

# Sick of War, 50 GIs Balk At Patrolling

By Stewart Kellerman

PHU BAI (South Vietnam) — (UPI) — It began with the usual grumbling of frustrated soldiers fighting an unpopular war.

"Man, the war stinks," the GIs complained to each other this afternoon. "It's a damn waste of time. Why the hell are we fighting for something we don't believe in?"

It didn't take long for the talk to turn tough. Maybe it was the hot sun hanging low in the sky. Maybe it was fear of at least three North Vietnamese divisions within one day's march. Or maybe it was simply the frustration of fighting a war nobody back home seems to care about any more.

## Outpouring

In a few minutes, a loud crowd of infantrymen gathered around their company commander, Capt. Joseph Cato, letting it all out, their pent-up anger with the war.

"We're not going," they 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?"

About 50 of the 142 infantrymen in Charlie Company refused for a stubborn hour and a half to patrol the rolling hills around Phu Bai, 42 miles below the embattled demilitarized zone.

In the end, the whole company drove out in a truck convoy to the hills southwest of the city led by their battalion commander, Lt. Col. Frederick Mitchell.

## Joined Comrades

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

(The U.S. Command later issued a statement in Saigon, saying that none of the GIs "failed to obey the orders of their officers or non-commissioned officers.")

(The soldiers are presently occupying the originally planned defensive positions in the vicinity of Phu Bai," the Command said.

The statement said the soldiers were part of a "600-man task force moved to Phu Bai yesterday for the purpose of securing U.S. troops and installations in the Phu Bai area." It was the first time the Command had acknowledged the northern movement by the U.S. troops.)

## Why They Balked

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

"I've been here too long," Pfc. London Davis, 20, of Bakersfield said, his thumbs stuck between a bandolier 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 get out there and do the fighting for the Vietnamese?"

"We're supposed to be doing defense, nothing else, not offense," Bowlin said. "Going out on patrol, that's defense? There are 40,000 dinks out there and they send in two companies."

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."

## Once Americal

Charlie Company is part of the Second Battalion, First Infantry, 196th Brigade which flew to Phu Bai yesterday to protect an estimated 2500 American soldiers still below the DMZ.

Its parent brigade, the 196th, used to be part of the ill-fated Americal Division, Lt. William F. Calley's unit at the time of the My Lai massacre.

The men of Charlie Company were driven to battalion headquarters a quarter-mile away from the airfield after their company commander tried for an hour and failed to talk the rebellious 50 men into going on patrol.

After a half-hour talk with the battalion commander at headquarters, the men finally put on their rucksacks and jumped reluctantly aboard waiting Army trucks.

## Peace Sign

The grunts made peace signs as they rumbled through the compound's barbed wire perimeter led by their battalion commander and sergeant major in a jeep.

Officers said they began patrolling on foot across the southwestern hills, considered a likely route for a Communist attack against Phu Bai, as soon as the truck reached the outskirts of the city.

Combat refusals, especially temporary ones, have become a common occurrence in Vietnam since the United States began pulling out troops from the war zone. Only a few, however, have been publicized, since news-men are not usually present.