

Vietnamese Say G.I.'s Slew 567 in Town

By HENRY KAMM

Special to The New York Times

TROUNG AN, South Vietnam, Nov. 16 — A group of South Vietnamese villagers reported today that a small American infantry unit killed 567 unarmed men, women and children as it swept through their hamlet on March 16, 1968.

They survived, they said, because they had been buried under the bodies of their neighbors.

The villagers told their story in the presence of American officers at their new settlement, which lies in contested territory less than a mile from the ruins of their former home.

The officers refused to comment pending the outcome of an Army investigation into charges of murder against First Lieut. William L. Calley Jr., 26 years old, of Miami.

A squad leader in the lieutenant's platoon, Staff Sgt. David Mitchell, 29, of St. Francisville, La., has also been charged in the case, with assault with intent to murder.

[In Washington, a spokesman for the Army said today that it would have no comment, in accordance with American Bar Association standards on pretrial discussion.

[Capt. James Bowdish, attorney for Sergeant Mitchell, said in Houston that estimates of 400 to 600 dead went "far beyond" any figures he had heard.

[George Latimer, Lieutenant Calley's lawyer, said in San Antonio that he was "shocked" by the report, according to United Press International. "I only know what is in official records," he

said. "My client had nothing to do with the killing of any civilians."]

A former soldier now studying at Claremont Men's College in California, Ronald L. Ridenhour, said yesterday that he had

Continued on Page 2, Column 4

Continued From Page 1, Col. 4

prompted the Army investigation by writing letters to Government officials after hearing several accounts of the alleged atrocity while stationed in Vietnam.

The site of the villagers' former home, about nine miles northeast of the provincial capital of Quang Ngai, is a desolate-looking place now.

Viewed from a helicopter, the ruins of houses along a well-used dirt road testify that a community once stood there.

The provincial Governor, Col. Ton-That Khien, said today in an interview that the killings had occurred, but he added that the number of dead was perhaps exaggerated.

A responsible Vietnamese official close to the case said that those slain probably numbered between 450 and 500.

Villagers' Account

As told by one of the villagers, Do Hoai, in the presence and with the assent of a number of others, this is what happened:

A heavy artillery barrage awakened the villagers around 6 A.M. It lasted for an hour, then American soldiers entered the village, meeting no opposition. They ordered all inhabitants out of their homes.

Although the area had been largely under Vietcong control, the villagers had engaged in no hostile action against the Americans and bore no arms.

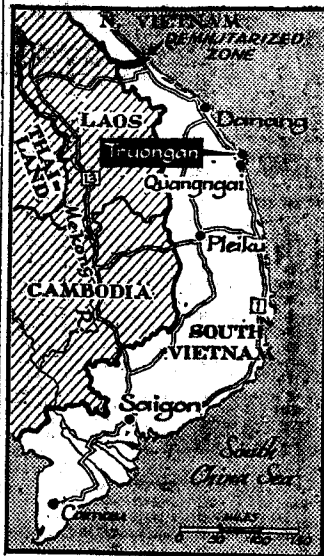
The Americans forced the villagers to gather in one place in each of the three clusters of houses that formed part of the village of Song My. The settlement also bore the names of Tu Cong, Dinh Hong and My Hoi.

The three death sites were about 200 yards apart.

When the houses had been cleared, the troops dynamited those made of brick and set fire to the wooden structures. They did not speak to the villagers and were not accompanied by an interpreter who could have explained their actions.

Then the Vietnamese were gunned down where they stood. About 20 soldiers performed the executions at each of the three places, using their individual weapons, presumably M-16 rifles.

In the interview, Colonel Khien said that the killings had



The New York Times Nov. 17, 1969

probably been carried out by fewer soldiers than Mr. Hoai reported, but said he did not know the exact number.

Mr. Hoai, 40, a rice farmer like most of the villagers in this green and marshy area between the central highlands and the South China Sea, said that those who escaped the slaughter, as he and his wife did, had hidden under the bodies of victims until the Americans left. The whole incident, he said, took about 15 minutes.

Mr. Hoai said that his mother, his older brother and the brother's three children had been killed.

A gaunt old woman, wearing the black pajamas and flat conic of Vietnamese peasants, interrupted to say that her 19-year-old son had also been killed.

A number of people in the crowd during the conversation at the edge of the new settlement said that Mr. Hoai's account was correct.

Mr. Hoai, informed that the United States Army might prosecute Lieutenant Calley for murder, said that he stood ready to go to the United States to testify at a court marshal.

Witnesses Questioned

Earlier today, an investigator of the Army's Criminal Investigation detachment visited the American Division, which conducted the operation during which the incident occurred. He questioned witnesses and left accompanied by two surviving village officials.

Mr. Hoai and the other villagers said that they had ar-

rived at the death total of 567 by subtracting the number of survivors—132 according to them—from the total known population of the hamlet.

They said they thought that all survivors had been found in three new locations.

The Provincial Governor said that the dead had been buried by survivors within three days of the killings and no body count had been made.

Another Vietnamese official said that the village chief had turned over to him a list of the dead, but the official refused to disclose their total number.

Colonel Khien, who is 40 years old and considered friendly to Americans, said that he had been notified of the killings within a week but at first had assumed that they had been the result of an artillery barrage and therefore a sad but unavoidable act of war.

The colonel said that the operation had taken place in the Americans' stipulated zone and that therefore no Vietnamese clearance had been required for the shelling and infantry advance.

Later, he said, the Vietcong distributed a propaganda leaflet about the incident. For that reason, he said, full silence was observed to avoid providing support for enemy propaganda.

When he realized three months later that the case was more serious, Colonel Khien said, the scene of action was no longer accessible because of Vietcong mortar fire and he could do no more than interrogate about 30 survivors. They gave him identical accounts of the killings, he said.

Praises Division's Work

The Provincial Governor said that as far as he knew President Thieu had not been informed of the slayings and no official complaint had been lodged with the American command. The senior province advisor for Quang Ngai, C. Edward Dillery, also declined comment on the accusation.

The Governor declared that he admired the pacification work done in this province by the American division and considered the killings an unfortunate exception. On the whole, he said, American troops were more solicitous of Vietnamese lives than his own troops are.

While declining to comment on what action the American Army should take to ascertain Lieutenant Calley's role, Colonel Khien said that if one of his officers were suspected of

killing women and children he would have to face a military court.

The colonel said that he doubted Mr. Hoai's assertion that all of the villagers had been unarmed. While most of those killed were probably not Communists, he said, there were Vietcong cadres in the village who may have used arms against the Americans.

Another responsible Vietnamese official, who declined to be identified because he feared the propaganda use that the enemy might make of the case, ruled out the possibility that the American soldiers might have killed the villagers because they had previously shown hostility to the Americans.

He said that the village had never before been entered by American troops.

Earlier, the village was identified mistakenly as My Lai, the name of six different hamlets in the vicinity. Differences in place names between cartographers and inhabitants are common in Vietnam.

The Truong An settlement here is a concentration area in which about 2,000 former residents of Vietcong-controlled hamlets have been consolidated to facilitate their defense. The village remains under constant Vietcong threat and occasional attacks.

To secure it for today's visit, the squad of United States Marines that normally defends it, together with two platoons of popular forces, was reinforced by troopers of an armored cavalry unit and additional American infantrymen.