

Charge of Massacre by G.I.'s Faces Saigon Inquiry

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Nov. 18 — President Nguyen Van Thieu was reported today to be preparing an order for a full investigation by the South Vietnamese military into assertions that up to 567 villagers were killed by American troops during a sweep in 1968.

The case was brought to Mr. Thieu's attention Saturday after reports in the American press that the Army was holding up the discharge of First Lieut. James L. Calley Jr. pending an inquiry into the suspected mass murder.

The former platoon leader in the Americal Division faces a possible court martial on charges of having murdered an unspecified number of civilians during a sweep through the village of Songmy on March 16, 1968.

Civilian Casualties Heavy

Official South Vietnamese sources here ascribed the apparent slowness of their Government to take action in the case primarily to regular reports of heavy civilian casualties in this war.

They cited also an unwillingness to believe the original re-

ports because they came from an area of heavy Vietcong influence, which rendered suspect the accounts of survivors.

In the background, the sources said, was a widespread reluctance to make an issue of the case for fear of giving credence to enemy propaganda. This reluctance continues.

No South Vietnamese newspaper has reported the charges of mass murder. Newsmen said this was due largely to the reluctance of editors to lay themselves open to suspicion of anti-Americanism, which might be construed as favoring the enemy and lead to Government measures against editors and their papers.

Heavy Artillery Barrage

Sources close to President Thieu said he had been informed of the case through military channels earlier but had probably accepted the view of regional officials that the killings were an unavoidable act of war, probably the result of a heavy artillery barrage that preceded the arrival of the infantry unit. The investigation he is reported to be preparing to order would be conducted by the joint General Staff of South Vietnam's armed forces.

Meanwhile, American mili-

tary spokesmen continued their silence on the case, noting that the Army was still conducting an investigation. Embassy spokesmen said that Ambassador Elsworth Bunker had not been aware of the case until last week's newspaper reports. It was learned from military sources, however, that the Army's investigation into Lieutenant Calley's role in the action had been under way for several months.

A check of military communiqués issued on the day of the reported massacre disclosed that the 1st Light Infantry Brigade, Lieutenant Calley's unit, was reported in action at the scene.

Two Accounts Agree

The time of the artillery barrage and the infantry advance checked with an account by surviving villagers given last Sunday.

The villagers reported that the Americans had shot their relatives and neighbors, including women and children, in three groups after burning and dynamiting all the houses of the hamlet. They said no shots had been fired against the Americans and there had been no arms in the village.

The communiqué at the time

reported the total enemy dead in the entire region of the operation, code-named Muscatine, at 128. Responsible South Vietnamese officials described the survivors' contention that 567 villagers had been killed, in their hamlet alone in the course of 15 minutes as excessive, then said that the dead amounted to 450 to 500.