

G.I. Says He Saw Vietnam Massacre

20 NOV 69

By ROBERT M. SMITH
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 19—An Army sergeant said tonight that he saw American soldiers gun down "women and children and old men" in a South Vietnam village last year.

Sgt. Michael Bernhardt said the slayings were carried out by "most of the men" in his company—C Company of the First Battalion, 20th Infantry, 11th Infantry Brigade.

"They were women and children and old men mostly," Sergeant Bernhardt said of residents of Sonmy village who were killed in March of 1968. "I didn't notice any military-age males there," he said.

The incident described by the sergeant, who is now stationed with a basic training company at Fort Dix, N. J., today in a telephone interview, is under investigation by the Army. The Army has charged First Lieut. William L. Calley—a platoon leader in Company C—with the murder of "a multiple number" of civilians.

It has also charged a sergeant in the platoon, David Mitchell, with assault with intent to murder.

Sergeant Bernhardt said he refused to take part in the shooting of the villagers.

According to the sergeant's account, the commander of C Company, whom he refused to name—gathered the men together for a briefing before they were to advance on the village, which Sergeant Bernhardt called Mylai 4.

"The company commander had us in a group," he said, "and gave us a briefing before we went on the mission. The briefing was to the effect that the village and the occupants were to be destroyed.

"He said they were all V.C. [Vietcong] and there were no innocent civilians in the area."

The sergeant, who at the time of this mission was a private and an automatic rifleman, said that no one had protested.

Asked whether he thought at the time that all the villagers

were Vietcong, he said, "It was ridiculous, but apparently some of them believed."

The sergeant said Company C was under strength; he said it had 60 or 70 men. "A large

Continued on Page 14, Column 4

Continued From Page 1, Col. 4

number of them" moved in and killed the villagers, he continued. "Only a few of us refused."

The sergeant described what he could see of the operation: "They would get the people together and gather them in groups. Then they would shoot them with rifles and machine guns."

"Going through the village," the sergeant went on, "I saw a lot of bodies. In these things that looked like bomb craters."

"I actually saw them shoot some of them," he said "I saw them shoot a group in a ditch, about 20 of them."

The sergeant said he could not estimate how many men had done the shooting of the 20—"there were a number of men involved in it."

"It took 15 to 20 minutes" to wipe out the village, the sergeant said. He said he did not believe that anybody had been left alive, but has subsequently learned that "there were some witnesses — they either hid or escaped, I guess," he said.

American reporters in Vietnam recently interviewed Vietnamese civilians, one of them wounded, who claimed to have survived such a massacre.

Asked whether the villagers had attempted to run away or had protested to the American troops, Sgt. Bernhardt said, "The Vietnamese aren't that way."

"Some of them fled," he said. "The rest couldn't quite understand what was going on—I guess they never expected it."

The Army has refused to comment on the details of the charges pending against either Lieutenant Calley or Sergeant Mitchell, on the ground that doing so might prejudice the rights of the two men or the rights of the Army in any courts-martial that might result.

In the case of both Lieutenant Calley and Sergeant Mitchell, no decision has been made that a court-martial should be held. The investigation concerning the lieutenant is now at the stage where one of his superiors

is reviewing the allegations to determine whether he should recommend a court-martial.

In the case of Sergeant Mitchell no witnesses have yet been heard, according to the sergeant's defense attorney.

Sergeant Bernhardt, who is now 23 years old, said that he has been interviewed by Army investigators at Fort Benning, Ga.

Lieutenant Calley is stationed at Ford Benning. Sergeant Mitchell is stationed at Ford Hood, Tex.

The sergeant said he could not be specific about the total number of people he had slain. "I myself would say 100," he said, but he called it a conservative estimate.

Private Interviewed

Special to The New York Times

LONDON, Thursday, Nov. 20—The Times of London published today an interview with three American soldiers, including one described as Pvt. Michael Terry. The copyright article, written by Seymour M. Hersh, quoted Private Terry as saying:

"They just marched through shooting everybody. Seems like no one said anything—they just started pulling people out and shooting them."

"They had them in a group standing over a ditch—just like a Nazi-type thing. . . . One officer ordered a kid to machine-gun everybody down, but the kid just couldn't do it. He threw the machine-gun down and the officer picked it up. . . .

"I don't remember seeing any men in the ditch. Mostly women and kids."

"Some of them were still breathing—they were pretty badly shot up. They weren't going to get any medical help, and so we shot them, shot maybe five of them. . . ."

"I think that probably the officers didn't really know if they were ordered to kill the villagers or not. . . . A lot of guys feel that they [South Vietnamese civilians] aren't human beings. We just treated them like animals."