

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 1969

# G.I. Asserts He Was Told Not to Discuss Massacre

By DOUGLAS ROBINSON

Special to The New York Times

FORT DIX, N. J., Nov. 20—An Army sergeant who says that he saw American soldiers shoot down Vietnamese villagers last year said today that he had been ordered by his company commander not to talk about the incident.

Sgt. Michael A. Bernhardt of Franklin Square, L. I., said he had been in a "minority" among the members of his infantry company as to his feeling against the shootings and had been "ostracized" by some of his fellow soldiers.

"The great majority of the men in the company treated it as a victory," he said, after describing how the Americans shot down the villagers, mostly old men, women and children.

Asked if there had been any Vietcong soldiers in the village of Spngmy, Sergeant Bernhardt said, "Some of the people weren't old enough to walk yet, so I couldn't see how they could be Vietcong."

He identified the company commander only as a captain, refusing to divulge his name.

## Just 'Let it Happen'

Sergeant Bernhardt said he had not participated in the shootings. He added, however, that "I just stood back and let it happen."

He said he had been ordered not to talk about the incident by the captain after it had become apparent that he was opposed to the action. "I wasn't threatened," he said, "I was just told not to mention it to anyone."

The only other person he found in his outfit who felt the same way, he said, was "a helicopter pilot who was killed soon after the incident."

"I'm not suggesting he was killed because of his feelings," he added, "it just happened."

"I had no place to go, and I didn't know who to talk about it to," Sergeant Bernhardt went on, in answering questions why he had not reported the incident earlier. "I did mention it a couple of times, but nobody believed me."

The sergeant said the Army had not put pressure on him

to avoid mentioning the incident once he returned to this country last December, but he added that "there are certain people in the Army who did not want this brought out." He declined to identify anyone.

About two months ago, he said, he went to Washington to make a report on the incident, which occurred in March of 1968.

He said his company had suffered a "number of people killed" in the area around the village and that the men "simply went off the deep end" once they were in Son'my. He said he had seen at least 30 villagers shot down.

Asked if the infantrymen received any hostile fire from the village when they went in, the sergeant said he was "not aware" of any. He said that one American was wounded accidentally during the incident when he shot himself.

In the weeks after the shooting, Sergeant Bernhardt said, no one in his company "would talk about it in my presence." "I was partially ostracized," he continued, but "I was not in fear of my life because I was armed all the time."

Asked his view of the war in Vietnam, he said that "I don't object to fighting wars, but fighting the way we are, we can't win."

"I'm opposed to war, generally," he said, "but this war I'm not opposed to." The sergeant said he did not belong to any peace groups.

His purpose in bringing the incident to light, he said, is to "prevent something like this from ever happening again."

Sergeant Bernhardt, 23 years old, enlisted in March, 1967. He went through basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C., and Airborne School at Fort Benning, Ga. He served in Vietnam from December, 1967, to December, 1968.

## Veteran Declines Comment

Special to The New York Times

PROVO, Utah, Nov. 20—Michael Brent Terry, a Vietnam veteran who reportedly took part in the shooting incident,

refused to talk to newsmen today on advice of counsel.

Mr. Terry, now a student at Brigham Young University, was summoned to the office of the university president, Ernest L. Wilkinson, this afternoon after a copyrighted article by Seymour M. Hersh quoted his account of the slayings.

Dean A. Peterson, assistant to the university president, appeared at Mr. Terry's bungalow in nearby Orem and explained that the university had been informed of the article by United States Representative Laurence J. Burton, Utah Republican.

Mr. Terry said he would talk to a reporter after the meeting with Mr. Wilkinson. However, after several hours, the reporter was informed that Mr. Terry was in the office of Philip Christensen, a local lawyer.

SEE ROBERT M. SMITH  
NYT, 21 NOV 69