

Two in Congress Ask Vietnam Massacre Inquiry

21 NOV 69
By ROBERT M. SMITH

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 20 — A Senator and a Representative called today for investigations of an alleged massacre of Vietnamese civilians by American troops last year.

In London, Prime Minister Wilson said in the House of Commons that if the reports of the massacre proved "one-quarter true, they would be regarded as very grave atrocities." In Paris, the Vietcong delegation charged that in March, American troops took 1,200 South Vietnamese from the village of Balangan, towed them to sea in boats and drowned them.

Representative William E. Minshall, Republican of Ohio, told the House that published accounts of the alleged slayings in Sungmy in March, 1968, indicate that the facts have been covered up. The "handling of the matter smacks of the same

Goodell and Minshall Call for Investigations Into Reports of Slayings

kind of secrecy that surrounded the Green Beret case," he said.

Mr. Minshall said he was asking Representative George H. Mahon, Democrat of Texas who is chairman of the defense subcommittee, to call Defense Department witnesses and establish the facts of the case.

Senator Charles E. Goodell, Republican of New York, later asked that the Senate Armed Services Committee initiate "a full-scale investigation" concerning the alleged killings.

Vietnamese civilians have told American reporters that an American infantry unit murdered 567 of the residents of the village of Songmy. Yesterday, an American serviceman

and two former servicemen said they were eyewitnesses to such a massacre but did not support the figure of 567. One put the number at more than 100.

"If we, as members of Congress, are concerned with the treatment of our fighting men by the enemy, we should be equally concerned that our military forces in Vietnam maintain the standards of a civilized nation at war.

"In his November 3d speech, the President expressed his deep concern that a collapse of the South Vietnamese Government might result in a 'bloodbath'—in slaughter of innocent Vietnamese civilians by Communist forces.

"If American policy in Vietnam is so deeply concerned with the possibility of a 'bloodbath' perpetrated by Communist forces," the Senator concluded, "it should be equally concerned

Continued on Page 18, Column 6

Continued From Page 1, Col. 5

with preventing the deliberate killing of civilians by our own or South Vietnamese forces."

The Senator asked that the inquiry also look into the operation of the "Phoenix" program, which he described as "the joint United States-Saigon program for assassinating supposed N.L.F. village officials."

He said that the Saigon radio "allegedly reported that by Dec. 31, 1968—one year after its inception—this program had caused the death of 18,393 persons."

Meanwhile, the former serviceman who touched off the Army's investigation in the alleged massacre reiterated his charge that orders to kill all the inhabitants of the village of Songmy had come from the commanding officer of the task force involved, "or possibly even higher."

Ronald Lee Ridenhour, now a student at Claremont Men's College in California, originally made the charge in a qualified form in the letter he sent to President Nixon, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, 23 Congressmen and other Government officials.

In the letter, he said that if three soldiers in C Company of the First Battalion, 20th Infantry, 11th Infantry Brigade—the unit allegedly involved in the incident—could be believed, "not only had Charlie Company received orders to slaughter all the inhabitants of the village, but those orders had come from the commanding officer of Task Force Barker, or possibly even higher in the chain of command."

Lieut. Col. Frank A. Barker Jr., who headed the three-company task force, was killed in action three months later.

In a telephone interview today, the 23-year-old student said there was no doubt in his mind that higher officers than the company commander, Capt. Ernest Medina, had authorized the soldiers to kill civilians.

"It was impossible for this colonel to have flown overhead

[in his helicopter] and not seen what was happening," Mr. Ridenhour said. "There was just no way."

Captain Medina, who is now stationed at Fort Benning, Ga., would not respond to questions concerning the allegations that a massacre took place. He referred questions to his attorney who could not be reached.

In his letter, dated March 29 of this year, Mr. Ridenhour said he had received his first report of "Pinkville"—the area in which the alleged incident took place—"with some skepticism."

"But in the following months," he went on, "I was to hear similar stories from such a wide variety of people that it became impossible for me to disbelieve that something rather dark and bloody did indeed occur."

A copy of Mr. Ridenhour's letter was obtained here today from a Congressman. In the letter Mr. Ridenhour explained that he had considered sending the letter to the mass media but had decided against it. "As a conscientious citizen," he said, "I have no desire to further besmirch the image of American servicemen in the eyes of the world."

Mr. Ridenhour said in the letter that the "first of many reports" he was to hear of "Pinkville" had come from Pfc. "Butch" Gruver, a soldier he had known in Hawaii. Pfc. Gruver told him that he had been assigned to C Company, the letter said.

"Charlie Company 1/20 had been assigned to Task Force Barker in late February, 1968, to help conduct search and destroy operations on the Batangan Peninsula, Barker's area of operation," Mr. Ridenhour's letter explained.

"The task force was operating out of L. F. Dottie, located five or six miles north of Quangnai City on Vietnamese National Highway 1.

"Gruver said that Charlie Company had sustained casualties, primarily from mines and booby traps, almost every day

from the first day they arrived on the peninsula.

"On village area was particularly troublesome and seemed to be infested with booby traps and enemy soldiers. It was located about six miles northeast of Quangnai City at approximate coordinates B.S. 728795.

"It was a notorious area, and the men of Task Force Barker had a special name for it: They called it 'Pinkville.' One morning in the later part of March, Task Force Barker moved out from its firebase headed for 'Pinkville.' Its mission: Destroy the trouble spot and all of its inhabitants.

"When Butch told me this," Mr. Ridenhour's letter continued, "I didn't quite believe that what he was telling me was true, but he assured me that it was and went on to describe what had happened.

"The two other companies that made up the task force cordoned off the village, so that Charlie Company could move through to destroy the structures and kill the inhabitants. Any villagers who ran from Charlie Company were stopped by the encircling companies.

"I asked Butch several times if all the people were killed. He said that he thought they were—men, women and children. He recalled seeing a small boy, about three or four years old, standing by the trail with a gunshot wound in one arm.

"The boy was clutching his wounded arm with his other hand, and while blood trickled between his fingers. He was staring around himself in shock and disbelief at what he saw. He just stood there with big eyes staring around like he didn't understand. He didn't believe what was happening.

Then the captain's RTO [radio operator] put a burst of 16 [M-16 rifle] fire into him.

"It was so bad," Gruver said, "that one of the men in his squad shot himself in the foot in order to be medevaced out of the area so that he would not have to participate in the slaughter."