

Meadlo's Home Town Holds Him Blameless

By J. ANTHONY LUKAS

Special to The New York Times

NEW GOSHEN, Ind., Nov. 25 —This village with the Biblical chime to its name woke up this morning as the home of the man who said he took part in the mass slayings of Vietnamese civilians.

But nowhere among its chunky church spires and white clapboard houses was anyone inclined to blame Paul David Meadlo, the veteran who admitted last night shooting 30 to 40 men, women and children in the massacre at Song My, South Vietnam, last year.

"Lots of people been in talking about it this morning," said Mrs. Josephine Neview, a clerk at Neal's grocery. "But they certainly don't blame Paul David in any way. After all, he had his orders."

"Paul David" is the way everybody here refers to the 22-year-old coal miner's son.

"I heard them announcing something about Paul Meadlo on the TV last night," said Mrs. Neview. "For a moment I didn't know who they were talking about; then I said, oh, my God, that's Paul David."

Visits Often

Although Paul David lives now with his wife and two children in neighboring West Terre Haute, New Goshen was his home for the first 18 years of his life, and he still comes here often to visit his parents, sister, four uncles and two aunts.

New Goshen's 450 residents all know the Meadlos and Paul David, when he's home, he is a familiar figure shouldering up to the bar at Hutch's Hut or warming his hands over the pot-bellied stove at Olivero's Grocery.

And he is popular here. Townspeople questioned today responded with one voice: "A very nice boy," "the nicest guy you'd ever want to meet," "easy-going, got along with everybody," "never had any trouble out of him. Wish I could say the same about some other youngsters around here."

So when newspaper and tele-

vision people from New York, Chicago and St. Louis began showing up around town this morning, the people of New Goshen stuck stanchly by their native son.

"How can you newspaper people blame Paul David," asked Robert Hale as he planed down some garage doors behind the pool hall he and his wife run. "He was under orders. He had to do what his officer told him."

"The only thing I blame Paul David for was talking about this to everybody on television," said Dee Henry, who was helping Mr. Hale fix the garage doors. "Things like that happen in war. They always have and they always will. But only just recently have people started telling the press about it."

"It's bad enough to have to kill people without telling everybody about it," he said. "This sort of thing should be kept classified."

Mr. Henry was a professional soldier for 11 years, fought in World War II and the Korean war and "would have been in this one too if I hadn't been wounded and discharged." He gives his occupation as "disabled veteran."

'No Questions Asked'

He feels Paul David is the victim of people who don't know how the Army works. "Anybody who's had any affiliation with the service knows you do what you're ordered to do—no questions asked."

Although others were not so emphatic, the same theme was echoed today in the town's tiny one-room post office, on front porches and on street corners under gaunt, leafless maples.

"What else could he do?" asked 22-year-old Floyd Cheesman, a classmate of Paul David's at West Vigo High School. "Boy, I would have done just the same thing. I'd take my orders. If they give you an order under fire and you don't carry it out they can court martial you."