

Ford Says Top Army Men Knew of Alleged Massacre

He Charges the Previous Administration 'Covered Up' Vietnam Report—Laird 'Shocked and Sick' Over the Story

By United Press International

Representative Gerald R. Ford, House Republican leader, said yesterday that "top Army officials knew about" the alleged massacre of South Vietnamese civilians in the village of Songmy in the period immediately following the incident in March, 1968.

The Michigan Republican told a news conference in the New York Hilton shortly before addressing a meeting of the Manufacturing Chemists Association that the delay in investigating the incident was "regrettable."

"This alleged massacre took place about a year and a half ago," Mr. Ford said. "I'm surprised that the previous Administration covered it up."

In answer to a question, he said he did not know if former President Johnson or then Sec-

retary of Defense Clark Clifford were ever aware of the alleged massacre, but he added, "Top Army officials knew about it, I know."

"I don't want to name individuals."

Comment by Laird

By E. W. KENWORTHY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 25—In the first direct comment by a high Administration official, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said that he had been "shocked and sick" when he first heard of the alleged shooting 11 months after it was said to have occurred.

He made this comment in reply to a question by Senator

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Laird Says Top Army Officials Knew About Alleged Massacre

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J. W. Fulbright during a seven-hour session with the Foreign Relations Committee last Wednesday.

Secretary Laird did not immediately answer the question but sent a written reply for insertion in the hearing record. The reply was received yesterday and made public by Senator Fulbright today with Mr. Laird's consent.

In a telephone interview today, Mr. Clark M. Clifford, who was Secretary of Defense at the time of the alleged massacre, said:

"I had never heard of it before until the story broke in the newspapers. It had never been brought to my attention. I am assuming that it had never been brought to the attention of the Secretary of the Army, because if it had been, I think he would have taken it up with me."

Mr. Clifford went on to say: "As far as the facts are concerned, I will wait until they are subjected to the two important tests of evidence taken under oath and a searching cross-examination."

Secretary Laird told the committee that, under the American system of jurisprudence and the provisions of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, he could not comment on the alleged shootings or on Lieutenant Calley and Staff Sgt. David Mitchell of St. Francisville, La., who has been charged with assault with intent to kill 30 persons. No decision has yet been announced as to whether Sergeant Mitchell will stand trial.

However, Mr. Laird said he wanted "to make clear, beyond any doubt, that the Nixon Administration is determined to insure absolute compliance with our orders and with the laws of war."

Secretary Laird told the committee that he had not heard about the alleged murders until early April of this year. This was a month after Ronald Ridenhour, a 23-year-old student who had been a soldier in Vietnam, wrote to the President, Mr. Laird, 23 members of Congress and a half dozen other officials. In his letter, he set forth what a friend had told him of the alleged Songmy massacre by members of the First Platoon, C Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry of the 11th Infantry Brigade.

Mr. Laird gave no reason to the committee why the alleged incident had not been brought to his attention sooner by the Army, nor why the report of an investigation made by the 11th Brigade in April, 1968, had not been sent to the Department of the Army in Washington.

This report, according to the Army, concluded that no disciplinary action was appropriate and no further action was required. In a statement provided to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee today, the Army said: "The matter [meaning the alleged incident and the original investigatory report] was not brought to the atten-

tion of the Department of the Army [in Washington], there being no apparent requirement for doing so."

The Army has refused to say who conducted the original investigation in April 1968. But yesterday it announced that Secretary Resor had named Lieut. Gen. William R. Peers "to determine the adequacy of both the investigation and its subsequent review."

The Armed Services Committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives today summoned Secretary of the Army Stanley R. Resor to testify tomorrow on the alleged mass killing of South Vietnam villagers in Quangnai Province in March, 1968.

Mr. Resor, who was also Secretary of the Army when the alleged shooting took place, will be accompanied by Robert E. Jordan 3d, general counsel of the Army.

At Fort Benning, Ga., the Army has announced that First Lieut. William L. Calley Jr. would be given a general court martial on charges of premeditated murder. In the specifications, Lieutenant Calley is charged with killing—"unlawfully" and "without justification or excuse"—109 men, women and children in the village of Songmy, which the Army called Mylai 4, on or about March 16, 1968.

In the Senate today Senators Peter H. Dominick, Republican of Colorado, and Ernest F. Hollings, Democrat of South Carolina, strongly criticized the Columbia Broadcasting System for carrying an interview with a former member of the infantry unit that allegedly shot the unarmed civilians during a sweep of Songmy.

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The veteran interviewed was Paul Meadlo, 22 years old, who had lost a foot the day after the alleged massacre at Songmy. Mr. Meadlo said in the interview that, at the direction of Lieutenant Calley, "about 370" villagers had been killed; that he himself had fired about 67 shots and "might have killed 10 or 15." At the end of the interview, Mr. Meadlo said, "I see women and children in my sleep. Some days . . . some nights, I can't even sleep. I just lay there thinking about it."

Commenting on the broadcast in a floor speech, Senator Dominick contended that the legal rights of Lieutenant Calley and Mr. Meadlo had been jeopardized. The Senator said the broadcast interview was "in total disregard of the rules of the Supreme Court" regarding pretrial release of informants in criminal cases.

"He [Meadlo] said he had personally participated in the murder of some of these men, some of these women and some of these children," Senator Dominick said. "He specifically mentioned the name of the man who is under indictment [Lieutenant Calley.] What kind of country have we got when this kind of garbage is put around?"

Senator Hollings rose in the nearly empty chamber and asked whether every soldier who had committed "a mistake in judgment" during the heat

of combat was "going to be tried as common criminals, as murderers?"

Senator Hollings said that Mr. Meadlo "was obviously sick," and that a man in his condition "ought not to be exposed to the entire public."

But Senator J. W. Fulbright, Democrat of Arkansas, who is chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, urged a thorough investigation of the allegations, saying that the reports of the incident "can cause grave concern all over the world . . . about what kind of country we are, what people think we are."

The alleged massacre, Mr. Fulbright said, "emphasizes in the most dramatic manner the brutalization of our society" brought on by the war, and provided "one of the most important and urgent reasons why we should move to a negotiated settlement of the war."

the interview with Mr. Meadlo: "C.B.S. News broadcast the interview with Paul Meadlo in the belief there was an over-riding public need for full disclosure about what happened at Mylai, particularly in view of previous statements made by other eyewitnesses and then the statement issued by the Government of South Vietnam that nothing untoward had happened there.

"This South Vietnamese official position was then contradicted by the United States Army decision yesterday to try an American officer on charges of premeditated murder at Mylai.

"C.B.S. News believes that Paul Meadlo was entitled to make his story public if that was his decision, and having established to our satisfaction that Paul Meadlo was qualified to speak on the subject as a bona fide participant in that incident, we would be guilty of not reporting information to which the American public was entitled.

"As for the free press-fair trial issue raised by Senator

Peter Dominick, Republican of Colorado, it is the belief at CBS, News that it is not applicable in this situation inasmuch as Lieut. William L. Calley Jr. would not be tried by a civilian jury but by a board of professional soldiers who are disciplined to make their decision on the basis of military law.

"It is worth noting that, at the pretrial session at Fort Benning, Ga., Judge Lieut. Col. Reed Kennedy said he felt the news media was sincerely attempting to assist furtherance of the investigation of what happened at Mylai.

"Judge Lieutenant Colonel Kennedy made this observation when he rejected a United States Government motion to restrain the news media from further publicizing statements of witnesses, photographs, sketches or any other matter which might be used as evidence. Judge Kennedy said such an order would be premature as well as unpre-

cedented in civil and military law."

Evidence Banned

COLUMBUS, Ga., Nov. 25 (AP)—A military judge ordered today that potential witnesses in the court-martial of First Lieut. William L. Calley Jr. be directed not to disclose any evidence they may have prior to the trial.

Lieutenant Calley has been charged by the Army with premeditated murder in the deaths of at least 109 Vietnamese civilians.

The directive concerning potential witnesses was issued by Lieut. Col. Reid Kennedy, senior trial judge in the judge advocate section at Fort Benning. He instructed Capt. Aubrey Daniel, who will be prosecutor at the Calley trial, to tell all witnesses immediately of his order.

Colonel Kennedy's directive came at a hearing here. He had been asked by both the defense and prosecution attorneys to ban further news interviews with persons who might appear at the court-martial.

C.B.S. Reply

Following is a reply of the Columbia Broadcasting System to the attack on it by Senator Dominick for having broadcast