

# 13 Villages Near Songmy Reported Razed in a Week

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CHU LAI, South Vietnam, Nov. 25 (Reuters)—Troops of the Americal Division were burning down suspected Vietcong villages near Songmy, the scene of an alleged massacre of South Vietnamese civilians last year by American soldiers, as recently as last month.

"Within a matter of a week at the end of October, we destroyed 13 villages," said Second Lieut. Norman E. Cuttrell, aged 22, of Terre Haute, Ind., who arrived in Vietnam last month. He leads a platoon in the Fifth Battalion, 46th Infantry, 198th Brigade of the Americal Division.

According to Lieut. Col. Russ Whitla of Ganado, Ariz., the burning by "Zippo squads," so named for their cigarette lighters, is intended to "deny the villages to the Vietcong." It is part of the pacification program in Quangai Province.

Twenty-four hours before the villages are razed, the inhabitants are warned by leaflets and loudspeaker broadcasts from "psychological warfare" planes to leave their homes.

## New Villages Set Up

The inhabitants are then placed in newly constructed "resettlement villages," which are often enclosed by barbed wire.

Members of the platoon described in detail how they perform at their task of destruction during an interview in their hut at Landing Zone Gabor, a few miles south of Chuai, the site of the battalion's headquarters.

First the Zippo squads set fire to the thatched dwellings with their lighters. Sgt. Steve R. Kohrt, 20, of Menominee, Mich., added: "When we found candles, some of us used candles. If we think it's really worth it, we throw a frag [fragmentation] or concussion grenade in."

The length of time it takes to burn down a village depends on the wind, said Sergeant Kohrt. "It also depends on the size of the village, he added.

## Air Strikes Requested

If the town is in a free-fire zone—an area where American artillery and aircraft can strike at will without obtaining prior permission from local authorities—and if the village has already been burned once before, "the people who go out know that they will be dead," the sergeant declared.

"If it's all a free-fire zone, you can sit on the hills and see the dinks [Vietnamese] running around, so they call in big air strikes," he said.

Lieutenant Cuttrell added: "What we try to do is to get all of the people out of the ville [village] before we start burning. Because of the psychological effect, of course, they don't want to go—that their home and everything.

"So what we do," he said, "is to get them all out of the ville and out of sight before we burn it so they won't have to stand and watch their houses burn."