

Veteran Says He Slew Ten in Vietnam Village

By ROY REED

Special to The New York Times

JACKSON, Miss., Nov. 26—A young veteran said today that he had killed about 10 persons, including a woman, during the alleged massacre at Songmy, South Vietnam, on March 16, 1968.

Varnado Simpson, 22 years old, a Negro who served in the infantry as a specialist 4th class, said in an interview that his company had been briefed the afternoon before by its commander, Capt. Ernest Medina, and had been told that Songmy, nicknamed Pinkville, was filled with Vietcong and their sympathizers.

He said Captain Medina had instructed his men to "kill or burn down anything in sight."

Mr. Simpson said his platoon landed by helicopter about 9 A.M. and, after waiting a few minutes to organize itself, moved into the village, taking the left flank.

One Platoon There

Platoon 1, led by Lieut. William L. Calley Jr., who has been charged with murder, had landed about five minutes earlier and was already in the village, he said.

Mr. Simpson said he and others in his platoon made their way through a perimeter of bushes, probing for land mines as they went, and emerged

alongside a group of "hooches, or huts.

A Vietcong soldier, clad in black and green pajamas and carrying a weapon, appeared in front of them and began running toward a doorway, Mr. Simpson said.

Mr. Simpson said a woman was running about 20 yards ahead of the soldier. An interpreter with the Americans shouted at the woman to stop, he said, and when she failed to do so, his platoon leader, whom he remembers only as Lieutenant Brooks, ordered him to shoot her. He did.

He said the 10 persons he killed that day were all adults.

Mr. Simpson told the National Broadcasting Company yesterday that he had been responsible for killing a 2-year-old child. When he was asked today whether he had seen any children killed, he lowered his head and said, "I'd rather not say."

Asked if the question was painful to him, he replied, "yes, it is." He rose abruptly from his chair and left the room. He returned about a minute later and continued answering questions.

Following Orders

He said he had felt that he was simply obeying orders at Songmy, but had since changed his mind about what he and his fellow soldiers had done.

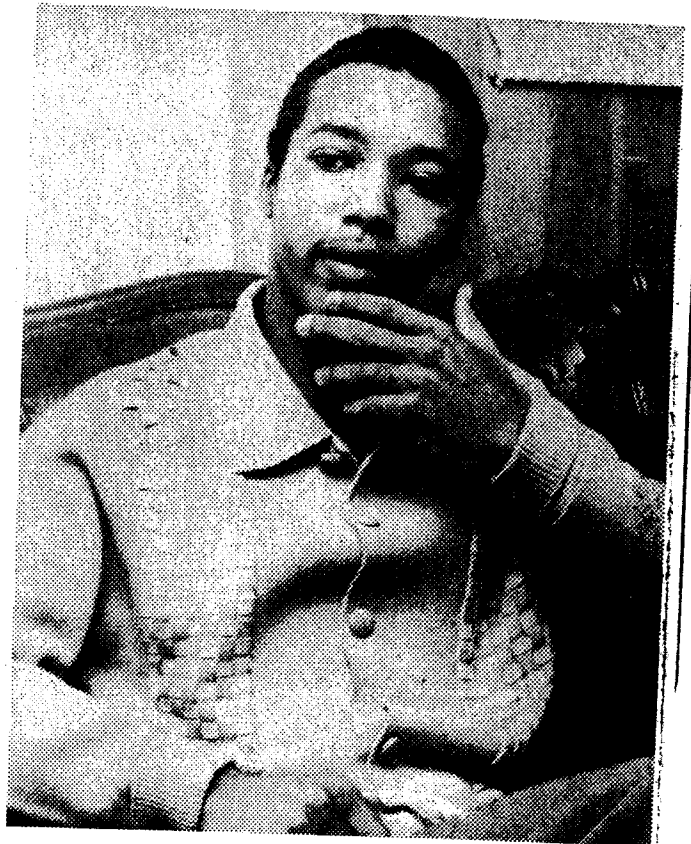
"I don't think all that should have happened—all those people," he said. "Then again, you got to realize, you got your life out there on the stake, too."

The slender, neatly dressed young man looked slowly around the living room of his mother's pleasant frame house, shaking his head occasionally in what seemed to be quiet anguish.

"I think something is going to happen to me," he said. "I dream about it a lot. Sometimes I just want to get away from people."

At camp that night after leaving Songmy, Mr. Simpson said, a radio operator told him that a helicopter pilot had watched from the air until he "couldn't stand no more," then had radioed to headquarters and reported the incident.

Orders came back from headquarters to stop the killing, he said.



United Press International

RECALLS KILLING: Varnado Simpson, at an interview in Jackson, Miss., tells of his part in incident at Songmy.

Villagers Released

Mr. Simpson said that about 150 of the 600 to 700 persons in the village had been rounded up but not yet shot, and that these were released after the order from headquarters came in.

He was asked why the slaughter had happened. He recalled Captain Medina's briefing and said, "Everyone who went into the village had in mind to kill. We had lost a lot of buddies, and so on. And it was a VC [Vietcong] stronghold. We considered them either VC or helping the VC."

He said he did not see any of the killing of people in groups that others have described. He said he did see about 25 persons, including some babies, lying dead in a group, indicating that they had been shot while huddled together.

Mr. Simpson remembered Captain Medina as a "gung-ho" soldier, a good leader but not personally likable. "I don't dig him," he said.

Mr. Simpson is a graduate of Brinkley High School here. He interrupted his second year at Tennessee State College at Knoxville in 1967 to enter the Army as a draftee and "get it over with."

After his discharge a year ago, he returned to Jackson and went to work in a bank. He quit the job a week ago to prepare to return to Tennessee State College in January.

He lives with his mother, an X-ray technician, at a Jackson hospital.