

Reports of Massacre Doubted By a Man Who Was at Songmy

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 26—A former Army private who was at Songmy when Vietnamese civilians were allegedly slain by American soldiers last year expressed doubt today about the accuracy of reports of a massacre in the village.

"I never saw where Lieutenant Calley was supposed to have shot all those people," said Leon Stevenson, who was discharged Sunday after completing a three-year enlistment in the Army.

Mr. Stevenson, who was interviewed by telephone from his home in Montana, was a member of the same company as First Lieut. William L. Calley Jr., who is charged with killing 109 men, women and children in a section of the village, which the army called My Lai 4, on or about March 16, 1968.

Mr. Stevenson, who was a 19-year-old private first class at the time, said his platoon was "on the other side of the village from Lieutenant Calley's platoon" during the assault on the village.

"I saw some bodies, too, but there were very few where I was," he recalled.

He said the bodies he saw numbered "15 to 20 at the most, and I doubt if that much."

Asked if the victims were men or women or children, he replied that they were "a little bit of everything."

Disbelieves 300 Deaths

Mr. Stevenson, who has been interviewed by Army investigators, said that villagers may have been deliberately executed.

"It just didn't seem like that big a place, from what I saw of it," he explained.

Mr. Stevenson's account is one of the few public eyewitness statements challenging allegations of a massacre. At least four former enlisted men who were there, including a combat photographer, have said that large numbers of civilians, numbering in the "hun-

drreds," were shot down by the G.I.'s.

"I don't think they are doing any good by trying to hang Calley," Mr. Stevenson said today. "They don't know what he's been through. It isn't going to do those dead people any good to hang Calley."

According to Mr. Stevenson, members of the company involved in the assault—Company C of the First Battalion, 20th Infantry, 11th Infantry Brigade—came under fire from Songmy while conducting combat operations nearby. He said Lieutenant Calley's platoon had been "pinned down" once by such fire.

'A Lot of Shooting'

"There was a lot of shooting on the day of the assault from the time we got there," he went on. "The gunships were firing when we went in. There was like a miniature war going on."

He said it was difficult for him to determine if all of the firing emanated from the invasion force or if any of it represented return fire from the village.

He also took issue with news reports alleging that the company commander, Capt. Ernest M. Medina, indicated to his men before the assault that civilians encountered in the sweep of the village should be killed.

"I can't remember him saying anything like that," Mr. Stevenson said. He did recall, however, that a routine briefing had been conducted by the captain.

"I never heard anybody say afterward, 'I was ordered to kill women and children,'" Mr. Stevenson went on.

His account questioned the innocence of the victims of the alleged killings.

"They keep saying 'innocent civilians' were involved, but over there, you have to be on one side or the other," he said. "How do you draw the line between killing innocent civilians and killing as a part of war?"