

Songmy Accounts Stir Brigade Chief; 'I Begin to Wonder'

By United Press International

NORFOLK, Va., Nov. 27—The former commander of the Army's 11th Brigade says he no longer is certain that his troops did not slay Vietnamese villagers at Songmy on March 16, 1968.

"Up until two weeks ago, I would have sworn it could not happen without me knowing about it," said Col. Oren K. Henderson, now attached to the Armed Forces Staff College here.

"But when I start seeing TV broadcasts and hearing soldiers speak about this subject who were themselves eyewitnesses, I begin to wonder," Colonel Henderson said last night.

The Army is investigating 26 former 11th Brigade soldiers in connection with the killings in a village believed to have been controlled by the Vietcong.

Colonel Henderson, who was interviewed over WVEC-TV in nearby Hampton after

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refusing all requests for interviews in the past, said the first report he had of any incident had come from a warrant-officer pilot. He said the pilot had told him of seeing a soldier kill a civilian on the ground below.

Colonel Henderson said the soldier later convinced him that he thought the civilian was dead at first but that the civilian then appeared to rise and throw a grenade.

"As a soldier I can accept this," the Colonel said. "It was purely a result of the survival problem you're faced with. You only have a split second to react."

The colonel said he had questioned all the troops operating in the area at the time and had been satisfied that there was no "shooting up of civilians."

He said that after his satisfaction had been confirmed by the commanding officer of the helicopter pilots, he made an oral report to the commander of the American Division.

That, he said, was about April 1, 1968.

Colonel Henderson said that two weeks later the Vietcong began bombarding the area with propaganda messages that said United States forces had killed an abnormal number of civilians.

The colonel said he had forwarded the leaflets to headquarters, then filed a requested written report with his superiors.

"I didn't attempt to ferret out more information by giving everyone a lie detector test, nor did I warn a single one of their rights," he said. "This was not an investigation—it was merely a commander looking over the operations and trying to determine if there was any basis for an investigation."

The colonel said he was not sure of the motives of former Cpl. Ronald L. Ridenhour. Mr. Ridenhour is the Claremont, Calif., college student who last March, after he was discharged, wrote top Government officials about Songmy.

"I can't believe a guy who did not participate in something, that his conscience would bother him a year later more than the men involved," Colonel Henderson said.

Seats at Trial Sought

FORT BENNING, Ga., Nov. 27 (UPI)—Requests for press accommodations at the court-martial of Lieut. William Calley Jr., who is charged with mur-

dering 109 villagers at Songmy, are coming in from as far away as Australia.

No date has yet been set for the court-martial, which is scheduled to take place in a room that has just 33 spectator seats.

Calley Visited Father

FORT BENNING, Ga., Nov. 27 (AP)—Lieutenant Calley was granted a week's leave last month to visit his ailing father in Miami.

"He felt he had to get home and talk to his father—to reassure him," Col. Talton W. Long, deputy post commander, said today.

Lieutenant Calley was assigned to Colonel Long's office after returning to Fort Benning last June 21. The lieutenant was under investigation then in connection with the alleged massacre.

William Calley Sr., a diabetic, lives with his 15-year-old daughter, Dawn, in a trailer park at Hialeah, Fla. Besides William Jr. and Dawn he has two other daughters who have married and moved away.

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