

Songmy's Victims

To the Editor:

The utter horror of what happened at Songmy, and of the many other occurrences now coming to light where we have killed Vietnamese noncombatants in clear violation of the laws of war, has forfeited whatever right we ever had to remain in Vietnam. How hypocritical is any claim that we are in Vietnam as the defenders of democracy and justice.

Our position up to now has been that we are seeking an honorable peace. But our honor was as much a victim of the M-16's at Songmy as the women and children slaughtered there.

If this had been an isolated incident, with the participants promptly brought to trial and stern measures taken to prevent a recurrence, our honor, though tarnished, might have been saved. But it was not an isolated incident, as Jonathan

and Orville Schell [letter Nov. 26] and others have made clear. And the military, with shocking indifference, has delayed for more than a year and a half any proper investigation of the matter.

The White House has promised that illegal and immoral conduct will be dealt with in accordance with the rules of military justice. But justice, in this instance, means far more than bringing to trial those alleged to be responsible. It also means justice to the Vietnamese, whom we have so severely wronged.

If the facts, as reported, are substantiated by whatever court of inquiry is established, a public apology by the President to the Vietnamese, North and South, and indemnification to the survivors would be the very least we can do.

Beyond that, surely the time has come for a frank admission on our part that we have failed in Vietnam. We should immediately stop all bombing and other offensive action and withdraw all our forces as rapidly as the logistics and their safety will permit.

In this incident we have reached one of the lowest moral points in our history. Our greatness as a world leader, and in the eyes of our own countrymen, rests on the response we make to Songmy. [Editorial Nov. 27.]

JOHN FRENCH
New York, Dec. 3, 1969

Records of Songmy Impounded by Army In Possible Inquiry

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Dec. 7 (AP) — The United States Army has impounded daily operational records of the Americal Division company involved in the alleged massacre at Songmy, dating from six weeks before the alleged incident.

A spokesman said today that the records were being held for possible use in an investigation. He did not elaborate on the statement, nor did he say when the documents had been impounded.

Asked if the statement alluded to pending court-martial charges against First Lieut. William L. Calley Jr., accused of murdering 109 Vietnamese civilians, the spokesman said he did not know.

Because the records of Company C, First Battalion, 20th

Infantry, 11th Infantry Brigade, were impounded, the spokesman added, they could not be inspected by newsmen.

The spokesman said he could not say whether the records of Company C were still in United States Army hands or had been sent to Washington.

Company C arrived in South Vietnam Dec. 20, 1967, three months before the alleged incident at Songmy. It began operations after a two-week orientation and training period.

Stennis Proposes Presidential Study Of Civilian Killings

WASHINGTON, Dec. 7 (UPI) — Senator John C. Stennis, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, proposed today that President Nixon create a special commission to investigate the alleged slayings of Vietnamese civilians by American soldiers.

"I frankly think this is the most effective way to get at this," the Mississippi Democrat said in a television interview on the American Broadcasting Company's "Issues and Answers."

Senator Stennis added that a private study by an impartial group of "outstanding men"

would be preferable to a Congressional hearing, which he contended would tend "to go off in a half dozen or a dozen directions."

The Senator declined to comment on the case involving First Lieut. William L. Calley, facing a court martial on charges of murdering 109 Vietnamese civilians at Sonmy, on the ground that the case "has been discussed too much already."

Stanley R. Resor, Secretary of the Army, said on the National Broadcasting Company's "Meet the Press" television program that there was "a serious problem" as to whether Lieutenant Calley could be given a fair trial in view of the advance publicity about the case.

Humphrey Urges Panel

LOS ANGELES, Dec. 7 (UPI) — Former Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey called today for

the appointment of a Presidential commission to determine what the alleged massacre at Songmy means to "the whole moral structure of our society."