

16 DEC 69

SAIGON SENATORS REPORT ON SONGMY

Committee Puts Civilian Toll
at a Minimum of 43'

By JAMES P. STERBA

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Dec. 15 — A three-member committee of the South Vietnamese Senate submitted an official report to the Senate's permanent office today that said the committee believed a minimum of 43 civilians were killed by American troops on March 16, 1968, in the village of Songmy.

The two-page report was filed after three Senators returned Saturday from their second trip — this one unannounced and private — to the area of the alleged massacre by United States soldiers on the coastal edge of Quangnai Province.

The three Senators, headed by Tran Van Don, chairman of the Senate Defense Committee, said after their first trip to the area early this month that they believed many civilians had been killed by small-arms fire at close range, but they declined to estimate how many.

Senator Don emphasized today that the figure 43 was believed to be a minimum and represented only members of the direct families of the survivors interviewed at length by the committee.

Estimates of the numbers of civilians allegedly killed have ranged as high as 567.

9 Survivors Interviewed

The Senators reported that the specific minimum number was arrived at after a series of private interviews with nine survivors of nine families in Tucung, one hamlet in the village.

The interviews were conducted last Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. In contrast to their first trip to the area, the Senators were not accompanied by newsmen.

The Senate was scheduled to meet next week in a plenary session to discuss the report. The committee is expected to present more details of its investigation at that time.

The committee members also interviewed two South Vietnamese Army interpreters, Nguyen Dinh Phu and Duong Minh, who they said were with the United States troops who entered the Songmy area on the day of the alleged massacre, and several other persons who said they had witnessed the slayings.

Forty-three is the figure given by some provincial officials in the area as the number of civilians killed. The South Vietnamese Government in Saigon has denied that any massacre took place.