

## Soldiers Feel Shock and Pride on Songmy Study

By LAWRENCE VAN GELDER

Army personnel at installations from coast to coast reacted in varying degrees from latest round of charges filed in connection with the alleged killing of civilians in 1968 at Songmy, South Vietnam.

The range of response to the charges made Tuesday by the Army against 14 officers appeared to be typified by the comments of one officer at the Pentagon.

"From the day the Peers board began its inquiry, from the very first day, I knew what they were going to come up with," he said, "but my God, I didn't think they would involve General Koster and General Young."

Maj. Gen. Samuel W. Koster, who commanded the Americal Division in Vietnam at the time of the alleged killings, and Brig. Gen. George H. Young Jr., the assistant division commander at that time, were two of the officers charged following an investigation carried out by an Army panel headed by Lieut. Gen. William R. Peers.

### Rules and Procedures

The officer at the Pentagon, who served under Generals Koster and Young in the Americal Division, said of the charges: "I think this hurts the Army, yes. But maybe something good will result from it. Maybe we'll come up with rules and procedures that will avoid this sort of thing in the future."

The officer made clear a preference for anonymity, as did most of the Army personnel interviewed yesterday at the Pentagon and at Fort Hood, Tex.; Fort Benning, Ga.; Fort Leavenworth, Kan.; Fort Jackson, S. C.; Fort Meade, Md., and in the Sixth Army area, with headquarters in San Francisco.

Some Army personnel refused to comment on the case; others expressed reservations about commenting without knowing more about the legal basis of the charges; some pointed out that the officers had not been convicted.

But at the Pentagon, one officer familiar with the case said: "Soldiers know that most of the men who are charged by the Army go to trial, and that most of those who go to trial are convicted, and I think that because of this, most soldiers feel that these fellows are probably guilty, instead of perhaps guilty."

### Penalties Described

The charges, filed against the two generals as well as three colonels, two lieutenant colonels, three majors and four captains, vary from individual to individual. They include dereliction of duty, failure to obey lawful regulations and false swearing. The Army has accused the 14 officers of suppressing information about the alleged massacre. If found guilty in courts-martial, they face penalties of up to three years at hard labor and dismissal from the service.

Some officers interviewed yesterday mixed praise for the Army in pressing the case with

### Views at Installations Vary Following Charges by the Army Against 14 Officers

fear of its effects on military personnel.

At Fort Benning, a colonel said: "I do have a perverse pride in the fact that the Army did this to itself, I do have a tremendous fear that this may be an indication of the climate in this country which will have a damned bad effect on a career officer for some years to come.

"I have reservations about the timing of all of this because we are in a war, but I do believe that the professional Army has to be like Caesar's wife in the long run—above suspicion. And this is part of the price you pay for that, I guess."

### A New Breed

Another colonel at Fort Benning said: "This may be a virtue carried to a dangerous excess. First of all it may give us a new breed of soldier who will stop and ask why, and when that happens, you're in trouble in combat. Second, it may shatter the individual soldier's faith in his professional leadership. That's equally fatal. Third, it makes a man feel pretty bad when he hears about his fellow career officers facing this kind of charge after distinguished service.

"You wonder when they're going to get around to you and maybe that's the biggest danger of all—when you wonder about what you do for a living and why you do it. It's making me think quite a bit about my own career."

A captain scheduled to return to Vietnam asked: "What happens if I take my infantry company into an operation? What do I do? Do I think about tactics or do I start thinking about laying a court-martial defense? I am confused. I'm going to stay in the Army but I'm going to keep my tail down until things change."

At the Army's Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, where the most promising majors and lieutenant colonels receive advanced training, the word most often

used to describe the latest charges was "shocking." Like other officers, Maj. Walter Plague of Hastings-on-Hudson, N. Y., a 1958 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, was upset as he considered the future of career officers.

"I'm beginning to feel a bit like a second-class citizen," he said.

### 'The Price of War'

At the Sixth Army headquarters, a major said many officers believed that the Army's actions were good. "If there is wrongdoing," he said, "they like to think the Army isn't sweeping it under the rug."

Many of those interviewed said that the killing of innocent civilians in war was inevitable. At Fort Jackson, a sergeant major with 22 years of service said: "That's the price of war. They want us to be a police force for the world, but they tie our hands. Soldiers are trained to react mechanically and it's kill or be killed."

There was little indication of feeling that the Army had been looking for scapegoats in the case. At Fort Meade, one officer said: "If these men are found guilty, it will sadden me personally. After all, I'm a professional soldier. But it will not change my opinion that the Army is a wonderful institution."