

Songmy Captain Accused Of Responsibility in Deaths

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WASHINGTON, April 1 — The Army is already investigating an earlier charge that accuses Captain Medina of four murders, a maiming and an assault during the Songmy operation on March 16 and 17, 1968.

The new charge, however, conceptually broadens the Army inquiry by apparently placing the blame for most of the murders believed to have taken place upon the commander of the men who allegedly did the killing.

The Army today withdrew an earlier charge that Captain Medina concealed from his superiors knowledge of slayings at Songmy. The charge was withdrawn because, according to the Army, "it is not common practice to charge an individual with the commission of an offense and its concealment."

The men were members of Company C, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, which was under the command of Captain Medina when it swept into Songmy on a combat operation.

In an evening news conference in Atlanta, Captain Medina denied the charges and disclosed that they accuse him of the premeditated murder of not fewer than 175 Vietnamese civilians.

He repeated his denials of having participated in or ordered or seen any mass killings in Songmy.

The new charge of premeditated murder does not mean, according to Army spokesmen, that Captain Medina is accused of personally murdering any individuals.

Rather, the spokesmen said, the charge "involves deaths allegedly caused by Captain Medina as a principal."

As defined by the Army, "a principal is one who counsels, commands or procures another to commit an offense sub-



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Capt. Ernest L. Medina

sequently perpetrated . . . whether he is present or absent at the commission of the offense."

Altogether, 13 military men have been charged with committing murder and other crimes in Songmy. In addition, 12 other officers, including two generals, are accused of involvement in suppressing information about the alleged mass killings in Songmy by American soldiers.

Army sources indicated today that Captain Medina was not accused of being responsible for "all" of the killings that the Army believes occurred, but of "most of them."

Lieut. Gen. William R. Peers, who headed an Army board of inquiry on Songmy, told a news conference on March 17 that the inquiry established that "a tragedy of major proportions" took place there.

A heavily censored version of the report made by General Peers was publicly released. An article about the uncensored version appeared, last week in The New York Times and said that the report identified an officer as having introduced a "revenge element" into the Songmy operation.