

SF CHRONICLE

Medina's Plea for Objectivity

Washington

Captain Ernest L. Medina, accused by the Army of murdering "not less than" 175 civilians at My Lai 4, says only those who have fought in Vietnam can know what the guerrilla war there is really like.

Now involved in the maze of military justice, Medina is under court orders to make no public statements about the events in the South Vietnamese hamlet on March 16, 1968.

But the 33-year-old infantryman is free to speak about the charges against him — "very overwhelming, very staggering . . . it scares you" — and the general public's ability to appreciate conditions in Vietnam.

"I don't think any individual who has never been in combat, that has never been to Vietnam, that has been through the misery of living in mud, in the rain, in the heat, in the cold, that has never been shot at in anger, that has not had to watch his friends die or his blood spilling on the ground, can really formulate an opinion and be very objective about it," he said.

Medina was questioned by reporters in a UPI interview.

Formerly commander of Company C, First Battalion, 20th Infantry, Medina has been charged with several specific murders, with torturing and assaulting prisoners and with responsibility for the death of at least 175 persons killed at My Lai after his unit entered the village. The Army is still conducting an investigation, expected to last into the fall, which will determine whether he must stand trial.

Medina, who is stationed at Ft. Benning, Ga., was asked how his fellow officers felt about the charges against him. "Infantry officers who have served in Vietnam as rifle company commanders or infantry officers with infantry units — they are very sympathetic," he said. "I think many of them feel that it could be them, instead of me."

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