

SONGMY INQUIRY FREES 3 OFFICERS

General and 2 Are Cleared
of Cover-Up Charges

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WASHINGTON, June 23—The Army dismissed criminal charges today against a brigadier general and two other officers implicated in an alleged cover-up of the Songmy incident.

Two of the officers, Gen. George H. Young Jr., and Col. Nels A. Parson, had been accused of failure to obey lawful regulations and dereliction of duty. The third, Maj. Robert W. McKnight, had been charged with false swearing.

The decision to dismiss the charges was made by Lieut. Gen. Jonathan O. Seaman, commanding general of the First Army, "upon his evaluation that the charges were unsupported by the evidence," the Army announced.

In a separate announcement, the Army disclosed that charges of premeditated murder and assault with intent to murder had been lodged against two junior officers who had already been accused of attempted murder in connection with a 1969 incident in South Vietnam.

The two officers, Capt. Vincent N. Hartmann and First Lieut. Robert G. Lee, who are assigned to the Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, Ga., were accused of the premedi-

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Inquiry on Songmy Dismisses Charges Against 3 Officers



George H. Young Jr. Robert W. McKnight Nels A. Parson Associated Press

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tated murder of a Vietnamese female and assault with intent to murder a Vietnamese male. Captain Hartman, 34 years old, and Lieutenant Lee, 22, were charged on May 28 in connection with an incident that took place on or about June 15, 1969, in a hamlet in the delta area of South Vietnam.

According to the earlier charges, the two men ordered soldiers under their command to fire into buildings "used for human habitation."

The new charges, which also stem from June 15, 1969, raise the prospect that the two officers may have to face the death penalty for premeditated murder if it is decided to place their cases before a courts-martial.

The announcement that charges against General Young and the two other officers had been dismissed was made at Fort Meade, Md., headquarters of the First Army, and at the Defense Department.

The three officers have been assigned to Fort Meade since a special Army panel disclosed the charges against them on March 17. The panel had been appointed to determine whether mass killings took place in the village of Songmy, South Vietnam, in March of 1968 and whether such killings had been hushed up.

As a result of the panel's investigation, 14 officers were accused of involvement in the suppression of information. The charges against one of them

were subsequently dismissed, and the nature of the charge against Capt. Ernest L. Medina was changed to reflect actual participation in the mass killings.

Today's announcement leaves nine officers accused of involvement in suppression of information and 12 other soldiers accused of actual participation in the alleged killings. Only four of them have been ordered to face trial. The others are under investigation.

"The dismissal action was taken at the preliminary inquiry stage of processing court martial charges under the Uniform Code of Military Justice," the Army said.

"This is the stage where the responsible commander makes his evaluation, based on the advice of his own legal staff, of whether there is sufficient basis for further processing of the charges," the announcement continued. The dismissal was made before a proceeding comparable to a grand jury investigation was held.