

Medina Says South Vietnam's Police Killed 2 He Is Accused of Murdering

By ANTHONY RIPLEY

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ALBUQUERQUE, N. M., Aug. 11 — Capt. Ernest L. Medina, expanding his version of events surrounding the alleged massacre of South Vietnamese at Songmy says that two of the murders he is charged with were committed by the South Vietnamese national police.

As to a third charge of murder against him, he says that he killed a woman in the almost reflexive action of a combat situation, thinking that she was armed.

A fourth charge of premeditated murder of a 2-year-old boy is "completely untrue," the captain maintains.

The 33-year-old infantry captain is the highest-ranking military officer to be charged with direct responsibility for the events of March 16, 1968, in the Mylai 4 hamlet of the Songmy village complex in South Vietnam. The area is also called Pinkville.

Replies to Charges

He is also charged with maiming a prisoner, three counts of assault with a deadly weapon, and over-all responsibility for the death of at least 175 South Vietnamese civilians.

In a series of 26 interviews, speeches and news conferences over four days, he has maintained his innocence and rebutted a number of charges against him.

Captain Medina said that the name "Mad Dog Medina" was a nickname given him in training and was not given him because of any preoccupation with enemy body counts.

He said that he fired his weapon only twice on March 16, 1968, and saw only 25 to 28 bodies that day. He said that mines that caused the heavy casualties to his men a month had been laid by the Vietcong, despite some press reports that the mines were laid by South Korean troops stationed in the area earlier.

Awaits Inquiry Report

In addition, Capt. Medina provided graphic descriptions of his interrogation of a prisoner, using a pistol and an M-16 rifle, and of his killing of a South Vietnamese woman.

Many events, including the charge of maiming a prisoner by cutting off one of his fingers, he did not discuss because they occurred on March 16. Captain Medina is under orders to keep



The New York Times (by Garry Settle)

DISCOUNTS GOVERNMENT CHARGES: Capt. Ernest L. Medina during a visit Saturday to Montrose, Colo., his home town. Captain Medina is charged with murder of four persons.

silent about that day and will talk only about points already brought out before the Military Court ordered silence.

The captain is now stationed at Fort McPherson in Atlanta as a maintenance officer and is under no other military restrictions. He is awaiting the report of an investigation of the charges against him.

He left Albuquerque today to return to Fort McPherson after a trip to Colorado and New Mexico that included 22 interviews and news conferences in four days and four public appearances. He is attempting to raise money for his defense.

How He Won Nickname

Captain Medina took command of Company C, First Battalion, 20th Regiment of the 11th Infantry Brigade on Dec. 1, 1966, in Hawaii. He said that the company had received almost every award possible in training and that his driving leadership and insistence on excellence had won him the name "Mad Dog" while on maneuvers in mountains in Hawaii.

The company was chosen a year later to fly to Vietnam as the advance party for the brigade while the rest of the troops went by ship.

After several combat operations, he said, Company C was chosen as a part of Task Force Barker and was assigned to an area near Songmy in late January, 1968. The area was south of Quangnai City, he said, and the troops could see the enemy's Tet offensive of that year going on north of them. He said they spotted 250 Vietcong withdrawing from the city after the battle.

He said that women and children in the Vietcong group had been seen or reported to be carrying arms, some in uniform. Some carried the wounded and some had packs on their backs, he said.

Request Cleared Too Late

Because it was not in his immediate area, he said, he could take no action against the withdrawing Vietcong, but he requested artillery fire, which had to be cleared by South

Vietnamese troops operating immediately north of his position. The request took two hours and required "political clearance" from the South Vietnamese army, he said, and by the time it was approved the Vietcong had disappeared into Songmy.

The area, he said, was a free-fire zone where everyone was considered enemy. He said it had been under Vietcong control for 20 to 25 years.

In the following weeks, he said, his company took casualties from sniper fire, booby-traps, mines and small-arms exchanges in the area. He said that the situation had been marked by frustration, pressure and constant danger.

"I scrounged two extra mine detectors," he said.

On Feb. 16, he said, a patrol walked into a Vietcong mine field. Three men were killed and 16 were injured. Captain Medina said he had been shocked at the scene.

"To see parts of arms and legs lying around and to see your men with their intestines

hanging out was hard to forget," he said.

He said that the mine field had not been left by South Korean troops, as some reports have indicated. Koreans were operating in the area before Task Force Barker arrived.

"The V.C. had left markers for civilians showing them how to get through safely," he said.

An assault was ordered to clear the 48th Vietcong Battalion out of the Songmy area, and Captain Medina went in with 105 men of his company the morning of March 16.

The night before, he said, "I gave them a pep talk and told them what to expect."

Captain Medina said that the woman he is charged with killing on March 16 was first identified to him from a helicopter as "V.C. with weapon" and was marked with a smoke grenade. He said he sent men to "secure the weapon." When he arrived, he said, he saw a woman lying on her stomach on the ground but saw no weapon. As he turned to go, the woman

moved an arm under her body, he said.

"In my mind I remembered 'V.C. with weapon,' and 'The first thing in my mind' was that she might have a grenade," he said. "I fired two shots and I assume I killed her."

Denies Shooting Child

Her death is one of four charges of premeditated murder brought against Captain Medina.

Captain Medina, is also charged with the death of a 2-year-old boy, but he said, "I never shot a South Vietnamese child."

The other two deaths were "two V. C. prisoners who were executed by the national police" of South Vietnam he said.

Two days after the Songmy incident, Captain Medina said, his troops captured four prisoners. One was a woman he identified as a Vietcong nurse and the two others were described as an instructor in terrorist tactics and a propaganda expert.