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First of Sonmy Trials Opens Today in Texas

WASHINGTON, Oct. 5 (AP)—A 30-year-old Army sergeant will enter a courtroom at Fort Hood, Tex., tomorrow to defend himself against charges that he shot "about 30" Vietnamese in the tiny village of Sonmy.

Staff Sgt. David Mitchell of St. Francisville, La., is the first of 25 soldiers, ranging from privates to generals, involved in the alleged massacre to go before a court-martial since the Army charged the first man 13 months ago.

In that time, charges against eight soldiers have been dismissed while courts-martial have been ordered for seven others, including Sergeant Mitchell. Investigations are continuing in the 10 other cases.

Months of pretrial hearings involving numerous defense motions, including ones for dismissal or to subpoena classified documents, have delayed the setting of trial dates.

Even in Sergeant Mitchell's case, no date has been formally set. However, the military judge said last week that he expected to begin selecting members of the court-martial panel sometime tomorrow.

An element of uncertainty was added over the weekend when the sergeant's attorney, O. C. Brown, said he probably would seek a change in the court-martial's site. Mr. Brown

Sergeant, 30, Charged With Slaying 30 Vietnamese in Alleged Massacre

said he was dissatisfied with the make-up of the trial board.

The 25 soldiers originally implicated in the Sonmy case were in two groups. Thirteen were accused of murder and other crimes in the alleged massacre on March 16, 1968, during a sweep by a rifle company of the Americal Division. The second group of 12 is accused of hushing up the alleged event.

Lieut. Gen. William R. Peers, who led an Army field panel investigating whether the incident had been covered up, stated last March 17 that the inquiry "clearly established that a tragedy of major proportions occurred."

General Peers also said "certain individuals, wittingly or unwittingly, by their action suppressed information about the incident from passing up the chain of command."

Sergeant Mitchell, who has pleaded not guilty, is charged with assault with intent to commit murder. The Army accuses him of shooting "about 30" Vietnamese. His commander, First Lieut. William L. Calley, was charged Sept. 5, 1969, with the murders of no fewer than 102 civilians. He was the first soldier accused in the alleged massacre.

A pretrial hearing for Lieutenant Calley, 27, of Miami, is scheduled to resume Oct. 13. The military judge at Fort Benning, Ga., is expected to rule on defense motions for release of Congressional testimony relating to the alleged incident and questioning the Army's jurisdiction.