

DEC 9 1971

SF Examiner

# General Cleared Of Viet Murders

FT. MEADE (Md.) — The Army today dismissed charges of murder and assault that have been filed against Brig. Gen. John W. Donaldson in the slaying of six Vietnamese civilians.

Donaldson was accused of shooting the Vietnamese from a helicopter in the period from November, 1968, to January, 1969, while he was commander of the 11th Infantry Brigade of the Americal Division in Vietnam.

The decision to dismiss the charges was made by Lt. Gen. Claire E. Hutchin Jr., the 1st Army commanding general. Donaldson's current duty is special assistant to the chief of staff of the 1st Army.

Hutchin acted on the basis of a grand jury-type investigation conducted by Maj. Gen. Robert R. Ploger, the commanding general at Ft. Belvoir, Va. The investigation lasted four months during which 23 witnesses were heard.

"Evidence established that no offenses were committed by Gen. Donaldson, then a colonel," the Army announcement said.

Donaldson was charged with shooting the civilians as he directed ground actions from his chopper.

According to Washington reports of the investigation of Donaldson, before Donaldson was actually charged, the then-unnamed general defended himself by saying that he fired at figures on the ground who were taking "evasive action."

Army sources said it was an unwritten rule in Vietnam that anyone who ran when an aircraft approached was assumed to be enemy.