

The Army's Secret Inquiry Describes A 2nd Massacre, Involving 90 Civilians

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WASHINGTON, June 4—The Army's official secret report on the Mylai massacre has revealed that a second massacre, involving the killing of as many as 90 civilians, "did in fact" take place less than two miles from the hamlet of Mylai 4 on the same morning — March 16, 1968.

The still-classified summary of the four-month inquiry into the Mylai incident said that troops from Bravo Company—a sister unit of Charlie Company in Task Force Barker—stormed into the hamlet of Mykhe 4 near the South China Sea and began shooting indiscriminately at civilians.

"It appears . . . that the number of noncombatants killed by [the company] on 16 March 1968 may have been as high as 90," the report said. "The company reported a total of 38 VC KIA [Vietcong killed in action] on 16 March, but it is likely that few if any were Vietcong."

Picked by Pentagon

The Army investigating team was headed by Lieut. Gen. William R. Peers, who was personally picked by high Pentagon officials in November, 1969, to head the inquiry. A complete copy of the final one-volume report has been provided to The New York Times.

No details about the second massacre were made available to the public when the Peers panel publicly announced some of its findings on March 17, 1970, and General Peers told a news conference at the time that he had "no knowledge" of any incidents similar to the Mylai 4 massacre.

The official report of the Peers inquiry said that Bravo Company's mission on March 16 was to assault what was depicted as the headquarters area for a Vietcong battalion at Mylai 1, another hamlet in the village of Sonmy in the north-central area of South Vietnam. The company's airborne assault began about 45 minutes after the men of Charlie Company had initiated their assault on Mylai 4, one and a half miles to the west, prompting an irony that was described without comment in the Peers report:

"Some member of B [Bravo] Company believed that sniper fire was received from the west as the company moved out from LZ [landing zone], but it is possible that these individuals mistook for hostile fire some occasional rounds landing in the area which had been fired by C [Charlie] Company as it advanced in their direction . . . to the west."

Boobytrap Casualties

There was no opposition at Bravo Company's landing zone, according to the Peers report, and the company began proceeding to Mylai 1. The mission was suddenly shifted, however, after the unit took a number of casualties from enemy boobytraps and, the report said, "B Company made no further attempts to enter Mylai 1 during the operation."

The First Platoon, commanded by First Lieut. Thomas K. Willingham, moved south across a small bridge to the hamlet of Mykhe 4 a few hundred yards from Mylai 1. The Peers report notes that the belief that the area was a support base area for the Vietcong coupled with the loss of men because of boobytraps, left the infantrymen extremely wary as they crossed the bridge.

After crossing the bridge, the report continues, about a dozen men attached to the First Platoon approached to within 75 meters of Mykhe 4, at which time they "opened fire on the hamlet."

The report said it was not possible to establish whether the lead elements of the platoon opened fire on the villagers in accordance with a previously outlined plan, in response to sniper fire (a few soldiers testified they had "heard" some snipers), or simply spontaneously.

Fire Called Intense

"In any case," the report said, "an intense volume of fire from M-16 rifles and the M-60 machinegun attached to the First Squad was directed into and around the hamlet for four or five minutes."

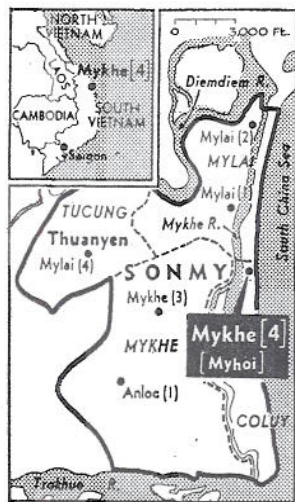
"Inhabitants of the hamlet," the report added, "mostly women and children, were cut down as they ran for shelter or attempted to flee over the ridge of higher ground toward the beach." After the firing, the report said, "Lieutenant Willingham gave the order to cease fire, and the [soldiers] moved south along the trail into the hamlet."

Later, the report noted, the commander of Bravo Company, the late Capt. Earl R. Michles, ordered Lieutenant Willingham by radio "to insure that women and children were not killed."

The killings had not yet ended, the Peers report said. After the shootings, the full platoon began a search and destroy operation in the hamlet, "burning the houses and destroying the bunkers or shelters which each family had constructed in or near their homes."

TNT Charges Used

The report noted that "elements of the platoon searching the hamlet killed an undetermined number of noncombatants in the process." TNT charges were used to destroy most of the bunkers or shelters, the report said, adding that "some witnesses alleged that the members of the [platoon] made no attempt to determine if shelters were occupied before throwing explo-



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sives into the entrances, and that in some cases unarmed Vietnamese were shot down as they exited from their shelters."

The Peers panel said that most of the members of Bravo Company who participated in the assault "have either refused to testify about the event or disclaimed any recollection of their observations." The report added: "For this reason, it has not been possible to establish the facts with any degree of certainty." But the report said that "both testimony and circumstantial evidence strongly suggest that a large number of noncombatants were killed during the search of the hamlet."

Concluding a separate chapter with Bravo Company, the Peers report said that "it

should be noted that, although 39 VC KIA were reported [during four days of operation], no weapons were reported, captured, no casualties were suffered [by the platoon] and there were no indications that the First Platoon was engaging an armed force."

"These circumstances," the report continued, "should have prompted inquiries from higher headquarters, but apparently none was made."

Widely Reported

The fact that a second massacre took place has been widely reported since early 1970, when the Army investigating panel began interrogating members of Bravo Company during its secret hearings in the Pentagon. The final report issued by the Peers panel repeatedly referred to the "incidents at Sonmy village," and did not limit its discussion to Mylai 4.

Yet, at a new conference on March 17, 1970, at which charges against 14 officers—in connection with the cover-up of Mylai 4 were announced, General Peers specifically denied having any personal knowledge of a similar massacre. *INSERT N.O.S.C.*

The final Peers report, in a chapter summarizing the findings of the inquiry, stated that on March 16, 1968, United States Army troops of [Task Force Barker] massacred a large number of noncombatants in two hamlets of Sonmy village."

The panel was set up by the then Secretary of the Army, Stanley R. Resor, and Gen. William C. Westmoreland, the

Army Chief of Staff, a few weeks after the first reports of the Mylai massacre were published and more than 16 months after the incident occurred.

General Peers eventually assembled a staff of more than 90, including 34 officers, and conducted nearly 400 interviews in Washington and in South Vietnam—about 50 of them with members of Bravo Company—before completing his one-volume report on the incident.

The Peers report was the basis of criminal charges by the Army against 14 Americal Division officers in connection with the suppression of the massacre. *INSERT N.O.S.C.*

Accused of Murder

One of those charged was then Captain Willingham, the platoon leader of Bravo Company. Earlier the officer had also been accused publicly of the unpremeditated murder of 20 civilians, an action that prompted more newspaper articles about the so-called second massacre. In June, 1970, both the coverup and the murder charges were dropped by the Army against Captain Willingham because, according to an official statement, "based on available evidence, no further action should be taken in the prosecution of these charges."

Up to now, no other member of Bravo Company has been publicly charged or prosecuted in connection with the shootings at Mykhe 4.