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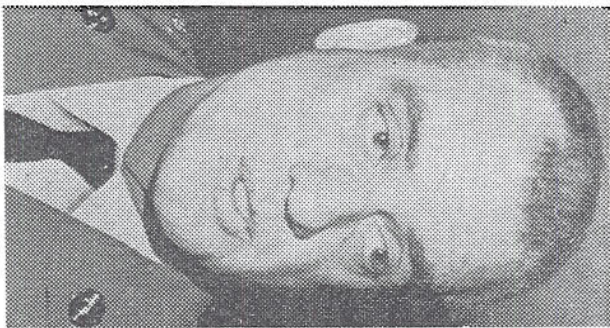
Wooldridge to Invoke Fifth Amendment; Denies Guilt

WASHINGTON, Oct. 7 (AP)—Sgt. Maj. William O. Wooldridge, once the Army's top enlisted man, said today he would invoke the Fifth Amendment at Senate hearings, but did not consider himself guilty of anything.

Speaking in the company of his lawyer in a Senate corridor, Sergeant Major Wooldridge told reporters he had been sickened by the accusations leveled against him. He said his name had been unfairly blackened and his 28-year Army career ruined by allegations that he was a key figure among a group of senior sergeants who profited from the operations of military clubs.

The lawyer, David L. Thomas of Huntsville, Ala., said that on his advice Sergeant Major Wooldridge would invoke the constitutional protection against self-incrimination when he is called to testify Thursday. Mr. Thomas said the Senate panel investigating an alleged conspiracy by Sergeant Major Wooldridge and a clique of sergeants had already prejudged his client.

"I'm convinced a military court-martial would give him a fair trial," Thomas said. "But with all this political pressure it may be difficult."



William O. Wooldridge

Sergeant Major Wooldridge expressed amazement at the wide range of allegations by military investigators and others. These include allegations of protection by influential generals, including the Army chief of staff; the concealing of vital records and the control of assignments of mili-

tary personnel to strategic club positions on three continents.

How, he asked, could a man with only a tenth-grade education do all of those things?

The sergeant major denied he had enriched himself and said his wife had difficulty paying bills at the end of the month.

He said he was worried about what effect the notoriety would have on himself, his wife and his four children—two in college, and two at home in Junction City, Kan.

"I could never serve effectively in another command because this thing would always follow me," he said. He did not indicate if he was considering resigning.

These were his responses to some of the allegations against him:

Allegation: He is a part owner of the Meredem Corporation, which allegedly sold millions of dollars of supplies to clubs controlled by members of the clique of sergeants.

Answer: He bought Meredem stock last year after clearing it with the Judge Advocate General who assured him there was no conflict of interest and so far he has received \$3,500 in dividends.

Allegation: He attended so-called summit meetings of mili-

generals at Fort Benning, Ga., and Lake George, N. Y., to set up a scheme to invest illicit proceeds from services clubs.

Answer: He had been to Fort Benning only twice, both times in his official capacity of sergeant major of the Army. He said he has never been to Lake George.

Allegation: He and other sergeants controlled the club system at the 24th Infantry Division in Germany during a period when \$350,000 annually was skimmed from slot-machine receipts.

Answer: His only connection with the non-commissioned officers club was that he had seen copies of the minutes of a monthly board meeting in his capacity as division sergeant major. He said he had visited one of the clubs about twice a week but had never been involved in any thefts.

Allegation: He arranged the assignment of members of the clique from Augsburg, Germany to Fort Benning and to Vietnam.

Answer: "To fix an assignment is physically impossible for anyone, even the chief of staff."

Sergeant Major Wooldridge conceded that as a 20-year-old private in 1943 he had been court-martialed and sentenced

to five months at hard labor for stealing \$8 from telephone coin boxes in London.

He said he and another soldier had been drinking and had broken into a coin box so they could buy more beer.

Investigators have testified that Sergeant Major Wooldridge was absent without leave from his unit on more than one occasion.

He said he had been AWOL once, when he was eight hours late getting back to a hospital in England where he had been recovering from a war wound.

'Shocked' Over Charges

WASHINGTON, Oct. 7 (UPI)—Sergeant Major Wooldridge said he was "shocked, sick, stunned" over the charges. "I've been in the Army 28 years. Never, in my wildest nightmare, did I believe this could happen to me," he said.

"If half of what they tell about me is true," he said, "I've been able to control every General in the army, including the Chief of Staff. I've been powerful enough to conceal and

destroy records at Fort Holabird, Md., depository for the C.I.D. [Criminal Investigating Division] and direct the military assignment of personnel all over the world." "And I only got to the 10th grade in school," he said.