

Songmy

The Massacre

Liberation News Service

1969

TROUNGAN, South Vietnam (LNS)—The inhabitants of this tiny village tell a story that one British Newspaper described as “The Massacre That Chilled The World”. They are the survivors of Songmy.

On March 16, 1968 a company of U.S. soldiers entered Songmy, meeting no opposition. They ordered all inhabitants out of their homes and gathered them together in three groups, about 200 yards apart. When the houses had been cleared the troops dynamited those made of brick and set fire to the wooden ones.

They then lined up the villagers along ditches and bomb craters and shot them, with machine-guns and M-16's. Most of the 567 victims were old men, women and children. More than a hundred people survived by lying still under the bodies of their neighbors.

The massacre of Songmy has been confirmed by GIs who were there. Sgt. Michael A. Bernhardt, now stationed with a basic training company at Fort Dix, New Jersey, said “It took 15 to 20 minutes to wipe out the village.” Asked at a press conference whether the villagers had attempted to run away or had protested to the American troops, Bernhardt said, “Some of them fled. The rest couldn't quite understand what was going on—I guess they never expected it.”

Pvt. Michael Terry was quoted by The Times of London as saying:

“They just marched through shooting everybody. Seems like no one said anything—they just started pulling people out and shooting them. They had them in a group standing over a ditch—just like a Nazi-type thing...One officer ordered a kid to machine-gun everybody down, but the kid just couldn't do it. He threw the machine-gun down and the officer picked it up...”

Songmy, located on the Eastern coast of South Vietnam about 250 miles south of the “Demilitarized Zone”, was in an area known as “pinkville”, in reference to the region's popular support of liberation forces.

According to Sgt. Bernhardt, his unit had entered the village with orders to “destroy the village and all its inhabitants.” The Army has so far refused to divulge the source of the order, but has charged a platoon leader in the Company with the murder of a “multiple number” of Vietnamese civilians.

The horror of Songmy has recalled the memory of Lidice, the Czechoslovakian village that was razed and its inhabitants executed by Nazi troops in 1942 in retaliation for the assassination of a Nazi official.

The sad fact is, however, that Songmy is probably only one of many such incidents.

Reports from NLF sources in South Vietnam indicate that during “Search and Destroy” operations last January and February in the Ba Lang An area, U.S. troops killed more than 300 civilians on the spot and transported 11,000 others to concentration camps.

During the same type of operation in Aunag Nam province, according to the sources, “thousands of people were killed in mass slaughters.”

In two villages alone (Binh Duong and Binh Dao), 630 people were killed, though it was not clear whether U.S. or South Vietnamese troops were responsible.

In the wake of the revelations about Songmy, the NLF delegation in Paris charged that U.S. troops had drowned about 1200 South Vietnamese men and women early this year at the coastal village of Balagan.

The victims were taken from concentration camps, towed out to sea in large boats and then sunk by U.S. warships which veered sharply enough to capsize the boats. An NLF document on the incident, published in March, was ignored by the American press.

NLF sources have generally been considered unreliable by the U.S. newspapermen, but it was these sources that originally reported the Songmy massacre right after it happened.

“Over there (in Vietnam), you can’t tell who the enemy is. Those women and kids are the enemy too.”

—Former Marine Cpl. Fino Rivas of New York City

A war of attrition becomes a war of genocide when your enemy is the people. The massacre of Songmy was not a fluke. It rests well within overall U.S. policy in Vietnam.

The majority of the people in South Vietnam live in the liberated countryside. Through the hamlet and village elected councils and the people’s associations—the farmers’, minorities’, and women’s liberation groups—the Provisional Revolutionary Government has taken shape.

Hospitals, schools, land reform, newspapers, people’s courts—through the institutions of the people, the people are forming their new nation.

Hospitals are hidden in deep caves, their access tunnels reaching as far as ten miles. Schools are set up in forest clearings; they disappear with the approach of U.S. troops.

This is the U.S.’s enemy. The only strategy the U.S. could have chosen to fight the Vietnamese People’s War is the one they chose: to destroy the people, their culture, their land.

Sen. Edward Kennedy stated in recent Senate hearings that there has been over one million civilian casualties in Vietnam mostly at the hands of the U.S. forces.

To talk of Songmy with horror is to be naive. All of our presence in Vietnam has been a massacre and based on a program of calculated genocide—systematic murder of the population. Songmy becomes nothing when compared with the regular B-52 raids and destruction of the rice crops by defoliation.

The massacre can only end when every U.S. serviceman has been brought home.

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