

General Says Refusal Insignificant Incident

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SAIGON (UPI)—A U.S. Army general said Thursday the case of five American infantrymen who temporarily refused to go into battle was an insignificant incident which detracted from bravery shown by thousands of other GIs in scoring a major victory in the Vietnam War.

"When you focus on this very small, insignificant incident involving the five men," said Maj. Gen. Loyd B. Ramsey, "it detracts from the outstanding contributions and accomplishments of more than 3,000 troops who did their jobs as professionals."

Ramsey, 51, of Somerset, Ky., is the commander of the Americal Division. He gave his view in a telephone interview with UPI from his headquarters at Chu Lai 335 miles northeast of Saigon.

"This was one of the greatest battles and victories my men have fought," Ramsey said of the campaign against North Vietnamese forces in the Que Son Valley. "The incident, a very small incident, was taken way out of context."

U.S. military spokesmen said the incident occurred last Sunday when five men of Company A, 3rd Battalion, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, refused to obey the orders of their young acting commander to advance into jungles where they had been engaged for several days in heavy fighting with North Vietnamese regulars.

The young officer, 1st Lt. Eugene Shurtz, 26, of Cedar-town, Iowa, reported the mutiny to battalion headquarters in a conversation overheard by war correspondents.

The battalion executive officer, Maj. Richard Waite, 38, of Atchison, Kan., and Sgt. Okey Blankenship of Panther, W. V., flew to A Company's position. Ten minutes later the entire 90-man unit advanced without protest with Lt. Shurtz and completed its mission.

Shurtz, who was relieved of command following the incident, issued a statement Thursday which praised his men but declined interviews. He has been in Vietnam about one month.

"The delay of my company was based on the hesitation of five men," Shurtz said. "All my men in the day's action did perform their mission in an extremely professional manner."

"I believe Alpha Company is an excellent unit and for anyone to believe otherwise would be a slap in the face to the men who gave their lives and those who suffered wounds and the remainder of the unit which executed its mission courageously and to the best of its ability."

"War is hell and in every tough situation a few people reach their breaking points," Ramsey said. "These five men were short-timers. They had seen their friends killed and

wounded."

Ramsey said the men of Company A and other troops of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade prevented North Vietnamese troops from taking a refugee camp at Hiep Duc in what he described as "a fierce fight, and I mean fierce."

"As far as I'm concerned, the enemy has been defeated badly, very badly," Ramsey said.