

Former Commander Claims Only Five Stopped**Soldiers Say Whole Unit Quit Fighting**

SONG CHANG VALLEY, Vietnam (AP) — The former commander of A Company said Friday only five soldiers refused to obey his order Sunday to go into combat in the hills south of Da Nang. But some of the soldiers said the whole company rebelled.

Lt. Eugene Shurtz Jr., 25, of Davenport, Iowa, relieved of command Monday, said five men "desired to see the inspector general rather than move with the company . . . The remainder of the company was ready to go."

Interviewed in the field, a group of the soldiers said the whole company was together in refusing to obey orders after five days of hard fighting because, as one of them put it: "Morale was at rock bottom." None of the soldiers who heard this contradicted the statement.

Some of the men of Company A, a unit of the American Division's 196th Brigade, agreed that Shurtz was a good soldier and had been required to take over the company in a bad situation. He had been put in command three weeks earlier.

Shurtz also had a good word for his men when talking with newsmen at Landing Zone Baldy, headquarters of the 196th Brigade where he has been reassigned as assistant personnel administrative officer. It was the first time he had talked with newsmen since his removal.

"All my men did go into the day's action and performed their assigned missions in an extremely professional manner," he said.

"I believe Company A is definitely an excellent unit, and for anyone to believe otherwise would be a slap in the face to families and friends, those who suffered wounds, and the remainder of the unit who executed their mission courageously and to the best of their ability."

The battle-worn and under-strength company went into action only after the battalion commander sent an officer and a veteran sergeant to talk to the men.

Newsmen went into the field to get the A Company soldiers' views of Shurtz' statement that only five men were involved.

"It's probably right that there were five who said they wouldn't go," said Pfc. Fred Sanders of Aiken, S.C., a medic.

"But when they stood up and said they wouldn't go, others said they wouldn't go either. I reckon it was moral support because nobody . . . we didn't want to go."

Said Pfc. Carl Morton of Elmsford, N.Y.: "The whole company definitely was behind the refusal. None of us thought we would withstand being

pinned down another day or spend another night out there.

"So we decided somebody had to see the I.G. (inspector general). Everybody couldn't, so those five volunteered and everybody agreed that they would represent the entire company to try to get someone out there that could do something about what was going on.

"Now they're trying to say that only those five men were the ones that wanted to refuse. The whole company was not ready to move out."

Sanders explained this was why the company refused to

obey the order: "Everybody was afraid we'd get somebody more killed and wounded. I felt we should wait for more support. We didn't know what they (the enemy) had out there."

Pointing out that the company had been repulsed repeatedly in attacks on enemy bunkers, Sanders continued: "We thought we'd be making the same mistake twice. I think that's what I was, making the same mistake twice. Everyone was scared. It was not a matter of discipline."

Sanders said after the company finally moved out that what it thought were enemy bunkers

turned out to be shallow trenches. The company, which is continuing to sweep the floor of Song Chang Valley, has met little resistance because the North Vietnamese pulled out.

At Landing Zone Baldy, Shurtz was asked if the company's refusal to obey his order was a failure of his leadership and he replied: "No, I think it just stemmed from fear."

With this Pfc. Morton agreed, saying: "Fear? Yes. We'd all been through it quite a bit. It was a green company and most of us had not seen the hard core NVA (North Vietnamese troops) in any kind of numbers. Every-