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1 cmg 1 Testimony of PFC Lawrence M. Colburn,
2 RA 18 975 748, Company B, 4/46th Infantry,
3 1st Armored Division, Fort Hood, Texas,
4 taken at Office of The Inspector General,
5 Headquarters, Department of the Army,
6 Washington, D. C., at 1015 to 1215 hours
7 on 19 June 1969, by COL William V. Wilson,
8 IG.
9

10 Q. PFC Colburn, I'm Colonel Wilson. I'm an
11 investigator from the Office of The Inspector General
12 at DA--is where you are--

13 A. Yes, sir.
14

15 Q. This investigation concerns the alleged destruc-
16 tion of a village in South Vietnam nicknamed Pinkville.
17 The Vietnamese name for the village is My Lai (4), and
18 it's about five or six miles north of Quang Ngai City.
19 The incident allegedly occurred in March of 68 during the
20 time Company C, 1/20th Infantry, Task Force Barker con-
21 ducted search and destroy operations on the Batangan
22 Peninsula. The investigation is official and is being
23 made at the direction of the Chief of Staff of the Army.
24 The investigation is privileged in the sense that the
25 report will be made to the Chief of Staff of the Army.
26 The substance thereof should not be discussed with others.
27 It'll carry a CONFIDENTIAL classification. The purpose
28 of the investigation is to determine the facts surrounding
29 the operation in question.
30

31 I'd like to place you under oath. Will you
32 stand and raise your right hand?

33 (The witness was sworn.)
34

35 Please state your full name, grade, and
36 serial number.

37 A. Lawrence M. Colburn, PFC, RA 18 975 748.
38

39 Q. Organization, station, and present duty assign-
40 ment.
41

42 A. I'm with Company B, 4/46th Infantry, 1st Armored
43 Division, Fort Hood, Texas. I am an automatic rifleman.
44

45 Q. What was your duty assignment in March 1968?

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A. I was a helicopter door gunner.

2
3 Q. Please describe in detail the events which
4 occurred when elements of Task Force Barker conducted
5 a combat assault in the vicinity of a village called
6 My Lai (4). And this operation took place on the 16th of
7 March. Be as specific as possible.

8 A. All right, sir.

9
10 We were working out of LZ Dottie, which is
11 about 15 miles from Quang Ngai. It was about 9:30 in
12 the morning when we got our first mission, and we went
13 into the area with an OH-23 and two gun ships. We were
14 making reconnaissance of the area, and we saw that the
15 people from the village were moving out. And they had
16 their personal belongings with them, and they were moving
17 down this road, leaving the village. We thought that they
18 might be sending in artillery and that was the reason for
19 the people leaving. But after we pulled some more recon-
20 naissance and came back into the village, we found that
21 a lot of the people that were leaving were dead alongside
22 the road. We thought maybe the gun ships had done it.
23 We were also working with the sharks; that's another
24 assault helicopter unit. We started popping smoke on
25 the wounded and--because we knew they were civilians,
26 and there were infantrymen on the ground and we were
27 expecting the infantrymen to give some sort of assistance.
28 Every person that we did pop smoke on, the infantrymen
29 went over, and if they were still alive, they killed them.
30 We sat down once and tried to explain the situation to
31 one of the infantrymen, but it didn't seem to help any.
32 That was a long time ago.

33
34 Just on the outside of the village there was
35 a large irrigation ditch of some kind, and it was full
36 of dead and wounded people. And the crew chief on the
37 OH-23 that I was flying on spotted two children that were
38 still alive. We sat down again and med'evac'd one of the
39 children to an ARVN hospital. Mr. Thompson, the pilot
40 of the OH-23, saw some people in a bunker. And they were
41 between ground forces, and the infantrymen were killing
42 everyone in the village so Mr. Thompson wanted to try
43 to get them out. So we sat down, and Mr. Thompson went
44 over to the bunker and got the people out and called down
45 a gun ship. We placed the people on the gun ship and got

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them out of the area before they were killed.

Q. What time did you go on station that morning?

A. I think it was about 9 o'clock, sir, maybe earlier.

Q. Nine o'clock?

A. It may have been earlier, sir. I don't remember.

Q. Did you go on station when the combat assault was taking place?

A. Yes, sir, we did.

Q. Did you see the slicks land?

A. No, sir, I didn't.

Q. Did you see the helicopter column which brought the ground troops in?

A. Yes, I did, sir.

Q. Did you observe firing from the escort gun ships of the troop column?

A. The sharks, sir?

Q. Yes.

A. Yes, sir, I did.

Q. Was this firing on the landing zone?

A. It was on the villagers in the village, sir.

Q. It was on the village?

A. Well, I didn't see the firing during the CA itself, sir, but the sharks were on station at the same time we were. And that's when I saw the firing, sir.

Q. Where were the gun ships with relation to the slicks as they moved toward the landing zone?

A. Sir, I saw them in the air in the column, but I didn't see them land.

Q. Well, while they were in the air, with reference to the slicks, which would be in the center--were the gun ships forward of the column, parallel to the column, or to the rear of the column?

A. I can't remember, sir. I can't say.

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1 Q. You mentioned that people were leaving the
 2 area. What route were they taking to leave the area?

3 A. It was just a dirt road. It was in the
 4 direction of Quang Ngai City. I don't know if it was
 5 north or south.

6
 7 Q. When did you first see these people?

8 A. We had been on station about 15 minutes, sir.

9
 10 Q. How many people were there?

11 A. Seventy-five or eighty, sir.

12
 13 Q. When did you first notice the wounded on the
 14 road?

15 A. After we--we reconned the outer part of the
 16 village, sir, because we had seen a VC earlier, and
 17 after we'd come back in I noticed that they were dead.

18
 19 Q. How many were dead?

20 A. Twenty or thirty, sir.

21
 22 Q. This was on the road?

23 A. Well, this was all around the village, sir.
 24 On the road itself, a dozen, sir.

25
 26 Q. Did you see these 12 on the road when you first
 27 got on station?

28 A. I saw them leaving the village alive, but then
 29 when we came back, they were on the road but they were
 30 dead.

31
 32 Q. How can you tell that these were the same
 33 people?

34 A. I can't, really, sir. I just--they were just
 35 villagers leaving the village. There may have been a
 36 steady stream of them. They may have not been the same
 37 ones, but out of the same village, apparently.

38
 39 Q. The first time you sat down--what was the
 40 purpose of that?

41 A. To try to get it across to the infantrymen
 42 that we were popping smoke not to have them kill the
 43 villagers but to assist them.

44
 45 Q. And this was in the vicinity of the road of
 46 the village--

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5 cmg 1 A. It was about a hundred meters off the road,
2 sir. It was in a little field just on the outside of
3 the village.
4

5 Q. How many people were in this ditch that you
6 mentioned?

7 A. They were piled up upon one another, sir.
8 There were at least a hundred, sir.
9

10 Q. Did you see this when you first got on station?

11 A. The crew chief did, sir; but I didn't see it
12 until later when he pointed it out to me.
13

14 Q. He saw it when you first got there?

15 A. I'm not sure when he saw it, sir.
16

17 Q. Who was the crew chief?

18 A. Specialist Androtta.
19

20 Q. What's his status?

21 A. He died about three weeks later, sir.
22

23 Q. KIA?

24 A. Yes, sir.
25

26 Q. Which door were you in?

27 A. The right door, sir.
28

29 Q. This would be the starboard door.

30 A. Yes, sir.
31

32 Q. The child that you you med evac'd to the
33 hospital--was it wounded?

34 A. No, sir. He was in shock, but he wasn't
35 wounded.
36

37 Q. Age?

38 A. Three years.
39

40 Q. Was this child in the ditch?

41 A. Yes, sir.
42

43 Q. Where did you take the child?

44 A. I don't know exactly, sir. It was an ARVN
45 hospital.

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1 Q. How many wounded, did you say, were killed by
2 the infantry?

3 A. Did I actually see?
4

5 Q. Yes.

6 A. Three, sir.
7

8 Q. Where were they?

9 A. There was one woman, not on the road, but along-
10 side the road in some grass. She was hiding. She knew
11 what was going on and she was hiding. And then there was
12 a young girl along a rice paddy dyke, just in that same
13 field where we sat down. And then one child, just on the
14 upper side of the ditch, sir.
15

16 Q. What method was used to kill these people?

17 A. M-16, sir.
18

19 Q. Automatic or single?

20 A. Automatic, sir.
21

22 Q. How many people participated in this act?

23 A. Three, sir.
24

25 Q. Three individuals shot three individuals.

26 A. Yes, sir.
27

28 Q. The same person?

29 A. No. It was one different individual for each
30 KIA, sir.
31

32 Q. Was anybody with the US soldier when he shot
33 these people?

34 A. Yes. He had infantrymen behind him.
35

36 Q. In clear observation?

37 A. This was the--the one girl alongside--or in the
38 rice paddy. There were infantrymen all over, and I'm sure
39 they did observe it, yes, sir.
40

41 Q. What did this man look like?

42 A. I think it was an officer, sir.
43

44 Q. Why do you think that?

45 A. He had captain's bars on his helmet, sir.

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Q. What about the woman?

A. She was hiding alongside the road, like I said. And we came back into the area, and the infantrymen were just leaving from the road. I didn't really see this one, sir, but we went to see if she was--if she had hidden from them, and she was still in the same position alongside the road, only she had been killed.

Q. What about the child?

A. The child was just on the other side of the ditch. I think it was his mother--he was still next to his mother; his mother was dead. And we popped smoke around the ditch because we knew they were--some of the people were still alive, and an infantryman went over and killed the child.

Q. Same man?

A. No, sir, it wasn't.

Q. What did this man look like?

A. I didn't really see him, sir. We were a lot closer when I saw the girl in the rice paddy.

Q. Did you see an artillery concentration that morning?

A. No, sir.

Q. Was it normal procedure to use smoke to mark bodies with enemy weapons and wounded civilians?

A. Yes, sir, it was.

Q. In other words, you threw smoke down on the wounded and on bodies with weapons.

A. Well, it depends upon the situation, sir. If we were under fire we wouldn't drop smoke; we would just suppress. It was--I'd say it was clear to the infantrymen that these people were not armed because there was no firing going on, sir. There was no enemy firing going on inside the village.

Q. Was there any difference in color used to mark weapons versus casualties?

A. No, sir.

Q. Who normally popped the smoke?

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A. Either one of us, sir. Either the crew chief or the gunner.

Q. Did you have earphones on, monitoring the communication?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Did the pilot ever discuss anything with someone on the ground over the radio?

A. Not that I remember, sir.

Q. Do you remember your helicopter landing by the ditch?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Do you remember Mr. Thompson talking to anybody there?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Do you know who he talked to?

A. No, sir, I don't.

Q. Did you see the person he talked to?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. What did he look like?

A. He was dressed in general fatigues, with a steel-pot helmet. I couldn't really describe him. I couldn't recognize him today, sir.

Q. Was he Caucasian or Negro?

A. He was Caucasian.

Q. He was Caucasian.

A. Yes.

Q. The other times that Mr. Thompson set the helicopter down--did he talk to people?

A. When he got the people out of the bunker, sir, there were infantrymen around the bunker. He was talking to someone over there, but I was outside the ship with my machine gun, covering. I didn't--I didn't hear what he was saying, sir.

Q. Did you take any photographs of this operation?

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A. No, sir, I didn't.

Q. Did you ever see anyone with the word "California" written on his helmet?

A. I don't remember, sir.

Q. Let's take about a five-minute break.

(Short recess.)

I'm going to read you some testimony from Mr. Thompson.

"Q. Do I recall correctly that you said someone fired into a group?"

"A. Yes, sir.

"Q. Would you give me a complete description of that incident?"

"A. Well, that was the first time I landed to see if we could get some--get them out, you know. They were in the ditch, a bunch of them, and that is when the other guy said something to the effect that the only way he could help them was to finish them or something like that. You don't hear everything distinctly when you have to holler at somebody and you have a helmet on, and as we picked up I didn't hear too well and my...told me something about it when we picked up and he said, 'Yet, he just shot in the pile of them.' I heard somebody shooting."

Now who told Mr. Thompson this?

A. It must have been the crew chief, sir.

Q. He said it was the crew chief, but later he said he didn't know whether it was you or the crew chief.

A. I don't think it was me, sir.

Q. Did you see this incident?

A. Sir, we were in a right-hand orbit around the area, and the ditch was on the other side. I mean, my field of vision was just inside the orbit, and it must-- it had to have been the crew chief.

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Q. So the man who saw this is dead.

A. Yes, sir.

I do remember one other thing though, sir.

Q. What?

A. Something that Mr. Thompson said after he came back from the bunker. When he was trying to get the people out of the bunker, he talked to someone--some of the--someone from the ground forces that was over there by the bunker, and they did say that the only way-- Mr. Thompson went over there to ask them if there was any way to get the people out of the bunker, and the person told him that the only way he knew to get them out was with a grenade. I remember that.

Q. Now this is what Mr. Thompson told you?

A. Yes, after he came back to the ship.

Q. Hearsay. You didn't hear this--

A. Yes, sir.

Q. --Is that correct?

A. No, I didn't, sir.

Q. Did you hear any discussion between Mr. Thompson and anybody he talked to on the ground?

A. No, sir. I don't--the noise of the helicopter and the flight helmet, and everything--it's pretty hard.

Q. I'm going to let you see this map board to sort of refresh your memory. It shows a 1:50,000 map and the area of operation (indicating).

A. (Examining map.)

Q. Here's the 1:50,000 map sheet, which shows the same area (handing map to witness).

Now using this map sheet, I'd like for you to draw me a sketch--not to scale--as you remember the general area. I'll make you a legend (annotating). And let's put My Lai (4) right in this (annotating) area. And this is not-to-scale, so when you draw these huts in, you're just showing the general area of where the village was.

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We know the Quang Ngai-Pinkville road was there (annotating).

Now from that--let's label this (annotating). From this general location sketch, give me, to the best of your memory, the location of the ditch where these bodies were.

A. (Examining sketch sheet.)

Q. One other thing--let's put on here Hill 85.

A. I don't remember where Hill 85 is located.

Q. You remember this (indicating) Citadel? A French fort I think.

A. Yes.

Q. Hill 85 was south of the road. Well, put it on there. If you don't remember, it's all right, but see if you can place the location of that ditch.

A. (Examining map.)

Q. Now I'm going to give you, in addition, an aerial photograph, which may help you.

A. (Examining photograph.)

Q. Now study those documents for a few minutes.

A. (Examining documents.)

Q. (To reporter.) You needn't take any more testimony at this point.

(Reporter excused for a short time.)

I'll remind you you're still under oath.

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Now what did you say about Androtta?

A. We set down and I took an M-16 out with me. Androtta went down into the ditch, and I kind of stayed on the upper lip. I was about four feet down into the ditch.

Q. You were?

A. Yes. And--and Androtta was down in the ditch, and he had to uncover this baby, because there were quite

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a few bodies down there. And he handed the child to me by the back of the shirt; and I got the baby and I set him down, and I helped Androtta out. Then we went back to the ship. But it was about 9 or 10 feet deep. The area of the ditch where the bodies were--that was about 30 feet long.

Q. And how many bodies did you say were in this ditch?

A. Well, they weren't only in the ditch; they were up on the side of the ditch. It looked like they just tried to throw them into the ditch. But there were bodies all along the side of the ditch and down in the ditch. They were about--oh, four or five high, so I said close to a hundred. I--(examining photograph)--

Q. From your observation of the bodies in the ditch, what type of wounds did they have?

A. I think some of it was mini-gun from a gun ship; M-16--and probably M-16. Some of them were torn up pretty bad--shrapnel wounds; they may have been wounded from a rocket from the gun ships also.

Q. Could it have been artillery--

A. Yes.

Q. --if it was shrapnel wounds?

A. Yes.

Q. Why do you think it was mini-gun wound in some cases?

A. Well, the mini-gun fires quite a few rounds per minute, and it rips up a body pretty bad--moreso than an M-16, I think.

Q. And how far from the general line of the village was this ditch?

A. You mean where the main group of hootches were?

Q. Yes.

A. It was just on the outskirts of it--50 meters. (Examining photograph.)

Q. Using the document that you have there, could you give me the approximate location of the road where

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the bodies were?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Put it on the sketch.

A. (Examining photograph.) I remember this tree lying right here (indicating) just on the other side of the road, here (indicating).

Q. Uh-huh.

A. That one woman that I told you that was hiding-- she was just on the other side of the tree line, about here (indicating) I think.

Q. Let's put that down (annotating on sketch).

A. The tree line was on the other side. Here (indicating) it is. Isn't this (indicating) the road itself right here (indicating)? (Examining photograph.)

Q. Uh-huh (annotating on sketch).

Now where were the bodies?

A. The people were moving out of the villages this (indicating) way. And some were moving out this (indicating) way. They were just scattered, really. Well, most of the bodies were right along in here (indicating).

Q. (Annotating on sketch.) And how many bodies were there?

A. About a dozen.

Q. And what time did you observe these 12 bodies?

A. Fifteen or twenty minutes after we had been on station.

Q. (Annotating on sketch.)

A. (Examining photograph.) And this (indicating) photo right here, sir--it seems that most everything was going on right around in here (indicating), just on the outside of the village.

Q. So that's the southern part.

A. Yes--because I remember this tree line running this (indicating) way, and the ditch had to have been along here (indicating) someplace because there was heavy foliage

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just on the other side of the ditch, and it wasn't inside the village; it was outside the village.

Q. Well, put it on the sketch, where you think it was. And this (indicating) is their symbol.

A. (Examining photograph; annotating on sketch.)

Q. Did the ditch go all the way down to the road?

A. No. It didn't meet the road--not that I can remember.

Q. (Annotating on sketch.)

Now I'm going to show you Mr. Thompson's sketch.

A. (Examining sketch.) Yeah. I remember there were hootches on the other side of the ditch (indicating).

Q. Now I want to show you a squad leader's sketch.

(To reporter.) Don't take this. I'll describe the sketch to him.

(Discussion off record.)

Now do you feel reasonably sure that that ditch was where you have it on your sketch?

A. Now that I've seen this (indicating) one that Mr. Thompson drew (examining both sketches)--well, this (indicating Mr. Thompson's sketch) seems closer to me. It just refreshes my memory as far as where the village was situated.

Q. Okay. Would you put across the top: "Sketch from memory; not to scale"?

A. (Complying.)

Q. Sign it.

A. (Complying.)

Q. Do you know of any situation where you could identify someone you saw alive earlier during the day that was dead later?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Give me the situation.

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A. The Vietnamese woman?

Q. The woman that the captain shot.

A. Oh, yes.

Q. That's the one?

A. Plus the woman on the other side of the tree line that I told you about; it was a girl. She was--I don't think she was even 20. She was laying just on one side of a dyke, halfway into the paddy, and she had been wounded in the stomach, I think, or the chest. This captain was coming down the dyke, and he had men behind him. They were sweeping through, and we were hovering just a matter of feet away from them. I could see them clearly. And he emptied a clip into her.

Q. This was the captain now?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Did you see him do this twice?

A. I saw--I saw him shoot the girl. I didn't see him shoot anyone else.

Q. Then is there another incident besides that?

A. The woman on the other side of the tree line-- on the other side of the road behind the tree line that appeared to be hiding. We saw her--and she was alive because we saw her look up; and when we came back into the area after the ground forces had gone through, she had been shot in the head. She was still in the same position she was in when she was alive.

Q. (Handing sketch to witness.) Where was the woman who was shot in the head?

A. (Indicating).

Q. (Annotating on sketch.)

Where did the captain shoot the girl?

A. (Examining sketch.) A paddy--approximately here (indicating), sir.

Q. (Annotating on sketch.)

When you were in the ditch, how many people

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2 A. Quite a few of them were moving, sir, but--
3 maybe five or six, sir. They were wounded, but they
4 weren't dead.

5
6 Q. Did you notice any soldiers around the ditch
7 when you were in it?

8 A. No, sir, I didn't.

9
10 Q. Did you see anyone taking photographs?

11 A. No, sir.

12
13 Q. Did you see any other incident where there was
14 indiscriminate killing?

15 A. No, sir, I didn't.

16
17 Q. Did you ever see groups of civilians under
18 escort by soldiers?

19 A. Yes, sir, but I--I can't exactly remember where.
20 I mean it was around the village, but I can't--I can't
21 remember where they were taking them, but I do remember
22 groups of--of five and ten being escorted by infantrymen.

23
24 Q. Just moving along.

25 A. I suppose they were people that were still in
26 the village. They were moving out of the village.

27
28 Q. And that's all you saw?

29 A. Yes, sir.

30
31 Q. Did you know anybody in these infantry units?

32 A. I met two men at Fort Hood that were with
33 Task Force Barker.

34
35 Q. Who were they?

36 A. Specialist Heath.

37
38 Q. Yes?

39 A. H-e-a-t-h. He's ETS out of the Army now.
40 And Specialist Miller; and he'll be gone within a matter
41 of days.

42
43 Q. Do you know what company they were in?

44 A. They were with 3/1st, sir.

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Q. Did you see the village burning?
A. Some of the hootches were on fire, sir, yes, sir.

Q. Some?
A. Yes, sir.

Q. Were all of them burned?
A. No, sir.

Q. What was the last time you flew over this village?
A. After we had med evac'd the child out of the ditch--oh, we reconned until we were almost out of fuel--I remember that. And we had to go back to refuel.

Q. Well, what I'm really trying to find out is: Did you go over this village at a later date?
A. In--in different recons around that area, yes, sir.

Q. Were there people living in this area at that time?
A. No, sir.

Q. The village was vacant?
A. From what I could see from the air, sir, yes.

Q. Were there any huts left in the village?
A. A few that weren't--that were only partially burned that were still standing, yes.

Q. From your later reconnaissance, would you say that the village was destroyed?
A. Yes, sir.

Q. This (indicating) photograph was taken a month after the operation. It's not clear enough to tell.

Q. Did you receive any fire during this operation?
A. The first thing that morning, sir, when we first came into the area, we saw a VC come out of a tree line and cross an open field. We passed directly over him; and I fired on him, but I didn't stop him. And I think after he made it to another tree line, he did fire.

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five rounds or so, sir.

Q. Same one?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Of the bodies that you saw, what proportion were men?

A. I'd say about 40 percent were old men, sir.

Q. What proportion were women?

A. About 50 percent, sir.

Q. That leaves 10 percent children.

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Were many bodies among the huts in the village?

A. I can't really say, sir. We didn't work right over the village that much. We were just on the outside of the village.

Q. Did these bodies which you observed appear to have been stacked?

A. Yes.

Q. And piled?

A. Yes. Just--well, thrown into the ditch, yes.

Q. Can you say with reasonable accuracy that the ditch was south of the village near the road? Regardless of whether it was east or west, was it south of the village?

Q. Did you ever see a large heavy-set Negro sergeant?

A. I saw a few Negroes with the ground forces. I couldn't tell what rank they were, sir.

Q. You don't remember anyone in particular.

A. No, sir, I don't.

Q. Did you hear the crew chief tell the aircraft commander words to the effect that--"Well, he shot him"?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Was this on a take-off?

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A. Yes, sir, I think so. After we were leaving the ditch, I think.

Q. Do you know who he was talking about?

A. One of the infantrymen.

Q. How many were there?

A. How many infantrymen--

Q. Yes.

A. --were on the ground, sir?

Q. Yes.

A. I think it was a couple--I'm not sure.

Q. No--

A. Around the ditch?

Q. Yes.

A. Four or five, sir.

Q. And the crew chief had reference to one.

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Do you know which one he was referring to?

A. No, sir, I don't.

Q. Among these four or five, was there a large heavy-set Negro soldier?

A. Yes, sir, I think so.

Q. You think so.

A. By the ditch, sir, yes; yes, there was.

Q. Was he an NCO?

A. I don't know, sir.

Q. Did he have any particular physical identification which you can recall?

A. No, sir.

Q. Do you have any further information concerning the matters we have discussed?

A. No, sir.

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Q. Do you have any further statements to make regarding the subject under investigation?

A. No, sir.

Q. This is an official investigation. It is privileged in the sense that my report will be made to the Chief of Staff of the Army for such use as he deems appropriate. You are ordered not to discuss this investigation or the questions and answers covered during this interview except as you otherwise may have a right to do so in accordance with law.

And you are finished. That's all there is.

(The witness was excused.)

(The foregoing testimony of PFC Lawrence M. Colburn was taken stenographically and transcribed by C. Mae B. Guzman, Shorthand Reporter, Office of The Inspector General, Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, D. C.)

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