

FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY
OF STATEMENT

NEWS RELEASE BY SENATOR JOHN C. STENNIS
CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 1970

RE: ARMY REPORT ON SONG MY AND MY LAI

Commenting on the Peers-MacCrate inquiry into the nature, scope and adequacy of the original Army investigations into the Song My and My Lai incidents, portions of which were released by the Army today, Senator John C. Stennis (D-Miss.), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, in a statement on the Senate floor, said that "In this affair it is crucial that justice be administered in accordance with our military processes and without any prejudicial publicity."

He stated that "While there is a special responsibility on the Armed Services Committee, the entire Congress, and the news media as well, has a responsibility to see that all those who are charged with criminal offenses receive a fair and impartial trial. It appears to me," he continued, "that this is an occasion which requires self-restraint by all of us."

The Chairman pointed out that the Committee had followed this matter closely since it was first reported to it last summer and that it would continue "to exercise its special jurisdiction over this entire matter." He added, however, that because of the pendency of the criminal charges the Committee has not made plans to hold hearings at this time. He said:

"With the filing of the report, and with the criminal charges having been preferred as a result, this entire matter is in the judicial stage and care must be taken that there be no action which would interfere with the judicial process or prejudice unduly the rights of either the defendants or the government. After

these trials are completed, the Committee will then take another look at the entire picture and all of the facts for the purposes of making a further determination as to the Army's responsibility and duty with respect to this matter and whether or not they were discharged satisfactorily and in a proper manner."

The entire text of the floor statement is attached.

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FLOOR STATEMENT BY SENATOR JOHN C. STENNIS
CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

RE: ARMY REPORT ON SONG MY AND MY LAI
MARCH 17, 1970

Mr. President, the Peers-MacCrate Inquiry established by the Department of the Army to investigate the nature, scope and adequacy of the original Army investigations into the Song My and My Lai incidents has now completed its work and submitted its report. The Department of the Army today released portions of the report and it is expected that the remainder of the report, except for portions classified for national security reasons, can be released at a later date when there would be no prejudice to the trials of those who have been charged with criminal offenses.

The Senate Committee on Armed Services has followed this entire matter very closely since the first report was made to us last summer. We have required the Department of the Army to furnish periodic reports and we held a special hearing on the matter on November 26, 1969, which was followed by a Committee news release. The Committee will continue to exercise its special jurisdiction over this entire matter and will continue its surveillance both of the alleged occurrences and the question of whether the Department of the Army has properly discharged its duties and responsibilities in investigating this tragic affair and in dealing with those who are allegedly guilty of criminal acts and violations of Army regulations.

Several Army officers and enlisted men have previously been charged with crimes such as murder, assault with intent to commit murder, and

similar offenses. As a result of the Peers-MacCrate report, charges have now been preferred against 14 command and staff officers for offenses ranging from dereliction of duty and/or failure to comply with applicable regulations and directives, false swearing and misprison of a felony. All men charged with crimes of whatever nature are, of course, entitled to a fair trial in accordance with the applicable military processes. Under the circumstances, and in order not to prejudice or interfere with the military trials, the Committee has not made plans to hold hearings on this matter at this time.

All of us recognize that this unhappy matter has serious and unfortunate consequences, both to the Army and to the country as a whole. The Committee will see that the maximum amount of information is released to the public to the extent that it can be without infringing on the right to a fair trial. The Committee on Armed Services has a special responsibility with respect to this matter and intends to carry it out fully.

In this affair it is crucial that justice be administered in accordance with our military processes and without any prejudicial publicity. While there is a special responsibility on the Armed Services Committee, the entire Congress, and the news media as well, has a responsibility to see that all those who are charged with criminal offenses receive a fair and impartial trial. It appears to me that this is an occasion which requires self-restraint by all of us.

As far as I know at this time, it appears that the Peers-MacCrate panel did a good job and performed well in making the investigation into the adequacy of prior investigations or inquiries about this matter, their subsequent reviews

and reports within the chain of command, and possible suppression or withholding of information by persons involved in the incident. The Peers-MacCrate report alleges that there were serious deficiencies in the actions of a number of officers holding command and staff positions, and these are the officers who have been charged with additional criminal offenses.

With the filing of the report, and with the criminal charges having been preferred as a result, this entire matter is in the judicial stage and care must be taken that there be no action which would interfere with the judicial process or prejudice unduly the rights of either the defendants or the government. After these trials are completed, the Committee will then take another look at the entire picture and all of the facts for the purposes of making a further determination as to the Army's responsibility and duty with respect to this matter and whether or not they were discharged satisfactorily and in a proper manner.