

NEW GOSHEN, Ind., Nov. 25—This village with the Biblical chime to its name woke up this morning as the home of the man who said he took part in the mass slaying of Vietnamese civilians.

But nowhere among its chunky church spires and white clapboard houses was anyone inclined to blame Paul David Meadlo, the veteran who admitted last night shooting 30 to 40 men, women and children in the massacre at Song My, South Vietnam, last year.

"Lots of people been in talking about it this morning," said Mrs. Josephine Neview, a clerk at Neall's grocery. "But they certainly don't blame Paul David in any way. After all, he had his orders."

"Paul David" is the way everybody here refers to the 22-year-old coal miner's son.

"I heard them announcing something about Paul Meadlo on the TV last night," said Mrs. Neview. "For a moment I didn't know who they were talking about; then I said, oh, my God, that's Paul David."

Although Paul David lives now with his wife and two children in neighboring West Terre Haute, New Goshen was his home for the first 18 years of his life, and he still comes here often to visit his parents, sister, four uncles, and two aunts.

New Goshen's 450 residents all know the Meadlos and Paul David; when he's home, he is a familiar figure shouldering up to the bar at Hutch's Hut or warming his hands over the pot-bellied stove at Olivero's Grocery.

And he is popular here. Townspeople questioned today responded with one voice: "A very nice boy," "the nicest guy you'd ever want to meet," "easy-going, got along with everybody," "never had any trouble out of him. Wish I could say the same about some other youngsters around here."

So when newspaper and television people from New York, Chicago, and St. Louis began showing up around town this morning, the people of New Goshen stuck staunchly by their native son.

"How can you newspaper people blame Paul David?" asked Robert Hale as he planed down some garage doors behind the pool hall he and his wife run. "He was under orders. He had to do what his officer told him."

"The only thing I blame Paul David for was talking about this to everybody on television," said Dee Henry, who was helping Mr. Hale fix the garage doors. "Things like that happen in war. They always have and they always will. But only just recently have people started telling the press about it."

"It's bad enough to have to kill people without telling everybody about it," he said. "This sort of thing should be kept classified."

Mr. Henry was a professional soldier for 11 years, fought in World War II and the Korean war, and "would have been in this one too if I hadn't been wounded and discharged." He gives his occupation as "disabled veteran."

He feels Paul David is the victim of people who don't know how the Army works. "Anybody who's had any affiliation with the service knows you do what you're ordered to do—no questions asked."

Although others were not so emphatic, the same theme was echoed today in the town's tiny one-room post office, on front porches, and on street corners under gaunt, leafless maples.

"What else could he do?" asked 22-year-old Floyd Cheesman, a classmate of Paul David's at West Vigo High School. "Boy, I would have done just the same thing. I'd take my orders. If they give you an order under fire and you don't carry it out, they can court martial you."

The only sharply differing point of view expressed in town today came from Paul David's father, a blunt ex-miner who still speaks with a trace of the Polish accent his father brought from the old country 67 years ago.

"If it had been me out there," he said, "I would have swung my rifle around and shot Calley instead—right between the God-damned eyes." Lieut. William L. Calley Jr. is the officer Paul David says ordered him to shoot the Vietnamese.

"Why did they have to take my son and do that to him?" said Mr. Meadlo's wife, Myrtle, as the tears she'd held back all morning began to flow.

Paul David came home without his right foot—blown off by a land mine the day after the Songmy massacre. His father stomps around the house on an artificial left leg—the result of a mine accident in 1961.

When Paul David first spoke to his mother from an Army hospital after the injury, he said, "Well, Mom, like father like son."

The Meadlos don't talk much about the victims of their son's gunfire in Songmy. But at times they seem to be thinking of them.

Showing a visitor a picture of Paul, his wife, Mary, and his two babies, Paul Jr., 2½, and Tresa Lynn, 15 months, Mrs. Meadlo said through her tears: "When he's around his babies he'll pick 'em up and love 'em. Just love 'em."