MY LAI MASSACRE

THE TRAGEDIES/MURDERS IN VIETNAM BY US TROOPS

A WAR (CONFLICT) OF LIES AND COVERUPS

(DOCUMENT CONTAINS VERY GRAPHIC EXPLANATIONS & PICTURES.)

280

Photo taken by United States Army photographer Ronald L. Haeberle on 16 March 1968, in the aftermath of the Mỹ Lai Massacre showing mostly women and children dead on a road Before it was all over there were 504 people dead. Among the victims were 182 women—17 of them pregnant—and 173 children, including 56 infants.

MILITARY HISTORY
JUN 2009

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https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/my-lai-massacre-1#section_

The My Lai massacre was one of the most horrific incidents of violence committed against unarmed civilians during the Vietnam War. A company of American soldiers brutally killed most of the people—women, children, and old men—in the village of My Lai on March 16, 1968. ***More than 500 people were slaughtered in the My Lai massacre, including young girls and women who were raped and mutilated before being killed. U.S. Army officers covered up the carnage for a year before it was reported in the American press,*** sparking a firestorm of international outrage. The brutality of the My Lai killings and the official cover-up fueled anti-war sentiment ***and further divided the United States over the Vietnam War.***

CHARLIE COMPANY

The small village of My Lai is located in Quang Ngai province, which was believed to be a stronghold of the communist National Liberation Front (NLF) or Viet Cong (VC) during the Vietnam War.

Quang Ngai province was therefore a frequent target of U.S. and South Vietnamese bombing attacks, and the entire region ***was heavily strafed with Agent Orange, the deadly herbicide.***

In March 1968, Charlie Company—part of the American Division's 11th Infantry Brigade—received word that VC guerrillas had taken control of the neighboring village of Son My. Charlie Company was sent to the area on March 16 for a search-and-destroy mission.

At the time, morale among U.S. soldiers on the ground was dwindling, especially in the wake of the North Vietnamese-led Tet Offensive, which was launched in January 1968. ***Charlie Company had lost some 28 of its members to death or injuries and was down to just over 100 men.***

WILLIAM CALLEY

Army commanders had advised the soldiers of Charlie Company that all who were found in the Son My area could be considered VC or active VC sympathizers *and ordered them to destroy the village.*

When they arrived shortly after dawn, the soldiers—led by Lieutenant William Calley—found no Viet Cong. Instead, they came across a quiet village of primarily women, children, and older men preparing their breakfast rice.

The villagers were rounded up into groups as the soldiers inspected their huts. *Despite finding only a few weapons, Calley ordered his men to begin shooting the villagers.*

MY LAI MASSACRE BEGINS

Some soldiers balked at Calley's command, but within seconds the massacre had begun, *with Calley himself shooting many men, women, and children.*

Mothers who were shielding their children were shot, and when their children tried to run away, they too were slaughtered. Huts were set on fire, and anyone inside who tried to escape was gunned down.

"I saw them shoot an M79 (grenade launcher) into a group of people who were still alive. But it was mostly done with a machine gun. They were shooting women and children just like anybody else," Sgt. Michael Bernhardt, a soldier at the scene, later told a reporter.

"We met no resistance and I only saw three captured weapons. We had no casualties. It was just like any other Vietnamese village—old papa-sans [men], women and kids. *I don't remember seeing one military-age male in the entire place, dead or alive," Bernhardt said.*

In addition to killing unarmed men, women, and children, the soldiers slaughtered countless livestock, raped an unknown number of women, and burned the village to the ground.

Calley was reported to have dragged dozens of people, including young children, into a ditch before executing them with a machine gun. Not a single shot was fired against the men of Charlie Company at My Lai.

HUGH THOMPSON

The My Lai massacre reportedly ended only after Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson, an Army helicopter pilot on a reconnaissance mission, landed his aircraft between the soldiers and the retreating villagers and threatened to open fire if they continued their attacks.

"We kept flying back and forth … and it didn't take very long until we started noticing the large number of bodies everywhere. Everywhere we'd look, we'd see bodies. *These were infants, two-, three-, four-, five-year-olds, women, very old men, no draft-age people whatsoever," Thompson stated at a My Lai conference at Tulane University in 1994.*

Thompson and his crew flew dozens of survivors to receive medical care. In 1998, Thompson and two other members of his crew received the Soldier's Medal, the U.S. Army's highest award for bravery not involving direct contact with the enemy.

COVER-UP OF THE MY LAI MASSACRE

Knowing news of the massacre would cause a scandal, officers higher up in command of Charlie Company and the 11th Brigade *immediately made efforts to downplay the bloodshed.*

The cover-up continued until Ron Ridenhour, a soldier in the 11th Brigade who had heard reports of the massacre but had not participated, began a campaign to bring the events to light. *After writing letters to President Richard M. Nixon, the Pentagon, State Department, Joint Chiefs of Staff*, and several congressmen—*with no response*—Ridenhour finally gave an interview to the investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, who broke the story in November 1969.

Amid the international uproar that followed Ridenhour's revelations, the U.S. Army ordered a special investigation into the My Lai massacre and subsequent efforts to cover it up. The inquiry, headed by Lieutenant General William Peers, released its report in March 1970 *and recommended that no fewer than 28 officers be charged for their involvement in covering up the massacre.*

Hugh Thompson, the helicopter pilot who stopped the My Lai massacre, later told the news program "60 Minutes" that *he was ostracized and received death threats upon his return from Vietnam.* But in 1998, Thompson attended a memorial service at My Lai on the 30th anniversary of the massacre.

***The Army would later charge only 14 men,* including Calley, Captain Ernest Medina, and Colonel Oran Henderson, with crimes related to the events at My Lai*. All were acquitted except for Calley, who was found guilty of premeditated murder for ordering the shootings, despite his contention that he was only following orders from his commanding officer, Captain Medina*.**

In March 1971, Calley was given a life sentence for his role in directing the killings at My Lai. Many saw Calley as a scapegoat, and his sentence was reduced upon appeal to 20 years and later to 10; he was paroled in 1974.

Later investigations have revealed that the slaughter at My Lai was not an isolated incident. Other atrocities, such as a similar massacre of villagers at My Khe, are less well known. A notorious military operation called Speedy Express killed thousands of Vietnamese civilians in the Mekong Delta, earning the commander of the operation, Major General Julian Ewell, the nickname "the Butcher of the Delta."

IMPACT OF MY LAI

By the early 1970s, the American war effort in Vietnam was winding down, as the Nixon administration continued its "Vietnamization" policy, including the withdrawal of troops and the transfer of control over ground operations to the South Vietnamese.

Among the American troops still in Vietnam, morale was low, and anger and frustration were high. Drug use increased among soldiers, ***and an official report in 1971 estimated that one-third or more of U.S. troops were addicted.***

The revelations of the My Lai massacre caused morale to plummet even further, as GIs wondered what other atrocities their superiors were concealing. On the home front in the United States, the brutality of the My Lai massacre and the efforts made by higher-ranking officers to conceal it exacerbated anti-war sentiment and increased the bitterness regarding the continuing U.S. military presence in Vietnam.

SOURCES

Eyewitness accounts of the My Lai massacre; story by Seymour Hersh Nov. 20, 1969. Cleveland Plain Dealer.
The Heroes of My Lai. Transcript of 1994 Tulane University My Lai Conference.
Was My Lai just one of many massacres in the Vietnam War? BBC News.
Coverup—I, by Seymour Hersh. The New Yorker.
The Scene of the Crime, by Seymour Hersh. The New Yorker.

ADDITIONAL DATA

TRIP ADVISOR WEBSITE – SHOWS MEMORIALS ETC. OF AREA TODAY

https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g651661-d2095404-Reviews-My_Lai_Massacre_Museum-Quang_Ngai_Quang_Ngai_Province.html

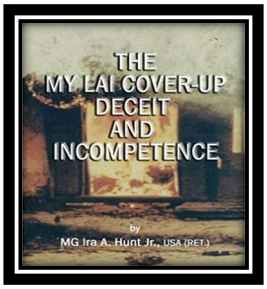
MY LAI – WHERE ARE THEY KNOW – SOME PARTICIPANTS

https://www.stripes.com/news/special-reports/1968-stories/my-lai-where-are-they-now-1.516984

SECTION TWO

HOW THE ARMY'S COVERUP MADE MY LAI MASSACRE EVEN WORSE

IT TOOK 20 MONTHS FOR THE WAR CRIME TO COME TO LIGHT



MILITARY HISTORY

INFORMATION UPDATED
MARCH 16, 2018

On the morning of March 16, 1968, U.S. Army soldiers entered a Vietnamese hamlet named My Lai 4 on a search-and-destroy mission in a region controlled by Viet Cong forces that the Army referred to as "Pinkville." The soldiers didn't encounter any enemy troops. Yet they proceeded to set huts on fire, gang-rape the women, and murder some 500 unarmed civilians including approximately 50 children under the age of four.

On the 50th anniversary of the My Lai massacre, the barbaric act remains difficult to fathom.

The massacre stands among the most infamous of wartime atrocities ***committed by any U.S. military force.***

When news of the massacre finally hit newsstands *more than a year and a half after it had occurred,* it swiftly became emblematic of the U.S. war effort in Vietnam. Especially in the eyes of the war's critics, the massacre was proof that America's moral compass no longer functioned, as well as evidence that the government's claim of "defending" Southeast Asia from atheistic communist aggression had become a cruel and paradoxical hoax.

The military's secrecy ultimately compounded the shock of the revelations once they became public. Not only had scores of Army soldiers participated in the wanton murder of defenseless women and children, but the Army's leadership had seemed to conspire *to sweep crimes against humanity under the carpet.*

The Tet Offensive that preceded the massacre at My Lai by less than two months led to graphic televised scenes and photographs that gripped the American public day after day. In contrast to the instantaneity of Tet's news coverage, My Lai triggered a cover-up by the Army that *served to keep the massacre secret from the American public for a staggering 20 months during an election year*. The U.S. military had deceived the public about the course of the war for years, but this was a concerted effort to hide an act of barbarism and turn it into a resounding victory over the Viet Cong.

The atrocity itself was a deeply inhumane act. American soldiers stabbed, clubbed, and carved "C [for Charlie] Company" into the chests of their victims; herded them into ditches, and blew them to bits with grenades.

One soldier recalled cutting victims' throats and chopping off their hands. "A lot of people were doing it and I just followed," he said. "I lost all sense of direction."

In his gripping account, *My Lai: Vietnam, 1968, and the Descent into Darkness*, Howard Jones reveals that this collective act of barbarism was far from an aberration by a small group of frightened and confused men, but a predictable result due to the way the war was being waged. *The Army had dehumanized the Vietnamese people as "Gooks" and depicted women and children as potentially lethal combatants,* while jungle warfare had fostered "an environment in which [U.S. troops] could not be sure who or where the enemy was," Jones writes.

Members of Charlie Company, which committed the bulk of the atrocities, had seen comrades killed by land mines and sniper fire, even heard one being skinned alive, and in the words of one troop, they had become *"leaderless, directionless, armed to the teeth, and making up their own rules*…" Their confusion was only bolstered by official military policy. At the time, the combat strategies and tactics in use—including an emphasis on "search-and-destroy" missions and "free-fire zones"—encouraged troops to destroy entire hamlets and villages and defoliate forests. *This, in turn, inflated enemy kill rates (the Pentagon's measure of the war's progress).*S

Some men were afraid to speak out about what had happened, and *Army officers who heard eyewitness reports of a massacre were quick to discount them.* The Army's Public Information Office issued a press release that informed news coverage, *but it was riddled with falsehoods.* The Army claimed its troops had killed 128 Viet Cong, even though they had met no resistance and suffered only one self-inflicted wound; Lieutenant Colonel Frank Barker, who helped to oversee the incursion, bragged that *"the combat assault went like clockwork,"* Jones reports.

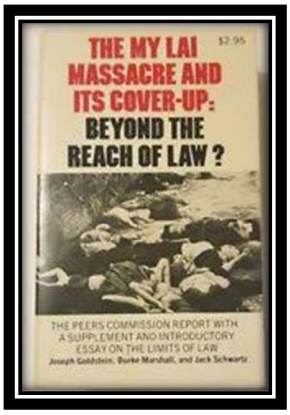
Helicopter Pilot Hugh Thomson being interviewed by the press

Although the public would not find out what happened for nearly two years, word of the atrocity quickly spread among troops in Vietnam. Some American GIs refused to remain silent about the Army's cover-up of the grisly deaths of unarmed women and children at the hands of U.S. soldiers. Helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson, for example, had tried to stop some of the soldiers from massacring civilians during the assault, ***and he and two others informed commanders about the war crime within hours, to little avail.***

Helicopter door gunner, Ronald Ridenhour, who had been told of the My Lai killings by soldiers who had taken part in the slaughter, returned to his home in Phoenix and compiled a dossier of facts about it. ***On March 18, 1969, almost one year to the day of the massacre, Ridenhour sent a letter to 30 Washington officials detailing the My Lai massacre***

A copy of Ridenhour's letter is shown later on in this article.

Two investigations—one focused on establishing whether a massacre had occurred; the other into a potential cover-up by Army brass—were launched.



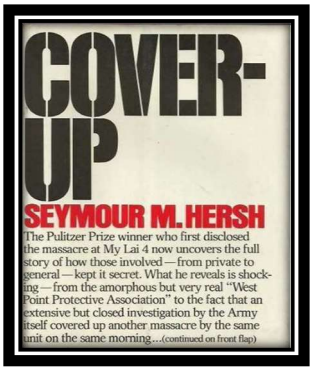
Soon, freelance reporter Seymour Hersh got a tip that Charlie Company's Lt. William Calley was being court-martialed on charges that he had killed Vietnamese civilians. Hersh interviewed Calley about his role in the slaughter, ***but Calley insisted that My Lai had been a fierce firefight with the Viet Cong, not an assault on unarmed villagers***. Hersh talked to others who were there, however, and in November 1969 he reported that an unparalleled atrocity had taken place in My Lai in a graphic story that appeared in dozens of newspapers.

The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* soon published Army photographer Ronald Haeberle's private photos documenting the slaughter. These first news accounts pricked the nation's conscience and set off a debate about what had happened, what the event said about America's war effort, and who bore responsibility for the massacre.

More than a dozen military servicemen were eventually charged with crimes, but Calley was the only one who was convicted. Despite growing opposition to the war, much of the American public remained supportive of its soldiers and was reluctant to pin the blame on them for simply following the orders of their commanders. This climate made it harder to charge senior military leaders, let alone win convictions in military courtrooms

Pham Thi Trinh, one of the few survivors of the My Lai Massacre, standing in front of a monument honoring victims

Millions of Americans considered Calley a "scapegoat" who had been "held responsible for almost a decade of mistakes in Vietnam," in the words of Alabama congressman Walter Flowers. President Richard Nixon reduced Calley's sentence to a light punishment—three years of house arrest. The My Lai massacre, the Army's cover-up, and the military courts' abject failure to bring military leaders and GIs to justice further undermined the faith of some Americans in their political and military institutions.



My Lai didn't occur in isolation, of course. The U.S. government for years had deceived the public about the war's progress, and dogged investigative reporting including the publication of the Pentagon Papers **was beginning to reveal the level of official deception. After the Tet Offensive in early 1968, a majority of the American public came to view the war as a mistake, and the subsequent cover-up of My Lai served to deepen people's despair that the war could ever be won. The massacre also raised big questions about whether the United States was capable of defending freedom, democracy, and human rights in far-flung places.**

GIs Call Viet Killings 'Point-Blank Murder'

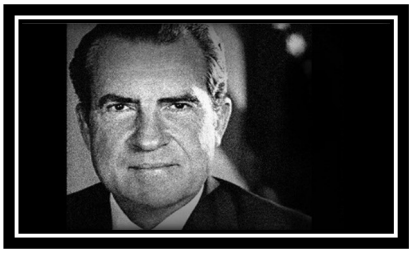
Rather than liberating concentration camps and promoting universal notions of human dignity, the United States now seemed to some Americans to have been complicit in covering up war crimes. At the same time, Americans who still supported the war in 1969 thought that Calley was just carrying out orders and had become the fall guy for higher-ups looking to take the spotlight off their own Vietnam-era blunders. *Finally, My Lai created an unflattering portrait of GIs which led to the shoddy treatment some returning soldiers received when they rotated back home from Vietnam.*

The My Lai massacre and the Army's cover-up are a particularly dark moment in the history of modern America*. Had the Army taken reports of atrocities seriously from day one; had it launched an investigation and made the findings public, perhaps the country would have had more faith in its institutions. Although the system ruptured in horrific ways during the assault on My Lai, others might have seen it working by holding those responsible for the crimes accountable. *That's not the way the aftermath transpired, and as a result, the legacy of the massacre remains even more haunting than it might have been.

NEW RESEARCH POINTS TO NIXON IN THE COVERUP OF THE MY LAI MASSACRE

The article is dated in 2014 and can be seen on the link shown below. Copy the link and paste it into your browser.

https://nypost.com/2014/03/15/richard-nixon-and-the-my-lai-massacre-coverup/



TRICKY DICK IS AT IT AGAIN

Nixon says" I didn't do it but those guys did".....

The Washington Post

Nixon Denies Role in Cover-up, Admits Abuses by Subordinates

U.S. to Appeal Court Order On Milk Data

Says Tapes' Release Would Be 'Crippling'

Two faces of William Calley: (left) at the Kiwanis Club in Columbus, Georgia, in 2009, where he spoke publicly about My Lai for the first time; (left) at a pretrial hearing at Fort Benning in 1970.

THE VIDEO OF MAN WHO'S LETTER EXPOSED THE INCIDENT
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nvTyMptOt8

GEN COLIN POWELL & THE MY LAI MASSACRE

The following article concerning Gen Colin Powell was extracted from another article entitled:

BEHIND COLIN POWELLS LEGEND- MY LAI

http://www.defenddemocracy.press/behind-colin-powells-legend-my-lai/

A PATTERN OF BRUTALITY

While a horrific example of a Vietnam War crime, the My Lai massacre was not unique. It fits a long pattern of indiscriminate violence against civilians that had marred U.S. participation in the Vietnam War from its earliest days when Americans acted primarily as advisers.

In 1963, Capt. Colin Powell was one of those advisers, serving a first tour with a South Vietnamese army unit. Powell's detachment sought to discourage support for the Viet Cong by torching villages throughout the A Shau Valley. While other U.S. advisers protested this countrywide strategy as brutal and counter-productive, Powell defended the "drain-the-sea" approach then — and continued that defense in his 1995 memoirs, *My American Journey*.

After his first one-year tour and a series of successful training assignments in the United States, Maj. Powell returned for his second Vietnam tour on July 27, 1968. This time, he was no longer a junior officer slogging through the jungle, but an up-and-coming staff officer assigned to the American division.

By late 1968, Powell had jumped over more senior officers into the important post of G-3, chief of operations for division commander, Maj. Gen. Charles Gettys, at Chu Lai. Powell had been "picked by Gen. Gettys over several lieutenant colonels for the G-3 job itself, making me the only major filling that role in Vietnam," Powell wrote in his memoirs.

But a test soon confronted Maj. Powell. A letter had been written by a young specialist fourth class named Tom Glen, who had served in an Americal mortar platoon and was nearing the end of his Army tour. In a letter to Gen. Creighton Abrams, the commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam, *Glen accused the American division of routine brutality against civilians. Glen's letter was forwarded to the Americal headquarters at Chu Lai where it landed on Maj. Powell's desk.*

"The average GI's attitude toward and treatment of the Vietnamese people all too often is a complete denial of all our country is attempting to accomplish in the realm of human relations," Glen wrote. "Far beyond merely dismissing the Vietnamese as 'slopes' or 'gooks,' in both deed and thought, *too many American soldiers seem to discount their very humanity; and with this attitude inflict upon the Vietnamese citizenry humiliations, both psychological and physical*, that can have only a debilitating effect upon efforts to unify the people in loyalty to the Saigon government, particularly when such acts are carried out at unit levels and thereby acquire the aspect of sanctioned policy."

Glen's letter contended that many Vietnamese were fleeing from Americans who "for mere pleasure, fire indiscriminately into Vietnamese homes and without provocation or justification shoot at the people themselves." Gratuitous cruelty was also being inflicted on Viet Cong suspects, Glen reported.

"Fired with an emotionalism that belies unconscionable hatred, and armed with a vocabulary consisting of 'You VC,' soldiers commonly 'interrogate' using torture that has been presented as the particular habit of the enemy. Severe beatings and torture at knife point are usual means of questioning captives or of convincing a suspect that he is, indeed, a Viet Cong…

"It would indeed be terrible to find it necessary to believe that an American soldier that harbors such racial intolerance and disregard for justice and human feeling is a prototype of all American national character; yet the frequency of such soldiers lends credulity to such beliefs. … What has been outlined here I have seen not only in my unit, but also in others we have worked with, and I fear it is universal. If this is indeed the case, it is a problem which cannot be overlooked, but can through a more firm implementation of the codes of MACV (Military Assistance Command Vietnam) and the Geneva Conventions, perhaps be eradicated."

Glen's letter echoed some of the complaints voiced by early advisers, such as *Col. John Paul Vann, who protested the self-defeating strategy of treating Vietnamese civilians as the enemy.* In 1995, when we questioned Glen about his letter, he said he had heard second-hand about the My Lai massacre, though he did not mention it specifically. The massacre was just one part of the abusive pattern that had become routine in the division, he said.

MAJOR POWELLS RESPONSE

The letter's troubling allegations were not well received at American headquarters. *Maj. Powell undertook the assignment to review Glen's letter but did so without questioning Glen or assigning anyone else to talk with him*.

Powell simply accepted a claim from Glen's superior officer that Glen was not close enough to the front lines to know what he was writing about, *an assertion Glen denies.*

After that cursory investigation, Powell drafted a response on Dec. 13, 1968. *He admitted to no pattern of wrongdoing*. Powell claimed that U.S. soldiers in Vietnam were taught to treat Vietnamese courteously and respectfully. The American troops also had gone through an hour-long course on how to treat prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions, Powell noted.

"There may be isolated cases of mistreatment of civilians and POWs," Powell wrote in 1968. But "this by no means reflects the general attitude throughout the Division." Indeed, Powell's memo *faulted Glen for not complaining earlier and for failing to be more specific in his letter.*

Powell reported back exactly what his superiors wanted to hear. "*In direct refutation of this [Glen's] portrayal," Powell concluded, "is the fact that relations between Americal soldiers and the Vietnamese people are excellent."*

Powell's findings, of course, were false. But it would take another American hero, an infantryman named Ron Ridenhour, to piece together the truth about the atrocity at My Lai. After returning to the United States, Ridenhour interviewed American comrades who had participated in the massacre.

On his own, Ridenhour compiled this shocking information into a report and forwarded it to the Army inspector general. The IG's office conducted an aggressive official investigation and finally faced the horrible truth. Courts-martial were held against officers and enlisted men implicated in the murder of the My Lai civilians.

But Powell's peripheral role in the My Lai cover-up did not slow his climb up the Army's ladder. Powell pleaded ignorance about the actual My Lai massacre, which pre-dated his arrival at the Americal. Glen's letter disappeared into the National Archives — to be unearthed only years later by British journalists Michael Bilton and Kevin Sims for their book Four Hours in My Lai. In his best-selling memoirs, Powell did not mention his brush-off of Tom Glen's complaint.

MILITARY AGE MALE (MAM) HUNTS

Powell did include, however, a troubling recollection that belied his 1968 official denial of Glen's allegation that American soldiers "without provocation or justification shoot at the people themselves." After mentioning the My Lai massacre in My American Journey, *Powell penned a partial justification of the Americal's brutality. In a chilling passage, Powell explained the routine practice of murdering unarmed male Vietnamese.*

"I recall a phrase we used in the field, MAM, for military-age male," Powell wrote. "If a helo spotted a peasant in black pajamas who looked remotely suspicious, a possible MAM, the pilot would circle and fire in front of him. If he moved, his movement was judged evidence of hostile intent, and the next burst was not in front, but at him. Brutal? Maybe so. But an able battalion commander with whom I had served at Gelnhausen (West Germany), Lt. Col. Walter Pritchard, was killed by enemy sniper fire while observing MAMs from a helicopter. And Pritchard was only one of many. The kill-or-be-killed nature of combat tends to dull fine perceptions of right and wrong."

While it's certainly true that combat is brutal, mowing down unarmed civilians is not combat. It is, in fact, a war crime. Neither can the combat death of a fellow soldier be cited as an excuse to murder civilians. Disturbingly, that was precisely the rationalization that the My Lai killers cited in their defense.

But returning home from Vietnam a second time in 1969, Powell had proved himself the consummate team player.

For more on Colin Powell's real record, please check out the *"Behind Colin Powell's Legend"* series published at https://consortiumnews.com/2018/03/17/be

THE LETTER

Mr. Ron Ridenhour
1416 East Thomas Road #104
Phoenix, Arizona
March 29, 1969

Gentlemen:

It was late in April 1968 that I first heard of "Pinkville" and what allegedly happened there. I received that first report with some skepticism, but in the following months, I was to hear similar stories from such a wide variety of people that it became impossible for me to disbelieve that something rather dark and bloody did indeed occur sometime in *March 1968* in a village called "Pinkville" in the Republic of Viet Nam.

The circumstances that led to my having access to the reports I'm about to relate need explanation. I was inducted in March 1967 into the U. S. Army. After receiving various training I was assigned to the 70th Infantry Detachment (LRP), 1lth Light Infantry Brigade at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, in early October 1967. That unit, the 70th Infantry Detachment (LRP), was disbanded a week before the llth Brigade shipped out for Vietnam on the 5th of December, 1967. All of the men from whom I later heard reports of the "Pinkville" incident were reassigned to "C" Company, lst Battalion, 20th Infantry, 11th Light Infantry Brigade. I was reassigned to the aviation section of Headquarters Headquarters Company 11th LIB. After we had been in Viet Nam for 3 to 4 months many of the men from the 70th Inf. Det. (LRP) began to transfer into the same unit, "E" Company, 51st Infantry (LRP).

In late April 1968, I was awaiting orders for a transfer from HHC, 11th Brigade to Company "E," 51st Inf, (LRP), when I happened to run into Pfc "Butch" Gruver, whom I had known in Hawaii. Gruver told me he had been assigned to "C" Company lst of the 20th until April lst when he transferred to the unit that I was headed for. During our conversation, he told me the first of many reports I was to hear of "Pinkville."

"Charlie" Company 1/20 had been assigned to Task Force Barker in late February 1968 to help conduct "search and destroy" operations on the Batangan Peninsula, Barker's area of operation. The task force was operating out of L. F. Dottie, located five or six miles north of Quang Nhai City on Viet Namese National Highway 1. Gruver said that Charlie Company had sustained casualties; primarily from mines and booby traps, almost every day from the first day they arrived on the peninsula. One village area was particularly troublesome and seemed to be infested with booby traps and enemy soldiers. It was located about six miles northeast of Quang Nh, ai city at approximate coordinates B.S. 728795. It was a notorious area and the men of Task Force Barker had a special name for it: they called it "Pinkville." One morning in the latter part of March, Task Force Barker moved out from its firebase headed for "Pinkville." Its mission: destroy the trouble spot and all of its inhabitants.

When "Butch" told me this I didn't quite believe that what he was telling me was true, but he assured me that it was and went on to describe what had happened. The other two companies that made up the task force cordoned off the village so that "Charlie" Company could move through to destroy the structures and kill the inhabitants. Any villagers who ran from Charlie Company were stopped by the encircling companies. I asked "Butch" several times if all the people were killed. He said that he thought they were men, women, and children. He recalled seeing a small boy, about three or four years old, standing by the trail with a gunshot wound in one arm. The boy was clutching his wounded arm with his other hand, while blood trickled between his fingers. He was staring around himself in shock and disbelief at what he saw. "He just stood there with big eyes staring around like he didn't understand; he didn't believe wh. it was happening. Then the *captain's RTO (radio operator) put a burst of 16 (M-16 rifle) fire into him."*

It was so bad, Gruver said, that one of the men in his squad shot himself in the foot to be medevac'd out of the area so that he would not have to participate in the slaughter.

Although he had not seen it, Gruver had been told by people he considered trustworthy that one of the company's officers, 2nd Lieutenant Kally (this spelling may be incorrect) had rounded up several groups of villagers (each group consisting of a minimum of 20 persons of both sexes and all ages).

According to the story, Kally then machine-gunned each group. Gruver estimated that the population of the village had been 300 to 400 people and that very few, if any, escaped.

After hearing this account I couldn't quite accept it. Somehow I just couldn't believe that not only had so many young American men participated in such an act of barbarism, but that their officers had ordered it. There were other men in the unit I was soon to be assigned to, "E" Company, 51st Infantry (LRP), who had been in Charlie Company at the time that Gruver alleged the incident at "Pinkville" had occurred. I became determined to ask them about "Pinkville" so that I might compare, their accounts with Pfc Gruver's.

When I arrived at "Echo" Company, 51st Infantry (LRP) the first men I looked for were Pfcs Michael Terry and William Doherty. Both were veterans of "Charlie" Company, 1/20, and "Pinkville." Instead of contradicting "Butch" Gruver's story they corroborated it, adding some tasty tidbits of information of their own.

Terry and Doherty had been in the same, squad and their platoon was the third platoon of "C" Company to pass through the village. Most of the people they came to were already dead. Those that weren't were sought out and shot.

The platoon left nothing alive neither livestock nor people. Around noon the two soldiers' squad stopped to eat. "Billy and I started to get out our chow," Terry said, "but close to us was a bunch of Vietnamese in a heap, and some of them were moaning. Kally (2nd Lt. Kally) had been through before us and all of them had been shot, but many weren't dead. It was obvious that they weren't going to get any medical attention so Billy and I got up and went over to where they were. I *guess* we sort of finished them off." Terry went on to say that he and Doherty then returned to where their packs were and ate lunch. He estimated the size of the village to be 200 to 300 people. Doherty thought that the population of "Pinkville had been 400 people.

If Terry, Doherty, and Gruver could be believed, then not only had "Charlie" Company received orders to slaughter all the inhabitants of the village, but those orders had come from the commanding officer of Task Force Barker, or possibly even higher in the chain of command. PFC Terry stated that when Captain Medina (Charlie Company's commanding officer Captain Ernest Medina) issued the order for the destruction of "Pinkville" he had been hesitant; as if it were something he didn't want to do but had to do. Others I spoke to concurred with Terry on this.

It was June before I spoke to anyone who had something of significance to add to what I had already been told of the "Pinkville" incident. It was the end of June 1968 when I ran into Sergeant Larry La Croix at the USO in Chu Lai. La Croix had been in 2nd Lt. Kally's platoon on the day Task Force Barker swept through "Pinkville." What he told me verified the stories of the others, but he also had something new to add. He had been a witness to Kally's gunning down at least three separate groups of villagers. "It was terrible. They were slaughtering villagers like so many sheep." Kally's men were dragging people out of bunkers and hootches and putting them together in a group. The people in the group were men, women, and children of all ages. As soon as he felt that the group was big enough, Kally ordered an M-60 (machine gun) set up and the people were killed. La Croix said that he bore witness to this procedure at least three times. The three groups were of different sizes, one of about twenty people, one of about thirty people, and one of about 40 people. When the first group was put together Kally ordered Pfc. Torres to man the machine gun and open fire on the villagers that had been grouped. This Torres did, but before everyone in the group was down he ceased fire and refused to fire again.

After ordering Torres to recommence firing several times, Lieutenant Kally took over the M-60 and finished shooting the remaining villagers in that first group himself. Sargent La Croix told me that Kally didn't bother to order anyone to take the machine gun when the other two groups of villagers were formed. He simply manned it himself and shot down all villagers in both groups.

This account of Sargent La Croix confirmed the rumors that Gruver, Terry, and Doherty had previously told me about Lieutenant Kally. It also convinced me that there was a very substantial amount of truth to the stories that all of these men had told. If I needed more convincing, I was about to receive it.

It was in the middle of November 1968 just a few weeks before I was to return to the United States for separation from the army that I talked to Pfc Michael Bernhardt. Bernhardt had served his entire year in Vietnam in "Charlie" Company 1/20 and he too was about to go home.

"Bernie" substantiated the tales told by the other men I had talked to in vivid, bloody detail and added this. "Bernie" had refused to take part in the massacre of the villagers of "Pinkville" that morning and he thought that it was rather strange that the officers of the company had not made an issue of it. But that evening "Medina (Captain Ernest Medina) came up to me ("Bernie") and told me not to do anything stupid like write my congressman" about what had happened that day. Bernhardt assured Captain Medina that he had no such thing in mind. He had nine months left in Vietnam and felt that it was dangerous enough just to fight the acknowledged enemy.

Exactly what did occur in the village of "Pinkville" in March 1968 I do not know for certain, but I am convinced that it was something very black indeed. I remain irrevocably persuaded that if you and I do truly believe in the principles, of justice and the equality of every man, however humble, before the law, that form the very backbone that this country is founded on, then we must press forward a widespread and public investigation of this matter with all our combined efforts. I think that it was Winston Churchill who, once said "A country without a conscience is a country without a soul, and a country without a soul is a country that cannot survive." I feel that I must take some positive action on this matter. I hope that you will launch an investigation immediately and keep me informed of your progress. If you cannot, then I don't know what other course of action to take.

I have considered sending this to newspapers, magazines, and broadcasting companies, but I somehow feel that investigation and action by the Congress of the United States is the appropriate procedure, and as a conscientious citizen I have no desire to further besmirch the image of the American serviceman in the eyes of the world.
I feel that this action, while probably it would promote attention, would not bring about the constructive actions that the direct actions of the Congress of the United States would.

Sincerely,
/s/ Ron Ridenhour

SUMMARY

The full letter, which is widely available these days, *ran to about 2,000 words* worth of evidence that "something very black indeed" had happened. Further publicity came in the form of an investigation by reporter Seymour Hersh — which originally ran in a Washington news service *after LIFE magazine rejected it.*

In the fall of 1969, one of the leaders of the platoon implicated in the massacre — his name was spelled Calley — was charged with murdering civilians; other charges against other soldiers and officers followed. Comparisons to the Nuremberg Trials were many, especially as many of the soldiers there argued that they had just been following orders. There were several legal difficulties in pursuing a lawsuit against them, both logistical and sentimental*, as TIME polls found that many Americans either did not believe Ridenhour's account or thought that such killing was a natural result of war.*

Several trials did move forward, however. In 1971, Calley was found guilty. (Other trials for those present continued, but Calley was the only one convicted.) The sentencing did not end My Lai's reverberations.

At a protest in New York, future Secretary of State John Kerry read this statement: "We are all of us in this country guilty for having allowed the war to go on. We only want this country to realize that it cannot try a Calley for something that generals and Presidents and our way of life encouraged him to do. And if you try him, then at the same time you must try all those generals and Presidents and soldiers who have part of the responsibility. You must try this country."

The verdict split the U.S. between those who thought that punishments for the massacre should instead go all the way up to the Commander-in-Chief and those who thought that condemning soldiers for killing was a travesty in its own right.

"The crisis of conscience caused by the Calley affair is a graver phenomenon than the horror following the assassination of President Kennedy," TIME opined. "Historically, it is far more crucial."

Though the nation was divided at the time, history has come out fairly firmly on one side: in 1998, three men who turned their weapons on fellow soldiers instead of My Lai residents were honored in Washington — shortly before Ridenhour died at 52 of a heart attack — *and in 2009 Calley apologized for his role in what happened. "There is not a day that goes by," he said, "that I do not feel remorse."*

The historian Howard Jones, author of My Lai: Vietnam, 1968, and the Descent into Darkness, read Calley's words in news reports but didn't believe they showed true contrition. "There just was no inner change of heart," Jones told me. "I mean it just wasn't there. No matter how people tried to paint it." Jones especially took issue with the fact that Calley insisted in the Kiwanis speech that he'd only been following orders.

It's still unclear exactly what Capt. Ernest L. Medina told the men of Charlie Company the night before they were helicoptered into Son My. (*He did not respond to interview requests for this story*.) The captain reportedly told his soldiers that they were finally going to meet the Viet Cong's 48th Local Force Battalion, a well-armed division of at least 250 soldiers, which for months had tormented them. Medina later claimed that he'd never told his men to kill innocent civilians. He testified at Calley's court-martial that Calley had "hemmed and hawed" before admitting the extent of the slaughter. He said Calley told him, two days after the massacre, "I can still hear them screaming." *Medina himself was charged, tried, and found innocent.*

I wanted to get firsthand reports from other Charlie Company men who were at Son My, so I started making calls and writing letters. I eventually reached five former soldiers willing to speak on the record. Dennis Bunning, a former private first class in Second Platoon who now lives in California, *remembered Medina's pep talk this way: "We're going to get even with them for all the losses we've had. We're going in there, we're killing everything alive. We're throwing the bodies down the wells, we're burning the villages, and we're wiping them off of the map."*

For much more information about the massacre and how Calley lived out his life copy and paste the following link into your browser.

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/ghosts-my-lai-180967497/

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