## Books of The Times

## 'Anything That's Dead and Isn't White Is a VC' BY CHRISTOPHER LEHMANN-HAUPT

LAT 4. A Report on the Massacre and its Affermath: Pr Sevinour M. Hersh. 210 pages Random Hause 55.33 MCRNING IN THE WAR. The Tragedy

By Richard Hammer 207 pages.

The commendation of United Man William sent a men of the life of the length of ding the "enemy" a "he would La Riderhour not be a self at Mylas but privy to stories that an arrange terrible had happened made and a somehow bring dealing the

A year later, after Ridenhour had succeeded and word was out that perhaps between 400 and 500 Vietnamese civilians Nixon assured the nation that massacre was not part of American policy in Viet-nam. Certain seaders of Life magazine wrote in to say that they found the published pictorial evidence of the slaughter "obscene" because some of the mutilated bodies were unclothed. But Seymour M. Hersh, a freelance journalist, and Richard Hammer, a staff member of The New York Times News of the Week in Review section, decided to write the books in which the foregoing information is con-

Mr. Hersh, going on the assumption that his audience was not immune to moral shock, thought to let the facts speak more or less for themselves. After briefly sketching in the background of Charlie Company, and characterizing the company com-mander, Capt. Ernest Medina, and one of its platoon leaders, Lieut. William L. Calley Jr., as ambitious hard nosed officers who saw their fortunes rising with the daily body count, Mr. Hersh launched into an eyewitness reconstruction of the event and its aftermath.

He told how Charlie Company encountered no resistance at Mylai, yet how the blood ran. He told how old men were

tortured and women raped and dying children thrown into a drainage ditch that made one think of Babi Yar and Treblinka. He told how chips of bone went whistling off the people and cattle that were use for target practice while the G.I.'s laughed. He told of the aftermath; how the Vietcone crawled in and biried the dead and printed leaflets that made Americans and South Victnamese who weren't there bepropaganda. How Ronald Ridenhour nag-ged Washington into an investigation. How the story slowly dawned on an unbe-lieving American public, and how many turned against the informers.

Seymour Bersh dan't try to make us understand. He just told it, and let it go at that Richard Hammer—knowing per-haps that Hersh, as the reporter who first broke the story to the American press, had the tump on him-tried to put the incident in perspective and thereby ended up writing the bester book.

Mr. Hammer told the whole story of the wa. He tried to make his leaders see the events leading up to the attack from both the American and Vietnamese points of view, He took the trouble to explain the gradual depersonalization of the Viet-namese in American soldiers' eyes — to make us understand how even women and children begin to seem hated and dangerous. He even had a theory that the wrong village was attacked because of the inaccuracy of Army maps—and saw in that yet another example of American disre-spect for things Vietnamese,

Mr. Hammer did not attempt to blame. individuals. He saw the massacre as a tragedy, just as his subtitle hinted. The tragedy he saw lay in America's presence in Vietnam, Without absolving "the Vietcong, the North Vietnamese Army and others for war crimes," he concluded that "what happened in extremis at Songmy is only symbolic of what has happened all over Vietnam since the massive enlargement of the American commitment. ... For the war has led to the brutalization of young men who become soldiers, who can hail the massacre as a victory. It has led to the place where the majority of Americans can look at such horror and shrug and say, 'It's only war,' and to condemn not those who committed the afrocity. those who were responsible for it, but those who revealed it."

Both Seymour Hersh and Richard Hammer wrote solid journalistic reports, morally sensitive yet calm in tenor. Unfortunately, what they described is beyond the uses of art and journalism. To read these books is to invite stomach cramps and helpless rage. And it becomes impossible to se the words on the page.