

White House Coverup in Massacre?

Examiner News Services

WASHINGTON — A civilian lawyer who helped investigate the My Lai and newly disclosed My Khe massacres speculated yesterday that the White House had ordered suppression of the Army's report on the atrocities.

New York attorney Jerome K. Walsh confirmed a report by writer Seymour M. Hersh that the investigative panel

headed by Lt. Gen. William R. Peers found a second massacre in which 60 to 155 civilians died had taken place on March 16, 1968, at My Khe 4, a village near My Lai.

However, Walsh disputed Hersh's assertion that military authorities had ordered continued suppression of the Peers report after the last My Lai court-martial ended

in December. Walsh was one of two civilian members of the Peers commission.

"I do not believe this was an Army decision," said Walsh in an interview. "I believe that the White House has decided to keep it classified."

Asked why the White House would do so, Walsh replied: "If President Nixon is going to pardon Lt. (William

L.) Calley, the White House is not going to want it made public what he did."

Witnesses told the secret Army inquiry that between 60 and 155 civilians were killed at My Khe 4 by a different company of the Americal Division, Hersh reported, and Army investigators calculated nearly a year ago

—Turn to Page 4, Col. 1

—From Page 1

that the death toll at My Lai was 347 persons, almost twice the previously admitted number.

Hersh, winner of a Pulitzer Prize for first uncovering the March 16, 1968, My Lai massacre, made his new disclosures in an article for the New Yorker magazine entitled "Coverup."

Transcripts

Hersh said that he had obtained the complete transcript of the Peers inquiry into the massacre. He said he also had gained access to supplementary documents from the Army's Criminal Investigation Division and had conducted further interviews on his own.

The army had no immediate comment on the disclosures. A spokesman said that Peers report was still classified and "not releasable." The Army has said it would make no decision about releasing it until conclusion of appeals by Calley.

Hersh charged that Peers' report made it clear that "military officials have deliberately withheld from the public important but embarrassing factual information about My Lai 4," including the actual death toll.

'Spectacular'

Even though, according to Hersh, Calley's platoon was responsible for one-third of the My Lai deaths, "there are some pretty spectacular accounts of what Calley did" in the Peers report, Walsh said.

According to Walsh, that report concluded that "a minimum of 175 — that is, it couldn't be less than that — and, we may have said, a maximum of 400" persons were killed at My Lai. Hersh had put the toll at 347.

Hersh reported that witnesses told the Peers panel that between 60 and 155 civilians may have died at My Khe. "My recollection is," said Walsh, "that we put the number — to the extent we could get an accurate reading — on the low side. There were only two or three witnesses."

'Insane'

Hersh quotes former Pvt. Terry Reid of Milwaukee as telling him of My Khe last May: "It sounded insane — machine guns, grenades. One of the guys walked back, and

I remember him saying, "we got 60 women, kids and some old men."

Later, Hersh said, the soldiers began blowing up bunkers and tunnels where the villagers were seeking shelter.

He wrote: "Another ex-GI told me what happened to those who stayed in the bunkers: 'You didn't know for sure there were people in them until you threw in the TNT, and then you'd hear scurrying around in there. There wasn't much place for them to go.'"

The platoon was ordered to stop the killing in mid-morning, he added, and many survivors were allowed to flee to a nearby beach. Hersh said they later told Army investigators about the My Khe 4 massacre.

CID Inquiry

He said the Army CID undertook its census of civilian casualties at My Lai 4 in February, 1970, at the request of the Peers commission.

The CID "concluded that Charlie Company had slain 347 Vietnamese men, women and children in My Lai 4 in March 16, 1968 — a total twice as large as had been publicly acknowledged," Hersh wrote.

"The incident at My Khe 4 would perhaps be just another Vietnam atrocity story if it weren't for four facts," Hersh said, listing them as: "Its vital connection with the My Lai 4 tragedy; the American public ignorance of it; the total, detailed knowledge of it among the Peers investigators, the Department of the Army, and higher Pentagon officials; and the failure of any of these agencies to see that the men involved were prosecuted."

Helicopter Tortures

His New Yorker article also reported that some helicopter pilots in the 11th Brigade of the Americal Division, the parent unit of the task force, also were guilty of atrocities.

One of the "more macabre forms of murder," the article says, involved the use of a lasso to stop a fleeing Vietnamese peasant.

"Helicopter crewmen would then jump out, strip the victim, and replace the rope around his neck, and the helicopter would begin to move at low speed, with the

Vietnamese running along.

"When the victim could no longer keep up, he would fall, snapping his neck," Hersh wrote.

Publicity Asked

Soon after the acquittal of Col. Oran Henderson in December on charges of covering up the My Lai massacre, Walsh and the other civilian attorney on the Peers panel, Robert MacCrate, called for public release of the panel's report.

The Army said, however, that it no longer felt bound by the March, 1970, promise of then-Army Sec. Stanley Resor that "substantially all" of the report should be made public when judicial proceedings were concluded.

Walsh said that on occasions when he had talked with Army officials about releasing the report, "I was told that the Secretary of Defense had stated that it would not be made public.

White House Guess

"I'm told that, if it's the Secretary of Defense that is

putting out orders like that, that means the White House is involved.

"I think it's the White House, and when I suggest the possibility with people in the Army, I don't find any disagreement."

Only one person was charged in connection with events at My Khe 4, former 1st Lt. Thomas K. Willingham, commander of Bravo Company's First Platoon. Charges of unpremeditated murder in the deaths of 20 civilians were dropped without trial.