

Lt. Calley Describes Mylai Massacre

By Jack Anderson

In his taped interviews, Lt. William Calley described the Mylai massacre as "just like killing animals" with whom he could neither speak nor reason.

He discussed the tragedy freely with psychiatrists. "Do you just want to get into some blood and guts?" he asked them. "Or do you want to go through the chronological order on what happened?"

He told about gunning down helpless Vietnamese villagers who had been taken prisoner. Later, he killed someone crawling through a rice field; it turned out to be a child. He also confessed to shooting an old man.

When one of his soldiers hesitated to join in the slaughter, Calley kicked him and ordered him to start shooting. Yet in the middle of the massacre, Calley stopped another soldier from sexually molesting a Vietnamese girl.

As Calley recounted the horror of March 16, 1968, he thought he was following orders. He was told the area was occupied wholly by the "enemy." His orders were to make a rapid sweep through the area and to destroy all the "enemy" so he wouldn't have them at his back. He did not feel, he said, as if he were "killing humans."

After the massacre, he began to feel "cocky" and "told

a few people off." The orders suddenly recalling him to the U.S. didn't deflate him. "I'd gone through 17 months in a combat area, and you just don't build yourself up on hopes or try to out-guess what the Army's got for you," he explained. "I was going back to the big headquarters. I had no guilt in my mind . . . I didn't honestly think I was going there for anything. I was going to get there and be very happily surprised."

The thought occurred to him, nevertheless, that he might be questioned about what went wrong at Mylai. "I told them if General Westmoreland (then the Army chief) wants to know anything about tactical operations or if we've made a mistake anywhere, I'm there to do everything in the world I can to sit down and help . . . But that wasn't what they were after. I was never asked my opinion."

The psychiatrists, however, were eager to get Calley's opinion. One asked whether marijuana or narcotics could have contributed to the killer craze at Mylai.

Calley replied that he was unaware of any marijuana smoking before or during the operation. He explained: "You grab a handful of cigarettes off a guy. All you could do is tromp 'em into the mud on him. Then, of course, you've got a morale problem. The

lieutenant's running around stomping on all of our cigarettes'. My troops think I'm the fall guy . . . I had no support from higher, so I didn't concern myself with the problem."

But on reflection, Calley regretted his apathy over drugs. "Gosh, I mean it's a terrible tragedy because I didn't go into it," he said. "If that was the cause of something irregular at Mylai, then it made me a very poor commander for not going into it."

Calley's most poignant remark wasn't recorded. But when he was away from the tape recorders, the doctors quoted him as asking anxiously: "I would like to have the three of you doctors tell me whether or not I can have the same killer impulses today as I had in Vietnam, because I would feel very bad if I suddenly found myself accused of killing my neighbors and their children."

This question still hangs heavily over Calley. Is he a psychotic who would kill under stress and who, therefore, wasn't morally responsible for the Mylai horror? Or is he a product of the U.S. military system who would follow orders blindly and kill helpless civilians in cold blood?

The Army psychiatrists who examined Calley detected personality problems and reported he "tends to reason and problem-solve in a rather simplistic 'either-or' fashion." But

they concluded: "There is no psychosis, no neurosis, no pattern of behavior deviant enough to label him as having a personality disorder."

At least three civilian psychiatrists came to the opposite conclusion. The strongest opinion was stated by Dr. Albert A. LaVerne of New York City, who declared:

"Calley at this time is very disturbed, lacking insight, impairment of judgment, denial of reality and full of hostility and the viciousness of a rabid, mad dog killer."

We discussed the secret Calley tapes with his attorney, George W. Latimer, who rejected LaVerne's findings. "It wasn't a question of insanity, of Calley's mental processes not working," said Latimer. "It was a question of what might happen to anyone who goes through the horrifying experience of war."

The U.S. Court of Military Appeals will review the Calley case probably in October. Then President Nixon has promised to make his own final review.

The tragic Calley, meanwhile, is awaiting the outcome numbly. The psychiatrists asked him about the future, and the secret tapes record his reply. "To be honest," he said, "I have no idea. If the case were dropped tomorrow, I would walk around like a dumb idiot."