

The Only Man Convicted for Mylai

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William Laws Calley Jr. SEP 26 1974

By LINDA GREENHOUSE

To some Americans, he was the symbol of the nation's moral confusion over Vietnam. To others, he was the cold-blooded murderer of helpless women and children.

And to many — a substantial majority, according to polls at the time of his conviction in 1971 — he was a scapegoat in the country's cynical attempt to save its conscience, a lowly lieutenant who said he was only following orders and who became the only defendant out of 25 enlisted men and officers to be convicted for his role in the Mylai massacre.

Whatever he was then or has become since, William L. Calley Jr. still seems equally unlikely in the role of villain, martyr or hero. Twenty-four years old at the time of the Mylai killings, Lieutenant Calley seemed to be one of life's losers, an undersized young man who had apparently failed at almost everything he had tried to do and who had gained a measure of respect, it seemed, for the first time in his life in the wartime Army.

The Army post at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., was not putting through any calls yesterday to the Disciplinary Barracks, where the former first lieutenant has been held since June 28 awaiting the result of his appeal.

His nearly three months of confinement in the 1,800-man

prison barracks, in a far corner of the base, was his only prolonged incarceration since he was convicted of the premeditated murder of not fewer than 22 unarmed Vietnamese civilians. Three days after the conviction President Nixon ordered him released from the stockade at Fort Benning, Ga., and placed under house arrest in a comfortable two-bedroom apartment.

There he received frequent visits from a staff of secretaries and a steady female companion, Ann Moore, a Red Cross worker at the base hospital.

At Fort Leavenworth, Mr. Calley was given a single room and assigned to work as a clerk typist. Had his conviction not been reversed yesterday, he would have been eligible for parole in a matter of months. The Army commuted his original life sentence to 20 years and then to 10.

As a free man, Mr. Calley will undoubtedly find residues of the public sympathy that in the days after his conviction prompted public demonstrations on his behalf and made a song about him into a hit record.

"My name is William Calley, I'm a soldier of this land," the song began. "I've vowed to do my duty and to gain the upper hand! But they've made me out a villain, they have stamped me with a brand? As we go marching on . . . The re-

cord sold 202,000 copies in the first three days after the verdict.

William Laws Calley Jr. was born June 8, 1943, in Miami. His father was a machine salesman and the family was moderately prosperous, with a country cottage in North Carolina. Boyhood friends remember young Calley, whose nickname is Rusty as a socialable, friendly boy.

Went to Military School

But he did badly in school and had to repeat the seventh grade after he was caught cheating on a test. His family sent him away to military schools. In his teens, he developed an ulcer. He enrolled in Palm Beach Junior College, but dropped out with failing grades after the semester.

Mr. Calley worked briefly as a bellhop and then as a restaurant dishwasher. In 1963, he got a job with the Florida East Coast Railroad. He was arrested for allowing a train to block five downtown intersections in Fort Lauderdale during rush hour. He was acquitted, but eventually quit the job with the railroad, tried and failed at several others and, with his mother bedridden and dying of cancer, headed west. His car broke down in Albuquerque. Out of money, he enlisted in the Army.

Private Calley applied for Officer Candidate School and was accepted. He was frequently criticized for below-average performance and lack of command presence, but the Army needed platoon leaders in 1967 and he was commissioned a lieutenant. He planned to make the Army his career.

"It seemed," said Mario Rodriguez, a high school friend who visited with him in 1968 before the Mylai scandal broke, "that he had finally found his place."