

Civilian court frees Calley

Examiner News Services

COLUMBUS, GA. — Less than four years after he was sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering 22 civilians at My Lai, former Army Lt. William L. Calley Jr. walked out of court yesterday a free man.

"Thank you, thank you," he said.

The only U.S. officer convicted for the 1968 slaughter in which as many as 500 South Vietnamese civilians lost their lives, was freed through civilian courts after the military had rejected his appeals.

U.S. District Judge J. Robert Elliott released the baby-faced, 31-year-old former infantryman under a \$1,000 personal recognizance bond.

Army lawyers didn't con-

test the setting of bond yesterday. The day before, the Army had announced it was granting Calley a parole on Nov. 19, no matter what the courts did.

The Army, however, has appealed Elliott's reversal of Calley's March 1971 conviction for the 1968 slaughter, viction, and the appeals court in New Orleans has said it will act on the appeal the week of February 17, 1975.

"Right now he's a free man," said J. Houston Gordon, the Tennessee attorney who spearheaded the legal motions that have set Calley free on bail and reversed his court-martial conviction.

"After three years of fighting appeals, at long last, it appears he'll never have to spend another day in

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WILLIAM CALLEY ARRIVES FOR BAIL HEARING
Afterward, he left without Ft. Benning provost marshal

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prison," said Gordon. "He wants to lead a normal life, without people hounding him."

Gordon spoke on the steps of the courthouse as Calley walked down the street followed by television cameramen and photographers. He said Calley plans to "sink into anonymity. He plans to stay in Columbus, where people don't condemn him."

Calley contended throughout that he was guilty of no wrongdoing at My Lai—that the Vietnamese village had been pinpointed as a Viet Cong stronghold and that he was merely carrying out the orders of his superiors when he led an infantry platoon on a sweep through the hamlet. The exact number killed in the action has never been firmly established, but estimates have ranged up to 500.

On March 29, 1971 Calley was convicted and drew a life term. This was cut to 20 years and finally to 10 years under the military appeals process.

Calley then turned to the civilian courts.

At one point while Judge Elliott had the case under consideration, he set Calley free on bail, but the Army went into appeals court and succeeded in getting the bail revoked. Calley, who had been confined in his bachelor officer quarters here at Ft. Benning ever since, was then taken to the military prison at Ft. Leavenworth, Kan., to finish serving his term.

On September 25, Elliott overturned Calley's court-martial conviction on ground that massive publicity in the case had prevented him from receiving a fair trial. Elliott again ordered Calley freed, the Army again filed an appeal with the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans.

Friday, the appeals court agreed Calley should be released on bond. He was then flown to Columbus from Leavenworth in the middle of the night so he could be on hand for a hearing yesterday before Elliott.