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Retirement Under Pressure

Lieut. Col. Anthony B. Herbert, though undaunted by two wars and eight injuries on the battlefield, has surrendered to what he considered intolerable pressure on him and his family by the Army which he has served with distinction for over twenty years. His decision to retire in February was taken despite the fact that he had been officially cleared of a slanderous efficiency report and, more recently, been promoted to his permanent regular rank of major.

The source of conflict obviously is Colonel Herbert's manifest doubt that the Army has genuinely sought to assess his charges of atrocities committed by South Vietnamese and American personnel. The question is simply whether an officer with an outstanding record has told the truth about incidents which, if they did actually take place, would make efforts at cover-up nothing less than complicity in war crimes.

The Army's persistent efforts to muzzle Colonel Herbert and recent lamentable attempts by his superiors to humiliate him by gratuitous lessons in how to salute render even more suspicious the continued official silence about the extensive testimony in the case. In the absence of full disclosure of this testimony, the Pentagon's somewhat reluctant vindication and subsequent promotion of Colonel Herbert, coupled with the far more emphatic dismissal of all charges against those officers he accused of covering up the facts, suggest the offer of a deal which the colonel—predictably—refused to accept. His retirement will leave him free to continue, as he has pledged, a battle that involves, far more than his personal honor: the integrity and effectiveness of the U.S. Army.