

Judgment on Mylai

The United States Army has faced up to the horror of Mylai with remarkable vigor and candor in the report of a panel of inquiry headed by Lieut. Gen. William R. Peers.

After a self-examination that is perhaps without precedent in a military organization, the Army board has conceded that, in the words of General Peers, "a tragedy of major proportions occurred" in the Vietnamese hamlet of Mylai on March 16, 1968. On that date more than 100 civilians—men, women and children—allegedly were killed, tortured and raped by members of the Americal Division.

The Pentagon made plain its determination to avoid future Mylais by filing charges against fourteen officers, including the Superintendent of West Point, who commanded the American Division at the time, for suppressing information about the mass killings. The guilt of the men so charged of course remains to be proved. But these accusations, together with charges already brought against ten men accused of direct involvement in the alleged atrocities, should help make clear to every G.I.—and to the world—that the United States does not condone and will not tolerate the behavior attributed to some American soldiers at Mylai.

General Peers said he has also recommended a tightening of regulations dealing with war crimes and quick reporting of atrocities, as well as improvements in training. The grim lesson of Mylai will not have been mastered until every American soldier, and especially every officer, has understood the horror of what unquestionably took place there and has recognized his own responsibilities under rules of war that were sternly enforced by American judges at Nuremberg and Tokyo after World War II.