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## My Lai 4

# A Rescue of Women, Kids

By Seymour M. Hersh

*(This is the sixth of several articles excerpted from "My Lai 4," a book on the atrocity that occurred on March 16, 1968 in a South Vietnamese hamlet. The author, Seymour Hersh, has received a Pulitzer Prize for his distinguished reporting on the My Lai tragedy.)*

LARRY COLBURN, who was just 18 years old at the time of My Lai 4, noticed that "the infantrymen were killing everything in the village. The people didn't really know what was happening. Some of them began walking out of there and the GIs just started going up to them and shooting them all in the back of the head." He added, "We saw this one woman hiding there. She was alive and squatting; she looked up when we flew over. We dropped a smoke marker. When we came back she was in the same position — only she was dead. The back of her head was blown off. It had to be point-blank."

Helicopter pilot Thompson was furious. He tried unsuccessfully to radio the troops on the ground to find out what was going on. He then reported the wild firings and unnecessary shootings to brigade headquarters. All the command helicopters flying overhead had multi-channel radios and could monitor most conversations. Lieutenant Colonel Barker apparently intercepted the message and called down to Medina at the CP (Command Post) just south of the plaza. John Kinch of the Mortar Platoon heard Medina answer that "had a body count of 310."

The captain added, "I don't know what they're doing. The first platoon's in the lead. I am trying to stop it." A moment later, Kinch said, Medina called Calley and ordered,



LT. WILLIAM CALLEY  
He shot the priest

"That's enough for today."

Harry Stanley was standing a few feet away from Calley near some huts at the drainage ditch when the call came from Medina. He had a different recollection: "Medina called Calley and said, 'What the --- is going on?'" Calley said he got some VC, or some people that needed to be checked out." At this point Medina cautioned Calley to tell his men to save their ammunition because the operation still had a few more days to run.

IT IS NOT CLEAR how soon or to whom Medina's order was given, but Stanley told the C.I.D. what Calley did next: "There was an old lady in a bed and I believe there was a priest in white praying over her. . . Calley told me to ask about the VC and NVA and where the weapons were. The priest denied being a VC or NVA."

Charles Sledge watched with horror as Calley pulled the old man outside: "He said a few more words to the monk. It looked like the monk was pleading for his life. Lieutenant Calley then took his rifle and pushed the monk into a rice paddy and shot him point-blank."

Calley then turned his attention back to the crowd of Vietnamese and issued an order: "Push all those people in the ditch." Three of four GIs complied. Calley struck a woman with a rifle as he pushed her down.

Stanley remembered that some of the civilians "kept trying to get out. Some made it to the top . . ."

Calley began the shooting and ordered Meadlo to join in. Meadlo told about it later: "So we pushed our seven to eight people in with the big bunch of them. And so I began shooting them all. So did Mitchell, Calley . . . I guess I shot maybe 25 or 20 people in the ditch . . . men, women and children. And babies."

Some of the GIs switched from automatic fire to single-shot to conserve ammunition. Herbert Carter watched the mothers "grabbing their kids and the kids grabbing their mothers. I didn't know what to do."

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CALLEY THEN turned again to Meadlo and said, "Meadlo, we've got another job to do."

Meadlo didn't want any more jobs. He began to argue with Calley. Sledge watched Meadlo once more start to sob.

Calley turned next to Robert Maples of Freebold, N.J., and said: "Maples, load your machine gun and shoot these people."

Maples replied, as he told the C.I.D., "I'm not going to do that."

One further incident stood out in everyone's mind: seconds after the shooting stopped, a bloodied but unhurt two-year-old boy miraculously crawled out of the ditch, crying. He began running toward the hamlet. Someone hollered, "There's a kid." There was a long pause. Then Calley ran back, grabbed the child, threw him back in the ditch and shot him.

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MOMENTS LATER Thompson, still in his helicopter, flew by. He told the IG what happened next: "I kept flying around and across a ditch . . . and it . . . had a bunch of bodies in it and I don't know how they got in the ditch. But I saw some of them were still alive."

Thompson landed his small helicopter near the ditch, and asked a soldier there if he could help the people out: "He said the only way he could help them was to help them out of their misery."

Thompson then saw Calley and the first platoon. "I asked him if he could get the women and kids out of there before they tore it (the bunker) up, and he said the only way he could get them out was to use hand grenades. 'You just hold your men right here,'" Thompson told the angry Calley, "'and I will get the women and kids out.'"

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**B**EFORE CLIMBING OUT of his aircraft, Thompson ordered Colburn and his crew chief to stay alert. "He told us that if any of the Americans opened up on the Vietnamese, we should open up on the Americans," Colburn recalled.

Colburn wasn't sure whether he would have followed orders if the GIs had opened fire at the bunker.

The helicopters landed, with Thompson still standing between the GIs and the Vietnamese, and quickly rescued nine persons — two old men, two women and five children. One of the children later died en route to the hospital.

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**Tomorrow: Children as targets**