

My Lai 4

Rape, Bayonets And Killing

(This is the seventh 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 M. Hersh, has received a Pulitzer Prize, for his distinguished reporting on the My Lai tragedy.)

By Seymour M. Hersh

IN OTHER PARTS of My Lai 4, GIs were taking a break, or loafing. Others were systematically burning those remaining homes and huts and destroying food. Some villagers — still alive — were able to leave their hiding places and walk away.

Charles West recalled that one member of his squad who simply wasn't able to slaughter a group of children asked for and received permission from an officer to let them go.

West's third platoon went ahead, nonetheless, with the killing. They gathered a small group of about ten women and children, who huddled together in fear a few feet from the plaza, where dozens of villagers already had been slain. West and his squad had finished their mission in the north and west of the hamlet, and were looking for new targets. They drifted south toward the CP.

Jay Roberts and Ron Haeberle, who had spent the past hour watching the slaughter in other parts of the hamlet, stood by — pencil and cameras at the ready.

A few men now singled out a slender Vietnamese girl of about 15. They tore her from the group and started to pull at her



GIs at My Lai

blouse. They attempted to fondle her breasts. The old women and children were screaming and crying. One GI yelled, "Let's see what she's made of." Another said, "VC Boom, Boom," meaning she was a Viet Cong whore.

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JAY ROBERTS thought that the girl was good-looking. An old lady began fighting with fanatical fury, trying to protect the girl. Roberts said, "She was fighting off two or three guys at once. She was fantastic. Usually they're pretty passive . . . they hadn't even gotten that chick's blouse off when Haeberle came along." One of the GIs finally smacked the old woman with his rifle butt; another booted her in the rear.

Grzesik and his fire team watched the fight develop as they walked down from the ditch to the hamlet center. Grzesik was surprised: "I thought the village was cleared . . . I didn't know there were that many people left." He knew trouble was brewing, and his main thought was to keep his team out of it. He helped break up the fight.

Some of the children were desperately hanging on to the old lady as she struggled. Grzesik was worried about the cameraman. He may have yelled, "Hey, there's a photographer." He remembered thinking, "Here's a guy standing there with a camera that you've never seen before." Then somebody said, "What do we do with them." The answer was, "Waste them." Suddenly there was a burst of automatic fire from many guns. Only a small child survived. Somebody then carefully shot him, too.

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BY NOW IT WAS NEARLY 10:30 a.m. and most of the company began drifting aimlessly toward the plaza and the command post a few yards to the south. Their work was largely over; a good part of the hamlet was in flames.

Herb Carter and Harry Stanley had shed their gear and were taking a short break at the CP. Near them was a young Vietnamese boy, crying, with a bullet wound in his stomach.

Stabley watched one of Captain Medina's three radio operators walk along a trail toward them; he was without his radio gear.

As Stanley told the C.I.D., the radio operator went up to Carter and said, "Let me see your pistol." Carter gave it to him. The radio operator "then stepped within two feet of the boy and shot him in the neck with a pistol. Blood gushed from the child's neck. He then tried to walk off, but he could only take two or three steps. Then he fell onto the ground. He lay there and took four or five deep breaths and then he stopped breathing."

The radio operator turned to Stanley and said, "Did you see how I shot that son of a bitch?" Stanley told him, "I don't see how anyone could just kill a kid." Carter got his pistol back; he told Stanley, "I can't take this no more . . ."

Moments later Stanley heard a gun go off and Carter yell, "I went to Carter and saw he had shot himself in the foot. I think Carter shot himself on purpose."

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SOME GIs didn't hesitate to use their bayonets. Nineteen-year-old Nguyen Thi Ngoc Tuyet watched a baby trying to open her slain mother's blouse to nurse. A soldier shot the infant while it was struggling with the blouse, and then slashed at it with his bayonet. Tuyet also said she saw another baby hacked to death by GIs wielding their bayonets.

Le Tong, a 28-year-old rice farmer, reported seeing one woman raped after GIs killed her children. Nguyen Khoa, a 37-year-old peasant, told of a 13-year-old girl who was raped before being killed.

There were "degrees" of murder that day. Some were conducted out of sympathy. Michael Terry, a Mormon who was a squad leader in the third platoon, had ordered his men to take their lunch break by the bloody ditch in the rear of the hamlet. He noticed that there were no men in the ditch, only women and children. He had watched Calley and the others shoot into that ditch. Calley seemed just like a kid, Terry thought. He also remembered thinking it was "just like a Nazi-type thing."

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MOST of the shooting was over by the time Medina called a break for lunch, shortly after 11 o'clock. By then Roberts and Haerberle had grabbed a helicopter and cleared out of the area, their story for the day far bigger than they wanted.

When a C.I.D. interrogator later asked Charles Sledge how many civilians he thought had survived, he answered: "Only two small children who had lunch with us."

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Tomorrow: Victory.