

# Calley Charged With Murder

By Seymour M. Hersh

*(This is the last 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.)*

AT 8:45 A.M. on June 13, 1969, the Inspector General's office of the Army staged a police line-up at the new Forrestal Defense Building in Washington, D.C.

One of the officers in the line-up was Lieutenant William L. Calley Jr. Calley had been abruptly pulled out of Vietnam in early June — at least one month before his tour of duty was over — and shipped home overnight to Fort Benning, Ga., with special orders to report to Washington.

The line-up was called by Colonel William V. Wilson to enable a key witness to the massacre — Warrant Officer Hugh C. Thompson of the 123rd Aviation Battalion — to identify the young officer who had been directing operations at the bloody drainage ditch at My Lai 4.



RONALD HAEBERLE  
Photographic evidence

range during that same day. Wilson now turned to that charge. He had received Captain Ernest Medina's explanation of the event during his interview with the captain on May 13 at Fort Benning.

"Could you identify the man who shot the girl?" Wilson asked Thompson.

"I think it was a captain, sir . . ."

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ON JUNE 19 Wilson interrogated Larry Coburn, who corroborated Thompson's testimony and also identified Medina and Calley as the officers involved in the shootings. Coburn picked out the Charlie Company officers from photographs shown by Wilson; the ex-GI also was shown detailed aerial maps of My Lai 4.

Wilson then began interrogating Medina's radiomen and others in his command post who had knowledge of the captain's movements that day.

Colonel Wilson and other officers in the Inspector General's office had interrogated 36 witnesses by the end of July.

Wilson's lengthy report was submitted to General William Westmoreland, and on August 4 Westmoreland responded by ordering the Inspector General's office to turn over the results of its investigation to the Provost Marshal's office of the Army and its Criminal Investigation Division to determine whether there was enough evidence to file criminal charges against Calley and others in the company.

On August 25 the C.I.D. agents found Ronald Haerberle in Cleveland, and he gave them a set of his color photographs of the shootings. Haerberle also told the military police agents that as far as he knew, his unprinted rolls of black-and-white film were still lying around the public information office of brigade headquarters. The C.I.D. immediately sent someone to check; the film was there.

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BY THE END of August, interrogations of former Charlie Company members were being conducted all over the United States and Vietnam.

Many witnesses were quizzed a second time and shown the Haerberle photographs. The photos jogged memories, and the GIs began recalling in more detail what happened.

On August 8, four months after the Army first received the Ridenhour letter, Major General William A. Becker, chief of the Congressional liaison for the Army, began giving oral briefings on the My Lai 4 case to members of Congress.

While the Army was preparing its case against him, Lieutenant Calley found himself a lawyer, George W. Latimer of Salt Lake City. The elderly Latimer was highly regarded in military legal circles, having served for ten years on the Military Court of Appeals in Washington and also on the Utah State Supreme Court.

It was now clear that the Army was going to institute proceedings against Calley. On August 19 Colonel Wilson flew down to Fort Benning to brief the legal officers there about the case. Under Army regulations, the commanding officer of Fort Benning and his legal staff were the ultimate authority for reviewing the evidence and filing charges against Calley, but the Pentagon wanted to make sure that the infantrymen at Benning knew exactly what was going on.

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A FEW DAYS earlier the Pentagon had notified officials at Benning by telegram that Calley must be charged with a general court-martial — a military proceeding for more serious offenses, such as murder — in order to retain him in the service beyond September 6, the day his two years' obligation ended.

By then, most senior officials in Washington knew that the Army was going to have an unprecedented murder case on its hands, one that could become an international liability and might even affect the progress of the war in South Vietnam.

On September 5, charges were formally preferred against Calley. Six specifications of premeditated murder were drawn up, accusing Calley of killing a total of 109 "Oriental human beings, occupants of the village of My Lai 4, whose names and sexes are unknown, by means of shooting them with a rifle."

On November 25 the Army formally announced that Calley had been ordered to stand trial at a general court-martial for the premeditated murder of 109 Vietnamese civilians.

The End

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