



Calley's Crime vs. The Rest of the Army

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A MUCH too belated attempt to explain the harsh conditions in which Lieutenant William Calley committed his crime, has been recently described as a "meandering search for extenuating circumstances." That is utterly untrue.

To begin with, there can be no extenuation of the shooting of undefended prisoners of war, which is what Calley's crime boils down to. But by the same token there can be no extenuation of the attempt to make Calley's crime appear to be generally representative of the U.S. Army's performance in Vietnam.

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THIS LAST statement will seem startling, even heretical to a great many ignorant but virtuous persons, who have been repeatedly told the flat opposite by the voices they listen to. Only a few months ago, however, the same ignorant but virtuous persons would have been equally startled by a denial that police in the United States were actively engaged in "genocide" of the Black Panthers.

The myth about "genocide" of the Black Panthers originated in a pack of lies told by a Panther propagandist. The lies were promptly swallowed whole, without the most momentary checking. Police "genocide" of the Black Panthers was widely treated as an established fact for a very long time.

Finally, in the "The New Yorker," Edward J. Epstein published a carefully researched story showing that the supposedly established fact was solely based on a pack of lies.

The story of the Vietnamese war is too complex and multifarious to be subject to the kind of detailed research that Edward J. Epstein did on the Black Panther myth. So it is perhaps better to consider the broader testimony of the most respected foreign service officer to work in the field in Vietnam, Charles Whitehouse, who ran the vast civilian effort in the huge III Corps Area around Saigon for nearly two years.

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REGARDING the precautions taken by the allies to avoid civilian casualties in Vietnam," he writes, "I can state categorically . . . (first that) B-52 strikes were targeted with the greatest of caution in order that South Vietnamese civilians would not be imperiled. No B-52 strike ever made in an area that was civilian-inhabited.

"(Second), I can only recall tactical air strikes being used in inhabited areas in a few isolated instances, when those areas had been occupied by enemy troops.

Finally, 'free-fire' zones were only established in uninhabited areas; and even then, warnings were broadcast that the areas in question were being so classified. . .

"In making the foregoing comments, I am not in any way seeking to exonerate Lieutenant Calley; but commentary . . . (on) this case appears in many instances to be based on the belief that our armed forces and those of South Vietnam have fought the war with utter disregard for the safety and welfare of the civilian population."