

A Civilized Scale of Values



Arthur Hoppe

THE GREAT national debate continues to rage over the conviction of Lieutenant William Calley for the premeditated murder of 22 Vietnamese men, women and children.

While the protesters cite a number of rationales for their anger, the feelings of many seem to boil down to a question of human worth.

"The lives of 22 unfortunate Asian peasants," said one patriotic letter writer, "aren't worth a single American boy!" And you can be sure that many Americans would agree.

Actually, they are quite right. The entire question was resolved at the International Conference on Human Worth which met in Geneva in the fall of 1966.

A transcript of that conference, which first appeared in this space, is reprinted today in hopes that it may be of helpful guidance to Lieutenant Calley's defenders.

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THE CONFERENCE was opened by U.S. Ambassador Homer T. Pettibone. "We do not contend, gentlemen," he began gravely, "that one American is worth a million Asians. Our restraint in using our nuclear weapons demonstrates this. On the other hand, it would be a travesty of logic to argue that an American and a Vietnamese are of equal value.

"For one thing, Vietnamese are smaller. On a straight per-pound basis, they are obviously worth less. In addition, the average peasant neither dresses properly nor speaks English, so that you must shout at him to penetrate his stupidity."

"Hear, hear," said the British delegate. "Felt the same about our Fuzzy-Wuzzies. Deuced good fighting men, though. Completely fearless."

"True," replied Mr. Pettibone, turning the point to his advantage. "But that, of

course, is because he places such a low value on his own life. For example, we compensate the families of friendly Vietnamese civilians we accidentally kill with a few hundred dollars. If they were Americans, each would cost us thousands.

"And rightly so. Few of these peasants own their own cars, television sets or freezers. Obviously, they are poor credit risks. Why? Because they simply aren't worth much."

"What non-Frenchman is?" asked the French delegate with a Gallic shrug.

"Generally speaking," continued Mr. Pettibone, "they are uneducated, ill-housed and underfed. Few read good books, play golf or go to the movies. In a word, gentlemen, they are natives."

"Oh, natives," said the Belgian delegate, nodding. "We dealt with them in the Congo. We know what they're worth."

"All we ask," said Mr. Pettibone, "is that this conference set a fair ratio — say, 30 to one — so that we can get on with the war in good conscience."

A lively debate followed, highlighted by the German delegate's hour-long speech on genetics, Nietzsche and the superiority of the Aryan race. In the end, a compromise of 28.2 Vietnamese per American was unanimously adopted.

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I FEEL this standard," Mr. Pettibone told reporters afterward, "accurately reflects the view of civilized people everywhere."

An irate African journalist protested that the conference's members included only delegates from technologically advanced, Caucasian, Christian nations.

"Good heavens, man," said Mr. Pettibone with surprise, "who else is civilized enough to compare the value of human beings?"