



By *Mary McGrory*
 Washington
 THE CASE is closed. The last of the My Lai defend-

Reporter Seymour Hersh (left) broke the My Lai story that sent Lt. Col. Oran Henderson and Capt. Ernest Medina (below) to trial



A Moral

ants, Lieutenant Colonel Oran K. Henderson, has been acquitted.

Only one man, it seems, was responsible for the murder of uncounted, unarmed Vietnamese peasants — "and babies too" — on March 16, 1968. Lieutenant William E. Calley Jr., is living in his quarters at Fort Benning, Ga., awaiting the outcome of a review, assured of the personal consideration of his commander-in-chief.

Captain Ernest L. Medina was found not guilty of murder. He has taken a position as a helicopter salesman. He says he is "not bitter." He told the Henderson court martial that he lied to Henderson and the Peers Commission.

The army is relieved. It is satisfied it did its duty. Twenty-five men were charged by the Peers Commission, which sprang into being after reporter Seymour Hersh broke the story that the Army tried to hide. Six were court-martialed.

Only Calley, who said it was "no big deal," was found guilty. The jury which returned the verdict, was vilified. Members explained somewhat apologetically that there was nothing they could do in the face of overwhelming evidence.

And what about the man who started it all?

Ronald Ridenhour, the

What happened to the man
who started the
My Lai inquiry?

Body Count



LT. WM. CALLEY
Lonely "guilt"

draftee who made it his business to tell the country what its soldiers were doing in Vietnam, can't find a job. He's living with his sister and brother-in-law in Las Vegas and trying to write a novel.

Ridenhour thinks his long, lonely and dangerous exertions helped to save Vietnamese lives.

"Before My Lai came out, it was open season on them," he says. "Every Vietnamese was fair game."

After his mission of conscience was accomplished, he finished his courses at Claremont College, where he was a mild if disappointingly non-dovish celebrity. The one profit he got from his one-man investigation and a historic

letter he wrote to unheeding Washington officials was a year's employment as a Time magazine stringer in Vietnam. Others got thousands for television interviews and photographs. He never made a dime.

When he went back to Vietnam, he found that more stringent policies about firing were in effect.

"You had to have a reason for shooting somebody," he says dryly.

The trials, which he followed in the press, he thought were "a farce."

"They had nothing to do with justice," he says. "How can you expect justice when the same people who give the orders do the investigating and the prosecuting and sit on the juries?"

"Henderson's defense was that every unit had its My Lai. That's the real issue and the Army never faced it. The real question was about responsibility. The generals couldn't help knowing what was going on.

"They know what happens in a war and that troops get out of hand. Body counts only tend to whet their appetite. They know they're supposed to keep the troops under control, that's their responsibility, and not one of them was brought to trial.

"The stories I heard from the G.I.s who were there, were quite different



Ronald Ridenhour, the draftee who told the country about My Lai, is out of work now

from what unfolded at the trials. Hundreds of people were killed that day, and one man is found guilty of killing 22."

He hasn't become "a foaming - at - the - mouth building burner," though.

"In a way, I'm a little disappointed in myself, obviously there's something wrong with the system," he says. "But I've become a cracker-barrel philosopher, and even more of a cynic than I used to be. I'd just like to find a job."

He doesn't think the trouble he went to to touch the Army's conscience taught the military anything except "don't get caught."

He thinks the real price it has paid for My Lai is the loss of the brightest young officers who are getting out because they think

there is no room for anyone "if you're not on the team and don't go along with the old bulls who think the way to deal with a problem is to keep it quiet."

He believes the country's conscience was reached, as evidenced by the uproar over the Calley verdict. "They were rejecting the evidence of what we were doing in the name of winning a war, they didn't want to believe American boys would do that."

The war itself, which some doves hoped would be ended by the ghastly revelations, continues. Now it is being fought increasingly impersonally from the air. In an automated war, on electronic battlefields, there will be no Ronald Ridenhours.