

The Real Scapegoat?

By Mary McGrory

Washington

MANY Americans look upon Lieutenant William F. Calley Jr. as the scapegoat of My Lai. But a retired one-star general who was

censured for his part in the immediate aftermath, considers himself its true political scapegoat.

George H. Young Jr., the assistant commander of the Americal Division, who a year ago thought he

was a "man who still had a future," now thinks he was dishonored "because the Army was so afraid of a whitewash it resorted to smear in my case."

He blames Army Chief of Staff General William Westmoreland, who was supreme commander in Vietnam at the time of the slaughter, for the ruin of his career.

"I surmise the reason General Westmoreland did it was to take the pressure off himself."

Young is a lean 51-year-old with wide brown eyes and gray hair. He and his wife are engaged in a desperate campaign to "restore his honor," tarnished last May when he received a letter of censure from then-Secretary of Army Stanley Resor, reprimanding him for taking only "minimum action" and making only "perfunctory inquiry" into what happened at My Lai on March 16, 1968.

What pains the general equally was the revocation of his Distinguished Service Medal.

His contention is that the Army bowed to the political pressure that attended the dismissal of charges against him and his superior, Brigadier General Samuel W. Koster, who was also censured, given a letter of reprimand and, addi-

tionally, demoted one grade.

A graduate of the Citadel, commissioned in 1942, veteran of three wars, Young sadly quit the service last June. He is now a consultant to a bus manufacturing concern, but his obsession is the hope that the Army will change its mind, remove the letter and give him back his medal.

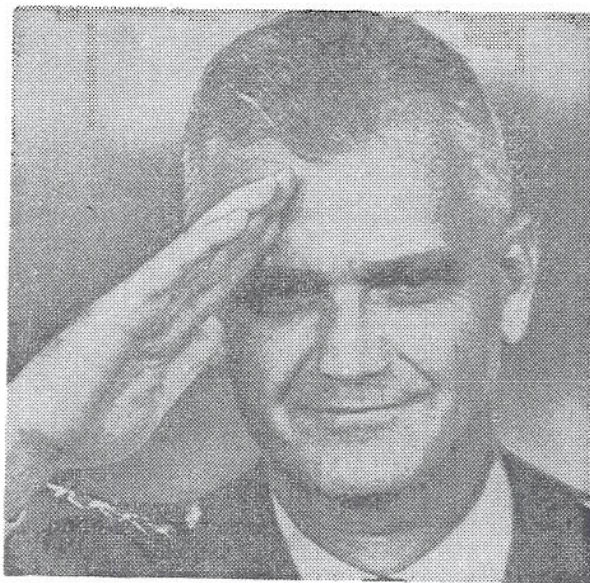
He feels that the service he loved and served so long has mistreated him. He was cleared by a judicial five-man panel headed by General Jonathan O. Seman in June 1970.



GENERAL GEORGE H. YOUNG JR.
"Afraid of a whitewash"



STANLEY RESOR
He wrote letters



GENERAL WILLIAM WESTMORELAND
"To take the pressure off himself"

"Why did the Army wait eight and a half months to circumvent military justice and go the administrative route?" he asks. "I would rather have been court-martialed."

Calley alone has been convicted. The last of the My Lai defendants, Colonel Oran K. Henderson, Young's subordinate in the Americal Division, was acquitted a week before Christmas.

Robert E. Jordan III, Army general counsel at the time, says the Army acted "properly and lawfully." It can always administratively punish a man even if he has been cleared of criminal charges. Young's performance was rated "substandard" for an officer of his rank and experience.

Like General Koster, Young tends to speak of the tragedy in terms of blasted career rather than murdered peasants. The

occurrence itself he still has difficulty accepting.

"It was not until the Calley verdict that I believed it," he says earnestly. "And I still have faith in American youth and the men who lead them. I don't believe American youth has degenerated to that extent."

"The Americal division did a lot of good, too. Its concern for the civilian population has been underplayed."

He was 50 miles away from the scene while the horrors were unfolding. The next day, he says, two helicopter commanders told him nothing of civilian deaths, only of a "tremendous amount of unnecessary firing" and a confrontation between a helicopter pilot and a ground combat leader.

The pilot was warrant officer Hugh Thompson, who was confronting Lieutenant

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Calley over the blood-covered body of a small child. Thompson threatened to fire on Calley's troops if they charged a bunker filled with terrified villagers.

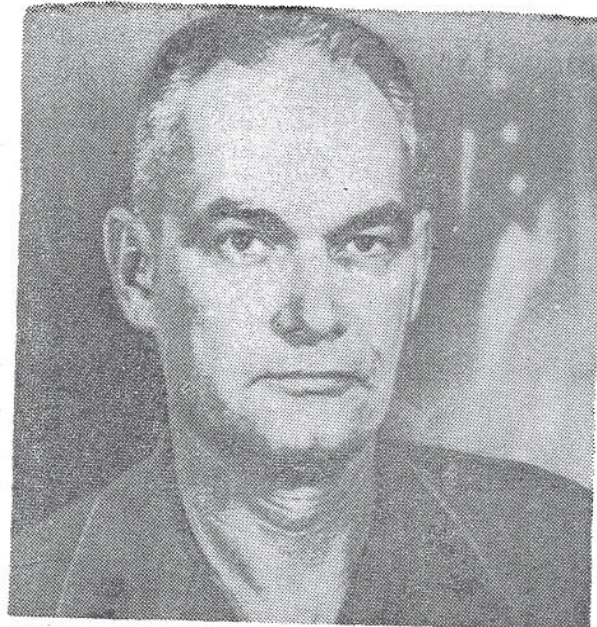
"I was gravely concerned about a threat by an American to fire on American troops," Young reports.

He says he prodded Henderson "every time I saw him" for the report subsequently ordered by General Koster.

"General Koster was satisfied with the report. Was I supposed to go over his head?" asks Young.

He never thought of going below to get information from the troops. Colonel Henderson was in charge.

When he is asked how a 22-year-old draftee named Ronald Ridenhour made it his business to find out what happened and ferreted the story out of Charlie Company veterans on night watches and in enlisted men's clubs, the general



BRIGADIER GEN. SAMUEL W. KOSTER
Censured and demoted

frowns.

"I wish Ridenhour had gone right to his commanding officer and reported what he had heard so a proper investigation could have been conducted."

He dismisses the notion that the Army did not want to hear about atrocities. He himself aggressively prosecute a grisly rape-torture incident that took place three months later in his command.

The old soldier rejects the idea that the policies were murderous. He himself never used the body count as a measure of success. With him, it was the number of captured weapons.

What did he think at the briefing the afternoon of

March 16, 1968, when a body count of 128 was reported and the capture weapons totaled only three? Did that discrepancy trigger any suspicions?

"No," he said, "I wish to heavens it had."

"But," he adds, "MACV (U.S. Military Headquarters in Saigon) got the same information about the same time, and they have hundreds of people there, and none of them questioned it. I believe the chain of command goes from top to bottom completely. You can't break it off at any one point.

"Everything that went wrong is blamed on one division, the Americal, because that's the way the Army wants it."

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