

# The Bitter Man Who

## Tempe, Ariz.

My Lai is a name few Americans will easily forget.

But most Americans never heard of or have long since forgotten the name Ronald Lee Ridenhour, the Vietnam veteran whose singular, year-long effort exposed the massacre.

That is as it should be, as far as Ridenhour is concerned.

It is not that Ridenhour has changed his mind about his role in implicating American soldiers in the murder of 400 My Lai civilians.

"What's more immoral," he said, "to turn in your friends for murder or to keep quiet? I obviously chose my course. Yes, I would do it again, but I don't know what's right or wrong about it in these terms."

The question obviously bothers Ridenhour as he pursues his studies in philo-

sophy and American literature here at Arizona State University. His fleeting prominence as the instigator of an incident that changed a large segment of national opinion about the Vietnam war is far behind him.

Older at 25 than most of his fellow students, working part-time to supplement his GI benefits and a commuter student to this tranquil campus, Ridenhour has not yet made friends at the school. He is not involved in campus activities and says other students are unaware of his My Lai role.

He is bitter and disillusioned over what he considers a whitewash of the massacre.

"Way deep down in my guts somewhere, despite my cynicism, you want to believe the system works and that the good old American values we've been spoon-fed really work. Well, in the case of My Lai, they don't."



RONALD L. RIDENHOUR  
'I'm outraged'

the quiet-spoken Ridenhour declared as he sat in the Student Union cafeteria for an interview.

"The whole thing has been handled in a cynical, Ma-

chievellian way. I don't think anything that has gone on since the revelations has had anything to do with justice."

It was in 1969, a year after the massacre, that Ridenhour brought My Lai to the attention of the world in a 1500-word letter about the incident to Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, other government officials and congressmen.

Subsequent investigation produced charges against a number of officers and soldiers, but all of them were exonerated except First Lieutenant William L. Calley Jr., who was convicted of the murder of 22 South Vietnamese civilians in My Lai in March, 1968. His life sentence reduced to 20 years. Calley is now under house arrest awaiting appeal and review of his case by President Nixon.

To Ridenhour, "Calley is obviously a scapegoat. He's

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# Exposed My Lai

also obviously guilty, but he's not the only one responsible for what happened. The crucial thing about My Lai is that if it was atypical, then only the officers of My Lai were responsible.

"But if My Lai is indeed typical, then the command and the policies are responsible. Then a whole lot of people up the chain of command should be held responsible, up to Westmoreland and even over into civilian commanders."

Ridenhour is convinced that official investigation would reveal that My Lai was not an isolated case and he is incensed that the Army has not made public the findings of its investigation.

"A Nuremberg situation? Yes." Ridenhour answers his own question. "But by handling the trials as they did, they completely circumvented that question, and it was never allowed to be raised."

A specialist 4 in a commando reconnaissance unit, Ridenhour was not at My Lai and never visited the village. He heard about the incident from a participant whom he had known in basic training. From then on, taking advantage of his mobility in the helicopter unit, Ridenhour questioned everyone he met who was at My Lai.

"I had a problem," Ridenhour noted. "I couldn't very well ask for an investigation. I hadn't been there. It wasn't until about two weeks before I was transferred home that I found a guy who was there and agreed with me about it, who said he would substantiate my story if I told it."

"The thing about My Lai," he said, "is it's all exactly what I expected and I'm outraged. And nobody else is outraged. Nobody in the position of power."

*N.Y. Times Service*

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