

A Talk With the Author Of Secret My Lai Report

The man who prepared the Army's long-secret report on the My Lai massacre coverup said last night it was "inconceivable" to him that only one man, Lieutenant William Calley Jr., was convicted by a court-martial for crimes relating to the incident.

Retired Lieutenant General William R. Peers, now a resident of Marin county, said more than 30 persons participated in the coverup of My Lai.

"To think that out of all of those men, only one was brought to justice — and now he's practically a hero. It's a tragedy," Peers told *The Chronicle* at his Kentfield home.

The rough-hewn Army veteran of 36 wrote his report in 1969 after news stories brought the massacre to light.

The Army made two of the four volumes of his investigation public Wednesday, 4½ years after they were completed.

The volumes still being withheld contain direct testimony, some of it irrelevant to the investigation Peers conducted but in certain instances personally embarrassing to the witnesses.

Peers said he would like to see these volumes "sani-

tized" and released to the public as well.

The soft-spoken retired general — now an aerospace consultant — held firmly to his belief that "justice wasn't served" in several courts-martial following the exposure of the massacre.

He cited as an example the acquittal of Lieutenant Colonel Oran K. Henderson, charged with investigating the incident shortly after it occurred.

"Henderson was only one of the officers who tried to cover it up," Peers remarked.

Peers was Chief of the Office of Reserve Components at the Pentagon when in 1969 he was asked to head the Army's investigation of a possible coverup of the My Lai incident.

"They probably picked me because I had just returned from service in Vietnam as commanding general of the Fourth Infantry Division. I knew then terrain."

He said he ran "a tough-nose operation" and blamed My Lai in part on poor leadership, permissiveness and low morale.

"They killed women and children who offered absolutely no resistance," Peers said. "Only one lonely individual out of all those people

had the decency to try and do something about it."

He was referring to Lieutenant Hugh Thompson, a helicopter pilot who landed his aircraft during the massacre and evacuated as many Vietnamese civilians as he could.

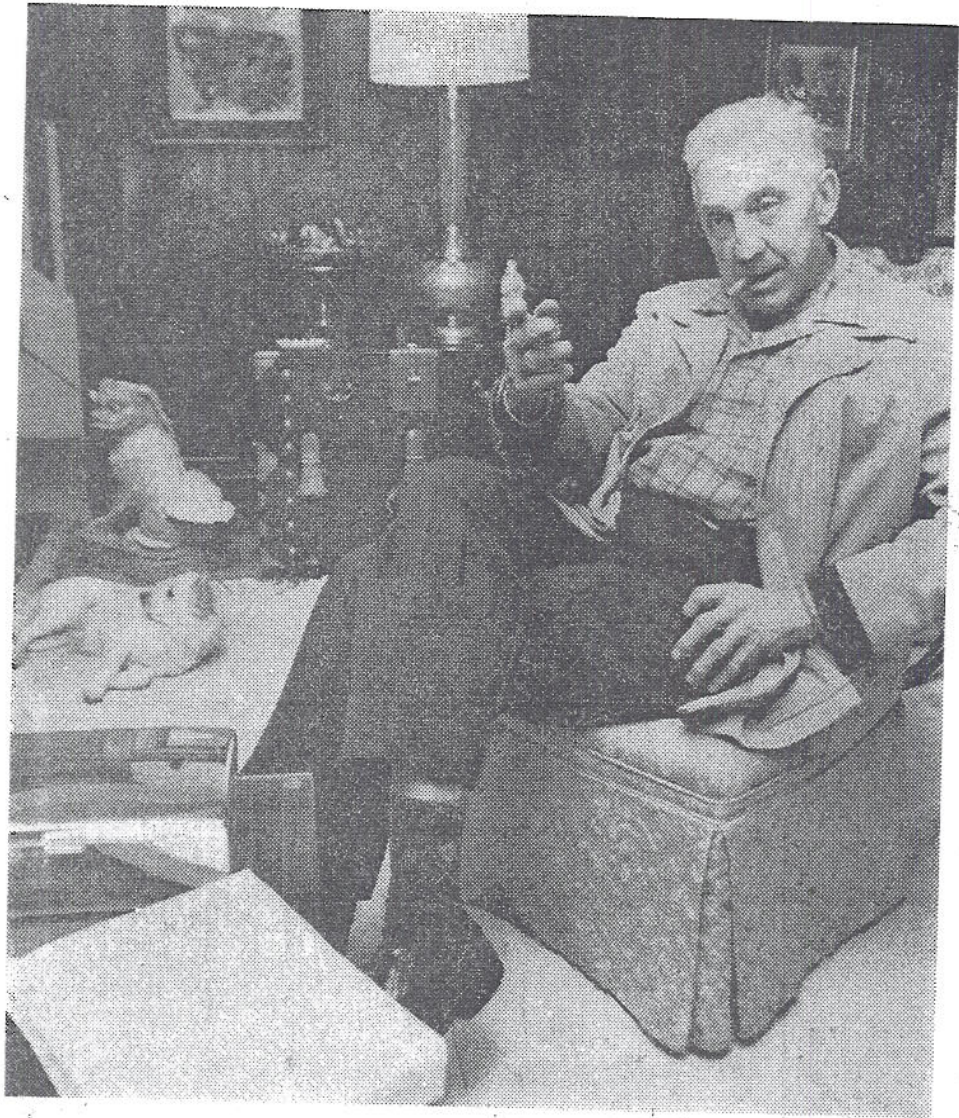
"That man's the hero. The others . . ." Peers dropped the thought, and sought a light for his cigar.

Born in Iowa, Peers joined the Army in 1937, commanded OSS operations in Japan during World War II, and was promoted to the rank of general in 1961.

Asked about the possibility of another My Lai-type incident in the future, Peers responded with a brusque wave of his cigar.

"Highly improbable," he said. "I think that's all you need to know."

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Retired Lieutenant General Peers in his Kentfield home