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The Colonel and the Army

After a delay of more than one year, Secretary of the Army Robert F. Froehlke has agreed under Congressional pressure to review the disturbing case of Lieut. Col. Anthony B. Herbert. The career of this up-from-the-ranks professional soldier with an outstanding combat and command record was shattered by a still unresolved conflict between him and his superior officers. At issue is whether Colonel Herbert's efforts, first, to stop and, then, to report atrocities allegedly committed by American and South Vietnamese military personnel led, as he maintains, to the reprisals against him.

Elementary justice requires that attention be given first to the protection of Colonel Herbert's rights as man and soldier. The last administrative order in the case, which asked that a damaging efficiency report be expunged from his record, has still not been complied with thirteen months later. This efficiency report was written by the very officer since promoted—who, according to Colonel Herbert, deliberately covered up the atrocities.

If Colonel Herbert's charges are proved true, the Army will have to answer questions as fundamental as any raised in the wake of the Mylai massacre. His specific complaints, if validated, would indicate that torture of prisoners and civilians had become part of American military intelligence procedures. This would be in total contradiction of past standards of training and behavior.

That Colonel Herbert's case remained in limbo until the Army Secretary agreed to a personal review—after extensive press disclosures—creates serious doubts about the entire process of military justice. The case now involves that process as much as one officer's career.