The action at Mylai received only a passing mention at the weekly Saigon briefing in March of 1968. Elements of the American Division had made contact with the enemy near Quang Ngai city and had killed 128 Vietcong. There were a few rumors of civilian deaths, but when the Army looked into them—a month after the incident—it found nothing to warrant disciplinary measures. The matter might have ended there except for a former GI, Ron Ridenhour, now a California college student. After hearing about Mylai from former comrades, he wrote letters to congressmen, warning that "something rather dark and bloody" had taken place. Now an officer has been charged with murder of "an unknown number of Oriental human beings" at Mylai, and 24 other men of Company C, First Battalion, 20th Infantry are under investigation. Congressmen are demanding to know what happened at Mylai, who ordered it, and whether or not U.S. troops have committed similar acts in Vietnam.

Because of impending courts-martial, the Army will say little. The South Vietnamese government, which has conducted its own investigation, states that Mylai was "an act of war" and that any talk of atrocities is just Vietcong propaganda. This is not true. The pictures shown here by Ronald L. Haebel, an Army photographer who covered the massacre, and the interviews on the following pages confirm a story of indisputable horror—the deliberate slaughter of old men, women, children and babies. These eyewitness accounts, by the men of Company C and surviving villagers, indicate that the American troops encountered little if any hostile fire, found virtually no enemy soldiers in the village and suffered only one casualty, apparently a self-inflicted wound. The people of Mylai were simply gunned down.

"Guys were about to shoot these people," Photographer Ron Haebel remembers. "I yelled, 'Hold it,' and shot my picture. As I walked away, I heard M16s open up. From the corner of my eye I saw bodies falling, but I didn't turn to look."
The order was to destroy Mylai and everything in it'

These photographs and the first detailed eyewitness account of Mylai were brought to light by Joseph Frazier, a reporter for the Cleveland Plain Dealer. He helped prepare the following article, based on his own interviews with Photographer Butch Hachetie and reporters from L.A. Times Correspondents Dale Winlow, John Saul, Tom Flaherty and Reg Branson, and Stringer Kent Demarest and June Estes.

'This man was old and trembling so that he could hardly walk. He looked like he wanted to cry. When I left, I heard two rifle shots.'

On the day before their mission the men of Company C met for a briefing after supper. The company commander, Captain Ernest Medina, read the official prepared orders for the assault against Mylai and spoke for about 15 minutes, mostly about the procedures of movement. At least two other companies would also participate. They, like Company C, were elements of Task Force Barker, named for its commander, Lt. Colonel Frank Barker, who was in the area three months later. But only Company C would actually enter the cluster of huts known as Mylai 4.

"Captain Medina told us that the village was heavily fortified," recalls one of his squad leaders, Sgt. Charles West. "He said it was considered extremely dangerous and he warned us not to be on our toes at all times. He told us there was supposed to be a part of the 9th NVA Regiment and the 4th VC Battalion there. From the intelligence that higher levels had provided, he said, this village consisted only of North Vietnamese army, Vietcong, and VC families. He said the order was to destroy Mylai and everything in it."

Captain Medina was a stocky, crew-cut, hard-nosed disciplinarian whom his men called "Mad Dog Medina." Men respected him. "Charly company was the best company to ever serve in Vietnam," says West. "Charly Company was a company, not just a hundred and some men they call a company. We operated together or not at all. We cared about each and every individual and each and every individual's problem. This is the way that we were taught by Captain Medina to feel toward each other. We were like brothers."

Mylai 4 was one of nine hamlets, each designated by a number, which were clustered near the village of Songy, a name sometimes used also for the hamlets. The men of Company C called the area "Pinkville" because it was colored red on their military maps and because these bright red coastal plants long had been known as Vietcong territory. Pinkville was only seven miles southeast of the provincial capital of Quang Ngai, where, during the Tet offensive only a month before, Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops had boldly occupied portions of the city. Soon Company C would use the name Pinkville not only for the entire area but for the single hamlet Mylai 4. Company C had seen its first real combat in the previous weeks, all of it around Pinkville. A couple of weeks before, sniper fire from across the river had killed one man. His buddies believed the fire had come from Mylai 4. Two weeks before, enemy land mines had killed five men and wounded 22. Several days before, in a hamlet near Mylai 4, a booby trap made from an exploded artillery shell had killed one of the GIs' favorite squad leaders, Sgt. George Cox.

"I was his assistant squad leader," recalls Charles West. "On the way back in camp I was crying. Everybody was deeply hurt, right up to Captain Medina. Guys were going around kicking sandbags and saying, 'These dirty dogs, those dirty bastards.' At the briefing, says West, "Captain Medina told us we might get a chance to avenge the deaths of our fellow GIs." Afterward the men held a memorial service for George Cox, but the ritual of mourning was more like a pep rally for the forthcoming action.

"Captain Medina didn't give an order to go in and kill women or children," says West. "Nobody told us about handling civilians, because at the time I don't think any of us were aware of the fact that we'd run into civilians. I think what we heard put fear into a lot of our hearts. We thought we'd run into heavy resistance. He was telling us that here was the enemy, that enemy that had been killing our partners. This was going to be our first real battle and we had made up our minds we were going to go in and with whatever means possible wipe them out."

Shortly after sunrise on March 16, 1966, a bright, clear, warm day, the helicopters began lifting approximately 50 men of Company C from the base camp at Landing Zone Dottie and delivering them 11 kilometers away in the paddies west of Mylai 4.

Army Photographer Sgt. Ron Hachetie and SPS Jay Roberts, both of the 3rd Public Information Detachment, came in on the second helicopter lift. Hachetie, who had been drafted out of college, had only a week left in his tour in Vietnam. Neither man had seen much action. They had volunteered for this operation because the worst was that it would be "a hot one." The squad the two were assigned to was given no orders by talkie-talkie from Captain Medina. Hachetie was carrying three cameras—one for the Army, two of his own. (He turns in his black-and-white film to the Army. The Army took no actions at that time but apparently reviewed his film and saw no evidence in the court-martial proceedings.) Roberts, a college student who had volunteered for the draft, took pad and pencil. Their conversation continued.
"You don't call"

CONTINUED

mission was to prepare news releases and a re-
port for the brigade newspaper.

"We landed about 9 or 9:30 in a field of el-
phant grass," says Varnado Simpson, then a
19-year-old assistant platoon leader from Jack-
son. His Guerishans had propped the area
with mortars and grenade launchers. It was
clear and very warm, and it got warmer. "One
landing zone was the outskirts of town, on the
left flank. There were about 25 of us and we
got directly into the village. There wasn't any
enemy fire. We'd come up on a hooch, we'd
search it to see if there was someone in it. If
there was no one in it, we'd burn it down. We
found people in some, and we took some back
to the intelligence people for questioning.
Some ran, we tried to kill them not to run.
There were about 15. Some stopped. About
five or six were killed."

Hatcher and Roberts moved through the rice
fields toward a hill in back of the village area.
Hatcher was with 10 or 15 GIs when he saw
a cow and began shots at the same time. The
shooting was straight ahead. A GI shot a cow
and then others kept pumping bullets into the
cow until the cow finally fell.

"Off to the right," says Hatcher, "a wom-

Hatcher remembers that the hole in front of a
burning house (above) kept twitching and that
one GI commented, "He's got a pin on him."

Insist on destroying everything that might be of
use to the Vietcong, a soldier (below) sinks a feet
with the hoppers used to dry rice and rugs.
them civilians—to us they were VC

an's form, a head, appeared from some brush. All the other GIs started firing at her, aiming at her, firing at her over and over again. She had dumped over into one of those things that stick out of the rice paddies so that her head was a popped-up target. There was no attempt to question her or anything. They just kept shooting at her. You could see the bones flying in the air chips chip. Jay and I, we just shook our heads.

"There were a whole lot of Vietnamese people that I especially liked," recalls Sgt. Charles West of his year in Vietnam. "Most of them were at this orphanage I used to visit frequently after I came off field duty. I'd go down there and the people would try to teach me more of the Vietnamese language and they would explain a lot of customs that I wanted to know something about."

Charles West led his squad of 13 men through the rice paddies and heard the sound of gunfire. They were coming down a sharply winding trail and were keeping a close watch for booby traps. They turned a curve in the trail and there, 22 feet ahead of them, were six Vietnamese, some with hakaus, coming toward them. "These people were running out," he says, "away from us, running every which way. It's hard to distinguish a man from a papa-san when everybody has on black pajamas." He and his squad opened fire with their M16s. Then he and his men kept going down the road toward the sound of the gunfire in the village.

"I had said it in my heart already," says West, "and I said in my mind that I would not let Vietnamese beat me. I had two accomplishments to make. The first was to save my government and to accomplish my mission while I was in Vietnam. My second accomplishment was to get back home."

"There was a little boy walking toward us in a daze," says Harberle. "He'd been shot in the arm and leg. He wasn't crying or making any noise." Haiderle knelt down to photograph the boy. A GI knelt down next to him.
The GI fired three shots at the child. The first shot knocked him back, the second shot lifted him into the air. The third shot put him down and the body fluids came out. The GI just simply got up and walked away. It was a stroboscopic effect. We were so close to him it was blurred.

"The people who ordered it probably didn't think it would look so bad," says Sgt. Michael A. Bershins, who asserts he refused to take part in the killings.

As he entered the village, Bernstein recalls, a plan was circling above, warning the people in Vietnamese to leave. "Leaflets were dropped ahead of time, but that doesn't work with the Vietnamese people. They have very few possessions. The village we went into was a permanent-type village. It had hard walls, tile roofs, hard floors and furniture. The people really had no place to go. The village is about all they have. So they stay and take whatever comes."

"It was point-blank murder. Only a few of us refused. I just told them the hell with this. I'm not doing it. I didn't think this was a lawful order."

"To us they were no-civilians," says Varano Simpson. "They were VC sympathizers. You don't call them civilians. To us they were VC. They showed no ways or means that they wasn't. You don't have any alternatives. You got to do something. If they were VC and got away, they could turn around and kill you. You're risking your life doing that work. And if someone kills you, those people--"

"This man and two little boys popped up from somewhere," says Harberle. "The GI I was with opened up, then moved in close to finish them."

"CONTINUED..."
Someone will always be pointing a finger at me and saying, 'He was one of them.'

Varndi Simpson of Jackson, Miss., hasn't forgotten the old woman and the child, dead in a smoldering doorway. "We saw a man running away from us, but he had a weapon. There were two running along with him. What else was there to do? Run up and beat them to stop? I had orders to shoot anyone that ran. They were about 20 yards away. I couldn't see the child. I used my M16... I noticed it was a woman and child when I walked over. It's hard to tell what they are from the back... The case? He got away.

"They can't punish me for that. Big officials are saying it doesn't matter that we were under orders. We're still guilty—but I don't see that. If you're under orders, you're going to be punished for not doing it and punished if you do. I didn't like what happened, but I didn't decide..."

Simpson's grandmother saw this picture and said quietly, "Lord, have mercy."
for a while but I don’t think they were crazy

Our mine-detecting machine to check out the trail because they would run their animals down the trail and walk behind them just to show the GIs, we don’t want to hurt you and we knew that you don’t want to hurt us.

Wing behind her mother, trying to kick the MOW of the Tall and the woman from objecting. One typical another dapped her up a bit.

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I saw three heaps of bodies about the same size,” says Sgt. Bernhardt, “all with about 20 people. These they were killed by artillery, which is ridiculous. The shell would have to land dead zero to kill this many people in one spot, and it would have blown them into the paddies.”

Hauberle and Roberts watched while troops accosted a group of civilians, including a teenage girl. The girl was about 13 and wearing black pajamas. A GI grabbed the girl and with the help of others stripped stripping her.

“Let’s see what she’s made out of,” a soldier said.

“VC boom-boom,” another said, telling the 13-year-old girl that she was a whore for the Vietcong.

“I’m horny,” said a third.

As they were stripping the girl, with bodies and burning huts all around them, the girl’s mother tried to help her, scrunching and clowing at the soldiers. Another Vietnamese woman, afraid for her own safety, tried to stop the woman from objecting. One soldier kicked the mother in the rear and another slapped her up a bit.

Hauberle jumped in to take a picture of the group of women. The picture (page 27) shows the 13-year-old girl, hiding behind her mother, trying to button the top of her pajamas.

“When they noticed me,” says Roberts, “they left off and turned away as if everything was normal.”

Then a soldier asked, “Well, what’ll we do with an’?”

“Kill ’em,” another answered.

“I heard an M60 go off,” says Roberts. “In the heavy weapons attack we turned back around, all of them and the kids with them were dead.”

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them while we took the child to a hospital. There must have been 15 or 20 people in a ditch—some dead, some wounded. I had never seen so many people dead in one place before.

Later the helicopter returned and landed in a paddock near Lieutenant Calley's platoon. The pilot got out and motioned for Lieutenant Calley to come over. "The pilots seemed angry," remembers Charles Sledge, Calley's radio operator. "But we couldn't hear what he was saying. Then Lieutenant Calley came back and told us, 'This guy isn't very happy with the way we're running the operation, but I don't care. He's not in charge.'"

Charles West's squad saw a little boy about 10 feet away. The boy was crying. He had been shot in the arm and leg—probably the same child Charles Grover had described.

"Gnu," a GI said, "what are we going to do with that kid up there?"

Without reply, says West, a radio operator turned, aimed and fired his M16, shooting the little boy through the head. Neither West nor anyone else said anything. They kept going, pushing on, "stirring up," as West calls it.

That day I was thinking militarily," says West. "I was thinking about the security of my own men. I said to myself: This is a bad thing that all these people had to be killed. But if it was to save all the soldiers, it would be justified."

An old pants-wear was found hiding. His pant leg was cut off. Two GI's dragged him out to be questioned. He was trying to keep his pants on. Captain Medina was doing the questioning. The old man didn't know anything. The kid started yelling, and somebody asked Captain Medina what to do with the man, and John Roberts heard the captain say, "I don't care."

Captain Medina walked away, Roberts heard a shot and the old man was dead.

In the entire day at Mylai 4, says West, "I can't rightly say that I got fired up. I heard shots all the time, but I couldn't tell whether it was our men or an enemy firing upon us. I did hear some guys call on a radio and say they had received sniper fire. They told Captain Medina they were going to try to get in position to tag the sniper. But I heard all that on the radio."

"I remember this man and his two small children, one boy and one girl, keeping walking toward us on this trail," says Haerber. "They just kept walking toward us, you know, very nervously, very afraid, and you couldn't hear the little girl saying, 'No, no,' in the Vietnamese tongue. The girl was on the right and the boy was on the left. All of a sudden, the GI's just opened up and cut them down.

Before noon Haerber and Roberts left to drop off to another company and have lunch. Later that day, at another company, Haerber heard a captain listening to a radio report: The report said 125 Vietcong had been killed. The captain didn't know anything about the incident, but he laughed and said, "Yeah, probably all women and children."

Later, back at base camp, West talked to Haerber. He said he thought there was a whole lot of wrongdoing," recalls West. "He had taken a whole lot of pictures of this. I stretched it and thought it was wrong that people should be walking around taking pictures of this. There were a whole lot of GI's going about taking pictures of dead bodies.

"Most of us felt that we were U.S. government property, which we were and still are. I tried to explain to the men at the base that you can't do. But I never had to fight that way—do your duty by doing the right thing."

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The first man to be accused by the Army in the deaths at Mylai was Lt. William Calley Jr., who commanded the first platoon to enter the village. He has been tried and convicted of murder for the unprovoked murder of at least 109 civilians. The Army has given no indication whether it plans to file charges against the company commander, Capt. Ernest Medina. Military spokesmen say only that Capt. Calley, the only one of the 23 men accused of being involved in the massacre, has been cleared of further charges. Senior Army officers admit that the Army cannot court-martial a civilian. In its decision, the Court appeared to rule Congress was right to offer a law to fill the loophole. Congress never acted. South Vietnamese civilians were not to be среди the civilians, but in light of President Thieu's view that all talk of atrocities in Vietnam program, such a move seems unlikely.

An accused lieutenant and the company commander

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Three rounds were in the chamber of his weapon, and he fired them in gusts, then dropped the gun and walked away. He was later found dead in a field near the COMA's chicane. He was the NVA platoon leader. Medina drew his pistol, took put ast minds and still are. I tried

One of the most talked-about issues in the Mylai investigation was the fate of the NVA platoon leader, Medina. His body was found near the COMA's chicane, and it was later determined that he was the NVA platoon leader. Medina had taken a whole lot of pictures of this. I stretched it and thought it was wrong that people should be walking around taking pictures of this. There were a whole lot of GI's going about taking pictures of dead bodies.

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'Before, Americans always brought us candy and medicine'