

Critic's Roundup

At the holiday season the movie industry reminds me of some rich old uncle unsure of what to send the nieces and nephews he never did know very well and who have changed a good deal since he last saw them. His solution is always the same—he spends too much and sends too much. The result is always the same, too—a great heap of stuff under the tree, little of which will be taken to heart. Some of the season's loot:

John and Mary are, in fact, Dustin and Mia, together for the first time, but just the way you've always loved them. Their vehicle could not be more fragile: a boy and a girl meet in a singles' bar, go quickly to bed, after the modern fashion, then spend the next day getting acquainted, with the result that they *really* fall in love. This reversal is about all the movie has to offer in the way of novelty, but under Peter Yates's tactful direction, it turns out to be a mildly chic, mildly engaging little thing, played with admirable believability by its principals. It is aimed precisely at the squishy, romantic hearts of the under-25 set who now dominate the movie audience and it will surely provide them



Dustin Hoffman and Mia Farrow

with some innocent pleasure. Unlike *The Graduate*, it is unpretentious and will do no harm to any of their elders should they happen to drop in.

I sometimes think Hollywood has invented a special lens for looking back on turn-of-the-century America—one that makes everything seem tinged with golden hues and slightly out of focus. It can be, in moderation, a pleasant effect, and there are moments in *The Reivers*, based on William Faulkner's last novel, that are very likable. It is, however, a rambling and pointless movie in which a white man (Steve McQueen) and a black man (Rupert Crosse) borrow a snazzy car from the leading citizen of a small Mississippi town and induce that worthy's young grandson (Mitch Vogel) to join them on an excursion to Memphis. There they introduce

him to the perils and pleasures of manhood, coax him into jockeying for them in a horse race they must win if they are to retain gramp's car, and teach him how painful and troublesome big-scale prevarication can be. Screenplay and direction strive so hard to recapture that old-time lei-



Steve McQueen in *The Reivers*

sureliness that our interest in the events of the story is reduced to minimal levels. *The Reivers* evokes occasional comfortable chuckles but never the laughter that is a way of acknowledging a film's relevance to an audience. Perhaps part of our trouble is our present-day disbelief in the film's insistence on such gentle, albeit Faulknerian, treatment of a ram-bunctious Negro in the South of 1900.

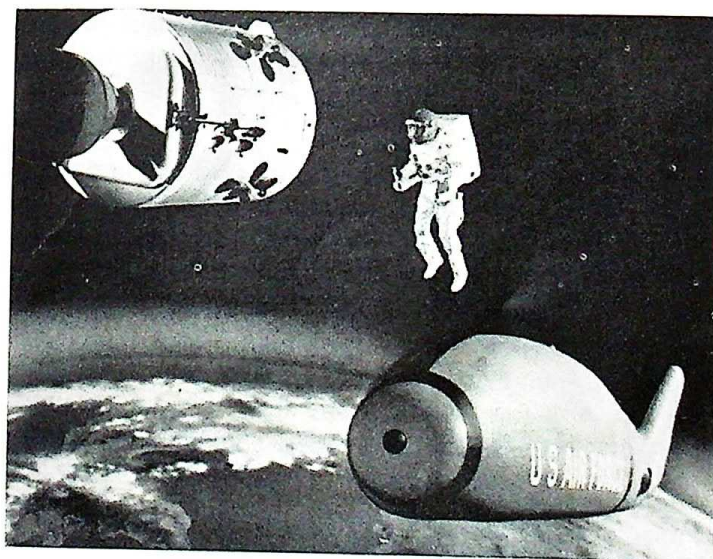
Gaily, Gaily, based on Ben Hecht's autobiographical sketches about going to Chicago in 1910, and the destruction of his country-boy idealism by that gaudy city's political and journalistic life, is also an exercise in nostalgia. It is a good deal more frantic in style than *The Reivers*, and rather more intrinsically interesting, since we don't get many movies about the central fact of American life in the early days of this century: the creation of the modern urban milieu. Director Norman Jewison strives for oxymoron—bawdy innocence—and occasionally achieves it, but despite the film's lavishness and energy, it doesn't really work. Screenwriter Abram S. Ginnies has not succeeded in stitching Hecht's short pieces into a truly dramatic narrative, and scene after scene peters out without achieving either comic or dramatic resolution. Jewison gets some nice isolated moments out of Beau Bridges in the leading role and from several of the supporting actors, but none achieves a really complete characterization, possibly because it wasn't called for—indications being sufficient to the director's very broad purposes. Again, it is a likable movie, but an unsatisfying one.

If your taste in flops runs to ambitious ones, you can do no better than Writer-Director Richard Brooks's *The Happy Ending*. It was his admirable intention to examine seriously the institution of middle-class marriages that have attained a certain age—a subject taken up all too rarely by American moviemakers. But the result is disgusting. The real issues between a man and a woman who have been married for a while are subtle, very often unspoken, perhaps undramatizable. To evade this defect Brooks has concocted a melodramatic travesty of a relationship in which a gin-guzzling wife (Jean Simmons) and dull-witted mate (John Forsythe) have at it for a couple of unpleasant hours. Their friends are equally vapid, without saving grace in style or intellect. I came to loathe all of them impartially, but I came to find Mr. Brooks even more contemptible. Following the basically sound fashion of making a highly personal statement on film, he has run afoul of *Catch 22* in the new esthetic, which holds that if you should by mischance possess a coarse, insensate and pretentious mentality the film will reflect these qualities. Mr. Brooks finishes in a dead heat with Elia Kazan for creating more cringes per linear foot of film than anyone else in 1969. Considering the kind of year it was, that is no mean achievement.

The commercial intent of *Marooned* is to place on the great screen before you a common current nightmare—that a group of astronauts are someday going to get hung up in orbit. The film plausibly places them on that sky hook, then proceeds to detail a possible, if not entirely plausi-

Russian space shot there. And John Sturges, who likes to make movies about shiny gadgets (*Ice Station Zebra*, *The Satan Bug*), somehow keeps the suspense building, right up and over the feeble dialogue and the wooden acting. The special effects are swell and I ended up feeling nice and tense despite myself. Any father who refused to take his little boy to *Marooned* during school vacation deserved no better than a dull maroon necktie for Christmas.

For adults, something very good indeed has arrived from abroad. It is called *Z* and it is based on the historical record of the assassination of a political liberal in Greece in 1963. The kill was made to look, by its right-wing perpetrators, like a traffic accident, and we see now that not only was it not an accident, it was also a harbinger of the dictatorship that was to come to that unhappy nation. What's so good about Director Costa-Gravas' simple, forceful reconstruction of the event is its understatement. There is almost no preaching, just a steady piling up of clues, a slow revelation of the lies with which the criminals attempted to cover their tracks. There is a fine performance by Jean-Louis Trintignant as the judge who patiently investigates the incident and puts his career on the line when he is forced to the conclusion that the conspiracy involves the most powerful elements in the nation—police, army, government. It seems almost irrelevant to speak of direction and acting when you are dealing with a film of this kind. Of course it is a superior *policier*, expertly entertaining. But it is also a powerful statement about how easily any establishment



An astronaut performs some EVA in *Marooned*

ble, attempt to detach them from it. Frightfully weak on characterization, its people created apparently by riffling through old copies of *Wings* and *Astounding Stories*, *Marooned*'s script nevertheless twists fate, if not characters, in interesting ways—an inconvenient hurricane here, a convenient

can turn vicious. It requires only a little laziness, a little willed blindness, a little corruption for it to have its own way. On film decency triumphs, but we know that in less than five years it had lost out in reality. And that knowledge chills our satisfaction as we leave the theater.

by Richard Schickel

Color photographs, eyewitness accounts

The Massacre at Mylai



PHOTOGRAPHS © R. L. HAEBERLE

Sprinting for cover, men of Company C left the helicopters that ferried them in for the assault on Mylai

The action at Mylai received only a passing mention at the weekly Saigon briefing in March of 1968. Elements of the Americal Division had made contact with the enemy near Quangngai 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 Haeberle, 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 Haeberle 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.”

Photographed by RONALD L. HAEBERLE

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Photographed by RONALD L. HAEBERLE

'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 Eszterhas, a reporter for the Cleveland Plain Dealer. He helped prepare the following article, based on his own interviews with Photographer Ron Haeberle and reports from LIFE Correspondents Dale Wittner, John Saar, Tom Flaherty and Reg Bragonier and Stringers Kent Demaret and Jane Estes.

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 45 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 to die in action three months later. But only Company C would actually enter the cluster of huts known as Mylai 4.

"Captain Medina told us that this village was heavily fortified," recalls one of his squad leaders, Sgt. Charles West. "He said it was considered extremely dangerous and he wanted us to be on our toes at all times. He told us there was supposed to be a part of the 98th NVA Regiment and the 48th VC Battalion there. From the intelligence that higher levels had received, 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: to Charles West he was one of "the best officers I've known." Most of them had served under Medina since the company had formed the previous year in Hawaii as C Company, First Battalion, 20th Infantry, 11th Light Infantry Brigade.

"As far as I'm concerned, Charlie Company was the best company to ever serve in Vietnam," says West. "Charlie 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 problems. 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 Songmy, a name sometimes used also for the hamlets. The men of Company C called the area "Pinkville" because it was colored rose on their military maps and because these fertile coastal plains long had been known as Vietcong territory. Pinkville was only seven miles northeast of the provincial capital of Quangnai, 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 unexploded 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 to camp I was crying. Everybody was deeply hurt, right up to Captain Medina. Guys were going around kicking sandbags and saying, 'Those dirty dogs, those dirty bastards.'"

At the briefing, says West, "Captain Medina told us we might get a chance to revenge 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, the enemy that had been killing our partners. This was going to be our first real live battle, and we had made up our minds we were going to go in and with whatever means possible wipe them out."

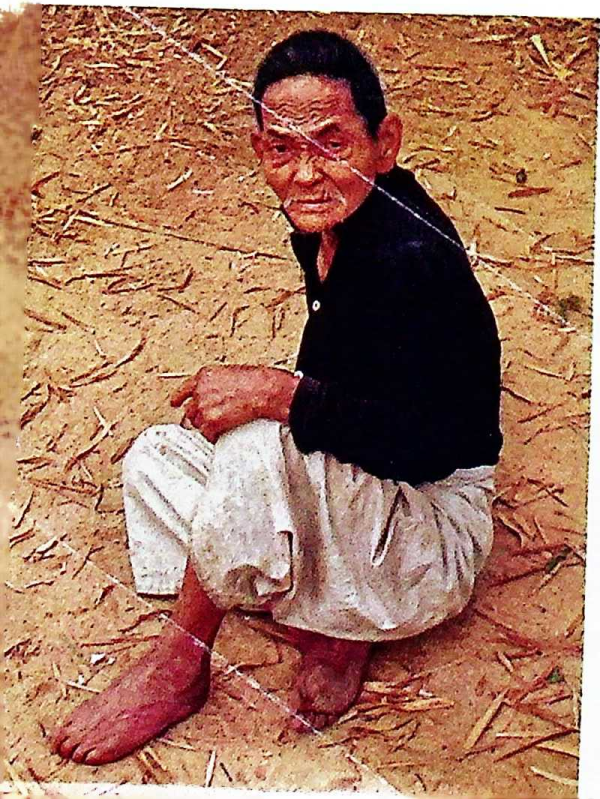
Shortly after sunrise on March 16, 1968, a bright, clear, warm day, the helicopters began lifting approximately 80 men of Company C from the base camp at Landing Zone Dottie and delivering them 11 kilometers away in the paddies west of Mylai 4.

Army Photographer Sgt. Ron Haeberle and SP5 Jay Roberts, both of the 31st Public Information Detachment, came in on the second helicopter lift. Haeberle, who had been drafted out of college, had only a week left on his tour in Vietnam. Neither man had seen much action. They had volunteered for this operation because the word was out that it would be "a hot one." The squad the two were assigned to was getting its orders by walkie-talkie from Captain Medina. Haeberle was carrying three cameras—one for the Army, two of his own. (He turned in his black-and-white film to the Army. The Army took no action at that time but apparently intends to use the film as evidence in the court-martial proceedings.) Roberts, a college student who had volunteered for the draft, took pad and pencil. Their

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



'You don't call

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mission was to prepare news releases and a report for the brigade newspaper.

"We landed about 9 or 9:30 in a field of elephant grass," says Varnado Simpson, then a 19-year-old assistant platoon leader from Jackson, Miss. Gunships had prepped the area with Miniguns and grenade launchers. It was clear and very warm and it got warmer. "Our landing zone was the outskirts of town, on the left flank. There were about 25 of us and we went directly into the village. There wasn't any enemy fire. We'd come up on a hootch, 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 tell them not to run. There were about 15. Some stopped. About five or six were killed."

Haeberle and Roberts moved through the rice fields toward a hill in back of the village area. Haeberle was with 10 or 15 GIs when he saw a cow and heard 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 Haeberle, "a wom-

Haeberle remembers that the body in front of a burning house (*above*) kept twitching and that one GI commented, "He's got ghosts in him."

Intent on destroying everything that might be of use to the Vietcong, a soldier (*below*) stokes a fire with the baskets used to dry rice and roots.



PHOTOGRAPHS © R. L. HAEBERLE

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 slumped over into one of those things that stick out of the rice paddies so that her head was a propped-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 chip by 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, 25 feet ahead of them, were six Vietnamese, some with baskets, coming toward them. "These people were running into us," he says, "away from us, running every

which way. It's hard to distinguish a mama-san 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 in my heart already," says West, "and I said in my mind that I would not let Vietnam beat me. I had two accomplishments to make. The first was to serve 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 Haeberle. "He'd been shot in the arm and leg. He wasn't crying or making any noise." Haeberle knelt down to photograph the boy. A GI knelt down next to him. "The GI fired three shots into 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. Bernhardt, who asserts he refused to take part in the killings.

As he entered the village, Bernhardt recalls, a plane 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 Varnado 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, then they could turn around and kill you. You're risking your life doing that work. And if someone kills you, those people

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



'They might have been wild



Ex-Pfc. CHARLES GRUVER



Ex-Sgt. CHARLES WEST

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aren't going to feel sorry for you."

Lt. William Calley Jr.'s platoon was the first to arrive in the center of My-lai. "There was about 40, 45 people that we gathered in the center of the village," ex-Pvt. Paul Meadlo told CBS News. "And we placed them in there, and it was like a little island, right there in the center of the village, I'd say.

"Men, women, children. Babies. And we all huddled them up. We made them squat down, and Lieutenant Calley came over and said, you know what to do with them, don't you? And I said yes. So I took it for

shooting them, and somebody told us to switch off to single shot so that we could save ammo. So we switched off to single shot, and shot a few more rounds."

"There was no expression on the American faces," says Haeberle. "I couldn't believe it. They were destroying everything. They were doing it all very businesslike. The Vietnamese saw the Americans but didn't run. They kept on walking until the GIs saw them and started shooting. Some of the people started pulling their animals off the road and hiding behind trees. The GIs were opening up with

for a while but I don't think they were crazy'



SGT. MICHAEL BERNHARDT



EX-PVT. PAUL MEADLO



SP5 JOHN KINCH



EX-SP4 LARRY COLBURN

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 us, GIs, we don't want to hurt you and we know that you don't want to hurt us.

"We would tell the kids to eat the food and bring the cans back and dump them in a large pile. There was a saying that every time we ran into a booby trap, it turned out to be made of a can that we had given to the kids."

"Just outside the village," says Reporter Jay Roberts, "there was this big pile of bodies. This really tiny little kid—he only had a shirt on, nothing else—he came over to the pile and held the hand of one of the dead. One of the GIs behind me dropped into a kneeling position, 30 meters from this kid, and killed him with a single shot."

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

Haeberle and Roberts watched while troops accosted a group of women, including a teen-age girl. The girl was about 13 and wearing black pajamas. A GI grabbed the girl and with the help of others started 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, scratching and clawing 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.

Haeberle jumped in to take a picture of the group of women. The picture (page 17) shows the 13-year-old girl, hiding behind her mother, trying to button the top of her pajamas.

"When they noticed Ron," says

Roberts, "they left off and turned away as if everything was normal."

Then a soldier asked, "Well, what'll we do with 'em?"

"Kill 'em," another answered.

"I heard an M60 go off," says Roberts, "a light machine gun, and when we turned back around, all of them and the kids with them were dead."

"The yanigans were doing most of the shooting," says Charles West. "I call them yanigans because they were running around doing unnecessary shooting. In a lot of cases they weren't even shooting at anything. Some were shooting at the hootches that were already burning, even though there couldn't possibly be anything alive in there."

"The guys were hollering about 'slants.' It wasn't just the young guys, older guys were shooting too. They might have been wild for a while, but I don't think they went crazy. If an individual goes crazy, you can't reason with him. Once everything was secured, everything did cease. If these men had been crazy, they would have gone on killing people."

"Most of the men in our squad were not reacting in a violent way. We were with the command element and Captain Medina was with us. He never would have stood to see us run around like rookies. He would have probably ordered a court-martial right on the spot."

A black GI told Haeberle he couldn't stomach it, he had to get out of there. Later Haeberle and Roberts were sitting near a ditch, a clump of bodies off to the left, when they heard a shot. They hit the ground, thinking it was a sniper. The soldier who had wanted to get out of there had shot himself in the foot with a .45. Accidentally, he said. Captain Medina was calling in a "dust-off," a helicopter, to take him out. "He shot himself purposely to get out of there," says Roberts. "He looked happy even though he'd shot up his own foot."

SP5 John Kinch, who is still on active duty in Vietnam, was the point man for the heavy weapons squad. "We moved into Pinkville and found another stack of bodies in a ditch. It

must have been six or seven feet deep and they were level with the top of it. One body, an old man, had a 'C' carved on his chest.

"Captain Medina was right in front of us. Colonel Barker, the task force commander, was overhead in his helicopter. He came through over the radio saying he had got word from the medevac chopper there were bodies lying everywhere and what was going on. I heard Captain Medina tell him, 'I don't know what they are doing. The first platoon's in the lead. I am trying to stop it.'"

"Just after that he called the first platoon and said, 'That's enough shooting for today.'"

"Colonel Barker called down for a body count and Medina got back on the horn and said, 'I have a body count of 310.'"

At 9 a.m. Haeberle and Roberts got into the village itself. On the outskirts they met Captain Medina. Roberts said Medina told him there had been 85 killed in action so far. He also said Company C had taken 20 suspects. One of them, an old man, said many Vietcong had been in the village the night before but had left at dawn.

Huts were being torched with cigarette lighters. One soldier with a 90-pound pack was cutting down cornstalks one by one. Some GIs were going through the civilians' belongings, looking for weapons. One soldier was keeping the civilians' piasters. There were two dead water buffaloes and two calves on the ground.

"I know that you've got to destroy the enemy's resources," says Roberts. "It's an old tactic and a good one. Sherman's march to the sea. You've just got to. We saw soldiers drag a body from a hut and throw it in a well to destroy the water supply. They shot and stabbed all the animals, which were, in effect, VC support units."

One soldier was stabbing a calf over and over again. Blood was coming from the calf's nose. The calf tried to move toward the mother cow. The GI was enjoying it and stabbed again with a bayonet which he'd taken off his rifle. Soldiers stood around and watched. Others were killing the

baby pigs and all the other cows.

"God," says Roberts, "those cows died hard. They had them in small pens. They'd shoot them—*paff, paff*, and the cow'd just go *moo*. Then *paff, paff, paff, moo*."

A GI was running down a trail, chasing a duck with a knife.

"I saw two military-age males running across the field about 500 meters away," says Charles West. "I yelled, '*Dong lai, dong lai*,' but neither of them stopped. At this distance we could have killed both of them, but we just fired in the air and then chased them about half a mile. Only one of them lived. The other one was killed by the interrogation unit. Some of the people told the interrogation unit they didn't understand what was being talked about. The men that didn't talk were killed by the Vietnamese that were doing the questioning, not by the Americans. There were, I guess, nine or 10 killed before one of them started talking. I was told that the guys were saying that there had been Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops there and that they had gone toward the ocean by underground tunnels."

Haeberle remembers a hideously small act of compassion. "A GI went up to a little boy who was badly mangled up, and put a blanket over him."

SP4 Larry Colburn was the gunner on a helicopter, flying reconnaissance over the Mylai area. "Outside the village," he recalls, "we saw a VC with a carbine and pack, but he got away. We came back near Mylai and noticed people dead and wounded along the road and all through the village. There was an irrigation ditch full of bodies. We noticed some people were still alive. We didn't know what had happened."

"Our pilot wanted to evacuate some of the wounded, but there was no room in our helicopter, so he called for gunships to help out. We spotted a child. We went down and our crew chief brought out a little boy about 2 years old. He seemed to be in shock."

"About 50 meters away there was a bunker with 10 or 15 people. We called for gunships to help evacuate

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COMBAT PHOTOGRAPHER
RON HAEBERLE



ARMY CORRESPONDENT
JAY ROBERTS

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them while we took the child to a hospital. There must have been 75 or 80 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 paddy near Lieutenant Calley's platoon. The pilot got out and motioned for Lieutenant Calley to come over. "The pilot 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 Gruver had described.

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

Without reply, says West, a radio-man 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, "clearing up," as West calls it.

"That day I was thinking military," 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 I was to say that at that time I actually felt a whole lot of sorrow for the people, then I would be lying."

An old papa-san was found hiding. His pants kept coming off. Two GIs 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. He rattled something off. Somebody asked Captain Medina what to do with the man, and Jay 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 rightfully say that I got fired upon. 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 zap the sniper. But I heard all that on the radio."

"I remember this man and his two small children, one boy and one girl, kept walking toward us on this trail," says Haeberle. "They just kept walking toward us, you know, very nervously, very afraid, and you could 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 GIs just opened up and cut them down."

Before noon Haeberle and Roberts left by chopper to cover another company and have lunch. Later that day, at another company, Haeberle 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 Haeberle. "He said he thought there was a whole lot of wrong-doing," recalls West. "He had taken a whole lot of pictures of this. I stressed that I thought it was wrong that people should be walking around taking pictures of this. There were a whole lot of GIs 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 time that you can't sit there and blame yourself—you were on orders, you were on a search-and-destroy mission. If anyone was to be blamed or court-martialed, it has to be someone higher than our echelon. Calley and the sergeant shouldn't be tried unless they try ev-

cry man that was on that operation."

"They captured three weapons [rifles]," says Roberts, "40 rounds of mortar ammo, grenades, web gear."

"We thought about Mylai a lot after we got back to Duchpho. But neither one of us was very much of a banner carrier." When he wrote it up for the brigade newspaper, Roberts says, "I played it up like it was a big success."

"The village was heavily fortified with rice," says West. "They did find documents that there had been NVA and VC troops there. Also they found evidence that these people had been there not too long ago. I understand that they found ammunition and as far as tunnels, I wouldn't know because I checked into some tunnels and I ran into dead ends."

"Eventually we reached the beach," says John Kinch. "We captured four suspects, one kid, one 15 to 27, one 40 to 55 and a girl in her twenties. They were being beaten kind of hard and the kid named the older man as an NVA platoon leader. Medina drew his .38, took out five rounds and played Russian roulette with him. Then he grabbed him by the hair and threw him up against a tree. He fired two shots with a rifle, closer and closer to the guy's head, then aimed straight at him. The guy must have been very scared because he started rapping like hell. He turned out to be an NVA area commander. Then Medina had a picture of himself taken while he drank from a coconut with one hand and held a big sharp knife under the throat of the kid who was gagged and tied to a bamboo."

"When we got back to LZ Dottie, Captain Medina gave the company a briefing. He said, 'They are running an investigation. As far as anyone knows, we ran into sniper fire and cut loose.' As far as I am concerned there was no sniper fire."

An accused lieutenant and the company commander



WILLIAM CALLEY

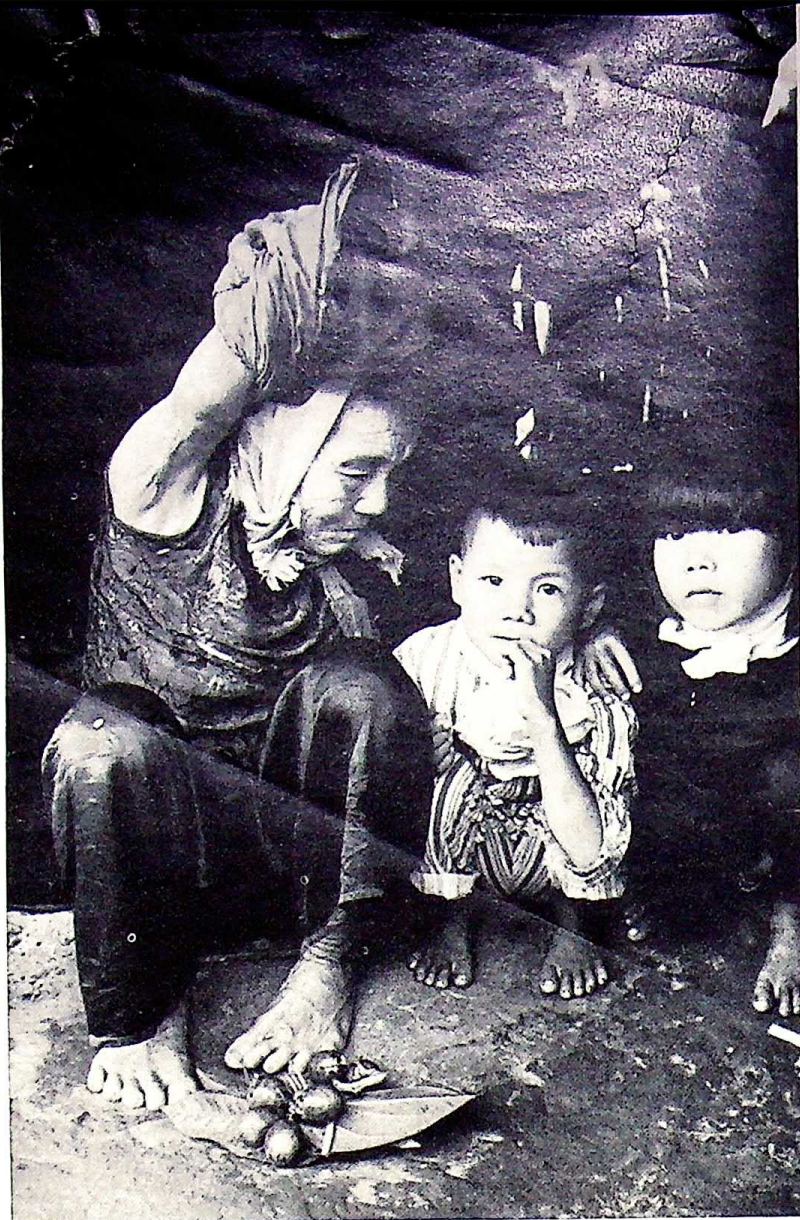
The first man to be accused by the Army in the deaths at Mylai was Lt. William Calley Jr., who commanded the first platoon to enter the village. He has been ordered to stand general court-martial for the premeditated murder of at least 109 villagers. The Army has given no hint whether it plans to file charges against the company commander, Captain Ernest Medina. Military spokesmen admit only that 23 other men are currently being investigated, 15 of them now civilians. Whether charges can ever be filed against the ex-servicemen is uncertain. The Supreme Court has ruled that the Army cannot court-martial a civilian. In its decision, the Court appeared to invite Congress to write a law to fill the loophole. Congress never acted. South Vietnam could ask to try the civilians, but in light of President Thieu's original reluctance to consider the tragedy an atrocity, such a move seems unlikely.



CAPTAIN ERNEST MEDINA

Charles West and his squad stayed in Mylai until about 5 that afternoon. They camped in the same area that night, before moving on to find Vietcong nearer the coast the next day. Some of the men talked about writing their congressmen to protest the action, but they never did. Some were quiet and grim, but not many. "A lot of people knew," Charles West says, "that a lot of people had been killed who didn't have to be killed, but the average GI felt that it was part of our mission. We all wondered where the enemy went. We were all concentrating on finding where they went."

At suppertime they set up bivouac in a little graveyard near Mylai. Children and old papa-sans were hovering nearby. When the GIs opened their C-rations, they shared their supper with these Vietnamese who had survived the massacre.



Survivors of Mylai gaze out of makeshift huts at the Songmy camp. Nguyen Thi Doc (above) was hit in the shoulder, saw her granddaughter

Oanh, at right, now age 9, shot in the foot. Oanh's brother was not hit. The women below were both married to a 71-year-old farmer who was killed.



'Before, Americans always brought us candy and medicine'

SONGMY
Crouched in the doorway as a heavy rain puddles in front of her thatch hut, the old woman looks suspiciously at those who pass by. She is wary of people she doesn't know well, and that includes even many of the Vietnamese living near her in the Songmy resettlement village of Quangngai province. Songmy is not the woman's home. It is a government corral where civilians can be protected while troops pursue the Vietcong through every other village in the area.

The old woman is Nguyen Thi Doc, like many in the refugee center a survivor of the massacre at Mylai.

The old woman recalls she was just beginning a morning meal with 13 of her family, including nine grandchildren, when she heard the Americans "come down from the sky."

"They had been in the village before," she says, "and always brought us medicine or candy for the children. If we had known what they came for this time, we could have fled."

The entire family was taken out of the hut and ordered into a field, she says, and then "the soldiers started shooting at everyone."

She was hit through the shoulder and left for dead. She saw her 8-year-old granddaughter, Tran Thi Oanh, shot through the foot and watched her fall over the bodies of her dead brothers and sisters. Nguyen Thi Doc says the Americans must have thought everyone was dead when they left the village about noon.

"I thought Oanh was dead, too," she says. "And I lay in the field until the next morning, when people came from nearby villages to help us."

They were taken to a Vietnamese hospital where they stayed four months. With the exception of Oanh's 6-year-old brother, who miraculously was not hit, everyone else in the family was killed. When she was sent to the resettlement village, other survivors from Mylai told Nguyen Thi Doc they had counted 370 dead. Her voice gets excited when she recalls the number and then trails off—there is nothing more to say.

Down the path in the settlement live two other women, both of them widows of Truong Van Vinh, a 71-year-old farmer. The younger wife had

gone to the market at another village the day of the attack. But the older woman and Vinh were sitting inside his hut, cringing from the artillery barrage that had been pounding near the village for hours. When it stopped, the old woman looked out and saw many Americans walking through the village. Vinh left the hut to see what was happening.

"When he got outside the door," the old woman says, "there was a shot, and I heard him fall to the ground. The soldiers came in and saw me, and motioned for me to come outside. One of them lifted his rifle to shoot me, but another group of Americans sitting around the well shouted to him and he walked away." The woman ran back into the hut where she hid for hours.

All of the Mylai villagers who talked of the incident said they could hear the Americans shouting when they arrived, but the only words they could understand were "VC," "VC." The villagers deny there were any Vietcong in the village, though American battle reports for the day indicated sniper fire and resistance had been directed against the American units for some time before they entered the village. The entire coastal strip of Quangngai province has been a battleground for most of the war. Even today the area around Mylai is frequently visited by the Vietcong.

One of the few male survivors from Mylai is Truong Quang An, a wizened peasant who looks much older than his 59 years. "When we saw the helicopters landing," he says, "I ran with my two nephews to the family shelter outside the hut." The shelter is no more than a four- or five-foot hole covered with thatch and a wooden pallet. An dropped in first and the nephews took their place on the outer edge, closest to the entrance.

"We heard the soldiers walking through the village and when they saw the shelter, they stopped. One of them could see inside, and he pointed his rifle at close range and shot both my nephews." Then the soldiers moved on to the next hut, and An could hear Mylai burning as he curled up in the darkness, sheltered beneath the bodies of the two young men.

HAL WINGO

Americans speak out on the massacre

The American people reacted to the massacre at Mylai—with horror, shame and shock, but also with disbelief, uncaring acceptance and even benumbed lack of interest. In interviews with LIFE correspondents and in letters to the editor, many saw Mylai as an inevitable consequence of war. Others blamed this particular war. Few were willing to place the entire burden of guilt on men of Company C who, by their own accounts, took part in the mass slaying of old men, women and children. Some accused the press of exaggerating the event or questioned whether it ever really happened. Seldom did Mylai actually reverse a person's feelings about the war; it served only to intensify views already held. Many were apparently so saturated with the horrors of the war that one more shock, even this one, left them with little new to say. Others, busy with their Christmas shopping, said nothing at all. In the following excerpts, persons identified by age and occupation spoke in LIFE interviews. Other excerpts are from letters commenting on the photographs and eyewitness accounts of Mylai, which appeared earlier in the U.S. edition of LIFE.

I've had two brothers over there. They tell me the kid you give a candy bar to in the day is shooting at you at night. I don't condone mass murder. I don't know who is to blame . . . just the war itself.



CHARLES BAX, 32
Kansas City policeman

As I read the description of the insensible horror, I would glance, briefly, at the photographs with half-shut eyes, thus blurring my vision . . . seeing and not seeing. . . . Halfway through the article I felt as if I had been holding my breath and, with the ultimate exhalation, I involuntarily voiced a loud curse: "God damn them!" I finished the article, but I have yet to read the rest of the magazine. Maybe I never will.

HELEN L. AUSTIN
Rye, N.Y.

Everyone takes the human element out of it. You're supposed to be above it all. When you're running around with a gun in your hand, brother, then you're going to make a mistake. I don't care who you are. So if you give guns to 500,000 men, things like this are going to happen.

THOMAS MCCARTHY, 31
Chicago policeman

As I weep for them, I feel like shouting and screaming for *someone* to say STOP!! But no one in Washington hears the sound of anything but their own voices making speeches, speeches, speeches, speeches, speeches, speeches.

MRS. ROBERT BARRON
New York City

's not a game. If you're going to fight, ht. The responsibility is on the Vietnamese people. They are alike, they

dress alike and look alike. When they are trying to kill you, well, if it had to happen, it had to happen.

JAMES JONES, 22
Vietnam veteran and Phoenix student

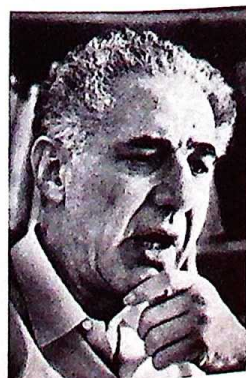
We as a people are also on trial and should not try to placate our conscience by scapegoating any or all of those directly connected with the alleged act. Every German I met right after the Second World War said he fought on the Russian front and Hitler was to blame for everything. If the Mylai massacre proves to be true, it will be further evidence of what this war is doing to all of us, not just the soldiers.

MARK HATFIELD
U.S. senator, Oregon

What happened was a part of the American military policy. It was a result of the policy in that war. I don't feel guilty about it because I consider the government that did this to be an enemy of mine. The anger it aroused in me made me think more about open revolution than peaceful, nonviolent.

RON MILEWSKI, 22
Chicago student

We have a thousand Mylais every day right here in America. I am talking about the brutalization of individuals in the everyday life of urban communities where people are killed by other people every single day. Yet our society goes on its frenetic way with hardly a second thought to what is happening. We are accepting killing, the killing of civilians in Vietnam and the killing here in Chicago of the head of the Black Panthers, as something that really doesn't affect us. It can grow into a way of life. I am absolutely agonized by this kind of window-shade response.



JULIE LOHN, 53
Chicago business executive

If the principles of the Nuremberg war trials mean anything at all—if *America* means anything at all—then these men who killed women, children and old men should never be allowed to hide behind the excuse that "I was just following orders."

TRUMAN R. CLARK
Conshohocken, Pa.

My first reaction was utter mortal fright at an episode so contrary to the American ideal, where we have thought of ourselves as protecting women, children and the oppressed. I got so I didn't want to read more of the massacre. I feel as sorry for our men in it as for those who are dead.



MRS. CARLING DINKLER JR., 46
Miami socialite

I don't think people should be subjected to the slander and innuendos until it is brought out in court. Several lives have been ruined over this, whether the people are cleared in court or not.

RICHARD PAWLUK, 27
Phoenix fireman

Even in the Civil War there were outrageous atrocities—and it's taken the South 100 years to get over them. You can't ignore these things for the sake of the country. But I'm not surprised. We had a medic in our town, a Vietnam veteran, who told us about things that happened. I'll tell you one thing—this country's getting too militaristic.

CHARLES DAINS
Benton, Ark.

Yes, it is terrible, but history repeats itself and this is *not* the first time that American soldiers have cruelly murdered women and children. To name one instance, how about Wounded Knee, South Dakota on Dec. 29, 1890?

WHITE WATER
Harrisburg, Pa.

If the time should come that my sons, too, must fight for their lives and in the course of that battle civilian lives are lost (or taken) in order to save theirs, so be it. My child, be he 16, 26, or 106, is much more precious to me (and should be to every fellow American) than the life of any enemy, no matter what their age or condition.

MRS. JEANIE HUDSON
Fort Lauderdale

Those pictures will haunt me the rest of my life. Maybe it will prevent more of the same. I weep for the children murdered, and I weep for the men that murdered them.

MRS. STELLA SWAIN RICO
Los Angeles

I think the whole thing has been blown

up out of all proportion. I believe the credibility gap is the inability of people to believe the TV commentators. There is an obvious campaign waged to show the United States as immoral.

HARRY FLETCHER, 44
Montgomery, Ala. professor

As a nation we can deplore our mistakes. But I do not believe that our national conscience should make us hang our heads in shame. That would be blaming all for the actions of a few.

ERIK JONSSON
Mayor of Dallas

I hope the soul-searching these pictures cause will shake up the "silent majority" on which Nixon so desperately counts. We must get out of this war before it destroys us.

KATHERENE W. FARRIS
Pullman, Wash.

I can speak from experience as a company commander in Vietnam that, given discipline, an American military unit could never be involved in the atrocities that have been alleged. Discipline is hard to instill in men, and the military of today has been severely criticized in peacetime for utilizing methods which have been proclaimed as being "brutal" and "inhuman" in an attempt to foster this required discipline that would have prevented this incident.

CAPTAIN THORNTON BOYD, USMC
Monterey, Calif.

The main fault is where the orders came from. It's just human nature that they wouldn't act like that if they were acting on their own—there's just too much natural instinct and pride and bringing up for that. I never saw a war with so much two-sidedness to it.



GORDON WILLIAMS
Brighton, Colo. foreman

For the week ending Nov. 27, 1969 the Vietcong killed, wounded or kidnaped 334 South Vietnamese civilians. This is a weekly toll, not an isolated incident. For the 1969 year so far, the toll is 5,958 killed, 14,915 wounded and 6,049 kidnaped. The American public is dismayed over the 109 civilians our soldiers killed. Surely, to be consistent, we should be at least three times as outraged for the Nov. 27 toll alone.

OLGA C. MANSON
Trumbull, Conn.

Having been a Marine, a devoted American, a true believer in our great country, I took the massacre as one would the death of his child. The picture in your issue was like a knife in my heart.

ROGER R. ECKERT
La Mesa, Calif.

at Mylai

Your Mylai issue set back the President's peace efforts two years, and will be responsible for many more deaths among our boys.

LAURETTA L. KIDMAN
Ogden, Utah

It just reinforces the horror that I've always felt about the Vietnam war. I don't blame the soldiers. They've been brainwashed or they wouldn't be able to shoot anybody over there. They're guilty, but no more than every person in the United States who allows our government to carry on the war.



MRS. KAY HOBBS, 35
Oklahoma City housewife

There is something very strange about the public posturing—the assumption that things were all right before. The fault goes back to John Foster Dulles and Eisenhower, to the “domino” theory and their protestations of righteousness, which I think were very wrong. We have been sending off people to do the dirty work for us, and then we don't want to face up to the consequences.

JOHN HATCH, 30
American teacher, London

As Agnew said so accurately, the press can make national issues overnight. I now see other reports of so-called tragedies popping up. I believe a new Communist tactic is occurring and they know they can rely on the liberals in the press as suckers.

JOHN A. MALAGRIN
Baltimore

For the first time I destroyed a copy of LIFE before my children got hold of it, not because I feel LIFE was wrong in publishing the pictures but because it would have been too difficult to answer the questions they provoked.

SYBIL KELLOGG
Aurora, Ill.

Is it because they weren't white, round-eyed Americans that their deaths are so unimportant to so many?

SHERRI SOLTOW
Killeen, Texas

Several years ago I sent a letter to you that was published and in which I stated, “thank God for American soldiers that are fighting to end such agony.” I had reference to a picture of a Vietnamese woman and her dying baby. Oh, dear God, how things change.

ELAYNE S. WHITCOMB
Bartlett, Ill.

We have to remember what happened when the atom bombs were dropped during World War II. Many civilians were killed, wounded and impaired from the cause of a decision that was

made by the President of the United States. I don't recall hearing of any criticism that was made concerning the dropping of bombs on the two cities.

PAUL CLAUSER, 72
Grapevine, Texas

Whose side are you on?

S. LEE
Beaver, Pa.

The news media weren't satisfied until the story was told over and over and the whole world knew of it and had their comments published. I believe that the public does not have to know every detail. I vote to send competent politicians to Washington to run the affairs of the government. I applauded Vice President Agnew and now hope he says more against television, radio and magazines.

MRS. NORRIS BREAUX
Crowley, La.

War is hell, as I know very well, having fought in two of them, including a year in Vietnam. But I know, and you know, that even if this incident happened as alleged, it is an isolated incident and not American policy.

COLONEL RAY H. SMITH, USA
Fort Sill, Okla.

The Army will not try those who are really responsible. The buck will be passed down and not up. The real question is: who set the tone in the American Division? There are outfits where a tone of violence, and inexcusable violence, is established. It is not just that the men above knew what had happened and did nothing about it—but that they set the tone that made such a thing happen. We really fool ourselves if we think there isn't a little SS in every army—just waiting for some fat-headed colonel or general to bring it out.

TOM CARMICHAEL
Ajijic, Mexico

Pope Paul has said “no more war.” The church universal has been saying that for a long time. Perhaps many feel that the pulpit should thunder forth its condemnation of the mass killings in holy righteousness. Personally, I do not feel moved to thundering. Inside, I feel more like crying.



REV. J. RICHARD WAGNER, 64
Cedar Rapids minister

A lot of people really don't care, don't want to get involved in it. A lot of people don't want to believe it, either. It seems to me the government is not letting people in on what's going on.

MARINO MICHELI, 19
Seattle cook

We judged the silent majority in Ger-



many when it insisted it did not know about the concentration camps and bloodbaths. Our newspapers are not yet censored, nor our radio and television muzzled. What will be the excuse for those who remain silent today?

MRS. NENA RIEGGER
Oxon Hill, Md.

The whole world is guilty—the Army as an institution and the government as representative of the American people. I feel bitter about it. It lowers the image of America throughout the world. It lowers whatever we strive for in Vietnam. I think they will try to whitewash it over by saying one guy is responsible for the massacre when the whole problem came from getting into Vietnam in the first place. I've a brother in Vietnam. I hate to think he's a part of any sort of organization in which this could happen and be condoned.



GLEN BUTLER, 21
Omaha student

It's part of this goddamned war, part of the whole mess. We have to get it over with and get back to positive, constructive work with people in the fight against poverty and ignorance. The President wants to get us out with honor and his program deserves support. Certainly, human nature is taxed under terrible conditions—like war or slums—and we must do everything within our power to eradicate these conditions. But we still have to maintain standards of conduct and punish persons for their crimes.

JOSEPH BLATCHFORD
Peace Corps Director
Washington, D.C.

When, in the same year, we can slaughter children at Mylai and also prove that we are capable of flight beyond the stars, then there is something wrong with our society. We had better forget

about the computers and magnificent technical feats, and concentrate on reading and trying to understand better a book called the Bible.

HAROLD SNYDER JR.
York, Pa.

This actually shouldn't change anybody's attitudes. It's reprehensible, of course, what happened, and must be dealt with. But we should win the war.

E. V. RICHARDS IV
Past president, New Orleans
Young Republicans

There is no longer any excuse for anyone to remain silent. Our President and Vice President, the Senate, all should be flooded with letters demanding that the real culprits, those that made the policy we followed in Vietnam, those that suppressed the evidence of this massacre for almost two years should be exposed for what they are.

MRS. JULIA THOMASON
The Bronx

I'm old enough to remember how we talked about the terrible Hun in World War I. I don't think you can blame any individual or even the government. It's just the outgrowth of a long, dirty war.

BERT ENGLAND, 64
Wichita grocery owner

LIFE's exposure of the grisly event will only add more fodder for the Communist propaganda media.

WILLIAM NOSAKA
San Mateo, Calif.

Under no circumstances do I think a person placed in the situation of being required to kill should be punished because he killed the wrong people.

JERRY CRAMM, 19
Oklahoma City student

There will still be the two extremes—those who want immediate withdrawal and those who want to drop the bomb. The people in between still don't give a damn about the whole thing.

RICHARD L. McMILLAN, 25
Vietnam veteran and University of
South Carolina student

One feels a need to place the blame for this latest horror. All we need to do is look in our mirror.

MRS. VIRGINIA APSEY
New York City

I think we'll forget all about it as soon as another crisis comes along. We don't have very long memories as a nation.

MRS. BETTY VICKERS, 51
Montgomery, Ala. housewife