

## Evidence in the Lieutenant Calley Trials

The following excerpts describe some of the evidence presented in Lieutenant Calley's trials. Read the excerpts, answer the discussion questions, and be prepared to discuss the facts of this case.

### **Judge Quinn describes the evidence presented in the prior trial, United States Court of Military Appeals, December 21, 1973**

Lieutenant Calley was a platoon leader in C Company, a unit that was part of an organization known as Task Force Barker, whose mission was to subdue and drive out the enemy in an area in the Republic of Vietnam known popularly as Pinkville. Before March 16, 1968, this area, which included the village of My Lai 4, was a Viet Cong stronghold. C Company had operated in the area several times. Each time the unit had entered the area it suffered casualties by sniper fire, machine gun fire, mines, and other forms of attack. Lieutenant Calley had accompanied his platoon on some of the incursions.

On March 15, 1968, a memorial service for members of the company killed in the area during the preceding weeks was held. After the service Captain Ernest L. Medina, the commanding officer of C Company, briefed the company on a mission in the Pinkville area set for the next day. C Company was to serve as the main attack formation for Task Force Barker. In that role it would assault and neutralize My Lai 4, 5, and 6 and then mass for an assault on My Lai 1. Intelligence reports indicated that the unit would be opposed by a veteran enemy battalion, and that all civilians would be absent from the area. The objective was to destroy the enemy. Disagreement exists as to the instructions on the specifics of destruction.

Captain Medina testified that he instructed his troops that they were to destroy My Lai 4 by "burning the hootches, to kill the livestock, to close the wells and to destroy the food crops." Asked if women and children were to be killed, Medina said he replied in the negative, adding that, "You must use common sense. If they have a weapon and are trying to engage you, then you can shoot back, but you must use common sense." However, Lieutenant Calley testified that Captain Medina informed the troops they were to kill every living thing—men, women, children, and animals—and under no circumstances were they to leave any Vietnamese behind them as they passed through the villages enroute to their final objective. Other witnesses gave more or less support to both versions of the briefing.

On March 16, 1968, the operation began with interdicting fire. C Company was then brought to the area by helicopters. Lieutenant Calley's platoon was on the first lift. This platoon formed a defense perimeter until the remainder of the force was landed. The unit received no hostile fire from the village.

Calley's platoon passed the approaches to the village with his men firing heavily. Entering the village, the platoon encountered only unarmed, unresisting men, women, and children. The villagers, including infants held in their mothers' arms, were assembled and moved in separate groups to collection points. Calley testified that during this time he was radioed twice by Captain Medina, who demanded to know what was delaying the platoon. On being told that a large number of villagers had been detained, Calley said Medina ordered him to "waste them." Calley further testified that he obeyed the orders because he had been taught the doctrine of obedience throughout his military career. Medina denied that he gave any such order.

One of the collection points for the villagers was in the southern part of the village. There, Private First Class Paul Meadlo guarded a group of between 30 to 40 old men, women, and children. Lieutenant Calley approached Meadlo and told him,

“You know what to do,” and left. He returned shortly and asked Meadlo why the people were not yet dead. Meadlo replied he did not know that Calley had meant that they should be killed. Calley declared that he wanted them dead. He and Meadlo then opened fire on the group, until all but a few children fell. Calley then personally shot these children. He expended 4 or 5 magazines from his M-16 rifle in the incident.

Lieutenant Calley and Meadlo moved from this point to an irrigation ditch on the east side of My Lai 4. There, they encountered another group of civilians being held by several soldiers. Meadlo estimated that this group contained from 75 to 100 persons. Calley stated, “We got another job to do, Meadlo,” and he ordered the group into the ditch. When all were in the ditch, Calley and Meadlo opened fire on them. Although ordered by Calley to shoot, Private First Class James J. Dursi refused to join in the killings, and Specialist Four Robert E. Maples refused to give his machine gun to Calley for use in the killings. Lieutenant Calley admitted that he fired into the ditch, with the muzzle of his weapon within 5 feet of people in it. He expended between 10 to 15 magazines of ammunition on this occasion.

With his radio operator, Private Charles Sledge, Calley moved to the north end of the ditch. There, he found an elderly Vietnamese monk, whom he interrogated. Calley struck the man with his rifle butt and then shot him in the head. Other testimony indicates that immediately afterwards a young child was observed running toward the village. Calley seized him by the arm, threw him into the ditch, and fired at him. Calley admitted interrogating and striking the monk, but denied shooting him. He also denied the incident involving the child.<sup>1</sup>

1. What was Lieutenant Calley’s assigned mission?
2. What kinds of injuries or losses had Calley’s platoon suffered prior to action at My Lai 4?
3. Who was Captain Medina, and what role did he play in the My Lai attack?
4. Describe the primary contradiction between Captain Medina’s instructions to Lieutenant Calley and Calley’s interpretation of how he should conduct the mission.
5. Why did Calley say he and his men killed individuals at My Lai 4?
6. Were there any examples of Lieutenant Calley’s men refusing to obey orders at My Lai 4? Explain.
7. Is there any specific evidence that Lieutenant Calley inflicted torture or brutalities at My Lai 4?

<sup>1</sup>William Calley Courts Martial Transcripts, National Archives Complex, College Park, Maryland.

**The Testimony of Private Meadlo at the Trial of Lieutenant William Calley, 1971**

QUESTION: Did you get instruction about following orders?

ANSWER: Yes. We were taught that in a combat situation, if you disobey an order you're liable to get shot right on the spot, or else go before a court-martial. In basic training, if they thought you were slow in carrying out an order, they'd come up and hit you on the head. If you weren't quick enough with your mask, they'd slap it against your face, and a bunch of other rinky-dink. You are supposed to obey orders. If you're told to go out in the middle of the highway and stand on your head, you're supposed to do it.

Q: Lieutenant Calley ordered you to fire into groups of villagers?

A: Yes.

Q: Why did you comply?

A: I got emotionally upset, but I continued to carry out my orders. In the briefing the day before we went into My Lai we were told everybody in the village would be Viet Cong or VC sympathizers. I still believe they were all VC or VC sympathizers.

Q: You killed men, women and children?

A: Yes.

Q: You were ordered to do so?

A: Yes. . . .

Q: What were the babies doing?

A: They were in their mothers' arms.

Q: Were you afraid the babies might attack you?

A: Yes. Any baby might have been loaded with grenades that the mother could have thrown.

Q: Were they making any move to attack?

A: Not at that time, no . . .

Q: What were the mothers doing?

A: Squatting down.

Q: Did Lieutenant Calley say anything?

A: He said, 'We've got another job to do Meadlo.' Lieutenant Calley started shoving them and shooting into the ravine. He ordered me to help kill the Viet Cong.

Q: What did you do?

A: I started shoving them and shooting.

Q: How long did you fire?

A: I don't know.

Q: Did you change magazines?

A: Yes.

Q: Did Lieutenant Calley change magazines?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

- A: Yes.
- Q: Do you recall how many times Lieutenant Calley changed magazines?
- A: Ten to fifteen times.
- Q: Were all the people killed?
- A: I couldn't tell if they were mortally wounded. I didn't check them out.
- Calley returned and asked: 'How come they're not dead?' I said I didn't know we were supposed to kill them. He said: 'I want them dead.' He backed off about 20 or 30 feet and started shooting, automatic, into the people, the Viet Cong. He was beside me. He told me to help him shoot. I helped him shoot. . . .
- Q: Did you get the impression that he (Calley) was violent, raving mad?
- A: No.

#### **Statement by Lieutenant Calley**

"I was ordered to go in there and destroy the enemy. That was my job that day. That was the mission I was given. I did not sit down and think in terms of men, women, and children. They were all classified the same, and that was the classification that we dealt with, just as enemy. . . . I felt then and I still do that I acted as I was directed, and I carried out the orders that I was given and I do not feel wrong in doing so."<sup>2</sup>

#### **Statement by Robert Maples (One of Lieutenant Calley's Soldiers)**

Maples told of entering My Lai and seeing Calley and Meadlo firing into a ditch of civilians. "[Calley] asked me to use my machine gun."

"What did you say?" [Chief prosecutor Aubrey] Daniel inquired. "I refused," was the reply.<sup>3</sup>

1. How did Private Meadlo and Private Maples' views differ about the military necessity of "following orders"?
2. Does it seem that Lieutenant Calley had any remorse or guilt associated with his actions? Explain.

<sup>2</sup>William Calley Courts Martial Transcripts, National Archives Complex, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>3</sup>William Calley Courts Martial Transcripts, National Archives Complex, College Park, Maryland.