**Cameraman Saw GIs Slay 100 Villagers**

**By JOSEPH ESZTERHAS**

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U.S. Army troops "indiscriminately and wantonly mowed down" civilian residents of a tiny South Vietnamese hamlet on March 16, 1968, a former Army photographer has told The Plain Dealer.

Along with his eye-witness account, the former photographer has made available to The Plain Dealer a set of photographs taken at the village. They are being reproduced today on two pages of The Plain Dealer. This is the first publication of the photos, which also are in the hands of U.S. Army authorities investigating the sensational accounts of the village deaths.

RONALD L. HAEBERLE, 28, of Cleveland, then a sergeant and an Army public information staff member, was attached to C Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment, 11th Light Infantry Brigade when the troops entered the hamlet of My Lai No. 4.

In an exclusive Plain Dealer interview, Haeberle described how U.S. soldiers "recklessly, wantonly and without any provocation" carried out the mass murder of South Vietnamese civilians.

In August of this year, Haeberle provided the Army’s Criminal Investigation Department (CID), an arm of the Army Security Agency, with prints of the exclusive pictures he shot in the village during the operation and gave investigators a six-page statement.

Since then, 1st Lt. William L. Calley Jr., 26, of Miami, Fla., and Staff Sgt. David Mitchell, 29, of St. Francisville, La., have been charged in the case – Calley with murder and Mitchell with assault with intent to murder.

ON TUESDAY, CAPT. Aubrey Daniel, a lawyer with the adjutant general’s office at Ft. Benning, Ga., confirmed to The Plain Dealer that Haeberle was present in the hamlet as an Army photographer March 16, 1968.

The mission that Haeberle witnessed and photographed with C Company in the little "Pinkville" village was his last mission in Vietnam. He was honorably discharged at the end of that same March.

Haeberle said U.S. forces did not engage in a firefight with Viet Cong while in the village. No Viet Cong were sighted; there were no reports of Viet Cong fire, he said.

U. S. FORCES, he related, mechanically killed the civilians , some in their bed in huts. The murders were carried out, he said, with M16 rifles and machine guns.

He said he saw as many as 30 American soldiers murder as many as 100 South Vietnamese civilians, many of them women and babies, many left in lifeless clumps.

The only U.S. casualty he saw was a soldier who shot himself in the foot accidentally. Afterwards, he said he heard the soldier shot himself purposefully.

"He couldn’t stand what was going on and wanted out of there," Haeberle said.

He told his story firmly, without emotion, recounting scenes vividly. "I was shocked. I’ve never been able to forget what I saw there," he said.

HE DESCRIBED HIMSELF as "just an average American with an upper middle-class background who was drafted." He said he is not against the war in Vietnam but was appalled by the kind of brutality he witnessed.

"I never saw U.S. GIs act like that before," he said.

He describes the soldiers who did the shooting as "intent on what they were trying to accomplish. There was no feeling, nothing human about it. It was, for the most part, grim, though later some of the men tried to be humorous about leaving the bodies for the dogs and the rats."

He emphasized he does not know whether the men were ordered to kill the civilians. "All I know is that I saw it happening and I had a camera with me." He said he made no effort, as an Army person, to photograph actual killings.

"AT ABOUT 5:30 IN the morning of March 16, I left where I was stationed, Duc Pho, by helicopter for Task Force Barker. That is an outlying area for the base camp. I was supposed to hook up here with C Company. I hooked up with C Company 6 or 6:30 – I’m not sure – around sunrise.

"No one really explained the mission, but from what I heard from the men, it was suspected that these villagers were Viet Cong sympathizers and it was thought there Viet Cong there.

"I came in on the second lift; which came about a half hour after the first. We landed in the rice paddies and I heard gunfire from the village itself, but we were still on the outside of the village.

"THERE WERE SOME South Vietnamese people, maybe 15 of them, women and children included; walking on a dirt road maybe 100 yards away. All of a sudden the GIs just opened up with M16’s. Besides the M16 fire, they were shooting at the people with M79 grenade launchers. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing.

"Off to the right, I noticed a woman appeared from some cover and this one GI fired first at her, then they all started shooting at her, aiming at her head. The bones were flying in the air chip by chip. I’d never seen American shoot civilians like that.

"As they moved in, closer to the village, they just kept shooting at people. I remember this man distincly, holding a small child in one arm and another child in the other, walking toward us. They saw us and were pleading. The little girl was saying "No, no" in English. Then all a sudden a burst of fire and they were cut down. They were about 20 feet away. One machine gunner did it. He’d opened up.

"There was no reaction on the guy doing the shooting. That’s the part that really got me – this little girl pleading and they were just cut down.

"I HAD BEEN ON the ground maybe 45 minutes at this point. Off to the left, a group of people – women, children, and babies – were standing around. The machine gunner was standing in front of them with the ammo bearer and all of a sudden I heard this fire and here the machinegunner had opened up on all these people in the big circle, and they were trying to run. I don’t know how many got out.

"There were two small children, a very young boy and a smaller boy, maybe 4 or 5 years old. A guy with an M16 fired at them, at the first boy, and the older boy fell over to protect the smaller boy. The GI fired some more shots with a tracer and the tip somehow seemed to be still burning the boy’s flesh. Then they fired six more shots and just let them lie.

"THE GIs FOUND a group of people – mothers, children, and their daughters. This GI grabbed one of the girls, in her teens, and started stripping her, playing around. They said they wanted to see what she was made of and stuff like that.

"I remember they were keeping the mother away from protecting her daughter – she must have been around 13 – by kicking the mother in the rear and slapping her around.

"They were getting ready to shoot these people and I said hold it – I wanted to take a picture. They were pleading for their lives. The looks on their faces, the mothers were crying, they were trembling.

"I turned my back because I couldn’t look. They opened up with two M16’s. On automatic fire, they went through the whole clip -- 35, 40 shots – and I remember actually seeing the smoke come from the rifle. The automatic weapons fire cut them down.

"I COULDN’T TAKE a picture of it, it was too much. One minute you see people alive and the next minute they’re dead.

"I came up to a clump of bodies and I saw this small child. Part of his foot had been shot off, and he went up to this pile of bodies and just looked at it, like he was looking for somebody. A GI knelt down beside me and shot the little kid. His body flew backwards into the pile.

"I had emotional feelings. I felt nauseated to see people treated this way. American GIs were supposed to be protecting people and rehabilitating them and I had seen that. But this was incredible. I watched it and it wouldn’t sink in.

"I left the village around 11 o’clock that morning. I saw clumps of bodies, and I must have seen as many as a hundred killed. It was done very businesslike."

Haeberle said he later saw a news story of C Company’s operation in the tiny hamlet listing a large number of Viet Cong killed.

"There were no Viet Cong," he said. "They were just poor, innocent illiterate peasants."