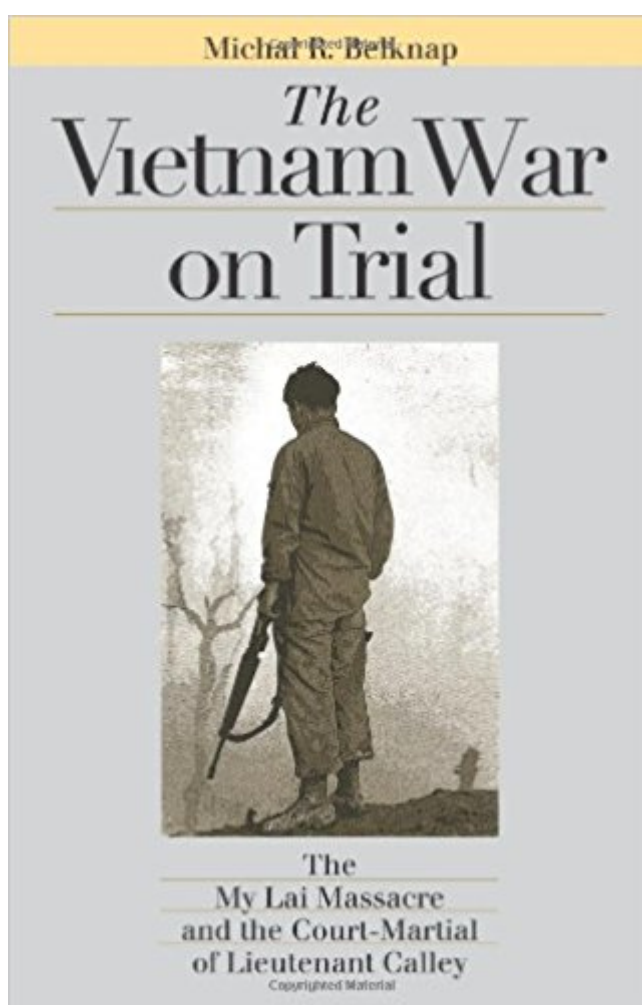


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# The Vietnam War On Trial: The My Lai Massacre And The Court-Martial Of Lieutenant Calley (Landmark Law Cases & American Society)



## Synopsis

The military trial of William Calley for his role in the slaughter of five hundred or more Vietnamese civilians at My Lai shocked a nation already sharply divided over a controversial war. In this superb retelling of the My Lai story through the prism of the law, Michal Belknap provides new perspectives and keen insights into core issues about the war that still divide Americans today. One of the most highly publicized trials of its day, the Calley case emerged at a time when protests against the war were growing larger, louder, and more intense. Well aware of this, the Nixon administration sought to downplay the My Lai incident, which military officers in Vietnam had tried to cover up in order to protect their own careers and reputations. It might never have come to light had it not been for the efforts of Vietnam veteran Ron Ridenhour and journalist Seymour Hersh. Their investigations revealed the full extent of the My Lai tragedy, further inflamed the antiwar movement, and brought to trial Lieutenant William Calley. Unfolding the Calley case step by step, Belknap shows how our system of military justice actually works. His dramatic reenactment takes readers through every stage of the trial, from pre-trial investigations to actual courtroom exchanges among prosecutors, defenders, witnesses, and judges. In the process, he reveals how a court-martial conducted within the public eye transformed a purely legal proceeding into a political debate about the conduct of the war. Calley's trial clearly demonstrated both how deeply the Vietnam War had divided our nation and how difficult it was for any court to deliver justice under such intense media coverage. Scrupulously fair to all parties involved, Belknap portrays Calley as both criminal and victim-guilty of the crimes of which he stood accused, but also an unintended scapegoat of the American military machine. His court-martial, for hawks and doves alike, epitomized all that was wrong with our involvement in Vietnam. By reopening the Calley case, Belknap helps a new generation of readers better understand why the Vietnam War was so controversial and damaging to national unity. His book, however, also provides insights that apply well beyond events of a particular war, suggesting that the grim lessons of My Lai will continue to shadow the conduct of America's present and future wars.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A wise, discerning, and powerful account of a notable trial that illuminates the larger meaning of the Vietnam War. Belknap's extraordinary analysis of the My Lai story skillfully explores the atrocities, the cover-up, and the political manipulation of the affair, and takes us beyond contemporary journalism to the complex history of what happened—and why. —Stanley Kutler, author of *The Wars of Watergate* I thought I'd overdosed on books about Vietnam years ago, but this one is terrific. It somehow manages to maintain its balance without losing its power to mesmerize. Vietnam junkies and novices alike cannot help but be affected by it. —John Hart Ely, author of *War and Responsibility: Constitutional Lessons of Vietnam and Its Aftermath*

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Love it.

Well written with a straightforward style that lets a reader feel they were there watching events unfold both at the trial and the events in VN that led to the trial.

This book arrived two days after my purchase; in excellent condition...almost brand new. The book was required for my 412 History of Viet Nam course; should be an interesting read.

Extraordinary book! Mr. Belknap really cuts to the core of the issues surrounding the My Lai incident and the subsequent Courts Martials (Calley being the only person actually found guilty). His review of the political issues of the era as well as the personal sacrifice made by the prosecution, really help the reader understand what happened after Lt. Calley returned to the United States. Anyone interested in military justice, or who may remember the incident and not understand fully what was involved, should pick up a copy.

I was too young to know much about this. Very interesting read. He was betrayed by the US Government and Military. Much like our military men are today.

This is a fascinating, balanced history of the My Lai massacre and the prosecution of William Calley. Although the events in Vietnam and in the courtroom are at the center of the book, the narrative ranges from the origins of the Vietnam war and the administration of the draft, to the machinations of the Nixon White House. The writing is clear and the judgments sound. My only serious complaint is that author Belknap keeps the narrative too focused on Calley's personal history, his actions on the day of the massacre, and his subsequent court-martial -- whereas it is clear from the text that many, perhaps most, of the soldiers in Charlie company went berserk alongside Calley and joined in the slaughter of Vietnamese civilians. It would be interesting to know more about the other "grunts" and junior officers who shared responsibility with Calley. Unfortunately, they have a walk-on role in the book, apparently because most of Belknap's research was based on legal materials such as the official record of Calley's trial.

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