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It was Saturday, which was market day. We saw a lot of people leaving the village with empty containers and baskets, moving slowly, walking down this road, probably like they did every Saturday morning for generations. We went outside the hamlet and reconned around for 15 or 20 minutes and when we came back, those people we saw on the road were still there, only they were all dead. Women, children and older men.

Oh, the children. That's what struck all of us. It appeared to be automatic weapons fire, small arms, from pretty close range. When a high-velocity round hits a child, there's not a lot of mass there and yeah, it was grotesque. Sure. Babies. Lying with their mothers and grandmothers. Baskets right there.

That's when Mr. Thompson, we all, started trying to figure out what happened. The last thing we wanted to admit to ourselves was that it was our own men.

People had been herded up systematically, made to get down in this irrigation ditch, and they were executed. We started marking some of the bodies that were still alive with green smoke, (dropping smoke grenades from the helicopter) so the medics on the ground could help them. We marked this one woman who had chest wounds. She was moving one arm, feebly, asking for help, so we marked her. Mr. Thompson backed up 20, 30 feet and hovered there 10 feet off the ground because he saw a soldier coming over to her. That was (Capt. Ernest) Medina. We pointed down to her. He kicked her, stepped back and blew her away right in front of us. That's when we simultaneously said something like: "You son of a bitch." Then we knew. The mystery was solved. It was people from Charlie Company.

Mr. Thompson was determined to stop this. He landed and said to one of the soldiers standing by the ditch, "What can we do to help these people out?"

The fellow said, "We can help them out of their misery."

Hugh said, "C'mon man."



The first time he saw another chopper go down, Colburn, far right, realized, "This is not a game. People die."

they were sympathizers.

As we lifted off, we heard automatic weapons fire. Glenn said, "My God, he's firing into the ditch again." Wounded people were climbing out of the ditch and they were shooting them. We checked other people we'd marked and sure enough, they'd been finished off. It felt like by marking these bodies, we were indirectly killing them ourselves.

They raped the women with M16s, bayonets. They sodomized children. They decapitated people. They killed a monk, threw him down a well with hand grenades. It was so obscene. They did everything but eat the people.

I didn't join the Army to do that sort of thing, even if

And God bless the men on the ground. We would have given our lives on any day, any moment for them. Glenn did three weeks later; he was shot in the head on a mission.

But just like in public life, you got a percentage of wackos. (At My Lai) their leaders didn't stop them. We're talking about 30 guys led by Commanders Lt. Stephen Brooks, Lt. William Calley and Capt. Medina. It was extremely poor leadership. Instead of nipping it in the bud, they escalated it.

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WE SAW SOME people in a bunker. There was a squad coming their way. We could see the kids peeking out, little kids with Prince Valiant haircuts, black bangs, black pajamas and sandals.

Thompson landed again. Glenn and I got out of the aircraft, took out the guns. Hugh walked over to this lieutenant (Brooks), and I could tell they were in a shouting match. I thought they were going to get in a fist fight. He told me later what they said:

Thompson: Let's get these people out of this bunker and get 'em out of here.

Brooks: We'll get 'em out with hand grenades.

Thompson: I can do better than that. Keep your people in place. My guns are on you.

Hugh was outranked, so this was not good to do, but that's how committed he was to stopping it.

He walked back to the aircraft. He said: "I'm going to go over and get them out of the bunker myself. If the squad opens up on them, shoot 'em." And he walked away.

Glenn and I looked at each other. We looked at the GIs we were supposed to protect, we looked at Thompson.

A million things were going through my mind. The first thing, I wanted no one to think I was going to raise an M60 machine gun and draw on them. Or they'd draw on us. I remember pointing my muzzle straight at the ground so there'd be no mistake. We had a little staredown but I caught one guy's eye and I kinda waved, thinking, hey, fellow American, and he waved back.



Colburn, left, and Thompson return to meet the children of My Lai in 1998. "He's the real hero," Colburn says of the pilot, who put his body in the line of fire and confronted higher-ranking officers to save villagers.

Colburn cited for heroism in Vietnam

Spec. Four Lawrence Colburn, son of Mrs. Catherine Colburn of Mount Vernon, has been awarded the Bronze Star Medal with "V" Device for heroism in Vietnam.

Colburn distinguished himself March 16, 1968, while serving as a gunner on a helicopter flying a reconnaissance mission over the village of My Lai. Colburn risked his life to rescue 15 children who were hiding in a bunker between ground forces engaged in a heavy fire fight, jumping from the helicopter as it landed, and removing the children to a gunship which had been flying cover for his helicopter, so they could be evacuated to a secure area.

After his ship was airborne, Colburn spotted a wounded child lying in an exposed area between the two forces. When his ship landed he rushed to the wounded child, picked him up, and carried him to safety in the helicopter.

Colburn, who attended Mount Vernon High School is with 123rd Aviation Battalion.



COLBURN



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Of the many involved in the My Lai massacre, Lt. William Calley was the only man found guilty. The Army charged him with murdering 109 civilians and sentenced him to life in prison with hard labor. Within three days, President Nixon ordered him released from jail pending appeal. He was under house arrest three years.

Hugh landed again and Glenn charged in there, mired above his knees in what was once human beings. Maybe 175 people stacked three or four high. He picked this little fellow up but couldn't get out of the ditch because it was hard to get footing so he handed the child up to me and I grabbed him by the back of his shirt. I remember thinking: I hope the buttons are sewn on well because they're going to have to support his weight.

Hugh went to the entrance of this little earthen bunker and motioned for the people to come out. It took a few minutes.

He kept his body in between Lt. Brooks and the people he'd gotten out of the bunker, got them over to our aircraft, and got on the radio with his buddy, the gunship pilot who was circling above: "Danny, do me a favor. Can you come down here? Can you shuttle some of these people out of here before they get killed?"

They landed. This is unheard of, to land a gunship and use it as a medivac. Makes you a sitting duck. Breaks all kind of military rules. But Hugh had thrown caution to the winds.

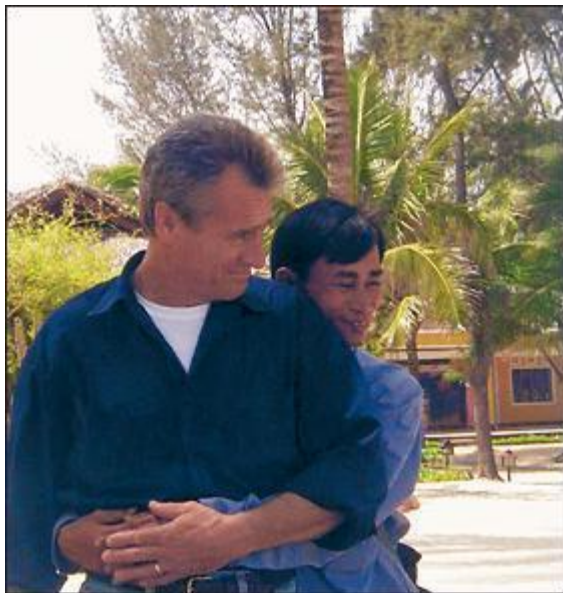
We passed over the ditch one more time and Glenn said: "I saw something move."

The child sat on my lap, limp. He had that blank thousand-yard stare. I couldn't even make him blink. He was in severe shock. He had no broken bones, no bullet holes, but he was completely drenched in blood. When Glenn picked him up, he was still clinging to his dead mother. We flew the little person to Quang Ngai hospital, an orphanage. A Catholic nun came out in her habit. Hugh took him and gave him to the nun. "Sister, I don't know what you're going to do with him. I don't think he's got any parents."

We left him there and flew away.

For 30 years, I prayed he was only 4 or 5 so he wouldn't remember, but when I met him (in 2001), I found out he was 8 and he remembers everything. You talk about someone to admire. This little boy stayed at the hospital for two days, then, on his own, left and went 10 miles through the jungle to his village to make sure his parents were buried properly.

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For 30 years, Colburn prayed the little boy he rescued was too young to remember the massacre. When they met in 2001, Do Hoa described everything. Now 42, he assembles electronics in Ho Chi Minh City for \$40 a month. "The clock is ticking!" Colburn says. "I want him to find a wife and have a baby of his own. He wants to be a dad."