



Four Hours in My Lai

By Michael Bilton, Kevin Sim

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Four Hours in My Lai By Michael Bilton, Kevin Sim Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #255570 in Books
- Published on: 1993-03-01
- Released on: 1993-03-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.60" h x .96" w x 5.10" l, .74 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 464 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The authors conduct a gut-wrenching inquiry into the tragedy at My Lai on March 16, 1968, when U.S. Army troops slaughtered some 500 Vietnamese villagers. Photos.

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From Library Journal

Written as a companion to the Yorkshire TV documentary (1989) by its producers, this unsettling account of the methodical massacre by a unit of the U.S. Army of over 500 Vietnamese villagers near Quang Ngai in 1968 gathers together evidence from GI eyewitnesses, survivors, and the extensive record of military investigators to tell us what happened, along with interviews and backgrounds of some of the participants to try to understand why. It then assembles a remarkably insightful assessment of the public's and the Nixon administration's response to both the war and this gruesome permutation of it. The book follows the legal repercussions that ended when only one of the many guilty parties, Lieutenant William Calley, was convicted. Any Vietnam War collection that does not carry this work is not complete; the massacre was both symptomatic of the military's prosecution of its mission and a watershed event in the evolution of the war itself. This investigation is a superlative dissection of those appalling crimes.

- *Mel D. Lane, Sacramento, Cal.*

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From Kirkus Reviews

Brilliantly realized study of the infamous Vietnam War atrocity in which US soldiers burned a Vietnamese village to the ground, shot the livestock, raped the women, and drove 400 men, women, and children into a ditch to slaughter them with machine-gun fire. Bilton and Sim (Women at War, 1982)--who co-produced an Emmy-winning TV-documentary on My Lai--begin by speaking with Varnardo Simpson, gunner with Charlie Company, 1969; for 20 years he has imprisoned himself in a tiny shack, tortured by memories. Through extraordinary research, the authors go on to discover the sad fates of several of Simpson's fellow vets; talk with Vietnamese survivors of the bloodbath; reveal facts cloaked by the Army's court-martial system; expose White House machinations to obscure "a grave breach" of the 1949 Geneva Convention; and document a coverup involving dozens of officers right up to the rank of major general. Only one soldier was court-martialed for the massacre: Lt. William Calley. And, as the authors explain, initial public outrage gave way, apparently as the result of manipulations by Richard Nixon, to the sentiment that Calley was a martyr: When the soldier was convicted of premeditated murder, Nixon ordered him released from Leavenworth. By the authors' account, there was only one hero at My Lai: young helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson. Seeing Charlie Company driving children to the killing ditch, Thompson landed in front of troops, trained his machine guns on them, and rescued the children. In a supreme irony, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross: his sound judgment "had greatly enhanced Vietnamese-American relations in the operational area." Thompson threw the decoration away. Savagery, the authors declare, has been endemic to every American conflict: in 1902, US troops in the Philippines slaughtered "goo-goos" indiscriminately; in WW II, soldiers sent their girlfriends Japanese skulls. But why is it continually repeated? "Massacre has a short shelf life," say Bilton and Sim. Essential for the war scholar's bookshelf; for the generalist, a profoundly moving human document. (Eight pages of b&w photographs--not seen.) -- *Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Leslie Marcellus:

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Joshua Bush:

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Omar Carter:

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