



Son Thang: An American War Crime

Gary D. Solis

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Three months after Army lieutenant William Calley was charged with the infamous massacre of civilians at My Lai, the Marine Corps had to deal with a savage war crime of its own. Although the incident received little of the media attention focused on Calley's crimes, the murder of sixteen women and children by five Marines at Son Thang-4 raised serious questions for the Corps and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Gary Solis, a Marine combat officer in Vietnam and later a judge advocate, draws on his considerable experience to describe the horrifying crime, its problematic investigation, and the complex courts-martial. It is an engrossing true courtroom drama, complete with unpredictable outcomes and the involvement of both Oliver North and James Webb. Were the five Marines of the self-styled killer team sent to Son Thang-4 on 19 February 1970 carrying out orders to punish the hamlet or reacting to snipers when they opened fire on noncombatant civilians at point-blank range? Were their actions simply a consequence of weeks of unrelenting combat in which fellow Marines were killed by the invisible Viet Cong and their boobytraps? Using trial records and extensive interviews, Solis brings to life the host of military and civilian attorneys, judges, and juries who wrestled with these and other thorny questions in the midst of a combat zone. His riveting courtroom narrative is every bit as fast-paced and readable as the best legal fiction, and his authoritative assessments of the principals' performances, explanations of the peculiarities of military justice, and analysis of issues that rocked the very foundation of the military code of justice assure the book's long-lasting value. Herefor the first time is the full story of what happened at Son Thang-4, including the controversial deliberations and verdicts - a study as pertinent today as it was in 1 Corps, Vietnam, more than twenty-five years ago.

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