



My Lai Massacre

Summary

- In My Lai, Vietnam
 - In province of Viet Cong stronghold
 - Hamlet containing no soldiers
- By 11th Infantry Brigade - Charlie Company
- March 16, 1968
- 350-500 dead, exclusively civilians
- Only 1 American injured
 - Shot himself in the foot



Images

No gore is shown, but the photos do display real moments from the massacre.

Taken by official Army photographer
Ron Haeberle



Peers Report:

Captain Medina instructed his men to "burn the houses, kill the livestock, and destroy the crops and foodstuffs."



Three Vietnamese lie dead in an area between towns.



Haeberle turned away after taking the picture, hearing gun fire. In his field of view, he could see "all the bodies falling over".

Leading Up To the Massacre

1. Free Fire Zones → anything that moved was a target
2. Phoenix Program → CIA campaign to stop VC by assassinating thousands BELIEVED to be guerilla spies
3. Tiger Cages → South Vietnamese brutally tortured political prisoners in jail.
4. Influences from leadership → Captains reportedly egged on the soldiers to murder civilians.
5. Claims by Anti War Vets
 - Poisoned wells and food.
 - Systematically burned down villages.
 - Cut off ears, tortured prisoners

People Involved

Lt. William Calley

Lieutenant of Charlie Company

- Led the first platoon of Charlie Company
- Commanded the first group of men to land in My Lai
 - Gave the order to start killing civilians which he defends as a direct order he followed
- First member of Charlie Company to be court martialed (Nov. 1970)
 - Originally charged with 6 counts of premeditated murder -> found guilty of 22 civilians
- Calley's life sentence brew national protests -> public accused US army of turning Calley into a scapegoat
- 1971 President Nixon intervenes with sentencing, 3 years later Calley serves 4 months in military prison



Ernest L. Medina

Captain of Charlie Company



- Reports to Lt. Captain Frank Barker
- Briefed the men stating no civilians are on the ground & to be extra aggressive
- The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) cannot confirm Medina's actions that day, around 300 were killed by Medina's direct orders
 - Reported Medina was seen participating in the massacre and abusing noncombatants
- After the conclusion of Peer's Inquiry, Medina was charged with assault with a deadly weapon + premeditated murder (March 1970)
- He was acquitted of all charged due to an overwhelming amount of sympathy from the jury (September 1971)

Hugh Thompson

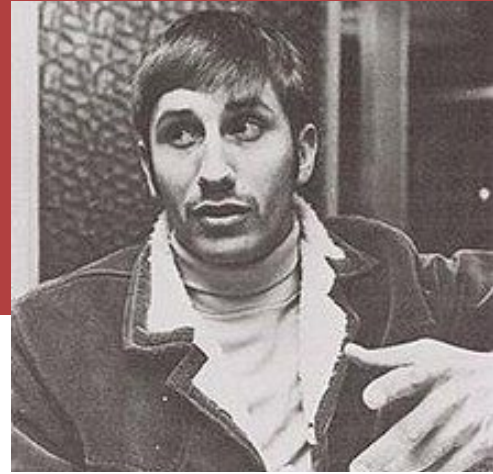
Warrant Officer of the 123rd Aviation Battalion of the 23rd Americal Division



- Job - draw fire from enemy forces, inform troops of enemy's location
 - Covered a village of civilians from ground fire, noticed the civilians being killed by Americans
- Thompson landed his helicopter to help My Lai citizens
- Filed an action report with the Company manager
 - Was sent in incredibly dangerous situations where he almost lost his life countless times
- Initial investigation Thompson identified Calley in a lineup of men (June 1969)
- Called before Senate + Department of the Army Inspector General, the Peers Commission to give testimony about the events during and after My Lai
- Awarded The Soldier's Medal for courage and valor (March 1998)

Ronald Ridenhour

Door Gunner of 11th infantry Brigade



- Not present during My Lai but intent of exposing the truth
- Given credit for bringing My Lai to public attention
- March 18, 1969 -> Ridenhour delivered all the evidence of My Lai massacre to 30 prominent figures on Washington
 - one into the events at My Lai and one into the attempts at a cover-up
- Rep. Morris Udall, who forwarded the letter to the Army's Chief of Staff, General William Westmoreland.
- These investigations, conducted over the next year, resulted in charges to 14 officers.

After the Massacre

Military Cover Up

- After Action Report
 - Written by American troops → false information about event
 - Stated that there was a firefight with 128 Viet Cong killed in action.

“American troops caught a North Vietnamese force in a pincer movement on the central coastal plain yesterday, killin 128 enemy soldiers in day-long fighting.”

- New York Times (based on military reports)

Exposing the Incident



- November 13, 1969 → Seymour Hersh makes incident public (1.5 years later)
- Sparked a public outrage over “Pinkville”

“You can’t afford to guess whether a civilian is a Viet Cong or not. Either they shoot you or you shoot them.” - Calley’s Attorney

“None of the men interviewed about the incident denied that women and children were shot. A source of amazement among all those interviewed was that the story had yet to reach the press...” - Hersh

The Trials

- *December 1969* - Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford: anyone involved in massacre will be prosecuted
- *1970* - Captain Medina + 14 others charged
- *March 1971* - Calley sentenced to life, Nixon promises to review case
 - Sentence later reduced to 20, 10 years
- *February to September 1971* - charges against other officers dropped / jury acquitted
- *November 1974* - Calley released on bond



Public Reaction

- Initially, 65% of Americans weren't upset by massacre
 - 1969
- As knowledge grew, skepticism & apathy fell
- Increased anti-war sentiment; decreased morale
 - Among those at home and in the war
- 70% believed Calley was scapegoat for superiors
 - Gallup Organization; 1971



Question:

There was a lot of controversy regarding the punishment of the commanding officers of the Charlie Company for the massacre. Do you think fair punishment was given? Why or why not?

Work Cited

- Digital History, www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/vietnam/vietnam_mylai.cfm.
- “Meet the Participants.” PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/my-lai-selected-men-involved-my-lai/.
- “My Lai Revisited: 47 Years Later, Seymour Hersh Travels to Vietnam Site of U.S. Massacre He Exposed.” Democracy Now!, www.democracynow.org/2015/3/25/my_lai_revisited_47_years_later.
- “Evidence of the Massacre at My Lai | American Experience | PBS.” Pbs.Org, 2009, www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/mylai-massacre-evidence/. Accessed 3 June 2019.
- “Digital History.” Uh.Edu, 2019, www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/vietnam/summary_evidence.cfm. Accessed 3 June 2019.
- “Digital History.” Uh.Edu, 2019, www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/vietnam/medina_notguilty.cfm. Accessed 3 June 2019.
- “Digital History.” Uh.Edu, 2019, www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/vietnam/reports.cfm. Accessed 3 June 2019.
- Armed Surdives Investigating Subcommittee. Investigation of the My Lai Incident. https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/MyLaiReport.pdf
- Editors, History.com. “My Lai Massacre.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 9 Nov. 2009, www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/my-lai-massacre-1#section_6.
- “Seymour Hersh Breaks the Story of My Lai (1969).” *Vietnam War*, 16 June 2018, alphahistory.com/vietnamwar/seymour-hersh-my-lai-1969/ .
- Lawrence, Quil. “50 Years On, My Lai Massacre Remains A Gaping Wound.” *NPR*, NPR, 16 Mar. 2018, www.npr.org/2018/03/16/594364462/my-lai-massacre-of-1968-continues-to-resonate-in-america.

Thanks Y'all