

The My Lai Massacre

This event (ironically pronounced “me lie”) was a watershed event of the Vietnam war. While it occurred during March of 1968, it was covered up by the military until the story broke in November of 1969. It is this area of the Batangan peninsula that the narrator of Tim O'Brien finds himself. In order to better understand the novel, it is important to understand the physical and social settings this created.

Search out the following information and record the answers in the space below. You may find the following websites helpful but you will need to search for other information on your own using search engines like Google.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Lai

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/mylai/mylai.htm>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/64344.stm>

General:

1. Why did the military believe that the Quang Ngai Province, more so than any other province in South Vietnam, was a VC stronghold? Provide specific examples that relate to Charlie Company (also sometimes referred to as C company).
2. What negative slang term did the soldiers often use to refer to all Vietnamese (whether North or South)?
3. What was the average age of a soldier in C company.
4. Find a copy of the “Nine Rules” pocket card and summarize the nine expectations of soldiers in the field?

The Massacre at My Lai

1. Characterize both Lieutenant Calley and Captain Medina. Include how they were perceived by military command, their peers, and other biographical information.
2. On what date did the My Lai massacre take place?
3. At approximately what time did the ground invasion of My Lai begin? Approximately how long did the actual attack last?
4. Name three different things that US soldiers did to the village of My Lai and/or the people of My Lai.

5. The number of dead is unknown for certain. The low range had at least 50 people (this figure comes from the original military report that was later revealed as part of a cover-up; it also identified those killed as VC). What is the high end of the estimate of Vietnamese citizens killed? Who were most of these people? (i.e. students, soldiers, political dissidents, etc).
6. At approximately what time did Captain Medina order his soldiers to “cease fire” and “stop the killing”? Ironically, Medina was accused of shooting a fleeing Vietnamese woman within an hour of his command.
7. What event supposedly changed the planned attack on the village into a free-for-all?
8. Look up the word *massacre*. Is massacre an appropriate word to describe the events that took place?
9. Identify Hugh Thompson and his role at My Lai.

The Cover-up

1. What was the code name for the investigation into the events at My Lai? (Hint: it’s also the name of the movie that Oliver Stone intends to make about the events).
2. Who was the only person actually convicted of crimes related to My Lai? What were the charges he was convicted of?
3. Who broke the story and cover-up the My Lai massacre?
4. Identify Rod Ridenhour and how he was involved with My Lai.
5. According to Ridenhour, what was the typical soldiers reaction to the events of My Lai after it occurred?
6. Identify Michael Bernhardt and how he was involved in exposing what happened at My Lai? How did Captain Medina allegedly attempt to prevent his involvement?