

The My Lai massacre

Basic information

Search-and-destroy mission

My Lai = Pinkville

VC HQ

200 VC guerrillas suspected

Charlie Company

Order

Destroy all houses, dwellings and livestock

Told that villagers all left for Saturday market; impression to kill everyone

16 March 1968

What happened?

Between 300 and 400 civilians killed

Mostly women, children and old men

Some working im fields, others at home

Machine-gun fire, irrigation ditch

No VC found; 3 weapons recovered

Response

Initially - claimed success

Report said 20 civilians accidentally killed

Rest of dead recorded as VC

After a year

Letter written by Ronald Ridenhour

Served in Vietnam, knew many of the My Lai soldiers personally

Evidence of "something dark and bloody"

Sent to 30 government offices and politicians; asked Congress to investigate

Investigation

Life magazine

Published photos of My Lai massacre taken by official army photograoher

Triggered investigation

Trial

Mass murder

Lieutenant Willian Calley

Charlie Company officer

Shot many in irrigation ditches

September 1969

Charge

Calley guilty of murder of 109 people

22 civilians

Sentence

August 1971 - 2 years hard labour

November 1974 - released

Ten others charged too

Aftermath

Revelation was deeply shocking

Charges too much for the army

Responsibility placed on Calley

Denied that Calley was acting under orders

His seniors were acquitted

