

Samuel Longo

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Remembering My Lai

More than five decades have passed since that fateful day on March 16, 1968, when the men of Charlie Company ruthlessly murdered 504 innocent Vietnamese men, women, and children. Even in 2022, the emotional pain surrounding the My Lai massacre runs deep. Anyone with empathy who learns of the tragedy that took place at My Lai is left with questions; Why did this have to happen? How could humans treat other humans the way they did? Unfortunately, no answer to these questions can bring back those who were lost. That being said, remembering My Lai and other events like it remind us of the extent to which human cruelty can sink if it is left unchecked. We therefore have a duty to remember the tragedies of the past in order to prevent tragedies of the future.

As someone two months away from commissioning as an officer in the US military, learning about My Lai has had a major impact on me. My first reaction was a sense of guilt. Even though My Lai happened long before my birth, it was hard to come to terms with the fact that the organization I am becoming a part of had been responsible for something so heinous. After talking to some of my peers who are also going into the military, I discovered that they feel the same way. Our shared sense of shame for the My Lai massacre just goes to show that individual actions often reflect more than just the individual, they become part of the collective identity of the organization. History will remember that the US Army carried out the My Lai massacre much longer than it will remember the name of Lt. William Calley. March 16th, 1968 will forever be a stain on America's history that no simple apology can set right. Although coming to this realization was difficult, it has taught me that my actions will not only affect the way people remember me, but they will reflect on my country as well.

Despite the shame I feel over the My Lai massacre, I am grateful for having learned about it. The innocent people who were killed deserve to be remembered. Their memory will be at the forefront of my thoughts when I become a Platoon Commander and will remind me what men are capable of in war. Having seen the atrocities that can occur when military power

goes unchecked, I will be certain to exercise my responsibility to restrain my subordinates if they start diverting from morality or the laws of war. I hope that all world military leaders learn about My Lai too so that they can understand the human consequences of failed leadership and ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated.