

The Red, White and Blue Scare:

A Study of American Military Policies in Vietnam and The My Lai Massacre

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Military Policy

Body-count

- Soldiers were ordered to prioritize the number of enemy casualties as the primary measure of success in combat. This policy was part of a broader strategy to wear down the enemy's morale and ability to fight through attrition. However, it led to a number of ethical and strategic issues, including the killing of innocent civilians and the over-reporting of enemy casualties.

Fire-free zone

- Certain areas were designated as zones in which soldiers were authorized to shoot at any individual, without prior identification or justification. This policy was intended to increase the lethality of military operations and create a sense of insecurity among the enemy. However, it often resulted in the killing of innocent civilians, as soldiers struggled to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants.

Pacification

- The policy involved a range of initiatives, including the provision of aid and infrastructure development, as well as efforts to build local governance and security forces. The aim was to create a sense of stability and legitimacy among the Vietnamese population, and to counter the influence of the communist forces. However, the policy was beset with a range of challenges, including corruption, mismanagement, and cultural barriers.

The My Lai Massacre

- The My Lai Massacre, one of the darkest moments of the Vietnam War, saw American soldiers mercilessly kill hundreds of unarmed civilians in a small village in Vietnam. This tragic event was not only a result of misguided military policies and strategies, but also a representation of the larger American way of war. The government deliberately tried to cover up the massacre and downplay its significance, fearing it would damage public support for the war effort. The military's use of maximum force tactics that prioritized enemy deaths over all other considerations was pervasive throughout the war, and the My Lai Massacre was a particularly egregious example of this approach. The aftermath of the My Lai Massacre shook the world and underscored the need for accountability and ethical conduct in times of war, and the government's attempts to cover it up highlighted the importance of transparency and responsible leadership.

504 Dead Civilians



Research and Conclusions

Research Question: How did the military strategies and policies of the U.S. during the Vietnam War contribute to the occurrence of the My Lai Massacre?

Sources:

- William Thomas Allison, *My Lai: An American Atrocity in the Vietnam War*
- David Anderson, *Facing My Lai: Moving Beyond the Massacre*
- Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*.
- Howard Jones, *My Lai: Vietnam, 1968, and the Descent into Darkness*

Conclusions

The focus on body counts, free-fire zones, and pacification led to a dehumanization of the enemy and a disregard for civilian life. These policies contributed to a culture of violence within the military, and ultimately led to tragic events such as the My Lai Massacre.

Reparations

The United States should be making reparations to Vietnam for the wide-spread destruction it caused. This could involve a range of measures, including financial compensation, infrastructure development, and environmental remediation. It could also involve initiatives to promote healing and reconciliation between the two countries, such as cultural exchange programs and educational partnerships.