



My Lai: A Brief History with Documents

James S. Olson , Randy W. Roberts

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This volume introduces students to the most controversial incident of the Vietnam War - the My Lai massacre when almost 400 Vietnamese civilians were killed in four hours. The authors discuss the ramifications of the cover-up and the ensuing investigations for the American public, policymakers, the anti-War movement and the soldiers involved. They examine the causes of the massacre and the issues of culpability and human rights. The narrative is built around 70 primary documents drawn mainly from testimony and reports from the government enquiry into the outrage.

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From Reader Review My Lai: A Brief History with Documents for online ebook

Isaac says

This was a very sad book in my opinion. It talked about Charlie company going into a village and killing nearly five hundred innocent men, women, and children. Thinking they were Viet Cong. I love the information it has but not the outcome. It is a must read book.

Laurie D'ghent says

The only reason this book did not get 5 stars is because the few pictures that were included had no caption. I looked on the Internet and learned so much more. I was also shocked at how much I found myself disliking Calley, only to discover he was 26. How can someone who has just entered adulthood make such decisions and be held culpable?

Dane says

Thorough look at a terrible tragedy.

Alma says

A must read for every American who needs a clearer picture about what truly went on in Vietnam.

Ted says

Lt William Calley was a horribly inept platoon leader. He was also a war crimes criminal and should have been hung for his actions. To be found guilty of killing unarmed men, women and, especially, children and ultimately only serving 3 1/2 years under house arrest for these atrocious actions is justice denied. That said, Calley was also a scapegoat. He was the only individual to be found guilty of this genocidal incident. His company commander, Capt Earnest Medina (who ordered his troops to destroy everything in the village that was "walking, crawling or growing") and all in the chain of command above that contributed to the coverup of the massacre in My Lai (Son My) all bore blame for this mass killing of some 500 unarmed villagers.

My Lai was certainly not an isolated incident, but for the National Liberation Front Committee of Quang Nai province to proclaim that this "was the most barbaric killing in human history" is ludicrous. I'm presently reading Mark Bowden's account of the Tet offensive of 1968 and the capture of Hue city by the Viet Cong and NVA forces (Hue 1968). Nearly 3000 civilians were executed by their northern "liberators". Many were found with their hands bound behind their backs with single gunshots to their heads. Others were found to have been buried while still alive. Barbaric killings indeed. So innocents died by the hands of both sides

during this sad and tragic war. Olson's book covers one such sad atrocity.

Chris says

Excellent book if a bit lengthy. Students respond to it well and it does a great job at facilitating discussions on My Lai and the broader nature of war and military culture.

Littleleaf says

Excellent for what it's meant for. Full of information, thought provoking at the very least. I, personally, am partial to fiction, however, so while it's factual and a good source for the history essay I read it for, it's not a book I would sit and read for fun.

Romaissa says

"How can I like a book that filled me with so much rage?" I pondered as I was picking out my rating. And I realized, it's not the content. It's the truth that it presents. I read this for my American History course and even used it to write an essay on the reasons for this tragedy and what its cover up etc. says about the nature of the Vietnam War, in general. I liked that these were primary documents that I was analyzing for the most part; not 2nd hand analysis from historians (though those most definitely have their value and esteemed place, especially for clarifying context). I ended with the sad belief that My Lai was not an isolated event; as the nature of war cannot ever be completely pure and honest (it's my more pacifist side speaking here). Overall, if you wish to learn about My Lai and the Vietnam War, this is a book I recommend.

Jasmine Nguyen says

This book was very helpful and informative. Though, in my opinion, the multiple interviews became repetitive and boring.

Theresa says

James S. Olson chose great documents and interesting interviews to inform us readers about this atrocity that happened just several decades ago. There were also some pictures that added more emotional content to the book, showing how terrible the massacre was. I enjoyed reading this book and would definitely recommend it to anyone who doesn't want to read too much but still want to get a lot of information out.

Also, a small side note, Olson does a fantastic job with giving the background information and organizing each document in his book.

