

My Lai Massacre Time Line

February 1, 1968

The Communist offensive, known as the Tet Offensive, is repelled by heavy American and South Vietnamese firepower, and the 48th Battalion retreats toward the coast through Pinkville, a region that earns its name from a section highlighted in pink on American military maps.

Early February, 1968

Charlie Company conducts regular patrols of the area in an attempt to engage the Vietcong, but they have little direct contact. Though few members of the Vietcong 48th are actually seen, the tension from their obvious presence and the constant onslaught of artillery fire causes a few members of Charlie Company to break down and Captain Medina to increasingly berate Lieutenant Calley.

February 25, 1968

The 1st and 2nd Platoons of Charlie Company stumble across a minefield, killing three men and wounding a dozen more.

The month of February has been devastating for Charlie Company. Frustration and anger from the loss of their companions led to aggression from traumatized soldiers.

Early March, 1968

Intelligence reaches Lieutenant Barker that the Vietcong 48th Battalion is almost certainly near the villages of My Lai, regrouping and garnering strength. Officers believe that a surprise attack on the 48th could wipe them out.

March 14, 1968

While on a patrol, the popular Sergeant George Cox is killed by a booby trap, and two other GI's are seriously injured. In one of the first documented instances of outright aggression, frustrated and angry members of Charlie Company lash out — while passing through a Vietnamese village on their return to camp, troops shoot and kill a woman civilian working in a field.

March 15, 1968

10:00AM

Colonel Oran Henderson takes over the 11th Brigade, the parent unit of Task Force Barker.

1:00PM

Captain Medina and the other commanders are briefed about increased intelligence that points to

a small group of villages called My Lai as the haven for the 48th Vietcong Battalion. This intelligence will later prove faulty at best.

Colonel Henderson addresses the task force, telling soldiers that the next morning they will have the opportunity to meet the enemy head on and encouraging the troops to be more aggressive. Barker and Captain Eugene Kotouc tell the troops that any Vietnamese civilians will have left for the markets in Quang Ngai City by the time the attack is scheduled to begin at 7:30am. Any civilians remaining in the villages would be considered Vietcong or actively sympathetic to the Vietcong.

That afternoon, unit commanders go on a reconnaissance flight of My Lai 4, a village called Son My, to scout landing zones.

5:00PM

Captain Medina addresses Charlie Company after the reconnaissance flight with orders for the following day. Medina “embellishes” Barker’s orders and adds a “revenge element” in his briefing. He tells his men they will be outnumbered two to one, with 250 to 280 members of the 48th hiding outside of Son My. Charlie Company will be airlifted south of the village and will attack Son My, destroying the enemy forces. Medina encourages his men to destroy the crops and kill any livestock seen; “mention was also apparently made of the burning of dwellings.”

Captain Earl Michles gives his company, Bravo, orders for the next day’s operations. Aero-scout teams called “sharks” will survey the area south of the My Lai villages by helicopter. One of these sharks is led by Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson.

March 16, 1968: The Day of the Massacre

5:30AM

Charlie Company is ordered out of their bunks to gather gear and receive ammunition.

7:22AM

Nine helicopters — the first “element” — leave LZ Dottie. This includes the 1st Platoon led by Lieutenant Calley and the 2nd Platoon led by Lieutenant Stephen Brooks.

While flying toward the western part of the hamlet, troops from Delta Company (from the 6th and 11th Artillery Battalion) shoot into Son My, the focus of the operation, for three to five minutes. The purpose of this artillery fire was to clear the landing zone, but instead it sends villagers running back into the village in fear instead of to the market.

7:30AM

The first element of helicopters lands in the paddy fields outside the village. Troops receive conflicting reports as to whether the landing zone is “cold” (no incoming fire) or “hot” (receiving fire).

7:38 AM

A second lift of men takes off from LZ Dottie and heads toward My Lai. This lift includes the rest of the 2nd Platoon, Lieutenant Jeffrey LaCross' 3rd Platoon, and Sergeant Ron Haeberle, an army photographer assigned to Charlie Company for the day.

Lieutenant Calley moves his men into a defensive position along the western edge of the village, securing the landing zone for the next lift. Lieutenant Brooks moves his men to the northwest edge of the village for the same purposes.

While Calley and Brooks are moving their men, several villagers attempt to leave their hiding places and are shot.

7:40AM

Warrant Officer Thompson, flying around the village in his "shark" scouting position, chases several armed Vietcong in black pajamas. Although the door gunners fire, they are unable to confirm the Vietcong had been hit.

7:47AM

The second element of helicopters arrives at the landing zone outside the village. When these helicopters take off again, they report receiving fire from a hamlet. The landing zone is declared "hot."

During this second lift, the sharks circling the village spot and kill four armed Vietcong on trails outside the village.

7:50AM

The two lead platoons from the first helicopter element begin moving through the village. Sergeant David Mitchell leads the first squad, followed by Lieutenant Calley and a squad of about 24 GI's, then Sergeant L.G. Bacon's squad and finally Sergeant Isaiah Cowan. As they move into My Lai the men shoot many fleeing Vietnamese and bayonet others. They throw hand grenades into houses and bunkers and destroy livestock and crops.

7:50-8:30AM

The two platoons in the village begin rounding up approximately 20-50 civilians (mostly women, children and old men,) pushing them along trails to a dirt road south of the village, and placing them under guard. Another group of 70 civilians are moved to the east of the village.

Soldiers begin killing the civilians without pretext. Men are stabbed with bayonets or shot in the head. One GI pushes a man down a well and throws an M26 grenade in after him. Over a dozen women and children praying by a temple are shot in the head by passing soldiers.

7:58AM

Captain Medina radios the operations center and reports 15 Vietcong have been killed.

It is reported that 300-500 Vietnamese civilians are fleeing southwest towards Quang Ngai City. A squadron led by Lieutenant LaCross opens fire on this group, and kills between three and 15 civilians.

Lieutenant Calley's platoon enters Son My from the south. In a hut, one soldier finds three children and a wounded woman and old man. The soldier shoots the man in the head, later claiming it was an act of mercy.

8:15AM

Two soldiers come across a woman carrying an infant and walking with a toddler; they fire at her. An elderly woman is spotted running down a path with an unexploded M79 grenade lodged in her stomach. One soldier forces a woman around the age of 20 to perform oral sex on him while holding a gun to a four-year-old child's head.

8:30AM

Captain Medina reports to Lieutenant Colonel Barker that 84 enemy have been killed. Barker radios this information to the tactical operations center. Medina directs Lieutenant Brooks to recover weapons from two Vietcong killed by the sharks while running from the small settlement of Binh Tay, north of Son My.

The group of civilians that had been herded to the south of the village are all shot by the soldiers guarding them. These soldiers then round up more civilians from inside the village and move them to a ditch. A fire squad is left guarding the people in the ditch, a number that has grown to about 50. The squads led by Sergeant Mitchell and Sergeant Bacon move east of the ditch and set up a defensive perimeter, further entrapping the people in the ditch.

Lieutenant Brooks' 2nd platoon fans out across the western part of the village. As they move through the village, they shoot down fleeing civilians, keeping no detainees. During this pass, approximately 50 to 100 civilians are killed, and at least two rapes are committed.

8:45AM

The Third Platoon moves into Son My and begins to burn and destroy homes, kill the remaining livestock, and destroy crops and foodstuffs. They shoot and kill a group of seven to 12 women and children.

On his way back to LZ Dottie to refuel, Warrant Officer Thompson spots a group of wounded Vietnamese citizens south of My Lai. He marks their positions with smoke grenades and radios soldiers on the ground to provide medical assistance. According to Lieutenant Colonel Barker, however, the message he gets is "eight or nine dinks with web gear" have been wounded south of My Lai, and he directs Captain Medina to recover the equipment.

9:00AM

Lieutenant Calley reaches the drainage ditch into which the civilians had been herded and gives the order to start killing them. Within ten minutes, all are shot down by members of the 1st

Platoon. Witnesses to the shooting report anywhere between 75 and 150 Vietnamese killed. None of the Vietnamese is armed.

Coming back from his refueling stop, Warrant Officer Thompson sees that the people whom he noticed previously as being injured are now shot dead.

9:15AM

Thompson's helicopter moves to the eastern side of the village, where he can see dozens of bodies in the irrigation ditch, some still visibly alive and moving. Thompson decides to intervene. In an unsanctioned maneuver, Thompson lands the helicopter on the east ditch and confronts a sergeant, but the officer says the only way he could help the people was to put them out of their misery.

After seeing the destruction to both property and civilians inside of the village, Captain Medina radios Lieutenant Brooks of the 2nd Platoon to stop the killing. This ceasefire order is never given to the 1st and 3rd Platoons, who continue killing for the next hour.

Medina's Charlie Company group moves into the village from the south, and interrogates an old man. The old man tells them that 30-40 Vietcong had stayed in My Lai overnight but had left the area before the assault began.

9:20AM

Minutes after Warrant Officer Thompson takes flight from the east ditch of Son My, his crew witnesses a sergeant shooting people in a ditch.

9:40AM

South of the village, the crew of Thompson's observation helicopter watches as a small group of soldiers approach a young woman lying wounded on the ground. Thompson had previously marked this woman with smoke. A captain walks up to the woman, prods her with his foot, and shoots her in the head. (This captain is later identified as Medina.)

9:45AM

Thompson flies to the northeast corner of the village where a small group of about 12-15 women and children are seeking refuge in a homemade bomb shelter. They are pursued by members of Charlie Company's 2nd Platoon who are on their way back from Binh Tay. Thompson lands his craft between Charlie Company and the civilians and radios the gunships that he needs help. His crew members point their guns at the men of Charlie Company, and Thompson tells them to fire if the GI's begin shooting at the civilians.

Jumping out of his helicopter, Thompson confronts Lieutenant Stephen Brooks, who offers no assistance while Thompson coaxes the civilians out of the bunker and onto the shark.

9:50AM

Thompson begs the other gunships to land and help rescue more civilians. Medevac pilots Dan

Millians and Brian Livingston land their sharks and fly nine or 10 civilians four miles away towards Quang Ngai City.

10:00AM

Lieutenant Jeffrey LaCross' 3rd Platoon continues killing. They gather a group of 10 women and children, and a few soldiers begin to sexually abuse a 15-year-old Vietnamese girl. Just after army photographer Sergeant Ron Haeberle takes a picture of the group, they are shot down and killed.

Captain Medina and Lieutenant LaCross meet at the edge of the village. During the conversation, some command group members stray off and kill several wounded Vietnamese.

10:20AM

Reports indicate that Private Herbert Carter shoots himself in the foot while trying to clear his pistol.

10:25AM

Private Carter is med-evacuated by Barker's command helicopter and flown back to LZ Dottie.

11:00AM

Captain Medina and his command group enter My Lai and walk through the village. After they reach the edge, Medina orders a lunch break for the entire company. The platoon leaders give him an estimate of enemy casualties: 90 killed. Medina reports this number to Task Force Barker. Later investigations will reveal estimates between 347 to 507 civilian casualties.

11:15AM

Thompson's aircraft arrives back at LZ Dottie. Thompson tells his section leader, Captain Barry Lloyd, what he had seen. Thompson confronts the company commander, Major Fred Watke in the aviation section's operations van. Major Watke passes the information on to Lieutenant Colonel Barker, who radios Major Charles Calhoun to find out what is happening on the ground and put an end to it.

1:30 PM

Still in the field, Charlie Company passes through My Lai 5 on their way to join Bravo Company. In My Lai 5, Charlie Company rounds up a large group of civilians and takes eight to ten young Vietnamese men with them for interrogation.

3:30 PM

Colonel Henderson receives a second report of civilian casualties and directs a company back through Son My village to get an exact count. However, Major General Joster, the commander of the Americal Division, radios that no further examination is necessary and countermands the order.

4:00 PM

Charlie Company arrives at its night defensive position, where Captain Eugene Kotouc, an intelligence officer for Task Force Barker, interrogates and kills at least two of the 10 Vietnamese suspects that both Bravo and Charlie Companies had gathered together during the afternoon.

10:00 PM

Back at LZ Dottie, Major Watke reports the allegations of Warrant Officer Thompson and other soldiers to Lieutenant Colonel John L. Holladay.

March 17, 1968

Bravo and Charlie Companies are ordered to search the area for the 48th Vietcong Local Battalion. Moving south along the Song Tra Khuc River, Charlie Company continues its destructive path, burning buildings and mistreating Vietnamese civilians.

8:00AM

Lieutenant Colonel Holladay alerts the Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General George Young, of the alleged mistreatment of civilians at My Lai.

9:30AM

The troops move deeper into the peninsula. Lieutenant Calley orders his men to press on, despite a threat of land mines. Walking at point, Private First Class Paul Meadlo steps on an enemy mine and blows his foot off.

10:00AM

Meadlo is med-evacuated and he shouts to Lieutenant Calley, "God got me, he'll get you - for what we did."

Noon

Brigadier General Young reports to Major Samuel Koster, who suggests that Colonel Henderson conduct a thorough investigation.

Afternoon - Evening

Charlie Company moves south, burning the villages of My Khe-3 and My Khe-1 and killing two Vietcong in the process.

March 18, 1968

9:00AM

Warrant officer Thompson is called in to report to Colonel Henderson, and he describes unnecessary killing of civilians. After the meeting, Thompson is described as being furious at Henderson's lack of concern, and throws his pilot's wings to the ground.

Brigadier General George Young, Colonel Henderson, Lieutenant Colonel Barker, Major Watke and Lieutenant Colonel Holladay hold a crisis meeting in a van at LZ Dottie. During the meeting, Henderson is instructed to conduct an investigation into the events that occurred on the 16th. However, this investigation proves to contain little else than the interview with Thompson, a brief conversation with Captain Medina, and a fly-over of the My Lai village area. Henderson's investigation report, submitted on April 24, states that 20 civilians had been killed and Thompson's allegations are false.

2:00 - 4:00PM

Charlie Company is evacuated to Dottie by helicopter. The operation at My Lai is finally over. Within hours of arriving at LZ Dottie, Henderson briefly interrogates Captain Medina, who in turn instructs his troops to stay silent about the mission.

March 22, 1968

A Vietnamese village chief reports to the leader of the Son Tinh District that 570 civilians have been killed and 90% of Son My village has been destroyed, including homes, animals and property.

In an official report regarding the My Lai operation, Lieutenant Colonel Barker concludes the assault was successful: "This operation was well planned, well executed, and successful. Friendly casualties were light and the enemy suffered heavily. The infantry unit on the ground and helicopters were able to assist civilians in leaving the area in caring for and/or evacuating the wounded."

April 8, 1968: The end of Charlie Company

Task Force Barker's mission is declared a success and the Companies involved are disbanded.

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