

Letters to the Edi

Assessing Blame in Massacres

To the Editor:

In our revulsion from the massacre of Mylai we are in danger of learning the wrong lesson and wrongly assessing the blame.

The lesson to be learned from Mylai—which is the Vietnam war in microcosm—is not that war is hell, nor that a venturesome foreign policy is dangerous, nor even that we should not have intervened in Vietnam. Some or all of these propositions may be true, but the lesson of Mylai is the old one that war is too important to be left to the generals.

For without depriving the individual participants of their individual responsibility, it must be said that the strategic principles adopted and stubbornly clung to by our military leaders have made this sort of horror inevitable.

Captain Medina says there was no massacre, but he also says that at Mylai he saw something move out of the corner of his eye and shot, and later found that he'd killed an unarmed woman. It was, let us say, fear for his life that made him do it. Why was he in such fear? Because he didn't know friend from foe. And he didn't know friend from foe, not because Vietnamese look alike (all WASP's do, too), but because there was no place his friends could go to demonstrate their friendship.

among our own troops. They have managed to lose a war and to waste the goodwill we had earned among men.

Would it not be wisdom now to retire them? We need soldiers, and we need officers to command them; but generals so demonstrably incompetent we could do much better without.

GEORGE P. BROCKWAY
New York, Jan. 8, 1970

Unsuitable Strategy

The search-and-destroy strategy is not interested in places, and so cannot be interested in the people who live in places, and so is peculiarly unsuited to a war said to be fought to establish a democratic government, that is, one of, by, and for the people.

Even if this not remarkably subtle point was too difficult for our military leaders to grasp in principle, the practice of a few months' fruitless searching and destroying should have taught them that something was wrong with their strategy. But these generals seem incapable of learning. And the air generals are no better, for bombing is only another form of searching and destroying — with the added contraindication that the destruction you can wreak on a largely undeveloped country is not much.

The stupidity of these generals has caused thousands of unnecessary deaths among the people we came to help and thousands of futile deaths