

The 'Unfortunate' My Lai Incident

General Ralph E. Haines Jr., commander in chief of the United States Army in the Pacific, told the Commonwealth Club yesterday the My Lai massacre was "an unfortunate incident."

"It is not at all representative of the conduct of our forces in Vietnam," he said. "We do not employ terrorism as a weapon."

The general, responding at the time to a question, said he could not discuss such matters as a justification for My Lai because of pending courts-martial.

CONTRAST

During his formal address, he also drew a sharp contrast between the behavior of the Viet Cong and American forces. The Viet Cong, he said, engaged in "premeditated acts of terrorism against civilians in the hamlets." In an obvious but unstated reference to My Lai, he said a few of our soldiers did engage in "improper conduct."

And this improper conduct of the few, he said, should not tarnish the brilliant performance of the more than two million Americans who have served in Vietnam.

"From the soldiers I have seen under the stresses of conduct in Vietnam," he said, "I have developed a great confidence in this generation of young Americans."

DISCONCERTED

He seemed disconcerted to find "our movement into Cambodia has been reported somewhat illogically in certain segments of the U.S. and world press as an invasion."

The truth, he suggested, was plain: We moved in simply to neutralize sanctuaries set up by the North Vietnamese in violation of Cambodia's neutrality; in fact, they had "sought to engender a full-blown insurgency in Cambodia to camouflage the nakedness of their aggression."

out Indochina had "shattered the myth that the Vietnam war is only a civil war." (This was the State Department's own description of the war before its white paper of January, 1965, titled "Aggression from the North.")

THOUGHT

General Haines offered, as he put it, a thought to those "who may question the wisdom of our continued involvement in the Far East."

The thought was this: We were merely extending our pioneer spirit ("enduring hardships, helping each other, looking to the future with optimism") to the far reaches of the Pacific.

"We can no longer simply opt out," he said.