

Bureaucratic pressure to produce Westmoreland's desired rate of attrition degenerated into careless brutality. The infamous My Lai massacre represents the most egregious case of the everyday horrors American forces visited on their hidden enemy, the incident with the highest box score. On May 16, 1968, a company of U.S. soldiers entered the small village of My Lai, rounded up the inhabitants (mostly women and children), placed them in a ditch, and turned murderous gunfire on them. Army investigators later placed the death toll at between four hundred and fifty and five hundred people, some of them infants in their mother's arms.¹²

Wanton cruelty became the everyday result of American policy. One marine described the "fun game" of tossing candy out of the back of a transport truck, leading Vietnamese children to run for it and possibly be mangled by the next truck in line. A Vietnamese peasant woman remembered how passing soldiers in a truck grabbed her son's hat and pulled him (it was held to his head with string) under the vehicle's tire, killing him. These random acts by some individual soldiers are dwarfed by the death and destruction wrought on the Vietnamese people by the indiscriminate use of artillery and airpower.¹³

The horrors American military personnel visited on the Vietnamese were replicated in the horrors they themselves endured, both in terms of bodily wounds and psychological damage. To the fifty-eight thousand American dead would be added seventy-five thousand physically disabled veterans. The trauma of the war left tens of thousands more with nightmares, severe depression, and other psychological maladies. In at least one case analyzed by anthropologist Mai Lan Gustafsson, a veteran came to believe he was haunted by the angry spirit of a Viet Cong fighter whose ID tag he had taken in 1968. The vet only found peace when he returned to Vietnam and gave the tag to the fighter's mother.¹⁴

American journalism made Vietnam the first truly televised war, and magazines such as *Time* and *Life* created a massive photographic record of wounded, dead, and dying Americans. Vietnam came to be known as "the Living Room War" with images of troops returning in body bags becoming an indelible image of the failure of American policy in Southeast Asia. Dismemberment entered the public record and became part of popular culture.¹⁵

Romero's zombies shambled on-screen as Americans became increasingly used to real-life images of graphic death, gore, and body parts blown to pieces. In January of 1968 the Tet Offensive inaugurated

with one week
four American
landscape cover
tling it out wit
perfectly suited

In the year
bringing these
Romero during
with him on *Ni*
in the army the
basic training a
drill sergeant w
as a combat ph
creativity that le
Lon Chaney Sr.¹

Savini's first
Deathdream (19
home to his horr
Romero on *Daw*
images of a zom
torn apart. These
paddies. In his 1
niques (with a pr
King), Savini rem
on a human arm,
bing the ground."
in the hospital w
In *Bizarro*, he sug
special effects in a

The Vietnam
for the vampire. F
graphic iconograp
a permanent part
years, in a very lit
Unlike the Second
included evidence
tized human body
The zombie and th
images, and Ameri
the national horror