The 23rd Infantry Division, also known as the Americal Division, had been deactivated in April 1956 after several years of service in the Panama Canal Zone. General William Westmoreland reassembled and reactivated the unit on September 25, 1967. He assigned Americal troops to I Corps in Vietnam, where the unit was to work cooperatively with the 1st Marine Division. Charlie Company, part of Americal's 11th Infantry Brigade, was deployed to Quang Ngai province in I Corps in December 1967. For the next three months, the troops participated in search and destroy missions, trying to locate the notorious Vietcong 48th Local Force Battalion, which operated regularly in the region.

It was an extremely difficult time for the soldiers. As you analyze the testimony in the following documents, look for frustration among the troops over their inability to locate and engage the Vietcong, even while they sustained serious casualties from mines and booby traps. You should also be able to detect a deep sense of resentment accumulating toward South Vietnamese civilians. The members of Charlie Company were convinced that villagers knew where the Vietcong had placed the mines and booby traps but refused to inform or even warn the Americans. Some members of Charlie Company eventually came to see all Vietnamese—North Vietnamese, South Vietnamese, and the Vietcong—as the enemy.
PEERS COMMISSION

Military Situation
in Quang Ngai Province
1970

When Charlie Company deployed to Quang Ngai province in December 1967, the soldiers entered a particularly dangerous region of South Vietnam, an area where enemy military forces were unusually strong and where civilian sympathies tended to support the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong rather than the United States or the government of South Vietnam. The Peers Commission developed the following assessment of the military situation that existed in Quang Ngai province at the time of the My Lai attack.

Enemy Situation in March 1968

As a basis for evaluating the enemy situation in Quang Ngai Province, it is noted that in March 1968, enemy strength throughout South Vietnam was estimated to be approximately 263,200 men. Of this total, about 55,900 were Viet Cong (VC) combat forces, 87,400 were North Vietnamese Army (NVA) combat troops, and 69,100 were guerrillas, with the remaining 50,800 comprising administrative personnel.

Considering only Quang Ngai Province ..., enemy strength ranged between 10,000 and 20,000 men during the 4 years preceding the Son My incident. In early 1968 enemy strength was estimated to be between 10,000 and 14,000 men of which 2,000–4,000 were regular forces, 3,000–5,000 were guerrillas, and 5,000 were assigned to administrative units.

A number of VC and NVA regiments operated in Quang Ngai Province from 1964 to 1966. However, four local force battalions and eleven companies of VC were the forces primarily responsible for harassing the area under government control. The 48th Local Force (LF) Battalion became the principal enemy force in Son Tinh District, although it also operated in the Batangan area to the north as well as to the south of the Song Tra Khuc. Members of the 48th LF Battalion reportedly lived with the local villagers in order to conceal their presence, often working as farmers during the day and fighting as guerrillas at night.