

U.S. Involvement Grows

Chapter 29, Section 2 & 3

Objectives

- Identify the factors that caused President Johnson to increase American troop strength in Vietnam.
- Assess the nature of the war in Vietnam and the difficulties faced by both sides.
- Evaluate the effects of low morale on American troops and on the home front.

What were the causes and effects of America's growing involvement in the Vietnam War?

As the war escalated, America's leaders and soldiers found themselves in a quagmire.

Eventually the war weakened the American economy, divided the people, and eroded the nation's morale.

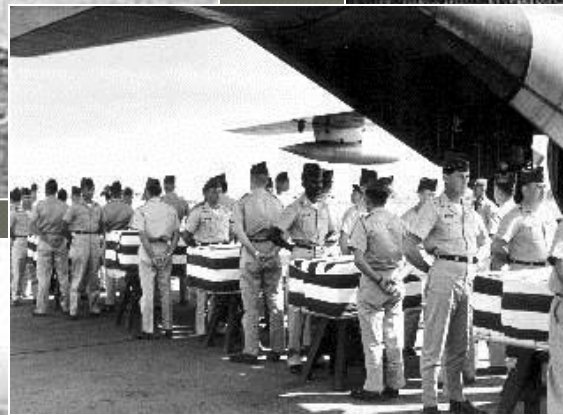
The **Battle of Ap Bac**

This marked a new phase of the Vietnam War. On January 2nd 1963, **only 340 Viet Cong guerrillas held off the combined assaults of more than 1,500 south Vietnamese government troops** near the small village of Ap Bac. The VC shot down five American helicopters and withstood major ground troops and air support during the battle. The VC suffered few casualties, much to the American advisors' frustrations. **Ap Bac's warning signs, while understood by the lower-level advisors and the press, were lost on the senior American civil and military leadership.**

The South Vietnamese army would not fight so was it worth the lives of American soldiers to defend their nation when they themselves wouldn't?



Modern Vietnamese monument to the communist victors of the Battle of Ap Bac.



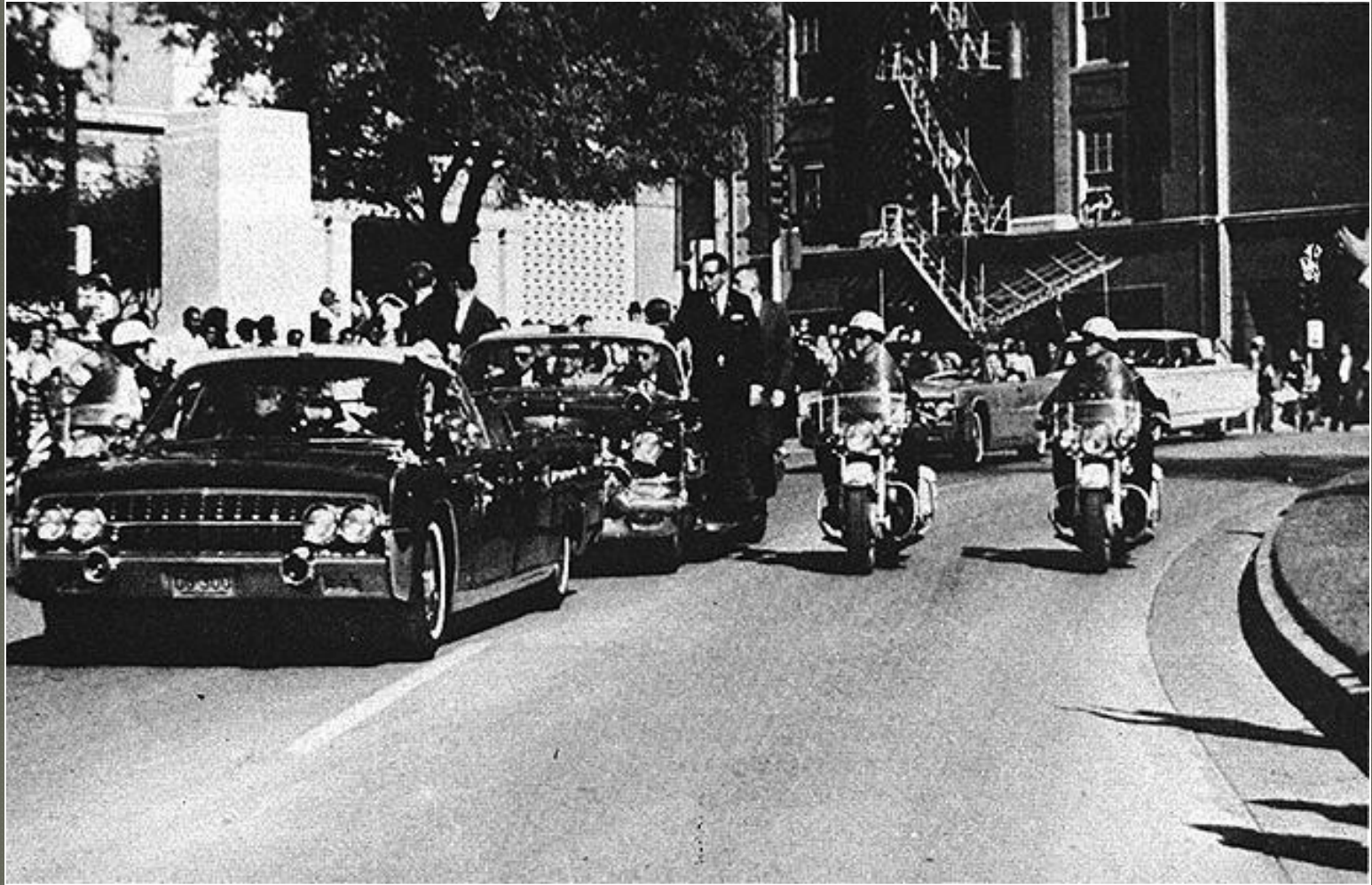
PHOTOS OF THE BATTLE OF AP BAC TAKEN BY STEVE STIBBENS
(<http://www.stibbens.com/war.htm>). USED WITH PERMISSION

General Harkins' overly optimistic reports led to a confused understanding of the true situation in south Vietnam. The south Vietnamese army was not fighting with any spirit or skill and would lose without a massive U.S. troop deployment.



"By Christmas it will be all over." (American General Paul Harkins, April 1963). But it wasn't over until 1975 when the communists won and took control of south Vietnam.

President Kennedy was assassinated a few weeks later in Dallas, Texas on November 22, 1963.



U.S. NAVY FILM ON GULF OF TONKIN INCIDENT



Tonkin Gulf Incident, August 1964

The official story was that North Vietnamese torpedo boats launched an "unprovoked attack" against a U.S. destroyer on "routine patrol" in the Tonkin Gulf on August 2, 1964, and that North Vietnamese PT boats followed up with a "deliberate attack" on a pair of U.S. ships two days later. Evidence uncovered since the event has proven that there was **no attack that night**, and some have suggested that this incident was an excuser to escalate U.S. involvement in the region.

USS Maddox

**Target of a
fictional North
Vietnamese
naval attack**



UNIVERSAL NEWSREEL

U.S. BOLSTERS FORCES

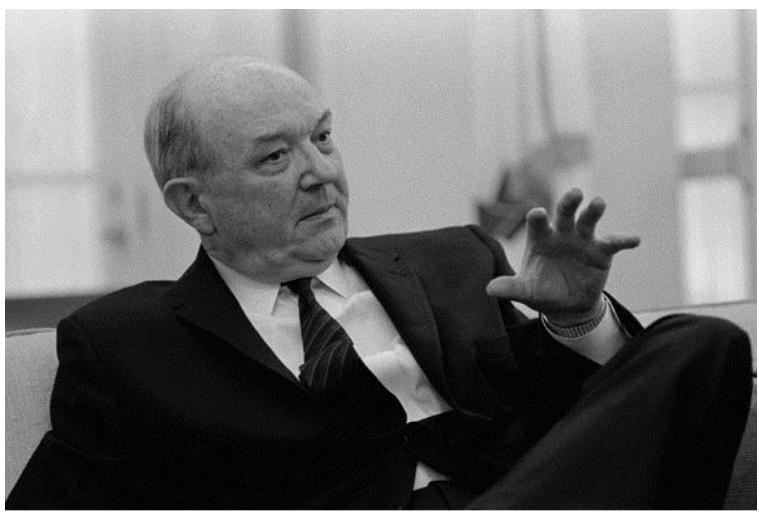
Planes And Men
Rushed To Asia

VOICED BY HERBERT

LBJ's Foreign Policy Team



**(Left) Robert McNamara,
Secretary of Defense**



Dean Rusk, Secretary of State



**McGeorge Bundy (National Security
Council) along with his brother
William Bundy (Pentagon) were
important advisors**

President Johnson signed the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**, August 7, 1964

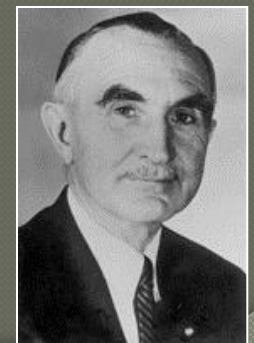
The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution authorized President Lyndon Johnson to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression."

The resolution passed unanimously in the House, and by a margin of **82-2** in the Senate.

The Resolution allowed **Johnson to wage all out war against North Vietnam without ever securing a formal Declaration of War from Congress.**



Senator Wayne Morse opposed the resolution



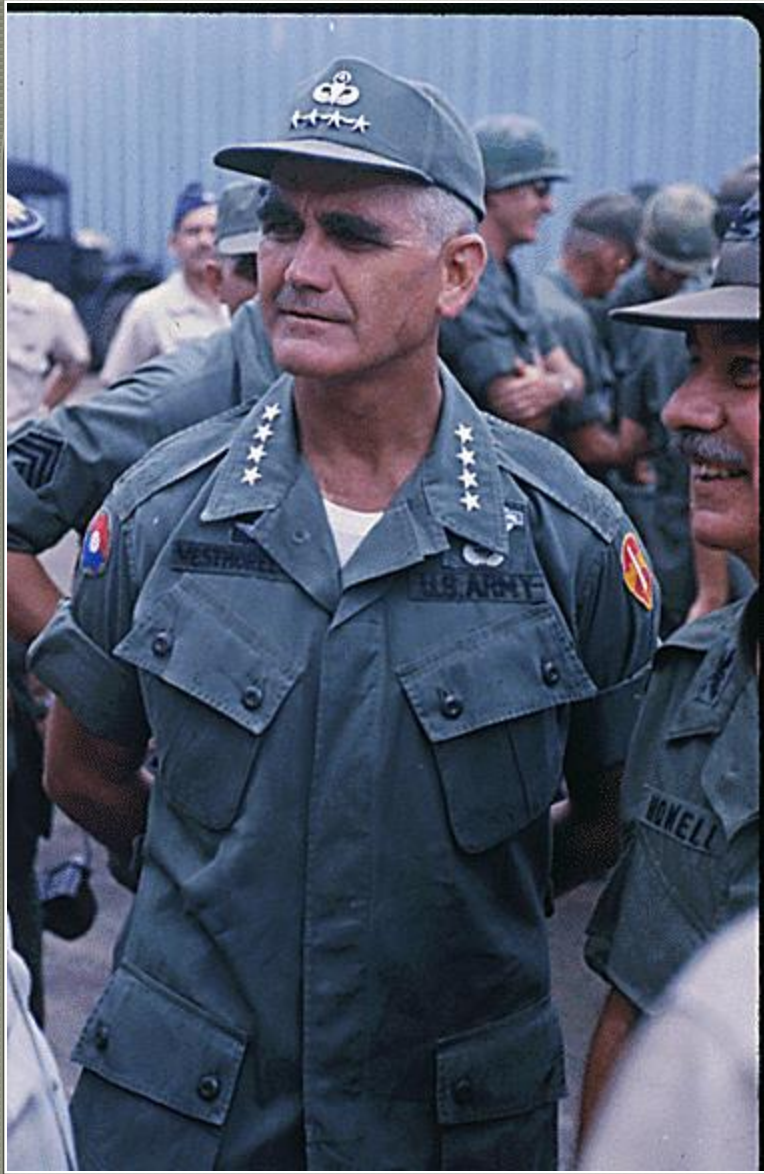


In 1965, **Johnson** escalated air strikes against North Vietnam and increased the number of ground troops.

The U.S. plan, called **Operation Rolling Thunder**, was to Americanize the war effort.

The U.S. would use its superior war technology to win the conflict quickly.

Johnson's advisers, including **William Westmoreland**, the American commander in Vietnam, supported the increased military presence.



General Westmoreland

In 1965 after Viet Cong forces attacked several American bases LBJ authorized the "Rolling Thunder" campaign, the **systematic bombing of North Vietnam**. This bombing would continue off and on for the next seven years.



B-52 bomber munitions load of over 70,000 pounds of ordnance including bombs, mines and missiles.



Arc light Operations

Arc Light was the code name for the devastating aerial raids of B-52 Strato fortresses against enemy positions in Southeast Asia.

The first B-52 Arc Light raid took place on June 18, 1965, on a suspected Vietcong base north of Saigon.

In November 1965, B-52s directly supported American ground forces for the first time, and were used regularly for that purpose thereafter.



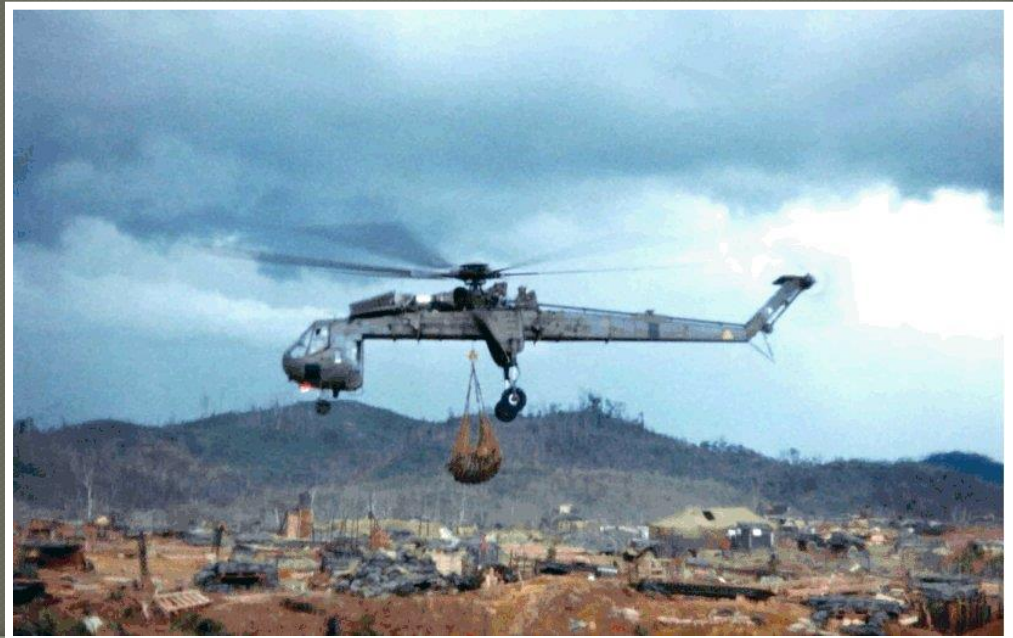
Dropping bombs



In Vietnam, the U.S. dropped three times the tonnage used in all of World War II, and 12 times the tonnage used in the Korean War.



**Air mobility:
the U.S. had
complete
mastery of the
air in South
Vietnam**



Aerial envelopment and movement: an air-based strategy to surround the enemy using helicopters, bombers and artillery.





Helicopters



U.S. Vietnam military strategy under General Westmoreland

General Westmoreland's strategy was one of a **"war of attrition,"** meaning he **sought to kill** infiltrated and indigenous **Vietnamese Communist soldiers faster than they could be replaced.**

The general created a plan of **"search and destroy"** missions where American units would try to **find and decimate Communist forces.** General Westmoreland was under constant pressure from Washington to avoid the kind of disaster that befell the French Army at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 that ended the French effort.

To avoid that situation he normally forbade any military operations by units smaller than a battalion of about 750 men. He also developed a somewhat unusual method of operation in which artillery guns were airlifted into fire bases and troops were, for the most part, forbidden to proceed past the **11,000- to 20,000-yard "fan" of the artillery.**

However, there were two major flaws in his plan. One was that Communist units could avoid the artillery fan and continue to fight. Second was that North Vietnam was able to infiltrate Communist soldiers into South Vietnam faster than General Westmoreland's soldiers could kill them.

SEARCH AND DESTROY MISSIONS

Offensive military operations undertaken by United States combat units in Vietnam to find and neutralize the enemy, especially when the enemy's strength and disposition had not been fixed precisely. The capture and holding of territory during such operations was not a priority.



“U.S. Search and Destroy missions” often came up empty handed



Search and Destroy operations



U.S. attacks inflicted many casualties on civilians and turned 5 million Vietnamese into homeless refugees.





Operation Ranchhand: Defoliation 1962



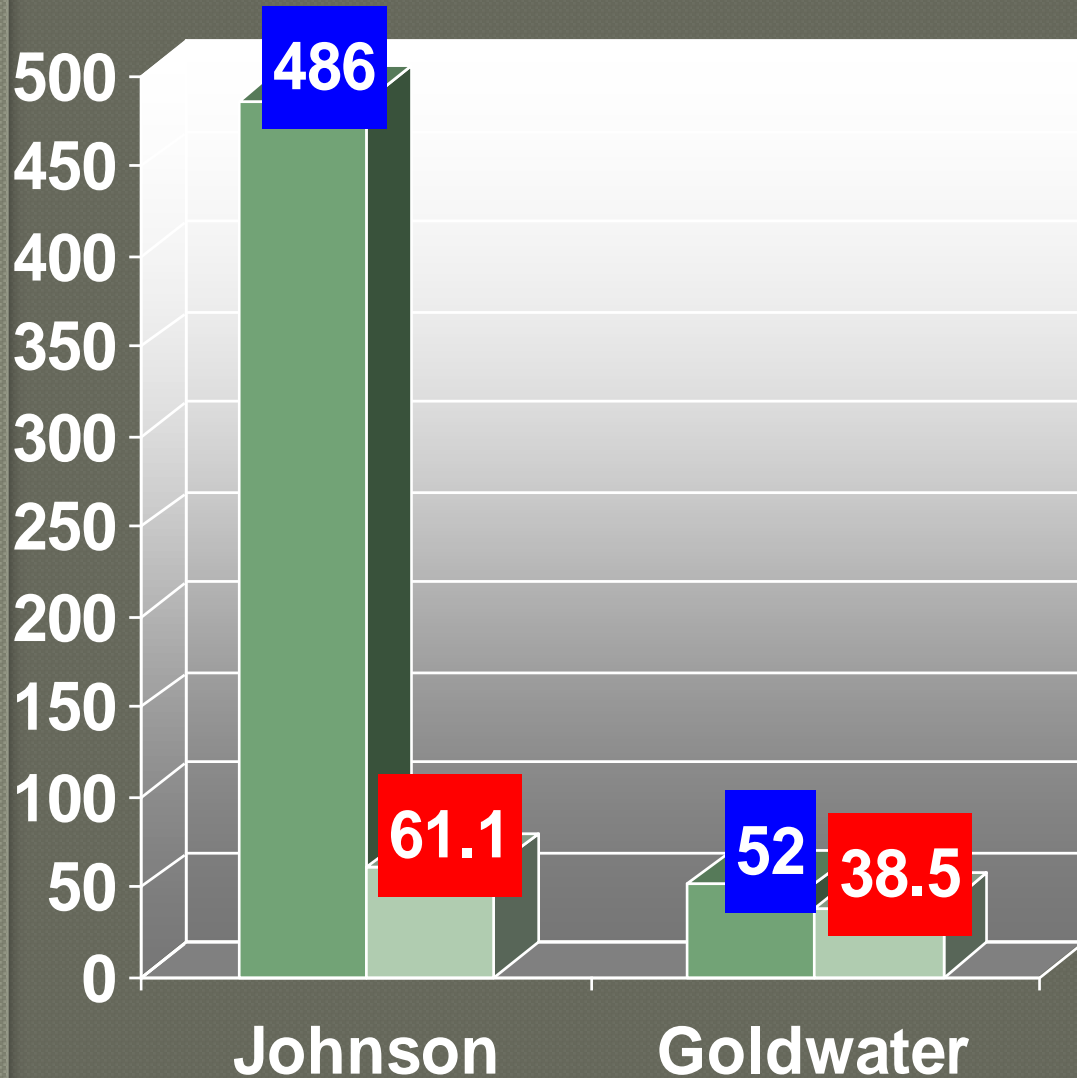
The goal was to clear vegetation along highways in order to make it more difficult for the VC to conceal themselves for ambushes.

Heavily sprayed areas included inland forests near the Demilitarized Zone (along the South Vietnamese borders with Cambodia and Laos), and the mangrove forests in the Rung Sat Special Zone along the river approaches to Saigon and in the Mekong Delta's Ca Mau Peninsula. Guerrilla trails and base areas were exposed, and crops that might feed Vietcong units were destroyed.

Vast tracts of forest were sprayed with **“Agent Orange”**, an **herbicide containing the deadly chemical Dioxin**. No safety precautions were taken with the dangerous chemicals and soldiers and civilians claimed ill effects for many years after the war ended.



The election of 1964



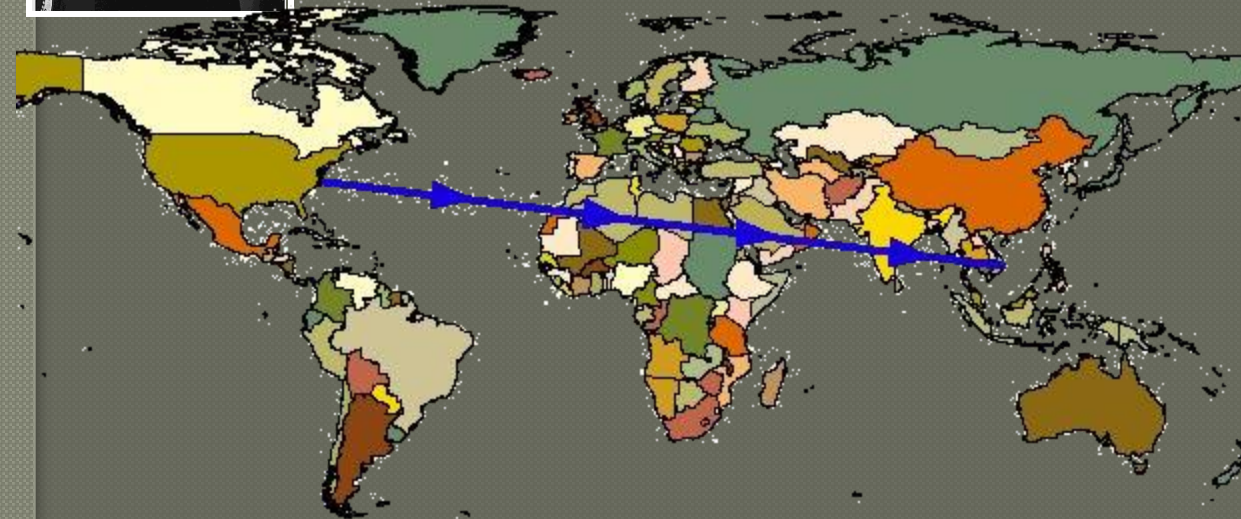
Johnson won by a landslide and quickly escalated U.S. involvement in Vietnam

■ Electoral vote
■ Popular vote



LBJ stated in the 1964 presidential campaign that he was
***“not going to send American boys nine or ten thousand
miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be
doing for themselves.”***

By early 1965 the communists were well on their way to
victory and Johnson had to either increase U.S.
involvement or see South Vietnam defeated.



Johnson sent ground troops, 1965

President Johnson did not want a full scale war in Vietnam like World War II. However, he also **did not want to be accused of “losing South Vietnam” as Truman had been accused of “losing China” in 1948.** In early 1965, LBJ approved the use of U.S. ground troops. Two battalions of Marines were sent to Da Nang. Massive U.S. troop deployments saved South Vietnam from falling but the majority of the rural areas of the country remained in the hands of Communist forces. The bulk of combat was now being done by U.S. soldiers.



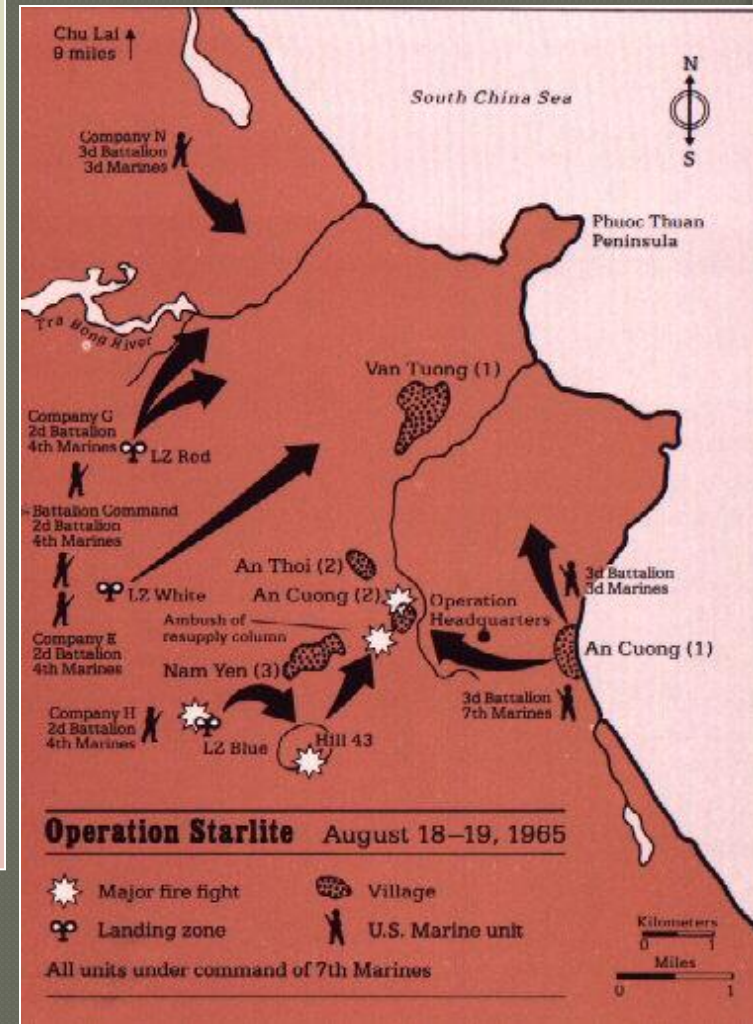
Marines landing at China Beach



Operation Starlite, August 1965: first major battle for the American military

A deserter from the Vietcong revealed that an attack was imminent against the U.S. Marine base at Chu Lai. Operation Starlite was planned and executed, **a victory for the U.S.**

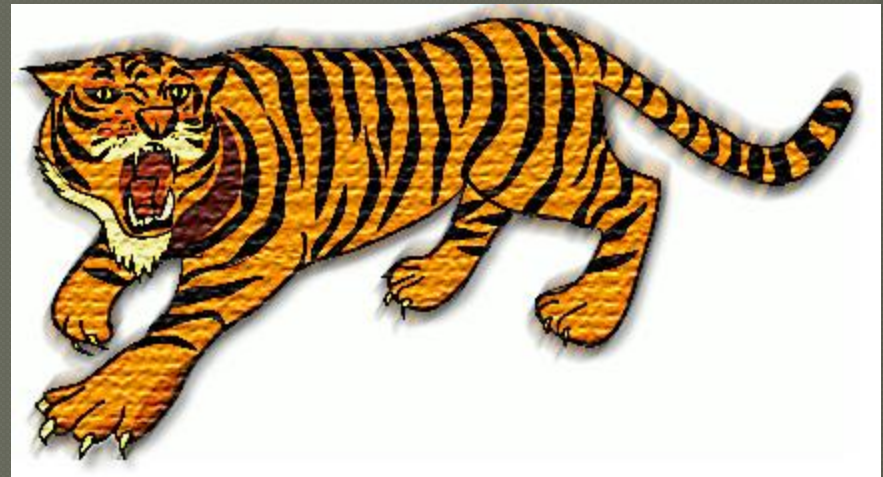
Ground forces including Marines, artillery from **Chu Lai**, ships and air support combined to attack VC soldiers who sustained nearly 700 deaths, while U.S. forces claimed 45 dead and more than 200 wounded.



The North Vietnamese and Vietcong fighters proved a difficult enemy.

Ho Chi Minh's military strategy was to **fight only when victory was certain.**

He exhorted his troops to be like a tiger fighting an elephant — the tiger keeps moving and takes bites out of the elephant.



Vietnamese Communist (VC) tactics

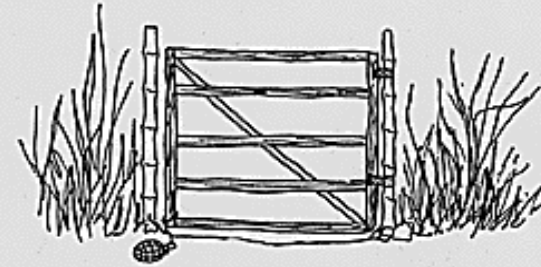
Guerrilla Warfare is where the fighters use the surrounding areas and geography of the land—mainly in mountains, jungles, swamps and cities—to hide in, to set traps in and to fight in without using heavy weapons like tanks, planes, warships, etc.

Guerrilla warfare involves setting traps and using ambushes to attack enemies. Some traps used were tripwires, punji traps, covered holes in the ground and spike pits with poison tipped spikes.

The Vietcong hid in trees and swamps and were spread out over a very wide territory of jungle.

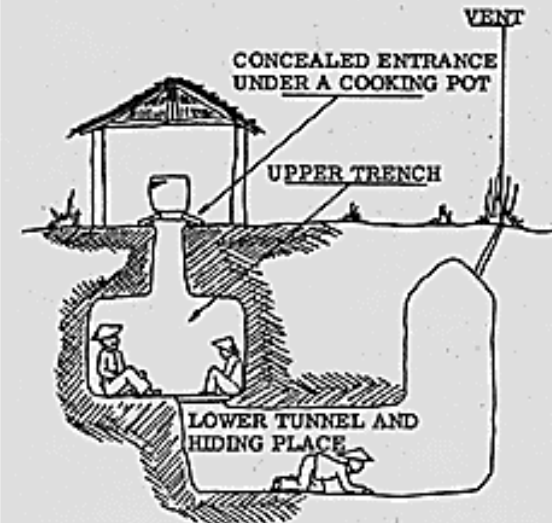
Another aspect of Guerrilla Warfare is that Guerrilla fighters look just like everyone else. This gave them an advantage when hiding in a town since it was hard to distinguish friend from foe.

GRENADE AT GATE



In most cases the grenades are buried (shallow) under the gate. A short trip wire is attached to the gate so that when it is moved even slightly, the grenade is detonated. Pressure release fuzes have also been employed. If there is heavy growth around the gate, the grenades will generally be hidden in the growth.

HIDING PLACES UNDER LOCAL HOMES



The **geography of Vietnam** made it a difficult battleground for U.S. soldiers.



Much of the land was **covered with jungles** and rice paddies making it hard for U.S. armor (tanks and armored personnel carriers) to move around.



Dense foliage prevented aerial observation and **allowed the enemy to move around without detection and stage ambushes.**

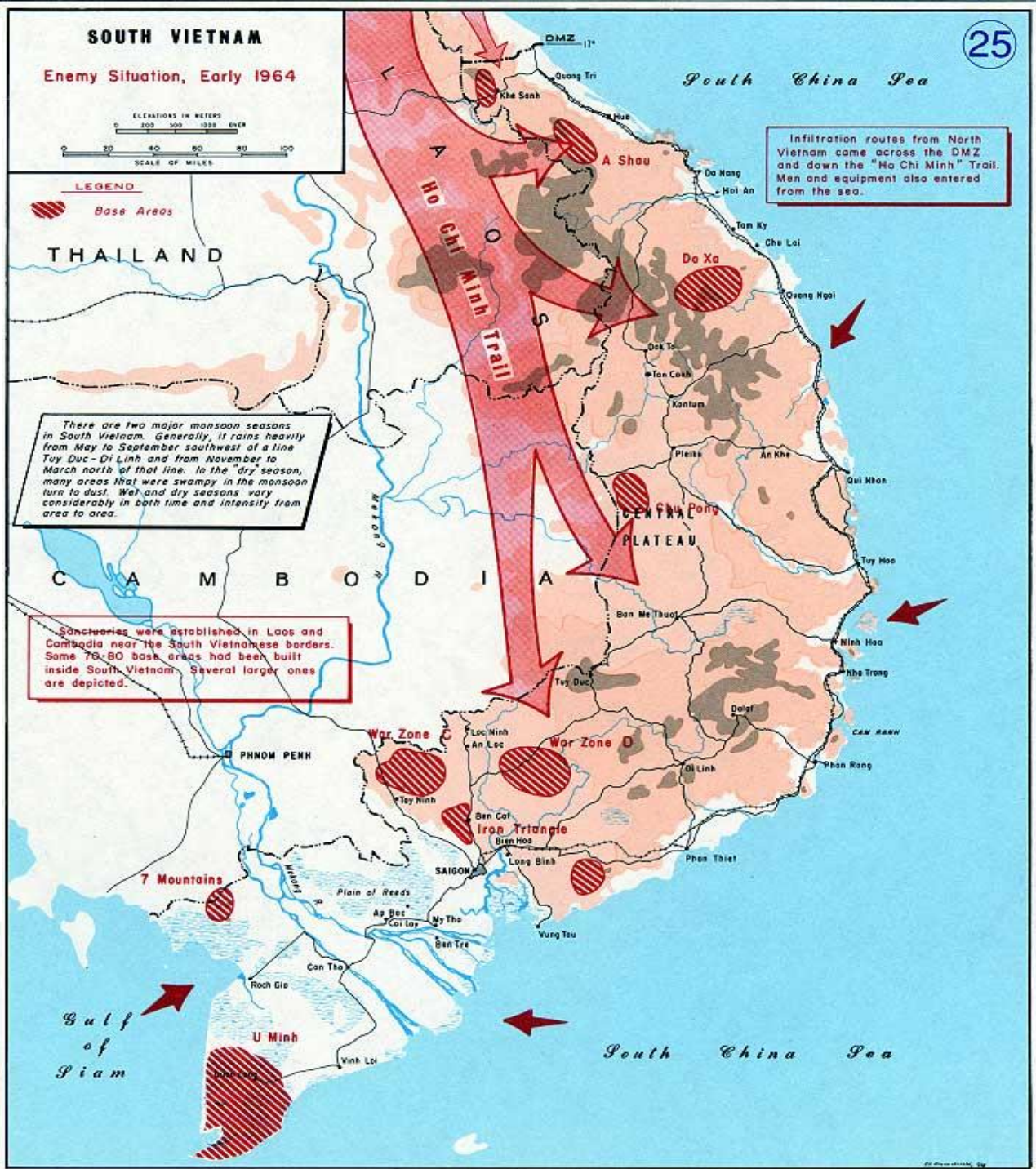


It was impossible to tell who the enemy were, for the **communist Vietcong were integrated into the countryside villages.**



Monsoon (rainy) seasons prevented the effective use of American airpower.

Map depicts the **Ho Chi Minh trail**. It bordered Cambodia and Laos and was used by the North Vietnamese throughout the war since they could retreat into nations that the U.S. was not at war with and be safe from U.S. attacks.



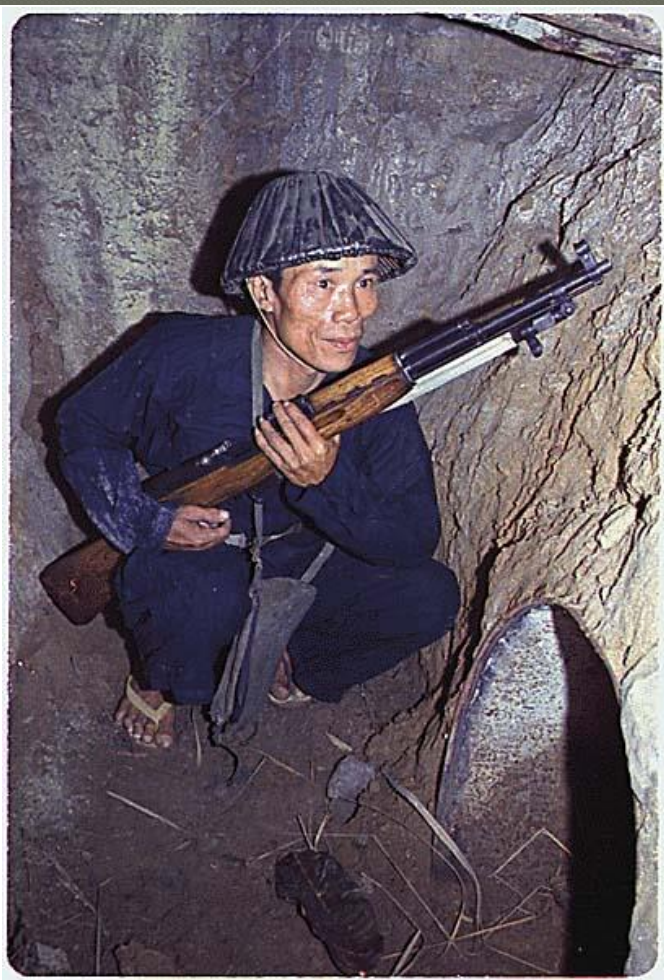
Ho Chi Minh trail



The Vietcong and North Vietnamese soldiers:



- traveled quickly and quietly with little gear
- attacked suddenly and then faded into the jungle
- set booby traps around U.S. encampments

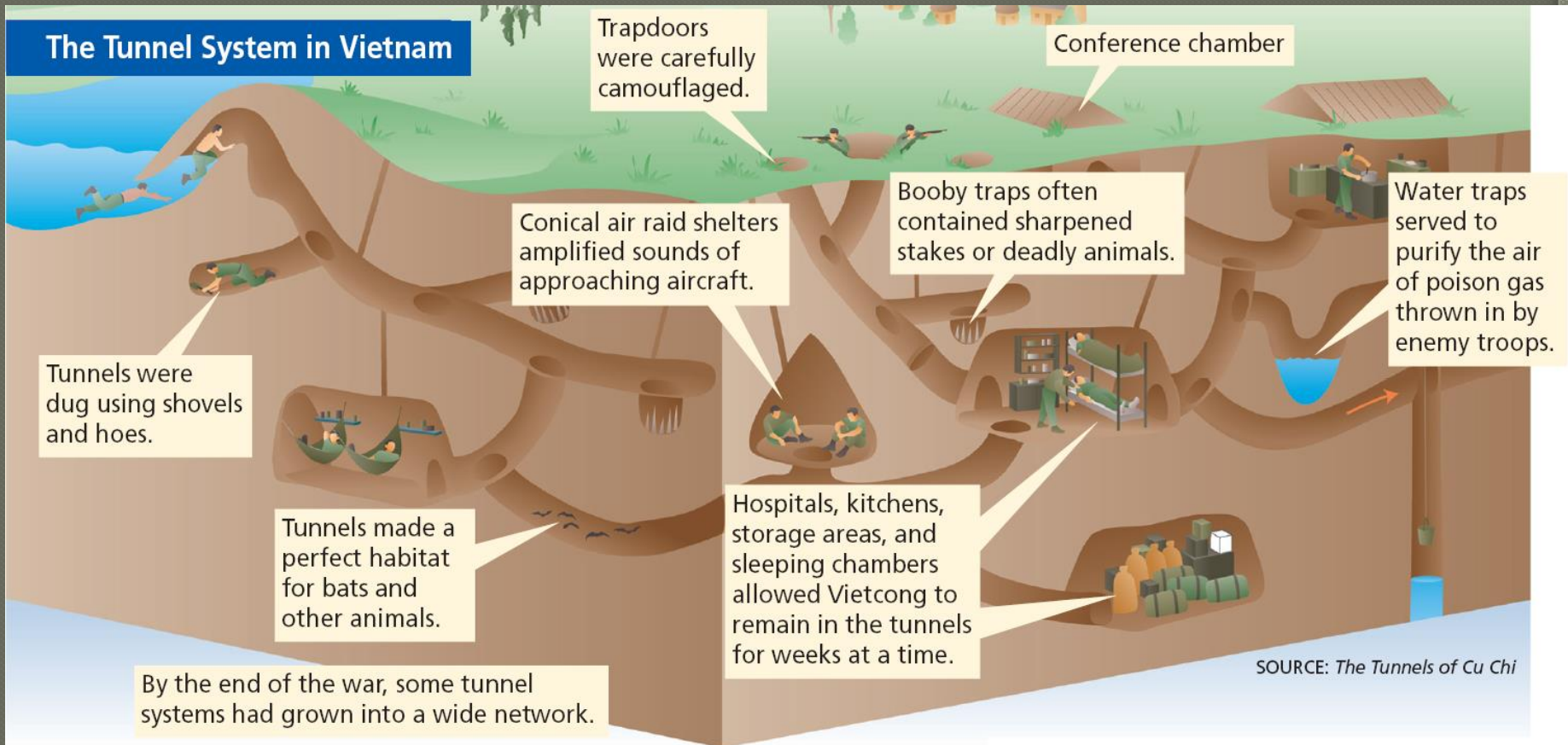


VC soldier sheltering underground



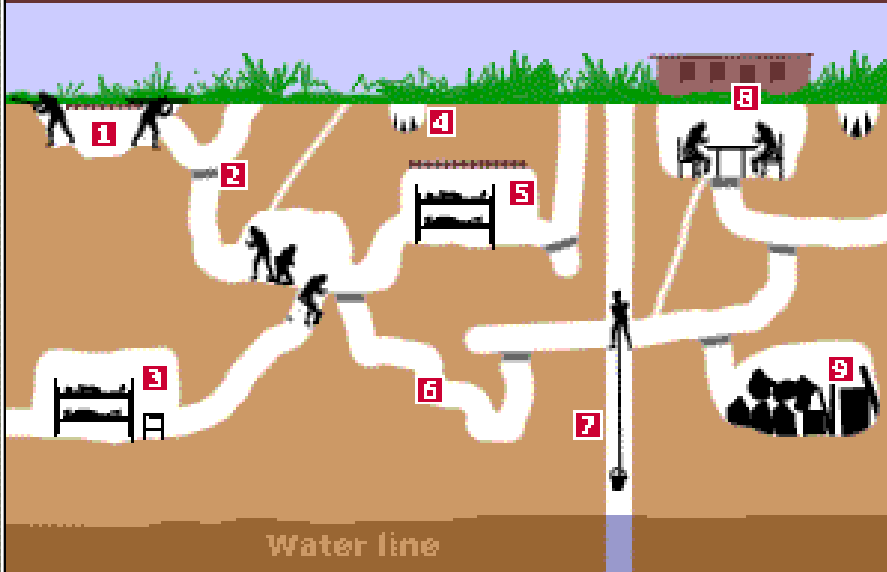
VC terror tactics: bombing

The Tunnel System in Vietnam



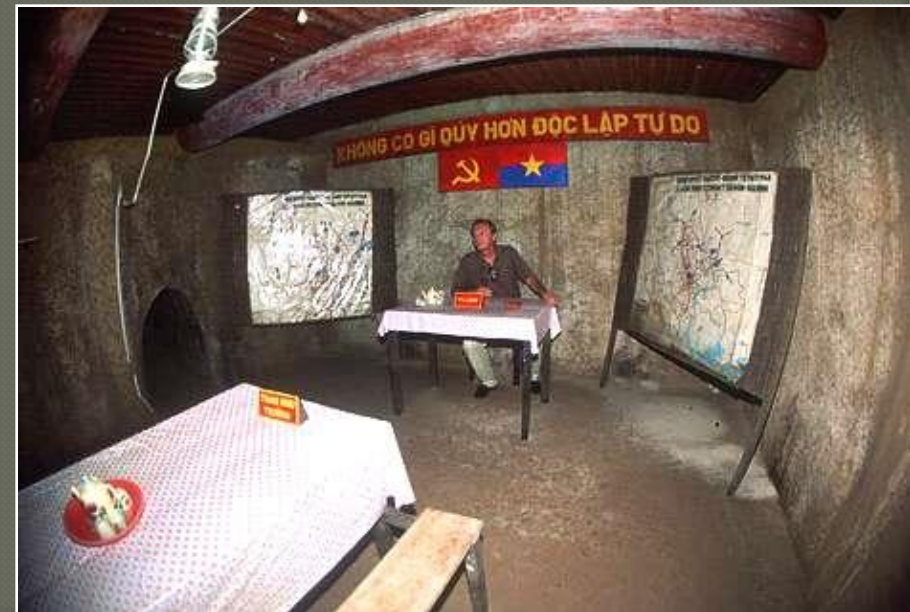
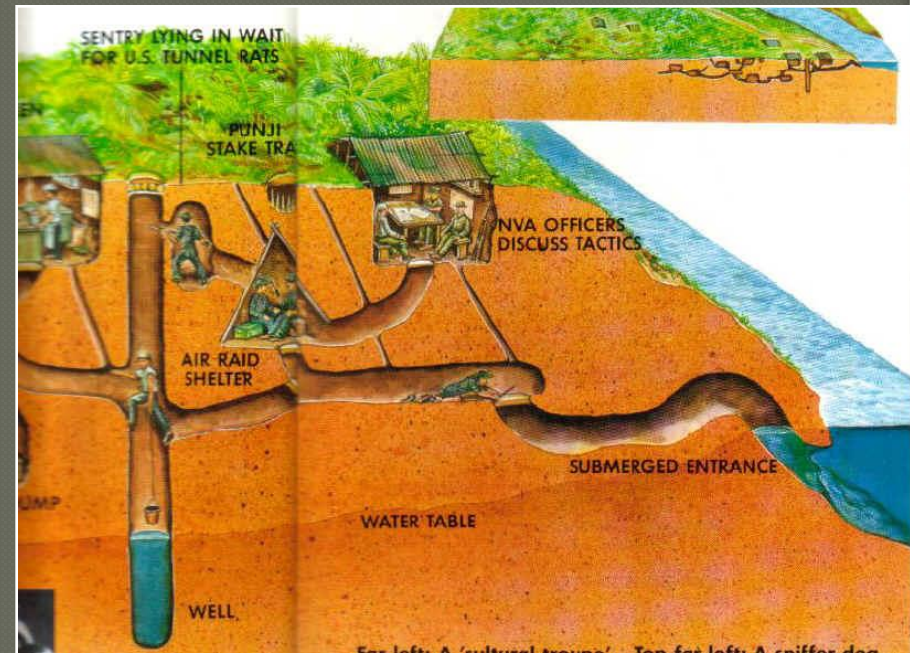
The Vietcong and North Vietnamese dug a complex series of tunnels, from which they mounted surprise attacks. The U.S. dropped **napalm** to burn these jungle hideouts.

VIET CONG TUNNEL COMPLEX



- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Firing post | 6 Blast deflection wall |
| 2 Airtight trapdoor | 7 Well |
| 3 First aid post | 8 Meeting room |
| 4 Punji stake trap | 9 Storage cache for weapons and food |
| 5 Reinforced sleeping chamber | |

The VC used underground tunnel complexes to hide from U.S. firepower.



Operation Crimp, January 8, 1966

The goal of the operation was to capture the Vietcong headquarters believed to be located in Saigon. Although American forces failed to locate a significant Vietcong base, they were able to learn the about the VC's tunnel Cu Chi system. Teams of **American soldiers** called "Tunnel Teams" were established and information was given to troops throughout the **country that the tunnels were to be cleared prior to destruction** since the enemy would burrow underground when under attack. An area would not be considered "secured" until the area both above and underground was cleared.



"Tunnel rat"
prepares to enter
viet cong tunnel



Using smoke grenades
to find tunnels



VC pulled from
tunnel

Pages from the combat tunnel training manual, 1966

DoD GEN-25/DA Pam 360-521/NAVPERs 15222/AFP 190-1-2/NAVMC 2612

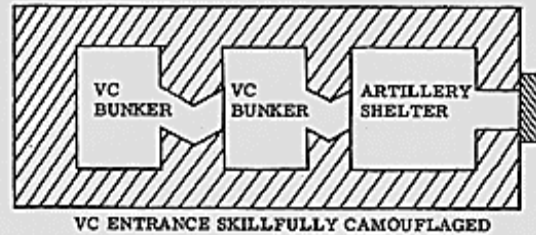
HANDBOOK FOR U.S. FORCES IN VIETNAM

ARMED FORCES INFORMATION AND EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

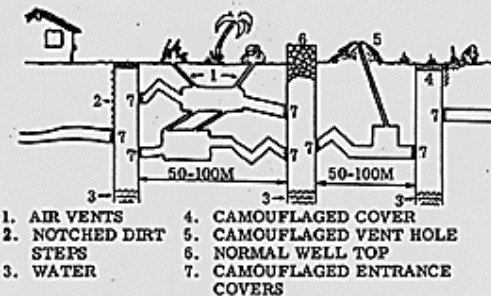


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OFFICIAL
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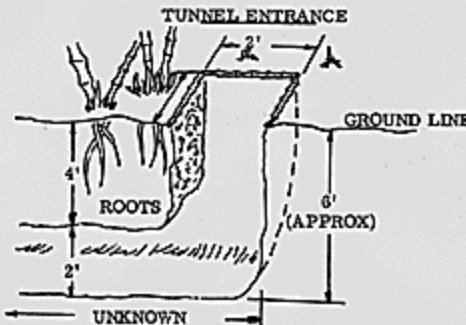
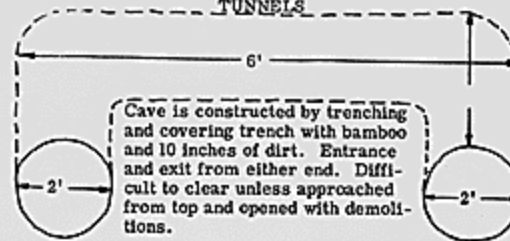
VC UNDERGROUND BUNKER



WELL - TUNNEL COMPLEX -- BEN CAT AREA

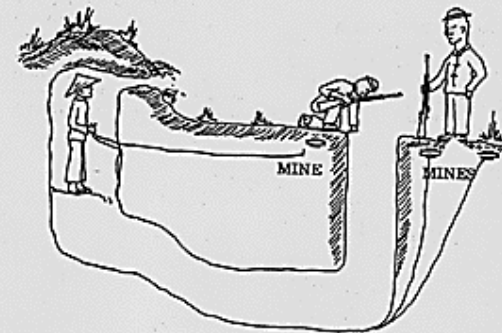


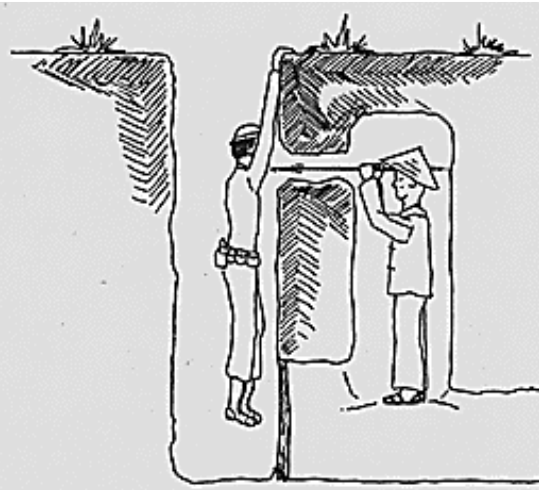
TUNNELS



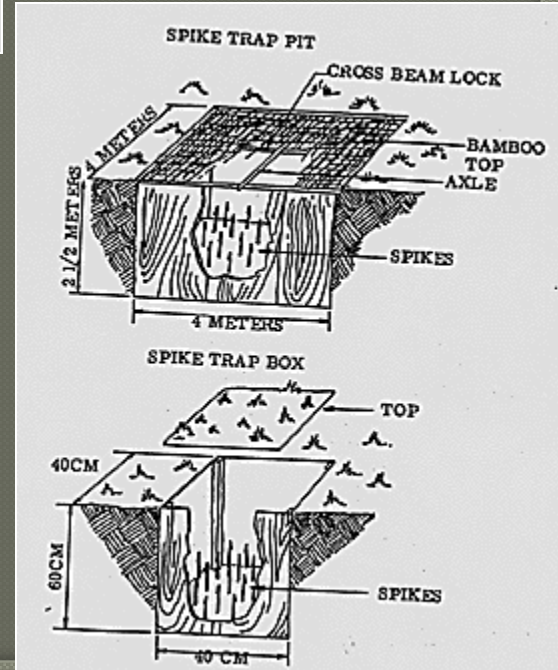
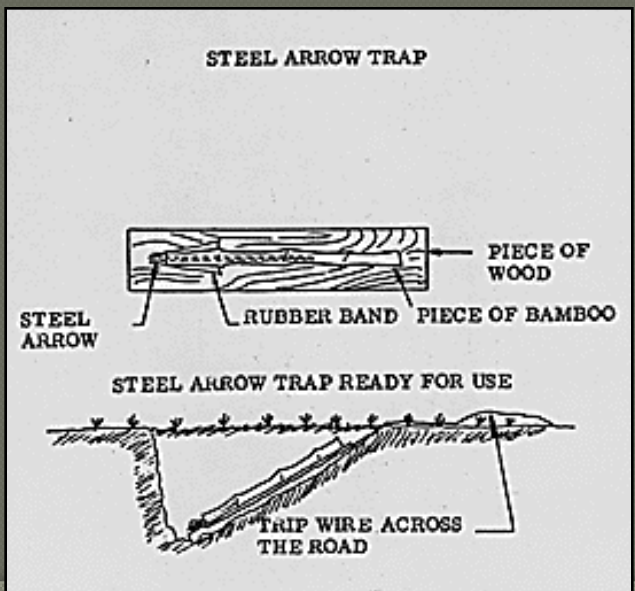
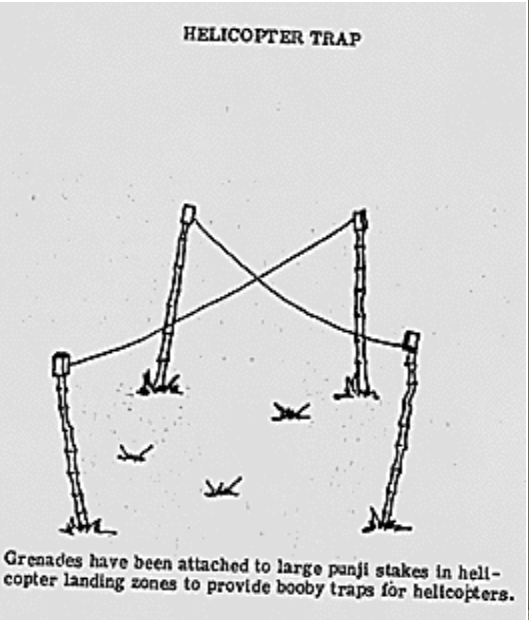
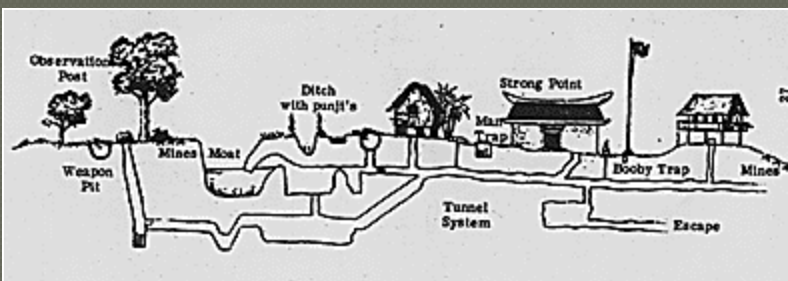
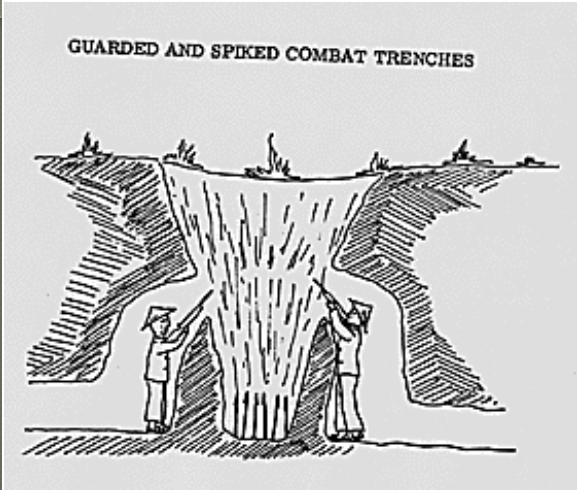
Root system provides excellent reinforcement for roof of cave.

MINED COMBAT TRENCH

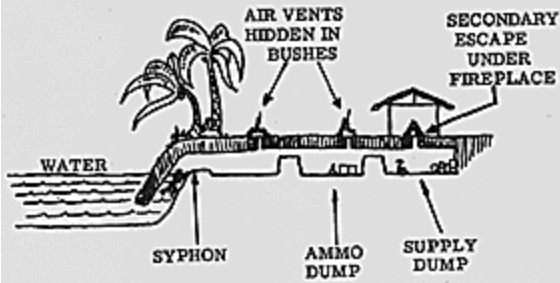




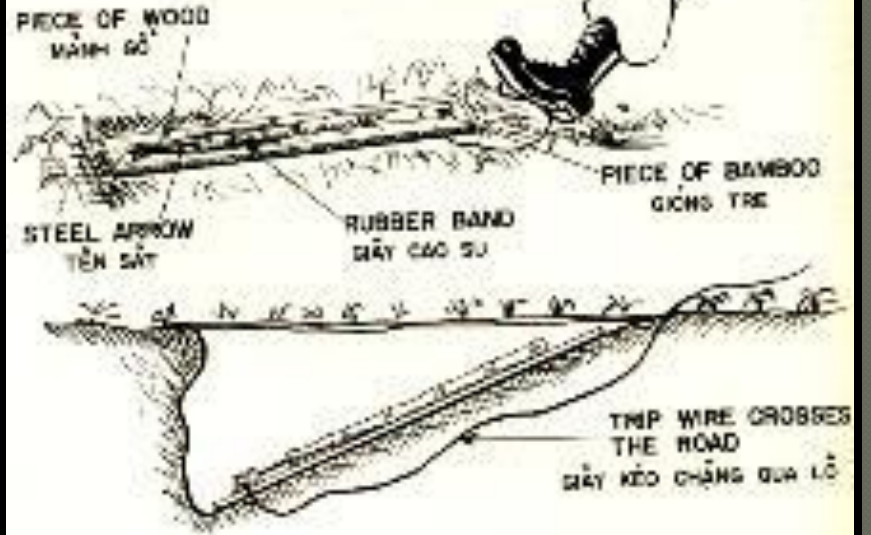
Examples of traps



GUERRILLA BASE



STEEL ARROW TRAP
BẦY TÊN SẮT



Vietcong traps used to wound or kill American and South Vietnamese soldiers



Beginning in 1965 other nations sent troops to aid the U.S. military in Vietnam:

- Australia
- Canada
- New Zealand
- Philippines
- South Korea



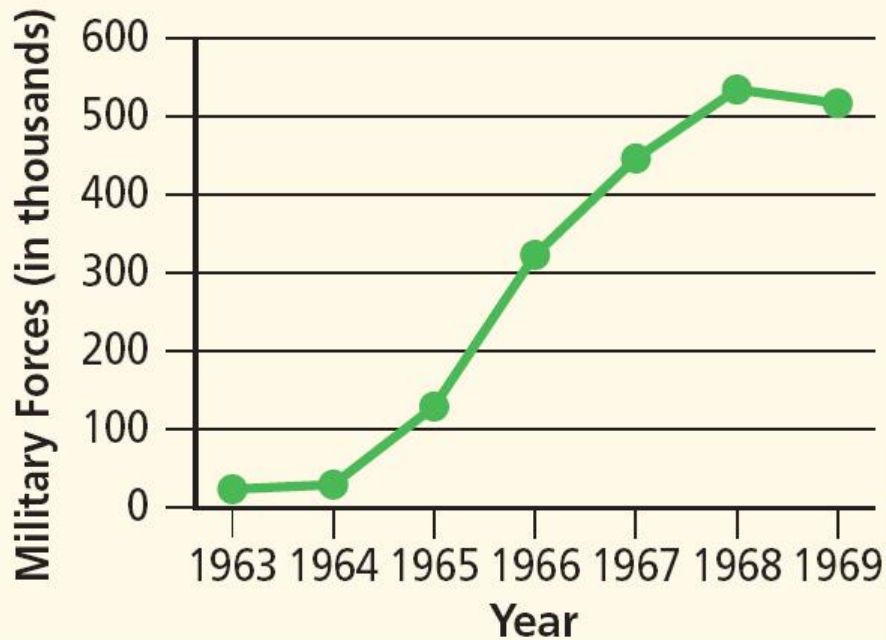
Troop strength in Vietnam by year

Year	USA	SVN	Aust.	Korea	New Zealand	Philippines	Thailand
1959	760	243000	--	--	--	--	--
1960	900	243000	--	--	--	--	--
1961	3205	243000	--	--	--	--	--
1962	11300	243000	--	--	--	--	--
1963	16300	243000	--	--	--	--	--
1964	23300	514000	198	200	30	20	--
1965	184300	642500	1560	20620	120	70	20
1966	385300	735900	4530	25570	160	2060	240
1967	485600	798700	6820	47830	530	2020	2200
1968	536100	820000	7660	50000	520	1580	6000
1969	475200	897000	7670	48870	550	190	11570
1970	334600	1,000,000	6800	48450	440	70	11570
1971	156800	1,000,000	2000	45700	100	50	6000
1972	24200	1,000,000	130	36790	50	50	40
1973	50	1,000,000	--	--	--		

The war grew increasingly difficult and frustrating.

- Many American soldiers had been drafted and did not see how the war helped U.S. interests.
- The **lack of progress toward victory** in Vietnam increased doubt about the war.
- The **war strained America's economy**.

U.S. Forces in Vietnam, 1963–1969



Source: U.S. Department of Defense,
Military Personnel Historical Reports

By 1968, there were more than half a million U.S. troops in Vietnam, and 30,000 had died.

Doves questioned the war. They included liberal politicians and students who saw the conflict as a localized civil war.



Hawks supported Johnson's war policies. They were mostly conservatives who believed the war was crucial to a U.S. Cold War victory.



The **Battle of Khe Sanh**, January-April 1968

The **Marine base at Khe Sanh** was heavily fortified to carry out attacks along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and to cut off supplies to North Vietnam. **The NVA assaulted the base with rockets**, mortar, artillery, and automatic weapons fire. Marine units patrolled the area surrounding the base but the NVA was still able to shoot down cargo planes and helicopters with supplies. In early February the special forces camp at nearby Lang Vei fell to the NVA after both sides suffered heavy losses.

The **fighting around Khe Sanh was widely televised on the evening news** in the U.S. President Johnson and others were determined that Khe Sanh **would not turn into an American version of Dien Bien Phu**.

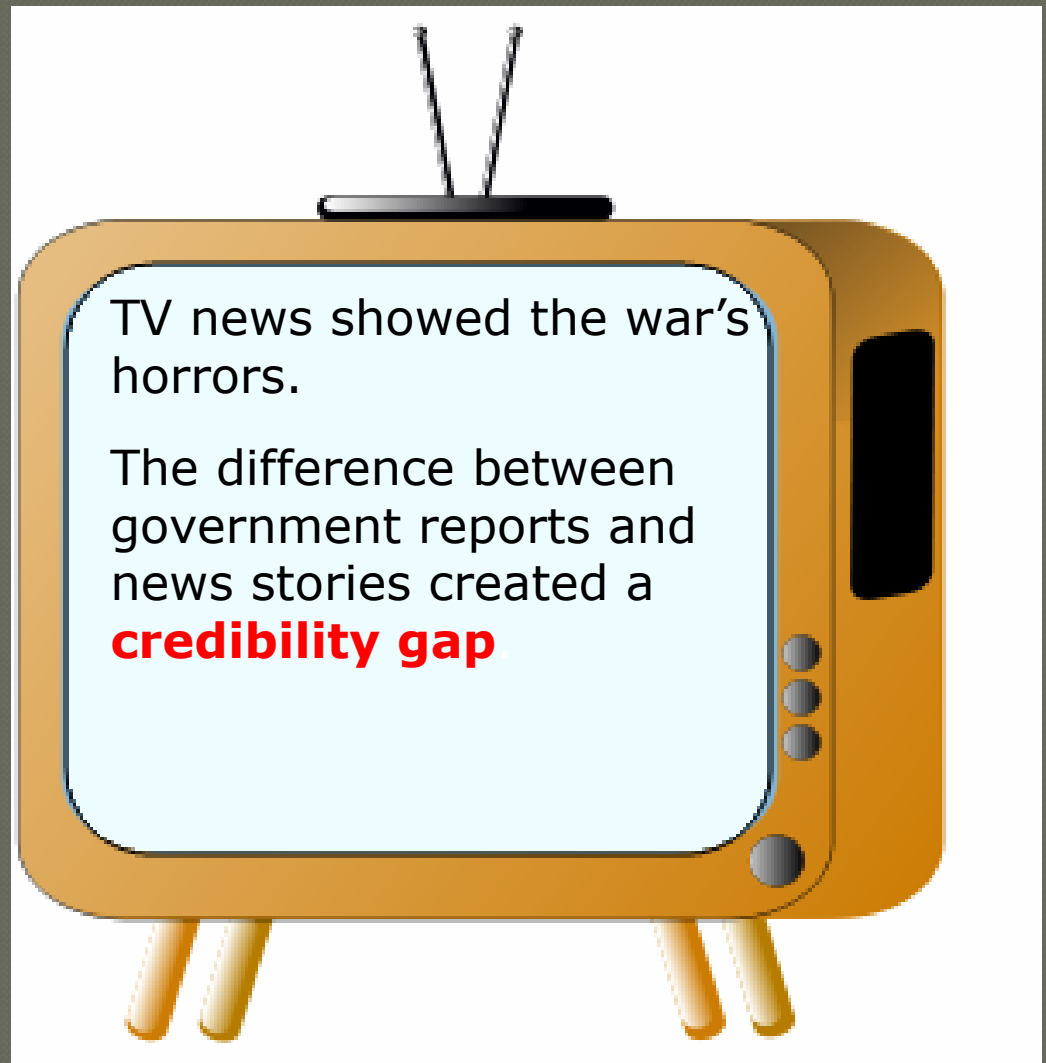
Although the **military victory ultimately went to the Americans**, it was a major psychological victory for the North Vietnamese.



Khe Sanh



**Beyond college
campuses, more
and more
Americans also
opposed the war.**



TV news showed the war's horrors.

The difference between government reports and news stories created a **credibility gap**

Terms and People

- **William Westmoreland** – the American military commander in South Vietnam
- **napalm** – jellied gasoline that was dropped in canisters and exploded on impact, setting fire to large areas
- **hawk** – a supporter of Johnson's war policies
- **dove** – an opponent Johnson's war policies