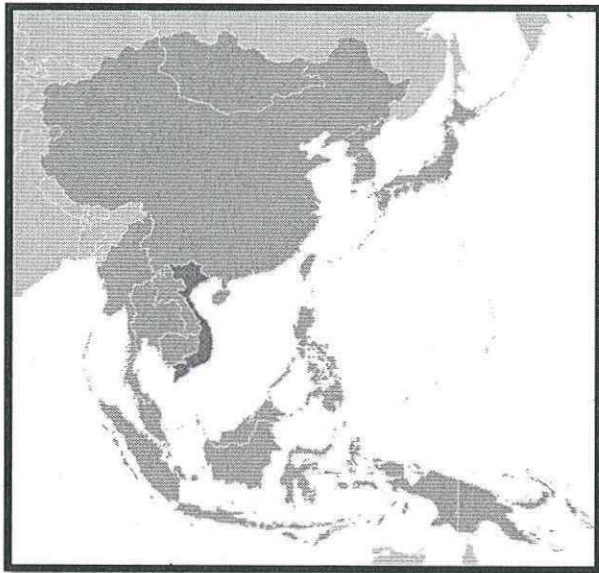


**CWA 4.1 – Origins of the Vietnam War (Page 1 of 6)**

Instructions: On each page, first, underline the dates and time markers (for example, "In the same year...") in the text below. Next, write a chronological list of the dates and include a one-sentence description of its importance and answer the questions posed. The first page is done for you.

**Regional History**

In ancient history, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam were connected to one another through the exchange of culture and religion. They also engaged in trade, as well as fought one another over territory. China bordered these three countries on the north. While they traded with China, they each had a history of conflict with China too. For nearly 1000 years, China held power over Vietnam before Vietnam achieved its independence in 939 under the rule of King Ngo Quyen.



Vietnam South Asia and Vietnam Detail Map, CIA Factbook. Source: Central Intelligence Agency, [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/maps/vietnam\\_locator\\_template.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/maps/vietnam_locator_template.html) & [https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/mplate\\_vn.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/maps/mplate_vn.html)

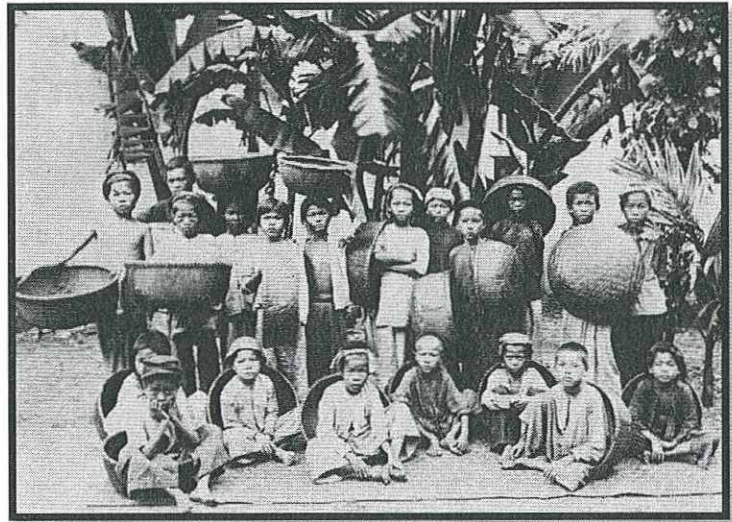
List two time markers with explanation (what happened and when):

- *Ancient history: Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam connected through culture & religion; region traded and fought with China*
- *Approximately 200 BC – 939: China controlled by Vietnam*
- *939: Vietnam achieves independence*

CWA 4.1 – Origins of the Vietnam War (Page 2 of 6)

**French Colonialism**

In modern history, many European countries seized areas of Asia and Africa and made them into their colonies. A colony is established when native land or territory is ruled by a distant country. France violently took over Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam in the mid-1800s. By 1893, France re-organized these countries as colonies under one name—“Indochina.” Determined to “civilize” the people of Indochina, the French imposed upon the Southeast Asians Western culture, religion, language, and government. Many endured forced labor in the production of tin, pepper, coal, cotton, rice, and rubber.



*Group of children, with baskets, posed under palm tree, Saigon, South Vietnam, ca. 1890 – 1923. Source: Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98507284/>*

While the primary motivation for colonialism, the system by which colonies are maintained, was economic exploitation, each of the countries within French Indochina experienced colonialism differently. French presence was especially strong in Vietnam where it had set up administrative centers in the South (Cochinchina), Center (Annam), and North (Tonkin). The Vietnamese faced economic oppression, such as high taxes and monopolies on salt and trade. French dominance permeated throughout all of Vietnam’s cultural, educational, and political institutions.

List two time markers with explanation (what happened and when):

What is a colony?

What was the primary motivation for French colonialism in Southeast Asia?

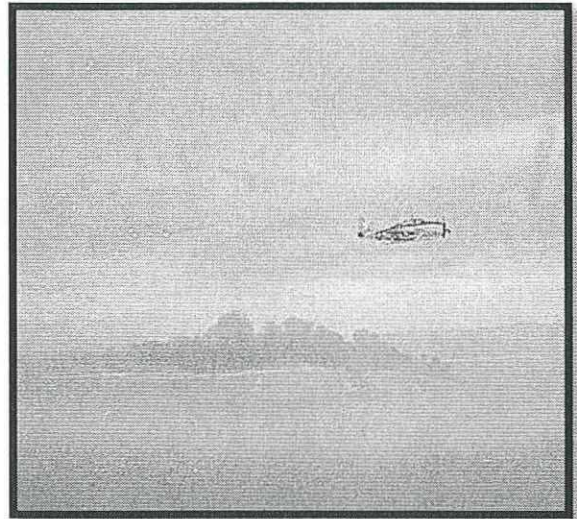


**CWA 4.1 – Origins of the Vietnam War (Page 3 of 6)**

**Rebellions and Revolution**

From the very beginning, the colonized people wanted to be free of French rule. Over the years, there were many anti-colonial uprisings and rebellions throughout all of Southeast Asia. World War II (1939-1945) was a turning point in the struggle for independence.

When Germany invaded France in 1940, France was forced to give up control of Indochina to Japan, an ally of Germany. Busy with their war efforts, Japan appointed local government leaders. Taking advantage of French military and political weakness at the time and in protest against Japanese occupation, anti-colonial movements flourished. Seizing on this opportunity, the Viet Minh is formed in 1941, a nationalist movement who called for Vietnamese independence, led by Ho Chi Minh. Japan removed the French from Vietnam in March of 1945. Six months later, the U.S. drops two atomic bombs on Japan, ending WWII, when Japan surrenders to the Allies on August 14. By August 19, Viet Minh revolutionaries seized power in Hanoi, in what becomes known as the August Revolution. On August 25, the emperor of South Vietnam turned over control to the Viet Minh. In the North, Ho Chi Minh declares the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in September. Despite the August Revolution, Vietnam did not have peace. France returned to re-colonize Vietnam in 1946.

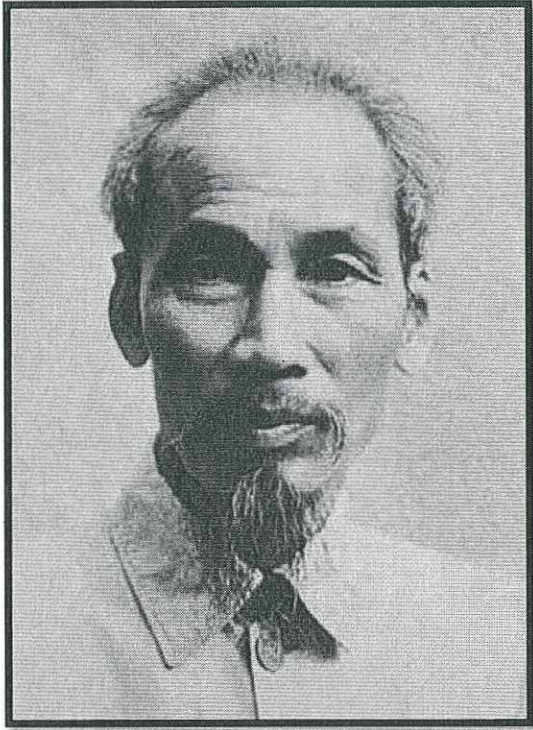


*Three Japanese oilers burning in Camranh Bay, Indochina. TBM's from the US Hornet (CV-12) which delivered the fatal bombs fly overhead, ca. January 12, 1945. Department of Defense. Department of the Navy. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier: 520865.*

Time Marker	What happened? Why is this important?
1940	
1941	
March, 1945	
August 14, 1945	
August 19, 1945	
August 25, 1945	
September, 1945	
1946	
What was the effect of Japanese surrender on Vietnam?	



CWA 4.1 – Origins of the Vietnam War (Page 4 of 6)



Ho Chi Minh, 1946. Cropped version Source: Wikipedia Commons, Vietnamese Public Domain, [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ho\\_Chi\\_Minh\\_1946\\_and\\_signature.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ho_Chi_Minh_1946_and_signature.jpg)

**The Cold War**

Unlike WWII, which was fought between the Axis (Germany, Italy, Japan) and the Allies (U.S., Soviet Union, Britain), the Cold War saw the United States and Soviet Union on opposite sides. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union viewed Vietnam as strategically important. Ho Chi Minh made several requests for U.S. support for Vietnamese independence in the 1940s. He even modeled the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence (September 2, 1945) after America's. However, Ho Chi Minh was a communist and the U.S. and France were long-time allies. France had lent its support of America's Marshall Plan in 1947 to rebuild Europe economically. The United States was committed to this containment policy. France sought and received funds from the U.S. in its campaign to retake Vietnam. In 1950, the U.S. established the U.S. Military Advisory Group-Indochina. In the same year, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China officially recognized the DRV and sent aid to Ho Chi Minh. From 1950-52, the U.S. spent \$50 million in military and economic aid to support nation-building and fight the communists in South Vietnam. Elsewhere in Asia, the Korean War was fought from 1950-1953. The U.S. sent troops to fight on behalf of South Korea against communist-led forces in North Korea, which was supported by China. The Korean peace treaty made permanent the division of Korea along the demilitarized zone (DMZ).

Time Marker	What happened? Why is this important?
1940s	
Sept. 2, 1945	
1947	
1950	
1950	
1950-52	
1950-53	
Why did the U.S. refuse to help Ho Chi Minh?	



**CWA 4.1 – Origins of the Vietnam War (Page 5 of 6)**

**First Indochina War**

From 1946-1954, Southeast Asians fought the First Indochina War in a war of independence from French reoccupation. On May 7, 1954, Ho Chi Minh's forces finally defeated the French in the battle of Dien Bien Phu. The Geneva Accords, the peace treaty, called for the French to withdraw and give independence to Cambodia and Laos. Vietnam was more complicated. The country was divided between North and South at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel, known as the demilitarized zone (DMZ), until 1956 when reunification would be decided by a presidential election. North Vietnam would be communist, governed by Ho Chi Minh. South Vietnam would be anti-communist. To give South Vietnam international recognition as a new country, the United States, along with France, Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan formed the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, or SEATO, in September 1954; South Vietnam was signed on as a formal member. SEATO existed to prevent the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. The U.S. installed a pro-western leader, Ngo Dinh Diem as the president of the Republic of Vietnam in the South in 1955. The same year, with U.S. assistance, South Vietnam forms the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).



*President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (from left) greet South Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem, Washington National Airport, May 8, 1957. Dept. of Defense, Dept. of the Air Force. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier: 542189.*

Time Marker	What happened? Why is this important?
1946 - 54	
May 7, 1954	
1954	
1955	
1955	
What did the Geneva Accords mean for Vietnam?	
What was the purpose of SEATO?	



CWA 4.1 – Origins of the Vietnam War (Page 6 of 6)



Vietnam. Vietnamese army personnel training in the jungle, May, 1962. U.S. Dept. of Defense, Department of the Army. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier: 530607.

**The Vietnam War**

An election never took place in Vietnam because the two opposing sides—South Vietnam supported by the U.S., and North Vietnam supported by China and Russia—could not agree on the terms of the presidential election. The U.S. believed that Ho Chi Minh would win the election, because of his popularity. North and South Vietnam were positioned to fight a civil war to determine which government would rule post-colonial Vietnam. Both sides built up their armed forces and engaged in battles. Thus began the Second Indochina War, known to Americans as the Vietnam War. It is called the Second Indochina War by historians because fighting also took place in Cambodia and Laos.

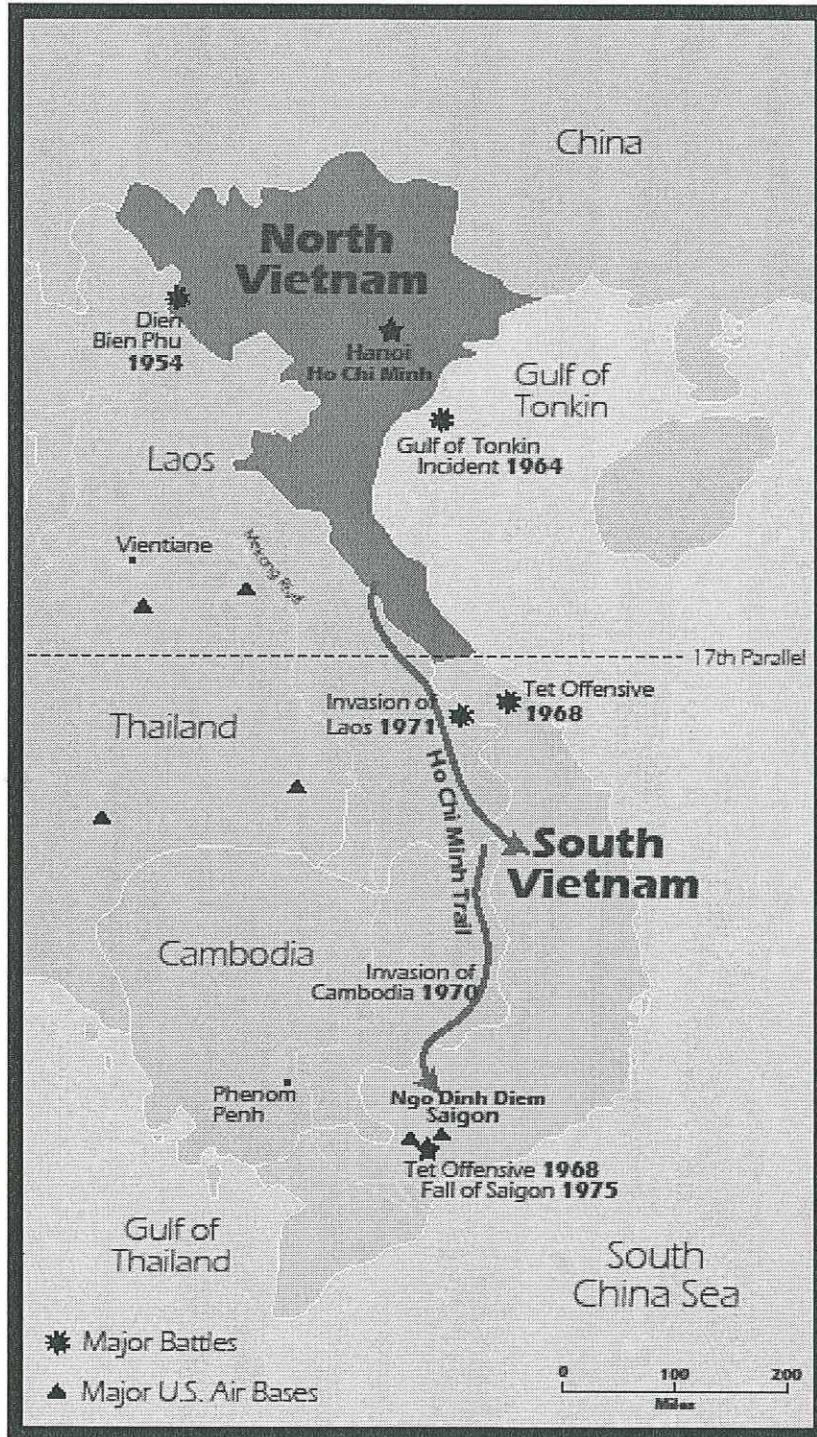
Why did the Second Indochina War start in 1956?

Why did the U.S. get involved in this conflict?

Why do historians call it the Second Indochina War?



# The Vietnam War



Map of Vietnam War, Sonali Dujari, for California History-Social Science Project. Copyright © 2013 Regents of the University of California, All Rights Reserved.



## CWA 4.5 – The Tonkin Gulf Resolution (Page 1 of 7)

*Directions: The United States first became involved in Vietnam in the early years of the Cold War, but significant military involvement didn't begin until 1964, following the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution by Congress. The resolution, which gave President Lyndon Johnson the power to wage war against communist North Vietnam, came as a result of a controversial series of incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin, off the northeastern coast of North Vietnam. To better understand how the US went from South Vietnam's sponsor to fighting a war, first read about the events of early August, 1964, then listen to taped phone conversations between Johnson and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara. Finally, in your groups, prepare an investigative editorial report, that answers the following: Why did the U.S. begin fighting the Vietnam War in 1964? How was escalation of the war justified?*

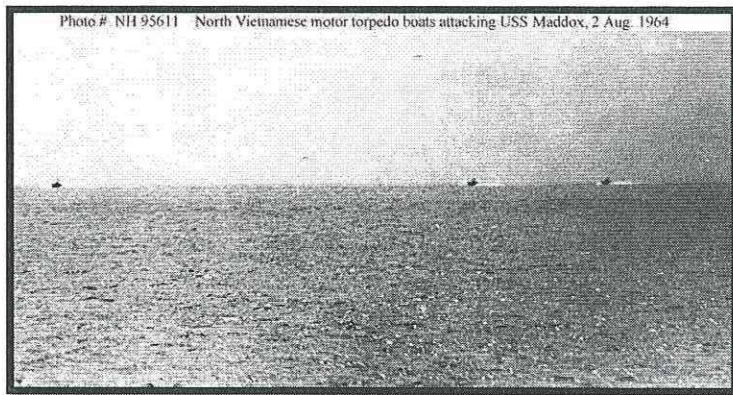


Photo #: NH 95611, Tonkin Gulf Incident, August 1964, Source: Official U.S. Navy Photograph, Naval History & Heritage Command, <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-m/dd731-k.htm>

Historical Context, Part 1: On August 2, 1964, the U.S.S. Maddox was collecting evidence while patrolling in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin, off the eastern boarder of North Vietnam. Also in the Gulf were South Vietnamese gunboats, which had just launched a clandestine raid on the North Vietnamese coastline as part of Operations Plan (OPLAN) - 34A, a covert intelligence operation coordinated by the United States. The Maddox reported being fired upon by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. In the battle that followed, two DRV (North Vietnamese) ships were sunk, but the Maddox sustained no losses. When word reached Washington,

President Johnson and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, along with other senior advisors began to discuss how the US should respond and what information should be shared with Congress and the public at large about the incident.

On August 3, at 10:30 pm, McNamara and Johnson discussed the incident on the phone. You may listen to their discussion and/or follow along using the transcript except below. Consider the following questions to discuss with your group:

1. What did McNamara and Johnson want Congress and the public to know about what happened in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 2?
2. Why do you think Johnson and McNamara were so worried about controlling what the public heard about the incident?

*\*\*Note: LBJ and McNamara reference a number of congressional leaders, including Speaker of the House John McCormick, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, and Minority Leader Everett Dirksen, as well as U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk. At the end of the call, they mention Goldwater, in reference to Barry Goldwater, the conservative Republican who challenged Johnson in the 1964 presidential election, George Ball, an American diplomat who opposed the U.S.' increasing involvement in Vietnam, George Reedy, Johnson's Press Secretary, and Walter Jenkins, a longtime Johnson aide.*



CWA 4.5 – The Tonkin Gulf Resolution (Page 2 of 7)

**Clip 1: Telephone conversation between President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, August 3, 1964, 10:30 EST.\***

\*Source for transcript and audio recording: the National Security Archive at George Washington University:  
<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB132/tapes.htm>

President Lyndon B. Johnson: Now I wonder if you don't think it'd be wise for you and Rusk to get Mac, uh, the Speaker and Mansfield to call a group of fifteen to twenty people together eh from the Armed Services and Foreign Relations to tell them what happened.

A good many of them are saying to me

Secretary Robert McNamara: Right. I've been thinking about this myself, and I thought that uh

President Johnson: They're going to start an investigation

Secretary McNamara: Yeah.

President Johnson: if you don't.

Secretary McNamara: Yeah.

President Johnson: And you got Dirksen up there

Secretary McNamara: Yeah

President Johnson: and he's saying you've got to study it further,

and say to Mansfield, "Now the President wants us, you, to get the proper people." And we come in and you say, "They fired at us. We responded immediately. And we took out one of their boats and put the other two running. And we kept our..., we're puttin' our boats right there, and we're not running on in."

Secretary McNamara: And it's hard to destroy.

President Johnson: That's right

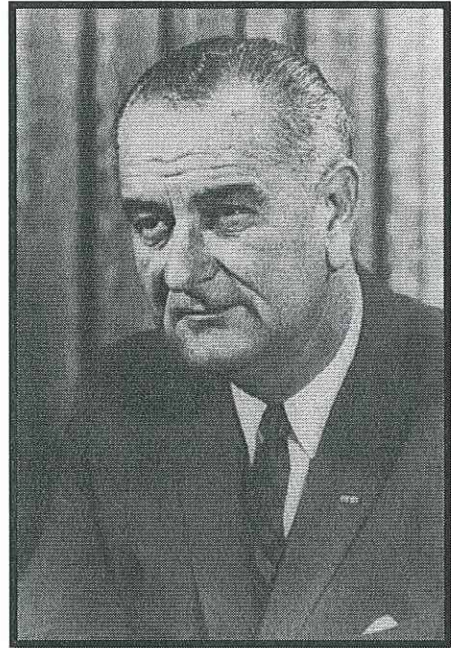
Secretary McNamara: Right. And we're going to, and I think I should also, or we should also at that time, Mr. President, explain this Op Plan 34-A, these covert operations. There's no question but what that had bearing on. And on Friday night, as you probably know, we had four TP [McNamara means PT] boats from Vietnam manned by Vietnamese or other nationals, attack two is lands. And we expended, oh, a thousand rounds of ammunition of one kind or another against them. We probably shot up a radar station and a few other miscellaneous buildings. And following twenty-four hours after that, with this destroyer in that same area, undoubtedly led them to connect the two events.

President Johnson: Well say that to Dirksen.

Secretary McNamara: That's what I know he'll like.

President Johnson: You notice Dirksen says this morning, that "we got to reassess the situation, do something about it." I'd tell him that we're doing what he's talking about.

Secretary McNamara: Well, I, I was, I was thinking doing this myself in personal visits. But I think your thought is better. We'll get the group together. You want us to do it at the White House or would you rather do it at State or Defense?



*Lyndon B. Johnson, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing left, June, 1964.*

*Source: Library of Congress,*

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/96522661>



CWA 4.5 – The Tonkin Gulf Resolution (Page 3 of 7)

President Johnson: I believe it'd be better to do it uh up on the Hill.

Secretary McNamara: All right.

President Johnson: I believe it'd be better if you say to Mansfield, "You call"

Secretary McNamara: Yup

President Johnson: Foreign Relations

Secretary McNamara: Yup, OK.

President Johnson: Armed Services

Secretary McNamara: OK. OK.

President Johnson: and get Speaker to do it over on his side [i.e., within the House of Representatives, as opposed to the Senate].

Secretary McNamara: We'll do it

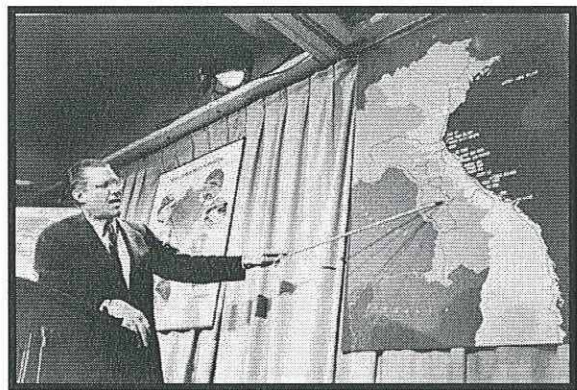
President Johnson: And just say it's very, I'd tell him awfully quiet, though, so they won't go in and be making a bunch of speeches. And tell Rusk that a, that's my idea.

Secretary McNamara: Great. .

President Johnson: And he's in New York, so I don't know whether he's got back.

Secretary McNamara: Well I just talked to George Ball a few minutes ago, and I'll have George arrange it. Or at least I'll tell him that, and then I'll call the Speaker and Mansfield himself.

President Johnson: Now I wish that uh you'd give me some guidance on what we ought to say. I want to leave



*Sec. of Defense Robert McNamara pointing to a map of Vietnam at a press conference, Marion S. Trikosko, Photographer, US News & World Report Magazine Photograph, April 26, 1965. Source: Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004666288/>*

an impression uh off the coast of North Vietnam, uh to add an additional destroyer to the one that has been carrying on the patrols, to provide an air cap, and to issue instructions to the commanders to destroy any uh force that attacks our force in international waters....



*Advisors; Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, 02/08/1968, President Johnson White House Photographs. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier # 192540.*

an impression on the background in the people we talk to over here that we're gonna be firm as hell without saying something that's dangerous. Now what do you think? Uh, uh, the people that are calling me up, I just talked to a New York banker, I just talked to a fellow in Texas, they all feel that the Navy responded wonderfully and that's good. But they want to be damned sure I don't pull 'em out and run, and they want to be damned sure that we're firm. That's what all the country wants because Goldwater's raising so much hell about how he's gonna blow 'em off the moon, and they say that we oughten to do anything that the national interest doesn't require. But we sure oughta always leave the impression that if you shoot at us, you're going to get hit.

Secretary McNamara: Well I think you would want to instruct George Reedy this morning at his news conference to say that you you personally have ordered the, the Navy to carry on the



## CWA 4.5 – The Tonkin Gulf Resolution (Page 4 of 7)

Historical Context, Part 2: Two days later, on August 4, 1964 the *U.S.S. Maddox*, and another US ship, the *C. Turner Joy*, were in the Gulf of Tonkin together. Both ships were on high alert, following the reported August 2 attack. That day, both ships recorded a number of sonar and radar signals they assumed to be from hostile DRV torpedo boats. In addition, naval personnel confused North Vietnamese radio signals actually sent on August 2 as new orders from Hanoi to attack the American ships. In this confusion, the ships radioed to Washington that they were under attack. The local commander, Captain John D. Herrick, quickly questioned this initial report, but the head of the Pacific fleet and Washington moved forward as if the initial confused reports were accurate.

On August 4, at 9:43 am, McNamara and Johnson discussed the incident on the phone. As you listen to or read their discussion, consider the following questions to discuss with your group:

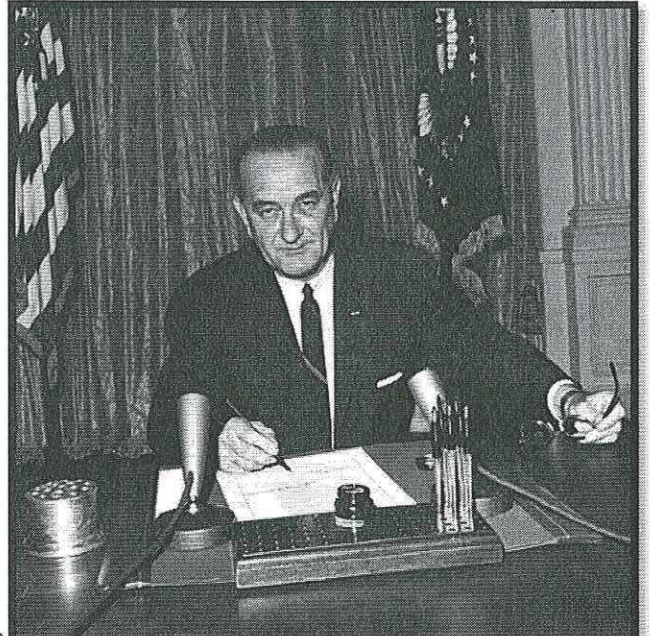
1. Why did President Johnson and Secretary McNamara want to believe the early reports which erroneously claimed that the U.S. was attacked by North Vietnam on August 4?

Secretary McNamara: .... I've talked to Mac Bundy [national security adviser] a moment ago and told him that I thought that was the most important subject we should consider today, and, and be prepared to recommend to you a response, a retaliation move against North Vietnam in the event this attack takes place within the next six to nine hours. And we

President Johnson: All right. Now we better do that at lunch. There's some things I don't want to go in with these other, I want to keep this as close as I can. So let's just try to keep it to the two....

Secretary McNamara: Now, thirdly, Sharp recommends that, that, uh, the, uh, task force commander be authorized to engage in hot pursuit beyond the eleven-mile limit in as far as the three-mile limit, which we [i.e., the United States] accept as the definition of territorial waters. At present the instructions to the commander are: do not pursue an attacker, uh, closer to shore than eleven miles. Uh, Sharp recommends that that eleven mile limit be shifted to three miles. I've talked to Dean about this; he agrees, uh, as far as air pursuit is concerned. Pursue by air as close as three miles to shore. Do not pursue by sea closer than eleven miles... The air power is likely the most effective power anyhow. And I would, therefore, recommend that we accept Sharp's recommendation but limit it to air.

President Johnson: All right. OK....



President Lyndon B. Johnson signs Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, August 10, 1964, Official White House Photo. Source: Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Serial # 313-4-WH64



## CWA 4.5 – The Tonkin Gulf Resolution (Page 5 of 7)

### Report on the Gulf of Tonkin Incident (August 4, 1964)\*

Lyndon Baines Johnson

\*Source for transcript and video recording: Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library (<http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3998>)

Directions: Despite questions about the accuracy of early reports detailing a second attack in the Gulf of Tonkin, President Johnson addressed the nation late on the night of August 4. As you watch his address (and read along using the transcript below), be prepared to discuss the following with your group:

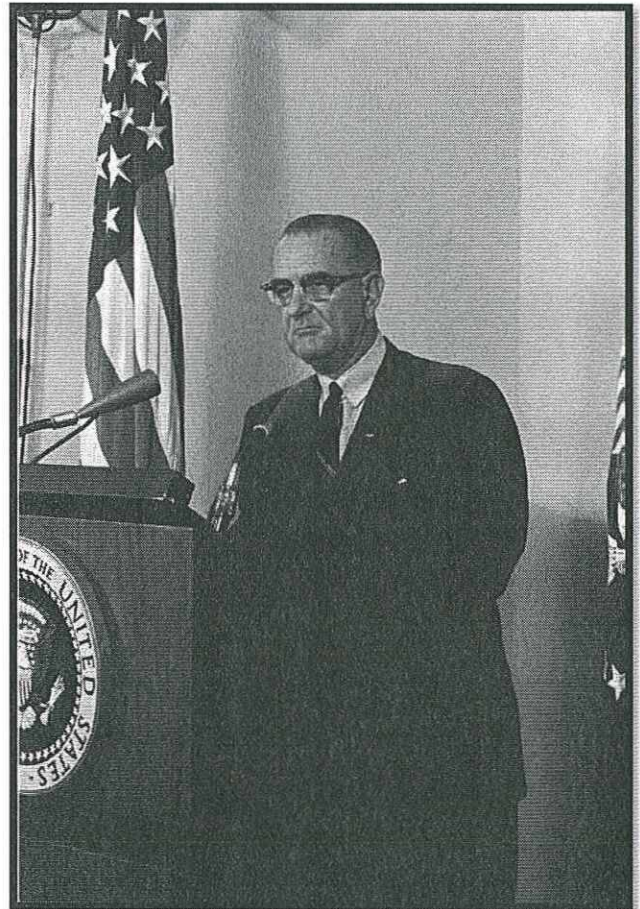
- What actually happened in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 2? On August 4?
- What does LBJ say happened in the Gulf? Is this report accurate? Why or why not?
- Consider Johnson's argument that military action will promote peace and freedom in Southeast Asia. Why does Johnson use this language and what does that reasoning have to do with American efforts to contain communism?

My fellow Americans:

As President and Commander in Chief, it is my duty to the American people to report that renewed hostile actions against United States ships on the high seas in the Gulf of Tonkin have today required me to order the military forces of the United States to take action in reply.

The initial attack on the destroyer 'Maddox, on August 2, was repeated today by a number of hostile vessels attacking two U.S. destroyers with torpedoes. The destroyers and supporting aircraft acted at once on the orders I gave after the initial act of aggression. We believe at least two of the attacking boats were sunk. There were no U.S. losses.

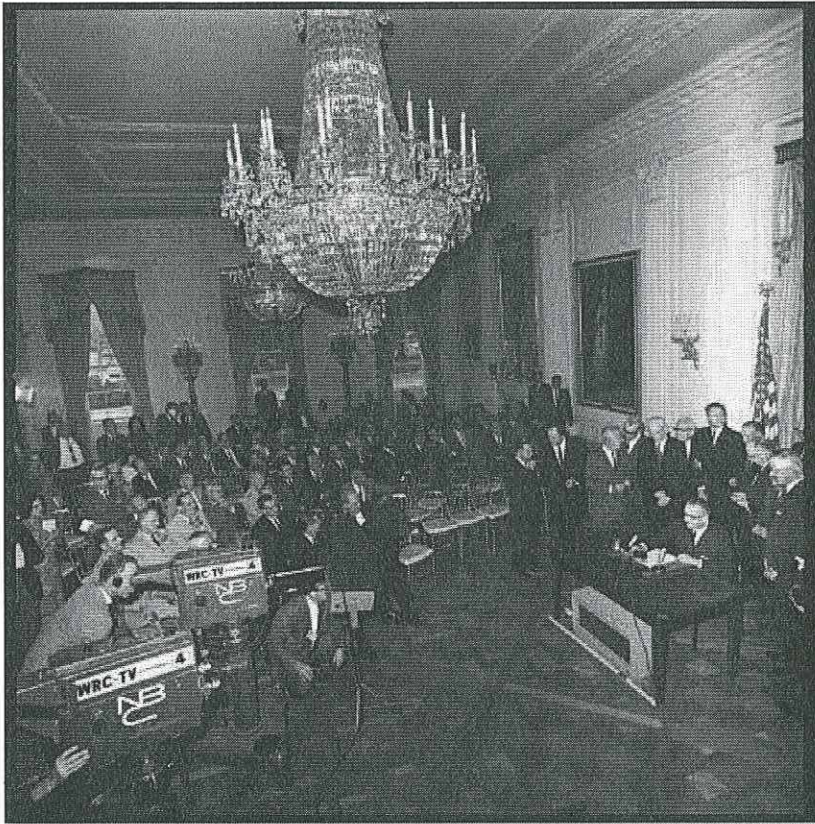
The performance of commanders and crews in this engagement is in the highest tradition of the United States Navy. But repeated acts of violence against the Armed Forces of the United States must be met not only with alert defense, but with positive reply. That reply is being given as I speak to you tonight. Air action is now in execution against gunboats and certain supporting facilities in North Viet-Nam which have been used in these hostile operations.



Photograph of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Midnight Address on Second Gulf of Tonkin Incident, 08/04/1964, White House Photo Collection. Source: LBJ Presidential Library, National Archives, ARC Identifier 192482.



## CWA 4.5 – The Tonkin Gulf Resolution (Page 6 of 7)



President Lyndon B. Johnson signs (Gulf of Tonkin) resolution. White House Photo Collection, August 10, 1964. Source: LBJ Presidential Library, Serial # 313-3-WH64

In the larger sense this new act of aggression, aimed directly at our own forces, again brings home to all of us in the United States the importance of the struggle for peace and security in southeast Asia. Aggression by terror against the peaceful villagers of South Viet-Nam has now been joined by open aggression on the high seas against the United States of America.

The determination of all Americans to carry out our full commitment to the people and to the government of South Viet-Nam will be redoubled by this outrage. Yet our response, for the present, will be limited and fitting. We Americans know, although others appear to forget, the risks of spreading conflict. We still seek no wider war.

I have instructed the Secretary of State to make this position totally clear to friends and to adversaries and, indeed, to all. I have instructed Ambassador Stevenson to raise this matter immediately and urgently before the Security Council of the United Nations. Finally, I have today met with the leaders of both parties in the Congress of the United States and I have informed them that I shall immediately request the Congress to pass a resolution making it clear that our Government is united in its determination to take all necessary measures in support of freedom and in defense of peace in southeast Asia.

I have been given encouraging assurance by these leaders of both parties that such a resolution will be promptly introduced, freely and expeditiously debated, and passed with overwhelming support. And just a few minutes ago I was able to reach Senator Goldwater and I am glad to say that he has expressed his support of the statement that I am making to you tonight.

It is a solemn responsibility to have to order even limited military action by forces whose overall strength is as vast and as awesome as those of the United States of America, but it is my considered conviction, shared throughout your Government, that firmness in the right is indispensable today for peace; that firmness will always be measured. Its mission is peace.



CWA 4.5 – The Tonkin Gulf Resolution (Page 7 of 7)

H. J. Res. 1145

PUBLIC LAW 88-408

**Eighty-eighth Congress of the United States of America**

AT THE SECOND SESSION

*Began and held at the City of Washington on Tuesday, the seventh day of January, one thousand nine hundred and sixty-four*

**Joint Resolution**

To promote the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia.

Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace; and

Whereas these attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and the nations joined with them in the collective defense of their freedom; and

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.*

SEC. 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

SEC. 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.

*John W. McCarmack*  
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

*Lee Harvey*  
Acting President pro tempore of the Senate.

APPROVED

AUG 10 1964

*Lyndon B. Johnson*

Joint Resolution for the Maintenance of Peace and Security in Southeast Asia, 08/10/1964. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier 2803448.



## CWA 4.8 – A War of Attrition (Page 1 of 5)

The war in Vietnam was not fought on traditional battlefields with clearly identified soldiers seizing new territory. Instead, the war was fought with different weapons, markers of success, and consequences than previous wars. Military planners on both sides of the conflict initially hoped to achieve quick success through strategic attacks on the enemy. While initial operations did inflict damage on their opponents, both sides ultimately settled into a war of attrition, a series of relatively small battles designed to deplete the resources of the enemy, weaken their morale and reduce public support for the conflict so that they were willing to surrender.

### *American Military Strategy*

The United States, for example, hoped to defeat North Vietnam through massive bombing campaigns, such as *Operation Rolling Thunder*. Starting in early 1965, American planes began to drop what would eventually total 4.6 million tons of bombs onto North Vietnam, as well on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a supply line that the



Photograph of a Marine Landing at Danang, Vietnam, 08/03/1965. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier 595865.



Two bombs tumble from a Vietnamese Air Force A-1E Skyraider over a burning [Viet] Cong hideout near Cantho, South Viet Nam, U.S. Air Force, 1967.

Source: Library of Congress,

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001699982/>

communists used to transport people and goods from the north to the south.

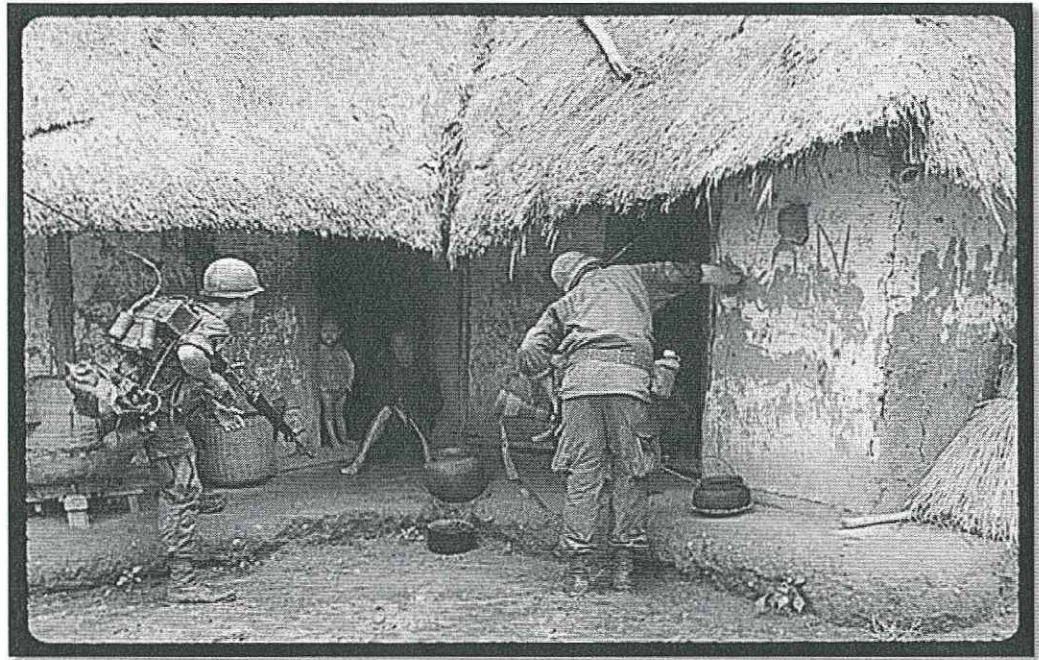
American commanders intended the campaign to demoralize the Communist soldiers and compliment U.S. ground troops. When President Richard Nixon took office in 1969 he employed a secret plan to end the war, which expanded the American air campaign. He began a secret bombing campaign in the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia, sovereign nations separate from Vietnam, in an effort to attack the communist forces hiding in these border nations.

On the ground, American troops conducted "search and destroy missions," to seek out the enemy and kill them to increase the body count, one measure of American success or failure in the conflict. Helicopters, a new military asset, quickly transported soldiers in and out during these missions. Soldiers burned to the ground many villages that contained suspected communist sympathizers. This displaced many civilians leaving them without food or shelter. (To see search and destroy missions in action, visit The History Channel website to see a three-minute video clip



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(<http://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/videos#search-and-destroy> ) to hear interviews with Vietnam veterans and archival footage of the war. You will see graphic images of search and destroy missions. As you watch, listen to the soldiers describe the purpose of these missions and the role that they or other soldiers played. What are their perspectives of this war strategy? )



Another tactic the U.S. employed was the use of defoliants and herbicides on the Vietnamese countryside. Hoping to

both deplete the communists' food supply and eliminate their cover from the sky, the US military sprayed, by air and waterways, 12 million gallons of Agent Orange, a variety of defoliants and herbicides, on Vietnam. This campaign destroyed the forests and farmland; millions of Vietnamese and Americans were ultimately exposed to the toxic chemicals. (To see film clips of soldiers spraying defoliant on riverbanks in Vietnam (and what the trees looked like afterwards), visit the Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University, "U.S. Army Newsfilm V-73-69: Weed Killer Knocks Out VC's Riverbank Ambush Sites," South Vietnam [VC Weed Killer], 8-11 February 1969. Item Number: 987VI0672, Record 85332)

*Vietnam. As the second phase of operation "Thayer," the 1st Air Cavalry Division (airmobile) is having operation "Irving" in the area 25 miles north of Qui Nhon which lies 400 miles north-northeast of Saigon. The 1st Air Cavalry was given the mission of clearing a mountain range where an estimated two battalions of North Vietnam regulars were supposed to be massing an attack on Hammond Airstrip. Troops of "A" Company, checking house during patrol, 10/06/1966. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier #530612*

The United States also tried to gain the support of local people so that they would not aid the communists. American soldiers would go into South Vietnamese villages and (1) determine if locals were providing food or weapons to the communists, and (2) if the villagers were not helping the North Vietnamese, solicit their support through food aid or protection from the enemy.

#### *Vietnamese Communist Strategy*

The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the Viet Cong (VC) employed a different strategy, but with the same goal – consistent pressure designed to weaken American resolve and promote a negotiated peace that favored their side. Employing a guerilla warfare strategy, NVA and VC forces favored hit and run attacks and surprise ambushes over full-scale military conflict. Although American forces benefitted from more training and



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*Vietnam. Vietnamese army personnel training in the jungle, May, 1962. U.S. Dept. of Defense, Department of the Army. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier: 530607.*

advanced military technology, NVA and VC forces posed significant challenges to the Americans. Neither the VC or the NVA wore bright uniforms marking their enemy status, making it difficult for American soldiers to differentiate between a civilian and a military combatant. And while many of the VC's weapons were crude in comparison to American firepower, as the war progressed Communist forces became increasingly proficient in killing and maiming American forces, using home-made booby traps and mines, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, and machine guns and anti-aircraft artillery imported from the Soviet Union and China. They repurposed the over 20,000 tons of explosive material dropped by U.S. planes for the homemade bombs. The communists also benefitted from a series of tunnels stretching throughout North and South Vietnam. The tunnels allowed for safe travel; stored ammunition, food, and water; provided sleeping quarters; and hospice for those in need of medical aid. The Communists were also aided by many civilians who provided safe haven, food, and support in local villages across South Vietnam.

*Khe Sanh and the Tet Offensive*

Likely the most significant military confrontation of the war occurred in January of 1968, when American troops faced a determined and aggressive communist attack. 40,000 members of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) surrounded Khe Sanh, an American military base just south of the Demilitarized Zone in South Vietnam, home to less than 6,000 Marines. On January 21, 1968, the NVA launched a massive attack against the base, driving the Marines into underground bunkers. The NVA used shells, mortars, and rockets to try to overrun the base and early on, it looked like they'd succeed, especially after hitting the base's ammunition storage, which caused an explosion that killed eighteen, wounded 40, and destroyed 90% of the Marine's ammunition. During the siege, which lasted a



*U.S. Air Force medical personnel, on detached duty from Da Nang Air Base, move a Marine casualty from the aid station at embattled Khe Sanh to a waiting C-130 Hercules aircraft for the flight to medical facilities at the base. Wounded personnel can be transported from the field to completely equipped hospitals in less than an hour, 01/01/1968*



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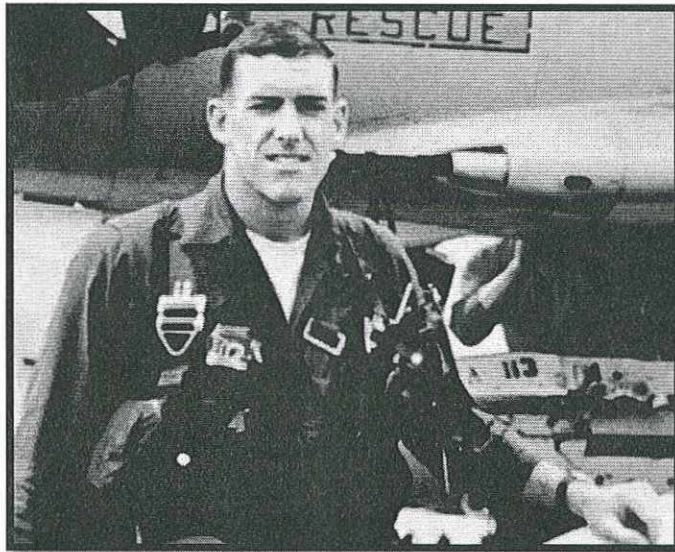
total of 77 days, Marines were hunkered down, sheltering in rat-infested underground bunkers that were dirty and lacked sufficient food and supplies. Both President Johnson and the American public were deeply engaged in the crisis – reading daily updates in the papers and watching the latest on nightly news reports on television. American forces outside Khe Sanh ultimately defeated the NVA, by resupplying the Marines manning the base, bringing in food, ammunition, and supplies, evacuating the wounded, and finally bombing the NVA soldiers circling the base into retreat.

On January 30 of the same year, the communists staged their largest military campaign, the Tet Offensive, a surprise attack of nearly all of South Vietnam’s major cities and the U.S. Embassy in 1968. Tet, Lunar New Year, had been traditionally observed as a time of cease-fire for Vietnam’s most important holiday and with the exception of Khe Sanh, American forces had expected a relatively quiet holiday. In a coordinated attack by the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese forces, American troops were at first surprised, but quickly rallied to push back the communist offensive.



*Battle of Hamou Village during Tet, 1968.  
Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier # 532451.*

*Prisoners of War / Missing in Action*



*James Scott Graham, US Navy, shot down over Vietnam on May 4, 1967.  
01/01/1967, Source: National Archives, 6404008*

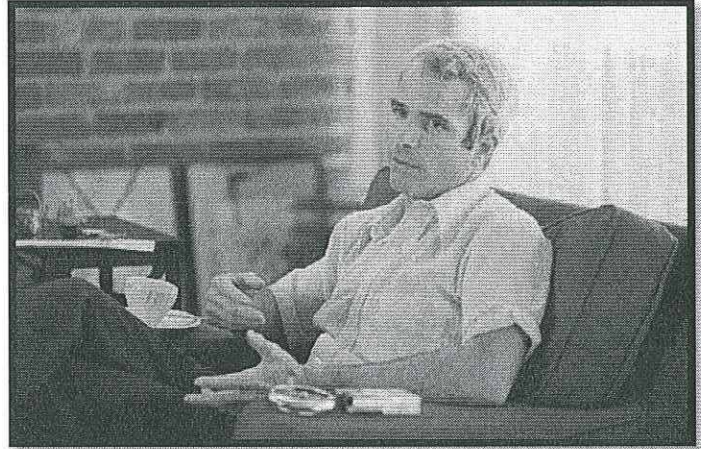
Hundreds of American troops were held as prisoners of war (POW) during the Vietnam War. Often, they were pilots and airplane crews shot down as they conducted bombing missions. Many POWs were held in prisons in North Vietnam; the most famous of these was Hoa Lo prison, known to Americans as the “Hanoi Hilton.” Conditions in these prisons were exceedingly harsh – beatings and torture were common occurrences, as the North Vietnamese captors sought tactical military information from the American prisoners. The Communists also used the POWs as part of their propaganda campaign, putting them in front of cameras or forcing them to write letters home detailing crimes committed by American forces against the Vietnamese people. Communication between prisoners and with the outside world was restricted – many POWs were held in solitary confinement for years. While some POWs

succumbed to their harsh treatment, others resisted by secretly communicating with each other or “confessing” untrue information to trick the Vietnamese military. James Stockdale, a naval pilot who had led aerial attacks



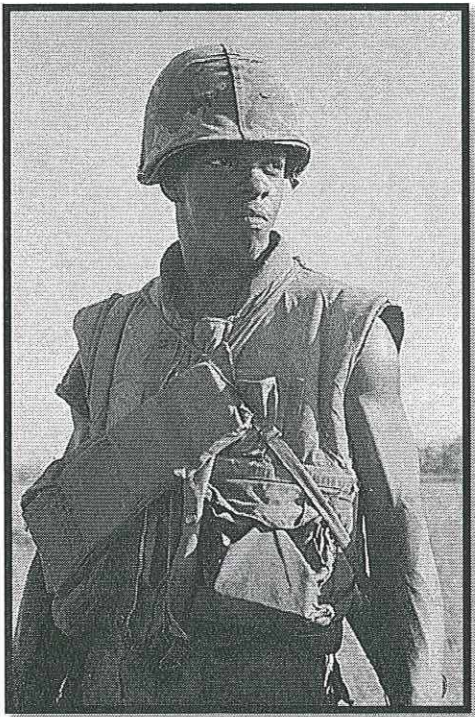
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from the U.S.S. Ticonderoga in the Gulf of Tonkin was shot down in 1965 and spent the next seven and one-half years as a prisoner of war. John McCain, who was elected to Congress in 1982 and became the Republican Presidential Nominee in 2008, was shot down and captured by the North Vietnamese in 1967, on his 23<sup>rd</sup> bombing mission in Vietnam. A graduate of the Naval Academy whose father and grandfather had been Admirals, McCain was offered early release by his North Vietnamese captors. McCain refused, believing his family's connections would be used as propaganda by the communists. McCain spent five and one-half years in prison, including time at the Hanoi Hilton. He was repeatedly beaten and tortured. Following his release from prison in 1973 as part of the peace negotiations, McCain was awarded the Silver and Bronze Stars, a Purple Heart, and a Distinguished Flying Cross. 590 American POWs were eventually released by the North Vietnamese; more than 2000 were classified as Missing in Action.



IVU w/ [i.e., interview with] Lt. Comdr. John S. McCain, Vietnam POW / [TOH]. Photographer: James O'Halloran, April 24, 1973, U.S. News & World Report Magazine Photograph Collection. Source: Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003673983/>

The End of the War



Photograph of Marines of Company I in Vietnam, 10/30/1969. Source: National Archives, ARC Identifier # 532492

President Richard Nixon shifted America's military strategy with his election in 1968. Nixon advocated a policy of "Vietnamization," which called for gradual reduction of American forces and increasing military leadership by the South Vietnamese. At the same time, Nixon's Secretary of State began secret peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese in Paris. These negotiations dragged on for years; a peace treaty between the U.S. and North Vietnam wasn't signed until 1973. In the interim period, the fighting continued and Nixon launched a controversial bombing campaign in Cambodia designed to destroy the supply bases supporting the communist forces. Public support for American involvement in the conflict declined precipitously during the period as well, increasing pressure on the Nixon Administration to end the war. Following the American departure from the war in 1973, South Vietnamese forces continued to fight until they were overrun in 1975 with the fall of Saigon.