

The Vietnam War, 1965-1968

I. **U.S. Expectations for the war in Vietnam:**

- a. The U.S. military assumed what? Why did they think this?

II. **Johnson sends in ground & air forces**

- a. “Our purpose in Vietnam is to prevent the success of aggression. It is not conquest, it is not empire, it is not foreign bases, it is not domination. It is, simply put, just to prevent the forceful conquest of South Vietnam by North Vietnam.”
i. MEANING WHAT?

- b. No clear military goal in Vietnam – was the goal to gain territory? Defeat the Viet Cong? Eliminate resistance in the South?

III. **Military preparations & training:**

- a. As the U.S. increased its involvement in Vietnam, the need for American troops grew.
- b. How do you raise an army during a time of war?
i. Use the _____!
ii. _____% of those who fought in Vietnam were draftees who were drafted for 2 years of service. Enlisted men signed on for _____ terms.
iii. Draftees were given 10 weeks of basic training while enlisted men received several additional months of training.
- c. The government implemented a **Selective Service Act** that allowed the govt to draft men between the ages of 18-26.
i. Not much resistance to draft in early 1960s – those who did were mostly **conscientious objectors** (DEFINE):
ii. About _____ men were drafted between 1964-1973

- iii. As more and more men were drafted, Americans began to question the _____ of the draft.
 - 1. College students could receive draft _____ so a majority of draftees wound up being young men from minority communities who were too poor to afford college – EXPLAIN?
 - 2. College students who received low grades were able to be drafted from 1966 on.
 - 3. From 1967 onward, draft resistance spread > many tried to claim physical disability, conscientious objector status, or left the country to avoid the draft (by the end of the war, roughly _____ draft resisters had left the country for Canada.)
- iv. Reacting to complaints about the system, Congress made some changes to the selective service system in order to address supposed inequity...
 - 1. How did the govt. alter the selective service process in 1969 to address these issues?

IV. **Basic Training:**

- a. Draftees were sent for _____ of basic training. Enlisted men were given several additional months of training.
- b. Basic training included:
 - i. fundamentals of being a soldier, including combat techniques, proper way to address a superior
 - ii. rigorous training to prepare their bodies for the eventual physical strain of combat
 - iii. daily schedule of duties & expectations (also taught self-discipline)

V. **The Ground War:**

- a. First "**living room war**": first _____ war in history – scenes of the war reached American homes in a matter of hours. TV news coverage increased the impact and led to an outpouring of backlash from the American public. HOW SO?
- b. **Strategy:** attempted to fight a " _____," MEANING?
 - i. This was accomplished by waging a ground and air war at the same time.
 - ii. How successful was this approach?

VI. The Air War, 1965-1968

- a. To keep U.S. casualties down, the U.S. initiated massive bombing
- i. Sustained bombing of North Vietnam referred to as _____ (began in March, 1965.)
 - ii. Bombing campaigns targeted:
 1. The northern capital city of Hanoi (bombed non-stop for 3 years!)
 2. The VC supply lines along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.
 - iii. More bombs were dropped on Vietnam in 1967 than in all of World War II.
 - iv. Civilian casualties were estimated at _____ a week in heavy bombing--a figure kept secret from the American public.



- b. Chemical warfare:
- i. The U.S. introduced the use of defoliants like _____ and _____. The hope was that defoliants would do what?
 - ii. Cost: millions of acres of jungle defoliated (_____ of Vietnam's rain forests,) painful chemical burns for thousands of innocent civilians, contamination of food chain, deformities.
- c. Viet Cong air defense – tunnels
- i. To counter the immense technological advantage held by U.S. forces, the Viet Cong developed an extensive network of _____.
 - ii. From these tunnels, the enemy could effectively _____ American forces and then safely vanish underfoot.
 - iii. Tunnel detection was difficult – WHY?

d. Impact of the air war:

- i. Damage:
- ii. Negative impact on American soldiers: dehumanized enemy (Asked if bombings killed civilians, one sergeant laughed and replied "What does it matter? They're all Vietnamese.")
- iii. General William Westmoreland claimed that: "Human life is cheap to the Asian. They don't

feel the same way about death that we do.”

VII. The War on the Ground

- a. **Who is the enemy? Viet Cong:** _____ by day; _____ at night. Very patient people willing to accept many casualties. The U.S. grossly underestimated their resolve and their resourcefulness.
- b. DESCRIBE:
 - i. How did many American men who enlisted in the war in the mid-1960s think/feel about the war itself and the U.S.’ cause?
 - ii. What changed for them once they were overseas, fighting in the war?
- c. The war was tough on American GIs – WHY?
- d. The Army wanted proof of enemy casualties, high “_____,” to present to Washington. MEANING?
- e. Philip Caputo recalled: "If it's dead and it's Vietnamese, it's Viet Cong, was the rule of thumb" in compiling casualty statistics.
- f. American morale begins to dip:
 - i. Greater percentage of poor people and minorities in the military (due to the system of draft deferments.)
 - ii. Officers in combat 6 mo.; in rear 6 mo. Enlisted men in combat for 12 mo. – long time to be in the field!
 - iii. Psychological toll of a drawn out guerrilla war was profound, significantly impacted their emotional/psychological health.
 - iv. Low troop morale

VIII. Are we becoming the enemy?

a. My Lai massacre (March 1968):

i. What happened?

ii. Became public in 1969, but officials at the time said My Lai was an "isolated incident."

iii. After that, GIs described dozens of other My Lai-style atrocities in which they said they had taken part.

iv. The Winter Soldiers (1971)

1. Attempt by a group of soldiers organized under the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) to let the American public know about the brutality & viciousness of the war in Vietnam.

2. Testimony before Congress led the Army to launch an investigation of their claims. Their investigation remained secret until a PhD. student stumbled across the 9000 page document in 2006.

3. What did the 1971 Winter Soldiers' hearings and investigation ultimately reveal? (Give 2 of their findings)