



The Vietnam

War

1954 - 1975

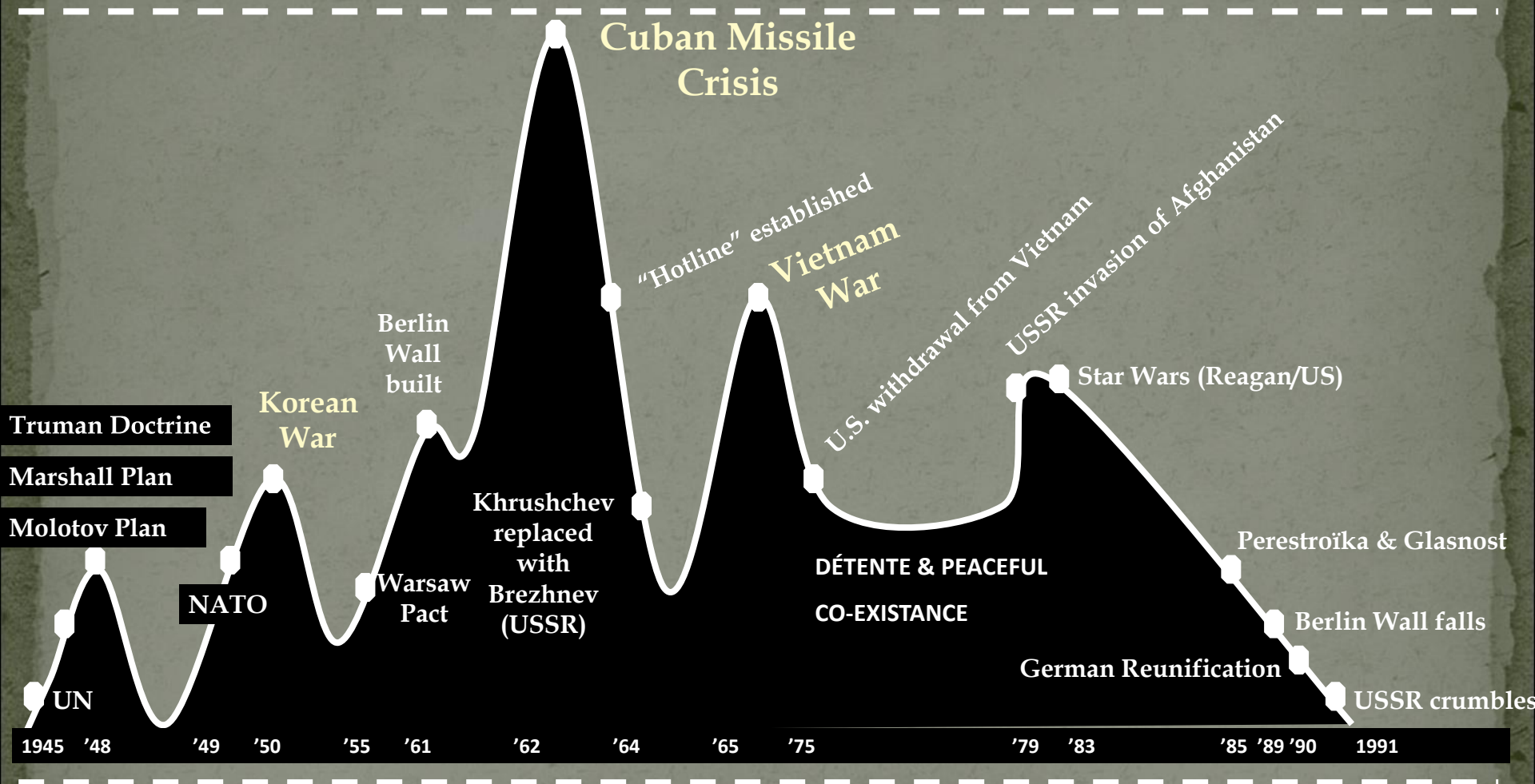
FLASHPOINT:
VIETNAM WAR, 1946-75
(the *10,000 Day War*)

J. Camsell & S. Masters

Richtor Scale of the Cold War:

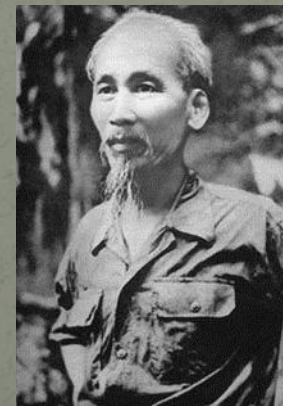
Détente or brinkmanship?

BRINKMANSHIP & PROXY WAR →→ →→



Phase 1 – A Colonial War Against The French (1945-54)

- Vietnam had been a French colony called French Indochina (along with Cambodia & Laos)
- Vietnam fought for its independence from France during WW2 (when France was preoccupied with European conflict)
- Vietnamese revolutionary leader was Ho Chi Minh, a Communist who wanted to be the leader of an independent, communist Vietnam
- He received support from USSR & “Red” China
- Vietminh: communist/nationalist guerrillas who fought the French in this phase



- This colonial war from 1946-54, ended in the French defeat at **Dienbienphu**
- France called a peace conference in Geneva, Switzerland.(attended by France, Vietnam, US & USSR)
- Decision of conference was to partition Vietnam into communist North led by Ho & a “democratic” South Vietnam led by **Ngo Dinh Diem**
- Settlement was result of basic Cold War tensions between US & USSR & clearly reflected US policy of **containment** with respect to Soviet communist expansionism
- US came to see South Vietnam as a “**domino**” that they couldn’t afford to lose





Ho Chi Minh, leader of Communist North Vietnam (backed by China and USSR)



Ngo Dinh Diem, leader of democratic South Vietnam (backed by France and US)

Growing American Involvement

- The U.S. believed that if South Vietnam fell to the communists, the rest of the nations in Southeast Asia would as well in a theory called the *domino theory*

The Domino Theory



Background Info

- Elections to unify the nation were set for 1956, but Diem backed out
- This led to military conflict between the north and south
- In North Vietnam, Communist supporters were called the **Vietminh**
- There was growing support in the South as well, by people who distrusted Diem and wanted the country unified—these were the **Vietcong**

Diem's Rule in the South

- Diem was a French-educated Roman Catholic. Under his rule:
 - His family held all the power
 - Wealth was dominated by a small elite
 - The Buddhist majority was persecuted
 - There was little room for political freedom

Diem's Rule in the South

- Still, Eisenhower and the US government sent financial and military aid
- 1960, over 600 US military “advisors” were sent to Vietnam
- After realizing that he would never be able to unite the people of South Vietnam against the communists there, the USA supported a military coup which murdered Diem & put a military government in control of South Vietnam

PHASE 2 – US ESCALATION & MILITARY INVOLVEMENT

- This originated with Presidents “Ike” & JFK but was intensified under Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ), who became president after JFK’s assassination in 1963
- US never issued a declaration of war, but after the **Gulf of Tonkin Incident**, where 2 American navy destroyers were apparently fired upon by the North Vietnamese, Congress passed the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolutions (August 1964)**
- Congress gave LBJ their support in sending US personnel & materiel





- In August 1964, U.S. military officials believed that the North Vietnamese had torpedoed an American ship in the Gulf of Tonkin

- In response, the U.S. passed the *Gulf of Tonkin Resolution*, which allowed the U.S. to begin bombing enemy targets within North & South Vietnam



The Forces Involved

COALITION FORCES



South Vietnam



USA

COMUNIST FORCES

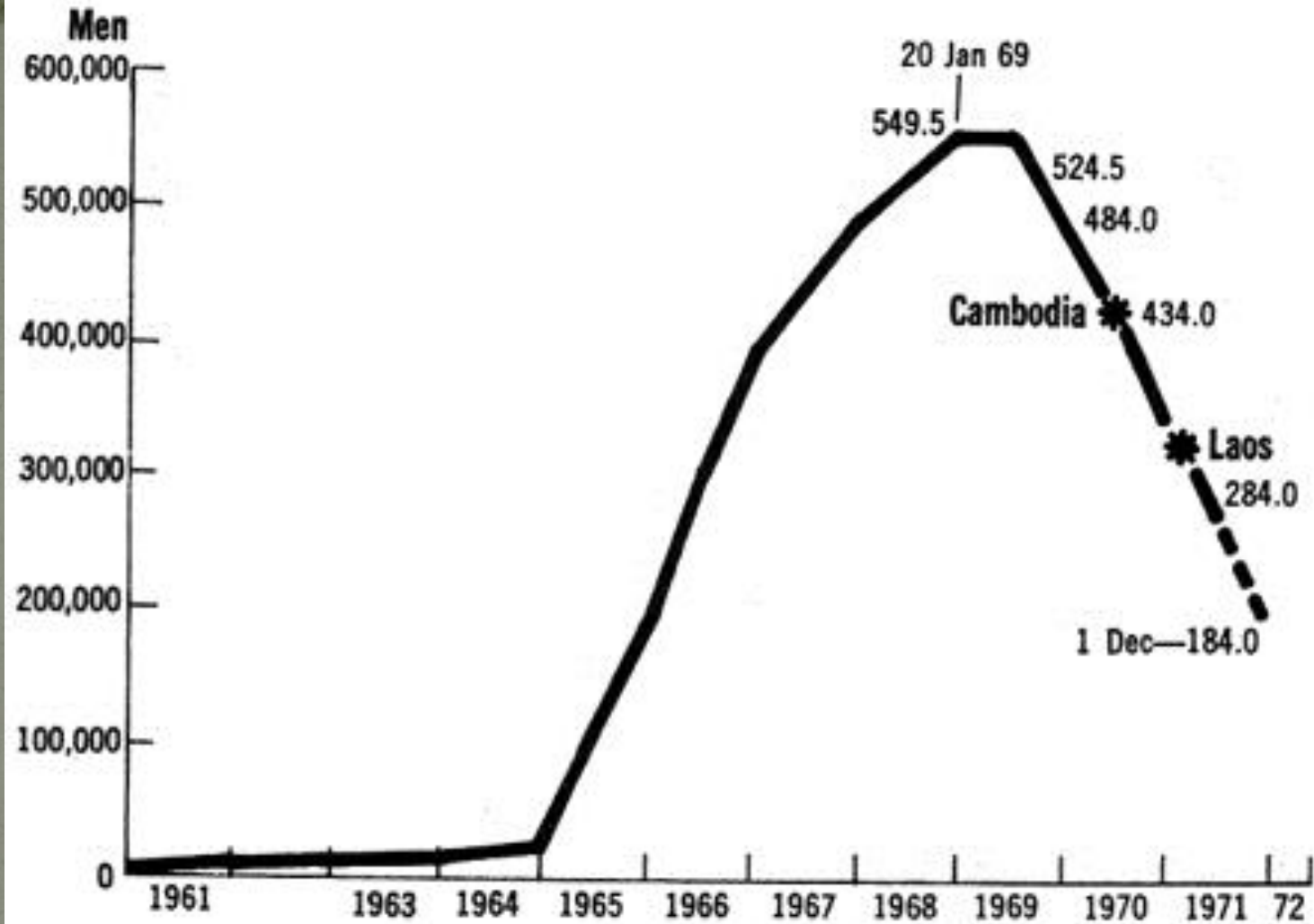


North Vietnam



Vietcong

- By 1968, over 500,000 US soldiers were fighting in the Vietnam War

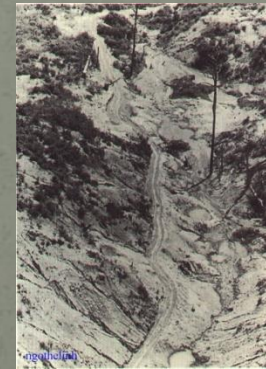


- As the fighting escalated, the US relied on the draft (conscription) for raising troops which caused civil unrest in America

- In spite of ongoing escalation throughout the 1960s, the US experienced a lack of success against communist Vietnamese guerrilla forces (the **Vietcong**) in South Vietnam as the US Army was unprepared for their tactics & mentality



- US was also never successful in shutting down the **Ho Chi Minh Trail**, a supply line that ran between North & South Vietnam via difficult jungle terrain, often underground & through bordering nations like Cambodia





Uncertain Enemy: The Vietcong

- Jungle warfare was difficult, & it was hard to locate the enemy
- In addition, it was very difficult to identify which South Vietnamese were US allies & which were supporting the Vietcong

Ex Vietcong showing secret tunnels, November 7, 2004

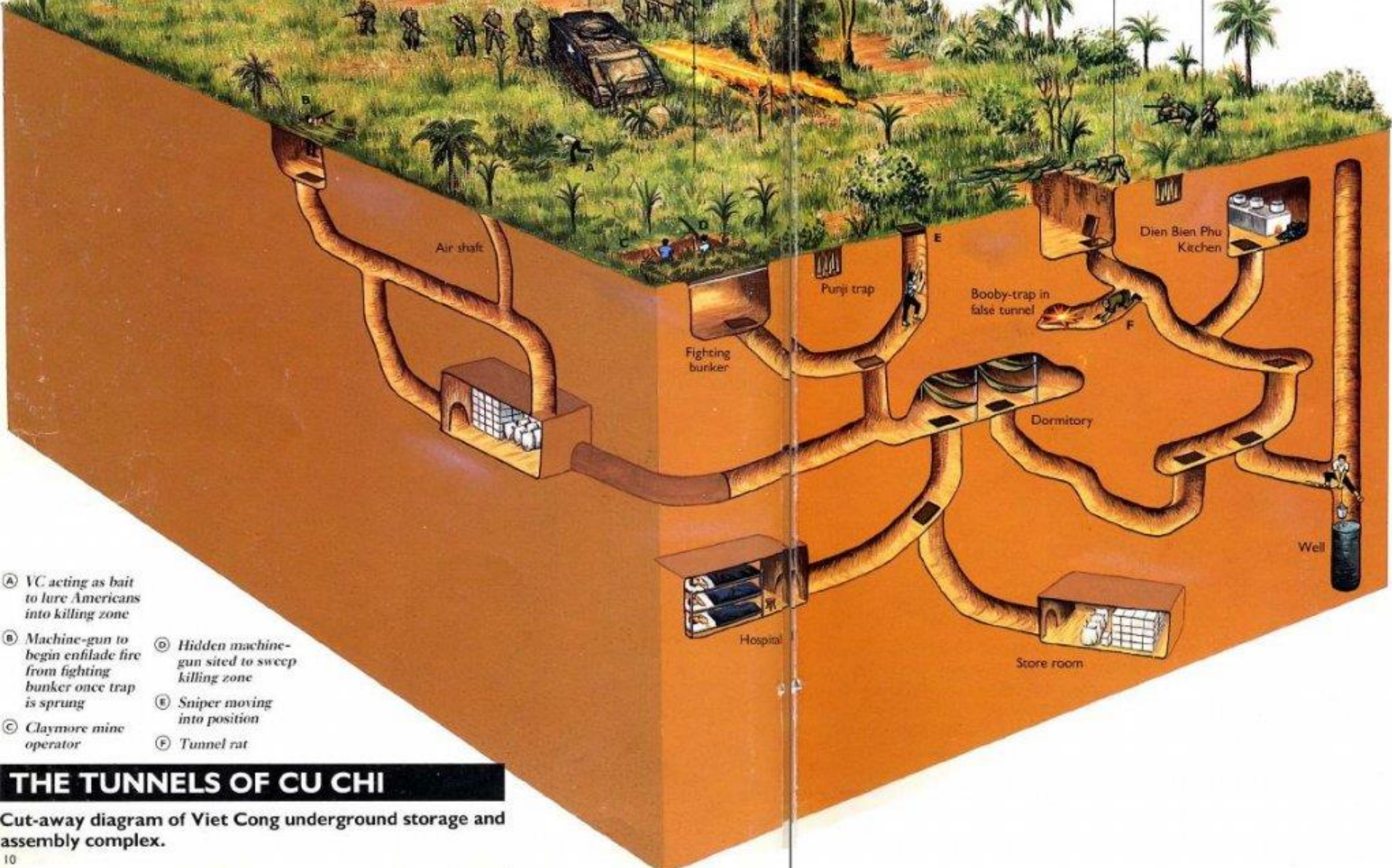
US mechanized team searching for VC

M113 armoured personnel carrier equipped with flamethrower attempting to burn-off jungle cover

VC-installed claymore mines in killing zone

Tunnel rat surface unit

Infantry security team



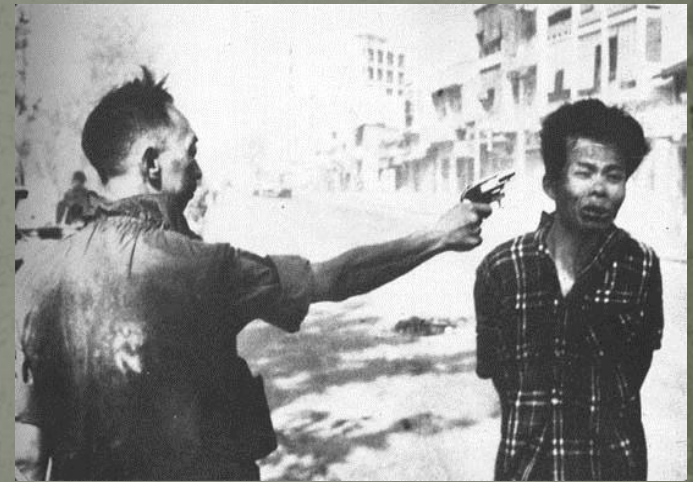
- A VC acting as bait to lure Americans into killing zone
- B Machine-gun to begin enfilade fire from fighting bunker once trap is sprung
- C Claymore mine operator

- D Hidden machine-gun sited to sweep killing zone
- E Sniper moving into position
- F Tunnel rat

THE TUNNELS OF CU CHI

Cut-away diagram of Viet Cong underground storage and assembly complex.

- War definitely turned against US in 1968, when North Vietnam began the **Tet Offensive**, a surprise offensive on a major Vietnamese holiday that saw attacks all over the country, including in Saigon itself
- Ongoing US casualties & losses saw an increase in anti-war sentiment on the American Home Front
- In large part because Vietnam was a **TV War** where US audiences saw the brutality of war firsthand



The Tet Offensive: A Turning Point

- In January 1968, the Vietcong launched surprise attacks on cities throughout South Vietnam
- The American embassy was attacked as well in the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon



Are We Becoming the Enemy?

Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry



- Mylai Massacre, 1968
- 200-500 unarmed villagers



⌘ Lt. William Calley,
Platoon Leader

- This included American atrocities at **My Lai** where US troops committed war crimes against civilians (Lieutenant Calley)
- US also used weapons like **napalm** & **Agent Orange**, which devastated the environment & future human births
- <https://youtu.be/ER5rztRzOaM>
 - 3:59-4:40





Agent Orange was the nickname given to a herbicide & defoliant used by the U.S. military in its Herbicidal Warfare program during the Vietnam War. *Crop dusting in Vietnam during Operation Ranch Hand lasted from 1962 to 1971.*

Effects of Agent Orange

Images taken from [Agent Orange: "Collateral Damage" in Vietnam](#) by Philip Jones Griffiths





- In the US, the counterculture gathered momentum (Hippies, Flower Children, etc.), protests became widespread & began to polarize US (between those in support, & those against the war)
- This intensified after the **Kent State Massacre**
 - National Guardsmen opened fire on student protestors in Ohio, killing four, & by Senator William Fulbright's (Chairman of the Senate Armed Forces Committee) admission that the war was a "mess"



The Question of the Vietnam War

"Who is the enemy? How can you distinguish between the civilians and the noncivilians? The same people who come and work in the bases at daytime, they just want to shoot and kill you at nighttime. So how can you distinguish between the two? The good or the bad? All of them look the same."

- Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in a private letter to President Lyndon B. Johnson, May 1967⁹²

- So the Question is in general terms, how can you win or support a war, in which you do not know your enemy?

Are we fighting for Democracy?

- Americans typically believed if they were at war, it was to defend democracy.
- South Vietnam however was a dictatorship, and a corrupt state?
- Many American soldiers (many of them conscripted) were dying for them?
- Americans began to ask, why are we defending tyranny, over communism?

Anti-War Demonstrations



Columbia University
1967



Hell no, we won't go!



Anti-War Demonstrations



Democratic Convention
in Chicago, 1968

Student Protestors
at Univ. of CA
in Berkeley, 1968



Anti-War Demonstrations



Kent State University

⌘ May 4, 1970

⌘ 4 students
shot dead.

⌘ 11 students
wounded

⌘ Jackson State
University

⌘ May 10, 1970

⌘ 2 dead; 12
wounded

“Hanoi Jane”



Jane Fonda: Traitor?



- This is where your stereotype:
- “Hippy” really comes on to the scene.
- The war in Vietnam, really changed the American view of their own government and it’s place in the world.

- Increasingly the American people came to perceive the “**Credibility Gap**” (i.e. they no longer believed that LBJ was telling them the truth about events in the war)
- In 1968, LBJ chose not to run for president, & President Nixon was elected on a platform of “**Peace with Honor**”



- Nixon wanted the South Vietnamese to play a greater role in the war, and start pulling American Soldiers out. A policy he labeled **Vietnamization**
- In spite of that, he continued carpet bombing Hanoi & ordered a secret invasion of Cambodia
- He relied on diplomacy of **Henry Kissinger** to achieve peace and/or an US withdrawal
- US does manage to extricate itself by Jan. 27, 1973 from Vietnam



Peace Without Victory

- In January 1973, the U.S. reached a cease-fire agreement with North Vietnam & brought their troops home
- They got their so called: “Peace with Honor”
- However, the U.S. continued to send billions of dollars in support of South Vietnam
 - Meaning Money, but also Tanks, Ammunition, guns, ect...



PHASE 3: VIETNAMESE CIVIL WAR, 1973-75

- North Vietnam easily defeated South Vietnam by 1975; the South had appealed to Nixon for aid, which had been promised, but by 1975 Nixon was embroiled in the domestic Watergate Crisis, & he was in essence a “lame duck” president
- 1975 – US abandoned its embassy in Saigon, which was renamed **Ho Chi Minh City** in the newly unified & communist Vietnam



And in the End....



Ho Chi Minh:

If we have to fight, we will fight. You will kill ten of our men and we will kill one of yours, and in the end it will be you who tires of it.

- Ho Chi Minh, was not only a communists, but a nationalist who believed he was fighting a war of liberation for the homeland and culture.

Vietnam Balance Sheet

- Between 1961 & 1973 over 58,000 Americans died in the war
- 1st US strategic defeat in war (“never lost a battle with over a 100 men, but lost the war!”)
- During same time period, over 1,500,000 Vietnamese died as well
- Failure of containment as an effective policy in the Cold War



*Vietnam War Memorial,
Washington, D.C.*





2,583 American
POWs / MIAs
still unaccounted for today.