

The Soldier's War

The Vietnam War was a uniquely difficult war for American soldiers to fight in. They were trained to fight a conventional war, but they had to fight a **guerilla** war in Vietnam. In Vietnam there were no clear front lines, and it was often impossible to distinguish the enemy from friends. Vietnamese culture was totally foreign to the Americans, as were the jungles and rice paddies where many of the battles occurred.

Rather than a war to control territory, the Vietnam War soon developed into a battle of **attrition**. For the commanders of both the American and the communist forces, the goal was to inflict as many **casualties** as possible on the enemy.

General William Westmoreland commanded the American troops. He depended on America's vastly superior military power for victory. He hoped to defeat the Viet Cong by bombing their supply routes and by crushing their forces through the use of superior fire power. America's military leaders believed that they could unleash such terrible power upon the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese that the communists would soon be forced to give up their attempts to overthrow the South Vietnamese government. U.S. planes dropped millions of tons of bombs during Operation Rolling Thunder. More tons of bombs were dropped on North Vietnam than had been dropped on Germany during all of World War II. Planes also sprayed a **defoliant** known as Agent Orange on the Vietnamese jungles to deny the Viet Cong hiding places. American ground troops engaged in "search and destroy" missions, where they attempted to find the Viet Cong forces scattered throughout the countryside and defeat them with their superior military power. The American soldiers were instructed to take "body counts" of the dead Vietnamese to help the generals track the war's progress. Whether fighting the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), the Americans almost always suffered fewer casualties due to their superior military equipment and air power.

Vo Nguyen Giap, the North Vietnamese commander, also realized that this was a war of attrition. Like Westmoreland, he wished to inflict as many casualties as possible on the American troops. He knew that his own casualties would always be much higher, but he also knew that the Vietnamese were much more dedicated than the Americans. He believed that the American people would soon tire of the war if casualties became high. The Americans would then leave, much like the French had done earlier. Assessing his possibilities for victory against such superior forces, Ho Chi Minh had once noted, "You can kill ten of my men for every one I kill of yours, but even at those odds, you will lose and I will win." The Viet Cong were prepared to fight for years to drive the Americans from the country, regardless of the cost.

Two different forces faced the American army. The Viet Cong were an organization of guerilla fighters. They blended into the population by day, appearing to be average South



Fighting in Vietnam was made more difficult by the jungle terrain.

Vietnamese peasants. By night, however, they were a well-organized military force, performing acts of **sabotage** and ambushing American and South Vietnamese troops. They chose when and where they wished to fight and hid in the jungles or among the local population if the American forces were too strong for them. Elaborate systems of tunnels had been dug to store supplies, treat the wounded, and to hide from the American troops. The Viet Cong received supplies from North Vietnam, via the Ho Chi Minh Trail (see map on page 86), and also used whatever supplies and weapons they could capture or steal from the Americans. The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) also sent several divisions to fight in South Vietnam after American troops began to arrive. These were regular, well-supplied army units rather than guerilla fighters. These troops, rather than the Viet Cong, fought most of the larger conventional battles against the Americans and South Vietnamese.

The war was very difficult for the American ground troops. Despite having the best equipment and plenty of supplies, they still had to endure the heat, mosquitoes, and leeches of the Vietnamese jungles. More importantly, they were faced with the dilemma of trying to identify the enemy. It was extremely difficult to distinguish the Viet Cong from the rest of the South Vietnamese people. Even women, children, and the elderly were active Viet Cong guerillas and could not be trusted. Fighting in Vietnam was brutal and bloody. Unfortunately, large numbers of Vietnamese civilians were killed. The Americans were never completely safe from attack, and the Viet Cong had placed land mines and booby traps throughout the country. Death could come quickly and without warning. All of these factors placed enormous stress on the soldiers.

Finally, as the war continued, the American army suffered from its policy of using **draftees**. Thousands of young men were drafted into the American army to provide the troops needed to fight the war in Vietnam. Many of the men did not want to fight in the war, but faced long jail sentences if they refused to serve. As the war became more unpopular, many young men avoided the draft by both legal and illegal means. It was difficult to keep **morale** high under such circumstances. While some soldiers retained their belief in what the United States was attempting to accomplish in Vietnam, others became very disillusioned.

Think About It

1. General Westmoreland and General Giap were both committed to fighting a war of attrition. Which general do you think had better reasons to think that his strategy would succeed?

Dictionary Exercises

Find the definitions to the following words:

1. Guerrilla
2. Attrition
3. Casualties
4. Defoliant
5. Sabotage
6. Draftees
7. Morale

Name _____ Date _____

Challenges

1. What kind of war was the Vietnam War?

2. What was the goal of both armies during the war?

3. Who commanded the American troops in Vietnam?

4. What was the main advantage of the American military?

5. What was the name of the defoliant that American planes dropped on the Vietnamese jungles?

6. Why did General Giap believe that the Vietnamese could defeat the Americans even if they suffered greater casualties?

7. What two enemy forces did the American army face in Vietnam?

8. Why was it difficult for the American soldiers to identify the Viet Cong guerrillas?

9. Why did the policy of using draftees hurt the American military?

The Media's War

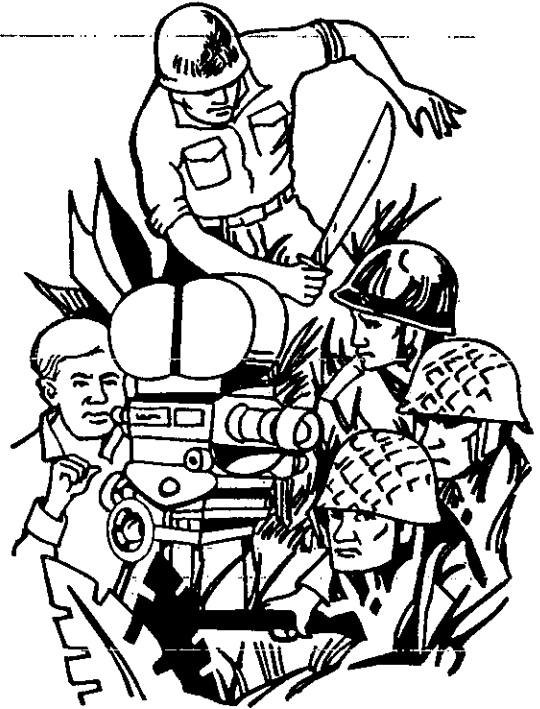
The Vietnam War was the first American war to take place during the age of television. In the 1960s television became the dominant source for news and entertainment for most Americans. Television both shaped and followed American opinion. For the first time, television cameras brought an American war into the homes of the country. Often, television coverage of the war is criticized as a reason for America's failure to achieve victory. Yet television was also used by the government to influence public opinion in favor of its policies.

From its **inception**, politicians realized the powerful effect that television had on forming public opinion. Presidents were able to effectively utilize television to deliver speeches to the American public. Television provided a way for the president to deliver his message in a personal way. Few politicians have ever used television as effectively as President John F. Kennedy. Kennedy's good looks and **eloquent** speaking style played well on television. Kennedy used television to build support for his presidency and for his policies. Among those policies was the decision to escalate American involvement in Vietnam.

Television news coverage of the American participation in the Vietnam War was certainly favorable at first. This is not surprising, as news reporting throughout the 1950s had been uncritical of decisions made by government officials. This **trend** continued well into the 1960s. Decisions by Kennedy and Johnson to increase American participation in the war were announced without presenting alternative possibilities. The accepted wisdom of the Domino Theory went unchallenged. The Vietnamese rebels were portrayed as barbaric hordes under the direction of world communism. Early reporting on peace demonstrations was almost entirely negative. News reporters tended to use the American government as their only source of information on Vietnam. News anchormen such as Walter Cronkite and Chet Huntley even participated in making propaganda films for the American military.

Television's entertainment programming of the fifties and sixties also affected public opinion. It was an idealistic era of television and of life in America. Television shows had happy endings. The good guys always won, and in many shows the message was that the good guys were always Americans. Many programs glorified military service and the belief that America was the wise and benevolent leader of the free world. The shows presented a world of good and evil where Americans always triumphed.

From this background, it is easy to see that in the early 1960s television contributed to the public willingness to fight in Vietnam. However, both television and the American people changed as the decade entered its final years. Support for the war in Vietnam eroded as casualties mounted and victory proved to be elusive. Many Americans began to lose faith



Television journalists brought the war in Vietnam home to viewers in the United States.

in their leaders. Television reporters were no different. They had the same doubts as the rest of the population. Voices against Johnson's policies in Vietnam started to become more numerous and were soon heard on television. Television coverage of the war became both a cause and a reflection of the division of opinion among Americans regarding Vietnam.

Television brought the war into the homes of America like never before. Except for those Americans who had served in combat in previous wars, most Americans had little idea what actual war looked like. They had seen only romanticized movies and television programs. News coverage of Vietnam changed this. For the first time Americans saw the horror of combat. They saw burning Vietnamese villages and heard the cries of the wounded. For the first time Americans saw an **uncensored** war. Many Americans were horrified and found it more difficult to support the war.

Americans also saw reports on the growing peace movement. Even when these reports presented the protesters in a negative light, as was usually the case, it made other Americans aware that many people were dedicated to getting American troops out of Vietnam. As the war dragged on, demonstrations and marches for peace became more numerous, and television coverage increased.

After the 1968 Tet Offensive, reporters **appraised** military reports on Vietnam more critically. It was clear that the military had been presenting overly optimistic reports to the reporters. The hundreds of reporters working in Vietnam soon came to refer to the daily military news briefings as the "Five O'clock Follies." Rather than merely presenting the military's version of what was happening, reporters began to rely on other sources of information.

The changing attitudes of the reporters were reflected by the news anchormen such as Walter Cronkite, David Brinkley, and Peter Jennings. Their presentation of the war in Vietnam changed slightly. No longer was victory just around the corner. The anchormen admitted what many administration officials and much of the public already realized: Vietnam had become a stalemate, with no end in sight.

Think About It

1. Television news reporting evolved during the Vietnam Era from blindly repeating the government's positions to providing more objective reports. What obligation, if any, do news reporters have to assist our government? Does this obligation change during times of war? Is it more important for reporters to tell the American people the truth or to protect our national interests?

Dictionary Exercises

Find definitions to the following words:

1. Inception
2. Eloquent
3. Trend
4. Uncensored
5. Appraised

Name _____ Date _____

Challenges

1. Which war was the first American war to take place during the “age of television”?

2. Which American president was the first to successfully use television to promote himself and his ideas?

3. At the beginning of the war, was television coverage favorable or unfavorable towards government policies?

4. At the beginning of the war, how were peace demonstrators portrayed?

5. How were the television shows of the 1950s different from television today?

6. Why did television reports on the war change as the war drug on?

7. Why did the coverage of the war by television influence the way that Americans viewed war?

8. What were the “Five O'clock Follies”?

9. Why did reporters choose to check other sources instead of only relying on military reports?

10. Name one of the television news anchormen who led broadcasts during the Vietnam War.

Activity Sheet 12: Analyzing a Primary Source

Name: _____

Date: _____

Case Study 5: Tragedy at Kent State

A conscientious objector is someone who is morally opposed to all wars. People who are conscientious objectors may write an application to the draft board to be declared exempt (excused) from military service. During the Vietnam conflict, about 470,000 men applied to be given conscientious objector status. Only about 170,000 were actually given this status and thus excused from the draft. The following selection was taken from an application for conscientious objector status. It was written by an individual in 1968. Read the following selection and then answer the questions that follow.

I will always combat [fight] the kind of thinking that makes wars into glorious adventures, and pacifists [people opposed to war] into cowards. Our country is easily led astray [in the wrong direction] by warlike men. My greatest responsibility to my country is to wake it up, before it causes any more destruction and sorrow than it already has. I think this is the social significance of conscientious objectors: They turn their friends, neighbors, and countries away from war, away from unthinking violence. Without these people the world will someday be destroyed.

1. (a) Who wrote this selection? (b) Why did he write it? _____
2. What does the author believe is the purpose of conscientious objectors?

3. What do you think the author is referring to when he states that he wants to stop his country from causing "any more destruction and sorrow than it already has"?

4. Imagine that you are 18 years old during the draft for the Vietnam War. Your friend is applying for status as a conscientious objector. Would you support your friend's decision or would you try to persuade him not to apply? Write a letter to your friend explaining your position.

Activity Sheet 11: Analyzing a Secondary Source

Name: _____ Date: _____

Case Study 5: Tragedy at Kent State

When President Nixon decided to invade Cambodia during the Vietnam conflict, he widened both the war abroad and the protests against the war at home. The following is an account from *Time Magazine* in May 1970. It provides a look at how one magazine summed up the attitudes of President Nixon and his staff toward the student protesters. Read the excerpt and answer the questions below.

Even as it widened the war in South-East Asia, the Nixon Administration chose to further estrange [distance] itself from the nation's campuses. Vice President Spiro Agnew, speaking to Republicans in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., unleashed another... attack on colleges as "circus tents or psychiatric centers for overprivileged, under-disciplined, irresponsible children of the well-to-do... permissivists." President Nixon, in [a]... talk at the Pentagon, referred to radical students as "those bums blowing up the campuses" and contrasted them with G.I.s fighting in Viet Nam: "the greatest kids—they stand tall and they are proud." The distinction between the two is fashioned, of course, as much by the whims [needs] of the draft as by personal choice. Still, soldiers and students last week faced each other head-on in several places as campus protests again broke out... across the U.S.

From *Time: The Weekly Magazine: 1970s Highlights*, "Protest Season on the Campus,"
May 11, 1970.

1. How did Vice President Spiro Agnew describe colleges and college students?

2. How did President Nixon refer to the college students? _____
3. How did Nixon compare the college students to the soldiers in Vietnam?

4. Generalizations are broad statements that can be supported by facts. State in your own words one generalization the article writer made and provide at least one fact from this excerpt or the case study to support it.

5. Reread the final sentence in the excerpt above. Imagine that the writer asked you to write a paragraph to follow the one he or she has already written. Based on what you learned in Case Study 5, write the paragraph using the space below and the back of this worksheet.

The New Technology, 1945–1960

Since the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century, the Western world has been interested in the application of science to the problems of everyday life. From the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century—with the invention of factories, and the application of steam power for everything from mill wheels to railroad locomotives—creative minds have been at work on the improvement of human life through technology.

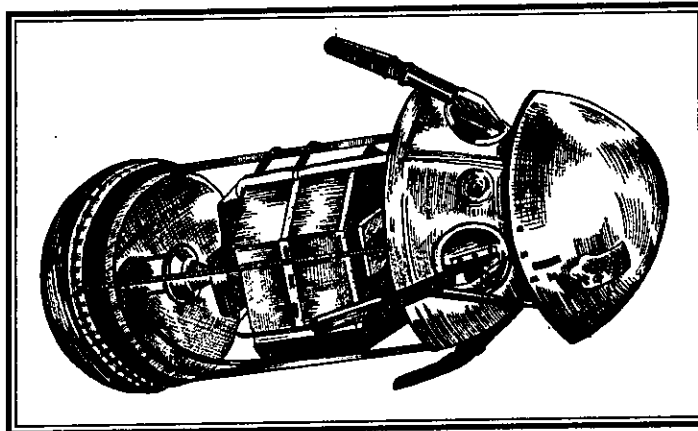
The end of World War II ushered in yet another era of explosive growth in science and technology. The twentieth century witnessed the development of plastics and synthetic fibers used in the production of inexpensive and mass-produced consumer goods. The synthetic material called rayon was introduced in the 1920s and used in clothing production. By 1939, the first nylon stockings were marketed in America, replacing silk.

The electronics industry underwent tremendous change during the twentieth century. The first completely electronic computer—called Colossus—was built in the early 1940s, and was used by the British to break enemy codes. By 1946, scientists in the United States announced the development of their work, the American ENIAC computer. This cumbersome arrangement of electronic gadgetry occupied a room the size of a gymnasium. It required 18,000 vacuum tubes to operate, and an enormous amount of electricity even when handling a small amount of information. It could, however, handle up to 5000 calculations a second. In an effort to reduce the size of such devices, Bell Telephone Company developed the transistor in 1948. This tiny device allowed for miniaturization of many different electronic devices including televisions and radios.

Television was another scientific invention which gained popularity after World War II. Developed as early as the 1920s, television did not become available to the masses until the late 1940s. Where

only 15,000 television sets existed in the U.S. at the end of World War I, Americans came to own over 34 million sets within a decade.

Perhaps the greatest manifestation of the scientific revolution during the postwar period was the space race. As an extension of the Cold War, the U.S. and the USSR competed with each other in the development of space travel during the fifties and sixties. By 1957, the Soviets launched the first



Sputnik I

artificial satellite into orbit—Sputnik 1—followed later that year by the launch of Sputnik 2, which included a Soviet dog named Laika on board—the first animal in space. (She died on board since the Russians had no means of returning her spacecraft to Earth safely.) The United States launched its first satellite, Telstar, the following year.

By 1961, the Russians launched the first man in space—Yuri Gagarin. The first American—Alan Shepard—was shot into space in 1962, the same year America launched the first communications satellite. By this time, the new objective between the two superpowers was the race for the moon, which the U.S. accomplished in 1969, when astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first human to walk on Earth's satellite.

Review and Write

1. Describe some of the major technological changes experienced by the West during the 1940s and 50s.
2. How did early space exploration become part of the Cold War?

