

The University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire

Political History for the United States to Fight in Vietnam War:  
Failure in War Tactic of Pacification addressing and Depicting War Tactics of Search and  
Destroy using Body Count for Justifications  
(1935-1972)

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## **Abstract**

In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century young American men gave their lives in the jungles of Vietnam for merely political reasons decided by the politicians in Washington D.C. The War Powers Act issued after the Gulf of Tonkin by President Lyndon B. Johnson justified the reasons for American deployment in Vietnam. While American troops were in Vietnam the proper war tactics of Pacification were not correctly executed which resulted in the United States withdrawing its troops in 1972. If we had exercised our war tactics correctly rather than resorting to the war tactic of search and destroy and a war of attrition based off the idea of a victory solely depending on a body count, we would have secured another victory for America and South Vietnam would not have fallen to communism. This paper will examine the roots of the conflict, our justification for entering South Vietnam, pacification war tactics, firsthand accounts of Vietnam soldiers, and end with why search and destroy ultimately failed.

## Historical Timeline of Major Events in Vietnam

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<b>1959</b>	Major Dale R. Buis and Master Sargeant Chester M. Ovnand become the first Americans to die in the Vietnam War during the guerilla strike at Bienhoa
<b>1960</b>	Vietcong Formed (National Liberation Front for South Vietnam)
<b>1961</b>	Vice President Johnson Tours Saigon
<b>1962</b>	Operation Chopper: America's first combat missions against the Vietcong. Operation Ranchhand: Objective to clear vegetation making it difficult for the Vietcong to ambush. US Military then Employs Agent Orange to expose roads and trails used by Vietcong forces
<b>1963</b>	Battle of Ap Bac where the Vietcong defeat the South Vietnamese Army President Kennedy Assassinated in Dallas and Lyndon B Johnson takes over the Presidency  Buddhist monks start setting themselves on fire in public places to protest against the Diem government policy of removing Buddhists from key government positions and replacing them with Catholics.  Diem and his brother are murdered. The Diem regime is overthrown

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**1964**

General Nguyen Khanh Seizes  
Power in Saigon  
3 North Vietnamese PT boats  
allegedly fire torpedoes at the  
USS Maddox named the Gulf of  
Tonkin Incident

Following the Gulf of Tonkin  
Incident Congress authorizes  
President Johnson to "take all  
necessary measures to repel any  
armed attack against forces of the  
United States and to prevent  
further aggression." The US  
wages total war against North  
Vietnam

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**1965**

Over 200,000 US troops are sent  
to Vietnam

February: Bombing raids on North  
Vietnam commence referred to as  
'Operation Rolling Thunder'. The  
air raids continue for three years

9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade  
arrive in Vietnam

Battle of Ia Drang Valley

Students at American Universities  
start to strongly protest against the  
US policy in Vietnam

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**1966**

B-52s Bomb North Vietnam  
President Johnson meets with  
South Vietnamese Premier  
Nguyen Cao Ky and his military  
advisors in Honolulu

American protests against the US  
policy in Vietnam continue and  
students are joined by veterans in  
Anti-War Rallies

**1967**

Operation Cedar Falls  
The Iron Triangle of Vietcong  
tunnels is discovered

American protests against the US  
policy in Vietnam continue and  
Martin Luther King and others  
call for draft evasion

The US Secretary of Defence  
Robert McNamara admits that the  
US bombing raids had failed to  
meet their objectives

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**1968**

The Tet Offensive: The Vietcong  
scores a psychological victory

Battle for Hue: Mass graves found

My Lai village Massacre by US  
troops

Peace Talks take place in Paris  
between the North Vietnamese  
and the Americans

President Johnson does not run for  
the presidency and Richard Nixon  
Elected President of the USA

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**1969**

Operation Breakfast: Nixon  
authorises the covert bombing of  
Cambodia in an attempt to destroy  
supply routes

Melvin Laird the US Secretary of  
Defense discusses a diminishing  
role for the US military in  
Vietnam

The death of Ho Chi Minh

The news coverage of the  
massacre of the My Lai village by  
US troops shocks America leading  
to numerous Antiwar

Demonstrations

**1970**

April : President Nixon extends Vietnam War to Cambodia

Tragedy at Ohio: National Guardsmen open fire on protesting students at Kent State University

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**1971**

Publication of the Pentagon Papers

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**1972**

Pressure on Nixon increases to end the involvement of the US in Vietnam and secret peace talks are initiated. US forces apply pressure on North Vietnam by heavy bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong  
Henry Kissinger is optimistic about the peace talks despite Vietnam opposition

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**1973**

A cease-fire agreement is signed in Paris

The end of the Draft is publicised

All remaining US troops leave Vietnam

Henry Kissinger wins the Nobel Peace Prize

Source:

<http://www.history-timelines.org.uk/events-timelines/06-vietnam-war-timeline.htm>

## **Introduction: Roots of United States Conflict**

Throughout the history of the United States there have been many military conflicts. In the 1700's the underdog United States defeated the British to declare their independence. Then in the early 1900's the United States declared itself a world superpower by contributing to win both World War I and World War II. After World War II the United States found itself in a nuclear standoff with the Soviet Union. Then in 1953 the United States declared victory in Korea. With the United States believing they were invincible they stepped into Vietnam where they used similar war tactics in hopes of preventing the domino effect that was sweeping through Southeast Asia due to communist Soviet Union's ideology. In hopes of justifying the United States stand as a world superpower they entered and were defeated in the jungles and mountains in Vietnam. Throughout this paper I will justify that with better tactics the United States' outcome would be similar to the Korean War. This paper will introduce the roots of the United States conflict from first a political stand point in Vietnam which then led to a militaristic standpoint. The paper will also depict that if the United States had exercised their main war tactic of pacification and had an actual solid war tactic they would have won. This paper will also examine the war tactics of strategic hamlet, close and hold, body count, and finally end with the main war tactic exercised in Vietnam, search and destroy. This paper will illustrate firsthand accounts of search and destroy and demonstrate how it ultimately failed.

The roots of United States conflict in Vietnam can be traced back to when the French had colonial control over Vietnam. The French moved into control of Vietnam in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Previous to French control, the Vietnamese economy was primarily agrarian with main exports of rice and rubber. One of the goals of the French in Vietnam was exporting coal, rice,

and rubber from Vietnam to France, while importing many French goods to stimulate both economies. In order for the French to gain power over the Vietnamese economy, they first had to get control of them at the village level. However, the Vietnamese weren't so grateful for the French intruders.<sup>1</sup>

When the French first arrived in Vietnam, mid-19th century, the Vietnamese president ordered resistances measure in Cochinchina. The French Admiral Léonard Charner assumed the peasants hated the French, so he ordered his officers to erase all trace of the former Vietnamese administrators. The officers went ahead and destroyed the official records and tax rolls. After the French destroyed much of the official Vietnamese documents, the citizens of Vietnam had virtually no government at the village level and the results helped create an uncertain political government. This led to making Vietnam weak and vulnerable.<sup>2</sup>

Over the next hundred years, Vietnam remained under control of the French. The French continued to repress the Vietnamese by stripping them of the culture, and language attempted to convert them to Christianity. It wasn't until 1953 that peace negotiations were finally discussed at the Geneva Accords. The peace negotiations were constructed because of the Korean Wars and because the Vietnamese insurgency had merged with the global East-West struggle. The French became players in the Geneva Accords because for many years they had depended heavily on the material and financial support of the United States.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the DRV (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) could hardly have survived without the Chinese and Communist bloc support. The Geneva Accord discussions covered many issues and included

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<sup>1</sup> Chester A. Bain, (*Vietnam: the Roots of Conflict*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967) 92

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 93

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 114

representatives from the French Union, USSR, Communists China, and Great Britain with Indochinese government officials and the United States present as an observer.<sup>4</sup>

The final decision was that Vietnam was to be broken up along the 17<sup>th</sup> latitude parallel into two countries, the North Vietnam and South Vietnam. At the location of the 17<sup>th</sup> latitude parallel the DRV, who was in control of Northern Vietnam, was to remove its troops within 300 days from demilitarize the zone. This meant that there could be no hostile forces to regroup and the civilians could now move from one zone to another. Neither the North nor South Vietnam could establish new troops, military equipment, or permit the construction of foreign bases. Even though the United States or Bao Dia (main political player of South Vietnam) did not sign the Geneva Accords and were more or less bystanders in the Geneva Accords, they both promised they would not use force to oppose their implementation in Vietnam. North Vietnam would be communist and the South would be democratic. The Accords insisted on the supervision of the United Nations in the reunification of the country by popular elections. After the Geneva Accords, France had granted Vietnam full independence.<sup>5</sup>

After the French pulled their troops from Vietnam in, there was the question on who was going to run South Vietnam. The Geneva Conference appointed Ngo Dinh Diem as the premiership of Bao Dai's government.<sup>6</sup> Diem seemed to the United States as the perfect successor of Vietnam. Diem had been to the United States many times where he lectured, met with Cardinal Francis Spellman as well as many other influential Americans including Senators Mark Mansfield and John F. Kennedy. Diem came from a Vietnamese mandarin family that had been Catholic for nearly 300 years; he believed in a democratic society and was opposed to communism. From this, the Geneva Accords made sure that Diem was guaranteed nearly

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.,116

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.,117

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,119

absolute power of South Vietnam. There were many flaws to Diem. He was extremely corrupt by preferring to control the country instead of leading it. He dictatorially controlled the government by choking off other official initiatives. He did not trust anyone who was affiliated with old French control. He replaced them with uneducated personal that blindly obeyed him.<sup>7</sup> Despite Diem's many flaws, he was still backed by the United States, which gave him large scale assistance politically and financially. However, the communist parties of the South Vietnam (Viet Cong) were not partial to him.<sup>8</sup>

It did not take long for the Communist parties to threaten Diem. One of the main sources that they used to threaten Diem was on their Radio Station Hanoi. This station exclaimed a huge array of propaganda that attacked Diem's every political move. On frequent accounts Diem was physically attacked where he barely escaped with his life.<sup>9</sup> Although Diem tried hard to "democratically" keep South Vietnam together, he ultimately failed to stem the Viet Cong's insurgency. On November 1, the ARVN surrounded Diem's palace in Saigon. Diem tried to rally support but failed. Diem and his brother Nhu tried to flee but were captured in a Catholic church in Cholon. The end of their story is not a pretty one. The two brothers were killed by police officers and were buried in remote secret graves.<sup>10</sup>

Despite Diem's faults and unpopularity with the citizens, he did a relatively good job in Vietnam. The things that Diem established were relative order and opportunities to a devastated chaotic land, also while in power Diem prolong a communist takeover. With Diem out of the picture Vietnam became politically unorganized and susceptible for Vietnam to tip towards communism. This would lead to domino theory ideology.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 124

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 115

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 120

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 131

## **The Domino Theory**

There are many theories as to why the United States decided to deploy troops to Vietnam. Many of the citizens in the United States believed that it was the United States' obligation to enter Vietnam because morally, it was the right thing to do. Other United States citizens believe it was for economic purposes. The most common reason people tend to believe was the domino theory.<sup>11</sup> The domino theory was suggested in the 1950's, at that time the United States and the Soviet Union were at each other's throats in a nuclear standoff during the Cold War. This meant that both countries were at a nuclear standoff in which there were no ground forces fighting each other directly in either country. The domino theory suggested that if one land in a region became communism, then another would follow, followed by another one. America ultimately feared the spread of communism that was taking place in South East Asia: China, North Korea, and North Vietnam were already communist or in the process of becoming communist. Some people felt that the United States was forced to flex its muscles and prevent the crucial domino of Vietnam to fall. America simply could not afford for South Vietnam to become communist because that would challenge our creditability as a world super power in our position against communism.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Gary R. Hess, (*Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Pub., 2009) 28

<sup>12</sup> <https://uwec.courses.wisconsin.edu/d21/orgTools/ouHome/ouHome.asp?ou=1066010>

## America's Obligation to Enter South Vietnam

After the capture and assassination of President Diem, America lost all of its political ties and influence in South Vietnamese government. South Vietnam was now politically vulnerable to the spread of communism. America needed a reason to deploy troops in hopes of stopping the spread of communism in South Vietnam. This all became possible after the Gulf of Tonkin incident-President Johnson received permission from Congress to deploy troops to Vietnam. He was able to do this because he was given the authority of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. This decision was within regard of the alleged attack on USS *Maddox's* on August 2, 1964. The USS *Maddox* had been on an intelligence gathering mission (Operation 34A) in international waters off the coast of North Vietnam. Operation 34A consisted of the USS *Maddox* driving straight towards the island of Ma Ne with its lock on land targets in an attempt to detect North Vietnam's radar sensors.<sup>13</sup>

The idea of the mission was to put pressure on North Vietnam communist leader Ho Chi Minh in an attempt to make him fold under the pressure and release his grasp on South Vietnam. Then on August 2, 1964, the USS *Maddox* was attacked by four Soviet-built P-4 motor torpedo boats. The communist boats launched multiple torpedoes that the USS *Maddox* averted. However, the USS *Maddox* was hit in its hull by one machine gun round.<sup>14</sup> The United States retaliated by sending an air strike on the communist boats. After the communists retreated, leaving their torpedo boats dead in the water, the USS *Maddox* retreated south to more safe waters.

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<sup>13</sup> Peter D. Scott, (*The War Conspiracy; the Secret Road to the Second Indochina War*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972) 56

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/adlai.html>

Two days later on the night of August 4, 1964, the USS *Maddox*, accompanied by another ship, the *C. Turner Joy*, was ordered to continue Operation 34A. Late that night, a distress from the USS *Maddox* concerning another attack was received in Honolulu. The message was sent to President Lyndon B. Johnson in Washington D.C. Johnson went to Congress to resolve the Gulf of Tonkin incident. This was called the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The Resolution proclaimed that,

...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.<sup>15</sup>

After this statement President Johnson, under the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, was granted the authority to deploy the first wave of troops into South Vietnam. This event was extremely important in the road to the Vietnam War. First and most importantly, it confirmed the absolute power in the presidency under Johnson. It also justified our reasons of preventing communism in Southeast Asia when he sent troops into the jungles of Vietnam. Even though the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution enabled President Johnson to send troops to Vietnam, it wasn't just America's ego in danger that Johnson was trying to defend; there were also other political reasons to justify Johnson's decisions.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/adlai.html>

## **Politics and Justification of Entering Vietnam**

The origins of Vietnam stemmed more deeply than the egoism behind the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. It cut to the core of Lyndon B. Johnson's principles, reforms, and Washington's cabinets. After the Gulf of Tonkin, Johnson was trapped not only emotionally but politically as well. Johnson, as well as everyone around him, knew he was trapped. Not only would he be risking his great domestic dreams, but he was also risking his legitimacy of his Presidential status. Johnson was elected president because of his can do mentality. He told the American public that he was a man to go forth and lead a country by image and show the world the American soul.<sup>16</sup> Now it came time for Johnson to test his image for the American people.

As for testing his image for the American people, President Johnson was stuck behind a rock and hard place. Previous to this in 1953 America had just finished with the Korean War and Johnson was unsure whether the American people would support another Asian land war. However, the American people and the Washington office holders felt America was invincible. President Johnson was aware of all the variables revolving around his decision. He knew his decision would not be easy. He knew that if he didn't go to, it was a tricky business because people in the future would have hindsight and would show that he should have gone and not to do so would reflect poorly on him as a president.<sup>17</sup> In Johnson's office, he was surrounded by can-do people like him. His political adversaries were telling him that America had a superior technological advantage over the Vietnam people and the time was now to go. Even though

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<sup>16</sup> Robert J. McMahon, (*Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War: Documents and Essays*. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin, 2008) 224

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 226

Europe, particularly the French, were telling Johnson that Vietnam was an impossible feat, Johnson was not the kind of guy that would cut and run.

Thus the dice were loaded for deploying troops to Vietnam. The advocates of force were appealing to the very nature of Johnson's personality. He felt that America needed to be taken seriously by the world. The thrust to go forward with Vietnam was just too great. Johnson felt that after Vietnam, America would become a wiser and more mature nation that would set the bar for the rest of world. The Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, was telling Johnson that Vietnam was an easy accomplishment and would be completed in six months or maybe a little more.<sup>18</sup> McNamara told Johnson that the way we would win the war with speed and ease was to set the tone there, "...we would have to be aggressive. Clean it up and get home. Show Ho what Americans could do, and get him to the table."<sup>19</sup>

The fate was now sealed for President Johnson. He wanted to be remembered as one of the great presidents, such as a Teddy Roosevelt or Abraham Lincoln. So cornered was Johnson, he would go ahead with Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Robert S. McNamara's new and revolutionary war doctrines in Vietnam.<sup>20</sup> These new war tactics fell into their own category of pacification and would be forever remembered as the war the U.S. lost.

Dean Rusk and Robert S. McNamara came up with an alternative plan in 1961. This new plan was for America to assist the South Vietnamese with a large-scale assistance in military, economic, and political fields. The purpose of this large-scale assistance was to prevent the influx flow of men and supplies from North Vietnam down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The military would be stationed along the Ho Chi Minh trail and check the personal and supplies entering South Vietnam in hopes to prevent the infiltration of communism from North Vietnam. At this

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 227-228

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 229-230

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 231

beginning stage of the war, Rusk and McNamara believed that the force of influence and mission from the United States could not be accomplished in the midst of an apathetic or hostile population. This pacification idea was to insert combat forces into the villages and contribute to the improvement in the villagers' morale and help them with their own efforts of well-being.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 163-164

## **Pacification**

There were many aspects of the pacification method used in the Vietnam War. They were military, political, economic, and social. The main objective was to win the struggle for the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people, or as the marines would say, “Get ‘em by the balls and their hearts and minds will follow.”<sup>22</sup> The roots of pacification go as far back as the 1950s and early 1960s at the time in history when the effort against insurgency in the third world countries attracted much attention. America finally decided that it was much easier and cleaner for us to allow the villagers of the third world countries to get their hands dirty instead of ours.

The first Vietnam pacification program began in 1961 with the election of President Kennedy. Kennedy was falsely informed by his administration that Vietnam wasn't in any real danger of communism spreading. After receiving this false information, the Kennedy administration issued money to South Vietnam rather than men because a ground army was much more expensive than sending a check. After the Kennedy administration learned that just sending money in hope that it would solve the problems wasn't working, a new plan had to be in motion.<sup>23</sup>

The new plan was a series of militaristic operations known as the *Chieu Hoi* program, Operation Phoenix also known as *Phung Hoang*, close and hold, the strategic hamlet program, and other strategies with the intent of gaining control over the villages in South Vietnam.<sup>24</sup> The new attempt at pacification wasn't economical, it was militaristic. President Kennedy provided 20,000 men to ARVN and also gave 12.7 million dollars to the civil guard in South Vietnam.

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Maclear, (*The Ten Thousand Day War: Vietnam, 1945-1975*. New York: St. Martin's, 1981) 255

<sup>23</sup> Tran Dinh Tho, *Pacification*, Article V

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/archive/hansen/1966/xx/pacification.htm>

The plan was, if it had been finished, was to develop democracy, reform society, and would ultimately contribute to America's main objective, winning the war. This plan, strategic hamlet, was supposed to be accomplished by securing villages, while establishing the villagers' trust, so that they would provide us with precious information on the whereabouts of guerillas in the area.

Then in 1961, the Phoenix Operation went underway. Under the supervision of President Kennedy, during this operation, high ranking American military leaders would kidnap, interrogate, civilians in attempts to identify Vietminh. The people captured would either be converted or killed. The members of the Phoenix program claimed to have correctly identified 65,000 Vietminh.<sup>25</sup> Operation Phoenix was successful in targeting and destroying the NFL's infrastructure. Despite the ideas behind the different forms of pacification in Vietnam it failed more than it succeeded. It failed for a number of reasons. First off, we were too accustomed to conventional war tactics as opposed to this unconventional war tactic. Second, we didn't invest enough time to really put the theory to practice. Lastly, when we did pull out prematurely, the villages the South Vietnamese grew dissatisfied and we lost the support that we initially had. In some cases, it was affective because in some villages while we were exercising pacification, we were gaining support from the villages that we were protecting.<sup>26</sup> The failures in pacification eventually led to the war tactic of search and destroy that emphasized a body count. The body count was based off an estimation of people killed rather than actual bodies recovered.

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<sup>25</sup> Dale Andradé, (*Ashes to Ashes: the Phoenix Program and the Vietnam War*. Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington, 1990) 11

<sup>26</sup> Harry G. Summers, (*Vietnam War Almanac*. New York, NY: Facts on File, 1985) 277

## **Strategic Hamlet**

The Strategic Hamlet program was part of the pacification program in Vietnam. Like pacification, the main goal of the Strategic Hamlet was to clear out the enemy forces, to “hold” the villages, to maintain security by various civil guard organizations and regional reaction forces, enable economic development, and ultimately strengthen the local government.<sup>27</sup> It was mainly a political action but it did have a mixture of military, social, psychological, physical (clear and hold tactic), economical and political measures. The Strategic Hamlets had many problems, which is the main reason why the program ultimately failed. The program Agro-Hamlet started in 1959. This program was the pioneer in the strategic hamlets. It was originally unsuccessful but received more success when it was modified on a smaller scale in early 1961. The Strategic Hamlet’s lifeline was from 1961-1963.

A Strategic Hamlet was similar to a fortress around a village that was put up to keep the village safe, as well as, to monitor who comes in and who leaves the village. The objectives of the hamlets were simple. The objectives were to secure an area and get to know the locals. Once they knew the villagers in their hamlet they could then more easily spot a newcomer to the village.

The Agro-Hamlet, also known as Agrovilles, were comprised of groupings of 300-500 families. They were initially designed to give the peasants of South Vietnam the social benefits of city life while they were still in the jungle. The main objectives of the Agrovilles were to increase the physical security, protect the villagers from communist influence, and to increase

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<sup>27</sup> [http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/Strategic\\_Hamlet\\_Program](http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/Strategic_Hamlet_Program)

the well-being of their inhabitants. However, this program, like many to follow, was unsuccessful. They were unsuccessful because of the fact that the location of the hamlets were too far from the villagers' fields and the peasants were moved too far away from their ancestral homes and burial plots. Also, the hamlets were much too small to comfortably support the large number of people that dwelt in them.

The agrovilles were later modified in early 1961 to support around 100 families and were constructed in correspondence to the harvesting season of rubber trees to appease the peasants.<sup>28</sup> The strategic hamlets experienced many problems because the number of Viet Cong regular forces were also growing at a high rate and the hamlets couldn't be constructed fast enough. The question that President Diem of South Vietnam asked himself wasn't if South Vietnam could defeat the insurgents but if it could save themselves from them.<sup>29</sup> South Vietnam now needed the aid of Americans in countering the insurgencies.

The first operational effort in which the U.S. had a hand in was the Operation Sunshine program. This program was based in the Binh Duong Province on March 22, 1962. Five hamlets constructed for the relocated peasants were built around a rubber plantation. This program was significant in the sense that when the U.S. constructed these hamlets, there were only 120 males of the age of recruitment out of the 200 families. From this, the U.S. determined that the majority of the males that could wage war had already been recruited to the V.C. and we were too late.<sup>30</sup>

The Strategic Hamlet program was ultimately a failure because of over expansion and the establishment of hamlets in insecure areas. It also failed because we poorly defended the

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<sup>28</sup> Pentagon Papers, (*Volume 2, Chapter 2, "The Strategic Hamlet Program, 1961-1963*, Boston Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1971) 133

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 134

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 153

hamlets. Finally, President Diem's inability to reform to the needs of the peasants was also a contributing factor to the strategic hamlet program.<sup>31</sup> The strategic hamlet program set the stage for the new pacification tactic, close and hold.

Close and hold were war tactics used in Vietnam under the plan of pacification. It would have been very effective had it been executed correctly. The close and hold strategy was most effectively used by the Marines from 1965-1968. The main objective of close and hold was to clear all the Viet Cong out of a hamlet or village and remain there to help the local infrastructure and social reform until the village was stable. In order for the close and hold tactic to be effective, it had to be accepted by all parts of the military. The military has to remain in one spot and not destroy everything in order to win the support of the peasant villagers. The United States could have won the support of the peasant villagers by remaining in the village after the guerillas had been driven out. This is necessary to do because once the guerillas are out, a soldier gets the chance to learn the faces of the people in that village, and if a guerilla did come back, they would have been spotted much easier and faster.<sup>32</sup>

The counter-insurgency aspect of this tactic included the secondary goals of: political, social, and economical factors that needed to be assessed and met. The United States needed to utilize the source of the strength. This means that we needed to limit the insurgents' access to valuable resources such as food, water, clothing, and important points on the terrain. If close and hold was executed correctly, it would have been much easier to identify guerillas in the villages as well as to correctly plan attacks and ambushes on the enemy guerillas. Identifying guerillas

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 159

<sup>32</sup> Michael Maclear Michael Maclear, (*The Ten Thousand Day War: Vietnam, 1945-1975*. New York: St. Martin's, 1981) 164

would have been easier to do because our forces would have been in an area long enough to know the terrain and the locals in the area who would have been more willing to help.<sup>33</sup>

An instance where the close and hold tactic was executed correctly and resulted in success was with Captain Jim Cooper's unit. Cooper and his men remained in the hamlet after the guerillas had been chased out, and while they stayed in the village, they went on many night patrols. This enabled the locals to have a sense of continuous peace. From Cooper's platoon's actions, the villagers learned to trust them. Once the trust had been established, the locals in turn combined efforts with the soldiers and kept the guerillas out of the village.<sup>34</sup>

In conclusion, the close and hold tactic failed because the United States was fighting a conventional war with a guerilla enemy. This is important because the United States' soldiers were trained in conventional warfare, not this form of guerilla warfare. It failed in many cases because the soldiers felt it was taking too long and founded that they were ordered to continue with the search and destroy tactic instead of the close and hold. However, when this tactic was exercised correctly, it was a highly successful tactic resulting in fewer casualties and fewer supplies, reaching the Viet Cong. No other form of pacification would be executed to the extent as dramatically as search and destroy.

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<sup>33</sup>Robert J. McMahon, (*Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War: Documents and Essays*. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin, 2008) 225

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 226

## Search and Destroy

The United States ground presence in Vietnam became the most influential source for media reports which began when there were only 3,500 marines in March 1965. Once the United States policy makers committed to ground war, it became evident that Army forces would be essential. The United States policy makers believed there were no other options to suppress the Viet Cong forces from the North.<sup>35</sup> The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) was successfully pouring in soldiers, materials, and supplies into South Vietnam. The United States officials now for the first time believed that North Vietnam would be able to take control of the northern provinces of South Vietnam. Go-to President Johnson, after a lengthy discussion, committed fully to sending in more troops to Vietnam. Johnson's decision brought the numbers of troops from 75,000 to 125,000. This more than doubled the draft call at the time. As Robert McNamara put it, "The United States would now carry the "brunt" of the fighting..." This decision sealed the fate of countless numbers of young men.<sup>36</sup>

These young men would embark on a new war tactic called "search and destroy". During "search and destroy," the objective was for the United States forces to identify the location of the enemy then call in air support to destroy it. The United States policy makers relied heavily on their superior technology to devastate forests to eliminate the enemy. The United States ground forces would fly out of South Vietnam bases in helicopters to search the hamlets, villages, patrol the jungles and rice paddies to engage in combat. The idea of body counts, rather than territory secured, was the way the United States measured success. The idea behind body count and the mentality of the soldier was to shoot first ask questions later. The typical United States soldier

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<sup>35</sup> Sarah A. Larsen and Jennifer M. Miller, (*Wisconsin Vietnam War Stories: Our Veterans Remember*. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2010) 51

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 52

could not tell the difference between hostile forces and civilians, however, they would often times leave a path of destruction behind them.

The body count notions left the ideology that if the United States soldiers killed more Vietnamese soldiers then were being replaced, then the Viet Cong would soon dwindle into nothing and lose the will to fight. This would secure another war victory for the United States. However, there was a major problem behind body count. The numbers of Viet Cong soldiers killed were often times “fudged” to portray a larger number than actually killed. This led people in the United States to believe that we were in fact winning the war when we were actually losing.

The “search and destroy” tactic also created tensions between South Vietnamese locals and the United States. The United States soldiers and the ARVN never left men behind to secure a location once it was secured. As Daniel Hinkle stated,

“We would take the same ground over and over and over... We would fight in the same rice paddy four or five times. Our victory amounts to a body count. Then we go drink beer. We clean our weapons, we write letters home, and then next week we go to the same spot and do it all over again for a week or so.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 52

## **Daniel Hinkle**

For this section of my paper, I decided to use as little government documents as possible and focus on firsthand accounts from the soldiers' point of view. I am choosing to not use as many government documents in this section because often times the government documents are fairy tales fabricated to the public to keep their support with the war effort. I wanted to use firsthand accounts of ground soldiers just trying to survive their tours. These soldiers that I am going to be discussing are: Daniel Hinkle, Bruce (Army, Fourth Infantry Division), Will Williams, Crystal Springs, NC (Army, 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division), David Kies, Platteville (Army, 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade), and Jim Kurtz, Madison (Army, First Infantry Division). These men were ordinary boys that became soldiers and experienced the hell of war in Vietnam. These men's stories truly justify the absolute hell that the soldiers went through. The search and destroy tactic executed by these soldiers led to their tragedies, sins, nightmares, and stories.

Daniel Hinkle never hesitated about his responsibilities; he enlisted rather than being drafted. Hinkle was raised with high values which would soon be diminished by horrors of war. Hinkle originally enlisted to be a chaplain's assistant, but ended up going to Infantry Officer Candidates School. Once he graduated from there, he went to Fort Benning for the duration of 1965 and 1966.

Once Hinkle completed basic training as an officer, he was assigned to Fourth Infantry Division. The very next day he was on a chopper and assigned to a battalion and then assigned to a company. He was literally in Vietnam for forty-eight hours and was a platoon leader with a combat mission. He recalls feeling horrified but the training kicked in quickly and thirty days later he was crawling through tunnels in Cu Chi with a .45 and he didn't care. "People got killed. People got blown up." The idea of victory came from the notion of body count.

Hinkle stated that the only source of victory or defeat was measured with a body count. If there weren't bodies to be counted after a gun fight, you failed. The whole mission became a failure. From this the practice of body mutilation became apparent. Hinkle said that he heard stories about his troops cutting off the ears of the Viet Cong. The practice first started when their colonels and generals didn't believe their numbers, so the troops brought them proof. The idea was insane; however, it became a normal practice.<sup>38</sup> Another soldier explains how he participated in body mutilation. Private Larry Miller recalls that the North Vietnamese started the body mutilation practice, so his justification was that if they were going to do it to them, they were going to do it right back. Miller explains one time he was out of the bush in a marine camp when another soldier thought, "What the hell is wrong with these guys?" Miller and some of the people in his platoon were wearing jawbones for necklaces, and black hair that they had cut off the Vietnamese women. One guy in his platoon, named Moose, the radio operator, had a shin bone for a stick.

One story of body mutilation that really struck me was the story about the dead Vietnamese that Miller and Moose used for a breakfast table. Miller recalls how strange it got.

...I remember carrying a dead body back to this command post area, a piece of bamboo [around] his feet. It was eight o'clock [in the morning]. We set him down and I said, "Moose, he's got a gold tooth." Moose said, "Ok, we'll get it." We were going to have breakfast. I had ham and eggs. We used this dead NVA for a table. We're eating breakfast off this dead guy. He said, "Larry, that captain is watching us over there. I can't get this gold tooth now." It dawned on me that this captain was pretty new. I said, "Moose, he can't see this gold tooth." So we finished our breakfast, got the gold tooth, and everybody was happy.<sup>39</sup>

One thing that surprised Hinkle was how loud the United States soldiers were. He states that he was in a mechanized battalion so they had tanks and armored personnel carriers and self-propelled artillery. The noise was so loud that you could hear it for miles. The unit was

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 70

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 93

powerful enough to knock over huge trees that might come in their path. On the other side of the battle lines were the light infantry of North Vietnam. The North Vietnamese soldiers were experts at camouflage, light in mobility, professional ambushers, and had something real to fight for. The average North Vietnamese soldier carried one gun, two rounds of ammunition and a tube of rice.<sup>40</sup> As described above, the United States soldiers were heavily bogged down in weight. This abundance of weight made it almost impossible to gain the higher ground in the mountainous landscape of Vietnam.

The idea of what is important in life becomes skewed when a soldier was in Vietnam. Hinkle talks about how the most important thing to him was his watch that his mom helped him pick out before departing for Vietnam. It was the most important thing to him because it was something not from Vietnam. The watch served as a channel that connected him with his family back home. Anything that could help a soldier get home alive became the most important thing to them. However, getting home in one piece was not always the case.

Hinkle served in Vietnam for the longest nine months of his life before he got blown up in June or July. He spent four and half months in a hospital in Japan. What landed him there was a land mine that he stepped on. The land mine was recovered from World War II and rigged as a booby trap from the Viet Cong. After he healed in Japan he was sent home. However, coming home and being a Vietnam Vet was not an ideal homecoming. He came home to an unwelcoming home front. Hinkle states, "I don't know why we have such trouble differentiating the war from the warrior. You can hate the war but why hate the warrior? He's doing what's asked of him or her...I hate the war, but I don't hate the warriors. I think were great at war.

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<sup>40</sup> George Herring, (*The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry and the Ia Drang Valley, 18 October-24 November 1965*) 302

We'll kick the hell out of anybody, but we suck at peace. We're not good at it. Our soldiers are the ones that suffer because of that.<sup>41</sup>

War changes people whether we like it or not. Hinkle states that's he will never get to where he was before. Not even close. Going to war changes boys to men in a short time, but also takes a lot away. Hinkle reluctantly confesses, "...one of the things I lost was God. I've tried to pick it back up, but it doesn't work anymore. [Mankind] can't go too long without killing somebody, or without being superior some way or another to someone else..."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Sarah A. Larsen and Jennifer M. Miller, (*Wisconsin Vietnam War Stories: Our Veterans Remember*. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2010) 75

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 54

## **Will Williams**

Will joined the military immediately after graduating from high school in 1962. He departed for Vietnam on January 3, 1966. When he joined the military, he was looking for a way to get out of Mississippi. The military was a chance for him to get his attitude straight and also enable him to send money back to his mother.

Will left the United States by ship and for eighteen days he sat on the ship with nothing to think about but uncertainty. Once his eighteen days were up, he docked at Vung Tau. Once Williams docked, they convoyed to Cu Chi. This is where Williams said the rubber hit the road. They set up base inside a unit's perimeter at Bien Hoa. They unintentionally built their base directly over the North Vietnamese tunnels. The tunnels were built during World War II as a way for people to hide and also to smuggle guns, ammunition, and food to soldiers. In the midst of the confusion Williams' platoon started taking casualties immediately. Williams stated in his recollection of the tunnels,

...I liked going in them myself, just to see how they were built, how they were constructed with the different levels, the different rooms. It was amazing. It aroused my curiosity. It wasn't like going into a cave where you're on one level. It was winding. They knew we had grenades. They were built in a way where when you'd first go in, you would go around the corner or down and up again. It kind of protected them from explosives and from bombs. They had kitchens there where they cooked and hospitals. You name it, it was there. They lived as they fought, right beneath us. That was our staging area. I never heard them talking or anything at night. We never detected the smoke when they would be cooking.<sup>43</sup>

The soldiers would see the enemy in the rice paddies one moment and the next moment they were gone. These tunnels were not just on dimensional burrow from point A to point B. As Private Will Williams recollects, that for a while they didn't know what was going on. The Viet

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<sup>43</sup> Sarah A. Larsen and Jennifer M. Miller, (*Wisconsin Vietnam War Stories: Our Veterans Remember*. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2010) 65

Cong were coming out of the tunnels inside their perimeter and sniped people. Then they would vanish.<sup>44</sup>

The “search and destroy” tactic frustrated the majority of the soldiers. Williams recalls that most of the fighting they did was at night time after “humping” (or marching all day). They would set up a temporary perimeter for the night. This is when they typically got hit by hostile forces. They never really got hit during the day when they were searching and destroying the villages. One place he recalls getting hit so many times was right outside a base camp, at Hobo Woods, Williams states,

“...It was an area that was crazy. I couldn’t understand why we kept going in there. We never kept security; we would go [one] week, lose a lot of people, and a week or two later we would go right back and the same thing would happen. I didn’t see where we were making any progress...”<sup>45</sup> The idea of death became an aspect of everyday life for the soldiers.

Death became part normal life for soldier Williams. With all the death going on all around him, making and keeping friends became almost an impossible dream. Williams described watching some die, “I don’t know how you can make one understand it, what it means to lose someone. If it’s not you getting hit, it’s someone you’ve known. To see them die. There’s no way you can explain where they are...But in the event there’s not grieving. You don’t have time for it. Your survival doesn’t allow you to do it. You move by instincts when one gets hit like that, especially if they die. I don’t think anybody can explain what it really, really feels like. At the time I felt like it’s no feeling, like you’re just hollow for a moment...It was really painful to be in a close proximity to a friend of yours who is with you no more. And you’re seeing him there when in reality he’s not...”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 57

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 67

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 70

After spending eight months in Vietnam, Williams' luck with avoiding explosions finally caught up with him. He was told that he took grenade fragments to the head, but never really remembered it. He too was sent to a MASH hospital where he recovered. By the time he recovered, his tour was over and was sent home.

## David Kies

Before the military, David Kies was in college but got kicked out because of his liberal attitudes towards society. After getting kicked out, he worked with American Airlines at Chicago O'Hare before he got his draft notice one year later. Once he received his draft notice, he knew exactly where he was going to be heading. He departed for Fort Knox, Kentucky and then to Fort Polk, Louisiana. Many of the soldiers went to basic training in Louisiana, Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina because similar to Vietnam; it had a similar humid climate. From there he went to jump school in Fort Benning.<sup>47</sup>

After jump school, Kies was on the first wave of replacements in Vietnam. On his first day in the field, his fellow troops kept dragging body after body after body from the jungle. Meanwhile a helicopter was shot down one hundred yards away. Kies recalls that his emotions filled his body all day every day. He had a constant thought that every day was going to be his last. His unit lost 1,400 guys. Kies stated,

“It was pretty tough; you didn't get attached to anyone. It took a toll on everyone there. You can't keep that up. You'd go out on a listening patrol or an observation post...you're on these bennies...You broke the squelch on the radio ever fifteen minutes so we knew you were still alive...they would deny they ever gave those to us, the speed.<sup>48</sup>

After one whole day and night of marching, Private Kies had just sat down to finally rest when an explosion went off. The explosion flipped him up in the air. He tried to get up only to notice that one of his legs was gone, and the other was just hanging there. Then a medic came over and took care of him until fighting commenced. He was then lifted by a stretcher made out of a poncho and a couple of sticks to a helicopter and air lifted to a MASH hospital away from

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 56

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 58

the field.<sup>49</sup> After Kies's recovered as much as he could in the MASH hospital, he was sent home, however losing a leg wasn't the only thing that would be wrong with him.

Kies, like many other soldiers suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as well and an unwelcoming America. Kies admitted that his emotions from his experiences in Vietnam fifty years ago still take hold him. Kies says, "Talk about emotions getting me. Once in a while, if I'm driving down the road and go by a Chinese restaurant and smell the spices they use, it sends me right off. It's just like, "Oh God." It's the smells more than anything else that brings the senses back."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 64

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 76

## **Jim Kurtz**

Jim Kurtz grew up in the 1950's in Madison, Wisconsin. At that time, the Cold War ideology was a constant fear. People were always in constant fear that the Soviet Union was going to come across the polar ice caps to bomb the United States. Jim graduated from high school in 1958 and came to a cross road. He had the choice to either go straight to military or go to college. However, going to college did not exempt you from the draft but merely postponed it. Jim decided to go college but had mandatory ROTC for two years. During ROTC, he was declared to prolong his schooling to avoid going straight to the military. So, Jim decided to attend law school from 1962 to 1965. The day he graduated from law school in April, he received letter ordering him to go to Fort Benning, Georgia, in September. Almost exactly one year after he graduated from law school, he received his letter that he would be departing for Vietnam.<sup>51</sup>

Kurtz flew into Tan Son Nhat, which at the time was the main airport in Saigon. He recalls that they came in at a very steep level because the Viet Cong controlled the land on the approach. Walking off the plane was like walking into a furnace. It was three o'clock in the morning and ninety degrees or so. Even though Williams was a lawyer, he did his duty as a ground soldier. If he hadn't gone straight to the field he would have been ordered to do paper work behind a desk in Vietnam for eight years.

In Williams' unit there was supposed to be forty-four people, however, his unit was down to twenty-three. Throughout William's tour, his platoon never had more than thirty people. The political idea behind this was to replace the unit's men at different times so that everyone in the unit wouldn't be replaced at the same time. Many of the soldiers state that the first two weeks and the last two weeks were the most dangerous for a person because their head was not on the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 57

mission or in the field.<sup>52</sup> However, dying wasn't the issue in Vietnam. The worst thing that could happen was getting caught by the enemy.

Getting caught by the enemy was the worst case scenario. As the Vietnamese learned from their experience with the French, the Vietnamese became experts in forms of torture. The soldiers often times were given a pill. If the pill was swallowed whole, it would pass through the indigestive system without causing any harm. However, if the pill was chewed, it would release toxins into the back of the throat and the person would be dead in twenty seconds.<sup>53</sup>

When Jim Kurtz first arrived in Vietnam he was a private in a platoon for three months before he was promoted to captain. Being a captain means flying around a lot; it also means being alone a lot. Being alone can do terrible things to the mind. Many times he was alone and the Viet Cong would be shooting at him. The fear of being caught was constantly on his mind. Before Kurtz departed for Vietnam his uncle told him, "The one thing you do, Jim, is you don't get captured. You just don't get captured." Kurtz found that he was much more concerned with getting captured than dying. If you get killed, there's no problem. If you get captured there are a lot of problems.<sup>54</sup>

The idea of body count was completely a skewed idea for justifying a victory among the men. The soldiers were expected to know exactly how many people they killed or wounded in the jungle when the brush was so thick that to move around they often times needed a machete to clear the path. On top of that, after a firefight the dead or wounded Viet Cong would be gone. This happened because their fellow soldiers would drag them into the secret tunnels that covered Vietnam. So, the American soldiers would have to guess how many people they thought they

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 61

<sup>53</sup> Dean Hughes, (*Search and Destroy*. New York: Simon Pulse, 2008) 42

<sup>54</sup> Sarah A. Larsen and Jennifer M. Miller, (*Wisconsin Vietnam War Stories: Our Veterans Remember*. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2010) 68

killed or wounded. When they reported their numbers to superiors and the numbers weren't high enough, they would have to fudge their numbers making them higher. This fudging of their numbers began with the soldiers and moved its way up the totem pole to the officials in Washington. The fudged numbers were reported to the American public to show that we were making progress in Vietnam, when in reality we were not. Kurtz explains what happened to him more often than not,

...The emphasis was if you ever got into a firefight, they'd want to know body count and they'd want to know it right now. If you didn't, they'd get really irritated. We'd get chewed out for not moving fast enough and not killing enough...At the end of my tour, I was a G-1 section and one of my jobs was dealing with body count...My job involved a big chart on the wall with each battalion listing how many people we'd killed or wounded. This general walks in and he says, "Captain, I don't like these numbers." And I said, "Sir I agree with you" We'd had a bad day that day. The First Division had it bad, took some bad casualties. He said, "I don't think you understand, I don't like these numbers." What he was suggesting was that the body count wasn't high enough...<sup>55</sup>

Kurtz was one of the lucky Vietnam soldiers that were able to go home fully intact, however, the mental aspect of war and returning home is another story. Before he left to come back to the states, his company threw a huge party for him, but it wasn't until he was on the plane home when the pilot said, "We are now leaving Vietnam airspace" that the real celebration took place. He was greeted by his family at the airport. Of course, Kurtz was happy to see them but he also suffered severely from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Kurtz says,

...You've had a job somewhere and you came back. I had been through the most intense experience of my life and there was no way to rally decompress from that. You're expected to be normal. You've had this experience and you're supposed to be exactly the way you were three years before it ever happened...They never told us that is was an issue. I never even thought about mental issues and stuff like that.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 71

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 74

When Kurtz arrived at home, he too was not appreciated for his services in Vietnam. On many occasions he came across protestors saying that the Vietnam soldiers were mass murders. Kurtz admits at the time the protestors didn't know that he was a veteran and were talking about him. The only thing that Kurtz felt he could do was to pretend he was not a veteran and not to participate in anything relating to the War. He admits trying to blank out the entire experience. He still to this day refuses to go to parades and parties that are now offered to the veterans.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 75

## Conclusion

Throughout the United State' history, they have succeeded on many occasions; however, the United States in has also been unsuccessful. The Vietnam War was a case in which we were unsuccessful. All the roots of the Vietnam War trace back to the spread of communism. Even though Vietnam was not important economically with its main industries in rice and rubber, it was an important piece in justifying America's creditability in preventing the "domino" theory.<sup>58</sup> In the United States attempt to prevent the stop of communism they entered Vietnam. Originally they did not deploy enough troops to finish the job early. While in Vietnam the United States did not execute the war tactics of pacification correctly, nor did they have a clear missions. Instead of executing pacification the soldiers thought they could do more good by executing the war tactic search and destroy.

America ultimately feared the spread of communism that was taking place in South East Asia. China, North Korea, and North Vietnam were already communist or in the process of becoming communist. The North Vietnamese broke the 1954 Geneva Accords (article 16) when they infiltrated South Vietnam and threatened their democratic nation.<sup>59</sup> The United States couldn't afford for South Vietnam to become communist because that would challenge thier creditability as a world super power in their position against communism. The United States couldn't allow for the "domino" theory to progress any farther than it already had with the Koreans and the Chinese. While the United States was in Vietnam, they did not execute their war tactics as we should. The United States fought a light, mobile guerilla enemy with a heavy, mechanical, and technological conventional war tactics.

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<sup>58</sup> Gary R. Hess, (*Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Pub., 2009) 28

<sup>59</sup> <https://uwec.courses.wisconsin.edu/d21/orgTools/ouHome/ouHome.asp?ou=1066010>

By the time the war ended, six million soldiers had fought and 150 billion dollars had been spent. The main problem the United States had was they did not have a clear cut mission outline. Instead the United State's soldiers lost moral while they were searching and destroying in the jungle. This ultimately led to frustration between the men and office holders in Washington. At the beginning of the war, the men were eager to fight the communist, but once we found out it was an unconventional war, our men felt useless while executing pacification. While in Vietnam, many of the men recalled they felt useless remaining immobile in the villages as opposed to searching and destroying the enemy in the jungle.<sup>60</sup>

Since the American Revolution, the American army had always fought a conventional war. This can be seen in our victories in WW1 and WW2. However, in Vietnam we fought a much lighter, quick army whose strategy was hit and run. The American army was heavily armored with trucks, tanks, helicopters, and heavily armed personnel. On the other side, we were fighting extremely light infantries of the North Vietnamese who would ambush then retreat to their safe fox holes in the ground.<sup>61</sup> We simply did not modify our methods of war to effectively counter the insurgencies of the North Vietnamese. To win this war, we would have had to execute pacification correctly. This would have to be done by winning the hearts of the local South Vietnamese. In cases that we did execute pacification correctly, the guerillas were not able to infiltrate the village and that area was considered a victory.

If the Gulf of Tonkin had never occurred, the Vietnam War still would have taken place under different circumstances. That is because the roots of Vietnam go much deeper then the Geneva Accords and attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin. The roots stretch down to the Cold War ideology and our creditability. We felt we needed to stop the spread of communism more than

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<sup>60</sup> Andrew Krepinevich, (*The Army in Vietnam-Brushfi3*) 5

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

anything. That need was the source of the Korean War. It also fueled us in Vietnam. So I believe it is safe to say that had the Gulf of Tonkin never happened, the politicians in Washington would have come up with other justifications to deploy troops to Vietnam.

When it all comes down to it, it was unfortunate for us that we were in the position where we had to go to war with North Vietnam. I believe the United States was put in a lose-lose situation where we felt we had to go to Vietnam to justify our own ideologies. I know it is easy for us to say now but while we were there we could have exercised pacification more strategically. But the past will always be the past and we have learned from our failures and have pushed forward. As Calvin Coolidge once said, "Patriotism is easy to understand in America; it means looking out for yourself by looking out for your country."<sup>62</sup> I believe that the Vietnam soldier exercised this quote to the full extent. They did more than what could ever be expected from anyone. Even though the war was lost, the United States turned its back on the young men providing the blanket of freedom that we raise and fall under every day. It is the efforts of our young men lying down their lives that we are able to have what we have. It is because of these men that we can watch a baseball game on a warm summer night, or enjoy the victory from our favorite football team. When it all comes down to it, the United States winning the wars that we won ensured this, however, war is hell.

War is glorified by the military directed at young boys by promising that their names will become immortal. However, when it all comes down to it, war is hell. War takes young boys and puts them in position of kill or be killed. It ruins the psychology of the mind. It forces soldiers to make rational or unrational decisions in a split second that haunt their memories for the rest of their lives. I guess the best way to sum up the Vietnam War is a quote from Vietnam

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<sup>62</sup> [http://thinkexist.com/quotation/patriotism\\_is\\_easy\\_to\\_understand\\_in\\_america-it/162351.html](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/patriotism_is_easy_to_understand_in_america-it/162351.html)

soldier Daniel Pierce, “It was just another war started by old men and fought by young boys that benefited a few but destroyed many. All you can do about it is try to survive in this world.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Sarah A. Larsen and Jennifer M. Miller, (*Wisconsin Vietnam War Stories: Our Veterans Remember*. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2010) 100

## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Branfman, Fred. *Voices from the Plain of Jars; Life under an Air War*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

This source primarily talks about what kind of a people the South Vietnamese were. Then it goes into great detail on the place called the Plain of Jars. The Plain of Jars is a huge field that has ancient giant pieces of pottery with no idea of their origin. I read this source to get a better understanding of how the Vietnamese people are. This source also talks about how the Vietnamese were once exiled from China and removed from their native lands. The source also talks about the impact the war had on their sacred area. This piece mostly talks about the native's experience associated with the plain. It opens up with describing the people's origin, work ethic, diet, etc. It will correspond with many of my other sources related to the war tactic called pacification. Source located in McIntire Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Burchett, Wilfred G. *Vietnam North*,. New York: International, 1966.

This source's goal is to provide distinction between the ground troops missions and the air force missions. It is written in the first person of a ground soldier on his experiences in the Vietnam War. This source explains why our strategies and tactics proved ineffective in Vietnam. The main purpose of this source primarily addresses the North Vietnam soldier. The North Vietnam soldier carried one gun, shorts, cut off t-shirt, one additional round of ammunition, and a small two foot long PVC pipe filled with rice. This soldier was quick on his feet and weighed around 125 pounds and stood just over 5 feet tall. This quick little guy could move easily through the jungle and into tight holes in the ground. This "Charlie" as they called him was familiar with the hot humid jungle climate, terrain, and could fit in with the local cultures. On the other hand, the American soldier carried a seventy pound pack on his back, a twelve pound gun, 8 additional rounds, food for a week of walking, full outfit, boots, was on average 5 feet 10 inches and weighed roughly 170 pounds. The American soldier was not used to the climate, terrain, or culture. I have used this source in my paper to compare and contrast the Wisconsin's soldier's tour experiences, perspectives, and emotions to Wilfred Burchett. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Hannah, Norman B. *The Key to Failure: Laos and the Vietnam War*. Lanham, MD: Madison, 1987.

This source strictly talks about the reasons behind our failures in Vietnam. It talks about how and why the soldiers ineffectively executed their orders on pacification in Vietnam. This source also breaks down the key failure in Vietnam and that is the fall of Laos. Like the source above this source describes the different failures in the battle strategies. However, this source's main concern is with the fall of South Vietnam's capital Laos. Which is later renamed Ho Chi Minh City. In the fall of Laos the American soldiers

were basically outnumbered, and out maneuvered. This source brings the reader back to the front lines of Laos. It gives the geography and battle plan. Then it talks about what we could have done differently to possibly win that deceive battle. It will go great in my paper because it is literates my point exactly as to our unsuccessful tours in Vietnam. I read this source in my 384 Major Problems in Vietnam class for a research paper. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Hosmer, Stephen T., Konrad Kellen, and Brian Michael. Jenkins. *The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders*. New York: Crane, Russak, 1980

This source is merely a report of extensive oral and written statements by twenty-seven former high ranking South Vietnamese military officers and civilians on their perceptions of the causes of the collapse of South Vietnam in the spring of 1975. This source explains why the local military forces and civilians stopped fighting and admitted defeat. It also illustrates how the Americans used the local South Vietnam soldiers in battle. To briefly describe this, the Americans would use the South Vietnamese as decoys to locate the enemy. After initial fire had taken place, the American troops would motor the location of the enemy. The consequences from this were many South Vietnamese soldiers were sacrificed to locate the enemy and the Vietnamese soldiers then hated fighting with the Americans. I have read through this source and it corresponds well with my paper to show how our war tactics proved in effective in Vietnam. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Pentagon Papers, *Volume 2, Chapter 2, "The Strategic Hamlet Program, 1961-1963, Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.*

This source talks about political talks that were taken place in the Pentagon before and during the Vietnam War. I used this source to describe the war tactics and how they were used.

Scott, Peter Dale. *The War Conspiracy; the Secret Road to the Second Indochina War*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972.

Short, Anthony. *The Origins of the Vietnam War*. London: Longman, 1989.

This source is strictly on the origins of the Vietnam War. It goes into great detail of the Ho Chi Minh and the French: National Communism. Its main focus is on the pre-war era and the incidences to what led to war. It also talks about the Geneva Accords that were signed then broken which provoked the first attacks. It describes the political importance of Vietnam. The source goes into great detail on the roots of the Vietnam War which some believe started in the 1500's, late 1800's, 1945, 1954, or 1961. I have used this book to address polices made by officials before the war that were designed to protect the peace. I have used this source as the foundation of my introduction to my paper. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Summers, Harry G. *Vietnam War Almanac*. New York, NY: Facts on File, 1985

This source explains different types of pacification. It goes into detail the objectives behind Operation Phoenix. This source supports my argument affiliated with Operation Phoenix.

## Secondary Sources

Anderson, David L. *The Vietnam War*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

This source briefly explains the origins of Vietnam, French colonialism, how Ho Chi Minh came to power, American war strategy, major battles, loss of support back home, and the lessons and legacies learned from Vietnam. This source also examines specific battles. Some of the battles include Ia Dang, Laos, and Plain of Jars. I have used this source in my paper to help set the scene for the war. I have also used this to back up my other sources when I talk about major battles and war tactics. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Andradé, Dale. *Ashes to Ashes: the Phoenix Program and the Vietnam War*. Lexington, MA: Lexington, 1990.

This source describes various operations of pacification used to win the hearts and minds of the native people in South Vietnam. Among these operations were close and hold, search and destroy, strategic hamlet and many others. This source is based off of a mission called the phoenix program. The phoenix program was ultimately a trial and error philosophy. In this mission a small number of troops went into villages and tried to win the hearts and minds of the people. They tried a number of different ways to this. The most effective were the close and hold. In this they would close down a village so no outsiders could infiltrate their way in. By doing this they would protect the friendly locals and win their loyalty. In the strategic hamlet mission, the soldiers would move a village into a more secure location. The most widely used technique was called search and destroy. In this form of pacification, the soldiers would wonder through the woods and attempt to engage and destroy the enemy. I have used this source to compare what Wisconsin soldiers did in Vietnam to what actually should have been happening according to what the tactic was on paper. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Bradley, Mark, and Marilyn Blatt. Young. *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

This source starts off with briefly explaining the early decisions to the United States and French War. Then briefly explains reasons for the Vietnam War, followed by the escalation from the people to arming themselves. I have read through this source and thought I would credit it in my bibliography. The source explains the many of the battle strategies in the Vietnam War. These strategies include rolling thunder, linebacker I and linebacker II. These operations consisted of massive amounts of bombs dropped from B12 bombers to pepper South Vietnam. This source provides insight and groundwork to

the era leading to the first conflict. I have read more in depth with this source for this assignment. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Elliott, Duong Van Mai. *RAND in Southeast Asia: a History of the Vietnam War Era*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010.

This piece is primarily a history of the Vietnam Era. It give brief overviews on many battles, the people of Vietnam, war tactics, reasons behind deployment, and reasons for our failure in Vietnam. This source also talks about the character of the South Vietnam people. The book describes them as semi nomadic people who had to settle in the mountainous region of the South. Originally the people of Vietnam came from China, to escape prosecution they left and settled where they are now. These people are hard working with few advances in technology. Because of their isolation in the mountains they could not use tractors to cultivate their rice or acquire the newer forms of technology. This source will work great in my piece because it supports all the arguments that I will try to get across while talking about our failures in Vietnam. I read this source in my 384 Major Problems in Vietnam class for a research paper. I have read more in depth with this source for this assignment. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Gilbert, Marc Jason. *Why the North Won the Vietnam War*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

This source strictly explains the reasons why the North defeated the South and America in the Vietnam War. This source describes pretty much why exactly the north won the war. It talks about a light Vietnamese infantry as opposed to a heavy American infantry. Also, describes why the battle operations and strategies did not work. This source does this by describing how we did not win the hearts and minds of the local people in South Vietnam. It will make for a great conclusion to Roger Anderson's firsthand accounts in Vietnam. It will help explain the ultimate unsuccessful mission that America contributed in. I have read more in depth with this source for this assignment. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Hess, Gary R. *Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2009.

This source talks about failures behind the lost war in Vietnam. It talks about unexecuted orders. It also explains diplomatic failures in Washington, loss of support at the home front, and key battles that were lost. This source also goes into detail on why the people of America lost support in the troops. The primary reason was because the war had been going on so long and felt nothing was being accomplished. The source also talks about the primary reasons behind the lost support. That reason was the popular media. These medias include: newscasters, images, papers as well as other sources. It will go great in my paper because it is literates my point exactly as to our unsuccessful tours in Vietnam. I have used this source in my paper to demonstrate the loss of support in America that the soldiers experienced once they came back from Vietnam. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Hughes, Dean. *Search and Destroy*. New York: Simon Pulse, 2008.

This source talks about first hand experiences with secret covert operations that were taken place in the middle of the night in Vietnam. The majority of it refers back and forth between how the soldiers were interpreting and executing orders from Washington and the particular individuals in Washington. I have used this source in my paper when I talked about the pill that would kill the soldier in case they were caught. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Larsen, Sarah A., and Jennifer M. Miller. *Wisconsin Vietnam War Stories: Our Veterans Remember*. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2010.

This source is a compilation of war stories told by Wisconsin Veterans of the Vietnam War. The stories entail emotions, geography, feelings, battles, etc. This source compiles stories from all over Vietnam. It has firsthand accounts written as a primary source. This source makes the Vietnam War more real because men from the region describe this horrific war. I have used this source in my paper to compare the soldier's perspectives, emotions, tragedies, losses, and feelings to illustrate how much hell war is. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Maclear, Michael. *The Ten Thousand Day War: Vietnam, 1945-1975*. New York: St. Martin's, 1981.

This source gives a brief overview of the ten thousand day war in Vietnam. It talks about initial reasons for America deploying troops to Vietnam. The justification behind deploying troops to Vietnam was the Gulf of Tonkin incident but was primarily the domino effect. Even though Vietnam wasn't important economically, it was important politically. All across Southeast Asia countries were becoming communist. America a super power at the time and in the midst of a Cold War with the Soviet Union needed to prove its legitimacy as a super power by stopping the spread of communism. The domino theory is that if one country falls to communism the rest will soon follow. America was looking for any reason to enter the area of South Vietnam. The reason became evident on the Gulf of Tonkin incident in which allegedly two American troops were attacked in the water by North Vietnam. When this allegedly happened, it gave president LBJ a reason to initially deploy the first round of troops to South Vietnam. It illustrates where the troops went and why, battle plans, and the strategy behind America's fronts. I used this in my paper to support the Wisconsin soldiers' narratives as merely listening to orders and trying to survive and return home from Vietnam. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

McMahon, Robert J. *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War: Documents and Essays*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.

Like the name of this book, it talks about the major problems in the Vietnam War. It is literally the bread and butter for my paper. It talks about the reasons for the French to

first send their troops to Vietnam. Then it talks about our involvement. Why we initially deployed troops, why our heavily armored troops lost to the light infantry of the Vietnamese, loss of pacification, loss of moral, changing of diplomatic leaders, and the end of the war. This source is an extensive collection of documents and accounts that literally talks about every way on why we lost the war in Vietnam. They include failures in pacification, failures in strategy during battles, way we fought (we fought a conventional heavy war, they fought an unconventional light guerrilla war), key battles lost, as well as lost at the home front. I used this source to back up basically every point I make. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Quincy, Keith. *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat: the Hmong and America's Secret War in Laos*. Spokane, WA: Eastern Washington University Press, 2000.

This source talks about the Laotian Secret War that America was involved in after the Vietnam War. This source talks about major diplomatic leaders behind the conspiracy. It also illustrates the reasons for our involvement in Laos after Vietnam even though it had no support back in America. The source describes the origins of the Secret War. The Secret War in Laos was primarily caused by the loss of the Vietnam War. Shortly after the war, already communist Laos was falling more and more into communism. America did not have the support from America to make the war public. However, secretly had bases, ground forces and financial support from America's government. As America we eventually abandoned the mountainous people leaving them to be on a continual run for their lives to this very day. These mountainous people supported our cause and did everything they had in their power to support the United States. These people were our brothers in arms and were left in the mountains. I was not able to use this source in my paper because it became irrelevant. However, I do pay tribute to it in this bibliography. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Young, Marilyn B. *The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991.

This book talks about explanations, justifications, and motives to why we decided to become a presence in Vietnam. It talks about official documents, war tactics, and major government players. This book agrees with all the sources above. It does not offer anything different or new to the Vietnam War. I have used this book as part of the introduction to set a stage for Wisconsin soldiers' firsthand accounts about their tours. . This source will provided me with governmental reasons to why were in Vietnam in the first place. Source located in McIntyre Library Eau Claire, Wisconsin.