



Fall 2010 ► HST 195 F10 (Escobar META 21581 24392) ► Forums ► Forum 2 Past Week's Discussions ► Ground troops and bombing

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Display replies in nested form
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Ground troops and bombing
by Joe Escobar - Monday, 1 November 2010, 10:30 AM

Discuss the situation which led the United States to send ground troops to South Vietnam. Also discuss the theory behind the American decision to make continual bombing runs over North Vietnam after February 1965. In each case, what did American leaders hope to accomplish? In particular, what impact did each of these actions have on the conflict?

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Re: Ground troops and bombing
 Monday, 1 November 2010, 09:35 PM

According to the third DVD episode "LBJ Goes to War," we first sent ground troops because we felt the South Vietnamese couldn't protect the vital air fields for the jet planes. So when soldiers got there that was their first priority, the episode goes on to say that within a few days they actively sought out Viet Cong. America decided to do continual bombing runs, because the Viet Cong did three attacks in three months: the airbase, the Brinks Hotel, and the attack on a village. The goal of Rolling Thunder was that while it wouldn't win the war, it could slow down supply lines. However with no major industrial zones, there were no real targets to bomb. To make matters worse the Viet Cong could continue their war effort with only a fraction of supplies coming in. The effect of Rolling Thunder was that it gave the North Vietnamese something to rally behind. It united them. The USA made it clear that we were their enemy.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing
 Tuesday, 2 November 2010, 11:00 AM

Johnson **held back** military action against the north after the bombing of the Brinks Hotel. Johnson, at the time, was withholding action against the north because of his campaign promises of "no wider war" and the instability of the southern government. He was trying not to provoke further NLF attacks in the south with retaliatory air strikes after the Brinks Hotel incident because of the weak southern military and government. Herring writes, "He (Johnson) refused even to retaliate when, on Christmas eve, the NLF bombed a U.S. officers' quarters at the Brinks Hotel in Saigon..." (151). Ultimately, however, the same reason Johnson withheld military action against the north, the weak and unstable southern government, became the justification for starting the sustained bombing campaigns against the north. It wasn't until late January, early February, that Johnson looked for an NLF attack that would serve as a pretext for implementing plans that **already** existed for bombing the north. He found that pretext when the NLF attacked the barracks in Pleiku and the nearby helicopter base. He implemented Flaming Dart which led to Rolling Thunder and this marked the beginning of sustained bombing of the north. Johnson was waiting for something like those attacks to happen so he could implement preexisting bombing plans. Herring explains, "it is abundantly clear, however, that Pleiku was the pretext for rather than the cause of the February decision"(154). So, according to Herring, those attacks were sold as the reason to escalate bombing when in fact, "it was... simply a matter of finding the right opportunity to justify measures to which the administration was already committed" (154).

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 12:02 PM

[REDACTED] I like and agree with you where you point out in your last sentence that it was simply a matter of finding the right opportunity to justify measures to which the administration was already committed. It sounds to me that our government was biting at the bit trying to find a way to start the air raids.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 08:21 PM

[REDACTED]

you are absolutely right, Johnson was looking for the right opportunity to engage with the enemy and Pleiku was just the excuse he needed to make everyone believe it was the right thing to do.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 09:20 AM

When ground troops were originally sent into Vietnam, they were sent under the guise of educating the South Vietnamese troops on warfare, with the orders that if attacked they could defend themselves, but were not to engage first. The continual bombing was decided upon to try to disrupt supply lines of the North Vietnamese, thinking that if the enemy couldn't get weapons and food they would be unable to continue to fight. The bombings only served to strengthen their resolve. If a bridge was blown up, they either quickly repaired it or found another route. The bombings destroyed many people and properties, but the North continued to rally and fight.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 09:06 PM

Yes, the idea of sending our special forces to South Vietnam was to train the South Vietnamese troops to defend themselves against attack, not engaging attacks but this appears to be a white-washed version of what really went down. The Southern Vietnamese government had a secret police, under Diem's control, this task force terrorized and tortured Diem's own people in addition to seeking out VC. This not only created a backlash of non-support from the South Vietnamese people which was eventually the final downfall of Diem, it also created additional guerilla attacks from the North, causing the U.S. troops who were there to 'train' to actually face fire.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 09:46 PM

I think there might be some confusion here. "Ground troops" didn't arrive in Vietnam until 1965 after the continuous bombing campaign against North Vietnam began. American military personnel in Vietnam, prior to 1965, whether they were involved in combat or not, were the Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG). And later under Project "Beef Up" it became Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). These forces were **not** considered ground combat troops, even though they were involved in combat fighting alongside ARVN forces. The American government went to great lengths to make this distinction.

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correcting a factual error

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 09:23 AM

From what I gather from the herring book the section named rolling thunder. Is that the government in south Vietnam was failing which made them weak towards attack from the communists? I remember that President Kennedy said in an interview that to the south's government that they were losing touch with the people and that if they wanted our help they need to have a stronger government. This statement was just before the coup the Vietnam history videos. Johnson later says in the Herring book "stable government or no stable government we'll have to do what we have to do" (153). I believe another reason to start the bombings and come hard was to keep out Chinese intervention. Another reason for bombing the North or the strike called Flaming Dart, is that our government did not want our troops up in the jungle with no back up or as the herring book "I can't ask our American soldiers to out there to continue to fight with one hand behind their backs". (153) the hope of the government was to give the ground troops support in the tough jungle. To let the Vietcong know that America ruled the skies and those we were the enemy. I think the impact was that the America was destroying the country with waves after waves of bombs and then with the use of napalm for a larger destruction area the beautiful country would be left to ashes. In the Appy book on Pg200, the Air War section says "the solution in Vietnam is more bombs, more shells, more napalm... until the other side cracks and gives up".

citations

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 06:16 PM

I totally agree with your post, especially the part about the US fearing that the south Vietnam government was to weak. I think your right that the lack of a stable government and fear of communism and China is really what drove America to put so much into Vietnam.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

Friday, 5 November 2010, 05:23 PM

Hi
I also agree with your post. The Johnson administration's hopes for the bombing escalation is also backed up by Herring on page 148, where he explains that America's government hoped the bombing would cause Hanoi to give up its efforts rather than face complete destruction.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

Friday, 5 November 2010, 09:23 PM

I agree with you that, in part, we probably sent the bombing over to Vietnam to help aid our troops. But I believe the main reason was to slow down the supply lines from the north heading to the south. I also like the quote you chose to use as your last line. We did indeed believe that a war of attrition would be successful and I'm sure that was helpful in the decision to start Operation flaming dart.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

Saturday, 6 November 2010, 11:58 AM

I really like your post. I agree with everything you said, I also like the quote from the Herring book on the stable government. It sums allot of things up to basically desperation! It just made them stronger and more resistant.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

Saturday, 6 November 2010, 05:24 PM

last day (Sat) repeats

I agree with what you say about the United States fearing the weakness of the South Vietnamese Government. They feared that with a weak government communism could easily come make their way in especially with China being near by. I agree with you.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

██████████ - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 10:24 AM

According to the assigned video series, video three "LBJ Goes to War" the situation that led the United States to send ground troops to South Vietnam was the strategic bombing of the Thanh Hoa Bridge. The bridge was bombed and repaired for several years. Gen. William C. Westmoreland, Commander in Vietnam said The bombing was intended protect the three airfields that were jet capable. Part of his direct quote was " We had to protect those airfields. I feared the the Vietnamese did not have the capability of protecting the American aircraft on those airfields. Therefore, my first request for troops were associated with protecting the airfields." The video series goes on to say that the request of Westmoreland was granted with little debate. On March 8, 1965 thirty five hundred troops had arrived to protect the airbase at Da Nang. By the end of the year two hundred thousand troops were present.

One reason for the continual bombings over North Vietnam was to disrupt and block the movement of North Vietnamese using the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In Video five of the series, "America's Enemy" it states that by 1967 nearly every military target had been damaged or destroyed, but operation Rolling Thunder had failed.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

██████████ - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 04:31 PM

Was this bridge project started after the Gulf of Tonkin? This obviously was one of many things that made America get more involved, but I'm interested to hear what made you pick this event, over the many others that year, as the one that increased American involvement?

I don't mean to sound accusatory at all, I was just interested in your reasoning since mostly everyone else said similar things to what I said and if I'm wrong I would like to know.

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question



Re: Ground troops and bombing

██████████ - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 07:35 PM

Hello ██████████

I can answer your question. Daniel is correct in that the reasons the Johnson Administration gave for the initial deployment of combat troops in Vietnam resulted from Westmoreland's request for combat troops to protect U.S. airfields; however, he made the request in late February, weeks after *Rolling Thunder* was underway. Westmoreland was expecting the Viet Minh to retaliate after *Rolling Thunder* started. Herring writes, "Anticipating retaliatory attacks for *Rolling Thunder*, General Westmoreland in late February urgently requested two marine landing teams to protect the air base at Da Nang" (155). Daniel is incorrect about the bridge being a reason for that initial combat troop deployment. In fact, it had nothing to do with why ground troops were deployed. The example of the bridge bombing in the PBS series was to illustrate what Secretary of State George Ball said about the futility of bombing the North as a means of turning the tide of the war. The bridge became a target after the initial bombing campaign started. The series explained that the bridge became a target after *Rolling Thunder* was already underway in the spring of 1965; the subsequent footage was filmed in 1967 and 1968, well after the bombing started and we were engaged in open warfare on the ground. The bridge had nothing to do with why America began a continual bombing campaign against the North either; it simply became a strategic target once the decision to bomb the North was made. The PBS series never clarifies whether or not the bridge bombing began before or after ground troops were in Vietnam. It just states that it started in the spring of 1965.

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answer a question

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Rate... **Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 11:52 AM

According to our DVD's, part three (LBJ goes to war,) there was rumor that Hanoi had attacked our ships making "routine patrols" in the Gulf of Tonkin. The North still claims that the second attacks never happened. The US government felt as if they could not wait for a positive yes or no if the attacks actually happened. Johnson felt like he had to respond so he decided to go full force and bomb N. Vietnam. Johnson named the air attacks "Operation Rolling Thunder." Our military thought that the bombings would make Hanoi fall back on their attacks. They also thought it would "bolster Saigon's morale" since there was such an instability of Saigon's government.

On March 8, 1965, the American troops were sent in to protect the US airfields because the US military did not think the S. Vietnamese troops could handle protecting all of the aircrafts and machinery. About a month later, they sent in more troops and changed the US military's mission to offensive operations (ground patrolling.) With the ground troops patrolling, the US military thought it would be of great benefit to bomb by air the enemies supply lines, and trails that they thought the Vietminh used to protect our troops from attacks and keep the enemies away.

With these decisions made, the US thought they had the "cat in the bag " so to speak when in fact, it made the North's feelings of us being the foreign invaders stronger. It made the North go full force and the conflict much stronger.

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analysis, cites sources

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Friday, 5 November 2010, 04:26 PM

I agree with your post. You make good points, and my post was similar. I think that the U.S. very much underestimated how North Vietnam would respond. The U.S. seemed to only think the bombings would destroy the North and weaken them. However, as you mentioned it did the opposite. Although the U.S. inflicted about \$600 million worth of damages, they also united the North more than ever. This was the incident in which the North really began to view the U.S. as an enemy. The North went full speed ahead with a stronger force. I think the bombings cost the U.S. more than it benefited them.

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money

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Friday, 5 November 2010, 05:35 PM

Hi [REDACTED]

That \$600 million worth of damage the U.S. inflicted on the north becomes even more scary when you take into account that it cost the U.S. nearly ten times that amount to inflict it. The amount of money spent on the air war alone is absolutely staggering.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Friday, 5 November 2010, 08:38 PM

I was just curious did they say how much it cost the U.S. just for the bombings? I don't remember a number specific to the bombings? Did I miss it? Do you know how much it was? If I remember right I believe Herring said that the U.S. spent about \$10 billion on war by it's end. It just seems like so much money and so many lives lost. Absolutely staggering indeed...

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[REDACTED] - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 12:20 AM

Hi [REDACTED]

The air war between 1965 and 1966 cost the U.S. government \$1.7 billion dollars. Overall, including aircraft loss, between 1965 and 1968 the cost was roughly 6 billion. It's estimated that for every \$1's worth of damage the U.S. inflicted on North Vietnam, the U.S. paid \$9.60. Take a look at page 179 in the Herring book; he gives a breakdown of how much the air war was costing the U.S. government. It's stunning.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Raina Kelley](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 09:59 AM

Thank you for pointing that page out to me. I looked at it and all I could think was just how much money that is. I can't even imagine having \$25,000 in my savings account let alone having enough money to spend \$1.7 billion on bombings that would take people's lives. It just doesn't even seem real spending all that money, my bleeding heart can't help but think about so many better things that money could have been used for. Things like homeless shelters, health care for the poor, better school funding, more programs for orphans, etc.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 04:08 PM

Hey [REDACTED]

It pretty much makes me sick on how much we spent on this war. I believe when Kennedy was president, they were spending something like 1 and a half million dollars a day! From there, it just escalated.

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"off topic" conversation

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 11:45 AM

[REDACTED] I agree with your post I think that the bombings did more good for the North the we will ever understand. It was one more reason for them to hate us and for them to come together and fight even harder. That is one of the main things that helped them, they would do anything to stay together as a united people.

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