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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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**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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I agree - and why



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

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

**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

by [REDACTED] - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 09:27 PM

[REDACTED]

Thank you for clarifying that for me, I knew that sounded a little out of sequence with the things I had read and watched. I somehow don't really remember hearing much about bridges, except in reference to the Ho Chi Minh trail and American soldiers trying to keep North Vietnam from being able to transport anything from the north to south. Are these certain bridges or just the ones that had to do with that?

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 10:13 PM

Hi [REDACTED],

Any target that would stifle the stream of men and material moving from North Vietnam to South Vietnam was considered fair game during *Rolling Thunder*. Railroads, bridges, roadways, trails, military installations, etc... The bridge in the PBS episode we're talking about was just one of many designated targets chosen to meet that objective. It was a target, not a cause. I hope that makes sense.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 08:46 PM

[REDACTED]

The reason I chose this event over many of the others is because I felt this answered the question of what led ground troops to Vietnam most directly. I very well could be mistaken but, I thought that this was the earliest event that placed troops in Vietnam.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 09:29 PM

I wasn't totally sure when I read your post Daniel, I was just wondering if you had read it or if it was from the video so I could go back and check to get my timeline straight. A lot of your answer sounded right to me, just the part bridges didn't sound familiar.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 10:47 PM

[REDACTED]

Yes, I did get that quote directly from the PBS videos and as Todd pointed out apparently is inaccurate (not the quote, but what was said by Gen. Westmoreland). Thanks for clarifying [REDACTED]

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 02:40 PM

I agree with your idea of the Thanh Hoa Bridge being continually bombed due to the necessity of protecting airfields resulting in deployment of ground troops to protect the air strips from the ground; however, I believe that the decision to act more aggressively towards the war came when the USS Maddox was "attacked." Just thought that may be this could be a different idea that you might like to look into a little bit. Great job on the description. I liked the bridge example and the explanation of the bombing.

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[REDACTED] - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 04:19 PM

[REDACTED]

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)Rate... **Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[REDACTED] - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 05:26 PM

[REDACTED]

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)Rate... **Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Jeremy Carlson](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 06:51 PM

I was wondering if you had any extra information about why destroying the North Vietnamese trails, railroads, and bridges took so long to be enforced by America. This just makes me wonder why the United States didn't do this before sending in ground troops? Was the war, for the United States, not ready to be escalated to the bombing of North Vietnamese travel passages?

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[REDACTED] - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 08:13 PM

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

██████████ - Friday, 5 November 2010, 10:14 AM

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

██████████ - Friday, 5 November 2010, 04:37 PM

[REDACTED]

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

Thursday, 4 November 2010, 05:29 PM

I made a mistake during this post and had a the Than Hoa Bridge being mixed up with other bombing raids as an example of the United States' further progress of committing ground troops when the ground troops had already been there for a month prior to the initial bombings. I am sorry for the mistake and will next time pay more attention to the reading and video. [REDACTED]

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

██████████ - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 11:40 AM

Hey [REDACTED] Thanks for the correction. It's easy to get your facts mixed up it was such a big long war there is also so much information out there! But hey that's why we're taking this class! :D

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

b[REDACTED] - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 07:55 PM

It seems as though I may have been slightly misguided by the PBS video series and mixed up some of my facts. According to the herring book troops were sent to Vietnam to protect the air base by the request of Gen. Westmorland, but it had nothing to do with any bridge that I had read about in the Herring book. I did however find confirmation that backs up the PBS video series in the Herring book:

“shortly after 9:00 A.M. on March 8, 1965, Marines from the 3rd Battalion 9th Marine Expeditionary Force, splashed ashore in rough seas at Da Nang. They were the first U.S ground combat troops in Vietnam.” (Herring, 156).

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

money

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Rate... **Re: Ground troops and bombing**
 - Friday, 5 November 2010, 05:35 PM
Hi 

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

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)Rate... **Re: Ground troops and bombing**

[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.

[REDACTED]

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

[REDACTED]

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

1

**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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[Redacted username]



Thunder were started to lower moral and support for North Vietnam. It also aimed to cut off their transportation systems. Unfortunately the plan was never very successful, the North Vietnamese were still able to get around without a problem. In fact all that the bombings succeeded in was giving them material for propaganda against the America. The other problem was the cost of Rolling Thunder. "The cost in bombs of a B-52 mission ran to \$30,000 per sortie. The direct cost of the air war, including operation of the aircraft, munitions, and replacement of planes, was estimated at more than \$1.7 billion during 1965 and 1966, a period when aircraft losses exceeded 500. Overall, the United States between 1965 and 1968 lost 950 aircrafts costing roughly \$6 billion. According to one estimate, for each \$1 of damage inflicted on North Vietnam, the United States spent \$9.60." (Herring, 179). Not only was the operation a complete failure it was also a money sink, which didn't aid in the fight against North Vietnam in anyway.

I think these were the turning points in the Vietnam war. Sending in troops began the involvement and combat part of America's conflict with Vietnam. The bombings, which I see as a largely unsuccessful operation, only helped to lower public opinion of the war. Anytime fear is a driving factor, and stopping something you fear, it means that decisions are made more quickly and with less thought. The American leaders tried to do what was best, but often this only lead to another problem and deeper involvement in the war.



Now, replace "the 1960s" with "2003" and read again...

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Heidi Zumburum](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 06:53 PM

Samantha, thanks for the cartoon, ironic that after all these years history can still repeat itself in a fool's hands. I really agree that not only was the bombing campaign really unsuccessful, it actually had a reverse effect. Because of this unforeseen outcome, this was really a major turning point towards the US escalation and our eventual downfall.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Samantha Mccourt](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 03:50 PM

Thanks Heidi, yeah I really liked the irony of the cartoon. I think its sometimes hard for us, since most of us are to young to have lived through Vietnam, to understand the reason that politicians would ever consider fighting there, but when you notice how similar the war we currently fighting it helps you connect with the events. I mean now its hard to envision the kind of fear that communism had for the those who wanted the war, but if you think of it in terms of terrorist acts such as those on September 11th, everyone was scared so they wanted to stop the kind of people who would do that.

Yeah I think the bombing campaign was badly thought through, it clearly just resulted in hurting innocent people more than actually stopping the enemy they were pursuing.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Donald Ebel](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 02:07 PM

Samantha,

I agree with you that the bombing campaigns were largely unsuccessful. However, they had much more of an effect than just lowering public opinion about the war. The American people didn't know much of the extent of the bombing for a long while after it started. There were much more profound effects in the country of Vietnam itself. For many South Vietnamese, the beginning of the bombing was the point when they started to regard the United States an more of an enemy than an ally. Vietnam was not such an advanced country industrially, so the U.S. only had so many targets to bomb. They often blew up villages and civilian compounds along with whatever else they were ordered to, leaving many people homeless. This extended the power of the North Vietnamese revolutionaries, which was the exact opposite of what the bombing was intended for.

So, what I'm saying is that you're definitely right! But there is certainly more to the effects of the bombing, and much sooner than when the American public found out about the extent to which it was being performed.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Samantha Mccourt](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 03:55 PM

Donald,

Your totally right, I know that there were obviously effects on the people of Vietnam, much more so than those in the states. I just meant that as a tactic it did nothing for America. I should have mentioned the south Vietnamese more. As a whole most of the reason that the bombings were unsuccessful was because of the fact that they were destroying homes of people who would have been on their side, but by doing that they made the North Vietnamese seem better.

Thanks for pointing out my mistake.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Jason Carlstrom](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 04:26 PM

"Anytime fear is a driving factor, and stopping something you fear, it means that decisions are made more quickly and with less thought."

i agree that their intentions were for the best, but they chose to use more force in response to attacks and did nothing but escalate the war. it was the fear of Communism taking over that they responded quickly with a suffocating amount of force. the quick thought that our superior weapons and army will mean a victory was a terrible miss judgment.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Molly Graham](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 08:14 PM

The Gulf of Tonkin Incident of early August 1964 was what allowed the United States to send its first ground troops into South Vietnam via the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which went through Congress very easily given the circumstances at hand (Herring 146). However, it appears that not only was the Gulf of Tonkin Incident a bit untruthful but also that the President and his advisors may have drawn up the Resolution two months previous to the "attacks" and used the Incident as an excuse to push through Congress their plan of escalation (Appy 113). The 3rd Episode of our PBS series describes the Resolution essentially as letting the President have full military authority for action. The series also concludes that because of this total command, when in early March of 1965 Westmoreland felt that U.S. airfields were vulnerable to attack, Johnson sent the first troops into South Vietnam.

In February of 1965, the second phase of Rolling Thunder and Flaming Dart were implemented, bombing North Vietnamese targets (Herring 153). This came after the Gulf of Tonkin Incident and its Resolution which followed and the attacks on U.S. Army barracks in Pleiku (as well as a helicopter base) by the NLF (Herring 153). The 3rd Episode of the PBS series points to the repetitive bombing by the Viet Cong from late 1964 into 1965 of U.S. airbases, Brinks Hotel, and Southern villages as the reason for which Johnson okayed Rolling Thunder. Rolling Thunder was planned long before the attacks at Pleiku and simply used the event as a means to put the plans into action (Appy 113). There was fear that the South Vietnamese government was close to collapse and the U.S. had to become more aggressive in their approach in order to avoid this (Herring 154).

American leaders hoped that both the introduction of troops and the repetitive bombing would send a message to other communist nations, namely Russia and China (Herring 148). Johnson also felt that de-escalation in Vietnam would interfere with the project closer to his heart, the Great Society (Herring 148). As far as strategy against the North Vietnamese, the administration hoped that Rolling Thunder would "coerce North Vietnam into abandoning the southern insurgency" (Herring 148).

Both the introduction of U.S. troops into Vietnam as well as the bombing of the north served to make U.S. involvement in Vietnam into a full on war (PBS Episode 3). These actions meant that the U.S. was committed (Herring 158). This brought about protests and widespread anti-war opinions throughout the nation as well as in the United Nations (Herring 159). This also caused problems in the ARVN as many deserted and others felt that they would "let the Americans do it" (Herring 161).

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Samantha Mccourt](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 04:04 PM

Great post Molly! I agree completely with everything you said. I'm particularly glad to hear someone mention what actually made LBJ a good president. I think its often lost that he wanted to do so much more beside the Vietnam war, but got bogged down in the politics of it.

You also made a good point about the bombings being a message to the communist nations of Russia and China, its easy to forget that a lot of the reason that America was fighting in Vietnam was to show that they were against those two countries.

This is a really well written post with a lot of great information, but I would be interested to know what you felt was the actual turn out of Rolling Thunder? Do you believe that there was any successful parts, or do you think as a whole it was completely destructive?

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Jesse Long](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 05:32 PM

I like a lot of what is being discussed, but I would also like to hear what you think of the turn out of rolling thunder. Do you think it was a success or not? It was a big mission and part of this war that is always brought up and part of any discussion covering the Vietnam war. Anyways thanks for bringing up that question.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Kristin Maurer](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 04:19 PM

I like that you pointed out that it was a full on war after the troops were sent in. Our posts were similar, but I did not mention that. Thank you!

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Heidi Zumbur](#) - Wednesday, 3 November 2010, 08:59 PM

US Ground troops were originally sent into South Vietnam under the cover of 'counter insurgency' by Kennedy. Special forces like the Green Berets were sent to train the South Vietnam special forces to fight in guerilla-style assaults. Although the US troops were not directly participating in the attacks, the US had supplied the South Vietnamese with the best American military technology available. The US military forces were sent in small numbers in order to keep a low profile and not flagrantly taunt other Communist countries into an all out war.

When LBJ was elected into office, he was focused on implementing his Great Society programs. "He also tied Vietnam to the realization of these goals, fearing that if he showed weakness southern conservatives who opposed his domestic programs, especially his commitment to racial equality, would attack him with a vengeance." (Herring 136) Johnson had already decided to use a firm hand and not back down from the incompetency in South Vietnam, nor the continued progression of the North Vietnamese agenda.

The Gulf of Tonkin situation presented Johnson an opportunity to flex his muscle on the Northern front. I think this was done equally to distract from the chaos and lack of government in the south and to also prove to Communists, Ho Chi Minh and the US that he was in control and would not back down. The fact that the Gulf of Tonkin may have never really happened did not stop Johnson from pushing forward. "Determined to prove their toughness, Johnson and his advisers agreed, as McNamara put it, that "we cannot sit still as a nation and let them attack us on the high seas and get away with it." They quickly decided on a 'firm, swift retaliatory [air] strike' against North Vietnamese torpedo boat bases."

McNamara received information that there was serious doubt that the attacks actually took place so he delayed the strikes until that afternoon when he selectively used reports and information to determine the validity of the attacks. Although Herring states that McNamara "did not knowingly lie about the alleged attacks, but they were obviously in a mood to retaliate, and they seem to have selected from the available evidence those parts that confirmed what they wanted to believe." (Herring 144) How can it be said that McNamara and his advisers did not knowingly lie? By taking information out of context and not evaluating all of the reports equally, they purposefully found evidence to support their own agenda. Johnson accepted McNamara's conclusions 'without question' and signed off on the air strikes to North Vietnamese torpedo boats that same afternoon.

These raids were considered a success and gave Johnson momentum in securing congressional resolution authorizing him to take "all necessary measures to repel any armed attacks against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." (144) Now the president had unlimited authority to dispense troops to Vietnam and used this power to his own political advantage. His challenger, Barry Goldwater, had vigorously urged escalation of the war and was promoting a platform that he could defend American interests. Johnson used his ill-begotten congressional power to put his plans into play. Unfortunately, the same air raids that gave Johnson his blank check, also rallied the North Vietnamese together and helped recharge their unity for their cause.

The theory behind the continual bombing runs over North Vietnam in 1963 was based on the idea that if we keep knocking them down, eventually they won't get back up. "Johnson, Rusk, McGeorge Bundy and McNamara seem to have hoped that by gradually increasing the bombing and injecting U.S. forces into the ground war they could coerce North Vietnam into abandoning the southern insurgency." (Herring 148) Further, it seems that they were also trying to 'maintain international credibility'.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Todd Lowry](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 05:03 PM

Hello Heidi,

I like your post and I think you made some good points in it. I found it interesting how, in the same section of the Herring book you referred to "Decisions For War", Herring talks about how many U.S. officials agreed that the bombing should start against North Vietnam yet disagreed as to why. Some thought it would boost morale in the ARVN forces in the south, others thought the bombing should begin to slow the Viet Minh infiltration to the south, while still others thought the bombing would stop Hanoi from further supporting the troublesome southern insurgency (149). Oddly the bombing, once it started, did not seem to have had an effect on any of those reasons.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Heidi Zumbrum](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 06:29 PM

Very true! In fact, the bombings seemed to have the exact opposite effect in both causes. Due to the overwhelming destruction caused by the bombs, the North Vietnamese were able to rally together and unite to focus on increasing their infiltration of the south. Further, the ARVN forces were not revived, if anything this bombing marked the beginning to the end of their independent fight. The South Vietnamese government was never consulted about the continued raids so in a sense, the Americans had come in and taken over and then side-stepped them to do as they wished, regardless of how the SV felt about it. This also was a significant point in the war where the ARVN had no choice but to become dependent on American forces. They were never truly given the opportunity to become a self sufficient army. I think overall, the bombing raids share similarity with a lie. If you tell a whopper, you stick with it, no matter how ridiculous it becomes, even if everyone knows it's a lie, because to admit it was a lie would be too embarrassing for most people. Not being able to admit that our plan wasn't working was one of the downfalls which led to future escalations.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Deanna Middlestetter](#) - Thursday, 4 November 2010, 09:00 PM

Ground troops were led to South Vietnam because of fear of the "Domino Effect". Operation "Rolling Thunder", did continual bomb runs over North Vietnam after February of 1965 because the United States wanted Ho Chi Minh to give up on the idea of overtaking South Vietnam. The war continued even though there was a shortage of supplies.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Heidi Zumbrum](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 06:37 PM

The sheer determination of the Vietminh is astounding! To be continually bombarded, everything you know destroyed to bits, being forced to live underground in fear for your life everyday. I think that these facts should have more closely analyzed by the U.S. Anyone that is willing to sacrifice and endure such hardships and STILL doesn't give up their cause? This is pure determination in the strongest sense of the word. Did we feel as strongly about our 'Domino Theory' as the North Vietnamese felt about independence?

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Raina Kelley](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 08:56 PM

Heidi,

Good points you make here. I do feel like it is obvious both sides were fighting for very different things and in some ways I feel that is the reason the U.S. could not seem to "win" the war. The Vietnamese were a very oppressed culture. For years and years they were forced to follow the rules of other countries and leaders. They had years of passion for independence building inside them. This is in strong contrast to the U.S. who was fighting out of fear. Fear that communism would take over the world and that would be a huge threat. It also seems to me that the majority of the U.S. troops who went to Vietnam weren't really informed as to why they are there. When I read the personal accounts in the Appy book I have never got a strong feeling that the U.S. soldier really felt any sort of passion for why they were there. They knew they were there to fight communism but I feel there was a bit of a lack of drive there, except the drive to stay alive. Then you look back at the Vietnamese who all knew they were fighting for their own independence. They showed passion and a deep desire to see this dream come true. I think fighting for your own independence is one of the most powerful fights. Looking back into history, the U.S. and the Revolutionary War in which we fought and won independence, the Revolution of Mexico- they fought for their independence and won, the same thing happened in Vietnam. It makes me think of the saying, "If you want something bad enough, you will get it."

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Daniel Bonner](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 07:34 PM

Heidi,

I absolutely agree with you about the determination of the Vietnamese soldiers, in fact I actually admire their determination and patriotism they seem to have for their country. While reading the Appy book and watching the PBS series I picked up the patriotism that many of them have for their country. You have made an excellent post with some very good points, well done.

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**Re: Ground troops and bombing**by [Marla Davis](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 11:21 AM

Before Johnson was elected he didn't want to send "combat" ground troops to Vietnam because, he wanted to win the election and in his campaign he said "no wider war" in Vietnam. And he thought he would lose the election if he sent additional troops there. Another reason he was hesitant to send more ground troops was the instability of the government in the South. In truth, he was just waiting for the right time (politically) and any excuse to send ground troops, and the attack in Pleiku gave him that. The ground troops were sent after the bombing was already going on. Herring states, "it is abundantly clear, however, that Pleiku was the pretext for rather than the cause of the February decision" (page 154).

The Gulf of Tonkin Incident was used as a reason to dispatch combat ground troops into South Vietnam. The Resolution was actually drawn up a few months before the incident even occurred and pretty much gave the President the ability to use military action as he deemed necessary.

The attacks on US airbases and the Brinks Hotel were the final catalyst that allowed Johnson to implement Rolling Thunder.

In 1965, the bombing raids were being used to try to disrupt the North Vietnamese's supply line, with the premise that if they couldn't get supplies and additional troops they would give up. The North Vietnamese either found a new route, repaired bridges as they were bombed, or if need be they just built a new bridge. They were also meant to improve the morale of the South Vietnamese.

US government thought that increased ground troops and Rolling Thunder would make clear to Russia and China that Communism would be fought at all costs. Johnson and his advisors held the hope that Rolling Thunder would cause the North turn tail and run. It seemed only to make their resolve stronger.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Deanna Middlestetter](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 06:40 PM

Thank you for straightening that out for me. I don't know very much about the Vietnam war and this is my first time taking a class like this. It is a lot of information to process and I am having some difficulty keeping things straight.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Hector Perez](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 12:30 PM

the increase in troops and the bombing was i think one strategy that really did help and it was very helpful to retrain the south vietnamese for further combat. The bombing wasn't intinded to teh civilians. Air battles also was a challenge the weather also planned a part into how much bombing really could be down.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Tikoya Wiget](#) - Friday, 5 November 2010, 09:09 PM

The United States first sent ground troops to Vietnam to protect the air fields for the jet planes. They claimed they didn't think the Vietnamese could do a sufficient job to protect it themselves. Yet protecting the air fields was in fact the troops first priority. After a short while though, they did give the order to actively seek out the Viet Cong in the perimeter around the base. The first **official** sending of troops to Vietnam was after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in which LBJ sent the first ground troops in March of 1965. After this the impact was clear. Soon more and more troops would join the struggle.

There were a few incidents that caused to U.S. to start Operation Flaming Dart, but the most significant was the attacks at Pleiku. The bombing operation was meant to force North Vietnam to cease its aid to the NLF by threatening their air defenses. But because of the lack of major industrial zones, there was no great target to bomb. So we stuck to bombing such things as bridges. Unfortunately this had negative affects. The video states that if the bombing did anything, it mainly boosted the morale of the North and increased there hate for the US.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Samantha Mccourt](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 04:09 PM

Tikoya,
I do remember hearing about troops being brought in to protect the air fields, but I don't remember where they said that it was because of the fact that they didn't think Vietnamese people could do it. I thought they were simply having their own troops do it because it was their base and thats what any military operation does in another country? Otherwise great post, I with the rest of your analysis, especially the last part about the negative effects of the bombing.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Shellea Montgomery](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 11:38 AM

After watching the DVD episode I gather that the attacks on the airbases and the attack at the Gulf of Tonkin are what really pushed Johnson over the edge. He decided it was time to send in troops under disguise with the order to not shoot unless they were in danger. They were really the deployment of the ground troops to defend the airbases, and rev up the war.

Johnson decided to put operation Rolling Thunder in action after the Tonkin Gulf incident; it was to cut off supply lines and to discourage the North Vietnamese. They hoped to take out bridges and damage the routes. Reading in the Appy book this was not successful as the North had teams of people that were just repairing bombed out roads and bridges. They were determined and this did not help the US, it was just another expensive venture in a losing battle.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Raina Kelley](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 07:45 PM

I agree with you, Johnson seemed to look for a reason to send troops and just used the Gulf of Tonkin as an excuse to do it. I think it is sad that the bombings happened and like you said they didn't end up helping the U.S. at all. It only hurt them because the North could fix the roads and the North became even more united in their effort then they were before.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Donald Ebel](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 01:41 PM

The DVD series Vietnam: A Television History's third episode, "LBJ Goes to War," explained the incident in the Gulf of Tonkin. On August 2, 1964, the U.S. destroyer, the USS Maddox was performing a DESOTO patrol in the gulf of Tonkin, off the coast of North Vietnam when it was attacked by three North Vietnamese torpedo boats. Fire was exchanged, but the Maddox was not hit with any torpedos.

Then two days later on August 4, while operating in heavy seas, the Maddox and another U.S. destroyer, the USS Turner Joy reported being under attack again. However, "Initial reports were based on sonar and radar contacts, both of which were admittedly unreliable under the adverse weather conditions..." (Herring, pg. 142)

Whether or not this second attack actually happened is highly suspect, and most likely did not occur at all. Nevertheless, Johnson used the ensuing political chaos to push the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution through Congress, "...authorizing him to take 'all necessary measures to repel any armed attacks against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.'" (Herring, pg. 144) The passing of the Gulf of Tokin Resolution allowed Johnson to introduce the first ground troops into Vietnam to protect U.S. air bases from Vietnamese retaliatory strikes. These air bases were used in Operation Rolling Thunder.

The four main reasons for Operation Rolling Thunder were: 1.) Boost the morale of the South Vietnamese. 2.) Persuade North Vietnam to stop supporting the communist insurgency in South Vietnam without the need for ground forces in North Vietnam. 3.) Destroy North Vietnamese transportation, air defense, and industrial base systems. 4.) Disrupt the North Vietnamese flow of men and material to South Vietnam.

In reality, all the bombing really did was turn the U.S. into an enemy for the Vietnamese people, which strengthened the North's resolve and extended its power. Vietnam as a whole was nowhere near as industrialized as many other countries that had been recently fought in WWII and throughout the Cold War Era, so there was only so much that could be destroyed through bombing. Also, China and the Soviet Union were sending so much material down the Ho Chi Minh Trail that only a very small amount of it had to be delivered safely. It was impossible for the United States to eliminate every piece of equipment brought down by bombing the trail, so that proved ineffective as well.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Kristin Maurer](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 04:23 PM

Donald,

I think we are all on the same page. I like how you laid out your forum. I'm in total agreement with you. It shows in my simalar post!

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Donald Ebel](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 06:53 PM

Yeah, that's funny. Great minds think alike, I guess. Or at least answer questions in the same order.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Jason Carlstrom](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 04:36 PM

Rolling Thunder was a WWII type of tactic where bombing facilities,plants,and factories were key in stopping productions and weakening them. the only thing was(and your right) North Vietnam really didnt make anything. everything was funded by China and the Soviets. Rolling Thunder just destroyed the hills/villages/towns where people lived and gave the US a very bad image to the Vietnamese and public world wide.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Donald Ebel](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 06:59 PM

Jason,

I definitely agree with you. For most of the war, the one of the major problems the U.S. had to do with using conventional war tactics against the Vietnamese. But this was hardly a conventional war. The North Vietnamese got most of their supplies from the Soviet Union and China, while South Vietnam relied a lot on the United States. Because of this, as you said, North Vietnam really wasn't making anything. This made bombing essentially ineffective (among other things, as explained in my previous post). The North Vietnamese excelled in guerrilla warfare, which the United States had trouble dealing with. Also, Vietnam is thick with jungle, a terrain feature that the United States never encountered in WWII. Trying to fit conventional war tactics over the Vietnam War proved extremely ineffective.

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Re: Ground troops and bombing

by [Jason Carlstrom](#) - Saturday, 6 November 2010, 03:51 PM

Once the French left Vietnam in 1956 the US Military Assistance Advisor Group (MAAG) took responsibility for advising the South Vietnamese forces. Their duties were to train the troops and supply them with weapons/supplies/food/money. There was a huge culture gap between the two that gave a bad start and was overall "criticized for failing to prepare the South Vietnamese Army for dealing with guerrillas." (71 Herring). MAAG was later replaced with Military Assistance Command,Vietnam (MACV) during project Beef Up(103 Herring) which brought in more than 9,000 advisors. During project Beef Up the South lost the battle of Ap Bac, Kennedy&Diem was assassinated, and the bombing of the hotels that killed advisers. Tensions were on the rise. The last straw was the Gulf of Tulkin&Pleiku attacks that president Johnson took the stand "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." Rolling thunder was the plan to bomb the North into the stone age and 2 battalions of troops came next to protect the bases. American leaders hoped to "break the will of the DRV/VC by depriving them of victory."(157 Herring) and bombing will stop the flow of troops and supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail so the NLF can be cut off while the South Vietnamese could build up if strength. It was agreed that "bombing would not do the job alone" so +40,000 troops were sent to the bases with operations only happening 50miles out.

The North didnt back down in the face of the massive US army and they responded with more troops as well. Every action that took place escalated the war in every way. The response was “more of everything” and the new technology like the helicopter, jets, rockets, and chemicals started to get used carelessly at this point from what ive read.

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