



Young Robin Hood

Pfc. Bernard A. Roe, Durango, Colo., chats with a trio of Vietnamese boys, one of whom wears a Robin Hood-style hat. Roe is a member of C Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf. of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division. This photograph and its title represent the American effort to "win the hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese. USA Photo by Spec. 4 Ben Croxton.

Chapter 5

America Takes Charge:

1965–1967

Background

Historical Summary

General William C. Westmoreland had conceived a strategy for Vietnam even before President Johnson granted his request for additional U.S. combat troops in the summer of 1965. He would use part of the force to protect American bases and other installations along the coast and in the area around Saigon, deploy units in the central highlands in order to prevent the Communists from cutting across the country, and bomb North Vietnam to cut off supplies to the South.

The strategy was founded on the theory that, where limited numbers of men in an advisory capacity had failed, the sheer weight of American industry and technology could grind down the enemy. As General William Depuy explained, it called for "more bombs, more shells, more napalm . . . til the other side cracks and gives up." American troops—"the flower of our youth", Lyndon Johnson called them—began to arrive in Vietnam by the thousands. They came prepared to fight, but many found that they were not prepared for the tropical climate, the strangeness of the people and their language, or the complexities of a war in which allies and enemy looked alike and might be discovered at any turn. Troops were deployed in mountains, plains and deltas, fighting highly trained North Vietnamese regulars and lightly armed South Vietnamese guerrillas.

The American military performed logistical miracles. Engineers constructed air fields and harbors, and thousands of tons of equipment poured into Vietnam to field the American forces. They were also helped by the most sophisticated devices, among them electronic sensors intended to detect guerrillas by smell. The Post Exchange system provided the luxuries that are necessities for U.S. soldiers away from home—beer and cigarettes, radios, stereo sets; and tape recorders. So enormous was the flow of American money into Vietnam that Wall Street brokerage firms opened offices in Saigon to sell GIs stocks and bonds.

For many U.S. combat troops, the war consisted of patrolling through dense jungles and across flooded rice fields where they were chronically plagued by an ingenious assortment of enemy mines and booby traps. Nor could they easily distinguish friend from foe among the peasants; thus they tended to suspect all villagers as Vietcong sympathizers.

In addition to reliance on American ground fire, Westmoreland's plan called

Points to Emphasize

- the justifications for the large increase in American troops in Vietnam between 1965 and 1968
- the explanations for the American military tactics in use during this period
- the role of technological innovations in the Vietnam War
- the reactions of the Vietnamese civilians to the American soldiers
- the reactions of the American soldiers to the Vietnamese civilians
- the rationale behind the pacification programs of both sides
- the reasons why the United States talked about negotiating while continuing to fight
- the definition of progress in the war
- the reasons why victory seemed sure but far away

Glossary of Names and Terms

J. William Fulbright Democratic Representative from Arkansas, 1943-1945. Democratic Senator from Arkansas, 1945-1975. Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 1959-1974. Helped guide the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution through the Senate but later became a leading opponent of the escalation of the war.

Robert Komer early advocate of the importance of the pacification program who took charge of that program in 1966 and worked as General Westmoreland's assistant in charge of CORDS in 1967.

Don Luce American civilian who worked in Vietnam beginning in 1958, originally as an agriculturalist in the International Voluntary Services. Directed IVS, 1961-1967. Returned to Vietnam and later worked with the World Council of Churches.

Nguyen Chanh Thi military figure in South Vietnam who rose to the rank of general. One of the "Young Turks" with Ky and Thieu in 1965. Fired as 1st Corps Commander by Ky in March 1966.

Truong Dinh Dzu Buddhist layman and lawyer who opposed Thieu and Ky in the September 1967 presidential election. Despite his relative anonymity, collected 17 percent of the vote. Proposed the recognition of and negotiations with the National Liberation Front. Jailed soon after the election.

body count American tally of enemy killed during the war.

Cedar Falls and **Junction City** two major American search and destroy operations in Vietnam in 1967.

Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) the program charged with the pacification of the South Vietnamese people.

doves Americans who opposed the U.S. military intervention in Vietnam.

hawks Americans who supported the war effort or wanted to use more force in Vietnam.

Honolulu Conference meeting between President Johnson and Premier Nguyen Cao Ky in February 1966 which resulted in Ky's promise to reform the South Vietnamese government and Johnson's assurance of continued American aid to South Vietnam.

Iron Triangle Vietcong stronghold just north of Saigon which was the setting for Operation Cedar Falls in January 1967.

Military Units for the U.S. Army

squad ten infantrymen under a staff sergeant.

platoon four infantry squads under a lieutenant (40 men).

company headquarters section and four platoons under a captain (160+).

battalion headquarters section and four or more companies under a lieutenant colonel (640+).

brigade headquarters section and three or more battalions under a colonel (1920+).

division headquarters section and three brigades with artillery combat support and combat service support units under a major general (5,760+).

San Antonio formula President Johnson's late 1967 proposal that the United States would stop bombing North Vietnam "with the understanding" that "productive discussions" would ensue. Johnson added that he expected that the North would not take advantage of any bombing halt to infiltrate more men or material into the South.



The Long and Winding Road

The Ho Chi Minh Trail was a series of footpaths which North Vietnamese troops took to the South. The trails, some of which traveled through the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia, were, as seen here, often quite narrow and primitive, but were modernized as the war went on. *Wide World Photo.*

Chapter 6 **America's Enemy:** **1954–1967**

Background

Historical Summary

In the summer of 1954, an international conference in Geneva oversaw the end of the war that had been raging in Indochina for nine years. The French and the Vietminh, the main belligerents in the war, signed a cease-fire agreement that partitioned Vietnam pending a permanent political settlement. No other agreements were signed. Under the Geneva Accords, however, it was understood that nationwide elections would be held within two years to reunify Vietnam. In the meantime, the French forces would leave the North while the Vietminh troops would depart from the South. Families of the Vietminh soldiers were permitted to remain in the South, along with Vietminh political cadres designated to prepare for the elections.

The division of Vietnam at the 17th parallel imposed severe hardships on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the Vietminh regime in the north. The southern part of the country had traditionally supplied rice to the north, and now these shipments were cut off, causing serious food shortages. In an attempt to spur agricultural production, the government in Hanoi launched a program to distribute land to poor peasants.

The agrarian reform was also designed by the Communists to destroy the political power of rural landlords. Officials set up “people’s courts” at which the landlords were tried. Many landlords were the victims of local vendettas or quotas set by officials. Between 3,000 and 15,000 were executed, and thousands more were sent to labor camps. Ho Chi Minh, the president of the country, later apologized personally for the excesses, which he feared might create disunity at a time when North Vietnam desperately needed to rebuild from the ruins of war.

Ngo Dinh Diem, the president of the regime in the South, refused to participate in the nationwide elections. He launched a campaign aimed at uprooting the Vietminh cadres who had remained behind, and his repression nearly wiped out the residual movement. He gave the Vietminh a pejorative name—the Vietcong, which meant Communist Vietnamese, and the name stuck.

By 1957, using weapons they had hidden during the French war, Vietcong

heavy casualties, there is no evidence that their determination to eject the foreigners ever wavered during the months of warfare leading up to the Tet offensive of January 1968.

Points to Emphasize

- the attitude of the old Vietminh political cadres to Diem's government
- the problems which faced Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam in its early years
- the reasons for the outbreak of hostilities between Diem and his opponents
- the methods used by the Vietcong for winning over the Vietnamese people
- the ways in which the fighting in South Vietnam changed in response to the American involvement in Vietnam
- the effects of Operation Rolling Thunder on the government and people of North Vietnam
- the differences between American and North Vietnamese methods of waging war

Glossary of Names and Terms

Le Duan leading political figure throughout the war years. Vietcong organizer in South Vietnam in the 1950s. Secretary, Lao Dong party Central Committee for the Southern Region, 1956. Secretary General, Lao Dong party, 1959. First Secretary, Lao Dong party, 1960.

Nguyen Huu Tho French-educated Saigon lawyer. Imprisoned by President Diem, 1954. Headed National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, 1961.

Pham Van Dong led Vietminh delegation to Geneva Conference, 1954. Premier of North Vietnam, 1955. Minister for Foreign Affairs, 1954–1961.

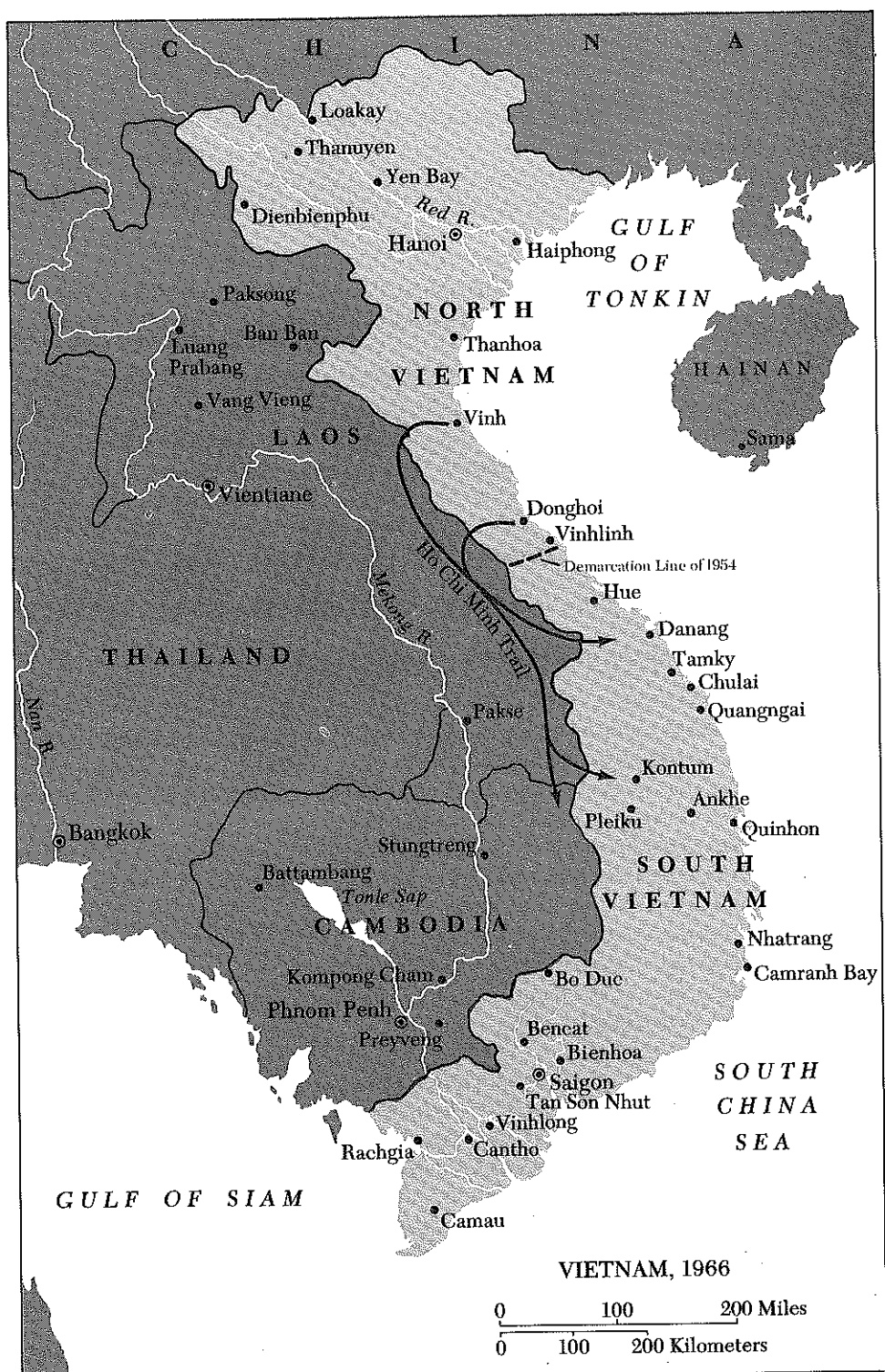
Vo Nguyen Giap Commander-in-chief of the Army of the Vietminh, 1946. Also held positions as Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister. Author of *People's War* *People's Army*.

Democratic Republic of Vietnam (D.R.V.) official name of Ho Chi Minh's government, known as North Vietnam from 1954 to 1975.

Government of Vietnam (G.V.N.) the government below the 17th parallel, officially called the Republic of Vietnam and known as South Vietnam from 1954 to 1975.

Ho Chi Minh Trail a series of paths leading from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. Major route for soldiers and supplies throughout the war. Expanded as the war continued. Some branches of the trail went through Laos and Cambodia.

Lao Dong party short form of Dang Lao Dong Vietnam, the Workers' Party of Vietnam. The official party of Ho's government.



napalm a jellylike gasoline substance used in incendiary bombs, flame-throwers, and other weapons.

Operation Rolling Thunder the American policy of sustained bombing of North Vietnam. Originally planned to last a few months, the policy was in effect from 1965 to 1968 with only a few short pauses.

shadow government in South Vietnam, the *de facto* government in rural areas set up by the Vietcong. This Vietcong administration often taxed families and recruited soldiers just like the Saigon government. Also known as the government of the night.



The Shot Seen Round The World

This photo, showing South Vietnamese National Police Chief, Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, killing an enemy soldier with a single pistol shot to the head, vividly demonstrated the horrors of the war. The summary execution was witnessed nationwide on television and reported in the newspapers. *Wide World Photo.*

Chapter 7

Tet: 1968

Background

Historical Summary

By the end of 1967, U.S. combat troops had been fighting and dying in Vietnam for more than two years, and the American public was beginning to express growing doubts about the war. President Lyndon Johnson and his commander in Vietnam, General William Westmoreland, sought to lessen these doubts by declaring that the United States was making progress in the conflict.

But at the end of January 1968, events in Vietnam tested the president's credibility as well as his conduct of the war, and forced him to reverse his strategy. These events came to be known as the Tet Offensive.

Tet is the lunar new year, the time when the Vietnamese traditionally celebrate their most important holiday. Months earlier, the North Vietnamese and Vietcong had planned to take advantage of the holiday to launch surprise attacks on South Vietnam's cities, which they had never before assaulted. Their purpose was to break the deadlock in the long war of attrition that had seemed to favor neither side. They hoped to spark uprisings in the urban areas that would compel Nguyen Van Thieu, the South Vietnamese president, to accept a coalition government in Saigon.

North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops were able to penetrate deep into South Vietnam's major cities and provincial capitals, hitting army installations, police headquarters, and radio stations. They even broke into the compound of the U.S. embassy in Saigon. The extent and boldness of their actions startled senior American officers, who had expected the main confrontation to take place at Khesanh, in the northern part of South Vietnam, where the enemy had laid siege to a U.S. outpost.

From a strictly military viewpoint, the Communists failed to attain their objective. On the contrary, the Vietcong forces suffered heavy losses, leaving the burden of the war in the future largely on North Vietnamese units.

The most significant impact of the offensive occurred in the United States, where key members of the Johnson administration, along with the rest of the nation, saw reports on television that seemed to contradict the official optimism.

In Washington many of President Johnson's advisers were disillusioned. Foremost among them was Clark Clifford, the new secretary of defense and an

old friend of the president. He felt that a continued war of attrition would drain the United States, and he argued for an alternative approach. Clifford was supported by a group of elder statesmen, most of whom were retired prominent officials. Their disenchantment with the war was heightened when, on March 10, the *New York Times* published a report revealing that Westmoreland had requested 206,000 more men for Vietnam. They, too, now shared Clifford's pessimism about winning the war.

Meanwhile, antiwar sentiment seemed to be spreading through the country. In the Democratic primary election in New Hampshire, an avowed peace candidate, Senator Eugene McCarthy, won an unexpectedly large proportion of the votes, nearly defeating the incumbent president.

On March 31, 1968, President Johnson delivered a televised address in which he announced that he would curtail the bombing of North Vietnam and seek to negotiate peace with the Communists. At the end of his speech, Johnson disclosed that he would not run in the November elections.

He may have planned earlier to retire from politics. But his unexpected announcement created the impression that he had been a casualty of the Tet Offensive. To a large extent, certainly, his dream of building a Great Society in America had been a casualty of the Vietnam War.

Points to Emphasize

- the effects of television coverage on the public's perception of the Vietnam War
- the credibility problem of the Johnson administration
- the shock value of the Tet Offensive and the strategic and tactical goals of the North Vietnamese
- the question of increasing the size of American forces in Vietnam
- the disenchantment with the Johnson war policy among both hawks and doves
- President Johnson's options: whether to escalate or disengage
- the impact of the New Hampshire primary on American electoral politics in 1968
- the factors which led to President Johnson's March 31, 1968 speech

Glossary of Names and Terms

McGeorge Bundy dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University, 1953–1961. Special Assistant to the President for National Security, 1961–1966. President, Ford Foundation, 1966–1979.

Clark Clifford Washington lawyer. Special Counsel to the President, 1946–1950. Head of President Kennedy's transition team, 1960–1961. Secretary of Defense, 1968–1969.

Robert Kennedy younger brother of John Kennedy and his campaign manager in 1960. Attorney General of the United States, 1961–1964. U.S. senator from New York, 1965–1968. Candidate for the Democratic nomination for President, 1968. Assassinated June 5, 1968, after winning the California primary.

Eugene McCarthy U.S. representative and senator from Minnesota, 1958–1970. Candidate for the Democratic nomination for President, 1968.

Harry McPherson Deputy Under Secretary for International Affairs, Department of the Army, 1963–1964. Assistant Secretary of State, Educational and Cultural Affairs, 1964–1965. Special Assistant and Counsel to President Johnson, 1965–1966. Special Counsel to President Johnson, 1966–1969.

Mike Mansfield U.S. representative and senator from Montana, 1952–1976. Assistant Majority Leader, 1957–1961. Majority Leader, 1961–1976. Member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

Walt Whitman Rostow professor of economic history, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1950–1960. Deputy Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, 1961. Counselor and Chairman, Policy Planning Council of State Department, 1961–1966. Special Assistant to the President, 1966–1969.

Earle Wheeler Deputy Commander-in-chief, U.S. European Command, 1962. Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, 1962–1964. Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1964–1970.

credibility gap public disbelief in the government version of events. One of the major problems of the Johnson administration with regard to Vietnam.

disengagement the pulling back of U.S. troops to end the Americanization of the war. The goal of Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford after the Tet Offensive.

Hue former imperial capital of Vietnam. Communist troops captured it during the Tet Offensive and held it for more than three weeks.

Khesanh isolated U.S. Marine base near the Laotian border which was under siege by the Communists in the winter of 1967–1968. Khesanh never fell but was evacuated by the Americans later in 1968, then rebuilt into a base in 1971.

Tet the lunar new year celebrations in Vietnam.

Ton Son Nhut Airbase American-built airport outside of Saigon. Headquarters for General Westmoreland.

Wise Old Men government officials and military men, both active and retired, who served as unofficial advisors to President Johnson, including: Dean Acheson, George Ball, McGeorge and William Bundy, Abe Fortas, Cyrus Vance, Henry Cabot Lodge, Dean Rusk, Clark Clifford, Richard Helms, Walt Rostow, Arthur Goldberg, and Generals Bradley, Ridgway, and Taylor.