

# The Vietnam War 1954 - 1975

- ★ America's most unpopular war
- ★ Cost LBJ his second term to Richard Nixon
- ★ America's longest and most expensive war
  - ★ Divided America on the homefront
  - ★ The best technical war money could buy
  - ★ America hardly ever lost a tactical battle
  - ★ *A war America did not win*

*Today, we are living with the  
“ghosts of Vietnam”.*



**Soviet Union  
1918**

**Berlin  
Blockade  
1947-8**

**Eastern  
Europe  
1946**

**China  
1949**

**Korean War  
1950 to 1953**

**Cuban  
Missile  
Crisis \***

**\*Cuba  
would  
remain and  
still is a  
communist  
country.**

**Vietnam War  
1946 to 1975  
US Involvement  
1965 to 1975**

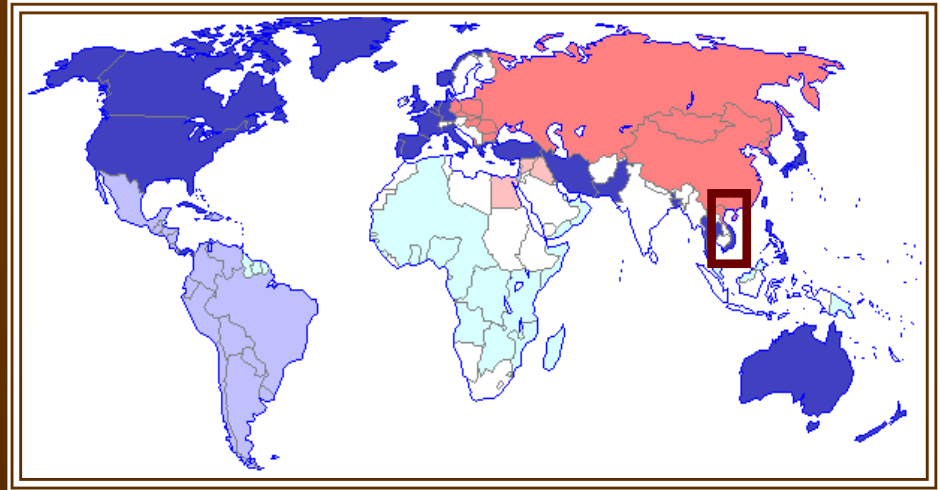
**CONTAINMENT**

- Marshall Plan
- Berlin Airlift
- NATO
- Korean War
- Cuban Missile Crisis
- Alliance for Progress
- Peace Corps

***Communist Expansion***  
***“CONTAINMENT”***

# Southeast Asian Conflict

## *A Chronology of Events*



# CONFLICTING INTERESTS IN VIETNAM

war sides

## INDIVIDUALS/GROUPS

## POINT OF VIEW

- ★ Ho Chi Minh
  - North Vietnamese Army
  - Communist insurgents
    - ★ Revolt against the South Vietnamese Govt
  - ★ - VC = Viet Cong or South Vietnamese guerrillas

- ★ Ngo Dinh Diem
  - South Vietnamese Army

- ★ United States

- ★ North Vietnam leader
- ★ Free of foreign interference
- ★ Re-unite Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh as communists
  
- ★ Dictator of SVN
- ★ Used US aid to keep power
  
- ★ Feared Communist takeover of South Vietnam
- ★ Supported Diem to keep SVN free
- ★ US willing to commit troops

# HO CHI MINH

***“You can kill 10 of my men for every one I kill of yours, yet even at those odds, you will lose and I will win”***

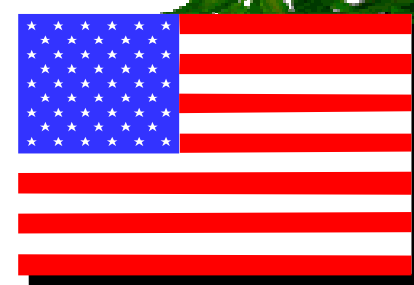


**Ho Chi Minh 1890-1969**  
**“Light-Bringer”**

- Founder of the *Vietnamese Communist Party*
- Traveled for almost 30 years around the world. Visited France, England, Russia, China, Thailand and the United States.
- In that time he learned to speak fluent Russian, Chinese and English.
- *Patriot or Communist?*
- Motivated the Vietnamese to rebel and fight against France/US for independence.
- Became Vietnam’s first president.



# Background to the War



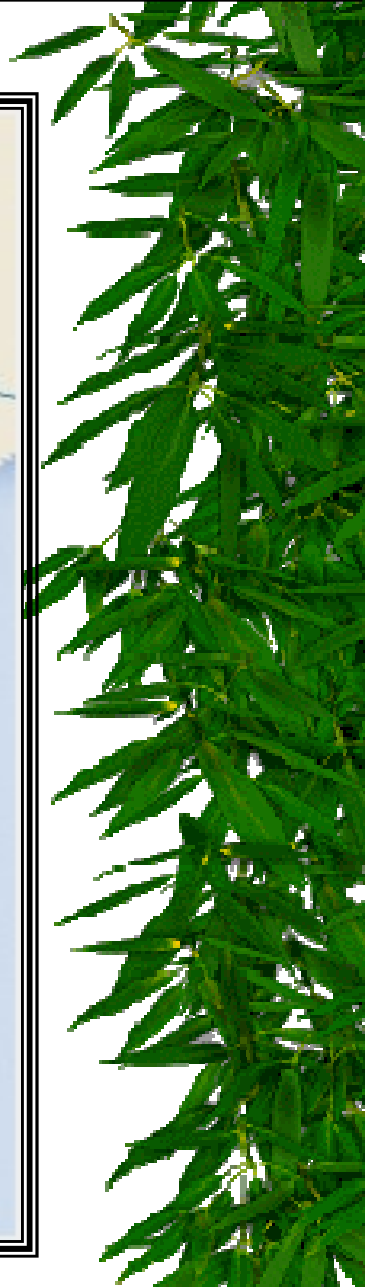
## 🌀 Vietnamese culture

- 🌀 Villages and rice
- 🌀 Buddhist

## 🌀 Historic tension with Chinese

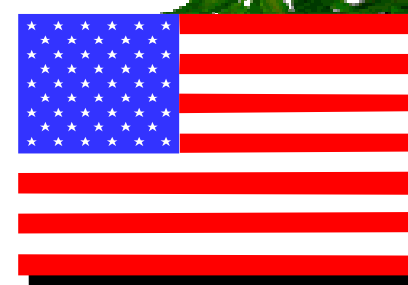
🌀 Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia were originally a French colony ([French IndoChina](#)) in the late 19th century

🌀 [Imperialism](#)





# Background to the War



☯ Japan took control during World War II

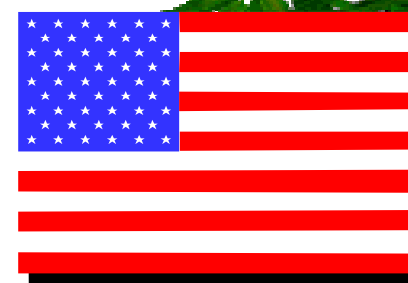
☯ Opposed by guerrilla force led by Ho Chi Minh

☯ US backed Ho Chi Minh's efforts to remove Japan





# Background to the War



☯ At end of WW II, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam an independent nation

☯ President Truman refused to recognize Ho Chi Minh and Vietnam.

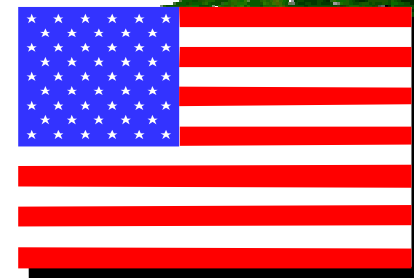
☯ With U.S. aid, France attempted re-colonize Vietnam



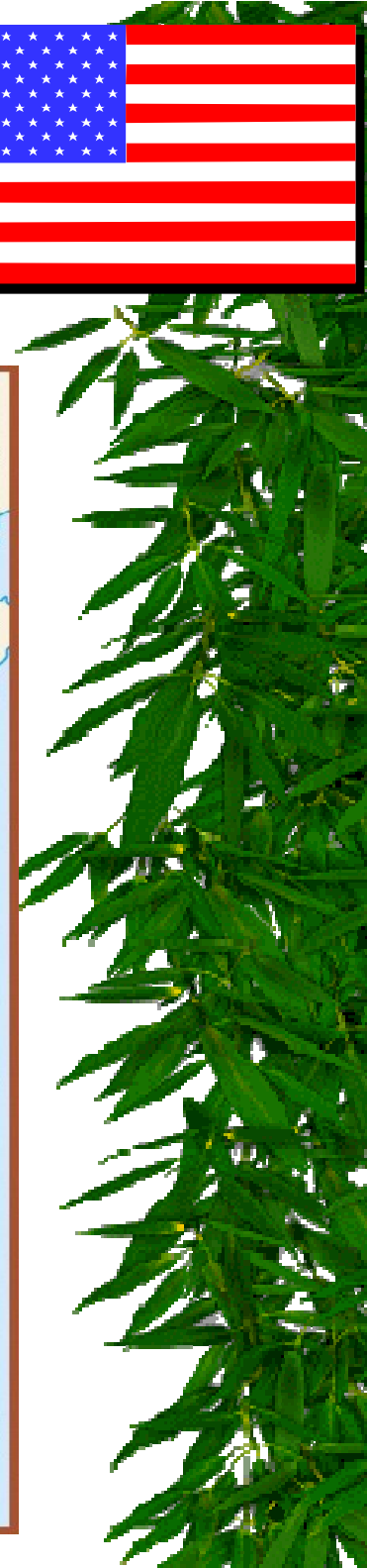




# Background to the War

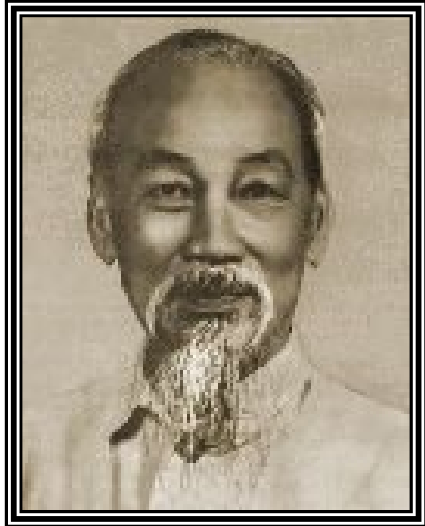
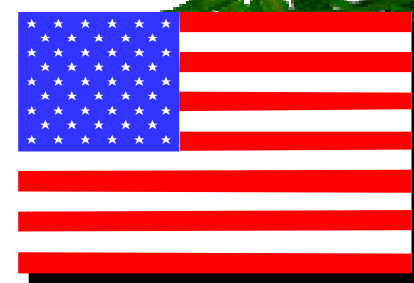


- ☞ Fighting between France and Vietminh began in 1946
- ☞ The French lost control to Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh forces at Dien Bien Phu... May 7, 1954
- ☞ France requested US air support
- ☞ Nuclear if necessary
- ☞ President Eisenhower declined to intervene on behalf of France.
- ☞ French withdrew from Indochina





# Background to the War



☪ International Conference at Geneva in 1954

♌ Vietnam was divided at 17<sup>th</sup> parallel

ॐ Ho Chi Minh's nationalist forces controlled the North

ॐ Ngo Dinh Diem, a French-educated, Roman Catholic claimed control of the South

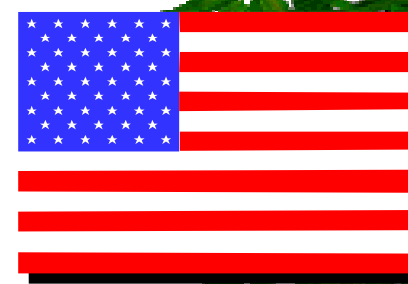
☪ Elections were to be held two years later.





# ***SEATO***

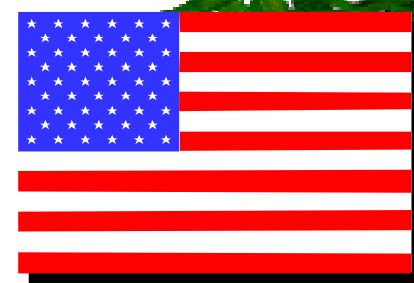
## ***Southeast Asia Treaty Organization***



- ★ **Initiated by the US in Sept 1954 to prevent spread of communism**
  - ***“Domino Theory”***
- ★ **Member nations were: US, Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand Philippines, and Pakistan**
- ★ **Didn’t require participants to support each other with military force**
- ★ **Politically justified US actions in South Vietnam**



# Background to the War



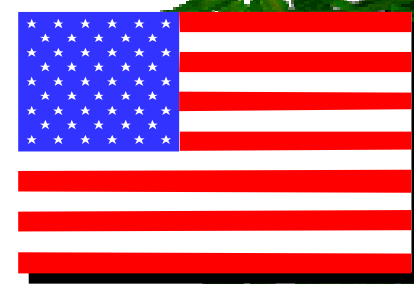
☉ A date was set for democratic elections to reunify Vietnam

☉ Diem backed out of the elections, leading to military conflict between North and South





# U.S. Military Involvement Begins



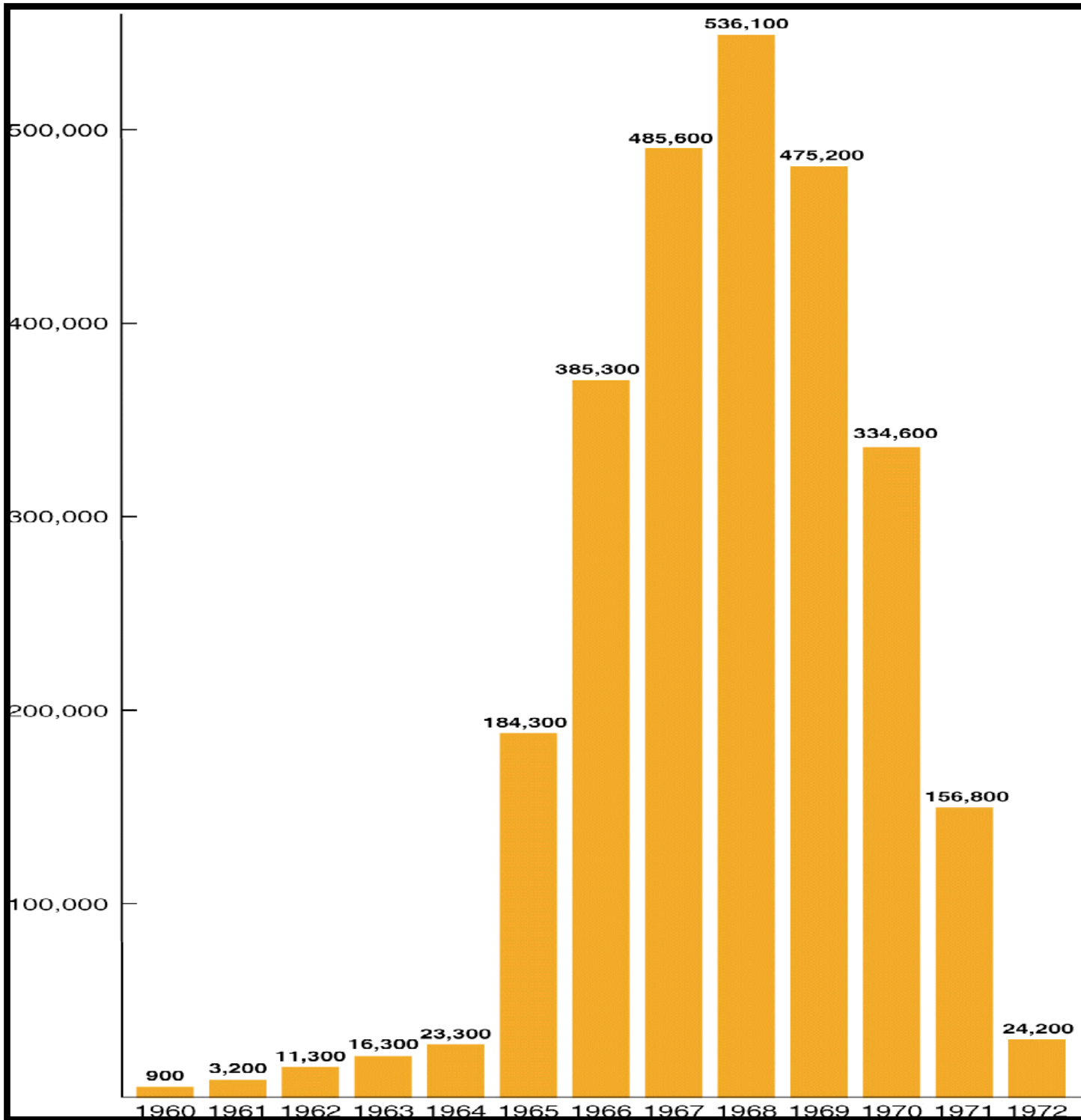
☰ **Repressive dictatorial rule by Diem**

- ♋ Diem's family holds all power
- ♋ Wealth is hoarded by the elite
- ♋ Buddhist majority persecuted
- ♋ Torture, lack of political freedom prevail

☰ **The U.S. aided Diem's government**

- ♋ Ike sent financial and military aid
- ♋ 675 U.S. Army advisors sent by 1960.

# U.S. Troop Levels in Vietnam



# 1960

★ **April 1955--US agrees to advise South Vietnam**

- **Green Berets arrive Oct. 1959 to train only South Vietnam troops.**

★ **1959 -- North Vietnam increased actions to unify North and South**  
**"insurgents"**

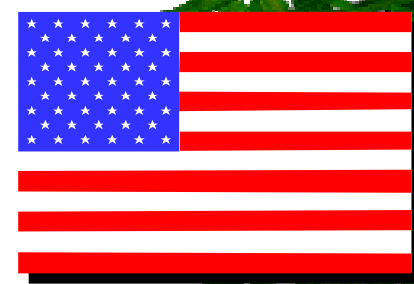
- **US increased action to prevent a North Vietnam victory**

<b>Troop Levels:</b>	
<b>South Vietnamese</b>	<b>243,000</b>
<b>American</b>	<b>900</b>





# U.S. Military Involvement Begins



- ☉ Kennedy elected 1960
- ☉ Increases military “advisors” to 16,000
- ☉ 1963: JFK supports a *S. Vietnamese military coup d’etat* – Diem and his brother are murdered (Nov. 2)
- ☉ Kennedy was assassinated just weeks later (Nov. 22)





# 1961 and 1962

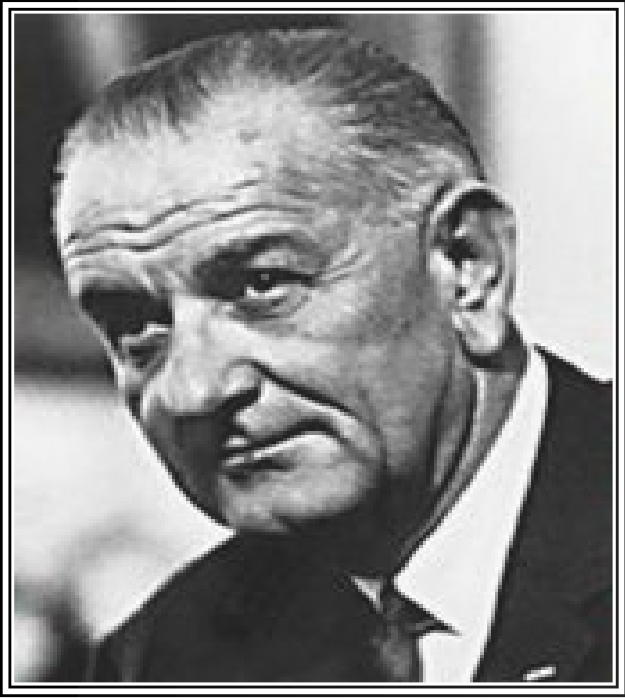
<b>Troop Levels:</b>	
<b>South Vietnamese</b>	<b>243,000</b>
<b>American</b>	<b>3,205</b>

In order to *contain* the spread of Communism, newly elected President Kennedy agreed to further US military assistance to South Vietnam.

# 1963

<b>Troop levels:</b>	
<b>South Vietnamese</b>	<b>243,000</b>
<b>American</b>	<b>16,300</b>
<b>Australian</b>	<b>30</b>

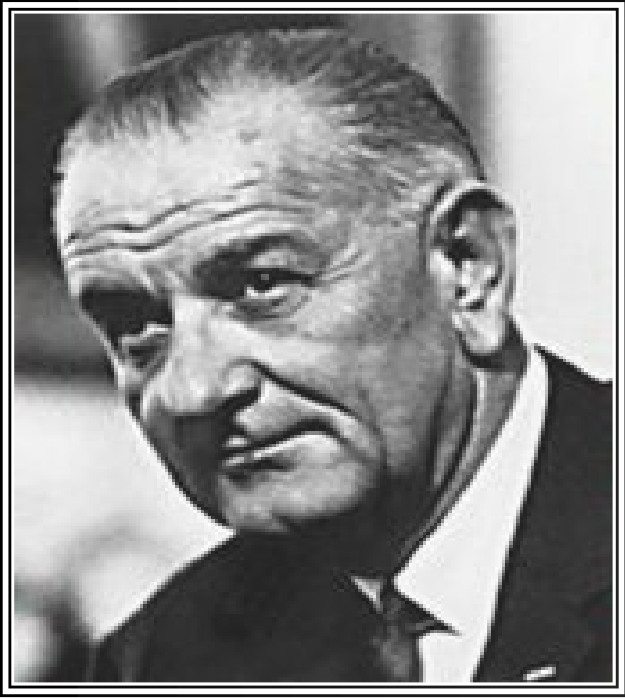
# VIETNAM WAR



**Lyndon Johnson,**  
**Speech at Johns**  
**Hopkins University,**  
*"Why are we in*  
*South Vietnam"*

- **Why are we in South Vietnam? We are there because we have a promise to keep. Since 1954 every American President has offered to support the people of South Vietnam.**
- **We have helped to build and we have helped to defend. Thus, over many years, we have made a national pledge to help South Vietnam defend its independence.**

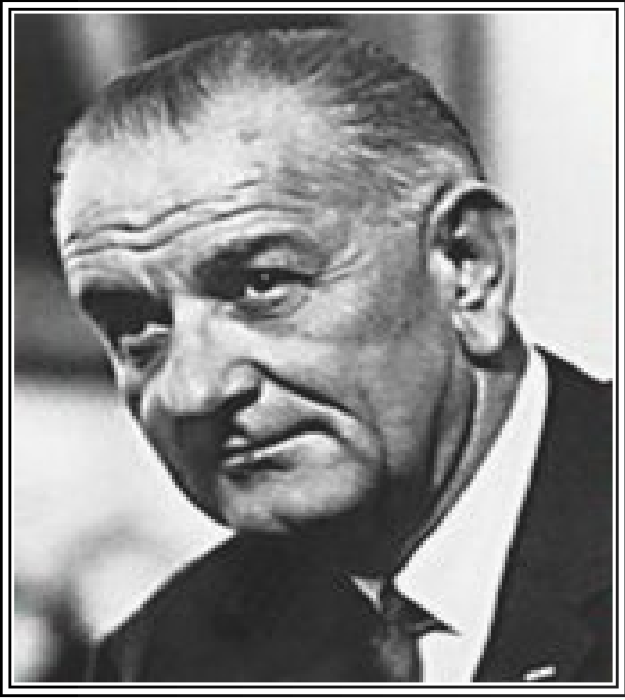
# VIETNAM WAR



**Lyndon Johnson,  
Speech at Johns  
Hopkins University,  
*"Why are we in  
South Vietnam"***

- I intend to keep our promise. To dishonor that pledge, to abandon this small and brave nation to its enemy and to the terror that must follow would be an unforgivable wrong.
- We are there to strengthen world order.

# VIETNAM WAR

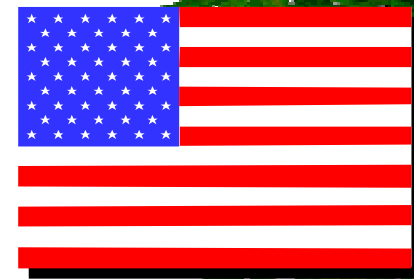


**Lyndon Johnson,**  
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*"Why are we in*  
*South Vietnam"*

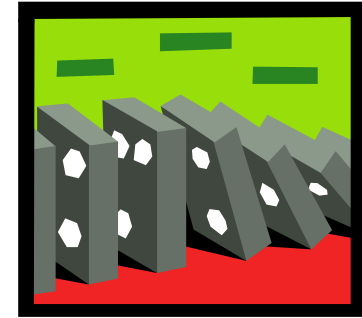
- Around the globe from Berlin to Thailand are people whose well-being rests, in part, on the belief they can count on us if they are attacked.
- To leave Vietnam to its fate would shake the confidence of all these people in the value of American commitment. The result would be increased unrest and instability, or even war.



# Johnson Sends Ground Forces



☞ Remembers Truman's "loss" of China → **Domino Theory** revived



*I'm not going to be the president who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went.*



# 1964

★ **Aug '64 -- N Vietnamese gunboats attack 2 US destroyers in Gulf of Tonkin...maybe**

<b>Troop levels:</b>	
<b>South Vietnamese</b>	<b>514,000</b>
<b>American</b>	<b>23,300</b>
<b>Australian</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>South Korea</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>New Zealand</b>	<b>30</b>

# 1964

## ★ Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

## ★ Passed by Congress 5 Aug 1964

- Radically altered the War in Southeast Asia

- Gave President Johnson a “blank check”:

*“To take all necessary steps to repel armed attack against US forces”, including force, to assist South Vietnam and any member of SEATO”*

- Committed US to fight for S Vietnam

- Changed balance of power between President and the Congress



# The Ho Chi Minh Trail

## The Vietnam War, 1964–1968



- North Vietnamese troops and supplies entered South Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a route that passed through Laos and Cambodia.

# Intensifying the War

- After the election of 1964, President Johnson began a gradual **escalation**, or expansion of the war. The number of American soldiers stationed in Vietnam rose from about 25,000 at the beginning of 1965 to nearly 536,000 by the end of 1968.
- Originally, American soldiers had been sent to advise the South Vietnamese; now their task was to prop up a failing South Vietnamese government led by Nguyen Cao Ky.
- Despite the large buildup of American troops, between 1965 and 1967 the war was at a stalemate.
- Within the United States, debate raged between **hawks**, those who supported the war, and **doves**, those who did not.

**In February the US commences bombardment of North Vietnam and begins to send combat troops to Vietnam.**

**1965**



**First U.S. combat troops land in Da Nang, South Vietnam.**

**Troop Levels:**

<b>South Vietnamese</b>	<b>642,500</b>
<b>American</b>	<b>184,300</b>
<b>Australian</b>	<b>1,560</b>
<b>New Zealand</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>South Korea</b>	<b>20,620</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Thailand</b>	<b>20</b>

## Some Weapons Used in the Vietnam War

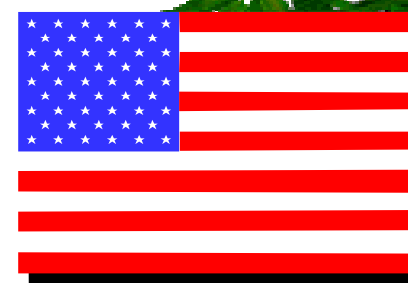
- **Land Mines** — Land mines, which can be set off by the pressure of a footstep, are explosive devices planted in the ground. Viet Cong landmines killed and wounded both American GIs and Vietnamese civilians.
- **Saturation Bombing** — American B-52 bomber planes dropped thousands of tons of explosives, resulting in saturation bombing of North Vietnam.
- **Fragmentation Bombs** — Fragmentation bombs, dropped by Americans over both North and South Vietnam, threw pieces of their thick metal casings in all directions when they exploded. In South Vietnam, fragmentation bombs killed and maimed countless civilians.

## Some Weapons Used in the Vietnam War

- **Agent Orange** — American pilots dropped an herbicide called Agent Orange over Vietnamese jungles, killing vegetation and exposing Viet Cong hiding places. Agent Orange was later discovered to cause health problems in livestock and humans.
- **Napalm** — Another chemical weapon used in Vietnam, napalm, was a jellylike substance which, when dropped from planes splattered, and burned uncontrollably.



# The Air War 1965-1968



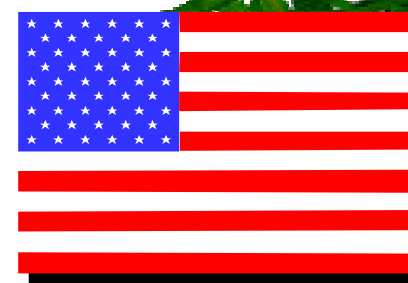
- ☞ 1965: Sustained bombing of North Vietnam begins
- ☞ Operation Rolling Thunder (March 2, 1965)

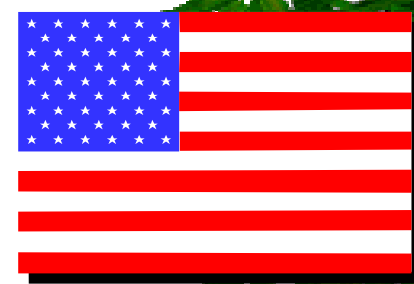


- ☞ 1966-68: Ongoing bombing of Hanoi nonstop for 3 years! Esp. targets the Ho Chi Minh Trail.
- ☞ Downed Pilots: P.O.W.s
- ☞ Carpet Bombing – napalm



# The Air War: A Napalm Attack





- ★ **Americans flew from bases in Thailand, Laos, Guam and South Vietnam**
- ★ **Troops from Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Philippines fought with the US and South Vietnam**
- ★ **China and the Soviet Union**
  - heavily supported North Vietnam





## American Troops

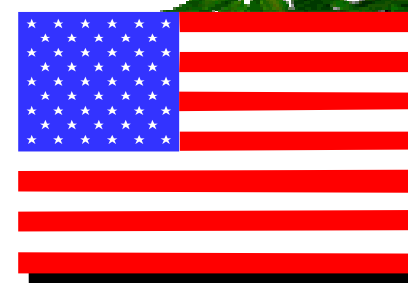
- **Had superior weapons**
- **Were unprepared for heat, terrain, or guerrilla tactics**
- **Lacked support of most South Vietnamese**
- **Most never saw the enemy but constantly faced the possibility of sudden danger.**

## Viet Cong Troops

- **Fought as guerrillas; avoided head-on clashes**
- **Were familiar with terrain; had support of many South Vietnamese**
- **Built and hid in elaborate underground tunnels**



# Who Is the Enemy?



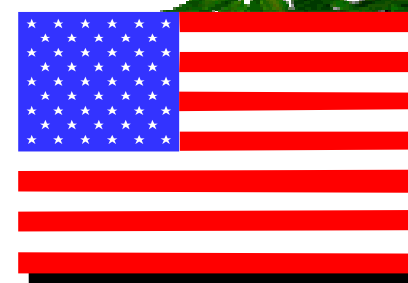
**The Vietcong consisted of a well organized guerilla fighting force in South Vietnam.**

**Their guerilla and jungle hit and run tactics made them a menace for American, South Vietnamese, and other allied forces.**



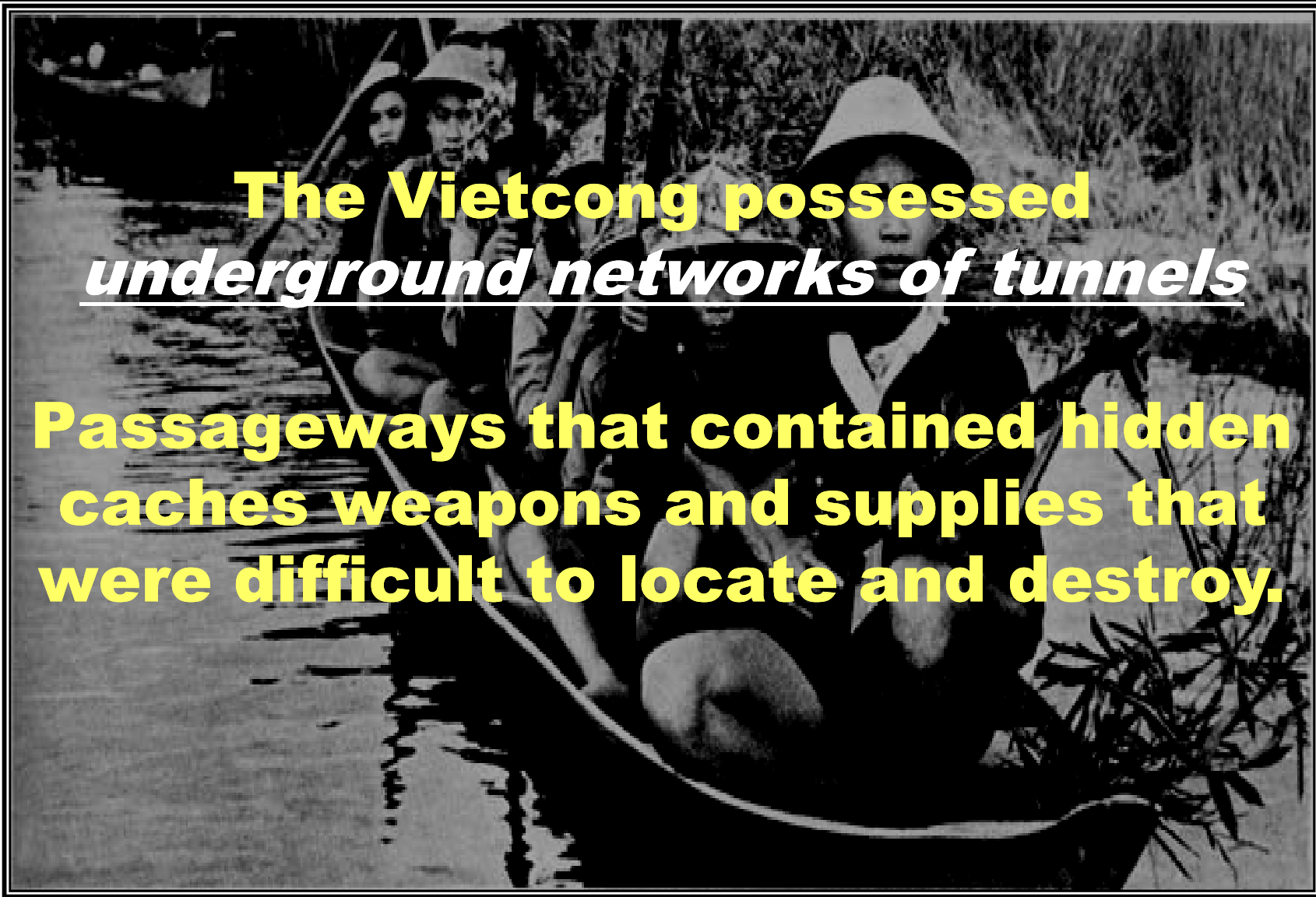


# Who Is the Enemy?



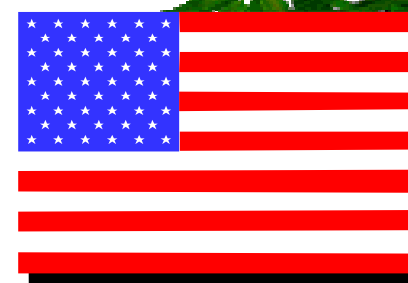
**The Vietcong possessed**  
**underground networks of tunnels**

**Passageways that contained hidden  
caches weapons and supplies that  
were difficult to locate and destroy.**





# Who Is the Enemy?



*Who's your enemy?*

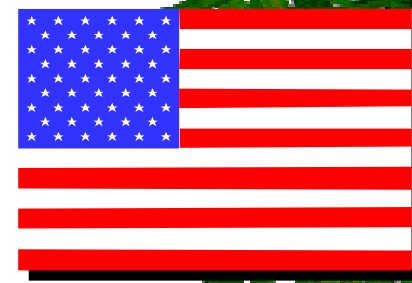
**U.S. and South Vietnamese forces found it extremely difficult to fight the Vietcong's *hit and run tactics.***

**Vietcong could easily blend into a village where they could move about freely since they did not belong to a *“standard”* army.**





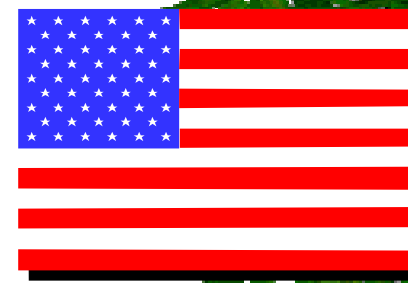
# Who Is the Enemy?



vc1



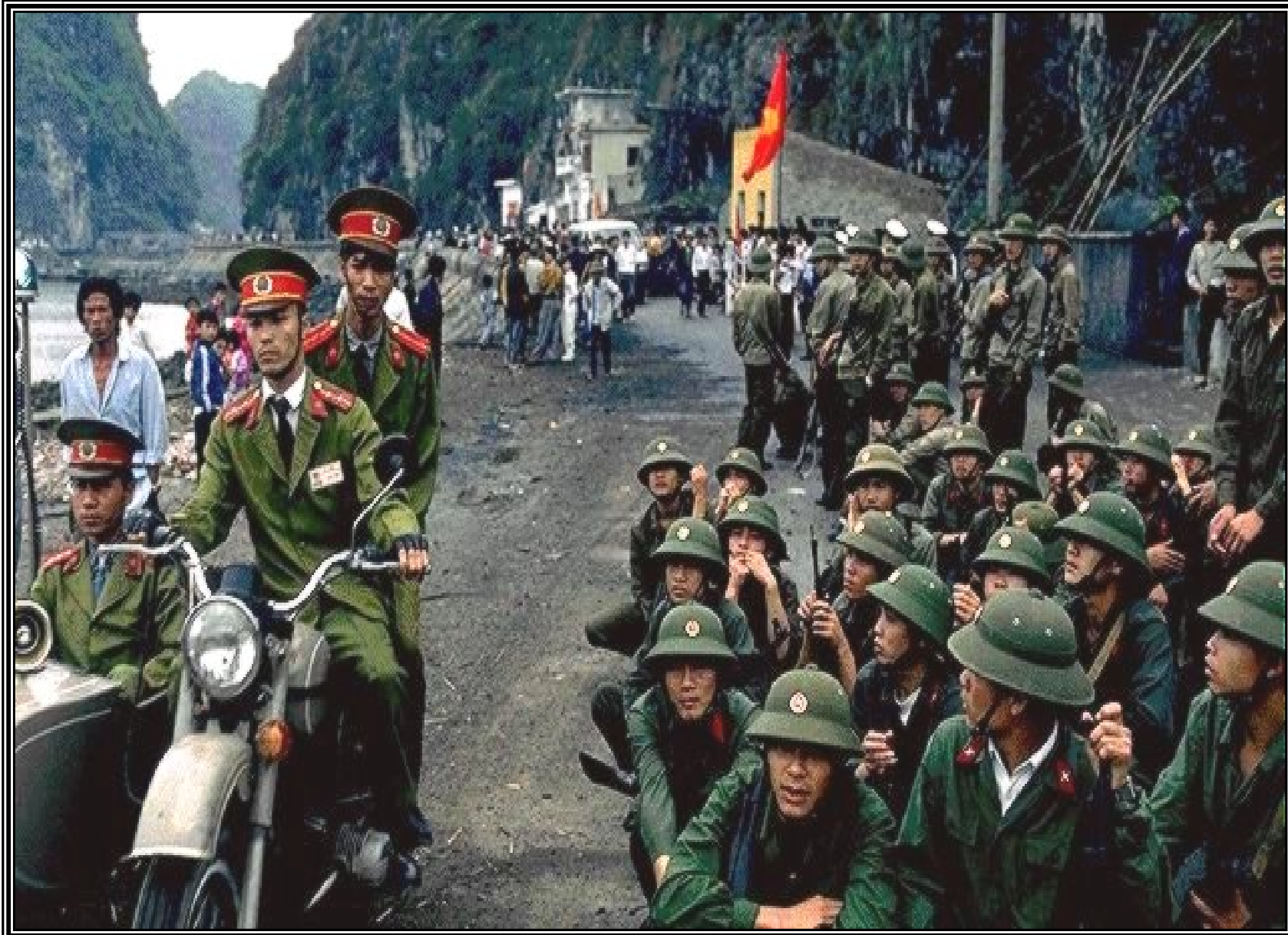
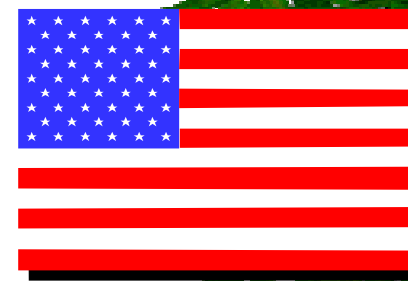
# Who Is the Enemy?



vc2

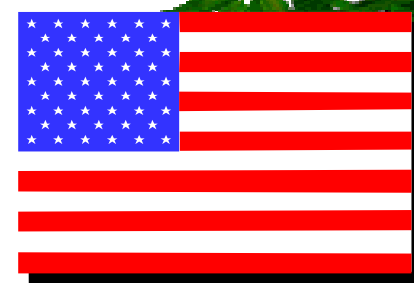


# Who Is the Enemy?





# The Ground War 1965-1968



- ☞ No territorial goals
- ☞ Body counts on TV every night  
(first **“living room” war**)

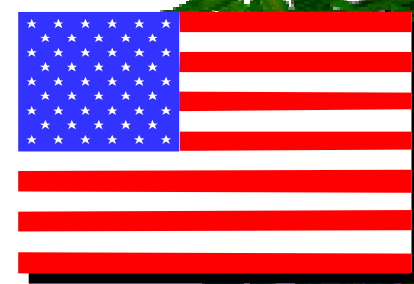


- ☞ Viet Cong supplies over the  
**Ho Chi Minh Trail**

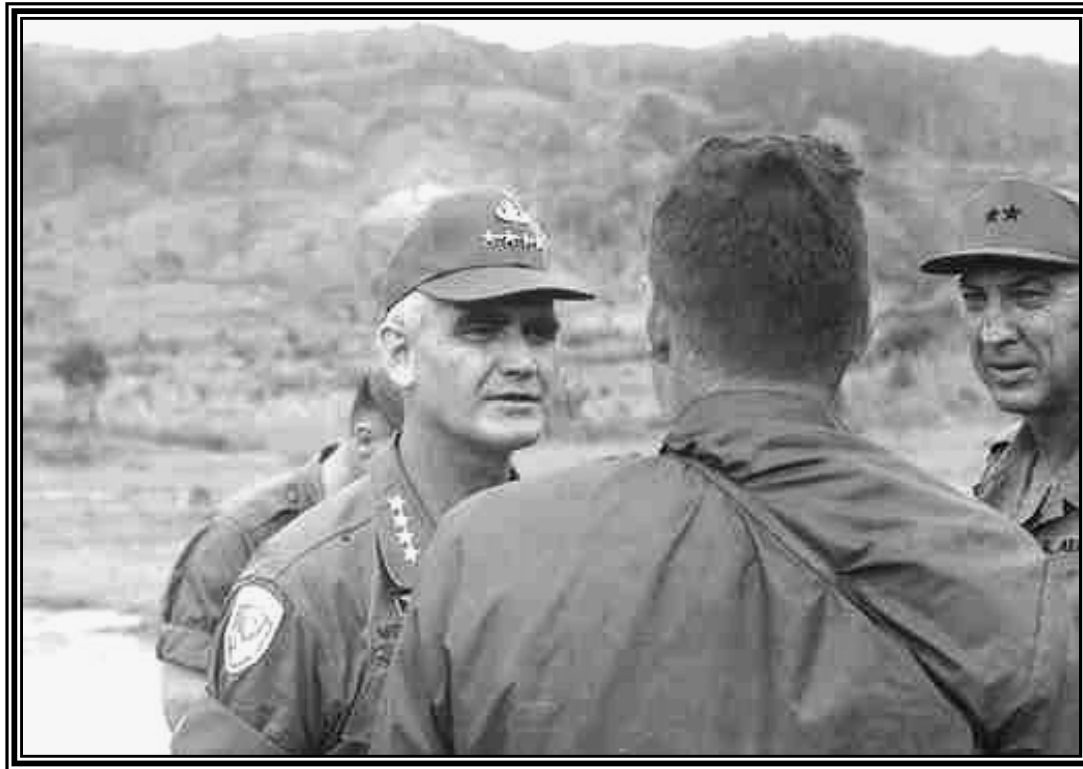




# The Ground War 1965-1968



☞ General Westmoreland, late 1967: “*We can see the light at the end of the tunnel*”

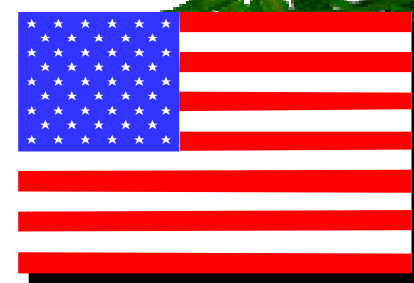


• *"a war of attrition"*





# The Tet Offensive, January 1968



☞ ***N. Vietnamese Army + Viet Cong attack South simultaneously***

☞ **80,000 attack 100 cities, bases and the US embassy in Saigon**

☞ **Take every major southern city**

☞ ***U.S. + ARVN beat back the offensive***

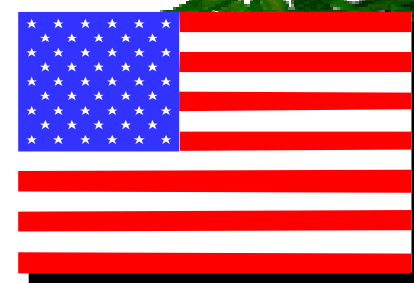
☞ **Viet Cong destroyed**

☞ **N. Vietnamese army debilitated**





## **The Tet Offensive: A Turning Point**

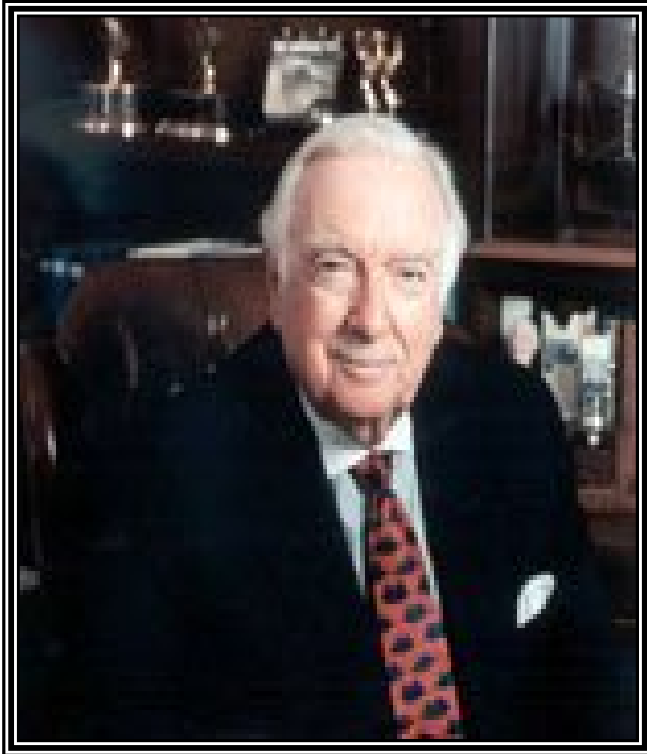
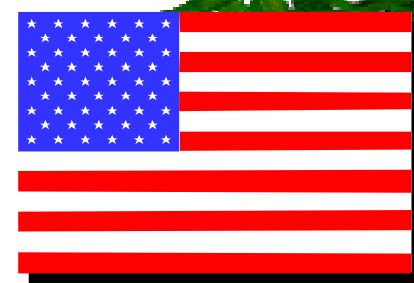


- \* Because Americans now knew that the Viet Cong could launch massive attacks, and because no end to the war was in sight, the Tet Offensive proved to be a major psychological victory for the Viet Cong and a turning point in the war.**





# The Tet Offensive, January 1968



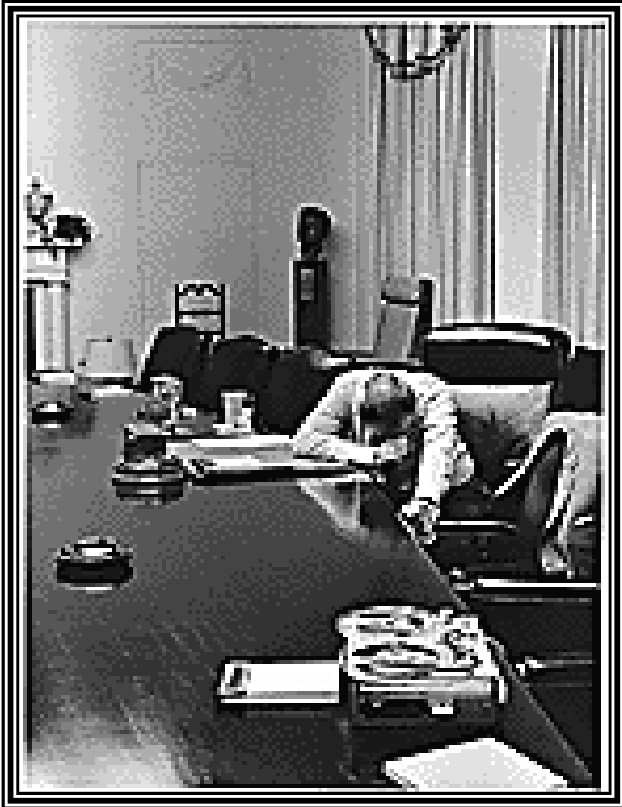
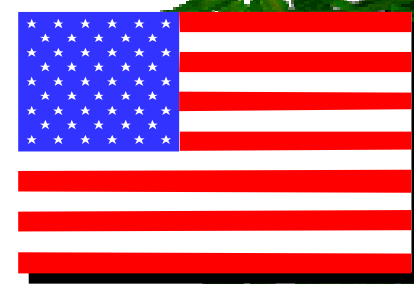
**Because of the Tet  
Offensive, the US  
media announced the  
US was losing the  
war.**

**Walter Cronkite,  
highly-respected  
anchor of CBS News  
who opposed the war  
after Tet.**





# Impact of the Tet Offensive

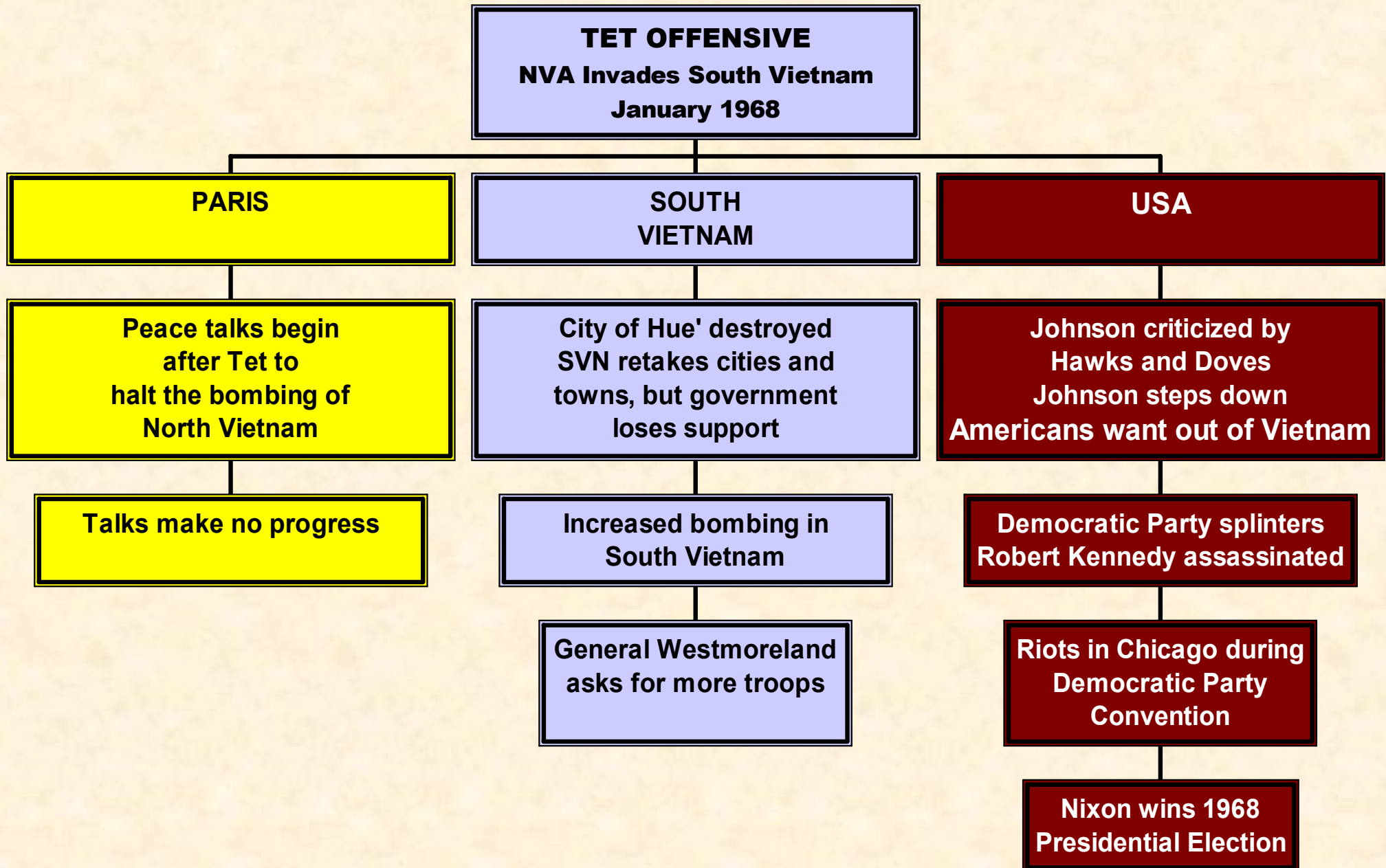


☯ Domestic U.S. Reaction:  
Disbelief, Anger, Distrust  
of Johnson  
Administration

☯ ***Hey, Hey LBJ! How  
many kids did you  
kill today?***



# Impact of the Tet Offensive

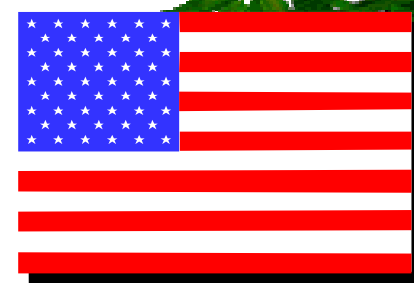


# 1968

<b>Troop Levels:</b>	
<b>South Vietnamese</b>	<b>820,000</b>
<b>American</b>	<b>536,100</b>
<b>Australian</b>	<b>7,660</b>
<b>New Zealand</b>	<b>520</b>
<b>South Korea</b>	<b>50,000</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	<b>1,580</b>
<b>Thailand</b>	<b>6,000</b>



# Are We Becoming the Enemy?



**Charlie Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 20<sup>th</sup> Infantry**



- ☯ My Lai Massacre, 1968
- ☯ 200-500 unarmed villagers



☯ **Lt. William Calley,  
Platoon Leader**

