

The Tet Offensive

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The country of Vietnam has endured hardship for almost 100 years. They have survived civil war, religious divisions that have separated the villages and tyrannical military leaders and government officials. During the century of French rule from 1860 until 1954, the French brutalized and took advantage of the Vietnamese also. Even though all of these incidents were present in Vietnam long before the US took an interest in the country, they are nonetheless a part of the history of the country and played a role in how both North and South Vietnam would handle occupation of their country by the US. Many of these events would be exacerbated by the Vietnam war and would become more evident after the Tet Offensive. After the Tet Offensive there was an almost audible hiss of air leaking out of the momentum of the US. The North sensed the US slipping and the South did as well. Even though the US won all of the major battles of Tet, many of the South Vietnamese and US soldiers would never regain the pre-1968 form of the Vietnam War. The Tet offensive was a turning point in the Vietnam War and a point in which the United States realized the war was unwinnable.

The French controlled Vietnam and they were absolutely nasty colonial masters. They did everything from uprooting entire villages and working them to death in fields or construction projects, to eliminating education (even reading and writing) for nearly all Vietnamese, to hunting down and killing anyone that opposed them. They frequently wiped out entire villages in reprisal for a minor demonstration by a few.

One good example is French conscription of 50,000 soldiers and another 49,000 workers to fight in World War I. They also took 336,000 tons of food during a period of natural disaster induced famine. To add insult to injury, the Vietnamese people were also forced to loan the French a bunch of money to finance the war. That meant that these people were essentially paying the costs to send some of them to

go fight and die, just to determine which particular European country would get their chance to take advantage of them.

The French set up monopolies on opium, salt and alcohol, and then actively encouraged their use. Salt was commonly handled in this manner by both the British and the French because it's required for survival, and difficult to make in secret. Opium and alcohol were correctly assessed to be things that would make a more docile population. When active encouragement wasn't enough, the French made an alcohol consumption requirement. Every village had to consume a certain amount of alcohol per kilogram of body weight.

Ngo Dinh Diem, a Vietnamese living in the United States as part of a CIA project, was flown over to Vietnam and put into power as the leader of South Vietnam. An imaginary line was drawn, and the U.S. said that Ho Chi Minh could hold the north, but that South Vietnam would be a separate nation allied with the U.S. The U.S. picked a loser in Diem. South Vietnam was over 80% Buddhist; Diem was a Catholic who persecuted many Buddhists. He also was personally corrupt and robbed millions from the treasury. Workers and students were suppressed, and the U.S. began sending hundreds of troops to Vietnam as advisors to help Diem.

Many rank and file workers and peasants wanted to rebel against Diem, but the policies of Ho Chi Minh and his Soviet backers was to discourage that at first. Eventually, rebellion in the south developed. Furthermore, many soldiers from the south had gone north only temporarily and found themselves separated from their families for years. By 1958, many of the them were moving back south as well, often with their weapons. The puppet Diem government and the U.S. called this "infiltration from another country", and President Kennedy had about 20,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam by 1963. By

this time, the communist-led National Liberation Front (NLF) controlled over 80% of the countryside with over two-thirds of the people.

Rebel gains coincided with the waning popularity of South Vietnam's president, Ngo Dinh Diem. Elected in 1955, Diem enjoyed great popularity at first, but public support, as well as that of military officers and cabinet ministers, gradually disappeared. This stemmed largely from the fact that Diem's brother and closest adviser, Ngo Dinh Nhu, was able to manipulate officers and military units at his discretion. Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, Diem's bitterly outspoken sister-in-law, also played a unique and important role in arousing the disfavor of Vietnamese and foreigners alike.

A serious setback occurred in May 1963, when President Diem, a Roman Catholic, prohibited the flying of the Buddhist flag. Thousands of Buddhists were arrested, and some were tortured or killed. Buddhist priests publicly burned themselves to death in protest; national morale was badly shaken. The Viet Cong attacked with greater fervor. Casualties and desertions from the South Vietnamese army rose sharply as public displeasure with the Diem regime mounted. In early November, barely three weeks before President Kennedy was killed in Dallas, Diem and Nhu were assassinated. A military junta assumed control. The government remained unstable, however, with a marked absence of popular support.

Civil war threatened as fighting erupted between government forces and troops loyal to Thi. Riots instigated by the Buddhists, notably Tri Quang, broke out in Saigon, Hue, and Da Nang. Again, as in 1963 Buddhists publicly burned themselves to death. In April Premier Ky acceded to most of the Buddhist demands; elections were scheduled for later in the year. The unrest continued, however, as militant Buddhists called for Ky's resignation. Meanwhile government troops won back control of the cities which had been taken over by Thi's followers. By mid-1966 the rioting had also subsided.

The main problem with the war from a policy perspective is that everyone involved on this side always saw it as an insurgency from the north, or the North taking over the South. Most writers still write about it that way. It is quite true that the drive for communism came from the North, and that all of the weapons, instructions, political ideology, money and other supplies came from the north. However, you should keep in mind that most of the fighting and dying was being done by South Vietnamese. People frequently confuse who exactly the communists are, and the same thing happened back then. The Viet Cong, which was the group that did most of the active fighting with the Americans was a southern organization which fought with southern soldiers on their own turf. The North Vietnamese army was never used in South Vietnam in large numbers until after the Tet Offensive in 1968, in which most of the Viet Cong were wiped out.

3-5 million Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians were killed, and 4 million injured (exact numbers are unknown and somewhat controversial. The smallest estimate I've seen is 2 million). That's a death rate of more than 550 people every day for the entire 20 years of direct involvement, and over 400 of those killed every day were non-combatants. Over 70% of those killed were civilians who were not fighting, and had no idea what the war was being fought over. Unfortunately, most Americans also had no idea about what it was being fought over either. 60,000 Americans were killed and another 300,000 were wounded, not counting people that died later from war related diseases or injuries. This means there were 50-80 people killed for every American killed. At the time, the total population of Vietnam was 30 million, so that means over 10% of the population was killed and another 13% were injured (Heinl, 130). That would be equivalent to the U.S. going to war today, and having the entire population of California killed.

During the war, the communists were at least partially successful in their recruiting because they were absolutely mean and nasty people, just like the U.S. It was not uncommon at all for the Viet Cong

to come to a village and give them the choice that either a dozen men and women (women fought too) would see the light and join up to throw out the imperialist aggressors, or the whole village would be burned down and a lot of people killed. A lot of villages had to walk a pretty fine line, because the ARVN (South Vietnamese Army) would come along the next day saying pretty much the same thing. Assassination of village elders or anyone that opposed the VC, as well as random violence and other acts of terror was quite common.

A lot of the strategies and tactics they used were deliberately designed to kill a whole bunch of Vietnamese to get a few Americans, because they (correctly) calculated that the Americans had a limit on the number of body bags they were willing to ship home.

Guerrilla warfare spread as Viet Minh soldiers who were trained and armed in the North—the Viet Cong—returned to their homes in the South to assassinate, ambush, sabotage.

The 1968 Tet Offensive was a decisive turning point in the public life of the United States of America, and indeed in world history. Professor John Guilmartin, Jr.(PhD), a LTC USAR (ret) wrote:” Largely as a result of its impact, Lyndon Johnson's presidency, which started on a note of cautious optimism, peaked in electoral triumph in the 1964 election, but ended in humiliation barely five years later.” . Moreover, although it only lasted for about one month, it was one of America’s most notable battles that taught the Americans and the Vietnamese valuable lessons about life and war. The Tet Offensive proved to be a political and a psychological victory for the Vietnamese communists.

Vietnamese Lunar New Year has been a traditional celebration that brings the Vietnamese a sense of happiness, hope and peace. However, in recent years, it also brings back a bitter memory full of tears. It reminds them of the Tet Offensive, which occurred on January 31, 1968, the bloodiest military campaign of the Vietnam War, the north communists launched against the south.

The North surprised the South Vietnamese and American forces in simultaneous attacks in many parts of Vietnam during the Vietnamese New Year, or Tet. Many of the attackers disguised themselves as Tet holiday celebrators. Although American troops did not withdraw from Vietnam until 1973, the Tet Offensive was the beginning of the end of the U.S. presence there. It was the first time the United States was unable to gain victory in war. Some of most important battles during Tet Offensive were Battle for Hue, Khe Sanh Battle, Battle at Saigon, and the last but not least My Lai Massacre.

On 31 January combat erupted throughout the entire country. The communists attacked thirty-six of 44 provincial capitals and 64 of 242 district towns, as well as 5 of South Vietnam's 6 autonomous cities, among them Hue and Saigon.

The most tenacious combat occurred in Hue, the ancient capital of Vietnam. Hue was the capital of Thua Thien Province and South Vietnam's third largest city, with a wartime population of 140,000. (Willbanks, 210). It was the old imperial capital and served as the cultural and intellectual center of Vietnam. Nevertheless, the city was on one of the principal land supply routes for the allied troops and it also served as a major unloading point for waterborne supplies.

"Gradually, the battling turned the once beautiful city into a nightmare. Hue's streets were littered with dead. A black-shirted Communist soldier sprawled dead in the middle of a road, still holding a hand grenade. A woman knelt in death by a wall in the corner of her garden. A child lay on the stairs, crushed by a fallen roof. Many of the bodies had turned black and begun to decompose, and rats gnawed at the exposed flesh." (Willbanks 43)

The battle began at 3:30 A.M. on January 31, 1968. The 6th NVA Regiment's 800th and 802nd battalions and the VC 12th Sapper Battalion launched a 122 mm mortar and rocket barrage followed by

a ground assault on the old Imperial Citadel. Meanwhile the 4th NVA Regiment attacked the U.S. MACV compound in the "New City" south of the river, which managed to hold out despite repeated assaults.

In the largest bloodbath of the Vietnam War, Communist cadres began a systematic roundup of Vietnamese government officials, military officers, Roman Catholic priests, and other "enemies of the people." The graves of 2,800 civilians who were marched off into the jungles and shot, bludgeoned, or buried alive were later uncovered, and 3,000 civilians were never accounted for.

The allied counterattack began immediately. Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong, the ARVN 1st Division commander, whose Black Panther reaction company had managed to hold on to the division headquarters compound in the Citadel, immediately ordered his 3rd Regiment, then on an operation north of the city, to come to his relief. Reinforced by the 2nd, 7th and 9th ARVN airborne battalions, they reached his headquarters in the Citadel's northeast corner on the evening of January 31. The next day General Truong began an attack to retake the entire Citadel and clear the north bank of the river.

When 1st ARVN Division attacks north of the river stalled on February 12, they were reinforced by two VNMC (Vietnamese Marine Corps) battalions and the U.S. 1st Marine Division's 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. Intense house-to-house fighting--the Marines took one casualty for every yard gained--finally forced the enemy from the area, and on February 21 the 1st ARVN Division linked up with elements of the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), which had launched a coordinated assault on the city from blocking positions to the west.

On March 2, 1968, the battle for Hue was officially at an end. More than 50 percent of the city had been damaged or destroyed. Communist casualties were estimated at more than 5,000 killed and 98

captured. ARVN and VNMC casualties included 384 killed, 1,830 wounded, while the U.S. Marines suffered 142 killed, 857 wounded, the U.S. Army 74 killed, and 507 wounded.

Khe Sanh was one of the most remote outposts in Vietnam, but by January 1968, even President Lyndon Johnson had taken a personal interest in the base. The Battle of Khe Sanh began at 0530, 21 January 1968. The North Vietnamese Army forces hammered the Marine-occupied Khe Sanh Combat Base with rocket, mortar, artillery, small arms, and automatic weapons fire. Hundreds of 82-mm. mortar rounds and 122-mm. rockets slammed into the combat base. Virtually all of the base's ammunition stock and a substantial portion of the fuel supplies were destroyed. The actions around Khe Sanh Combat Base, when flashed to the world, touched off a political and public uproar as to whether or not the position should be held. Along with the President, American military officials decided to try and hold the base.

The base at Khe Sanh remained relatively quiet throughout the first week of the North Vietnamese Tet offensive, but the lull ended with a heavy ground attack on the morning of 7 February.

The armor defeating weapons in the camp consisted of two 106-mm. recoilless rifles, a few 57-mm. recoilless rifles, and 100 light antitank weapons known as LAWS. The LAW is designed to be fired once and discarded. These special weapons had been provided to the camp shortly before the attack as a result of intelligence reports which indicated that an attack was imminent and that armored vehicles would most likely be involved. Because of the newness of the weapons, few of the indigenous personnel and only half of the Americans had had the opportunity to fire the weapon before the attack. One survivor reported that several LAW'S failed to fire. This may have been due to lack of training or to improper storage.

As the battle continued, air strikes were called in. When day broke over the battlefield, the defenders located in the operations center called for and received air support to assist them in breaking out of the still surrounded position.

North Vietnamese pressure on the Khe Sanh Combat Base continued during the following two weeks but not in the form of any major ground attacks. During this period Khe Sanh and its surrounding outposts continued to be supplied almost entirely by air. Marine and Air Force cargo aircraft made numerous daily runs to keep the base provisioned, to bring in replacement troops, and to take out wounded. The pilots had to brave both poor weather and intense North Vietnamese antiaircraft fire to accomplish these tasks.

On 15 February, one of the most lucrative targets, an ammunition storage area, was pinpointed 19 kilometers south southwest of Khe Sanh in the Co Roc Mountain region. Flight after flight of strike aircraft were directed into the area throughout a 24-hour period. Another aspect of the air operations was the last leg of the resupply system in which helicopters picked up supplies at Dong Ha and carried them to the outposts on the surrounding hills. They faced the same problems as did the fixed-wing pilots, but to a greater degree. The low-flying helicopter pilots were more vulnerable than their higher flying, faster fellow aviators. Because of the additional exposure, helicopters soon were escorted by strike aircraft to provide suppressive fire as they dropped off supplies and picked up troops.

Helicopters were greatly affected by the weather. When the helicopters were grounded, life became hard on the marines in the outposts. One period of weather when the helicopters could not fly persisted for nine days and created such a water shortage that one small position was authorized to conduct a two-hour march to obtain water from the nearest stream. The patrol surprised a group of North Vietnamese soldiers and eliminated many of them.

During the early evening hours of 29 February, a string of sensors indicated a major movement of troops along Route 9. The fire support control center at the base directed all available assets against the area. The firepower was massive. Artillery, radar-guided fighter bombers, and minor and major B-52 strikes pounded the North Vietnamese's route of march.

A battalion of the 304th North Vietnamese Army Division made the first strike at 2130 on 29 February. The 37th Vietnamese Army Ranger Battalion received the brunt of the initial assault, and all available supporting fire was given the rangers. Hit with this concentrated firepower, the North Vietnamese was unable to breach the outer defenses. His second attempt two hours later met a similar fate. So did the third at 0315 on 1 March.

Although the North Vietnamese continued to harass the base, to probe the weakness along the perimeter, and to shell it from a distance, they had changed their basic tactics. They assumed a less aggressive posture and began waiting for the Marine patrols to come to them. But this did not help them either. As time passed and the weather improved, indications by mid-March were that major North Vietnamese Army units were leaving the area around Khe Sanh.

The Marine's last significant clash during this battle took place on 30 March when a company, moving under a closely coordinated artillery support package, swept 850 meters south of the Khe Sanh perimeter and assaulted a heavily fortified North Vietnamese position. Surprise was with the attackers, however, and the marines drove the North Vietnamese out of his positions, destroyed the fortifications, and returned to their base.

Shock of Intense Battle forced President Johnson, the commander-in-chief, to seek refuge in the

military. The president, said nothing to the nation. Tet had crystallized the dilemma of the war. President Johnson wanted victory. But his enemy, though rebuffed, was still not defeated. He could not win now without expanding the war and committing more troops?

Due to the heavy U.S. casualties, General Westmoreland began begging for more troops (Allen 197) Ironically they weren't to be had. The U.S. was having a hell of a time maintaining order within its own borders and was hesitant to supply the number of trained troops needed.

Of the troops they did send in response to Westmoreland, the story of the 3rd Brigade, 82nd airborne, highlights the problems the U.S. were facing. The 82nd had already been in Nam and had been sent back home as part of troop reductions. Suddenly all leaves were cancelled, the troops were told to pack up, and boarded on to planes headed back to the Nam. Not surprisingly, a lot of the troops revolted and began raising all kinds of hell. Due to deployment regulations, the Army was forced to give many of them a choice on whether to stay in country or return home to the world. The response was overwhelming. Of the 3,650 that were deployed, 2,513 elected to return home immediately (Gilbert 145 ). There was obviously a certain sentiment involved here. General Westmoreland was quoted as saying, "Once you've stepped in shit you don't need to" be told not to step in it again" (Westmoreland 7).

Growing belief within the Johnson Administration that there is no hope for victory: Tet was the final nail in the coffin for the administration of Lyndon Johnson (Allen 154). In 1963, when he came to power in the wake of the assassination John Kennedy, his approval rating was over 80%. But by 1967 it was down to 40%. 'But then came Tet and his ratings plummeted as if Vietnam were a burning fuse that had suddenly ignited an explosion of dissent (Gilbert 248 ).'

By the beginning of March his popularity dropped towards 30% (Gilbert 240). More dramatically, endorsement for his handling of the war stood at only 26%. His credibility was gone.

There were repercussions on the civilian population. The divisive effect of the Vietnam War on American society was especially evident on campuses throughout the country. At Kent, the day after the announcement to send U.S. troops into Cambodia marked the start of a weekend of anti-war protests that began on campus and spilled into the city of Kent's downtown. Broken windows and other damage to a number of downtown businesses prompted fear, rumors, and eventually a call by the city's mayor to the governor for assistance.

Kent State University was placed in an international spotlight after a tragic end to a student demonstration against the Vietnam War and the National Guard on May 4, 1970. Shortly after noon on that Monday, 13 seconds of rifle fire by a contingent of 28 Ohio National Guardsmen left four students dead, one permanently paralyzed, and eight others wounded (Lund-Goldstein 10). Not every student was a demonstration participant or an observer. Some students were walking to and from class. The closest student wounded was 30 yards away from the Guard. While the farthest was nearly 250 yards away.

In the Spring of 1970, campus communities across this country were characterized by a chorus of protests and demonstrations. The issues were the escalation of the war in Vietnam and the U.S. invasion of Cambodia; the ecology; racism and repression. No institution of higher education was left untouched by confrontations and continuous calls for change.

The American Press turns against the war effort (Karnov, 542 ). Tet offensive was a turning point in the war, and the North Vietnamese were successful in altering the course of the war far beyond the accomplishments of their army. The American people were shocked that the Vietcong/North Vietnamese Army (VC/NV A) possessed the strength to make the widespread strikes.

Many Americans concluded that the war was too costly to pursue. It has always been clear that the press played a vital role in this dramatic shift of opinion. It has been evident that dissatisfaction with the war among media opinion-makers helped form an American public attitude of discouragement.

Morale turned bitter toward military leadership. "The morale, discipline, and battle worthiness of the U. S. Armed Forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at any time in this century and possibly in the history of the United States. By every conceivable indicator, our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and non-commissioned officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited where not near mutinous. Elsewhere than Vietnam, the situation is nearly as serious (Heinl 23)."

So wrote Col. Robert D. Heinl in June of 1971. In an article entitled "The Collapse of the Armed Forces"

In the spring of 68, "Fragging" became a problem. Some soldiers engaged in the practice of using violence against their senior leaders. This behavior was widespread in Vietnam (Anderson, 142). The Army still cannot account for how 1,400 officers and non-commissioned officers died. Research shows that 20 to 25 percent of US troops had knowledge of a "fragging incident" (Anderson 142).

Drug use in the field was rare and was discouraged even by personnel who used drugs in the rear. The reasoning was fairly straightforward: drug use in the field endangered lives. It was not a "victimless crime" in the field. Peer pressure was usually enough to discourage drug use when in the field. Those who were stupid enough to use drugs in the field were often beaten senseless by their non-drug-using comrades. Those that persisted were occasionally killed in action, sometimes by hostile fire, and occasionally, tragically, by friendly fire.

On March 16, 1968 the angry and frustrated men of Charlie Company,

11th Brigade, Americal Division entered the village of My Lai. "This is what you've been waiting for -- search and destroy -- and you've got it," said their superior officers (Allen 178). A short time later the killing began. When news of the atrocities surfaced, it sent shockwaves through the US political establishment, the military's chain of command, and an already divided American public. The Mai Lai massacre was an incident that shows how morale and order had plummeted.

Before Tet, most Americans supported the war and believed America was winning. Then, Tet happened and many Americans believed the war was unwinnable. The North Vietnamese Army and Vietcong had launched a surprise offensive, attacking every major city in South Vietnam to include its capitol. Many blamed the media for causing the lack of support for the war. However, some believed the media was not to blame. Media played a crucial role in reversing the support for the war many believed that the media just reported accurately what they had seen.

Americans saw news stories of the war on a daily basis for years. So, they had become accustomed to the familiar images of war. These images showed columns of U.S. troops walking across muddy rice fields or artillery shells bursting on faraway targets. Soon, it became routine to most Americans.

The escalation of the war in Vietnam continued for three years. Many Americans knew that our past wars did not last past beyond four years. For example, the Civil War lasted three years, nine months; World War I lasted one and a half years; World War II, four years, eight months, the Korean War, three years, one month. (Boettecher, 434). However, U.S. soldiers would face a fourth year of fighting in Vietnam. So far, the war had received positive press coverage. Also, the media and the American public were led to believe the war in Vietnam was going well.

The attack of the U.S. embassy in Saigon was shocking to the South Vietnamese, Americans and our allies. But, because of media coverage these were the most disturbing images shown back in the United States thus far in the war. On the morning of 31 January, 1968, nineteen Vietcong commandos blasted their way into the American embassy. (Karnow, 526). They killed five U.S. soldiers during the attack. (Karnow, 526). The American embassy, an American symbol in Vietnam, was supposedly a secured and safe place, but it was breached. This evidence showed the American public that the war was not going well at all.

Television played a crucial role during the offensive. Americans saw the carnage brought on by the offensive in their living room. American campuses were in an uproar within days of the news report. (Omicinski, 2). Weeks after, the American public had turned against the war. (Omicinski, 2).

The news organization reacted with rage. Overnight, the media's view of the war changed. They became distrustful of American military commanders and some reporters who felt betrayed by the military's past numbers became backseat tacticians. (Boettecher, 435). For example, Walter Cronkite gave a special report about the Vietnam War that aired February 27, 1968. He stated that Khe Sanh, which was built up to block enemy infiltration was now in danger of being overrun. (Boettecher, 435). However, Khe Sanh was never in serious danger of being overrun. Walter Cronkite was probably the nation's most reliable newscast journalist at the time. He stated on the evening news that the Vietnam War would end in a stalemate. (Karnow, 547).

The antiwar movement came out of the Civil Rights movement. During the summer of 1964, members of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) organized a mass movement for social

change in America. (Boettecher, 424). During this time, President Johnson, who had promised peace, ordered the air war against North Vietnam. The sustained air war called Rolling Thunder had begun in early March 1965. (Boettecher, 422). This led to an organized national movement on April 17, 1965. (Boettecher, 424). Fifteen thousand students took part in the protest against the Vietnam War that was sponsored by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

(Boettecher, 424).

President Johnson had sponsored many special programs and it led to the signing of the Voting Rights Act into law in 1965. But, the escalating war in Vietnam had reverted resources from social issues at home. Martin Luther King, Jr. sensed that the war was bad for Black America. On January 1, 1966, he spoke publicly against the Vietnam War. (Boettecher, 427).

So far, mainstream America had not joined the antiwar movement. At the time, they did not identify with long haired college students and Black America. However, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and traumatic events at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicaco changed the mood of America.

After the Tet offensive, the American public opinion changed. Now, mainstream America was against the Vietnam War. They saw images on television of the offensive, which showed destruction and carnage and they knew that the war was far from over.

Criticism of the Vietnam War had increased in Congress. Many senators and congressmen have supported the Vietnam War, but many have doubts about the war too. One senator, Thruston Morton of Kentucky, was a firm supporter of the Vietnam War, but he changed his mind through a series of senate speeches and press conferences. (Hammond, 338). Congressman Thomas P. O'Neill, a former supporter of the war, told reporters that he believed President

Johnson's administration claim of progress was wrong. (Hammond, 338). There were less than 30 of 100 senators and 50 of 435 representatives who opposed the war on record. Many in Congress were still undecided. However, soon after Tet, many in Congress were against the war in Vietnam. They believed the war was unwinnable.

The Tet Offensive led to Lyndon Johnson loss of credibility. Prior to Tet, many Americans believed we were winning the war. But television coverage of the offensive, which showed utter confusion and destruction to millions of Americans proved otherwise.

Six weeks following the Tet Offensive, President Johnson's job performance approval dropped from 48 to 36 percent. (Karnow, 546). Additionally, the endorsement for his handling of the war dropped from 40 to 26 percent. (Karnow, 546).

Most importantly, President Johnson lost the support of vocal Americans such as the media commentators, business executives, educators, and other "elites." They felt the war was no longer worth the effort.

The Tet Offensive and the Vietnam War was the downfall of Lyndon Johnson. After he came into office in 1963, he had an approval rating over 80 percent and by 1967 it was down to 40 percent. (Forrest, 3). But after Tet, Johnson's ratings plummeted. Then, at the New Hampshire Democratic primary, President Johnson polled only 300 votes more than Eugene McCarthy, an unknown who stood on an antiwar ticket. (Forrest,3). This was unheard of for an incumbent president. This further intensified the antiwar protest.

On March 31, 1968, President Johnson announced 'I shall not seek, and I will not accept the nomination of my party for another term as your president.'

The Tet Offensive was a turning point in the Vietnam War and a point in which the United States realized the war was unwinnable. The families of the soldiers of South Vietnamese were shattered by the Tet Offensive. Tet was characterized by some of the most intense fighting in American military history. The ambiguous agenda of the war and the loss of many more lives during Tet caused moral of the soldier in the jungles of Vietnam to sink to an all time low. The Tet Offensive made the U.S. news media and the American people less supportive of the war. In the long run, the Tet Offensive was a victory for the Communists because it reduced the American will to fight and was the beginning of the end for the United States failed war in Vietnam.

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