



The Vietnam War: Part 4

One difficult aspect of the war for the U.S. was the so-called “Ho Chi Minh Trail,” a route through Laos and Cambodia by which the North resupplied its forces in the South with men and materiel. As independent countries, Laos and Cambodia were technically not a part of the war, not a legitimate “field of fire” for U.S. forces. You can imagine how frustrating it was for the U.S., which would one day “go after” the Trail’s base camps.

An easy if expensive (and debatably ineffective) aspect of U.S. force power was saturation bombing. This, as much as the draft, helped push U.S. public opinion against the war. We dropped *three times more bombs* on Vietnam than all the bombs dropped in WW II. For the public supporting the war with their taxes, the question was “How could the U.S. drop so many bombs and see so little evidence of success?”

In addition this week, we’ll take a look at the role of combat forces in their attempts to “secure” South Vietnamese villages against the enemy, and the famous Tet Offensive that exposed the massive and effective planning capacity of the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong. Though defeated in all their military goals during Tet, the communists won the propagandawar, showing that after all of our efforts five years into the war, we had not yet remotely made South Vietnam secure from attack. The American public opinion polls at that moment showed a dramatic shift against the war, and President Johnson announced that he would *not* run for re-election – a political bombshell no one expected.

Assignments: (Note: check-up quizzes will be regularly given for this unit.)

In class, Monday, 5/23: “The Ho Chi Minh Trail and the DMZ,” page 38 & “The Rolling Thunder Bombing Campaign,” page 40.

Tuesday, 5/26: “The Villagers’ War”, pages 56 – 58, and “The Tet Offensive,” pages 74 - 75.

Questions for consideration:

THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL, page 38:

- ✓ Why could the North use the HCM Trail with impunity through two “neutral” countries?

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✓ *What purpose had the DMZ been designed for in 1954?*

THE ROLLING THUNDER BOMBING CAMPAIGN, Page 40:

✓ *What is a financial irony of the bombing campaign?*

✓ *What is the irony of what happened to North Vietnamese attitudes in the bombing campaign?*

THE VILLAGERS' WAR, Page 56:

✓ *What was an irony of the U.S. policy of relocating villages away from the enemy?*

✓ *Name one difficulty in the U.S. effort to "win the hearts and minds" of South Vietnamese villagers?*

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THE TET OFFENSIVE, Page 74:

- ✓ *What was the huge cost to the North Vietnamese and Vietcong from their losses in the Tet Offensive?*

- ✓ *How did U.S. news reports give a different picture (than the question above addresses) of what had happened during Tet? Why was this picture actually a reasonable one?*
