

Media in the vietnam war

[War](#), [Vietnam War](#)



Throughout America's history, the United States has won the majority of all of its major conflicts. Up until the Vietnam War, America was seen as invincible and unbeatable. At the time, television and personal audio recorders were becoming more mainstream. News by television was growing - for the first time, people were turning to TV rather than the newspaper or radio to learn about current events.[1]The news was uncensored, and citizens, for the first time, were able to view the reality of war. Although the Vietnam War initially had the public's full support, uncensored anti-war news coverage on the newly developed commercial television influenced popular sources of entertainment, like music artists, which in turn led people to protest the war; the protests, combined with the major losses and defeats in the conflict, prompted the government to withdraw from Vietnam.

The Vietnam War was a Cold War conflict that officially started on the first of November, 1955. President Lyndon B. Johnson took full advantage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which occurred in 1964; the resolution allowed the President to use conventional military power in south Asia without the approval of Congress. President Johnson used this incident as a reason to escalate troop levels in Vietnam, thus escalating the conflict.[2]The escalated conflict, which turned into a full-scale war, was fought between North Vietnam and its Communist allies and South Vietnam supported by anti-communist nations. The larger strategy at hand was the containment of communism. Started as a Russian revolution, the Soviets had started spreading Communism throughout the world. Although the war technically started in 1955, it wasn't until the early 1960s that US troop levels began to grow rapidly.[3]In 1968, the US launched the infamous Tet Offensive, an

operation in which there were many casualties on both sides.[4]The Tet Offensive marked the period in which approval for the war started to rapidly decline which would later cause the U. S, five years later to start a peace process in which the US would eventually withdraw from Vietnam.[5]This peace processes ended two years later in 1975 with the capture of Saigon by North Vietnamese forces.[6]

Although veterans sharing their experiences of war happened in any previous war, the Vietnam War was exposed much more through new technology such as television, and personal audio recorders. At the same time the Vietnam War was starting, citizens started switching where they would get their news information. A series of surveys conducted by the Roper Organization for the Television Information Office from 1964 until 1972 demonstrates the growing power of television; multiple answers allowed, respondents were asked from which medium they “ got most of their news”, 58 percent said television; 56 percent, newspapers; 26 percent, radio; and 8 percent, magazines.[7]By 1972, 64 percent said television while the number of respondents who primarily relied on newspapers dropped to 50 percent.[8]TV was more attention-grabbing than newspapers and radio – the visual element allowed user to feel as if they were in the middle of the intense battles and death. Additionally, intense visuals helped explain the complex nature of war to Americans who might not understand the military’s technical language. Furthermore, anchors, who hosted the news programs quickly became famous – in fact, Walter Croncrite, a major anchor at the time was often cited as “ the most trusted man in America”.[9]This trust in the media led people to quickly believe their word as fact, clearly spreading

the media's bias throughout America's culture. When footage of the Tet Offensive started coming out in early 1968, the dominant view that 'the war was just' was quickly flip-flopped. The media started showing more anti-war footage, with a focus on critics of the Johnson administration.[10] Most importantly, the footage of the My Lai massacre, where hundreds of Vietnamese were killed in cold blood by Americans, acted as a main example of why peace needed to be established.[11] Later on, the media focused on domestic anti-war movements, which further exemplified how the Vietnam War was unjust.

Not only were Americans seeing the war in a new way, they were also seeing more casualties coming back from the front. All the way from the beginning of the war to the end, the casualty rates were rising at a constant rate. By 1968, there was an average of 1200 men who died per month in Vietnam. [12] Correlating with the increase in deaths at the front, more and more American soldiers were sent to Vietnam, and by 1968 over half a million troops were stationed there.[13] At the same time, naturally, the approval rating for then-President Lyndon B. Johnson plummeted to an all time low - even as low as 35% during the Tet Offensive.[14] Because American approval for Johnson went steadily lower over time, it can be inferred that it was because of his actions during his time as president. Since there were so many casualties and little progress was being made in Vietnam, most people thought the war was unwinnable, which was later confirmed in 1968 by the top news anchor of the time, Walter Cronkite.[15] This notion that the war was unwinnable furthered the American public's cause to end the war and bring the remaining soldiers home. This general feeling of an American

demise in Vietnam eventually spread to popular entertainment and popular culture.

Although the media generally spread the anti-war message, music artists picked up it's caused and spread the message of peace to the younger generation. Artists such as Edwin Starr, Billy Joel and Bruce Springsteen were incredibly popular in the 1960's and early 1970's. Much of their work consisted of anti-Saigon lyrics which displayed the harsh realities of war, and explaining why our soldiers should come home. These songs and artists sparked the counter culture of the time – generally known as hippies. These peace loving people carried out the messages of these artists – peace, love and respect; their main goal was the end the Vietnam War and to create peace.[16] This counter-culture spread rapidly, especially among young people. Because of its amazing popularity, the media covered most of youth rallies and protests, such as draft card burnings and Human-Be-In's.[17] This excessive media attention spread the counter-culture even further, spreading its ideas across the United States. Because more people were being aware of these acts of civil disobedience, more people were tempted to 'follow the crowd'. As more people got caught up in the movement the number of people at the protests rose, from as little as 700 participants in 1964 to 500, 000 total in 1967.[18] This primarily shows how an anti-war bias spread by the media found its way into popular culture, which then caused many citizens to protest the war. Even those who did not go out and protest, which was the majority of the country, regarded the Vietnam War as a mistake.[19]

Throughout the 60's and early 70's time, American citizens were constantly fighting against American involvement in Vietnam. Hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated every year to bring American troops back home. The number of people demonstrating kept rising as the approval rating for the war lowered exponentially every year.[20]As more people started demonstrating, pop-culture heavyweights, such as boxer Muhammad Ali and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. publicly endorsed peace. Not only did this lead to an increase in media coverage of the issue, but it also lead those who were fans of those public figures to become active in the fight for peace in Vietnam. Civil disobedience was on the rise - more than 16 million American citizens dodged the draft by the end of the Vietnam War.[21]Also, in 1967, a group of "flower power" hippies marched on the Pentagon where they were blocked by National Guard troops, and subsequently they put flowers in their gun barrels (Appendix A).[22]A photographer, Bernard Norman Boston took a photo of the incident, and it became the runner up for the Pulitzer Prize that year, further broadcasting the strength of the counter-culture movement in the United States. The more media converge there was, the more people decided to join the movement for peace.

The media even had a profound effect on the soldiers stationed in Vietnam; some GI's decided to resist the commands of the US army. The army in Vietnam, according to Marine Colonel Robert D. Heintz Jr., a veteran combat commander with over 27 years experience in the Marines, and the author of *Soldiers Of The Sea*, was on the verge of collapse:

“ 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. ... Sedition, coupled with disaffection from within the ranks, and externally fomented with an audacity and intensity previously inconceivable, infest the Armed Services...”[23]

Not only was the army mutinous, but there were also many fragging incidents that occurred on bases. Fragging, is where there is a bounty placed upon a commanding officer, and that man is to be murdered, and whoever does it gets a monetary reward. These bounties were placed in underground army newspapers which majority of the army read.[24]In the year of 1970 alone, there were 209 reported ‘ fraggings’.[25]The people responsible for the fraggings mostly got away with it too, as the army’s justice system was quite corrupt: “ The Army’s Judge Advocate General’s Corps estimated that only 10% of fragging attempts resulted in anyone going to trial.”.

[26]Although there were those who took action against their superiors, there were also those who ran away. By 1970, the U. S. Army had 65, 643 deserters – almost four infantry divisions worth of troops.[27]In 1966 the desertion rate was 14. 7 per thousand, in 1968 it was 26. 2 per thousand, and by 1970 it had risen to 52. 3 per thousand; absence without leave was so common that by the height of the war one GI went AWOL every three minutes.[28]From January of ’67 to January of ’72 a total of 354, 112 GIs left their posts without permission, and at the time of the signing of the peace accords 98, 324 were still missing.[29]The army also resisted politically, releasing underground news papers to solders. By 1972 around 300 anti-war

and anti-military newspapers, with titles like Harass the Brass, All Hands Abandon Ship and Star Spangled Bummer had been published by enlisted men.[30] Hundreds of GIs created these papers, but their influence was far wider - with thousands more who helped distribute them, and tens of thousands of readers.[31] They were also those determined to stop the war based on the act of sabotage; in June of 1972 the USS Ranger was apparently disabled by sabotage, and it had to return to its home base for repairs.[32] A movement that embodied this ideology was SOS - Stop Our Ship. They used petitions to try and get their superiors to ground naval operations.[33] Even the troops, who may have had a lack of media knowledge, knew the war was wrong, and they decided to do something about it. They did all of this not only because they were saving themselves from being killed unnecessarily, but also because they knew the war which they were fighting was either not worth the fight or it was unjust.

The media was the most decisive factor that drove the United States to end the war. Indirectly, they caused the public to accept that the war was unwinnable and that it would keep taking up the time and resources of the U. S. By conveying their message to popular culture artists, the media was able to target a larger audience, which was also coincidentally more active group socially. These people led protests which were both seen and heard by the national government. The media instigated these protests, displaying primarily anti-war protests on the daily news. Not only was the war being lost overseas, a battle against the government was being fought at home to end the war. Because of the constant pressure from America's citizens and the North Vietnamese Army, the U. S decided to withdraw from Vietnam, letting

Saigon fall into enemy hands, but at the same time, sparing many American lives. Although the media may have ended up tarnishing the honor of the United States with its first major loss since its creation, it stopped a cycle that would have ended up killing more American soldiers. Without the media causing an end to the war in Vietnam, the US would have been in a much worse place than it is today.

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