

How effective were
the us tactics of
search and destroy
and defoliation in the
vi...

[War, Vietnam War](#)



Introduction -> In the Vietnam War the US army believed that if Vietnam would become communist countries like Cambodia, Thailand and Laos would follow proving their “ Domino Theory” correct.

Their main aim was to get the North Vietnamese people to surrender. They assisted the South fight the North, so their military had to come up with methods to defend themselves from the Viet Cong; who used their own guerilla tactics. Tactics such as defoliation and search and destroy were the most commonly used, and are the most famous today. The US military were being affected psychologically so badly by the Viet Cong’s tactics, that they had to come up with a way to overcome it. Search and Destroy -> US Commander General Westmoreland was the one who developed the Search and Destroy tactic as bombing could not defeat the Viet Cong.

These raids would be launched from helicopters so they could then descend on villages and destroy any Viet Cong forces they found or were informed about. Even though this method would sometimes kill Viet Cong soldiers it was not always accurate and caused many unnecessary problems. They would send out inexperienced soldiers who would then fall into traps because they were not paying attention, innocent villagers and civilians were massacred and most of the time the raids were based on incorrect information. All of these mistakes lead the soldiers to be very unpopular with the people as they were killing innocent people whom they were also meant to be assisting. On March 16th 1968 three platoons full of US soldiers landed in the town of My Lai. They had been sent there because of information that the Viet Cong were there.

They started to fire at the villagers, burnt home and crops; though it soon became clear that there were no Viet Cong troops they did not stop. Women were raped, children and elderly shot even though they were all innocent. The final body count came to 300. As this was the first war the media and newspapers got involved in the public in the USA eventually became aware of this tragedy. Many in the US believed that the war had become a symbol of defeat, confusion and moral corruption. Protests started all around the country many of them were led by students; they included chanting 'Hey, Hey, LBJ how many kids did you kill today?' and burning the American flag which is a criminal offence.

In November 1969, 700,000 protesters turned up in Washington DC, it was the largest political protest ever. Because of all of this the calls to end the war were strengthened as the US had received a serious blow. Defoliation -> To destroy towns and villages the US army developed a system called Defoliation which consisted of spraying chemicals over them. They were used to burn jungle and town areas where the Viet Cong could be hiding and make sure the traps they made were also destroyed. These Chemical Weapons were known as Napalm and Agent Orange. Agent Orange was originally used as a weed killer though the US army used it to destroy the jungle where the Viet Cong was hiding.

By spraying thousands of square kilometers of jungle the US army used about 82 million litres of Agent Orange. The reason for doing all this was very simple: to stop the Viet Cong from transporting supplies and personnel around by foot. It did what it was designed for though the soldiers were

not able to control were exactly it landed; because of this it was claimed that about 5 million people were victims to this method. If you were exposed to it, it could cause cancer and genetic problems which meant many children born were also severely affected.

Napalm was the other main chemical weapon used by the US. Each container of napalm held 130 gallons of gasoline with on six percent of napalm in it. They also created a device which could cover a surface with flames that were 270 feet long and 75 feet wide. It was so powerful that it would burn right through clothes and burn skin until it reached the bone.

As this was the first war to be televised many people in the US saw the affect of napalm and the famous images of it being sprayed over people were published. Possibly the most famous image from the war the photo of ten year old Kim Phuc (Image 1) who had been caught in a Napalm attack and all her clothes had been burnt of and it was so bad her skin was beginning to peel off. Amazingly she survived though is left with terrible scars from the attack. Her story shows that the US army did actually attack innocent villages and people. Over the war 400, 000 tones of napalm was dropped and many said it felt like a burning hot shower. The use of napalm caused carbon monoxide to form in the air meaning people who had not been burnt or hit by the attack were suffocated.

The agricultural affects in Vietnam meant that even today some areas are still not safe to cultivate on as the toxic chemicals are still found in the soil.

Conclusion -> Even though the US military tactics were effective so that

many of the Viet Cong were killed they often were given wrong information which lead to innocent civilians being killed. There methods also did not adapt to the Viet Cong's methods as they would send out inexperienced troops who would just fall straight into their traps. In my opinion the US did what they were sent there to do though they did so by using unnecessary methods which killed too many innocent people because they did not have a specific target but just a vague guess on were the Viet Cong would be. Even though there were so many problems and mistakes South Vietnam grew stronger which eventually meant that US troops could go home.