



The Tet Offensive and the Battle of the Bulge Compared

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This paper will explore the differences between World War II's Battle of the Bulge and the Vietnam War's Tet Offensive. It will compare military, political, and societal context of the battles, as well as examine the media coverage in each conflict. Particularly interesting are comments by a military officer who served in both battles as well as a renowned journalist who reported on both battles. The paper will conclude with similarities of the United States military engagements in South Vietnam and Afghanistan.

Military Strategy: A Desperate Enemy's Last Gasp

Until early 1968, the American public generally supported the Vietnam War. It was framed as a theater in the Cold War against worldwide communist domination which had commenced two decades earlier at the end of World War II. The United States, up to that point, had never lost a war in its nearly two century history. The conflict in Vietnam seemed to be going well for the South Vietnamese although there had been some governmental, civilian, and religious instability. Americans fully expected that the Vietnam conflict would be settled with a situation similar to that of the Korean Peninsula which meant a totalitarian communist state in the north and a free democratic state in the south. The hope was that the communist north in both areas would become failed states and eventually reunite with their prosperous southern counterparts. The idea of the United States, the world's leading superpower, being defeated by North Vietnam, a small third world country, seemed implausible.

In late 1967, the concept of a North Vietnamese "Battle of the Bulge" came to surface as a topic of conversation and speculation among top U.S. military leaders.¹ The Battle of the Bulge was the last major German offensive on the western front in late 1944. The Germans had hoped to stop the Allied advance into their homeland

¹ Edwin E. Moïse, *The Myths of The Tet Offensive: The Most Misunderstood Event of the Vietnam War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 239-241.

territory and either obtain a stalemate, or better yet, push the Allies back into the ocean (as had been done in 1940 in Dunkirk). The Germans would then have had a chance to regroup and rearm to continue the war. The eased pressure on the western front would have allowed them to better concentrate on the Soviet Red Army advancing from the east. The Germans did not succeed in this offensive and were unable to prevent the western and eastern Allied forces from reaching Berlin and forcing an unconditional surrender five months later in May 1945. The Battle of the Bulge has been framed as a last-ditch effort by a losing combatant nation to change the course of a war. World War II had ended a little over 22 years previously as U.S. military leaders were considering another Battle of the Bulge in Vietnam. Many of these career commanders had seen action in the second World War and had been involved in the Battle of the Bulge. North Vietnam and the communists in the South Vietnam were viewed in the same lens as the Germans had been seen at the end of World War II. Both were exhausted combatants on the verge of defeat who were capable of one last offensive action before complete defeat.

The Vietnamese Battle of the Bulge is called the Tet Offensive, and it began on the Lunar New Year holiday at the end of January 1968. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earl Warner, first offered this Battle of the Bulge concept publicly in December 1967 to warn the American public that heavy fighting in Vietnam might be likely in the near future from an almost defeated enemy. The projected combat would be a last-ditch effort by the communists and would be crushed by American and South Vietnamese troops. National Security Advisor Walter Rostow echoed Warner's prediction. Retired General Bruce Clarke compared North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap to Adolph Hitler.²

The Vietnamese communists had been planning for a major offensive several years prior to Tet 1968. The concept of a major communist armed move against the Saigon government started after the Diem coup in November 1963, with the goal of creating an insurrection in the south and overthrowing the South Vietnamese regime. The communists felt that it would be necessary to proceed quickly before the U.S. committed to greater support for the Saigon government. The communists termed this action "Plan X" and was framed in Resolution 9 by the North Vietnamese politburo in Sept. 1964. This military effort would entail completely shattering the

² Moïse, *Myths of the Tet Offensive*, 240.

Frankel, Tet Offensive and Battle of the Bulge

South Vietnamese army (ARVN, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam) and creating a general civilian uprising in the south which would ultimately topple the Saigon government. The North Vietnamese Army (PAVN, Peoples' Army of Vietnam) and the south's National Liberation Front (NLF) would then move in and reunite both countries under communist control. As the U.S. built up military forces in South Vietnam, a third point was added to the plan in 1967 which the North Vietnamese Politburo termed Resolution 13. This consisted of a "talk-fight" strategy with the U.S. The Resolution 13 plan was to inflict as many casualties as possible on American troops, demoralizing both the military and U.S. public, to force Washington to the negotiating table and eventual withdrawal from Vietnam. The communist plan had some historical basis as the Vietnamese had driven the French from Indochina a few years earlier in 1954 utilizing a similar methodology.³

Albin F. Irzyk: "Oh no, not again"

Brigadier General Albin F. Irzyk participated in both the Battle of the Bulge and the Tet Offensive. He was a major with the American Fourth Armored Division which helped to retake Bastogne from the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge in 1944. He described his experience as "incomprehensible...what happened...The Germans amassed a tremendous force...There were no leaks...It was a total surprise." Irzyk was commander of the U.S. Army Headquarter Command in Saigon during the Tet Offensive in 1968. He had a feeling of *deja vu* and said, "Oh no, not again."

Irzyk had commanded battle-hardened combat troops in 1944, but in 1968, only had support soldiers and military police to defend the city. These support troops had only fired weapons during basic training but never in combat which made Saigon's defense even more difficult. Irzyk described the communist enemy as "sneaky guys coming in ones and twos." Irzyk managed to survive both the Battle of the Bulge and the Tet Offensive. He retired from a very successful military career in 1971 and lived to the ripe old age of 101.⁴

³ Merle L. Pribbenow II, "General Võ Nguyễn Giáp and the Mysterious Evolution of the Plan for the 1968 Tet Offensive" *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 1.

⁴ Don Hirst, "From the Battle of the Bulge to Tet," *Historynet* (March 27, 2017). Accessed April 17, 2022. <https://www.historynet.com/from-the-bulge-to-tet/>

After the Battle of the Bulge victory, Americans and its allies gained substantial confidence that it could completely defeat Nazi German and did so a few months later in 1945. The Tet Offensive was a military victory for the U.S. and South Vietnam. The communist-oriented National Liberation Front (NLF) was almost destroyed. North Vietnamese General Hoang Phuong termed the next two years for the communists in the south to be the two worst years of the war.⁵ The U.S. had the communists on the ropes, as had been the case with the Germans after the Battle of the Bulge but were unable to throw “the knockout punch.”

The U.S. had thought that it was dealing with a weak enemy but was shocked by the intensity of the surprise Tet Offensive which continued for several months with three waves of attacks throughout South Vietnam. The American worry of a possible defeat was so great that another 206,000 troops were sent to the Vietnam theater which was a forty percent increase from the pre-Tet Offensive level. American confidence of a South Vietnamese victory completely eroded in 1968. The My Lai Massacre in late March of that year demoralized the American public which now saw its troops as marauding savages who killed indiscriminately.

The My Lai incident framed much of the American public's view for the remainder of the U.S. war effort. Although the U.S. had decisively won the Tet Offensive militarily, the communists did succeed in pushing America to the Paris Peace table which opened the door for the U.S. to completely withdraw its military forces from Vietnam.

Another factor in the Battle of the Bulge/Tet Offensive comparison is the consideration of enemy alliances. Germany, at the end of 1944, had no major allies in Europe who could come to its defense. North Vietnam, on the other hand, was a part of the communist world and did have support from both the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) and the Soviet Union. However, the West did not fully comprehend in the 1960's the huge rift between the PRC and the Soviets. In retrospect, after the Tet Offensive, the United States and ARVN might have undertaken a land offensive to topple the Hanoi regime (which would have been justified as the North Vietnamese army had attacked across its border into South Vietnam which was a legally separate country.) The U.S. concern at the time was that either or both the

⁵ Ngo Vinh Long, "The Tet Offensive and its Aftermath" in *The American War in Vietnam*, Ed. Jayne Werner and David Hunt (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Publications, 1993): 23-46.

PRC or Soviets might have become involved in the conflict which could lead to World War III.

The West had little understanding that the Soviets and PRC were at odds with each other regarding ideology nor the fact that the Chinese and Vietnamese had historically never gotten along well. (China and Vietnam had a rather intense border war in the late 1970s). The U.S. was also unaware of the rift in the North Vietnamese politburo which, before the time of the Tet Offensive, was briefly dominated by a pro-Chinese faction. The pro-Soviet faction had been purged earlier in the decade. The U.S. remembered the lesson of the Chinese incursion into the Korean War almost two decades earlier which led to a stalemate in that conflict. In the early 1950s, the Chinese did not yet possess nuclear weapons. However, in the late 1960s, both the communist and U.S. sides had nuclear weapon capability. An American and South Vietnamese incursion into the north could have easily developed into a nuclear exchange with the communists. One might consider that this allied incursion might have also encouraged dissatisfied North Vietnamese civilians to revolt against their communist masters (as the north had hoped would happen in the south).

Thus, after the Battle of the Bulge, the U.S. and its allies marched into the defeated German capital of Berlin and concluded the European theater of war. The opposite occurred after Tet Offensive communist defeat. There was no allied advancement into the defeated enemy's capital of Hanoi, and instead, the U.S. reduced enemy territory bombing in order to entice negotiations for an end to the Vietnam War.

Germany had been considered a formidable enemy in World War II, and along with its major allies, Japan and Italy, could have potentially invaded and occupied the United States and other territory in the Western Hemisphere. There was never a thought, at least publicly, that North Vietnam would physically attack the United States (although it would have had the right to do so under the laws of war). The American fight with Germany had more a "life and death" scenario than the war with the communist Vietnamese. Germany was the "main course" of World War II while Vietnam was a "side show" in the overall battle with worldwide communism. Perhaps, this explains why Americans were so shocked by the intense Tet Offensive fight and ensuing South Vietnamese instability.

The American Government in War: FDR and LBJ

Harry G. Summers, Jr. has written that one of the great mysteries of the Vietnam War is the allied military victory achieved during the 1968 Tet Offensive was so complete that the Viet Cong were unable to play a significant role for the remainder of the war and, yet, this allied triumph was turned into a crippling American political defeat. Summers acknowledges that negative U.S. media coverage of the war was partially responsible, but feels that the real cause of the political defeat was based on the national command authority. During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt relied heavily on advice from close military associates who included Admiral William D. Leahy (Chief of Staff and *ad hoc* Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), and JCS members General George C. Marshall and Admiral Ernest J. King. These men helped Roosevelt through the various military crisis of World War II including the surprise Battle of the Bulge attack by the Germans.⁶

Summers writes that President Johnson did not have a similar military support base at the height of the Vietnam War. In 1947, Congress created the Department of Defense and the cabinet level position of Secretary of Defense. The Secretary of Defense, in effect, became the command authority over American armed forces. The Defense Reorganization Act of 1958 separated the various U.S. commands throughout the world as well as their link to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Vietnam War was the first (and only) American war fought without a unified chain of command. There was a lack of communication among top military leaders that had been of critical importance to the American commanders in World War II. Summers believes that the lack of a unified command contributed to the American defeat in Vietnam.⁷

In the late 1950's and early 1960's, the Secretary of Defense was entrusted with managing the national defense budget as well as deployment of troops for combat. Robert McNamara was named by President John Kennedy for the post and retained by President Lyndon Johnson. Kennedy had chosen McNamara primarily

⁶ Harry G. Summers, Jr. "The Turning Point of the War—Vietnam," *Historynet*. Accessed April 16, 2022. <https://www.historynet.com/turning-point-war-vietnam/>

⁷ *Ibid.*

Frankel, Tet Offensive and Battle of the Bulge

because of his business leadership background at Ford Motor Company. McNamara was briefly the president of Ford and had a significant role in reforming the corporation's planning, organizational, and management systems which would aid in allocating the Defense Department's budget.

McNamara also had considerable military leadership experience in the U.S. Army during World War II, rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel by the end of his six-year stint in 1946. However, Summers notes, that McNamara was not able to effectively compete in the same military arena with the “military genius” of North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap who was determined to win the Vietnam War. McNamara was the longest serving Secretary of Defense in America's history and resigned in 1968 after over seven years in office as he became increasingly skeptical of the large troop commitment in Vietnam. Clark Clifford, a successful Washington lawyer and close ally of President Johnson, was McNamara's replacement as Secretary of Defense. Clifford had less military experience than McNamara, having served in as a captain in the U.S. Army from 1944 to 1946. Clifford had a bit of a “wheeler-dealer” attitude in business and was involved in several controversies after leaving office in 1969 (which included a Grand Jury indictment during his time with the Bank of Credit and Commerce International).

Both McNamara and Clifford were unable to convey their true feelings to Johnson that the Vietnam War appeared to be unwinnable.⁸ The Joint Chiefs of Staff were imbued with a “can do” spirit and were reluctant to convey negative views to LBJ. The end result was that Johnson did not have close military advisors regarding the Vietnam conflict as Roosevelt did during World War II. Military associates guided Roosevelt through the Battle of the Bulge whereas business leaders guided Johnson through the Tet Offensive. Peter Braestrup notes in *The Big Story* in 1983 that LBJ seemed to be “psychologically defeated” by ...the [Tet] onslaught on the cities of Vietnam.” LBJ had been more concerned about having his “Great Society”

⁸ Ibid. See also “Robert McNamara,” *Historical Office of the Office of the US Secretary of Defense*. Accessed April 17, 2022, <https://history.defense.gov/Multimedia/Biographies/Article-View/Article/571271/robert-s-mcnamara/>; and “Clark M. Clifford,” *Historical Office of the Office of the US Secretary of Defense*. Accessed April 17, 2022, <https://history.defense.gov/article-view/article/571292/clark-m-clifford/>

legislation passed and never had passion for the Vietnam conflict. However, he did not want to be the first president to lose an American war.⁹

Prussian (German) Carl von Clausewitz's ten volume *On War (Vom Kriege)* contain what some historians consider one of the most important collection of thoughts regarding political and military connections and strategy. *On War* was written between 1816 and 1830 and was not yet finished when Clausewitz died. His wife, Marie von Bruhl, edited her husband's work from 1832 to 1835 and had it published initially in German. The first three volumes contain much of Clausewitz's critical thinking. He believed that war is dominated by political and moral considerations. War has no purpose on its own, but rather, is one of the instruments of the political process. Clausewitz maintained that war has two primary objectives, the first is to achieve limited political aims, and the second is to disarm the political enemy rendering the opponent helpless and impotent. Clausewitz continues with his "hub of all power" theory in which small countries rely on larger protector allies in times of war. The army of the protector nation is the center of military gravity, and if the protector is defeated, the protected will soon follow.¹⁰

Summers writes that the Vietnamese communists, perhaps quite by accident, struck a fatal blow with their Tet Offensive strategy against the common interest of the "protector" Americans and "protected" South Vietnamese. In wrestling match terms, it was as though President Johnson had been thrown and pinned by the underdog Vietnamese communists.¹¹ His wrestling handlers, McNamara and Clifford, were of no help in the match and may have actually contributed to his defeat. The United States, by contrast, was the hub of "some" power in World War II and was an essential element of the Allied victory over the Axis powers. The U.S. role in the Second World War was not quite as dominate in that conflict as it was in the Vietnam War. President Roosevelt received better advice and support from his military "handlers" than did Johnson which certainly made an important difference in the Battle of the Bulge and Tet Offensive comparison.

⁹ Summers, "Turning Point of the War." See also Peter Braestrup, *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983).

¹⁰ General Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*. Trans. Colonel J.J. Graham (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1873).

¹¹ Summers, "Turning Point of the War."

Media coverage plays a critical role in every war. The American government has traditionally issued reassuring statements to the public to counter reports of individual battles which have not ended well for the U.S. These government pronouncements usually infer that the situation is under control, the combat was not necessarily a defeat, and that the U.S. would soon be back on the road to victory. Braestrup writes that Vietnam was the only war where the American government did not provide reassurances to the public.¹²

Johnson was reclusive during the Tet Offensive. He understood the need to stand firm in the war but was unable to articulate the meaning of “standing firm.” This led to the decrease in public confidence about the war.¹³

Military Leadership: Westmoreland and Patton

General William Childs Westmoreland was commander of American forces in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968. He applied a strategy of "attrition" which was a military effort to force the enemy to collapse and surrender because of devastating personnel and materiel losses. Relentless strategic artillery and bombing were utilized to achieve this end-goal. President Johnson approved of this strategy. In hindsight, attrition was effectively destroying the communist Vietnamese war effort. However, the American public was so shocked by the Tet Offensive that public opinion turned against the U.S. military effort in Vietnam. Westmoreland was relieved of the Vietnam command later in 1968 and was “kicked upstairs” to become Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, a position which he held until 1972. Westmoreland was very critical of his Vietnamese adversary and counterpart, Vo Nguyen Giap. Westmoreland, in a 1998 interview with *George Magazine*, indicated that Giap had been trained in small-unit, guerrilla tactics, but persisted in large scale warfare during the Vietnam War which resulted in devastating losses for communist forces.¹⁴

General George Smith Patton, Jr. commanded the U.S. Third Army which broke the German siege of Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge on Dec. 26,

¹² Peter Braestrup, *Big Story*.

¹³ Summers, “Turning Point of the War.”

¹⁴ “William Westmoreland,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed April 16, 2022. [britannica.com/biography/william-westmoreland](https://www.britannica.com/biography/william-westmoreland) This author found a strange coincidence while researching Westmoreland. He was born on this writer's birthday, March 26, and died on this author's mother's birthday of July 18.

1944. Patton was brash, hard-driving, and sometimes controversial. He literally insisted on winning and refused to accept any alternative which earned him the nicknames of “bandito” and “old blood and guts.” He was well liked by his troops, but his antics sometimes displeased the Allied high command. Patton tragically died in an automobile accident in Germany shortly after World War II had ended in late December 1945. He was born in 1885 and would have been too old to have served during the 1968 Tet Offensive. Patton certainly would not have tolerated General Creighton Abrams' negative comments about the status of the Vietnam War to journalist Walter Cronkite (which is described below) and probably would attempted to oust Abrams from the Vietnam command.¹⁵

One might also imagine Patton's relationship with President Johnson during the Vietnam War with three possible scenarios. Patton might have been ignored as was Johnson's general practice with military advisors. However, Johnson did not want to be the first U.S. president to lose a war and might have found Patton's probable advice of taking the land war north of the 17th parallel, perhaps even to Hanoi, as "interesting." On the other hand, Johnson might have found Patton's flamboyant mannerisms to be annoying and had him replaced with a more compliant commander. We can only speculate on this relationship between Johnson and Patton which might have changed the course of the Vietnam War.

Westmoreland's steady and determined military strategy might have led to fewer casualties among the advancing American forces during the Battle of the Bulge but might have also allowed for a somewhat longer German siege of U.S troops in Bastogne, thus resulting in increased casualties and, perhaps, an erosion of American public support.

American Media: Friend or Foe?

Vietnam was America's first "television war." The networks' evening news programs provided clips of the daily occurrences in the war including enemy dead body counts. Until the Tet Offensive, the war seemed to be going according to the American plans, but it simply never ended. The American public was stunned by the ferocity of Tet Offensive and the subsequent My Lai massacre coverage. After the

¹⁵ “George Smith Patton,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed April 16, 2022. [britannica.com/biography/george-smith-patton](https://www.britannica.com/biography/george-smith-patton)

Tet Offensive, the network news coverage was filled with scenes of civilian violence and death in Vietnam which further lowered the morale of Americans.

Walter Cronkite was one of the most significant and influential journalists of the twentieth century. His long career allowed him to report near the front lines of the Battle of the Bulge during World II and later, as a legendary CBS Television Network anchorman, on the Tet Offensive in the Vietnam War. Cronkite was considered "the most trusted man in America" in various opinion polls throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Soon After the Tet Offensive began, Cronkite made a trip to South Vietnam in mid-February 1968 to assess the war firsthand for his viewers. He interviewed General Creighton Abrams, second in command, who was, allegedly, quite negative in his comments to Cronkite about the possible outcome of the Vietnam War. Cronkite returned to the U.S. and provided historic editorial comments regarding his opinion of the Vietnam War during his CBS Evening News broadcast on February 27, 1968:

It is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out [of the Vietnam War]...will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who...did the best they could.

Some have claimed President Johnson said after the broadcast that "if I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America." Cronkite's editorial on Tet Offensive most certainly swayed public opinion against the Vietnam War.¹⁶ One must also wonder if Cronkite would have made similar remarks about the feasibility of negotiating with the Nazis if Germany had succeeded militarily in the Battle of the Bulge and the subsequent reaction of those comments to the American public.

American media coverage in Vietnam can be divided into pre-Tet and post-Tet coverage. Iconic movie star John Wayne was so concerned about growing anti-war sentiment before Tet that he co-directed and starred in *The Green Berets*, a movie shot in 1967 and based upon a novel by Robin Moore that was written in 1965. The book and movie involved U.S. military special operations units in

¹⁶ "Walter Cronkite," *Encyclopedia Britannica*. britannica.com/biography/walter-cronkite. Cronkite's editorial comments were entitled "Report from Vietnam: Who, What, When, Where, Why?" General Creighton Abrams was deputy to General William Westmoreland in the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) at the time when he spoke with Cronkite. It should be noted that Cronkite's comments initiated a rather unfortunate trend in American journalism in which reporters now feel free to regularly interject their own personal opinion into news coverage which continues in the present day.

Vietnam. It contained a strongly anti-communist and pro-Saigon government message.¹⁷ The film had a throwback feel to World War II combat in the Pacific. The Vietnamese communists had replaced the Japanese as antagonists. The movie was considered a critical failure but was successful at the box office. The movie's theme song, "Ballad of the Green Berets," had been recorded by Barry Sadler in 1966.¹⁸ (17) It had been a Number One record during the year and was in the Top Ten for record sales.

The "MASH" movie and television series were emblematic of the post-Tet era. A Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) in the midst of the Korean conflict of the early 1950s was the focus. Although the setting was the Korean War, in actually, the backdrop was the Vietnam War. Both Korea and Vietnam are, conveniently for the producer and writers, Asian countries. The movie and television show combined elements of both dark humor and drama with a strong anti-war sentiment. Most of the characters did not want to be in the war zone (which is the main theme) and saw the actual horrors of war on a daily basis as wounded troops and civilians constantly arrive at the hospital for treatment. One of the supporting actors even dressed in drag with the hope of being sent home but was unsuccessful in his effort to be discharged. (The military did not accept gay personnel into its ranks at the time.) A Harvard-trained doctor in the hospital who supported the war effort was generally painted as a buffoon. The only humor came primarily in the form of sexual innuendo. The movie won an Oscar Award for its screenplay in 1970 and was further recognized by the American Film Institute (AFI) in 1998 as one of the 100 greatest American films. The AFI later pronounced "MASH" as one of the ten funniest American films. The "MASH" television series, which ran from 1972-1983 on CBS TV, was considered one of the most successful programs in the history of television. The movie and television shows' theme song contains the following chorus: "Suicide is painless. It brings on many changes...And I can take or leave it if I please."¹⁹ This passage signifies the suicidal nature of America's participation in the Vietnam War, its accompanying high casualty rate, and the counter-cultural "hippie"

¹⁷ James Lee Barrett and Robin Moore, *The Green Berets*, dir. Ray Kellogg. (Hollywood, CA: Warner Bros. 1968).

¹⁸ "Barry Sadler," *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed April 17, 2022. [britannica.com/biography/barry-sadler](https://www.britannica.com/biography/barry-sadler)

¹⁹ "The Movie that Spoke Truth to War," *The Attic*. Accessed April 17, 2022. <https://www.theattic.space/home-page-blogs/2020/2/8/test-draft>

Frankel, Tet Offensive and Battle of the Bulge

movement which was becoming popularized by the draft- age Baby Boom generation in the United States. Both the movie and television series are still watchable, but the humor has not held up well over time.

A very significant post-Tet song was "I feel I Like I'm Fixin' to Die" which was recorded by Country Joe and the Fish. Although the lyrics were written in 1965 in the pre-Tet era, the record became quite popular after the group performed it live at the 1969 Woodstock Music Festival. The song became an anthem for the U.S. anti-war movement in the post-Tet period. The song implicitly blames American politicians, military leaders, and big corporations for starting the Vietnam War. The signature chorus is:

And it's one, two, three, what are we fighting for?
Don't ask me I don't give a damn
Next stop is Vietnam
And it's five, six, seven open up the pearly gates,
Well there ain't no time to wonder why,
Whoopie! We're all gonna die!²⁰

The Vietnam War media content stands in stark contrast to World War II. The Second World War movie newsreels portrayed gallant efforts of the Allied forces fighting the "evil and devious" Axis powers on a regular basis which served as an inspiration to the American public at home. Some of this newsreel footage was the basis for the Emmy Award-winning "Victory at Sea" television series in the early 1950s which covered the naval conflicts of World War II.²¹ The "Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress" was a 1944 documentary highlighting an American bombing mission over Europe the previous year and depicting the daily courage of its crew members.²² One of World War II's most popular songs was the "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy" recorded by The Andrews Sisters in 1941 on the eve of America's entrance into the war. It depicts a professional musician who is drafted

²⁰ John Gilliland, *The Pop Chronicles* (Pasadena, CA: KRLA, 1969), Track 3, "Show 42-The Acid Test : Psychedelics and a Sub-Culture Emerge in San Francisco", *University of North Texas Digital Library*, accessed April 17, 2022. digital.library.unt.edu/ark:67531/metadc19801/

²¹ "Victory at Sea: Timeless Film, Soaring Music," *National World War 2 Museum*. Accessed April 17, 2022. thenationalww2museum.org/war/articles/victory-at-sea

²² William Wyler, dir. *Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress* (Hauppauge, NY: Video Treasures, 1986).

into the military, accepts his fate, and readily serves his country in uniform. The lyrics include:

He was a famous trumpet man ...
the top man at his craft
but then his number came up
and he was gone with the draft
He's in the army now, a blowin' reveille...(for) Company
It really brought him down because he couldn't jam
The captain seemed to understand
Because...the cap' went out and drafted a band
And now the company jumps...
He can't blow a note unless the bass and guitar is playin' with [him].²³

This song was Number Six in early 1941 and became signature music during World War II. In summary, the media did its best to support the U.S. effort in the Second World War while, in the post-Tet era of the Vietnam War, encouraged anti-war sentiment and dissent which was partially responsible for the American defeat in the conflict.

Conclusion: Winning the Battle and Winning or Losing the War

The United States militarily won both the Battle of the Bulge and the Tet Offensive in a decisive manner. The American home front during World War II strongly supported the troops overseas, thanks in part, to strong government leadership and a sympathetic media. The Tet Offensive, although a battlefield victory, resulted in a spiritual defeat to the American public. The U.S. had gained confidence from the Battle of the Bulge victory and, along with its allies, forced Germany into an unconditional surrender a few months later in May 1945. On the other hand, after the Tet Offensive win, the U.S. gradually pulled back from its Vietnam War commitment due to public disillusionment, American government misunderstanding of the nature of the conflict, and an unsympathetic media. German First Quarter

²³ Andrews Sisters, "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy," (Hollywood, CA: Capitol Records, 1987).

Master General Erich Ludendorff, in 1919, attempted to explain his country's loss in World War I as a “stab in the back” to his nation's brave soldiers resulting from the German public's loss of confidence in the war effort.²⁴ The same comment can be equally applied to the American experience in Vietnam.

Neither the Battle of the Bulge nor the Tet Offensive losses destroyed either enemy's political ideology. Although Nazi Germany was completely defeated, Nazi (National Socialist) ideology continues to be present in the Twenty-First Century. No country since 1945 has been ruled by a party specifically identifying with national socialism. However, the Nazi agenda which espouses racist, white supremacy is the guiding force behind numerous contemporary groups with alternate names and symbols. National socialism does have the potential to rise once again, becoming a significant political force in the world, and a major threat to free, democratic nations.

The Vietnamese communists have been in power for nearly a half century. The country currently has one party rule but allows for some private enterprise. The Peoples Republic of China on Vietnam's northern border is considered a national security threat which has pushed Vietnam's communist government into an informal (perhaps unholy) military alliance with its old adversary, the United States. It is extremely interesting to note that Hanoi hosted a summit meeting in February 2019 between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un. Only time will tell if there is another conflict in Asia involving the United States.

And Now, Afghanistan: Oh No, Not Again

As this paper was being written in the spring of 2021, President Joe Biden announced that U.S. Troops would be completely withdrawn from Afghanistan on Sept. 11, 2021 after a generation of military engagement in that country. (It should be noted that the date was pushed up from the original May 1, 2021 date proposed by the previous administration). The American public has shown relatively little interest in the 20-year length of the war as all of the U.S. troops stationed in the country were volunteers rather than draftees. The scenario of Afghanistan and South Vietnam

²⁴ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, UK, Second Edition, 2004), 186-188.

seem to be eerily similar with U.S. unilateral disengagement from both unfinished conflicts. One must wonder if history repeats itself.

The Taliban in Afghanistan seemed poised to rise to power reminiscent of the communists in South Vietnam in 1975. One might consider the possibility of the Taliban mounting a “Tet Offensive-style” military operation in order to harass retreating U.S. troops, create civil unrest, and topple the current Afghan government (just as the Vietnamese communists had hoped to accomplish in 1968 during the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam, with their ultimate goal of overthrowing the Saigon government). We must wonder if we Americans are doomed to future *deja vu* scenes of U.S. diplomats and Afghan civilians, especially educated women in leadership roles, fleeing in panic from advancing Taliban forces on the Afghan capital of Kabul. We must also evaluate the possible consequences of a new Taliban regime in Afghanistan as well as a mass exodus of Afghan refugees.

In a world of nuclear proliferation and entangled military alliances, perhaps only limited military objectives are now feasible. The Allied victory of World War II over the Axis powers was in an “all-out war” without nuclear weapon capability on either side (until the very end). There will never again be a conflict similar to that of World War II as the use of nuclear weapons will create mutually assured devastation on both sides. The Cold War against the communists was won, not by a massive and utterly destructive traditional military war, but instead, because the citizens in those countries had had enough of one-party communist rule. The Vietnam War may well be a preview of future conflicts. The U.S. did not wage complete war against the Vietnamese communists for fear of creating a larger conflict with the possibility of nuclear weapon usage by both sides. The U.S. failed at “nation building” in South Vietnam and may have the same result soon in Afghanistan. The U.S. should study the feasibility of limited military actions in the future with very specific goals to avoid more “Oh no, not again” moments.