



## Source 44



open picture in PowerPoint

## SOURCE 44



US troops on a search-and-destroy mission in Vietnam.

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**Search and destroy**

Humming could not defeat a guerrilla army. The US commander General Westwood developed a policy of search and destroy. He established secure and heavily defended US bases to the north of the country and near to the coast. From here, US and South Vietnamese forces launched search-and-destroy raids from helicopters. They would descend on a village and destroy any Viet Cong forces they found. Soldiers had to send back reports of body counts.

Search-and-destroy missions did kill Viet Cong soldiers, but there were problems.

- The raids were often based on inadequate information.
- Inexperienced US troops often walked into traps.
- Innocent villages were mistaken for Viet Cong strongholds.
- Civilian casualties were extremely high in these raids. For every Viet Cong weapon captured by search-and-destroy, there was a body count of six. Many of these were innocent civilians.
- Search-and-destroy tactics made the US and South Vietnamese forces very unpopular with the peasants. It pushed them towards supporting the Viet Cong.

## SOURCE 44



US troops on a search-and-destroy mission in Vietnam.

**The Tet Offensive, 1968 – a turning point**

In 1968 the Communists launched a major offensive. During the Tet New Year holiday, Viet Cong fighters attacked over 100 cities and other military targets. One Viet Cong commando unit tried to capture the US embassy in Saigon. US forces had to fight to regain control room by room. A round 4500 fighters died down a much larger US and South Vietnamese force in Saigon for two days.

In many ways the Tet Offensive was a disaster for the Communists. They hoped that the people of South Vietnam would rise up and join them. They didn't. The Viet Cong lost around 80,000 experienced fighters and were badly weakened by it.

However, the Tet Offensive proved to be a turning point in the war because it raised hard questions about the war in the USA.

- There were nearly 500,000 troops in Vietnam and the USA was spending \$30 billion a year on the war. So why had the Communists been able to launch a major offensive that took US forces completely by surprise?
- US and South Vietnamese forces quickly recaptured the towns captured in the offensive, but in the process they used enormous amounts of artillery and air power. Many civilians were killed. The ancient city of Hue was destroyed (see Source 41). Was this right?

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