

# Virginians at War

## Vietnam: Tet Offensive

### Resource Packet

Contains: Glossary, Timeline, Images, Discussion Questions, Additional Resources

**Program Description:** Virginians at War: The Tet Offensive explores the experience of Virginians that fought during the critical Tet Offensive in 1968, a turning point of the Vietnam War. Launched by the North Vietnamese Army on 30 January, the coordinated attack against thirteen different provincial capitals throughout South Vietnam took Americans and South Vietnamese by surprise. The result was a costly, long campaign that ended in a hard-fought military victory for the United States and South Vietnamese. However, the outcome of the campaign had a significantly negative impact on support for the war in the United States, from which the nation would not fully recover.

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**Length:** 18:59

**Streaming link:** <https://vimeo.com/367038067>

#### Featured Speakers:

MSG Lonnie S. Ashton, Montross  
MSG Lauren P. Bands, Colonial Heights  
COL Robert C. Barrett, Jr., Colonial Heights  
LT COL Frank S. Blair, Richmond  
MSG Charles M. Carter, Warsaw  
SGT Earl E. Cousins, Ashland  
CPT James H. Dement, Jr., Richmond  
1st LT Daniel G. Doyle, Richmond  
LT COL John D. Edgerton, Williamsburg

SPC Orthea Harcum, Richmond  
LT Hugh D. Keogh, Midlothian  
SGT Prentis Lee, Clifton  
SP/4 Powhatan "Red Cloud" Owen, Charles City  
SGM Douglass I. Randolph, Charlotte Court House  
MAJ John A. Rawls, M.D., Mechanicsville  
1st LT Cathie Lynn Solomonson, R.N., Woodbridge  
1st LT James F. Walker, Roanoke

**For a transcript of this program and more information on the Vietnam War, please visit [vawarmemorial.org/learn/resources/vietnam](http://vawarmemorial.org/learn/resources/vietnam).**



# GLOSSARY

## IMPORTANT TERMS

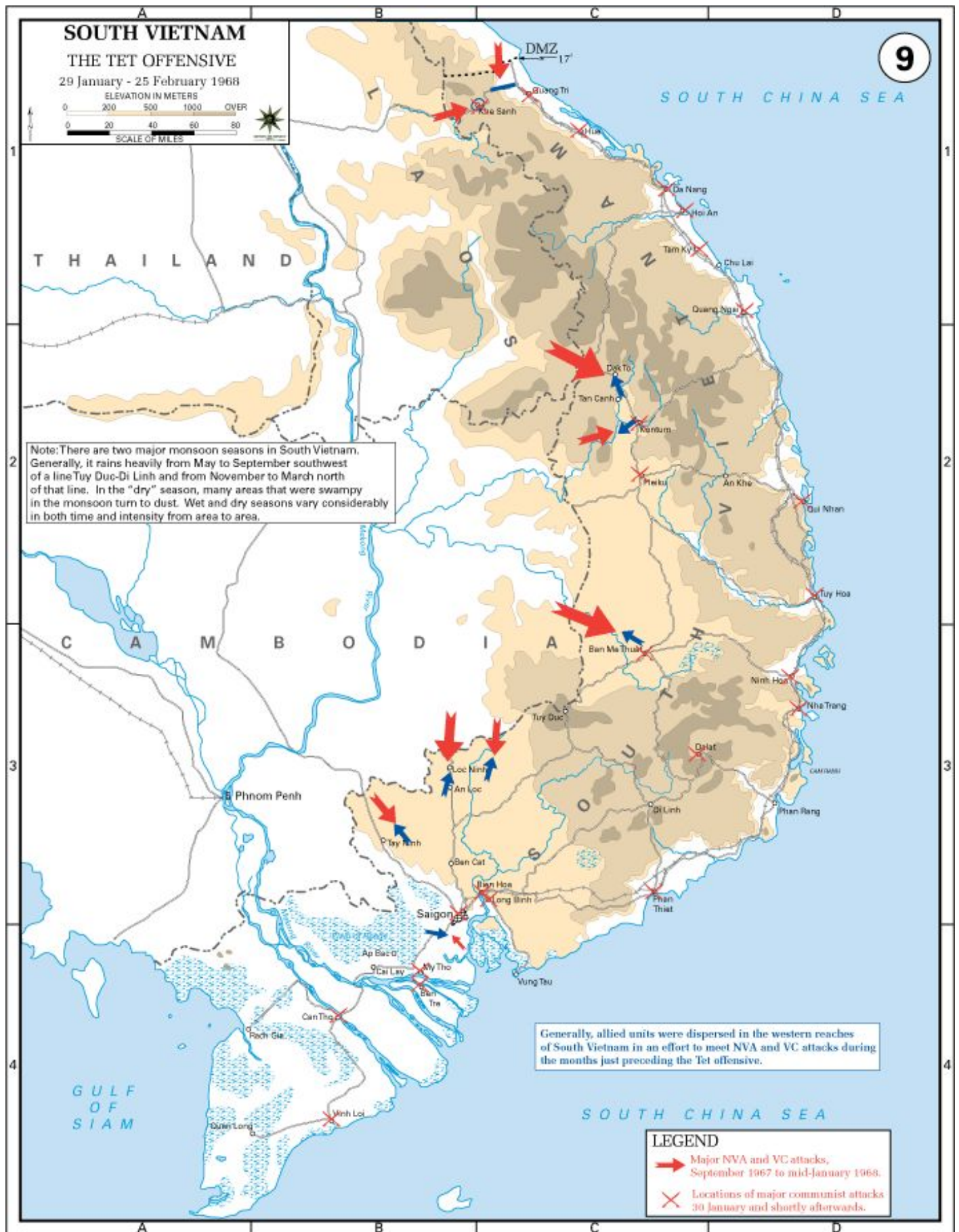
- **Chinook:** the Boeing CH-47 Chinook was one of the standard helicopters used by the United States Army in the Vietnam War, and was often used for missions that called for heavy lifting.
- **Communism:** a political and economic ideology under which the government owns all means of production. Supported by the Soviet, Chinese, and North Vietnamese governments during the Cold War (among others).
- **Democracy:** a system of government in which the people exercise the authority of government; democratic governments in the Cold War era included the United States.
- **Domino Theory:** states that if one country in a region came under the influence of communism, the surrounding countries would follow; used by the United States to justify involvement in several conflicts during the Cold War.
- **NVA:** short for North Vietnamese Army, the regular army of North Vietnam. Also called the People's Army of Vietnam.
- **Tet:** the Vietnamese New Year.
- **VC:** short for Viet Cong, also known as the National Liberation Front; the guerrilla force that fought against the United States and South Vietnam, with the support of the North Vietnamese Army. Also referred to by American soldiers as "Victor Charlie," or "VC" in the phonetic alphabet.

## IMPORTANT PLACES

- Khe Sanh
- North Vietnam
- Pleiku
- Saigon
- South Vietnam

# VIETNAM WAR TIMELINE

- **May 7, 1954:** Ho Chi Minh's communist Viet Minh forces defeat the French to end the First Indochina War
- **July 1954:** countries come to an agreement at the Geneva Conference to divide Vietnam into two zones - North Vietnam to be governed by the Viet Minh, and South Vietnam to be governed by the State of Vietnam. Cambodia and Laos created as separate states.
- **November 1, 1955:** the first American advisors are sent to South Vietnam as the American Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was created.
- **December 20, 1960:** National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) established in South Vietnam.
- **August 2-4, 1964:** Gulf of Tonkin incident, Johnson seeks congressional approval for United States involvement
- **March 8, 1965:** First United States Marines land in Vietnam (Danang)
- **November 14-18, 1965:** the Battle of Ia Drang - the first large scale battle between the United States and the North Vietnamese Army. Both sides claim victory.
- **January 21-July 9, 1968:** Battle of Khe Sanh
- **January 31, 1968:** the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong launch the surprise Tet Offensive, attacking provincial capitals and other urban centers throughout South Vietnam.
- **January 27, 1973:** Cease-fire reached between North Vietnam and the United States. POWs begin to return home.
- **March 29, 1973:** last US combat troops leave South Vietnam.
- **April 30, 1975:** Fall of Saigon.



(West Point)



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong trying to accomplish with the Tet Offensive? Do you think they were successful? Why or why not?
2. One of the Veterans talks about how the Tet Offensive was a “political defeat but a military victory” for the United States. What does he mean by that?
3. Why was the Tet Offensive considered a turning point?
4. While you were watching the film, what were some scenes or stories that stuck out to you? Were there any scenes that made you feel patriotic? Why?
5. What physical, mental, and emotional survival skills are necessary or helpful in war time? How are those skills developed? What are some examples from the film of survival instincts and training?
6. What do you think it was like to be a nurse in the Vietnam War?

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about the experiences of Virginians in the Vietnam War, view *Virginians at War: Vietnam War - Air Operations* at [vawarmemorial.org](http://vawarmemorial.org). Looking to do more research? Check out the links below.

- PBS:  
<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/1acd1aae-7b42-46c0-bff2-1f961b87b804/the-tet-offensive-video-ken-burns-lynn-novick-the-vietnam-war/>
- NBC News Special Report on the Tet Offensive (January 31, 1968):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wA8n114eYXc>

Want to learn more about the Vietnam War? Visit [vawarmemorial.org/learn/resources/vietnam](http://vawarmemorial.org/learn/resources/vietnam) for more resources, glossaries, activities, and research opportunities!

