



GUIDED READING *U.S. Involvement and Escalation*

Section 2

As you read about the escalation of the war, take notes to answer the questions.

1. What role did each of the following play in the decision to escalate U.S. military involvement in Vietnam?
Lyndon B. Johnson
Robert McNamara
Dean Rusk
William Westmoreland
U.S. Congress
American public opinion

U.S. military strategies result in a bloody stalemate.

2. What military advantages did the Americans have over the Vietcong?	3. What military advantages did the Vietcong have over the Americans?
4. What military strategies did the Americans use against the Vietcong?	5. What military strategies did the Vietcong use against the Americans?

Public support for the war begins to waver as a “credibility gap” grows.

6. What role did each of the following play in this change of public support?
The U.S. economy
Television
The Fulbright hearings



Section 2

SKILLBUILDER PRACTICE *Distinguishing Fact from Opinion*

In his State of the Union Address of 1966, President Johnson spoke of the course of the war in Vietnam and U.S. efforts for peace there. Read the portion of his speech presented below. Then, beside each number at the bottom of the page, write "fact" if the underlined phrase with that number is a fact, or "opinion" if the phrase is an opinion. (See Skillbuilder Handbook, p. R9.)

[O]ur choice gradually became clear. We could leave, abandoning South Vietnam to its attackers and to certain conquest—or we could stay and fight beside the people of South Vietnam.

[1] We stayed, and we will stay until aggression has stopped.

We will stay there because [2] a just nation cannot leave to the cruelty of its enemies a people who have staked their lives and independence on America's solemn pledge, a pledge which has grown through the commitments of three American Presidents. . . .

We will stay because in Asia, and around the world, are countries whose independence rests in large measure on confidence in America's word and in America's protection.

To yield to force in Vietnam would weaken that confidence; would undermine the independence of many lands, and would whet the appetite of aggression. [3] We would have to fight in one land, and then we'd have to fight in another—or abandon much of Asia to the domination of the Communists. . . .

And we do not intend to abandon Asia to conquest.

[4] Last year, the nature of the war in Vietnam changed again. Swiftly increasing numbers of [5] armed men from the north crossed the borders to join forces that were already in the south; attack and terror increased, spurred and encouraged by the belief that [6] the United States lacked the will to continue and that their victory was near.

Despite our desire to limit conflict, [7] it was necessary to act to hold back the mounting aggression, to give courage to the people of the south, and to make our firmness clear to the north.

Thus, [8] we began limited air action against military targets in North Vietnam; [9] we increased our fighting force to its present strength tonight of 190,000 men.

These moves have not ended the aggression. But they have prevented its success. . . .

We seek neither territory nor bases, economic domination or military alliance in Vietnam. We fight for the principle of self-determination, that [10] the people of South Vietnam should be able to choose their own course—choose it in free elections, without violence, without terror and without fear.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____



Section 2

RETEACHING ACTIVITY *Involvement and Escalation*

Finding Main Ideas

The following questions deal with America's entry into the Vietnam War. Answer them in the space provided.

1. How did most Americans react to President Johnson's decision to commit troops to the war in Vietnam? Why?

2. What difficulties did U.S. troops encounter in Vietnam?

3. What actions by U.S. troops hindered the effort to win the support of Vietnamese villagers?

4. What factors led to a decline in the morale of many U.S. soldiers?

5. How did the Vietnam War affect President Johnson's Great Society?

6. What role did television play in increasing Americans' doubts about the war effort?



Section 2

PRIMARY SOURCE Letter from a Soldier in Vietnam

Marine Second Lieutenant Marion Lee "Sandy" Kempner from Galveston, Texas, arrived in Vietnam in July 1966 and was killed four months later by shrapnel from a mine explosion near Tien Phu. He wrote the following letter to his great-aunt less than three weeks before his death at the age of 24.

October 20, 1966

Dear Aunt Fannie,

This morning, my platoon and I were finishing up a three-day patrol. Struggling over steep hills covered with hedgerows, trees, and generally impenetrable jungle, one of my men turned to me and pointed a hand, filled with cuts and scratches, at a rather distinguished-looking plant with soft red flowers waving gaily in the downpour (which had been going on ever since the patrol began) and said, "That is the first plant I have seen today which didn't have thorns on it." I immediately thought of you.

The plant, and the hill upon which it grew, was also representative of Vietnam. It is a country of thorns and cuts, of guns and marauding, of little hope and of great failure. Yet in the midst of it all, a beautiful thought, gesture, and even person can arise among it waving bravely at the death that pours down upon it. Some day this hill will be burned by napalm, and the red flower will crackle up and die among the thorns. So what was the use of it living and being a beauty among the beasts, if it must, in the end, die because of them, and with them? This is a question which is answered by Gertrude Stein's "A rose is a rose is a rose." You are what you are what you are. Whether you believe in God, fate, or the crumbling cookie, elements are so mixed in a being that make him what he is; his salvation from the thorns around him lies in the fact that he existed at all, in his very own personality. There was once a time when the Jewish idea of heaven and hell was the thoughts and opinions people had of you after you died. But what if the plant was on an isolated hill and was never seen by anyone? That is like the question of whether the falling tree makes a sound in the forest primeval when no one is there to hear it. It makes a sound, and the plant was beautiful and the thought was kind, and the person was humane, and distinguished and brave, not merely because other people recognized it as such, but because it is, and it is, and it is.

The flower will always live in the memory of a tired, wet Marine, and has thus achieved a sort of immortality. But even if we had never gone on that hill, it would still be a distinguished, soft, red, thornless flower growing among the cutting, scratching plants, and that in itself is its own reward.

Love,
Sandy

from Bernard Edelman, ed., Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam (New York: Norton, 1985), 137–138.

Discussion Questions

1. In this letter, Lieutenant Kempner describes a plant. What does the plant look like?
2. What does this plant represent to Kempner?
3. Based on your reading of this letter, what qualities or traits do you think might have helped Kempner cope with the trials of war in Vietnam?



AMERICAN LIVES

Robert McNamara

The Legacy of Vietnam

Section 2

"Looking back, I clearly erred by not forcing . . . a knock-down, drag-out debate over the loose assumptions, unasked questions, and thin analyses underlying our military strategy in Vietnam."—Robert McNamara, In Retrospect (1995)

Robert McNamara made the U.S. Defense Department more organized and efficient. Later he led an aid agency that funded programs to help poor people around the world improve their lives. However, he will probably be remembered most for his role in the Vietnam War.

McNamara (b. 1916) graduated from college with honors and attended the famous Harvard Business School. During World War II, he trained officers in the Army Air Corps in management techniques. After the war, he and a team of other managers joined the Ford Motor Company. These "Whiz Kids" led Ford out of difficulty and into new success. McNamara was named president of Ford—the first to come from outside the family. In 1961 he left that post to become President Kennedy's secretary of defense.

McNamara reformed the Defense Department and tightened control of the armed services. He joined in the planning that helped resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis. He also won Kennedy's approval of the new doctrine of "flexible response." This idea reduced the nation's heavy reliance on nuclear weapons. Instead, it based U.S. security on large conventional troop forces that could respond quickly to international crises.

The central issue of McNamara's time in office, though, was the Vietnam War. McNamara visited Vietnam in 1962, talking to leaders and American officers there. He backed the idea of using American troops as advisors and believed that with American help, the war could be over by 1965. After Kennedy was assassinated, he stayed as defense secretary under Lyndon Johnson, who came to rely on McNamara greatly.

McNamara supported the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which gave Johnson sweeping power in Vietnam. When administration planners debated whether to start bombing North Vietnam, McNamara thought it would not work, but he went along with the decision. He agreed with the policy of sending more troops.

As time went on, though, McNamara grew to

believe that the Vietnam War could not be won. In meetings with Johnson and other top advisors, he expressed these doubts. In public, however, McNamara never voiced these concerns.

He became so identified with Vietnam policy that war critics often attacked him personally. They called the fight "McNamara's war" and branded him a "baby burner" for air attacks that resulted in the deaths of children. McNamara persuaded Johnson to halt the bombing at the end of 1965, hoping for a peaceful gesture in return from the other side. There was no response. In 1966, a McNamara peace proposal was secretly sent to North Vietnam. Again, there was no response.

In 1968, McNamara felt he could not continue in the administration. He left the Defense Department to become president of an international aid agency. He served as chief of the World Bank for fifteen years. Before him, that agency concentrated on funding large industrial projects around the world. McNamara shifted the focus. Under him, the bank concentrated on funding programs that worked to help the poorest people in the world more directly.

In 1995, McNamara published his memoirs—*In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. The book revealed his earlier doubts that the war could be won. He said loyalty to Johnson prevented him from saying anything, even after he left office. Many reviewers criticized him for remaining quiet for so long and not having the courage of his convictions and speaking out at the time of the war.

Questions

1. Would you say that McNamara was effective at leading organizations? Why or why not?
2. Why did McNamara come to believe that fighting the Vietnam War was a mistake?
3. Do you agree that McNamara should have spoken out against the war when he left the Defense Department?