TimeLine Theatre Company

WASTELAND

by Susan Felder
directed by William Brown

STUDY GUIDE

Prepared by
Maren Robinson, Dramaturg

This Study Guide for *Wasteland* was prepared by Maren Robinson and edited by Kerri Hunt and Lara Goetsch for TimeLine Theatre, its patrons and educational outreach.
Please request permission to use these materials for any subsequent production.

— STUDY GUIDE —
Table of Contents

About the Playwright 3

About the Play 3

The Interview: Susan Felder 4

Glossary 11

Timeline: The Vietnam War and Surrounding Historical Events 13

The History: Views on Vietnam 19

The Context: A New Kind of War and a Nation Divided 23

Prisoners of War and Torture 23

Voices of Prisoners of War 24

POW Code of Conduct 27

Enlisted vs. Drafted Soldiers 28

The American War 28

Discussion Questions 29

References and Further Reading 30

Download a PDF of the entire
Study Guide at TimeLine's website:
http://www.timelinetheatre.com/wasteland/
TimeLine_Wasteland_StudyGuide.pdf

About the Playwright

SUSAN FELDER has been a professional actor, director and educator for more than 20 years. Her original play *Temple Spirit* was workshopped by The House Theatre of Chicago. She wrote and directed the short play *Jumping Mouse* for Kids in Distress (an organization for homeless and at-risk foster kids). In 1999, Camp-Make-A-Dream (a summer program for children surviving cancer) adopted her short story Mooky the Flying Camel as a camp staple. Selections from her musical *Waking Eden* (based on the Jack London novel Martin Eden) were chosen to be performed at the Royal George for Chicago Musical Theatre Works. She has taught theatre at Montana State University, Northwestern University, University of Notre Dame and Loyola University Chicago and holds an MFA degree in Shakespeare studies and language from the Academy for Classical Acting at George Washington University. Recent Chicago directing credits include *The Quiet Man Tales* (Chicago Theatre), the world premiere of *A Love Lost Life — The Marlon Brando Story* (Theatre Building Chicago), several one acts for the Steppenwolf One Act Festival in association with Northwestern University and Remy Bumppo, and several productions for Loyola University Chicago and Montana Shakespeare in the Parks. As an actor, Susan has appeared around Chicago, including at the Goodman, Northlight, Next, Chicago Shakespeare, Court and Remy Bumppo theaters. Regionally she has appeared at Orlando Shakespeare, Boarshead Theatre (*Mother's Day*, Thespie Award – Best Supporting Actress), Indiana Repertory Theatre, Milwaukee Shakespeare, Peninsula Players, Attic Theatre, and 15 seasons at Montana Shakespeare in the Parks. She is a member of Actors' Equity Association.

About the Play

Playwright Susan Felder has said she was not thinking about the T.S. Eliot poem of the same title when she sat down to write the play. However, after many questions, she did research into the Eliot poem and the use of the word wasteland and found that both Eliot and his predecessors used the word to describe a state of isolation, desperation and hopelessness that certainly fit with the state of being prisoners of war.

The Interview: Susan Felder

During rehearsals for *Wasteland*, TimeLine Artistic Director **PJ Powers (PJP**) talked with Chicago playwright **Susan Felder (SF)** about her life as an actor, director and now playwright; the experience of working on her first fully produced play; and getting caught in that hole in the ground.

(PJP) You've primarily been an actor and director, so what led you to playwriting?

(SF) The need to express something that you don't feel is being expressed anywhere else, I guess. The journey from actor to director to playwright seems natural to me. As an actor you're focused on one character—telling their story. As a director, the story gets bigger. It was pretty natural to go the extra step to, can I shed light on the entire story I know in my head? Can I capture the essence of something that I feel is hidden and needs to be said?

My actor always looks for that. My director always looks for that. And then as a playwright, the whole ball game becomes yours on paper. It's always been the same for me: If I can show our vulnerabilities to the world so that we understand ourselves, then I'm not alone in those. When you're dealing with those difficult things in life, you either bore your friends, you get therapy, or you write a play.

(PJP) What's it been like to be in the writer's chair?

(SF) VERY different. I'm aware of what it's like to be an actor and a director. Those processes are very different. When I became a director, it made me understand how to work better as an actor—more able to collaborate from a knowledgeable place. Writing is similar. I get how your head can spin as an actor—how a director has to use nails to get things into place sometimes. It's my desire not just to write a script, but to make it easy and accessible for a director and for actors. It's actually for selfish reasons. Even a comma put in the right place can send an actor in a different direction in their minds (hopefully, the place in my mind). I think the big difference is that as a writer, you're not the captain. You're not the crew. You have to build the whole boat so others can get you where you want to go. The process is a surprise, though, still.

I feel bad making these actors go to these places sometimes. They love it, but after six hours of rehearsal they come out shell-shocked. I feel like I'm the artillery. And then I go home and do re-writes—and have to get back to that place again— stay in that hole. Most therapists would say "don't dwell." As a writer, you have to, in order to remember, to feel the truth of what that actually is.

I remember hearing about a Chicago actor who had a heart attack. His doctor told him he needed to stay out of stressful situations. He said he had a good life as a member of a prestigious company so he wasn't really stressed. His doctor said his characters suffered and were stressed all the time and then added, "You think your body knows the difference?" So, I'm being careful to remind myself that my life is great right now; I'm loving rehearsals and finally working at a theatre I've respected for years—I'm not in a forgotten hole in Vietnam—even though my emotional psyche is spending 24/7 there! It's a bit of a trip.

(PJP) *Wasteland* marks your first full production, but I know you have a few other scripts ready to go. Can you talk a bit about how this play differs from the other pieces you've written?

(SF) My friend Karen Woditsch came to the reading, and she said, "All of your stuff is so different. It's like different people wrote them." But I think they all focus around a similar theme of boundaries and isolation. This play is the rawest of the bunch. I try to expose ugliness and isolation and ask "why" all the time. Even the comedy in *Wasteland* is me asking "why?" And "how?" This play is the closest thing to what it's like to be ravaged by all that—and how we fight it. No, that's wrong. Rather, it's how **amazing** it is that we fight it and find our way. It's probably the most triumphant outlook of any of my plays thus far—and the others are comedies!

Temple Spirit is a piece in verse, which follows Japanese ghost stories—sort of a Noel Coward meets Shakespeare thing. It's got a ton of verse forms in it—from iambic pentameter to haiku—and all sorts of ghosts and demons. Nothing like two young soldiers in Vietnam. The language is very different. The other one is a comedy about boundaries in art and age—very contemporary. [Director William Brown] would argue, but I think *Wasteland* is influenced by my work with Beckett and O'Neill. It's raw realism, with an underlying existential thread. Different forms help you do different things. You feel it in your bones. You wouldn't want to create a beach party with a waltz. But I like to play with form, like you might want to do a Mamet play in iambic pentameter and see how that feels.

(PJP) You've worked with these *Wasteland* guys before—director William Brown and actors Nate Burger and Steve Haggard. Why were they each right for this project?

(SF) Nate was on the project from the beginning. He took my acting classes at Loyola University Chicago and did the first reading of this play in my office when it was a 25-page short play. I had cast him in *Waiting for Godot* and found his access to emotional life amazing. Steve and I have worked as

actors together several times. I think he is one of the boldest, bravest actors I know. And he's a party. I needed a Riley who was funny but could project an entire personality through a solid wall. Haggard.

And Bill and I have known each other for years. He's been one of my most consistent friends through my life. My champion. My critic. We've worked as actors together, as director/actor, and I've verse coached for him a lot—working side by side to interpret language and intention. So, I know he's interested in that. Truthfully, he was also instrumental in getting this seen, because he saw that the play was about the triumph of the human spirit. He's also a very good director. In the actual process I was stunned at his process with a new play. He's genuinely interested in finding what I'm trying to say with this—and illuminating *that.* Getting **me** to illuminate that, rather than telling a different story based on a piece of it that interests him—which is a problem for playwrights. Shakespeare must lose his mind on this one. Oh, I don't mean to sound—well, you have to collaborate, get other ways of seeing it in there—but sometimes, strangely, the playwright's intent is abandoned. They lose their voice.

All three of these guys were my friends to begin with. Having all of these guys in the room when you're exploring the most intimate parts of human experience is a gift. They're the guys you want in your foxhole.

(PJP) What inspired you to write *Wasteland*?

(SF) OK. I'll keep this short. Sometimes things spin until they burn and you have to get them out quick. But they might spin for a long time. On a literal basis, in my darkest hours I always felt, "At least I'm not in a hole somewhere where nobody can find me." That would be the end. Eventually, on the advice of Eleanor Roosevelt, I decided to explore that awful fear. I began writing *Wasteland* one morning and didn't get off the couch until it was finished. Twenty-five pages of it. I felt safer. Like it wasn't loose in the air or the dungeon anymore, but like I had pulled it up and looked it in the face.

(PJP) What role did research play in the script's development and evolution?

(SF) Research was huge. At first I was just relieved the piece had been written. Then I needed to know if my truth was clear. Your fears have a way of hiding in artistry sometimes so that they stay hidden to all but the most astute. I wanted to expose them—to expose us as humans. For that you need other people. And it's a play after all.

So I got two students to read it in my office. This is where the title came from. After I asked them what they felt it was about, one asked, "What is this for you?" It was my wasteland—my exploration of and journey through.

I sent it to another friend who said it was "bogus." I asked if it was because I was writing for young men. So few people write real women—so my radar's out on that one. He said that part was dead on, and accused me of being a 20-year-old boy (hooray!), but said they wouldn't talk like that in Vietnam. So, oops. I had used that setting because I needed a world that nobody could understand—that seemed like hell. The hole is just another circle of that hell. I now needed to do my research.

So I talked to vets. I read books and watched interviews, movies, documentaries, etc. I lived in it for months. I found out there wasn't near enough profanity in the play! One statistic records that the second most used word in interviews with soldiers was "fuck." The first was "umm." That is a language of obscene struggle—push against something. Vietnam is what brought that mightily offensive word into our national usage.

I think the folks at TimeLine understand that history is just a record of who we are, and how we become that and why things keep resonating with us. When I chose Vietnam, I didn't know a lot about it, but something resonated with me. As I researched it, I found what that was. One source talked about Vietnam and how it changed the country. We woke up and said, "This is who I am?! How did I get here? This can't be it." It was like America's mid-life crisis or something. That resonated with me, so I used it in the play. One book talked about how men were conditioned by John Wayne movies, by World War II, comic books, G.I. Joe—so that we could think of ourselves a certain way—as heroes, the good guys. And when we found out that we weren't that—when we felt like the first warrior who failed—well, our world fell apart. But it was all a lie to begin with. So, of course, a version of that went into the play. Anything that resonated with the places in the rocks I had to get to, that's what I explored in the play.

(PJP) Like so many, you have family ties to the Vietnam War, correct? What did the personal connection mean to you in writing this?

(SF) Correct. But, I hadn't thought about it until I wrote this play, actually. Vietnam was, in my limited understanding at 10 years old, a monster that had passed. But I think two experiences stayed with me and influenced my choices. We had a family friend when I was a teenager. He looked like Jesus Christ, but he rode a motorcycle and smoked—a gentle man with a lot of demons. My parents took him under their wing; he worked with my Mom at the Senior Citizens Center. I knew he had been to Vietnam but we never, never talked about it. I just wasn't done. He was looking for a place to hold on and he found our family. He found a place for a while, but as he got older the world still didn't hold much for him. For a while with our family, he had "normal." But, it didn't last.

I did engage my brother-in-law about Vietnam. He told me to read *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien and that *Platoon* got the conditions right. He then began to talk about his time in "the Nam." My sister watched in careful astonishment. He didn't usually talk about the war much, you had to get a few drinks in him. But if someone was telling a story about it, he wanted them to "get some of it right at least." He steers away from any mention—any mention—of patrol or being in the field. The danger stories he keeps far away, but he talks about the time mortar came through the roof of his hootch on base and went right through his mattress. He still has the shrapnel that would have killed him had he been there. When his son asks him if he killed anybody, he just gets a weird far away smile out one side of his mouth and says, "Oh, now. That's not …." But he won't go further. The energy in the room changes and we all look for ways to let him out of it. He still, at 63, has a plastic baggie of red dirt that he carried home.

(PJP) Your play opens just a few weeks before this year's election. What do you hope *Wasteland* has to say about America in 2012?

(SF) Coming from a political family (my Dad was in politics for 30 years), I am numbed by the division in this country. The wall seems impenetrable and I want to know why, so that it gets exposed. Differences are part of it. Our similarities bond us, but they've become a trap. Keeping others out leaves us with a smaller space. Walls go both ways. I don't think we see that—not fully.

I hate election time now. As a kid, I'd sit with my Dad at the polls (his first job was a county clerk so he ran the elections). I had a sweatshirt with red, white and blue letters that said "VOTE." I went to Washington with him when I got older, conventions, a few state inaugurations, etc. So, I saw a lot of it, at a pretty young age. My father was the end of a type of politician that can't exist anymore. We've become two clans that can't get along—we think like clans. The "old lions" of the Democratic party worked and played together with those in the Republican party. My Dad was part of that generation, so that's what I knew of politics. My father backed a Republican for Senator once. Today that would keep him from getting elected. These guys golfed together, talked together, had lunch. They had different ideologies, but they supported the country and knew it was all a means to an end. It was more of a team sport. If somebody had a better idea, they'd say "Shit, that's a better idea. Let's go with that." Strangely, it let them think for themselves.

But now, politics has become religion. "Church and state" don't need evangelical preachers to threaten it—it's living in the hearts of people already. So, I'm a little broken-hearted over what's happened to our country, our sense of unity. We battle each other. We're in a civil war of a different kind. Much like Vietnam at home during that time. It's hard to say how we

got here. I think concentrating on the divisions, the walls, is what did it, sure. There's also something in the general psyche of the country that is repeating the post-Vietnam phenomenon: Loss of hope over things too complicated to grasp; the feeling that nobody, not even Uncle Sam, has our backs.

On another note—my director, Bill Brown, is very political. We have discussions among our friends and I want to hide my head. I was over-saturated with politics when I was younger. So, I'm also like those people who've had enough politics and just want to watch TV. I don't know, the politics of Vietnam—the impossibility of figuring it all out because passion meets ideology which breeds propaganda and misinformation—it just feels familiar right now. I hope this play lets us see some of that.

(PJP) I've talked about the magical night when we did a reading of this play and quickly shuffled plans to get *Wasteland* on our schedule. What was the reading like for you and why is TimeLine a good home for your play?

(SF) That night—wow. As a playwright you have to go into those things carefully. Usually people comment and tell what they did and didn't like. It's like standing naked and people saying, "I think if she had one less arm it would be better." You have to go into it knowing that if the play touches them at all, they want to write a new version—their version—because something sparked in them. And let's face it, we're all playwrights.

So, that night. I'll try to share what that was like because I'll always be grateful for that night whatever else happens with this play. I held my breath through the reading. You have eight hours of rehearsal and there's so much to explore. I write in layers and threading them all through takes time. I watched all these moments slip by and some of them land, and I thought, "I hope they don't hate me after this for keeping them so long in this cave with these demons." I relished the humorous part that distracted us all from it. I wanted to hide a little. I didn't sit with friends because I needed to experience it on my own, to feel out the audience. This happens with any play reading, by the way.

The end came, the lights went up and I felt the entire audience, at the same time, exhale. There was a moment of exhale, stillness—and then they applauded, for a long time. So I thought, "Was that—something? Okay, that was cool."

And then you have to put your clothes back on and sit in front and talk about the play! But they've seen the naked ugly. Clothes don't help. We don't think about the fun they had, only the tough stuff. People are OK with fun, after all. You're afraid someone is going to whisper, "My word, what's *wrong* with her?" I was braced, because I know how these things go. You have to get info,

you want to know so you can make things clearer, but you have to pretend it's for someone else, for later (my research makes me liken it to war—they're shooting at you, but it's not personal and you'll think about that later.) You have to tip-toe across the reality of it all, until later. But what happened is rare. It never happens.

They started to talk—not about how to change the play, but rather, how the play affected them. I remember near the end of the talk-back, before the hour where people stayed to continue talking, when I thought, "OK. Open it up. Let it in. You're safe to feel this fully because it's good and it's rare and you better suck this all in." I actually went home and recorded all the good things that were said—to hold onto for later. To process later. I still read them and there are things that I don't remember. A woman shook my hand and kissed me, but didn't say a word.

The only criticism was the one I absolutely wanted. Someone asked if maybe we could see Riley on one side of the stage—imagine what a cool play that would be. I know I've won when they say that—they want him that badly. Like Joe does. And they can taste it and imagine.

So, that was the night of the reading. That never happens. I knew TimeLine was the right place, because I think the mission here—to explore present day resonances from yesterday's echoes, to see where human beings are timeless—goes to the heart of the play. History is just the record of humanity after all. There's an energy at this theatre that I've always longed for. In a play about longing, well, it was a good match for a lot of personal reasons.

(PJP) So what's next for you?

(SF) I'm in the process of trying to move on a play I've been writing for twice as long as *Wasteland*. It's been through some readings, gotten amazing response—but getting it produced—well, let's just say TimeLine was a rare miracle! So, I'm pitching that and getting more readings going.

My actor is auditioning. You're an orphan at a certain age without a theatrical home. But that's a blessing too. I know that if I'd had a wildly successful career as an actor I never would have become a playwright—and I'd have nothing to write about. Cliché, demons as gifts, but there it is.

I'm teaching part-time at Loyola and Northwestern. It's always light and summer in the classroom for me. I love it. There's a project about cowboys I'm dying to direct.

Funny, PJ, this is the question of the play. It's the thing I keep coming up against. At the end of a process, there's a cliff with nothing beyond it. It's a common theme with artists. If it's not 9 to 5, it's risk and constantly facing

the end of things, the fear that nothing will begin again no matter how much you've been told you rock. But things can come, beyond that cliff.
I once heard someone say, on a sunny day, "A guy who committed suicide yesterday, would be sorry today!" I guess I find that hysterical and oddly life affirming because it looks it right in the face. This play is actually a bizarre look at that. I believe in building that kind of faith. Now I'm playing every day with amazing people. The sun is shining and I'm taking it all in as fast as I can. That all ends in a month and then … who knows? I'm putting the good stuff in the emotional bank.

GLOSSARY [1]

AK-47 – the basic infantry weapon of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the Viet Cong guerillas (VC). Originally manufactured in the Soviet Union.

Arty – artillery

Boo Coo – modification of the French beaucoup, meaning "many."

Boom boom – a short visit with a prostitute.

Bouncing Betty – a type of booby-trap in which an explosive is propelled about four feet into the air and then detonates, causing a greater likelihood of death or injury.

Caca Dau – Vietnamese phrase for "I'll kill you."

Charlie, Charles, and Chuck – slang for the Viet Cong from a shortening of the military alphabetic phrase Victor Charlie.

C-rations – the canned meals used in military operation rations also included an allowance of toilet paper, salt, pepper, sugar, cigarettes, and sometimes Chiclets or chewing tobacco. *(Pictured at right)*

Di Di Mau – Vietnamese for "move quickly."

Dung Lai – Vietnamese for "halt" or "stop."

Evac – abbreviation of "evacuation," generally of wounded soldiers by helicopter.

Extraction – the removal of troops from an area by helicopter.

[1] www.vietvet.org
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/trenches/language.html

Fire-base – a temporary military encampment.

Firecracker – an artillery round composed of many small bomblets, which are ejected over a target area and explode in the air simultaneously. The name comes from the rapid popping sound they make.

FUBAR – acronym for "Fucked Up Beyond All Repair" or "Recognition." Soldiers used the term to describe impossible situations or equipment.

Hootch – house or living quarters, or a native hut.

Interval – distance between soldiers moving in a column or line. If soldiers were close together there were more casualties if a bomb or grenade exploded.

Klick – one kilometer (0.62 miles).

Lai Dai – Vietnamese for "come here" or "bring it here."

LZ – acronym for "landing zone."

LZ cut – a maneuver performed from C-130 aircraft, usually by rolling a large bomb out the rear to clear an area so the aircraft could land.

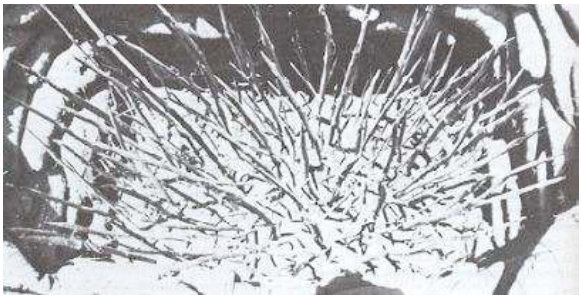
M14, M16 – both standard issue rifles for the U.S. military in Vietnam; the M16 model replaced the M14. M16 rifles were notorious for failing in the jungle conditions of Vietnam. *(M14 and M16 pictured below)*

Mad minute – a military exercise in which all soldiers fired non-stop toward the enemy or a fixed point for one minute.

Mortar – a tripod-based system for firing shells at a high angle. A round is dropped in the tube, striking a firing pin, causing the projectile to leave the tube at a high angle.

Nook – Vietnamese for "water."

Punji stick – a stake or spike in the ground, often at the bottom of a camouflaged pit. *(Pictured at right)*



Recon – abbreviation of "reconnaissance." A mission to obtain information about the activities and resources of the enemy.

SAR – acronym for "search and rescue."

Sky pilot – slang for a chaplain.

Spider hole – a camouflaged enemy foxhole.

Trip-wire – a thin wire strung across an area in which a soldier might walk. Tripping the wire would generally activate a mine or other booby trap.

Triple canopy – thickest jungle, with dense vegetation growing at three levels, often up to 50 feet thick.

Timeline: The Vietnam War and Surrounding Historical Events[2]

1950s

August 1950 The United States commits advisors to France in the latter's war against the Vietnamese and agrees to pay for half of the French war effort.

1954 The United States funds about three quarters of the war's cost.

October 1955 Ngo Dinh Diem defeats Bao Dai in a rigged election and proclaims himself President of the Republic of Vietnam.

1961

1961 Four hundred North Vietnamese guerrillas attack a village in Kienhoa Province. They are defeated by South Vietnamese troops.

April 17, 1961 A U.S. plan to invade Cuba and overthrow Fidel Castro goes wrong when air support at the Bay of Pigs does not arrive.


JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY, BOSTON

May 12, 1961 On a tour of Asia, Vice President Lyndon Johnson visits Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon and assures Diem that he is crucial to U.S. objectives in Vietnam.

October 12, 1961 President Kennedy authorizes the creation of the "Green Berets," a Special Forces operation based at Fort Bragg, N.C. They will specialize in counterinsurgency.

---

[2] http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/timeline/tl3.html#a
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/honor/timeline/index.html
http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/15/newsid_2533000/2533131.stm
http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history

1962

1962 The U.S. Air Force begins using Agent Orange, a herbicide that comes in orange containers and is used to defoliate dense jungle to expose roads and trails used by Viet Cong forces.

February 27, 1962 Diem's palace in Saigon is bombed in an attempted coup.

October 1962 The Cuban Missile Crisis occurs. Photos taken from a U.S. spy plane reveal the Soviets placing offensive missiles on Cuban soil. President Kennedy orders a naval blockade around Cuba to prevent the delivery of additional missiles; the world comes the closest it's ever been to nuclear war.

After visiting Saigon, Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield voices his concerns that Diem has wasted the $2 billion America has spent there.

1963

January 3, 1963 Viet Cong fighters defeat the South Vietnamese Army in the Battle of Ap Bac.

1963 Tensions between Buddhists and the Diem government are strained as Diem, a Catholic, replaces Buddhists in several key government positions with Catholics. Buddhist monks protest the religious discrimination by setting themselves on fire in public places.

November 2, 1963 Diem is overthrown in a CIA-backed coup led by General Duong Van Minh. He and his brother, Ngo Dihn Nhu, are killed.

December 1963 Two-dozen American soldiers and civilians are prisoners of war in Vietnam and Laos.

November 22, 1963 President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Tex. Kennedy's death places the burden of Vietnam on the new president, Lyndon B. Johnson.

1964

January 30, 1964 In a bloodless coup, General Nguyen Khanh seizes power in Saigon. The South Vietnamese junta leader, Major General Duong Van Minh, is placed under house arrest.

August 2, 1964 Three North Vietnamese PT boats allegedly fire torpedoes at the U.S.S. Maddox, a destroyer located in the international waters of the Tonkin Gulf, approximately 30 miles off the coast of North Vietnam.

August 7, 1964 Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, authorizing President Lyndon Johnson to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against forces of the United States and to prevent further

aggression." The resolution allows Johnson to wage war without securing a formal declaration of war from Congress.

November 1, 1964 The Viet Cong attack Bien Hoa Air Base, near Saigon.

November 3, 1964 Lyndon Johnson is elected president in a landslide over Republican Barry Goldwater. The conflict in Vietnam is a significant issue during the election.

1965

February 1965 Operation Rolling Thunder, the sustained American bombing raids of North Vietnam, begins. The air raids will continue for three years.

March 8, 1965 The first American combat troops, the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, arrive in Vietnam to defend the U.S. airfield at Danang. U.S. troop levels will reach 200,000 by the end of the year.

1966

February 6-9, 1966 President Lyndon Johnson meets with South Vietnamese premier Nguyen Cao Ky in Honolulu, Hawaii. Johnson promises to aid South Vietnam, with the caveat that the U.S. will be monitoring South Vietnam's efforts to expand democracy.

April 12, 1966 In an effort to disrupt supply routes along the Mugia Pass, American B-52s bomb North Vietnam for the first time.


U.S. AIR FORCE

1967

1967 Numerous protests—including a protest by veterans of World Wars I and II and of the Korean War—take place in cities across the U.S.

January 8, 1967 In Operation Cedar Falls, about 16,000 U.S. and 14,000 South Vietnamese troops set out to destroy Viet Cong operations and supply sites near Saigon. They discover a massive system of tunnels, apparently a former Viet Cong headquarters.

May 1, 1967 Ellsworth Bunker replaces Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. as U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam.

April 4, 1967 The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. speaks out against the Vietnam War.

April 8, 1967 Students at the University of Wisconsin demand that recruiters for Dow Chemical not be allowed on campus because they produce napalm used by the U.S. military.


LBJ LIBRARY PHOTO
BY YOICHI R. OKAMOTO

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara testifies before a Senate subcommittee that U.S. bombing raids against North Vietnam have not achieved their objectives.

1968

1968 Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia allows U.S. and South Vietnamese forces to pursue the Viet Cong into his country.

January 1968 The North Vietnamese launch the Tet Offensive. Catching the U.S. military off guard, they seize several key cities, including Saigon. American forces turn back the onslaught and recapture most areas, but the Communists consider the offensive a "psychological victory."

1968 The battle for Hue rages for 26 days as U.S. and South Vietnamese forces try to recapture the city seized by the Communists during the Tet Offensive. Much of Hue is leveled in the fighting, leaving civilians homeless. After U.S. and A.R.V.N. forces retake the city, they discover mass graves of those executed during the Communist occupation.

General William Westmoreland requests 206,000 additional troops.

March 16, 1968 The angry and frustrated men of Charlie Company, 11th Brigade, America l Division, enter the village of My Lai and in a chaotic day kill numerous civilians, including women and children. When news of the atrocities at My Lai surfaces, it will send shockwaves through the U.S. political establishment, the military's chain of command, and an already divided American public.

March 31, 1968 Lyndon Johnson announces he will not run for reelection.

April 4, 1968 Martin Luther King, Jr. is slain in Memphis.

May 10, 1968 Peace talks begin in Paris between W. Averell Harriman representing the United States and former Foreign Minister Xuan Thuy heading the North Vietnamese delegation.

June 6, 1968 Robert Kennedy is assassinated in Los Angeles.

August 22-24 1968 Mayor Richard J. Daley orders police to crack down on anti-war protests at the Democratic Convention in Chicago. Violence erupts between police and protestors as the nation watches on television.

November 5, 1968 Richard M. Nixon is elected president with 43.4% of the popular vote.

1969

January 20, 1969 Nixon is inaugurated as the 37th President.

1969 Nixon authorizes Operation Breakfast, a secret bombing campaign in Cambodia with a goal to destroy Communist supply routes and camps.

May 12, 1969 The first of 17 "national security" wiretaps on White House aides and media is installed following newspaper leaks about the secret bombing of Cambodia.

Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird announces a policy of "Vietnamization" in which the role of the U.S. military in Vietnam will be diminished and the military burden to defeat the Communists will shift to the South Vietnamese Army.

September 2, 1969 President Ho Chi Minh of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam dies of a heart attack at age 79.

October 15, 1969 One of the largest anti-war demonstrations assembles in Washington, D.C.

November 12, 1969 Journalist Seymour Hersh reports on the My Lai Massacre and Americans learn for the first time of atrocities committed by American troops. At the time of public reports, the Army has already charged Lieutenant William Calley with the crime of murder.

1970

March 18, 1970 Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia is ousted in a coup orchestrated by his defense minister, Lon Nol.

May 4, 1970 National Guardsmen open fire on a crowd of student anti-war protesters at Ohio's Kent State University, resulting in the death of four students and the wounding of eight others.


KENT STATE UNIVERSITY, UNIVERSITY NEWS SERVICE PHOTOGRAPHS

February 21, 1970 U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and North Vietnamese General Le Duc Tho begin secret talks aimed at brokering a cease-fire.

1971

March 30, 1971 Lt. Calley is convicted of murder for the events that occurred at My Lai. Of the 26 officers and soldiers initially charged for their part in the My Lai Massacre or in the subsequent cover-up, only Calley is convicted.

June 13, 1971 *The New York Times* publishes the Pentagon Papers, revealing a legacy of deception concerning U.S. policy in Vietnam on the part of the military and the executive branch.

July 15, 1971 President Nixon announces his plan to visit the People's Republic of China. His announcement is seen by the North Vietnamese as an effort to create discord between themselves and their Chinese allies.

October 1971 President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam is re-elected without opposition, amid charges of corruption.

1972

1972 Nixon cuts troop levels in Vietnam by 70,000.

January 27, 1972 In a televised appearance, Nixon reveals Kissinger and Le Duc Tho' s secret peace talks.

February 1972 Nixon travels to China for talks with Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong.

The Nixon administration orders the heavy bombing of supply dumps and petroleum storage sites in and around Hanoi and Haiphong in an effort to influence ongoing peace talks.

1973

June 17, 1973 Five men are arrested for breaking into the Democratic National Headquarters at the Watergate building.

November 7, 1972 President Nixon wins reelection with 60.8% of the popular vote.

May 21, 1973 A cease-fire agreement is signed in Paris by Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. President Nixon says it will bring "peace with honor in Vietnam and Southeast Asia."

January 1973 All five Watergate burglars enter guilty pleas.

May 17, 1973 The Senate Watergate Committee begins televised hearings.

January 27, 1973 The United States announces the end of the military draft.

March 29, 1973 The last American combat troops leave Vietnam.

July 16, 1973 The Senate Armed Services Committee opens hearing on the secret U.S. bombing of Cambodia; Congress orders that all bombing in Cambodia cease as of midnight, August 14, 1973.

1973 The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to Henry Kissinger of the United States and Le Duc Tho of North Vietnam. Kissinger accepts the award; Tho declines, saying that peace does not yet exist in Vietnam.

1974

January 4, 1974 Alleging violations of the cease-fire, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu announces resumption of war with the North Vietnamese.

A report issued by the National Academy of Sciences states that the use of chemical herbicides during the war has caused long-term damage to the ecology of Vietnam.


NATIONAL ARCHIVES

May 9, 1974 The House Judiciary Committee opens impeachment hearings against President Nixon.

August 9, 1974 President Nixon resigns.

1975

January 6, 1975 Communist forces capture Phuoc Long province. The U.S. does not respond to the loss of the South Vietnamese Army.

March 24, 1975 The North Vietnamese initiate the Ho Chi Minh Campaign, an effort to take the city of Saigon.

March 26, 1975 The city of Hue in South Vietnam falls to the North Vietnamese.

April 16, 1975 The Cambodian capital Phnom Penh is captured by Khmer Rouge insurgents. The Lon Nol government surrenders, ending a five-year period of fighting and ushering in a period of genocide under the dictator Pol Pot.

April 23, 1975 In a speech at Tulane University, President Gerald Ford announces that the Vietnam War "is finished as far as America is concerned."

April 29, 1975 Americans and their allies evacuate by helicopter as Saigon falls to the Communists. The last two U.S. servicemen to die in Vietnam are killed when their helicopter crashes.

The History: Views on Vietnam

> *"I believe that one of the reasons for the deep division about Vietnam is that many Americans have lost confidence in what their Government has told them about our policy. The American people cannot and should not be asked to support a policy, which involves the overriding issues of war and peace unless they know the truth about that policy."*
>
> — President Richard M. Nixon on Vietnam in his "Silent Majority" speech, November 3, 1969[3]

[3] Link to Nixon's "Silent Majority" speech complete text and video: http://watergate.info/1969/11/03/nixons-silent-majority-speech.html

"To me, the tragedy of the Vietnam war was not that there were disagreements – that was inevitable, given the complexity of the [conflict] – but that the faith of Americans in each other became destroyed in the process ... I believe that most of what went wrong in Vietnam we did to ourselves. I would have preferred another outcome – at least another outcome that was not so intimately related to the way that we tore ourselves apart."

— Henry Kissinger, addressing a State Department Conference on September 29, 2010[4]

"As President of the United States I have concluded that I should now ask the Congress, on its part, to join in affirming the national determination that all such attacks will be met, and that the United States will continue in its basic policy of assisting the free nations of the area to defend their freedom.

"As I have repeatedly made clear, the United States intends no rashness, and seeks no wider war. We must make it clear to all that the United States is united in its determination to bring about the end of Communist subversion and aggression in the area. We seek the full and effective restoration of the international agreements signed in Geneva in 1954, with respect to South Vietnam, and again in Geneva in 1962, with respect to Laos ..."

— President Johnson in Joint Resolution of Congress H.J. RES 1145 August 7, 1964

"No event in American history is more misunderstood than the Vietnam War. It was misreported then, and it is misremembered now. Rarely have so many people been so wrong about so much. Never have the consequences of their misunderstanding been so tragic."

— President Richard M. Nixon in his book *No More Vietnams*[5]

[4] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/09/29/henry-kissinger-vietnam-we-did-to-ourselves_n_744337.html

[5] http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/vietnam/journalists.html

"The camera can describe in excruciating detail what war is all about ... It's true that on its own every piece of war film takes on a certain anti-war character simply because it does not glamorize or romanticize. In battle, men do not die with a clean shot through the heart; they are blown to pieces."

— Journalist Morley Safer writing about the Vietnam War in 1966[6]

"They must see Americans as strange liberators. The Vietnamese people proclaimed their own independence in 1954 -- in 1945 rather -- after a combined French and Japanese occupation and before the communist revolution in China. They were led by Ho Chi Minh. Even though they quoted the American Declaration of Independence in their own document of freedom, we refused to recognize them. Instead, we decided to support France in its re-conquest of her former colony. Our government felt then that the Vietnamese people were not ready for independence, and we again fell victim to the deadly Western arrogance that has poisoned the international atmosphere for so long."

— The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. in a speech against the Vietnam War at Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967[7]

"I'm not sure how people think that we should have been able to tell these people apart; they didn't look any different, they didn't speak any different, dress any different, their signs said the same thing; they were trouble—we read about them, and they spoke of causing trouble in our city for the convention. Poisoning things, having sex on the streets, and hurting delegates. It was all bad, and we could hear it coming down the pike, and smell it, too."

— Former cop Ernie Bellows speaking about the violent clashes between protesters and police at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago [8]

[6] http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/vietnam/journalists.html
[7] http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm
[8] Kusch, Frank. Battleground Chicago: The Police and the 1968 Democratic National Convention, Chicago. Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004.

"***There was no distinguishing hippies, Yippies, Diggies, SDSers, and all of those radical groups. They went under different names, but we kept our eyes on all of them. I think they were pretending that they were different at times, but that was just a ploy, because when they got on the street, they all behaved the same way. Your regular patrolman was not going to be able to tell these people apart, and they didn't seem to care what we thought, anyway; even if they weren't trouble, they wanted to look the part."***

— Former cop Mel Latanzio on violence at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in the book *Battleground Chicago*[9]

"I didn't know they were arresting media. So I just went in the middle of the street thinking that I had a press card and I had my cameras and they'd let me take pictures. I didn't want to get arrested. I just happened to see these demonstrators being dragged — they were dragging them by their collars and their feet. What was I supposed to do? I'm just about to snap the picture of a hippie being arrested and all of a sudden seven cops jump on me. And they drag me into the wagon."

— Press photographer Barton Silverman, who was arrested while taking photos of protesters at the Democratic National Convention in 1968.

"Vietnam, it seems to me, has become a theater of the absurd … by late 1966, the United States was spending for the Vietnam War at an annual rate of twenty billion dollars, enough to give every family in South Vietnam (whose normal annual income is not more than several hundred dollars) about $5000 for the year. Our monthly expenditure for the war exceeds our annual expenditure for the Great Society's poverty program. … The Pentagon disclosed in 1966 that it had paid to relatives an average $34 in condolence money for each Vietnamese killed accidentally in American air strikes that summer. At the same time, according to reports from Saigon, the Air Force was paying $87 for each rubber tree destroyed accidentally by bombs."

— Howard Zinn, *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal*[10]

---

[9] Kusch, Frank. Battleground Chicago: The Police and the 1968 Democratic National Convention, Chicago. Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004.
[10] Zinn, Howard. Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal, Southend Press, 2002, p2.

The Context: A New Kind of War and a Nation Divided

The Vietnam War was a watershed moment in American history. It was the first war widely covered by film crews, who brought images of the war into American homes in an unprecedented way. Advances in radio technology meant that generals could order troops from a great distance rather than being close to the troops.

Unlike World War II, in which Americans felt a moral imperative to enter the war and achieved a definite victory, the conflict in Vietnam was more complicated in its aims and outcomes. This complexity undermined how many Americans felt about the war and about the role of American on the international stage.

The U.S. Army's use of the chemical Agent Orange to defoliate jungles, its use of napalm, and the killing of civilians in the My Lai massacre turned many Americans against the war and fostered outrage at the U.S. military. Nick Ut's 1972 Pulitzer Prize-winning photo—showing children running down a road in pain after a napalm bomb was dropped on the village of Trang Bang by the South Vietnam Air Force—epitomized the civilian cost of the war and reinforced the criticism that no moral authority could easily be claimed by United States and South Vietnamese forces.[11]

While political and social dialogue in the United States has often fractured, the Vietnam War was particularly divisive, splitting American families as well as American public opinion.

Prisoners of War and Torture

During the Vietnamese conflict, hundreds of Americans were incarcerated in Vietnamese prisons in North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and China. Many were confined in barbaric conditions. 591 prisoners of war were released during Operation Homecoming in the spring of 1973, but more than 2,000 Americans remained (and still remain) unaccounted for. While the "Hanoi Hilton" is the most well-known prisoner of war camp, there were at least 13 other large camps, and soldiers could be held in smaller villages as well.

Because of the large number of soldiers who remained missing, POW/MIA advocacy groups were formed that criticized government efforts to investigate and recover possible prisoners of war. Some of these groups continue to work

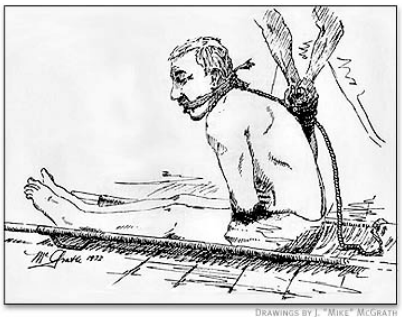
[11] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:TrangBang.jpg

to see if soldiers remain in Vietnam, or to locate burial sites or evidence of death. New intelligence reports and evidence coming out of Russia after the fall of the U.S.S.R. have kept hope alive for families who are still seeking resolution to the questions surrounding missing soldiers. But a complete accounting of soldiers listed as missing or presumed dead remains unlikely.

The 1949 Geneva Convention guidelines call for the humane treatment of prisoners of war. These guidelines, however, were ignored by both North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese forces. The Viet Cong were accused of torturing captives in a variety of ways including beating them with fists, clubs, and rifle butts, flaying them with rubber whips, and stretching their joints with rope in an effort to uncover information about American military operations. Poor food and medical care were standard. Prisoners were often kept in isolation and in some prison camps used a system of tapping to communicate with other prisoners.

Voices of Prisoners of War

Former prisoner of war Mike McGrath illustrated the sorts of torture he received and described his experience the American Experience Documentary *Return with Honor:*



"Some men were tied to their beds, sometimes for weeks at a time ... the usual position was with the wrists handcuffed behind the back. A man would live this way day and night, without sleep or rest. He could not lie down because his weight would cinch the already tightened cuffs even tighter, nor could he turn sideways.

"The cuffs were taken off twice a day for meals. If the cuffs had been too tight, the fingers would be swollen and of little use in picking up a spoon or a cup.

"Hopefully, a man could perform his bodily functions while the cuffs were momentarily removed at mealtimes. If not, he lived in his own mess.[12]

[12] http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/honor/gallery/72.html

"They wanted propaganda. They wanted us to denounce our leaders. They wanted us to denounce capitalism. They wanted us to praise Ho Chi Minh. They wanted us to praise the communist initiative. They would put the standard communist glowing terms on every little thing that happened."

— United States Air Force Pilot and Vietnam POW, William "Dave" Burroughs[13]

"The vast majority of POWs were guilty of violating the Code of Conduct. The ones who refused to give the North Vietnamese anything but name, rank, and serial number didn't come home."

— Frank Anton, POW Jan. 1968-Mar. 1973[14]

"The Code of Conduct was one thing I remembered as an unchanging guide. Even when the issues were totally confused, it provided the standard of conduct that should be maintained, and if I could comply with it, I would be right. The only problem now was to stay alive while following it."

— James "Nick" Rowe, POW, Oct. 1963-Dec 1968[15]

"As I sat there in the secretary's handsomely decorated, spacious dining room, I felt we were beginning to make some progress. This was the first time I'd heard any talk about specific plans for the end of the war. There'd been no indication in the press that the end was anywhere near, but the secretary of defense certainly knew far more than the rest of us, and it was good to hear that detailed plans were on the drawing boards. I had to conclude that this "Vietnamization" I was hearing about for the first time was President Nixon's secret plan to end the war. I thought it was a pretty weak plan, myself, but I couldn't help liking Secretary Laird. He'd ended the "keep quiet" policy and had the guts to talk about the truth of the prisoners' treatment in public. I secretly felt that the organizational efforts of us wives and families on a national level had been influential in forcing our

[13] http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/honor/filmmore/pt.html
[14] Howes, Craig, Voices of the Vietnam POWs, Oxford, OUP, 1993, P17
[15] Howes, Craig, Voices of the Vietnam POWs, Oxford, OUP, 1993, P17

government to join us in speaking out publicly. One official in the Defense Department told me they knew they'd better join us or we were going to mop up the floor with them. That was exactly how I wanted them to feel."

— Sybil Stockdale, from the book *In Love and War*, Stockdale was the wife of POW Vice Admiral Jim Stockdale and an organizer of the National League of Families a group that worked on behalf of Vietnam soldiers who were missing in action or prisoners of war.[16] *(Below Sybil Stockdale meets with President Nixon, AP Photo/ John Duricka)*

"When someone is killed, there's finality. With those who are missing, there's uncertainty. It's harder to know when to give up hope and when to begin grieving. Our nation has an obligation to stand behind those who serve. That means that if someone becomes captured or missing every reasonable effort is made to account for them. They want to know that if something happens to them, they won't be left behind."

— Ann Mills Griffiths, executive director of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia and sister of Vietnam MIA Lt. Commander James B. Mills of the U.S. Navy Reserves

[16] http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/honor/sfeature/sf_stockdale.html

POW CODE OF CONDUCT[17]

Article I.

I AM AN AMERICAN, FIGHTING IN THE FORCES WHICH GUARD MY COUNTRY AND OUR WAY OF LIFE. I AM PREPARED TO GIVE MY LIFE IN THEIR DEFENSE.

Article II.

I WILL NEVER SURRENDER OF MY OWN FREE WILL. IF IN COMMAND, I WILL NEVER SURRENDER THE MEMBERS OF MY COMMAND WHILE THEY STILL HAVE THE MEANS TO RESIST.

Article III.

IF I AM CAPTURED, I WILL CONTINUE TO RESIST BY ALL MEANS AVAILABLE. I WILL MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ESCAPE AND AID OTHERS TO ESCAPE. I WILL ACCEPT NEITHER PAROLE NOR SPECIAL FAVORS FROM THE ENEMY.

Article IV.

IF I BECOME A PRISONER OF WAR, I WILL KEEP FAITH WITH MY FELLOW PRISONERS. I WILL GIVE NO INFORMATION OR TAKE PART IN ANY ACTION WHICH MIGHT BE HARMFUL TO MY COMRADES. IF I AM SENIOR, I WILL TAKE COMMAND. IF NOT, I WILL OBEY THELAWFUL ORDERS OF THOSE APPOINTED OVER ME AND WILL BACK THEM UP IN EVERY WAY.

Article V.

WHEN QUESTIONED, SHOULD I BECOME A PRISONER OF WAR, I AM REQUIRED TO GIVE MY NAME, RANK, SERVICE NUMBER, AND DATE OF BIRTH. I WILL EVADE ANSWERING FURTHER QUESTIONS TO THE UTMOST OF MY ABILITY. I WILL MAKE NO ORAL OR WRITTEN STATEMENTS DISLOYAL TO MY COUNTRY AND ITS ALLIES OR HARMFUL TO THEIR CAUSE.

Article VI.

I WILL NEVER FORGET THAT I AM AN AMERICAN, FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM, RESPONSIBLE FOR MY ACTIONS, AND DEDICATED TO THE PRINCIPLES WHICH MADE MY COUNTRY FREE. I WILL TRUST IN MY GOD AND IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

[17] http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/honor/filmmore/ps_code.html

Enlisted vs. Drafted Soldiers

One of the major political issues of the Vietnam War was the military draft. An individual who enlisted was making a decision to join the military. However, many soldiers who served in Vietnam did not enlist, but were drafted into the military through the Selective Service and a government-created lottery system. Men between the ages of 18 and 26 were eligible for the draft. Approximately 1.8 million men were drafted; it is difficult to determine accurate numbers because some who knew they were going to be drafted chose to enlist instead.[18]

The American War

The Vietnam War is known as the American War in Vietnam—a reminder that the parties who fight wars define them from their own perspectives. Conflict in Vietnam has its roots in the colonization of "Indochina," starting with the Sino-French war in 1884-1885. Over the next century there would be a series of wars as the Vietnamese population chafed at French colonial rule. During World War II, the Vichy French government maintained partial control of the region, and the Japanese controlled other portions. In 1945, the Viet Mihn overthrew French and Japanese forces and declared independence. However, conflict with first the French and then the United States would continue over the next 30 years.

Fears about the spread of Communism drove the U.S. to back the French financially and eventually to enter the conflict directly. The war in Vietnam was in part a civil war as various groups vied for power and definition in the post-colonial era. It was exacerbated by the intervention of foreign powers and armies.

Just as it would be difficult to claim a single American perspective on the war, it would be difficult to claim a lone Vietnamese perspective. Southern Vietnamese fought with the United States against the communist north. The three main political groups in Vietnam were the Viet Mihn, the communist party led by Ho Chi Mihn; The Republic of Vietnam (RVN); and the National Liberation Front (NLF), or Viet Cong, who fought against the RVN and the United States in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

Many Vietnamese were simply civilians trying to farm and live in the midst of war and potential abuse by invading armies from either side. Civilians were killed both by the North Vietnamese as well as by U.S. soldiers and South Vietnamese forces.[19]

---

[18] http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/09/16/sept-16-1974-conditional-amnesty-for-vietnam-draft-dodgers-and-military-deserters/

[19] Chapman, Jessica. "Teaching the Vietnam War from the Vietnamese perspective" OAH Magazine of History, 2004.

Discussion Questions

About the Play

1. The play calls for one actor to be offstage. What might be the importance of never seeing one of the characters in a two-character play? In watching the play, what effect does it have not to see the other character? How did you picture Riley?
2. Both of the characters are named Joe. Why do you think they share a name? How does it play into or against our notions of the many "G.I. Joes" who have fought in wars?
3. Is war the central issue of the play? What are the other issues the play addresses?

About the Production

1. The set design features Joe in a big hole in the ground and the light source is through that hole. How did you feel watching Joe in his hole in the ground? What is the effect of having the audience sitting so close to that space and yet not in contact with him?
2. Joe also experiences rain and dirt in his underground prison. Why is it important to see Joe in the rain and mud?
3. Occasionally we see how Joe's nonverbal responses don't match his answers to Riley on the other side of the wall. How do these moments affect how we understand Joe?

About the Context

1. The Vietnam era was a divisive time in American history. In what ways do Joe and Riley reflect the issues of their time? In what ways is American culture still divided?
2. We learn certain information about Joe and Riley during the course of the play. In what ways has American culture changed and in which ways has it stayed the same regarding the issues?
3. What issues confronted soldiers in Vietnam and what issues confront soldiers today?

References and Further Reading

Books

- Bowman, John S. *The Vietnam War: An Almanac*. New York: World Almanac Publications, 1985.
- Brinkley, Douglas. *War letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars*, New York: Scribner, 2001.
- Ebert, James R. *A Life in a Year: The American Infantryman in Vietnam, 1965-1972*. Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1993.
- Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.
- Kutler, Stanley. *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996.
- Langer, Howard. *The Vietnam War: an Encyclopedia of Quotations*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2005.
- Meyerson, Joel. *Images of a Lengthy War*, Washington D.C. Center of Military History, 1986.
- O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried*. New York: Mariner Books, 2009.
- O'Nan, Stewart, editor. *The Vietnam Reader*. New York: Anchor Books, 1998.
- Page, Tim. *Another Vietnam: Pictures of the War from the Other Side*, Washington D.C.: National Geographic, 2002.
- Rosser-Owen, David. *Vietnam Weapons Handbook*. England: Patrick Stephens Limited, 1986.
- Shilts, Randy. *Conduct Unbecoming: Lesbians and Gays in the Military, Vietnam to the Persian Gulf*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Films

- *American Experience Vietnam: A Television History*
- *American Experience: Return with Honor*
- *American Experience: My Lai*
- *Platoon*

Websites

Oral Histories and first person accounts

- http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/index.htm
- http://www.pbs.org/pov/stories/

Vietnam

- http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/timeline/tl2.html#b
- http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/honor/
- http://openvault.wgbh.org/collection/vietnam/

Slide show of Horst Faas Vietnam War Photography

- http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/horst-faas-vietnam-war-era-photographerdies-at-79/2012/05/10/gIQAAZ22GU_gallery.html#photo=4

Gallery of Prisoner of War Mike McGrath's drawings of torture

- http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/honor/gallery/0.html
- http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/honor/tguide/index.html