

# ***THE TET OFFENSIVE***

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The Tet Offensive was, and still is, considered the turning point of the Vietnam War. It turned American opinion against the war, even though it was a critical success for America and its allies.

Before the Tet Offensive, most of the war took place in the jungle. TV viewers were used to seeing troops fighting in the jungle, tall grass and on muddy roads. The Tet Offensive was a complete change of pace for the war. Instead of only soldiers getting killed, it was extended now to civilians. Also, instead of just jungle getting destroyed, now homes, buildings, and historical structures were being blown up and burnt.

Tet is the Vietnamese lunar new-year, which is in mid-February. Both North and South Vietnam had signed an agreement to stop all fighting on this holiday. The North Vietnam strategist, General Vo Nguyen Giap, launched a massive attack on numerous major South Vietnam cities on this holiday. It was known as then Tet Offensive. Over 100 urban targets were singled out for an attack.

The Tet Offensive was a month long assault on South Vietnam. During this offensive, the U.S. and South Vietnamese forces, within only a matter of hours or days, recaptured most targets that were attacked. The area that had the worst fighting during the offensive was at the city of Hue. The fighting in Hue lasted for almost three weeks. Hue contained many ancient temples and palaces, all of which had a large historical value. During the U.S. attempt to recapture the city, many of these sites were completely leveled.

The Tet Offensive also had many other battles. Some of these included Khesank, Lang Vei, Ashau, Quangtri, Hoi An, Kham Duc, Dakto, Kontum, Quinhon, Pleiku, Bienhoa, Vinh Lung, Chau Doc, and Camau. All of these battles lasted about few hours or days. Two other large battles were Saigon and Dalat. These lasted a little while longer.

During the Tet Offensive, the Vietcong captured the U.S. embassy in Saigon. Although the U.S. recaptured it in only a matter of hours, this proved that no place, whether it was the middle of the jungle, or a heavily fortified base camp, was safe from the Vietcong attacks.

The Tet Offensive turned out to be an overall failure to the Vietcong

and North Vietnam. During the first two weeks of fighting, over 33,000 communist soldiers were killed. By the end of the month-long offensive, over 85,000 communist soldiers were lost.

The offensive also had an effect on the U.S. and its allies. 1,100 U.S. soldiers were killed in the fighting, 2,300 South Vietnamese soldiers were killed, and over 12,500 civilians were killed. Over 1,000,000 South Vietnamese people became refugees. A large majority of the towns, villages, and cities of South Vietnam also lay in ruins.

When the offensive had ended, the U.S. was quick to step up and claim that the enemy had been routed, and was on the verge of defeat. The communists too admitted that Tet, in a way, had failed. The communists said that their main goal was to create rebellions and uprisings in South Vietnam, and had failed at this.

Even though Tet was a success, it had a devastating psychological effect back on the homefront. Many people felt the war was unwinnable, and favored pulling out. After Tet, much protest against the war was held. The public opinion of Vietnam took a nosedive, and within four years, almost all U.S. forces were out of Vietnam. The Tet Offensive was the turning point of the war.