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Horst Faas, a legendary German photo-journalist, took many significant photos during the Vietnam War (called the "American War" by the Vietnamese people). In this photo—which Faas took on 26 December 1964—we see an A-1 Skyraider dropping 500-pound bombs on a Viet Cong position in South Vietnam. Copyright, Horst Faas/AP, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for education purposes.

Many Americans questioned why their country went to war in Vietnam. While people grasped "the domino effect" (if one country falls to a communist revolt the neighboring countries may also fall), they doubted whether a small country in Southeast Asia had much to do with American interests.

Americans also knew, and greatly feared, that if the U.S. were to get involved in Vietnam, Americans would die. Maybe many Americans would die.



According to President Johnson, however, U.S. officials believed fighting in Vietnam was

...guided by North Vietnam, and it is spurred by Communist China. Its goal is to conquer the south [of Vietnam], to defeat American power, and to extend the Asiatic dominion of communism.

If there really was a threat to American interests, people wondered why the U.S. military didn't invade communist-controlled North Vietnam. The logic was: If you want to keep northern guerillas from wreaking havoc in the south, stop them from leaving the north. But U.S. government officials were worried about China's reaction if the north were invaded.

One such 1964 document, quoting Chinese officials, makes the point:

The Chinese people are watching closely at all times the U.S. imperialist acts of aggression and adventurism... The Pacific Ocean may dry up and stone may rot, but the unity and fraternal friendship between the Chinese and Viet-Nam people will remain unbreakable and will exist forever.

Recent document releases from Soviet archives tend to support the concern that China may have gone to war with the United States had American troops invaded North Vietnam. Turns out there was a secret agreement, to that effect, between China and the North.

Because of this cautious approach to fighting the war, respected military men like General Norman Schwarzkopf (of Gulf War fame) have said America fought in Vietnam with one hand tied behind her back.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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Media Stream



An A-1 Skyraider Drops Bombs in Vietnam

Horst Faas, a Pulitzer-prize-winning German photo-journalist, took many significant photos during the Vietnam War (called the “American War” by Vietnamese people). In this photo—which Faas took on 26 December 1964—we see an A-1 Skyraider dropping 500-pound bombs on a Viet Cong position in South Vietnam.

The ground smoke, which we also see in this famous photo, is from a prior pass which the Skyraider made over the target area.

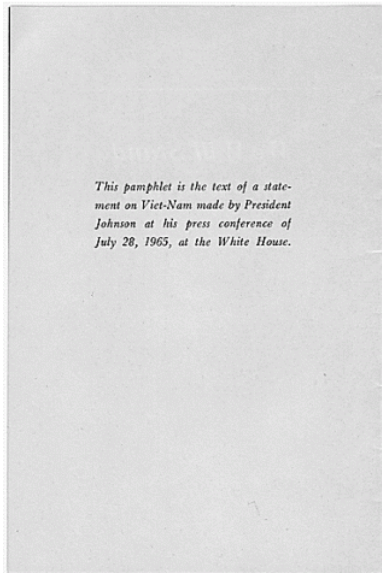
Faas, like other legendary Vietnam-era photographers, worked for the Associated Press (AP) at the time he took this picture.

Click on the image for a better view.

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LBJ: "We Will Stand in Viet-Nam"

Cover sheet of LBJ's press-conference presentation - on July 28, 1965 - online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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General Schwarzkopf

Photo by Russell Roederer, online courtesy U.S. Department of Defense.

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