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Was the attack on Camp Holloway different from earlier North Vietnamese attacks on Americans? Or was retaliation in February of 1965 more a question of timing than an issue of provocation?

About six weeks earlier, the Brinks Hotel in Saigon was home to 125 American military officers and their civilian guests. It was Christmas Eve, 1964. At about 5:55 p.m., Viet Cong terrorists exploded a car bomb in the hotel's garage. Two Americans were killed and 107 Americans, Australians and Vietnamese were wounded.

The force of the blast was so severe that buildings behind the hotel were completely destroyed. The United States did not respond. Briefings earlier that summer had warned of possible Chinese retaliation if America attacked North Vietnam:

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.

But U.S. officials also knew, long before the Christmas Eve attack, that massive U.S. support would be required if South Vietnam were to prevail in its struggle with the North.

For whatever reason the Johnson Administration chose to change U.S. objectives in Vietnam, the conflict escalated immediately after the attack on Camp Holloway. Months before the first ground battles in the Ia Drang Valley (late in 1965), *Operation Rolling Thunder* (which had replaced *Operation Flaming Dart*.) demonstrated a very different U.S. mission:

- In 1965, fire bombs exploded on Viet Cong structures south of Saigon in the Republic of Vietnam. (Such bombs are particularly dangerous since they scatter burning napalm, a type of jellied gasoline or thickened petroleum.)
- The United States Air Force bombed other Viet Cong structures in South Vietnam during 1965.

The Vietnam conflict had definitely escalated in the air. And it was about to begin on the ground.

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/CONFLICT-ESCALATES-We-Were-Soldiers>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/CONFLICT-ESCALATES-We-Were-Soldiers>

Media Stream



The Brinks Hotel in Saigon

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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Fire Bombs - Napalm in Vietnam

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Operation Rolling Thunder - Conflict Escalates in 'Nam

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