

Vietnam: The First Television War – part 2

On April 1, 1968, the day after President Lyndon B. Johnson announced that he would not run for reelection, he stated:

As I sat in my office last evening, waiting to speak, I thought of the many times each week when television brings the war into the American home. No one can say exactly what effect those vivid scenes have on American opinion. Historians must only guess at the effect that television would have had during earlier conflicts on the future of this Nation: during the Korean war, for example, at that time when our forces were pushed back there to Pusan; of World War II, the Battle of the Bulge, or when our men were slugging it out in Europe or when most of our Air Force was shot down that day in June 1942 off Australia.

Televising the Vietnam War helped to divide a nation that took pride in its ability to unify. The dramatization of stories in the news distorted the public's perception of what was actually happening in the field. Since it was visible in their homes, Americans were able to connect and empathize with the soldiers more than ever before. This caused an outcry of public opinion against the war.

By seeing the war on television, the anti-war advocates argued that the war was unnecessary, and hundreds of thousands of "American boys" were not dying for a noble cause. In fact, they believed that the United States was involved in a war in which they shouldn't be involved at all.

In contrast, the pro-war supporters regarded anti-war marches as disloyal to U.S. soldiers. They saw the perils of the battlefield and felt an obligation to support their troops regardless of whether they should be there or not. The disagreements between the pro-war and anti-war advocates caused a partition in the American population that still persists.

In addition, the strong public anti-war opinions expressed in the media influenced U.S. policy makers. Americans could see military abuses on television, such as the My Lai Massacre in 1968, which sparked riots in cities and university campuses across the nation. This outrage, fueled by television coverage, ultimately led to the decision to withdrawal of U.S. troops in 1973, and end of the U.S involvement in the war.

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