America's Role Escalates

As a Young Historian, I will be able to…

- Analyze the major issues and events that caused President Johnson to increase American troop strength in Vietnam.
- Assess the nature of the war in Vietnam and the difficulties faced by each side.
- Evaluate the effects of low morale on American troops and on the home front.

Escalation of Forces

Johnson shifted focus on military efforts to Vietnam, with no quick victory in sight

Operation Rolling Thunder- The first sustained bombing campaign against North Vietnam

As the bombing caused widespread destruction, The Vietcong army doubled their efforts

American soldiers were placed on the front & the South Vietnamese army took a limited role

Johnson Changes Strategies

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara & General William Westmoreland began to advise Johnson

Belief was to "Americanize" the war by increasing military presence & do more of the fighting

Between 1965-1973 the U.S. dropped 3x the tonnage of bombs than WWII!

Napalm- Jellied gasoline that would explode on impact & cover large areas in flames

War Tactics

Agent Orange- Herbicide that killed plant life & poisoned people with cancer

Agent orange was used to defoliate forests & disrupt enemy food supplies

March 8th, 1965. Marines arrived at Da Nag & troops began various missions

Guarding bases, search-and-destroy, & helicopter commandos performing quick strikes

Vietcong Tactics

Large scale battles were rare & mostly focused on small guerrilla engagements

Ho Chi Minh took a tiger tactic & compared the U.S. forces to an elephant

"An elephant will stomp us out but if we attack quickly like a tiger victory is assured"

Vietcong forces would travel light, hide in tunnels, used explosives, & set booby traps

Casualties Escalate

Vietcong believed if they could just avoid losing the war, the U.S. would just leave

American strategy had limited effects as industry & troop movements were not disrupted

After 3 years in the war, there were 500,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam with 30,000 dead

South Vietnam was plagued with corruption & by 1967, the war was a quagmire

Sinking Morale

The U.S. did not try to invade North Vietnam for fear of involving the Soviet Union or China

While troops could not tell friend from foe, the soldiers faced the war with dedication & bravery

Most battles were at night & the Vietcong used the natural foliage & landscape to perform hit & run battles

American soldiers sought to contain communism, protect the citizens of South Vietnam, or because they felt a duty to their country
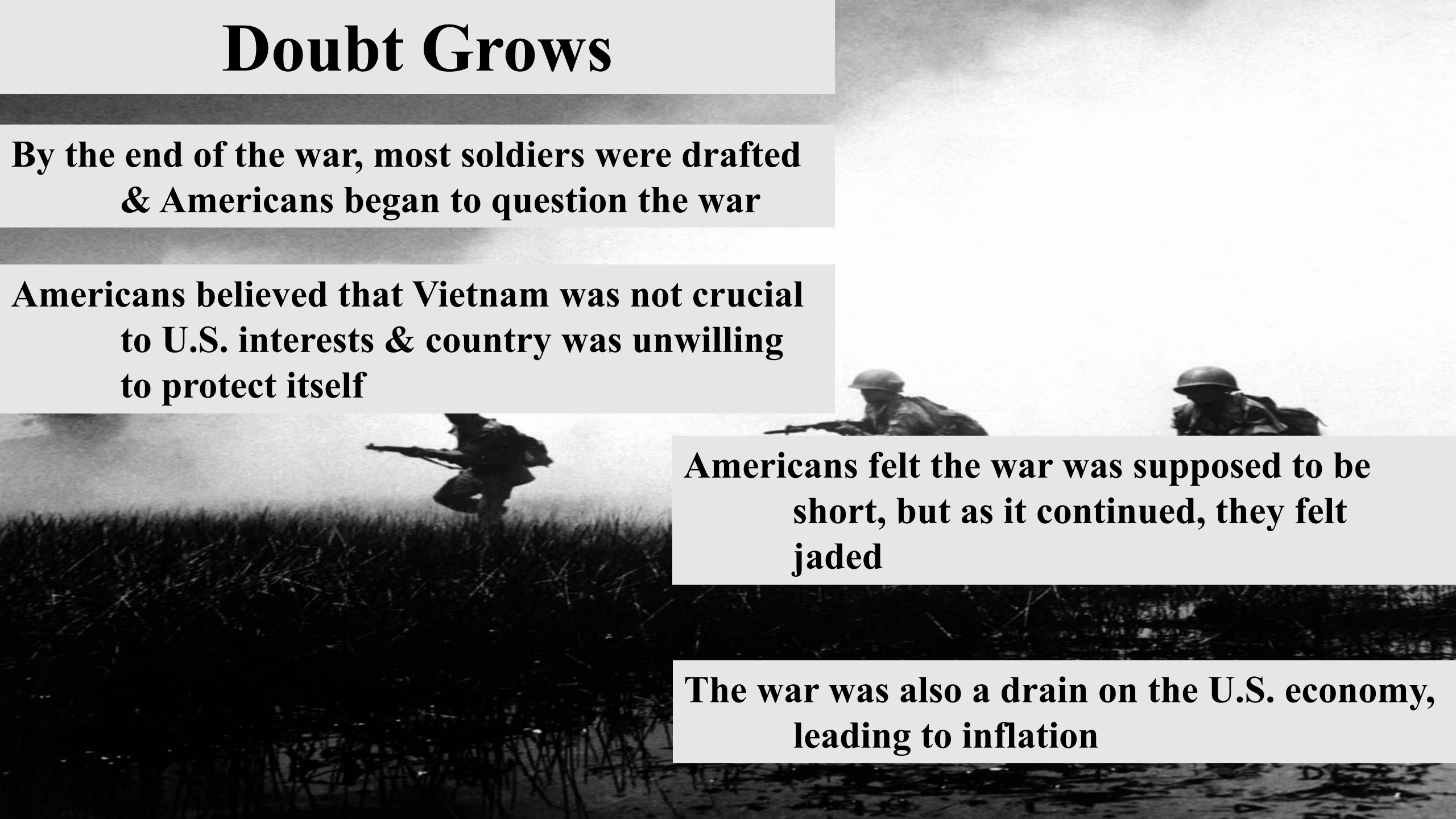
Doubt Grows

By the end of the war, most soldiers were drafted & Americans began to question the war

Americans believed that Vietnam was not crucial to U.S. interests & country was unwilling to protect itself

Americans felt the war was supposed to be short, but as it continued, they felt jaded

The war was also a drain on the U.S. economy, leading to inflation

Antiwar Movement

Congressional support for the war began to waver as the war progressed

Conservative Hawks supported Johnsons war policy believing in the containment of communism

The Doves broke with policy questioning the war on moral & strategic grounds

Senator J William Fulbright began to convince the public the war was a civil war in Vietnam, not a cold war conflict