



INSIDE THE VAULT

Eisenhower's Views on Vietnam, 1967-1968
with Professor Michael Birkner

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2022



THE
GILDER LEHRMAN
INSTITUTE
of
AMERICAN HISTORY



How to Participate



- If you would like to ask a question, you can use the Q&A feature.
- We will be answering audience questions throughout the session.

For Security and Privacy

- Your microphone is automatically muted.
- Your camera is automatically turned off.

Michael Birkner



Michael J. Birkner is a professor of history at Gettysburg College, where he has taught since 1989, chairing the department from 1993 to 2003.

Birkner is the author or editor of fifteen books and many articles on 19th- and 20th-century American political history. Recent publications include *Encounters with Eisenhower* (2015); *Eisenhower's Gettysburg Farm*, co-authored with Carol Hegeman (2017); *The Worlds of James Buchanan and Thaddeus Stevens*, co-edited with Randall Miller and John W. Quist (2019); and *Democracy's Shield: Voices of World War II* (2022).

Birkner served as a historical consultant for the e-Eisenhower component of the Eisenhower Memorial in Washington, DC, and for the introductory film at James Buchanan's home, Wheatland.

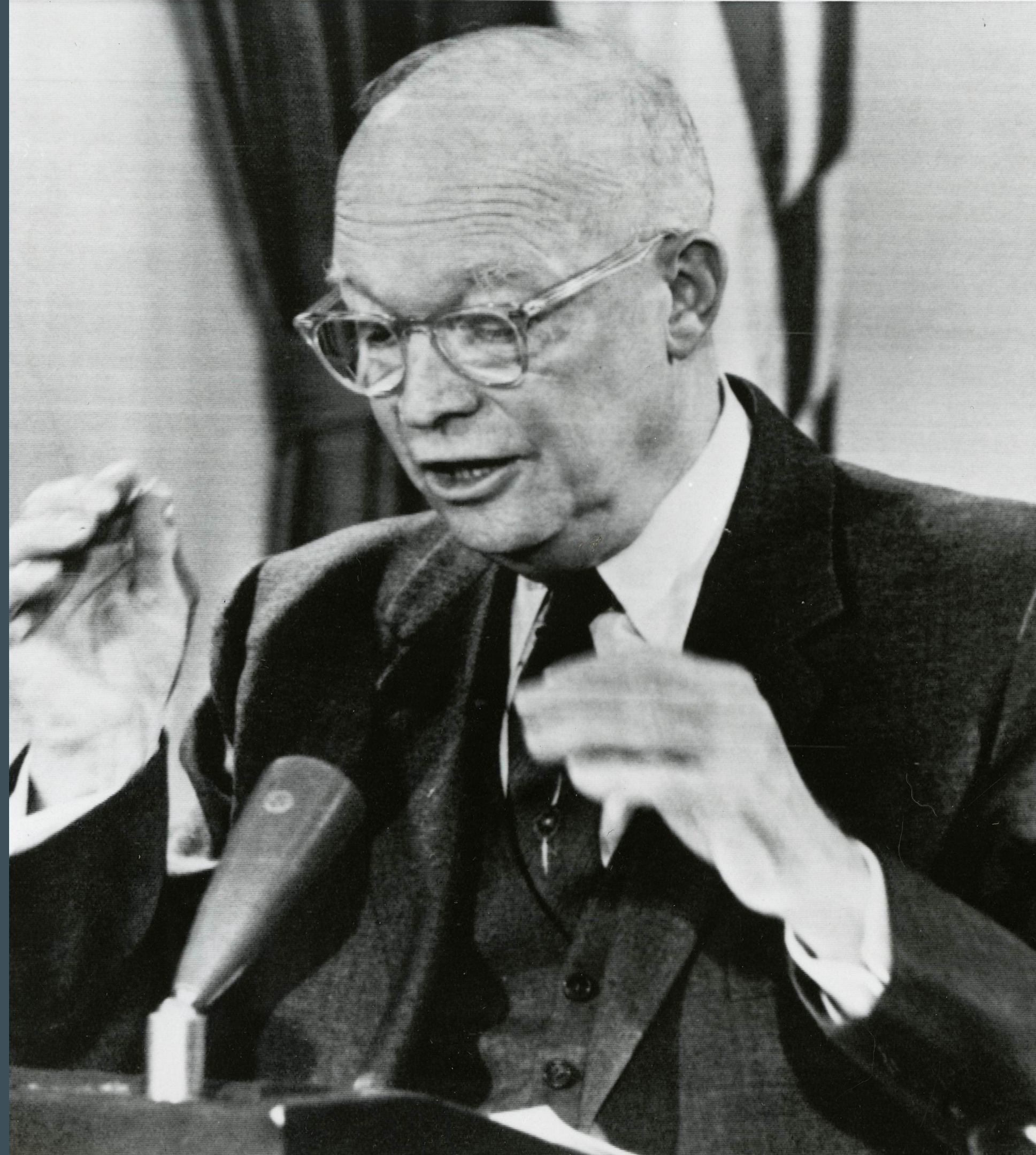


Today's Documents

- “A Balance Sheet on Bombing: Statement of the Special Committee on Bombing Policy of the Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam”
- “Negotiations: Hopes and Realities”

Dwight D. Eisenhower

34th President of the U.S.

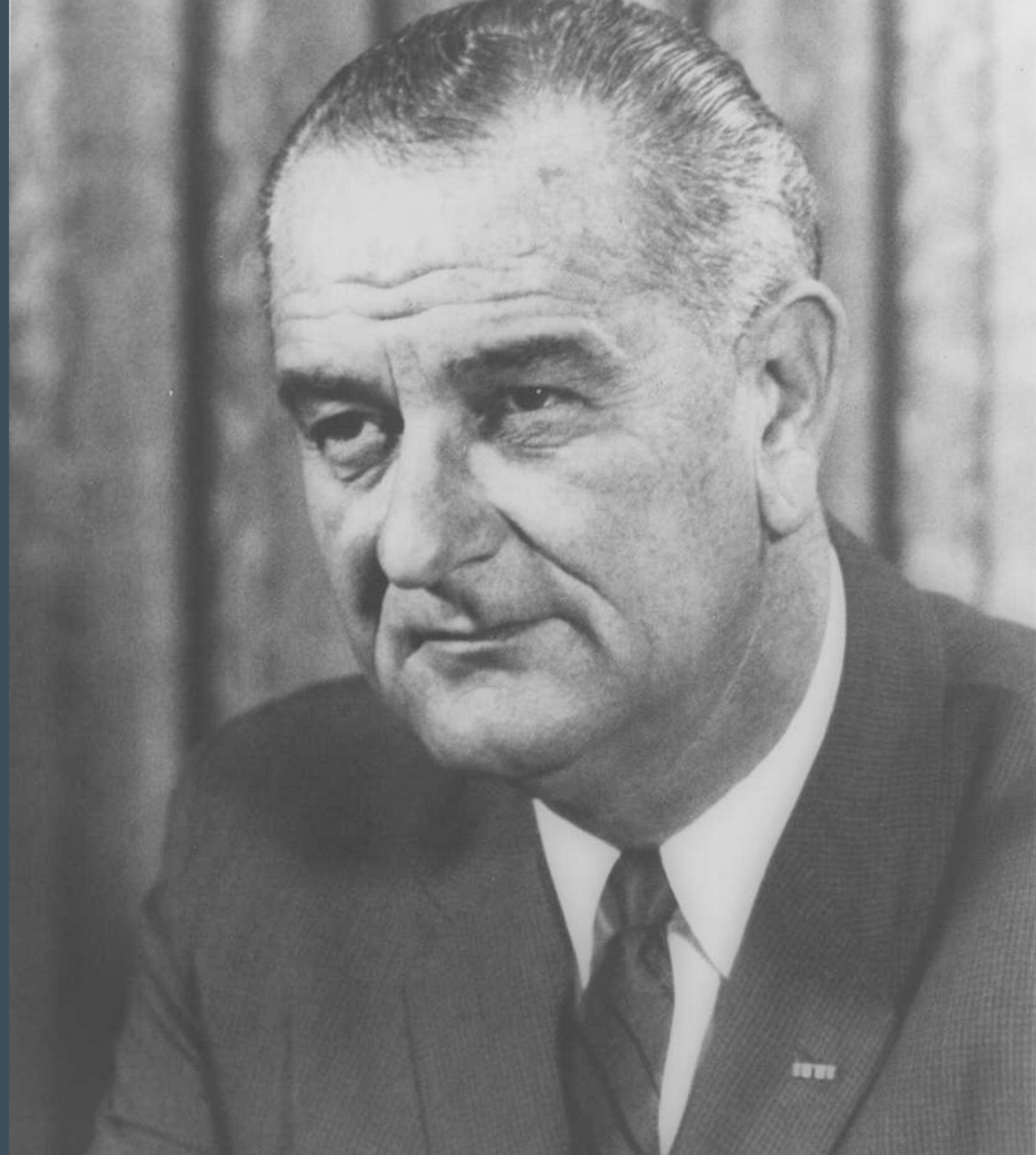


United Press International,
President Eisenhower, 1961.
(The Gilder Lehrman
Institute, GLC09677.61)



Lyndon B. Johnson

36th President of the U.S.



[President] Lyndon B. Johnson, 1964.

(Library of Congress, 96522661)



LBJ and Eisenhower



Yoichi Okamoto, *LBJ and Eisenhower*, 1965.
(LBJ Presidential Library, A1452-18)

Eisenhower at Gettysburg



*Dwight D. Eisenhower at his office in
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 1963.
(CSU Archives/Ever)*

William Westmoreland

Commander of U.S. Forces

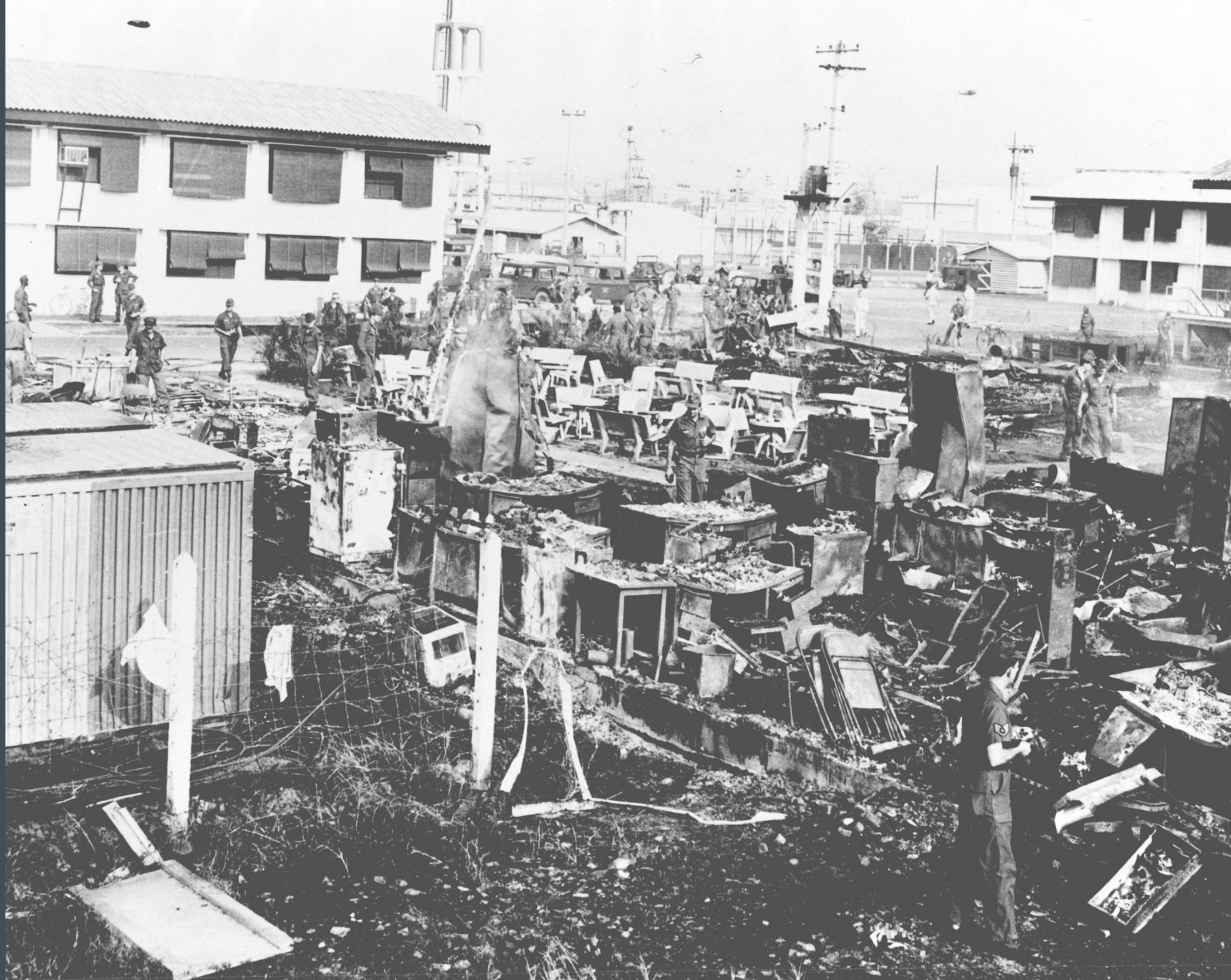


Robert C. Lafoon, *General William C.
Westmoreland Watching Ceremonies, 1967.*
(U.S. National Archives and Records
Administration, 17331454)



Tet Offensive

January - April 1968



United States Air Force,
*Communists destroyed
buildings and aircraft at Tan
Son Nhut Air Base., n.d.*



LBJ's Reaction



Jack E. Kightlinger, *President Lyndon B. Johnson listens to tape sent by Captain Charles Robb from Vietnam, 1968.* (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 192617)

"A Balance Sheet on Bombing"

December 7, 1967

Confidential (Eyes only)

Draft 12/7/67

"A BALANCE SHEET ON BOMBING"

Statement of the Special Committee on Bombing Policy of the
Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam

Our bombing policy in Vietnam is the subject of considerable controversy.

There are calls here and abroad for an extended suspension of our bombing of North Vietnam or for a permanent cessation.

U.S. opinion is divided. Some people hold that our bombing is a great obstacle to negotiations and to ending the war. Others contend that we should increase our bombing of the North and "get the whole thing over with". Still others, and probably the largest group, generally approve ^{the} our present policy. *of concentrating our bombing on the enemy's war-making capacity.*

Finally, there are those who say that we should have done something different in the past -- bombed more or bombed less or not bombed at all.

~~(We choose to ignore the latter those who wish to re-live the past.)~~ The past is beyond our influence. We are concerned with the here and now - and with the future.

We disagree with those who call for a sharp or unlimited escalation of our air attacks in the North ~~[as a means of ending the war.]~~ We believe that the air campaign in the North cannot be a substitute for the war in the South. Bombing of the North can hinder but cannot prevent the enemy from securing supplies from China and Russia and infiltrating some of them into the South. Bombing can limit but not prevent the

"A Balance Sheet on Bombing: Statement of the Special
Committee on Bombing Policy of the Citizens Committee
for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam," 1967.
(The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09911.01)



"Negotiations: Hopes and Realities"

April 10, 1968

CONFIDENTIAL

First Draft 4/10/68

NEGOTIATIONS

Hopes and Realities

The United States welcomes negotiations which offer a hope of peace with freedom and honor in Vietnam. We do not and probably cannot require an advance guarantee but we should insist on a reasonable hope that the negotiations will be productive. We should not be deceived by rhetoric. It is not how Hanoi says something; it is what it says. ^{and, more importantly,} ~~and~~ does.

Negotiations will be desirable if they lead to a mutual de-escalation of the conflict, and if they advance the prospect of achieving our minimum objectives. They will be dangerous and undesirable if they develop into a long drawn-out sequence of meaningless round-table discussions while our fighting men continue to pay a high daily toll of death and disability. ^{under worse conditions than at present,} Negotiations will be insupportable if Hanoi escalates its military effort in the face of the reduction in ours. We must bear in mind that once negotiations begin, the pressure to continue them will be infinitely more insistent on us than on them. We are highly responsive to domestic and to world opinion; Hanoi is far less responsive to both.

We must remain clear as to our minimum objectives in Vietnam and we must state them repeatedly and with precision. We seek the independence of

"Negotiations: Hopes and Realities," 1968.
(The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09911.02)



Precision Bombing

"A Balance Sheet on Bombing:
Statement of the Special
Committee on Bombing Policy of
the Citizens Committee for Peace
with Freedom in Vietnam," 1967.
(The Gilder Lehrman Institute,
GLC09911.01, Page 8)

Our bombing has been pin-point accurate. Only a minute fraction of our bombs
has missed the target. China has not been hit.

We have confined our bombing to military and supply targets and have never
intentionally bombed civilians or engaged in the "terror bombing" tactics of World War II.
Civilians have been killed by mistake just as some of our own troops have been killed by
mistake. These tragic mistakes are a matter for deep regret but they are an inevitable

"Clean Hands"

"A Balance Sheet on Bombing:
Statement of the Special
Committee on Bombing Policy of
the Citizens Committee for Peace
with Freedom in Vietnam," 1967.
(The Gilder Lehrman Institute,
GLC09911.01, Page 8)

mistake. These tragic mistakes are a matter for deep regret but they are an inevitable part of war. As John F. Kennedy said, "War is unfair." War is also cruel, barbarous and wasteful. However, we must recognize the big difference between accidental killings by our forces and the systematic, planned murders committed by the Vietcong. Vietcong terrorists have already killed or kidnapped over 50,000 innocent South Vietnam villagers. We hear little about these Vietcong murders because they are largely committed in the dark of night and without other eyewitnesses. The Vietcong murders of civilians are part of its war of terror -- a conscious, deliberate policy rather than an accidental by-product of war.



Upcoming Programs

INSIDE THE VAULT: November 3 at 7 pm ET

- We will be joined by Barbara Harris Combs (Kennesaw State University) to discuss the NAACP pamphlet *Meanwhile Back at the Branch*.

TEACHING CIVICS THROUGH HISTORY: October 17 at 9 am CT

- Oklahoma and Texas teachers are invited to livestream our professional development workshop on Federal, State, and Tribal Governance.

NATIONAL HISTORY TEACHER OF THE YEAR: October 18 at 5 pm ET

- Join the livestream to celebrate the 2022 winner, Misha Matsumoto Yee.

GLI PRIZE FOR MILITARY HISTORY: November 6 at 6:30 pm ET

- Tickets are available online to attend this free program—in person or via livestream—celebrating the 2021 winner, Kevin J. Weddle.

