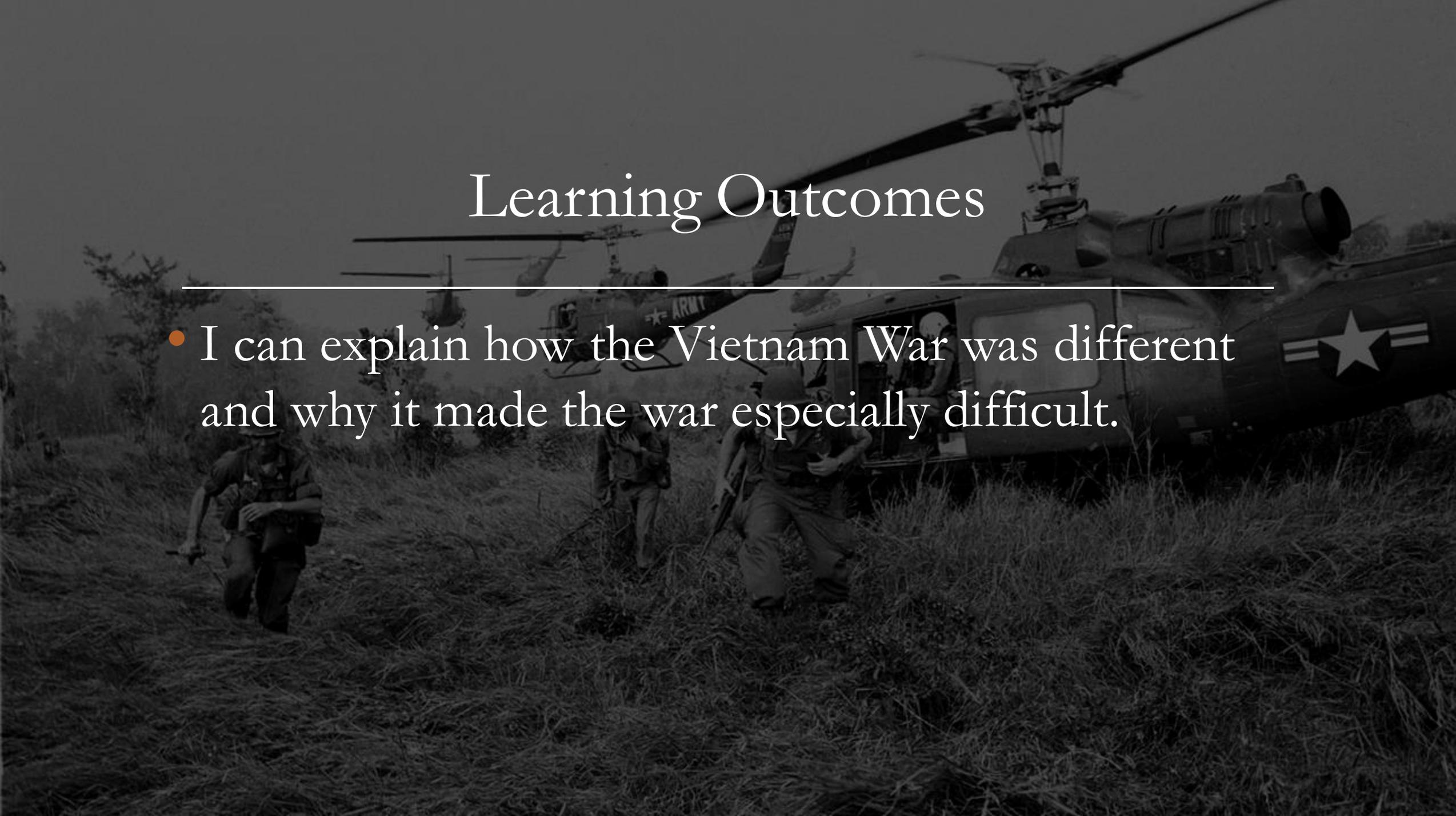


The Vietnam War

The War Itself

Learning Outcomes

- I can explain how the Vietnam War was different and why it made the war especially difficult.



Unfamiliar Terrain

- Few American GIs had ever experienced such **hot and humid** conditions
 - Temperatures rose above **90°F** much of the year
 - Heavy **monsoon** rains fell from May to October.





Unfamiliar Terrain

- Greatest geographic challenge for U.S. soldiers was Vietnam's **rugged topography**.
 - Soggy, lowland rice paddies
 - **Swamps** and over steep jungle-clad mountains
 - **Heavily forested**

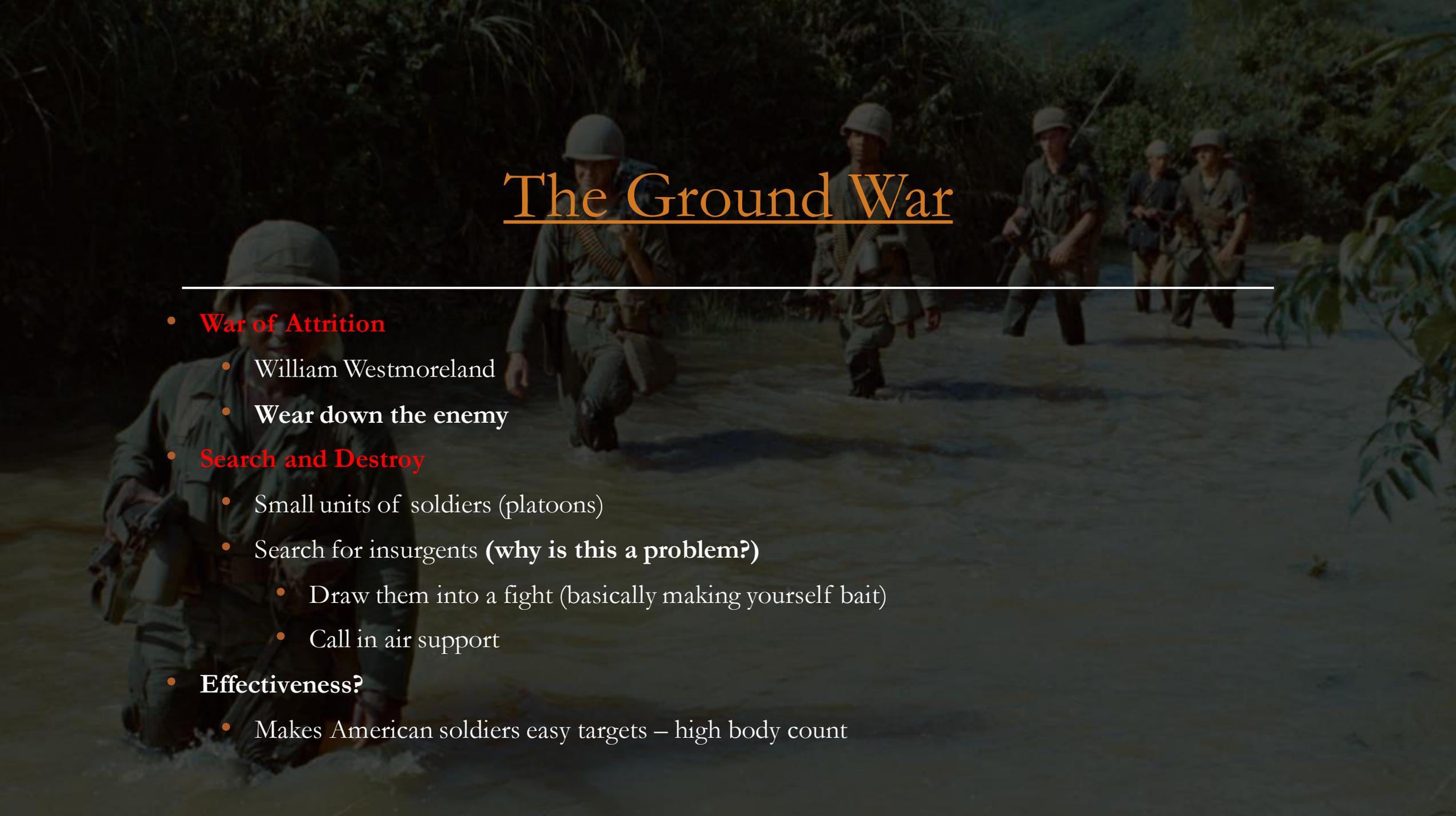
Tactics and Strategies

Viet Cong Advantages

- Guerilla warfare
- Familiar with terrain
- Protection in Cambodia and Laos
- Could hide in local population

US Disadvantages

- Confused and frustrated
- People at home seemed indifferent (not much support)
- Friend vs foe? (Enemy and friends are all Vietnamese)
- Even women and children posed a threat (VC could be anywhere)



The Ground War

- **War of Attrition**

- William Westmoreland
- **Wear down the enemy**

- **Search and Destroy**

- Small units of soldiers (platoons)
- Search for insurgents (**why is this a problem?**)
 - Draw them into a fight (basically making yourself bait)
 - Call in air support

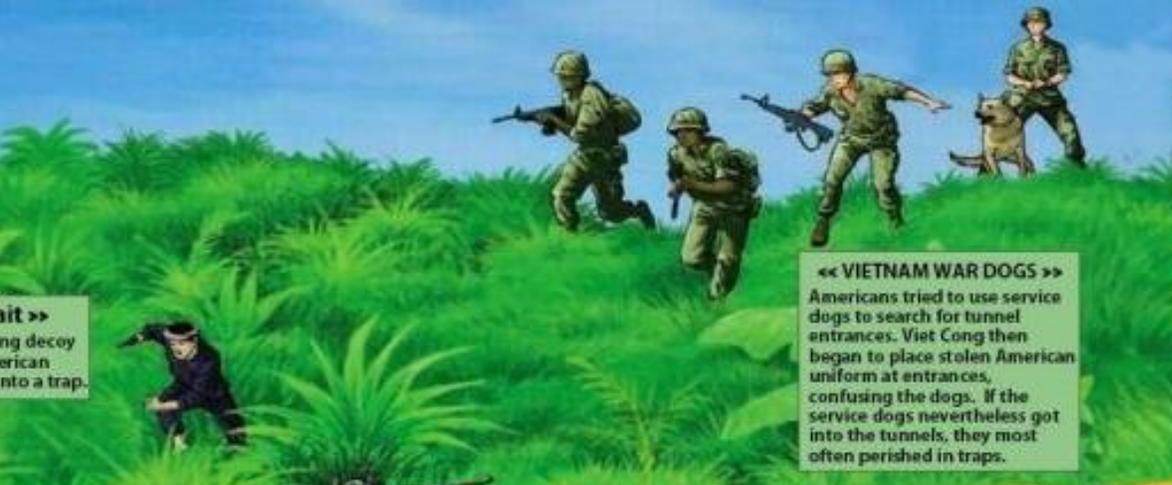
- **Effectiveness?**

- Makes American soldiers easy targets – high body count

The Ground War

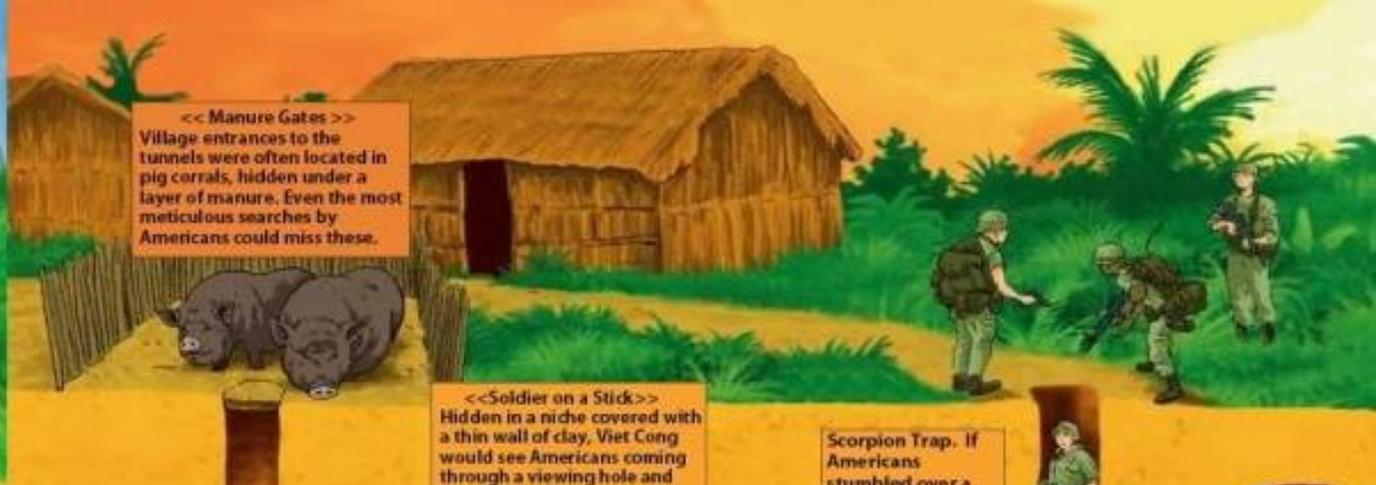
- VC avoided head-on clashes
- Small group **sneak attacks**
- Hide in elaborate **underground tunnels**
 - Running water and electricity
- **Booby traps**
 - Punji trap – camouflaged pit of sharp stakes
 - Land mines
 - Trip wires
 - Made little contact with the enemy





<< VIETNAM WAR DOGS >>
 Americans tried to use service dogs to search for tunnel entrances. Viet Cong then began to place stolen American uniform at entrances, confusing the dogs. If the service dogs nevertheless got into the tunnels, they most often perished in traps.

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 nto a trap.



<< Manure Gates >>
 Village entrances to the tunnels were often located in pig corrals, hidden under a layer of manure. Even the most meticulous searches by Americans could miss these.



<< SPIDER HOLES >>
 A sniper waits for Americans from an entrenchment, from which there is easy escape to the tunnel system.

Trip wire grenade traps are the most common trap found in the tunnels.

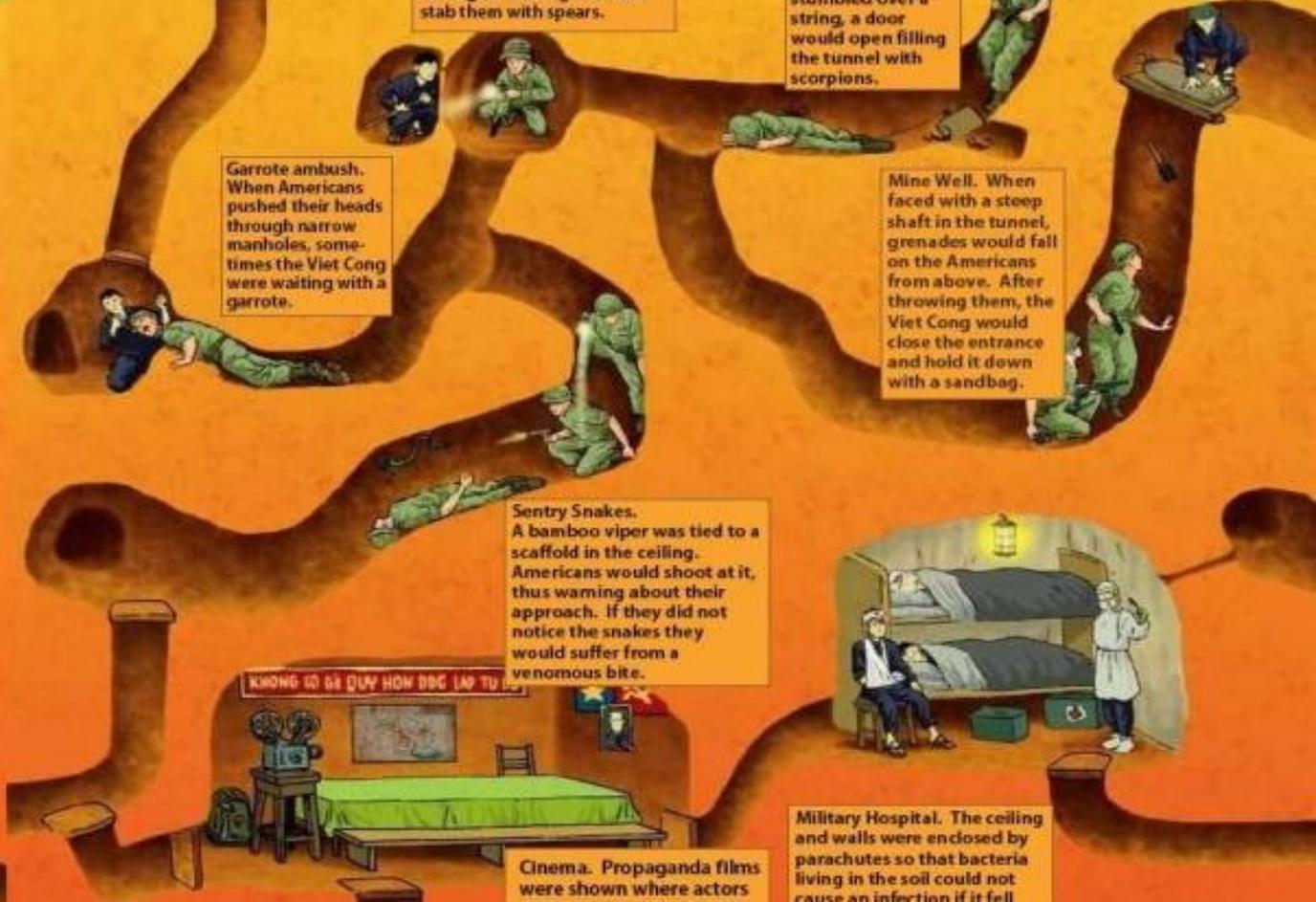
A classic pit trap with Punji spikes.

<< CORPSES IN WALLS >>
 To keep Americans from estimating their losses, the dead were buried as soon as possible, sometimes directly into a wall. Because of the humidity the bodies quickly decayed, filling the top level of the tunnels with a distinct stench.

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<< MINI-INFIRMARY >>
 Some caves were equipped with medicines and special ventilation where the wounded guerrilla could rest in bed and gain strength.

<< SIDE NICHES >>
 Niches are located deep in the tunnels where the Viet Cong wait for



<< Soldier on a Stick >>
 Hidden in a niche covered with a thin wall of clay, Viet Cong would see Americans coming through a viewing hole and stab them with spears.

Scorpion Trap. If Americans stumbled over a string, a door would open filling the tunnel with scorpions.

Mine Well. When faced with a steep shaft in the tunnel, grenades would fall on the Americans from above. After throwing them, the Viet Cong would close the entrance and hold it down with a sandbag.

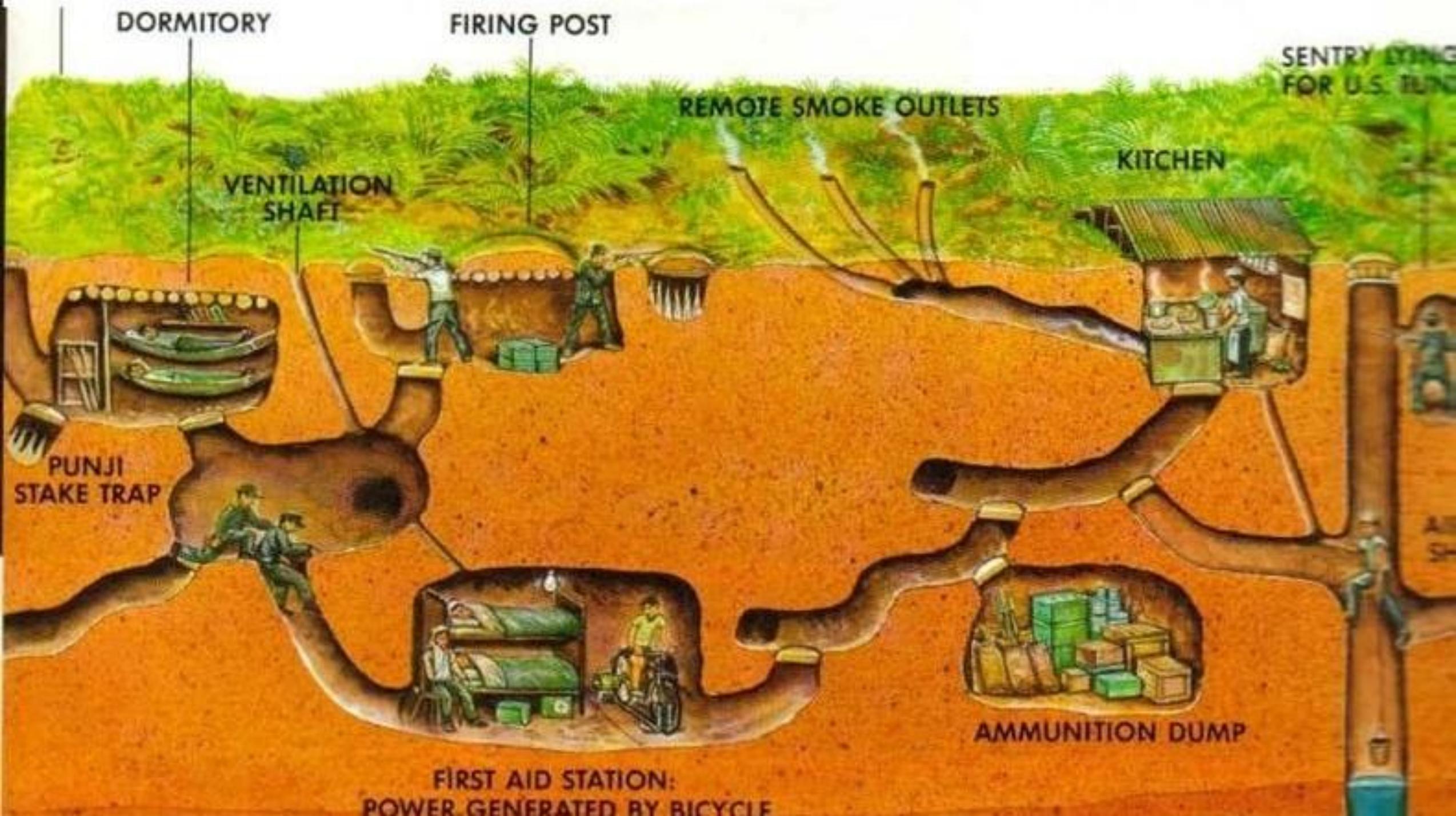
Garrote ambush. When Americans pushed their heads through narrow manholes, sometimes the Viet Cong were waiting with a garrote.

Sentry Snakes. A bamboo viper was tied to a scaffold in the ceiling. Americans would shoot at it, thus warning about their approach. If they did not notice the snakes they would suffer from a venomous bite.

KHONG LO DE QUY HON DUC LAP TU

Cinema. Propaganda films were shown where actors

Military Hospital. The ceiling and walls were enclosed by parachutes so that bacteria living in the soil could not cause an infection if it fell



DORMITORY

FIRING POST

SENTRY LYING FOR U.S. TUNNEL

REMOTE SMOKE OUTLETS

KITCHEN

VENTILATION SHAFT

PUNJI STAKE TRAP

AMMUNITION DUMP

FIRST AID STATION:
POWER GENERATED BY BICYCLE

The Battle in the Air

- B-52 bombers
- Target roads and bridges
- Thousands of tons of explosives
- **Saturation (Carpet) bombing**
 - Like it sounds. Super dense bombing
- **Fragmentation bombs**
 - Exploded into lots of small pieces
 - Many civilians killed

The Battle in the Air

- **Chemical weapons**
 - Agent orange
 - Herbicide
 - Exposed hiding places
 - Kills crops, humans and livestock
 - **Napalm**
 - Jellylike substance
 - Intensely hot burning



**Running
from
Agent
Orange
and
Napalm.
Would
burn
skin and
melt
clothes.**

Pacification

- **Campaign to win over the Vietnamese people and undermine support for the Viet Cong**
 - Policy designed to **promote security and stability** in South Vietnam.
- First aimed to bring **economic development** to rural South Vietnam
 - Supplying villages with food and other goods to building schools and bridges
 - Spread **propaganda**
 - **United States hoped to “win the hearts and minds” of the Vietnamese people.**

Pacification

- **Second, sought to undermine the communist insurgency**
 - Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) remove the Viet Cong and their sympathizers from villages.
 - Cut off the flow of recruits to the enemy
 - Make it safe for rural Vietnamese to support the Saigon government.
- **Problems:**
 - ARVN **lacked the leadership**, skills, and dedication
 - Second, the U.S. forces in Vietnam were too busy fighting the Viet Cong to pay much attention to “the other war” for villagers’ “hearts and minds.”
 - **The lack of security**
 - difficult to carry out their mission.