



## 'Lost' Cronkite Broadcast Reveals 180-Degree War Flip

*Editor's note: With the 50th anniversary of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, WND takes a fresh look at the way CBS News anchorman Walter Cronkite's famous 1968 editorial altered U.S. public opinion about the war – a broadcast that was untrue, turning a monumental defeat for the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces into a propaganda victory. This is the first of a three-part series.*  
By WND staff

WASHINGTON – A newly discovered CBS News clip broadcast by Walter Cronkite while still in Saigon following the Tet Offensive reveals the influential newsman had a much different perspective on the battle than he expressed in the history-making commentary he delivered after returning to New York days later. Anyone who had reached the age of awareness when Cronkite delivered his famous live editorial Feb. 27, 1968, knew the significance of what “the most trusted man in America” was saying: The U.S. had lost the Vietnam war. President Lyndon Johnson's famous reaction told the story: “If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America,” he is reported to have said.

*“Tonight, back in more familiar surroundings in New York, we'd like to sum up our findings in Vietnam, an analysis that must be speculative, personal, subjective,”* he said in opening his brief closing report. *“Who won and who lost in the great Tet Offensive against the cities? I'm not sure. The Viet Cong did not win by a knockout but neither did we.”*

Cronkite went on to say it was now clear that the war was headed for a stalemate and that it was time to negotiate a way out, “not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could.”

But buried in the dusty archives of CBS News was another Cronkite report from Saigon broadcast days earlier – nearly two weeks earlier to be exact. The “lost” Feb. 13 clip, shows Cronkite had a much different and unambiguous view of the recent Tet battlefront immediately after it was over.

**“First and simplest, the Viet Cong suffered a military defeat,”** he reported. “Its missions proved suicidal. If they had intended to stay in the cities as a negotiating point, **they failed at that. The Vietnamese army reacted better than even its most ardent supporters had anticipated. There were no defections from its rank, as the Viet Cong apparently had expected. And the people did not rise to support the Viet Cong, as they were also believed to have expected.**”

The video was discovered by Fred Koster, an independent filmmaker who directed the Vietnam film “Ride the Thunder,” based on the book of the same name by author-producer **Richard Botkin**. Since that movie did not deal directly with the events of the Tet Offensive, Koster and Botkin put the Cronkite clip aside, later sharing it with WND before the 50th anniversary of the Tet Offensive being observed this month.

“The two reports by Cronkite, broadcast so close to one another, raise a number of questions,” says Botkin. **“First, why are they so starkly contradictory? Why did Cronkite change his mind about who won the battle? What made Cronkite change his mind in a matter of a few days? And why is Cronkite's report in New York so famous and so pivotal while the other report was buried, forgotten, lost to the history of the last 50 years?”**

No matter what Cronkite said immediately after the Tet Offensive or days later in his New York broadcast, the history 50 years later is conclusive that the massive coordinated attacks by the Viet Cong guerrillas and the North Vietnamese army, though surprising in their magnitude, were not only soundly and convincingly repulsed by U.S. forces and the South Vietnamese army, but **actually annihilated in one of the most spectacular military defeats in history.** Nevertheless, in part because of Cronkite's famous broadcast, according to historians and Vietnam veterans, the staggering military defeat proved to be **a major propaganda** victory for the Communist forces.

“That's why it's still important today,” says Botkin, a Marine officer in the post-Vietnam era? The Tet Offensive refers to a wave of attacks in the late-night hours January 30, 1968, during the national holiday of Tet. It involved more than 80,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong soldiers in more than 100 towns and cities,

including 36 of 44 provincial capitals, including the capital city of Saigon. Though the magnitude of the initial attacks stunned both the U.S. and South Vietnamese forces, causing them to temporarily lose control of several cities, **they quickly regrouped, beat back the attacks, and inflicted heavy casualties on North Vietnamese forces.** During the Battle of Huế, intense fighting lasted for a month, resulting in the destruction of the city. **During their occupation, the North Vietnamese executed thousands of people in the Massacre at Huế.** Around the U.S. combat base at Khe Sanh, fighting continued for two more months.

Although **the offensive was a military defeat for North Vietnam,** it had a profound effect on the U.S. government and shocked the American public. But the North Vietnamese military command had much higher objectives for the Tet Offensive. It's also worth noting that, even though the U.S. and South Vietnamese command **saw the huge buildup occurring for weeks and months prior to Tet,** the North still benefited from the element of surprise. In October, Hanoi announced that it would observe a seven-day truce from Jan. 27 to Feb. 3 for the Tet holiday, and the South Vietnamese military made plans to allow recreational leave for approximately half of its forces. **General William Westmoreland requested that its ally cancel the upcoming cease-fire, but President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu refused to do so, claiming it would damage troop morale and only benefit the enemy.**

Nevertheless, for the military leadership of North Vietnam, the coordinated Tet surprise attacks involving at least 84,000 soldiers fell far short of their grandiose goals, which included:

- “annihilate and cause the total disintegration of the bulk of the puppet army;”
- “overthrow the puppet regime at all administrative levels and place all government power in the hands of the people;”
- “annihilate a significant portion of the American Military’s troop strength;”
- “destroy a significant portion of his war equipment in order to prevent the American forces from being able to carry out their political and military missions;”
- “crush the American will to commit aggression and force the United States to accept defeat in South Vietnam and end all hostile actions against North Vietnam.”

**Cronkite, therefore, was correct in his first assessment of the offensive. It had been a disaster for the communists.**



Gen. Patrick Brady

The first surge of the offensive was over by the second week of February. The U.S. estimated that during the first phase (Jan. 30-April 8) approximately 45,000 North Vietnamese soldiers were killed and an unknown number were wounded. The South Vietnamese suffered 2,788 killed, 8,299 wounded, and 587 missing in action. U.S. and other allied forces suffered 1,536 killed, 7,764 wounded, and 11 missing. Later, American estimates showed that of the 84,000 North Vietnamese soldiers and Viet Cong guerrillas involved in the entire offensive, a staggering total of 58,000, or 72.5 percent, had been killed by South Vietnamese, American and other allied forces.

**“There is no question that the Communists suffered one of the greatest military defeats in history at Tet,”** said Gen. Patrick Brady, the most decorated living U.S. military figure, a Vietnam war hero and author of “Dead Men Flying.” **“The North was about to quit – Cronkite helped change that.”** **(Cronkite, un salaud!!)**

**“In his pseudo-documentary on Vietnam, Ken Burns repeats Cronkite’s apocalyptic version of Tet despite the fact that it was surely one of the greatest military victories in the history of warfare,”** said Brady. **(Ken Burns, un autre salopard!!)** “We killed at least 41,000 and captured 2,500 of 84,000 enemy combatants. Yet it was portrayed as a defeat, thanks to the likes of Uncle Walter, who had his nose up Ho Chi Minh’s posterior (**Cronkite thang cho chet nguoi dit ho chi minh**). It was like America turned around after Normandy and retreated across the English Channel or George Washington quitting after Yorktown.” In fact, David Halberstam wrote in his 1979 book, “The Powers That Be,” **“It was the first time in American history that a war had been declared over by an anchorman.”**

*“As a newsman of 40 years, I ask myself how and why Cronkite could go from characterizing Tet as ‘a military defeat for the Viet Cong’ to saying, they ‘did not win by a knockout,’”* said Joseph Farah, founder of WND and

formerly editor-in-chief of major-market dailies in the 1980s and 1990s. “Normally, when people change their mind in a matter of days like that they need to explain themselves. When one army launches an offensive and loses **more than 10 times as many soldiers than the forces they attack**, that’s a catastrophe. Today we talk about ‘fake news.’ But these reports by Cronkite go beyond that. **This is contradictory news** – two completely different stories being told by the same superstar anchor 13 days apart. It made a difference in the outcome of the war. It made a difference to Lyndon Johnson. **It made a difference to millions of Vietnamese who lost their lives or their freedom.** It made a difference to America’s brave warriors, too, who were betrayed by ‘the most trusted man in America.’”



That raises the question as to whether the more famous broadcast – the one characterized by Farah as “fake news” – **actually gave aid and comfort to North Vietnam.** About that there is little doubt, according to the written testimony by a former North Vietnamese colonel named Bui Tin, who wrote a book published by the Naval Institute Press in 2002, which suggests such reports in the U.S. media had profound impact in “nurturing the North Vietnamese people’s will to fight and their faith in the final victory during the war years.” Tin personally participated in the translation of such U.S. and European media reports for top leaders. He writes that only favorable reports were disseminated to Hanoi, which “had its drawbacks, its distortions.” **He even mentioned Cronkite by name – in the same breath as radical Viet Cong supporter**

#### **Tom Hayden, husband of Jane Fonda.**

He added: “Unsophisticated leaders who had never set foot abroad, who were used to reaching only material selected because it was favorable to Hanoi, after awhile were inclined to think ... that all journalists were like Walter Cronkite, Don Luce, Tom Hayden and John Hittinger.”

In 1995 the Wall Street Journal published an interview with Bui Tin, asking him point-blank how Hanoi intended to defeat the Americans in Vietnam. He said: “*By fighting a long war which would break their will to help South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh said, ‘We don’t need to win military victories, we only need to hit them until they give up and get out.’*”



*Walter Cronkite (le salopard qui reniffle les fèces de hochiminh!)*

Asked if the American anti-war movement was important to Hanoi’s victory, he said: “It was essential to our strategy. Support for the war from our rear was completely secure while the American rear was vulnerable. Every day our leadership would listen to world news over the radio at 9 a.m. to follow the growth of the American antiwar movement. Visits to Hanoi by people like **Jane Fonda** and former **Attorney General Ramsey Clark and ministers** gave us confidence that we should hold on in the face of battlefield reverses. We were elated when Jane Fonda, wearing a red Vietnamese dress, said at a press conference that she was ashamed of American actions in the war and that she would struggle along with us.”

Asked if the Politburo paid attention to these visits, he responded, “Keenly.” “Those people represented the conscience of America,” Bui said. “The conscience of America was part of its war-making capability, and we were turning that power in our favor. **America lost because of its democracy; through dissent and protest it lost the ability to mobilize a will to win.**”

He added:

**“We had the impression that American commanders had their hands tied by political factors. Your generals could never deploy a maximum force for greatest military effect.”**

Brent Bozell, founder of the Media Research Center, says the man known affectionately as “Uncle Walter” to millions of Americans in the 1960s **was actually not the fatherly straight newsman he pretended to be.** “Walter Cronkite’s partisanship in his ‘news’ coverage of the Vietnam war is not just a matter of speculation,” Bozell told WND. “It is not just a matter of fact. It is celebrated fact by those closest to the newsman. Leslie Midgley was Cronkite’s long-time producer and in his book, ‘How Many Words Do You Want,’ he recounts how he turned ‘America’s Most Trusted Newsmen’ against the war and concludes they were doing ‘the true work of the Lord.’ In journalism the only thing worse than bias is the false denial of bias. Cronkite and company were guilty of that until the bitter end.”



Bozell adds: **“There is no question, none whatsoever, that the Tet Offensive was a crushing military blow for the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong, thus Cronkite’s suggestion that it was some sort of draw was, at best, naive.** But it succeeded in another, equally important sense. It launched a political movement among the elites (as opposed to the hippies) to end the war as ‘unwinnable.’ This argument suggested that all of America’s power could not defeat the popular will, therefore a continuation of hostilities was unacceptable. This is precisely what Cronkite argued. The American response to the Tet Offensive was a massive defeat of the enemy, but it hadn’t eradicated it from the face of the Earth, so it was a draw.”

**“History ought not to be re-written to establish that this was anything but an American victory,”** Bozell concluded. “Nor should it be re-written to establish that Cronkite didn’t have an opinion on the war which significantly influenced his ‘reporting.’”

The late Peter Braestrup of the Washington Post wrote a 1977 book called “Big Story.” In it, he said of the U.S. press coverage of Tet: “Rarely has contemporary crisis-journalism turned out, in retrospect, to have veered so widely from reality.” To have such a defeat for the enemy portrayed also as a major defeat for America, he added, “cannot be counted as a triumph for American journalism.” And the biggest blow to truth, critics charge, was Cronkite’s famous commentary – one that was completely out of context, even from the anchorman’s reporting from Vietnam two weeks earlier.

Read more at <http://www.wnd.com/2018/01/lost-cronkite-broadcast-reveals-180-degree-war-flip/#ThOJGm2zkWSfmW9m.99>