

# Lewis William Walt

1913–1989



**WHY HE MADE HISTORY** A highly decorated United States Marine Corps general, Lewis William Walt led troops in three major wars. He spoke out against the United States' strategy in Vietnam.



*As you read the biography below, think about General Walt's military career. How do you think each war he served in prepared him for the next?*



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As the Vietnam War progressed, the United States sent more and more ground troops. In response to the guerrilla tactics of the Vietnamese, American troops used a search-and-destroy strategy. Forces moved from village to village killing, burning, and clearing out the enemy. Concerned that too many American soldiers would die, General Walt challenged that strategy.

Lewis William Walt was born on a farm near Harveyville, Kansas, in 1913. His parents died when he was a teenager. Walt attended Colorado State University where he majored in chemistry and played on the football team. He entered the United States Marine Corps as a second lieutenant in 1936. A year later, Walt went on his first military mission serving as a platoon leader in China.

Walt played an active role in World War II. In 1942 he fought in the first American ground offensive in the Pacific. He received a Silver Star for his bravery. He also fought in the Battle of Guadalcanal, one of the most important battles of the war. He was wounded there and received a promotion. Then he led the marines in a three-week jungle campaign against Japanese forces in New Britain. He was wounded again, and received the Navy Cross, the second highest combat decoration.

In 1961 Walt received a promotion to brigadier general. He was promoted again in 1965 to lead the Marine Amphibious Force in South Vietnam. During his years in Vietnam, Walt challenged the search-and-destroy strategy of General Westmoreland. Walt believed that a ground war would cost too many American lives. He wanted forces to take control of local villages and protect the civilians there. Congress backed Westmoreland, believing Walt's strategy would take too much time. Walt left Vietnam in 1967. A year later he lost a fight to become commandant of the Marine Corps, becoming assistant commandant instead.

**The Vietnam War****Biography**

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Walt was the first Assistant Commander in the Marine Corps to be promoted to four-star general. He served 35 years in the military and received many medals and decorations for his courage. In 1971, however, a frustrated Walt retired from the military. He publicly criticized Congress and continued to speak about the mistakes he believed the government was making. Walt died in 1989. He is buried at Quantico National Cemetery in Virginia.

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

1. **Identify** What strategy did Walt challenge during the Vietnam War and why?

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2. **Make Generalizations** What events in General Walt's background might have led him to disagree with U.S. military strategy in Vietnam?

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**ACTIVITY**

The Vietnam War was primarily a ground war. Research recent conflicts around the world. How are wars fought differently today? Create two lists that compare the Vietnam War with a more recent conflict. Share and discuss your lists as a class.