By the mid 1960s many Americans were speaking out publicly against U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Thousands of Vietnamese and American lives had been lost. Vietnam was in ruins. Three American presidents had come and gone, and no peace or resolution was in sight. Many now criticized the people who had supported the war, including national security adviser McGeorge Bundy.

McGeorge Bundy was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1919. He was the son of a very successful lawyer and was encouraged to excel in learning. Bundy spent much of his childhood debating politics and history with adults. He became the first student to receive perfect scores on his entrance exam at Yale University in 1936. He graduated in 1940 first in his class.

Following his graduation from college, Bundy attended graduate school and ran unsuccessfully for city council. He signed up for the military draft, but was rejected because he had weak vision. In 1942 Bundy succeeded in enlisting in the army by cheating on the eye exam. He memorized the eye chart.

Bundy worked in intelligence during World War II and received an honorable discharge in 1946. He began a career in foreign affairs and worked as a research assistant for former secretary of war Henry Stimson. He helped write Stimson’s memoir and an article explaining why the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Japan. In 1949 he went to work at Harvard University as a lecturer, and then as an administrator.

In 1960, Bundy became the special assistant for national security affairs for President John F. Kennedy. He became one of the most influential advisers to both President Kennedy and President Johnson. Bundy made
critical defense decisions in the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Vietnam War.

Bundy pushed for U.S. involvement in Vietnam and supported the use of ground troops. He was a loud supporter of the war effort and wanted to increase the number of American troops in Vietnam. Bundy resigned from his position as national security adviser in 1966. He went on to head the Ford Foundation, one of the largest philanthropic organizations in the country.

In the years after he resigned, Bundy was criticized for the decisions he made during the Vietnam War. Critics accused him of war crimes. Professors at New York University protested against him when he joined the faculty there. His future in government and his hopes to be secretary of state came to an end. Bundy was writing a book about lessons learned from the war when he died in 1996. The book was never finished.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. **Summarize**  What role did McGeorge Bundy play in the Vietnam War?

2. **Make Judgments**  Many experts think Bundy was responsible for the U.S. failure in Vietnam. What do you think?

ACTIVITY

McGeorge Bundy was known for writing very powerful memos. In fact, his writing influenced the decisions of presidents. Write a memo convincing the president to use a specific strategy in the Vietnam conflict. Your memo may support or oppose the use of ground troops.