

AMERICA IN VIETNAM

- May 1950** President Truman provides US aid to French military in Indochina. 35 American advisors are sent to Vietnam.
- May 1954** French forces defeated by Vietnamese at Diem Bien Phu.
- July 1954** Geneva Conference on Indochina brings cease-fire and temporarily divides Vietnam along 17th Parallel.
- Oct. 1954** President Eisenhower pledges direct American aid to the South Vietnam.
- Nov. 1961** President Kennedy increases number of military advisers to South Vietnam.
- Nov. 1963** US assists in the overthrow of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem.
- Aug. 1964** American and North Vietnamese forces clash in Gulf of Tonkin. Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.
- Feb. 1965** US begins bombing of North Vietnam
- March 1965** First American ground combat troops arrive in Vietnam.
- Jan. 1968** Tet offensive brings Vietcong attacks on more than 100 towns and bases.
- March 1968** President Johnson announces partial cessation of bombing North Vietnam, opening the way for talks and announces that he will not seek reelection.
- Jan 1969** Paris Peace talks begin
- Nov. 1969** President Nixon calls for "Vietnamization" of the war and orders staged withdrawals of American troops.
- March 1970** US troops enter Cambodia to destroy North Vietnamese supply bases.
- June 1971** Presidential adviser Henry Kissinger begins secret peace negotiations with North Vietnam.
- Aug. 1972** Last US ground combat troops leave South Vietnam.
- Dec. 1972** US engages in Christmas bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong
- Jan. 1973** Truce agreement signed in Paris, cease fire in Vietnam
- March 1973** Last US military personnel leave South Vietnam.
- April 1973** US prisoners of war released.
- April 1975** Fall of Saigon and evacuation of American Embassy.

The Vietnam War

“The Vietnam conflict was a war without beginning or end, like an interminable and confused Oriental drama in which alien characters (Japanese, French, Americans) came upon the scene, played their roles and vanished, permitting the local characters to carry on as before.”

-- Robert Leventhal

History

Since the mid-1800's, Vietnam (Indochina) had been a colony to more than one imperialist nation. France controlled Vietnam until 1940, when upon the defeat of the French in World War II, Japan took control. The Japanese had difficulty ruling Vietnam due to the efforts of an underground organization named the League for the Independence of Vietnam, otherwise known as the Viet Minh. The Viet Minh was a nationalist movement seeking independence from imperialist control. Its leader was a brilliant and dedicated Marxist (Communist) named Ho Chi Minh. After the defeat of Japan, Vietnam gained its independence from imperialist control--although France again played a major role in Vietnam's internal affairs--and was renamed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. By 1946, a bloody struggle between the French and the Viet Minh erupted. Ho Chi Minh warns the French that his people will fight for ten years if necessary. The French in turn place a former emperor, Bao Dai in charge of the nation, or at least in the southern part of Vietnam. In President Truman provides US aid to French military in Indochina. 35 American advisors are sent to Vietnam. By 1954, Bao Dai is forced into exile after the French leave Vietnam after their defeat at Dien Bien Phu. The responsibility of containing Communism in Vietnam now falls solely to the US.

Eisenhower and Vietnam

In the summer of 1954, a temporary agreement is reached in Geneva which divides Vietnam along the 17th Parallel. Elections are to be held in 1956. Until then, Ho Chi Minh and his Communists will control the area north of the 17th Parallel. The southern part of Vietnam will be in the hands of the anti-Communists who are led by Ngo Dinh Diem, supported by the US. Diem's popularity with the people is short-lived. By 1955, 1 million North Vietnamese Catholics flee south to escape what they consider to be an anti-religious Communist regime in the north. In 1956, Diem refuses to hold national elections as promised. To support his government President Eisenhower sends 300 military advisors to train South Vietnamese troops. Within the next five years, the Communists create what will become known as the National Liberation Front (NLF), otherwise known as the Vietcong (VC), a group which appealed to Vietnamese peasants. Worried, the US triples its advisors in South Vietnam.

Kennedy and Vietnam

In 1961, Kennedy becomes president. He has the choice of whether to increase or decrease American involvement in Vietnam. He decides to gradually increase the number of advisors, reaching 16,000 by 1963. That same year, millions of South Vietnamese Buddhists revolt against Diem (Diem was a Catholic). Although the uprisings are put down, in order to ease tension within South Vietnam, Diem's generals, with the support of the US, assassinate Diem. In the next ten years, ten different governments will rule South Vietnam and all will be supported by the US government.

Johnson and Vietnam

In August 1964, two US destroyers are reportedly attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. President Johnson call for swift and far-reaching action on the part of the US. This even leads to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which authorizes Johnson to “take all necessary steps to repel armed attacks against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” In February of the following year, Vietcong attack American outposts at Pleiku. The US responds by bombing north of the 17th Parallel. By summer 1965, 23,000 US advisors are turned into combat troops and sent into action. General William Westmoreland calls for more US troops, the first of many such requests. By the end of 1965, 184,000 US troops take over the fighting from the South Vietnamese, who have a propensity for retreating without their rifles when confronted by the Vietcong. Reaction to US involvement as 1965 comes to an end is still mostly positive. After all, Vietnam is a “brave little democracy” fighting to maintain its freedom. The containment of Communism plays a big part in continuing US efforts to support the south. By the end of 1966, over 400,000 US troops are serving in Vietnam. With increasing involvement comes increased casualty figures; 1966 casualty rate was 21,000, six times the 1965 total. In 1967, the US increases bombing raids on the north in futile attempts to slow Soviet and Chinese supplies to North Vietnam. By 1968, American troop levels reach 535,000.

By this time many Americans begin to have serious doubts about their country’s involvement in Vietnam. Many ask: How long will the war persist; What are we doing in Vietnam anyway; Shouldn’t the US focus on solving its own domestic problems; Is South Vietnam really a “brave little democracy”? Added to this dismay, were growing problems among the troops such as drug addiction, venereal disease, and Vietcong guerrilla tactics. These issues and others help to solidify the feelings of the opponents of the war (Doves) that the US should seek an immediate end to the war in Vietnam. Many young Americans refuse to serve in the armed forces and instead elect to serve prison terms or leave the country.

January 1968 sees the Vietcong launch the Tet Offensive, a massive attack on Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam as well as on more than 100 towns and bases. Although a crushing defeat for the Vietcong, the Tet Offensive proves to many Americans that the war is nowhere near concluding. However, many Americans (Hawks) want the war to continue until a successful conclusion is reached. Following the Tet Offensive Westmoreland calls for 205,000 more troops. With his “Great Society” program becoming a victim of the war, President Johnson refuses to up American troop levels, declares that he is limiting the bombing of North Vietnam, and announces that he will not seek reelection in the upcoming election. A short time later, peace talks begin in Paris between representatives of the US and North Vietnam. That same year, General Westmoreland turns over command of US troops to General Creighton Abrams. Westmoreland admits that an American victory in Vietnam is impossible. By the end of 1968, bombing of North Vietnam is temporarily halted.

Nixon and Vietnam

In the 1968 presidential campaign Richard Nixon, a virulent anti-Communist, urges Americans to soften their opposition to the war. He promises to bring the war to a satisfactory conclusion, but after one full year in the Oval Office, few US soldiers have been withdrawn from Vietnam. To many Americans, Nixon’s real intention seems to be an escalation of the war rather than a de-escalation of US involvement. Proof of this sentiment comes when, in 1970 the president orders American troops into Cambodia to clean out North Vietnamese and Vietcong sanctuaries. A national uproar over this order erupts throughout the US including on the campus of Kent State where four student-protesters are killed the National Guard. Two months later, US troops are withdrawn from Cambodia. As 1970

comes to a close, 200,000 US troops have been pulled out of Vietnam; Casualty figures drop accordingly. However, defoliation of Vietnam (napalm, Agent Orange) continues in the vain attempt to deny the Vietcong refuge in the cover of Vietnam's vast jungles and forests.

In 1971 Nixon's plan of Vietnamization begins, It calls for the de-escalating the use of US ground troops in favor of more South Vietnamese responsibility for fighting the war. Although the US has spent billions of dollars in training and supplying the South Vietnamese army, the massive financial aid doesn't buy success. A major invasion of neighboring Laos by South Vietnamese troops meets with disaster on the Ho Chi Minh Trail as many on the newly equipped units break and run from the battlefield, in the process suffering heavy casualties. The protests in America continue, as do the peace talks in Paris. By 1972, Nixon resumes the bombing of North Vietnamese supply lines and industrial targets, following a massive North Vietnamese/Vietcong offensive which nearly brings the collapse of the Saigon government. By the end of 1972, the last US battalion is withdrawn from Vietnam.

Just prior to his landslide re-election, Nixon tells the American public that the Paris peace talks are soon to bring about a cease-fire in Vietnam. The cease-fire never develops, however, and Nixon orders a resumption of bombing led by B-52's. The bombing is on an unprecedented scale, ravaging hundreds of square miles of North Vietnam, but also inflicting heavy loses in planes and pilots. Tired of the war, Congress plans to restrict the president's war-making powers, but quite suddenly Nixon, Kissinger and Hanoi announce simultaneously that a cease-fire would soon be signed in Paris, much to the dismay of the South Vietnamese leader Thieu. While Hanoi claims a great victory, the US claims it has contained Communism. Nevertheless, fighting soon resumes.

End of the War

1975, The South Vietnamese army, no longer bolstered by US support, crumbles under the strain of successful North Vietnamese and Vietcong attacks. In May of 1957, the Saigon government falls thus ending the Vietnam war, and leaving the pro-Communist Hanoi government in control of Vietnam.

The Commitment

Americans who served	3,330,000
Americans killed	58,721
Americans killed in battle	47,565
Americans wounded	303,713
Americans taken prisoner	839
Returned	691
Escaped	34
Died in captivity	114
American aid to Vietnam	\$24 billion
American expenditures	\$165 billion

The Aftermath

Americans evacuated	1,373
Vietnamese evacuated	5,595
US equipment lost	\$5 billion
Total dead (all sides)	1,313,000
Land defoliated	5.2 million acres
Indochinese refugees	9,000,000
Compensated US veterans	500,000
Disabled US veterans	519,000