



# **The War in Vietnam**

**The Second Indochina War**

**1945 -1975**




# Background

- 📄 French colony: Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia
- 📄 Viet Minh starts as independence movement in 1941, adopts communism in 1950's.
- 📄 Viet Minh fight guerilla war for independence from 1946-1954 against the French.
  - The U.S. support the French because of Containment Policy
  - Viet Minh win decisively at Dien Bien Phu.
  - Massive loss of life French: 2,200. Of the 50,000 Vietnamese that attacked there were 23,000 casualties with 8,000 killed.
  - French Surrender May 7, 1954



# Background

 Geneva Conference: To discuss Vietnam

- Temporarily divided at 17<sup>th</sup> parallel
- Elections will be held in 1956 as to unification
- Ngo Dinh Diem leader of U.S. supported South Vietnam
- Eisenhower is worried about Domino Effect
- Ho Chi Minh leader of Communist North Vietnam



# Background

📄 North looks like probable victor in elections;  
South refuses to participate with US  
blessing

📄 Ngo Dinh Diem

- Anti-Communist
- CORRUPT
- Catholic
- Forced Catholicism on Buddhist monks
- Monks set themselves on fire in protest

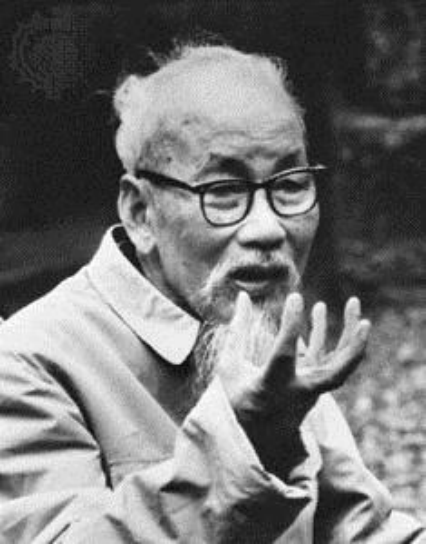
📄 1957 Elections

- Canceled in the North
- 605,000 vote in the South, only 405,000 registered voters





# Background









# North vs South

## North

- Communist
  -  Backed by USSR and China
- Govt led by Ho Chi Minh (“Uncle Ho”)
  -  Spy for US OSS during WWII, became increasingly totalitarian.
- Experienced, motivated army (NVA) led by very qualified Gen. Giap

## South

- Semi-democratic
  -  Backed by US
- Govt led by Diem
  -  Corrupt and filled with family-members
  -  Favoritism for Catholics angered Buddhist majority.
  -  Overthrown by group of generals in Nov ‘63.
- Unreliable, conscript army (ARVN)
- Viet Cong guerillas.



# Prelude to War

"If we withdrew from Vietnam, the Communists would control Vietnam. Pretty soon, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Malaya, would go..." President Kennedy

📅 1961: Jan -- 900 advisors

- December 1961 -- White Paper recommends big build up; some argue to stay out altogether; Kennedy chooses middle ground of adding 420 more advisors

📅 1963: Nov – 16,000 advisors

- NVA regulars invade RVN
- Military Coup overthrows Diem, with US blessing
- Kennedy not happy about the assassination of Diem. JFK begins talking of American withdrawal
- I'm not about to send American boys 9-10,000 miles away to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves."- LBJ

📅 1964: Summer – 27,000 advisors

- "I am not going to lose Vietnam. I am not going to be the President who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went."-LBJ
- US begins covert raids against targets in NV and coastal surveillance missions.





# Gulf of Tonkin



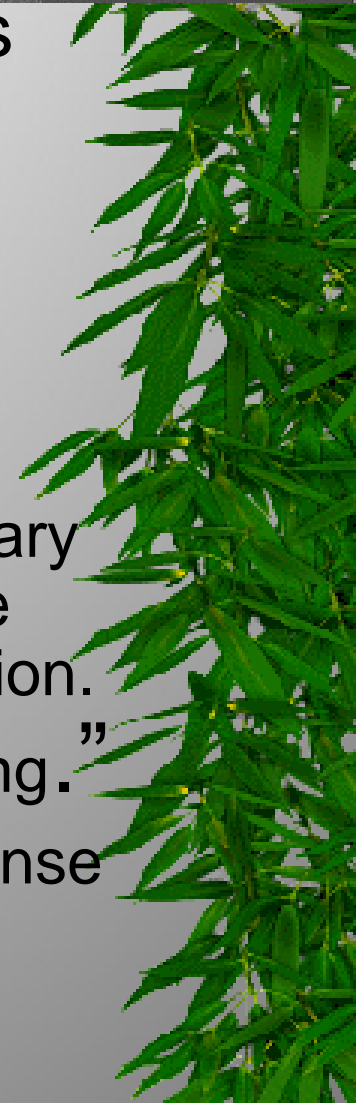
\* August 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 1964, two US destroyers allegedly fired on by NV gunboats.

📁 LBJ sends Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to Congress on August 5, 1964.

- Approved **nearly** unanimously by Congress on August 7.
- Gave LBJ broad authority to “to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the US and to prevent further aggression.”

“Like Grandma’s night shirt, it covered everything.”

📁 Carrier-based air raids into NV conducted in response to attacks.



# The 5 P's of Vietnam

- 📄 Power: Nations go to war to increase their power or prevent their enemies from increasing theirs.
  - April 1950: If the USSR came to dominate even more areas of the world it might mean “that no coalition adequate to confront the Kremlin with greater strength could be assembled...”
    - 📄 National Security Report on Vietnam




# The 5 P's of Vietnam

- 📄 Prestige: The desire to protect or defend a nation's prestige-that is a nation's standing in the worlds view.
  - The present U.S. objective in Vietnam is to avoid humiliation... To preserve our reputation as a guarantor, and thus to preserve our effectiveness in the rest of the world.
    - Asst. Secretary of Defense John McNaughton  
January 1966




# The 5 P's of Vietnam

-  Principles: Sometimes nations go to war to enforce cherished principles, such as ensuring human rights or the rights of vessels at sea.
- “The central lesson of our time is that the appetite for aggression is never satisfied. To withdraw from one battlefield means only to prepare for the next. We must stay in S.E. Asia- as we did in Europe.”
  - LBJ in a speech at Johns Hopkins University




# The 5 P's of Vietnam

 Profit: Nations go to war for profit, that is to advance their economic interests by protecting investments, securing raw materials or gaining new markets for their exports.

- He who holds influence in Vietnam can affect the future of the Philippines and Formosa to the east, Thailand and Burma with their huge rice surpluses to the west, and Malaysia and Indonesia with rubber, ore and tin to the south. Vietnam does not exist in a geographical vacuum- from it large storehouses of wealth and population can be influenced and undermined. –U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge 1965




# The 5 P's of Vietnam

 Protection: When a nation is attacked or invaded by another nation it usually will fight to protect its people and territory.

- “What we are doing now in Vietnam is vital not only to the security of S.E. Asia but it is vital to the security of every American...” LBJ 1968



# Wrap-up the 5 P's

-  July 1965: Under Secretary of State George Ball correctly forecast the loss of U.S. prestige because of its failure to triumph decisively in Vietnam:
- “I am concerned about world opinion... If the war is long and protracted, as I believe it will be, then we will suffer because the world’s greatest power cannot defeat guerillas.”



# Operation Rolling Thunder



# Air Campaign

📁 Johnson places extensive restrictions on targets due to concerns over public opinion and Soviet and Chinese response.

📁 Massive tonnage of bombs dropped, often on questionable targets. Saturation bombing.

- US drops greater tonnage of aviation ordnance around Khe Sahn in three months than it had dropped on Japan during all of WWII.
- NVA avoid large troop concentrations or other opportunities for strategic bombing.
- Eventually we bombed roads, homes and factories killing thousands of civilians.

📁 **ROLLING THUNDER**

- Planned for eight weeks, lasted three years.
- 500 US aircraft shot down
  - 📁 NV use captured US aviators as propaganda weapons.
    - Aimed at US Civilians... popular support.





Section 2

# **U.S. INVOLVEMENT AND ESCALATION**



# The Combined Action Program

- Westmoreland wants end the war quickly by reaching the “crossover point” through attrition. Wear down the enemy through constant contact.
- VC (Viet Cong) difficult to distinguish from non-combatants.
  - Also difficult to determine which side non-combatants support.
- Limited supporting establishment/infrastructure to attack.
- Military leaders see civilians (“hearts and minds”) in SV countryside as opponents’ critical vulnerability.
  - Take hiding places and logistical support away from VC.
  - Argued that the military should engage the Communist regulars for the most part only “when a clear opportunity exists to engage the VC Main Force or North Vietnamese units on terms favorable to ourselves.”




In regular warfare, the responsible officers simply strive to attain a method of producing the maximum physical effect with the force at their disposal. In small wars, the goal is to gain decisive results with the least application of force and the consequent minimum loss of life. The end aim is the social, economic, and political development of the people subsequent to the military defeat of the enemy insurgent forces. In small wars, tolerance, sympathy, and kindness should be the keynote of our relationship with the mass of the population.



## *Small Wars Manual*



# Air Campaign

 In addition to bombs the U.S. dropped

- Agent Orange, herbicide that was a defoliant but caused cancer in our soldiers.
- Napalm, fire bombing the NVA and sometimes us
- These tactics did not have the effect that the U.S. had hoped.
  - Strengthened the resolve of the NVA
  - They responded with ingenuity
    - underground tunnels
    - guerilla tactics



# How the War was Fought

- 📖 Americans were not ready for Jungle warfare
- 📖 Had to deal with leeches, fever, dysentery, jungle rot and racial tensions and unknown enemy
- 📖 US was not morally ready for VC tactics
  - Booby traps
  - Guerilla Tactics
- 📖 Frustration over the war leads to mistakes like My Lai
- 📖 ARVN was not capable of standing on their own
- 📖 Exaggerated number of US kills- Why?
- 📖 By 1967 we had over 500,000 soldiers in country



# Ia Drang Valley

- 📖 *We Were Soldiers Once And Young*
- 📖 Nov 1965
- 📖 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division
  - New “airmobile” tactics
- 📖 First meeting between US and NVA in SV.
- 📖 Initial battle is tactical and operational victory for US, but...
- 📖 Halts NV invasion plans.
- 📖 NVA realize they can't go toe to toe with US, revert to hit and run tactics.



# How the War was Fought II

- 📖 Search and Destroy replaces hearts and minds
- 📖 VC had advantages, blend in, home field advantage and elaborate tunnel system(pg. 738)
- 📖 US Pacification program was not well received
- 📖 Use of land mines



# Psychological Effects

- 📄 War seemed endless and un-winnable
- 📄 Many soldiers “snapped”
- 📄 Average age was 19
- 📄 Unclear goals, enemy and end
- 📄 Soldiers will use drugs to escape
- 📄 Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
- 📄 Did not come home to a welcoming public, although doing their duty for their country



# War Comes Home

- 🏠 Vietnam was called the living room war
- 🏠 The press was uncensored by the military- **SIGNIFICANT**
- 🏠 Credibility Gap
- 🏠 Youth of America are beginning to protest
- 🏠 Support for the war at home is waning.
  - “I want to get out but don’t want to give in.”- Middle America
- 🏠 “the U.S. is mired in a stalemate” – Walter Cronkite
- 🏠 “ if we have lost Walter, we have lost the country.”- LBJ





Section 3

# A NATION DIVIDED

# Working Class War

- 📁 Resisting the draft
  - Conscientious Objectors
  - New Left
  - Selective Service/ Draft
- 📁 Deferments made initially by the government
  - Married
  - College Attendance
  - 80% of American soldiers in Vietnam were from the lower class
- 📁 Racial Tensions and low troop morale
- 📁 Spurred on by Credibility Gap
- 📁 Beginnings of SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and FSM (Free Speech Movement)
- 📁 Teach-Ins





# Anti War Movement II

- Escalation in Vietnam brought an escalation in protests
- March on Washington D.C.
  - SDS called for Civil Disobedience
    - Escalation: Burn Draft Cards
    - Escalation: Flee to Canada or Sweden
- March on the Pentagon in 1967 over 100,000
- Up the Ante- Movement was not having the effect it had hoped
  - Burn Cards, Not People and Hell No We Won't Go

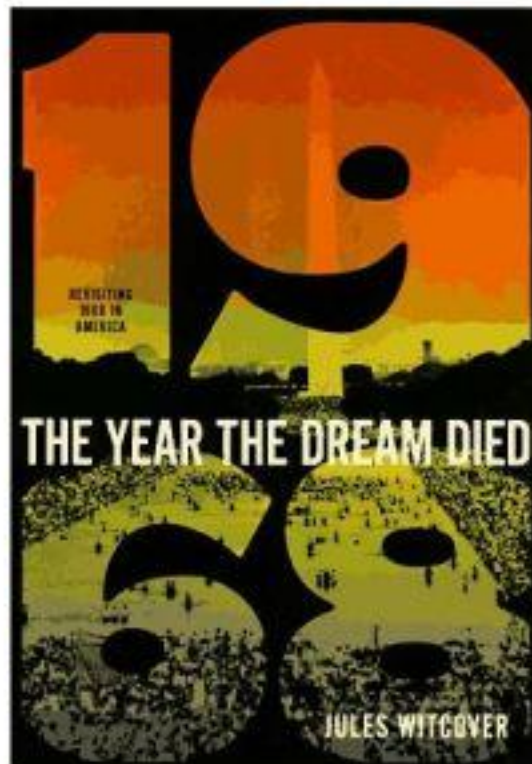


# Protests Continue to Grow

- 📖 Jane Fonda, Hanoi Jane
- 📖 Draft resistance continues to grow until President Nixon ended the practice in the early 70's
  - More than 200,000 Americans were accused of draft dodging
  - 4,000 will go to jail
  - 10,000 flee the country
- 📖 Creation of Doves and Hawks



# 1968: A Tumultuous Year





# Khe Sahn

## Dec 67-July 68



- 📖 Patrol base and outpost for ops along western DMZ and interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.
  - Greater political/psychological importance than military.
  - Concerns about “another Dien Bien Phoo”.
- 📖 6k Marines hold off 20k NVA and endure over 40k rounds of incoming artillery, mortar, and rocket fire during 77 day (Jan-March) siege.
- 📖 Army division finally breaks through and ends siege.
- 📖 Marines argue to abandon, but Westmoreland refuses.
- 📖 Joint Army-Marine force continues to occupy until camp is abandoned the day after Westmoreland changes command.
- 📖 NV and war opponents exploit propaganda value of flip-flop, raising further questions back home about the conduct of the war.



# The Tet Offensive

- 📖 US attention focused on Khe Sahn.
- 📖 Jan. 31, 1968 estimated 85k NVA and VC launch attacks throughout SV.
  - Sought max psychological impact by attacking political centers, including Saigon, Hue, and US Embassy.
  - Sought to incite a general uprising among RVN populace.
  - Achieve strategic and tactical surprise by attacking during Lunar New Year, when many RVN and US troops on leave, reduced alert, etc.
- 📖 US/SV win tactical victories, but North (with help of media) achieves strategic victory.
  - Viet Cong losses are so great that it is not a factor for remainder of war, but...
  - Johnson has been assuring US public that victory is in sight.
  - After Tet, public believes war will go on indefinitely.
- 📖 March: Johnson announces end to bombing N of 20<sup>th</sup> parallel and that he will not seek re-election.





# Details of Tet

- 📁 Began on January 30, 1968
- 📁 Attacked virtually every major town and city in South Vietnam, including Saigon
- 📁 Largest battle of Tet was at Hue, a holy city to the SV- Bloodiest single battle of the war
- 📁 Thousands of civilians are executed by VC in Hue
- 📁 Americans lose 1000 soldiers. 363 SV and the VC/NVA lose over 5,000!





# The Effects of the Tet Offensive

- 📄 Demoralizing to US
  - Clark Clifford: “We seem to have a sinkhole.”
- 📄 Diminished President’s will to fight
- 📄 The President said he was willing to seek peace talks
- 📄 Led public to believe the fight was unwinnable
- 📄 General Westmoreland is replaced
- 📄 The turning point of the war



# Gen Giap on Tet

 *The Tet Offensive is a long story. ... It was our policy, drawn up by Ho Chi Minh, to make the Americans quit. Not to exterminate all Americans in Vietnam, [but] to defeat them.*

 *And [after Tet] the Americans had to back down and come to the negotiating table, because the war was not only moving into the cities, to dozens of cities and towns in South Vietnam, but also to the living rooms of Americans back home for some time. And that's why we could claim the achievement of the objective.*



# President Johnson

- 📄 No formal declaration of war created problems
  - Could not mobilize all forces
  - Allowed for numerous deferments
  - Failed to get Allies to join with us
  - Forced to offer one year enlistments
  - By the end of the war over 2.15 million will have served in Vietnam
  - What happened to Grandma's nightshirt?



# The War Comes Home

- 📄 Tet shocked the American public
- 📄 Presidential approval ratings plummet
- 📄 Kennedy and McCarthy enter the presidential race as “Dove” candidates
- 📄 LBJ withdraws from the race
- 📄 MLK assassinated
- 📄 Democratic Convention in Chicago





# 1968 Democratic National Convention

- 📁 Chicago Seven organize the riot that takes place outside the convention.
- 📁 Major violence took place
- 📁 Even though hundreds were arrested all convictions were overturned on appeal
- 📁 Republican Candidate Richard Nixon wins the election!



# Legacy of the War

## Section 5





# 1968



- 📖 Peace talks begin in Paris.
- 📖 My Lai: Lt. Wm. Calley orders the extermination of a village- 200 RVN civilians killed by USA platoon
- 📖 June: announced 25k troop reduction (reduction from 540k) is balanced by promises to increase aid to RVN and bombing of NV by US
- 📖 Nixon elected and promises he has a plan to end the war
- 📖 “Vietnamization” policy seeks to turn fighting over to South Vietnamese.
  - US commanders instructed to minimize casualties.



# Vietnamization



- Gradual withdrawal of troops
- ARVN to take a more active role militarily
- Over the next three years troop numbers are reduced from 500,000 to 25,000
- Nixon Administration is seeking “Peace with Honor”
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLhZryqKVZM&noredirect=1>

# 1969-70

- 📖 US and ARVN forces invade Cambodia April 30, 1970 to attack NVA staging areas.
- 📖 US planes bomb Cambodia and Laos to cut off Ho Chi Minh trail.
- 📖 Anti-war protests increase on campuses across the country
  - 4 students killed at Kent State
  - 2 killed at all Jackson State
- 📖 Congress repeals Gulf of Tonkin Resolution Dec. 31, 1970
- 📖 Pentagon Papers are released
  - Relates that the government lied about winning the war. The war is un-winnable



# The End

- 📖 March 1972- Massive NV attack on the South
- 📖 Christmas Bombings
- 📖 Henry Kissinger seeks peace
- 📖 Peace treaty signed on Jan. 27, 1973.
  - US would withdraw all forces.
  - NV would repatriate all POWs.
- 📖 Fighting resumes in 1974.
  - US drastically cuts aid in August. Congress will not allow further military involvement
- 📖 April 1975 Operation FREQUENT WIND evacuates remaining US and many Vietnamese from Saigon as it falls to NVA.
  - Last helo lifts remaining Marines from the embassy roof on April 30, 1975.



# The Legacy of Vietnam

## Costs of the war

- 58,000 American soldiers killed. Over 303,000 injured
- 15% of Americans who served developed PTSD
- 3-5 million Vietnamese Killed!
- Cost to the US \$170 Billion
- An end to many of the Great Society programs
- Questions about MIA's and POW's
- Draft was abolished
- Curbing of Presidential powers in terms of war
- War diminished Americans faith in their government
- Parade given to Vietnam veterans in 1981
- Vietnam Memorial displayed in Washington D.C.



# Issues to Consider

 US attempts to fight war of attrition while NVA/VC fight maneuver-style campaign.

- Is an attrition strategy the best way to fight a limited war?

*When (he) remarked to a North Vietnamese colonel that American troops had never lost a major battle in Vietnam, his counterpart replied, "That may be so, but it is also irrelevant."*

 Strategic considerations of civilian populace.

- Vietnamese Refugees- Boat People
- Cambodia the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot- 1 million killed!

Vietnam Retrospective on my website

