

Vietnam War Research

Other info about the war

- A.k.a. "Second Indochina War" or "Resistance War Against America"
- 1/11/1955 - 1975 (fall of Saigon to communist forces)
- North Vietnam + Viet Kong (Southern allies) against South Vietnam + US
- Up to 500,000 US military troops involved in the war at a given time
- President Nixon ordered the withdrawal of US forces in 1973
- There was strong opposition to the war in the US

Causes of the war

- Rise of Ho Chi Minh in North Vietnam and his Viet Minh (League for the Independence of Vietnam) communist party
- Japan had occupied Vietnam during WWII, and the French had a colonial system set up in Vietnam
 - The Viet Minh fought against the Japanese and the French colonialists
 - Vietnam became independent when Japan withdrew its forces in 1955
 - The Emperor Bao Dai (educated and supported by the French) in power when Vietnam became independent got overthrown by the Viet Minh, who declared the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) with Ho as president
 - Capital at Hanoi
- France supported Bao Dai in order to regain the land lost to the DRV
 - It set up Vietnam (South Vietnam) and had armed conflict against the DRV
 - Capital at Saigon
 - It lost a decisive battle at Dien Bien Phu (1954) against the North Vietnamese
 - Vietnam became split along the 17th parallel
 - North and South Vietnam agreed to have a vote to reunify in 1956
- Before the vote in 1956, Ngo Dinh Diem was elected leader of South Vietnam
 - South Vietnamese became the Government of the Republic of Vietnam (GVN)
 - Ngo Dinh Diem was strongly anti-communist
- The US supported Diem and South Vietnam because of its anti-communist stance in the Cold War
 - After the creation of the NLF, the U.S. increased US troops to South Vietnam (9,000 by 1962)
- Diem began to persecute communist supporters in South Vietnam (vietcongs)
 - 100,000 people were arrested by him in South Vietnam, many of whom were executed
 - In retaliation, the National Liberation Front (NLF) was formed by dissenters of Diem's harsh regime, including communists and non-communists alike
 - The US was concerned that it might be a communist-backed organization led by North Vietnam, even though the NLF declared themselves as anonymous
- Diem was assassinated in 1963 (shortly before Kennedy's assassination)

- The instability in South Vietnam after this allowed the US to have stronger support for the South Vietnamese, and US aid to Vietnam increased
- North Vietnam also torpedoed two American ships, making the US even more anti-North Vietnam
 - This led the US to retaliate by bombing Vietnam
- In 3/1965, Johnson authorized the US military to fight in Vietnam
 - Many Americans supported this action
 - Originally had 82,000 troops, 200,000 more given in the next two years
 - US-South Vietnamese troops generally fought on the ground
- South Korea, Thailand, Australia, and New Zealand also gave troops to South Vietnam to help them the American and South Vietnamese troops against communism
- The war strategy was very brutal
 - The main war strategy was to kill as many enemy troops as possible rather than to achieve a certain objective (strategy of attrition, weakening enemy as much as possible)
 - There were many civilians killed in heavy bombing raids
 - Some areas were evacuated of citizens and considered “fire-free zones,” in which both sides ruthlessly killed each other
- North Vietnam and the DRV, supported by China, refused to surrender
- US citizens began to lose confidence in the war, believing that it was “supporting a corrupt dictatorship in Saigon” and that the US was not truly winning the war like the government claimed
 - This was due to the media that portrayed terrible scenes from the war
 - This led to the protest of 35,000 people outside the Pentagon
- The largest anti-war protest in American history happened against the Vietnam War on November 15, 1969
 - Over 250,000 Americans protested peacefully in Washington DC
 - This split anti-war and pro-government advocates
- There was a high rate of desertion and “draft dodging,” especially near the end of the war
 - This ended when Nixon introduced an “all-volunteer” army, removing the draft in 1972
- The US and South Vietnam invaded Cambodia and Laos to try to get rid of North Vietnamese troops there
 - This broke international law and sparked strong conflict
- After another failed round of North Vietnamese attacks against the South Vietnamese and another attempt at peace talks, the US bombed North Vietnam again in the “Christmas bombings”

Vietcong

- Literally meant “Vietnamese Communist” — North Vietnamese sympathizers in the South
 - Originally used by the South Vietnamese leader to belittle the vietcongs
- They were guerrilla troops that fought against the South Vietnamese in South Vietnam with the support of North Vietnam
 - Their focus was to overthrow the democratic government of the South Vietnamese and reunify the nation (as a communist nation)

- They were connected to North Vietnam with the Ho Chi Minh Trail (through Laos and Cambodia)
 - This trail was as a result a target of the bombing of Operation Rolling Thunder
- It formed the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) against the South Vietnamese government

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

- August 7th, 1964
 - Happened shortly after the assassination of Diem and the torpedoing of US ships by North Vietnam
- This resolution gave the US “broad war-making powers” in Vietnam
 - Johnson commenced Operation Rolling Thunder the next year
- Critics (especially in hindsight) view this as Johnson misleading Congress into an expansion of the war effort

Vietnamization

- Happened when the Vietnam war was already largely unpopular
- Nixon began to hand over military control of the war to South Vietnam and end US involvement to appease the Americans
 - This included “a program of withdrawing troops, increasing aerial and artillery bombardment and giving South Vietnamese control over ground operations”

Kent State U protest

- Protests at Kent State University and Jackson State University were strong student responses to government invasion of Cambodia and Laos (against international law)
 - These were some of the strongest and most violent riots in America during the Vietnam War
 - Together six students were killed in the riots

Operation Rolling Thunder and Agent Orange

- Operation Rolling Thunder (1965-1968) happened after the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution
 - It was a bombing campaign of North Vietnam by the US
 - It was meant to weaken the North Vietnamese against the South Vietnamese
 - It was the first major US military involvement in the Vietnam War
 - It failed to achieve its purpose of dissuading the North Vietnamese from communism
 - This was largely due to the anti-air missile systems that the North Vietnamese had installed (with the help of the Chinese), taking down hundreds of American planes
 - Unexploded bombs from Operation Rolling Thunder has killed tens of thousands of Vietnamese after the war
 - It was ended in 1968 by Johnson in order to attempt peace talks with North Vietnam, but after those failed Nixon began Operation Linebacker, another bombing project on North Vietnam

- Agent Orange was a harmful herbicide sprayed in North Vietnam forests
 - It was used to destroy North Vietnamese crops and forest cover (to unveil their troops)
 - Over 19,000,000 gallons were sprayed over 4,500,000 acres of land
 - It had harmful health effects not only for the plants but for Americans and Vietnamese soldiers and civilians

Tet Offensive

- The North Vietnamese were growing impatient about the lack of progress and launched the Tet Offensive
 - This included fierce attacks on 100 South Vietnamese cities with 70,000 DRV troops
 - This took the Americans by surprise, but they were able to recover and strike back, taking back all of the cities
- The Tet Offensive caused the US citizens to lose even more hope in the war, causing President Johnson's popularity to drop
 - As a result, Johnson decided to take out many of the troops from Vietnam after that and seek peace in Vietnam
 - This led to the beginning of peace talks with North Vietnam

My Lai Massacre

- The US had massacred 400-500 civilians at the village of My Lai
 - My Lai was believed to be a Viet Cong stronghold, and the Americans were ordered to destroy the village
 - However, when the Americans arrived, only civilians were found, but they were still all killed
- It was covered up by the military until soldier Ron Ridenhour began a campaign to bring light to it
 - The covering up of this horrific act only sparked more outrage by the American citizens
- Of the 14 officers committed for war crimes at My Lai, only 1 was convicted
- This gave stronger support to anti-war advocates thought that the US involvement in the war was violent and corrupt

Pentagon Papers

- The Pentagon Papers were a secret report of the status of the Vietnam War by the Department of Defense
 - It was the military history in Vietnam from 1945 to 1967, prepared for Secretary of Defense McNamara in 1967
 - It included 47 volumes of 3,000 pages of narrative and 4,000 pages of supporting documents
- Daniel Ellsberg, a military analyst, was anti-war and decided to secretly have the NYTimes publish it
 - Ellsberg worked on the report and believed that the US would not win the war and that the information on the war should be made open to the public

- The government tried to stop the publication for the reason of national security but lost a Supreme Court ruling against the publishers
- The Papers revealed that all of the presidents since Truman had misled the public about the degree of involvement in Vietnam
 - This only increased the Americans' anti-war suspicion and pleading
- Ellsberg was almost convicted of criminal charges against the government but the trial involved a burglary of Ellsberg's office

How the war ended/outcomes of the war

- The US ended hostilities toward North Vietnam in 1973
 - However, the war between North and South Vietnam continued until April 30, 1975, when Saigon fell to North Vietnam
- Over 3 million people killed
 - 58,000 Americans killed
 - 2 million Vietnamese civilians killed
- 3 million Vietnamese were wounded, 12 million became refugees
- Saigon fell to the communists, who had lost US support with Vietnamization
 - A year later the country was reunited as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam
 - However, there was still internal violence and conflict with China and Cambodia
 - Reconstruction was slow but was aided by a free-market economy
- > 500,000 of the American forces involved in Vietnam suffered from PTSD
- \$120 billion was spent by the US on the war
 - This was made worse because of an oil crisis in 1973
 - This caused massive inflation and extremely high fuel prices

Sources

- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Viet-Cong>
- <http://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war>
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- <http://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/gulf-of-tonkin-resolution>
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