



OVERVIEW
The Vietnam war was a highly significant Cold War conflict which saw the USA get dragged into an old French colonial conflict to try and stop Vietnam becoming communist. They would become involved in nearly 20 years of war which would cost over 50,000 US lives, cost billions of dollars and see the US ultimately humiliated.

It would see all the might and finance and weaponry of the United States become gradually overwhelmed by the stubbornness and ingenuity of communist leader HO CHI MINH's communist fighters combined with the loss of the hearts and minds of people both in Vietnam and in the US.

The conflict would become a nightmare for the US and would dent its confidence throughout the 1970's.

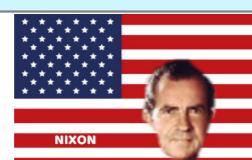


- 1) **HUMILIATION:** The US were undoubtedly humiliated. As a superpower they had been beaten by some of the poorest people on the planet (although with huge Soviet / Chinese assistance) Vietnam would horribly divide American society and damage its confidence for at least a decade. The fall of Saigon in 1972 showed it was never peace with honour. Two weak Presidents and the Watergate scandal also brought despair to US leadership.
- 2) **DETENTE :** The US would be encouraged to undertake a process of detente with the Soviets during the 1970's. They would sign the SALT 1 nuclear weapons treaty and compromise over issues such as Berlin and human rights in the HELSINKI agreements. Vietnam. Encouraged this process.
- 3) **HUMAN COST:** nearly 60,000 American dead and over 250,000 wounded along with deep mental scars for many. The cost for Vietnam was much higher with up to 2 million killed including over 1 million civilians.
- 4) **ECONOMIC COST :** The cost for the US in particular was huge. They had an army of nearly half a million stationed in Vietnam, far away from the US. The war had cost up to \$180 billion and this could have been spent on dealing with America's many social issues.
- 5) **FAILURE OF CONTAINMENT:** this time the US had failed in their task of preventing communism spreading. In fact many argue that it actually encouraged it. Countries like Laos and Cambodia soon became communist and Vietnam as a whole became united and communist in 1975.
- 6) **SOVIET WEAKNESSES:** the Vietnam war did not lead to a surge of soviet domination in Asia as many had predicted. Different countries had different versions of communism and in reality the USSR were on tense terms with the Vietnamese and the chinese. They would get their own 'vietnam' in the form of Afghanistan.



KEY STEPS

- 1) **TET OFFENSIVE :** Despite the huge military build up in Vietnam the U.S. and South Vietnam were caught off guard by a huge VIETCONG attack on the Vietnamese new year holiday of TET in January 1968. The VIETCONG got as far as SAIGON- the capital city of South Vietnam. They were then driven back with heavy losses but the damage had been done.
- 2) It was clear to American civilians that the war could not be won.
- 3) **PRESIDENT JOHNSON** was under huge pressure. There were major civil rights protests in America and many others protested over the Vietnam war - especially the young. Many young people burnt their draft cards or left for Canada
- 4) President Johnson faced so much opposition he didn't run for office again. Instead in 1968 PRESIDENT NIXON took over. Nixon took over the promise of achieving 'PEACE WITH HONOUR' in Vietnam.
- 5) He started a policy of VIETNAMISATION - this was training the South Vietnamese army to take over the fighting. The U.S. army would be gradually withdrawn
- 6) In 1973 a PEACE TREATY was signed in PARIS: the remaining US troops left Vietnam and American Prisoners of War were released.
- 7) Nixons ' peace with honour' last only 2 years. By 1975 ALL of Vietnam had become Communist...



KEY EVENTS

- 1) Vietnam had been called INDOCHINA & had been a FRENCH COLONY up until World War 2
- 2) During the war it had been occupied by the JAPANESE
- 3) Following the war the FRENCH wanted to retake Vietnam. HOWEVER, Vietnam had its own independence movement called the VIETMINH which was locally based and Communist
- 4) It was led by HO CHI MINH
- 5) The VIETMINH against the odds defeated the FRENCH and aimed to declare Vietnam independent and Communist, though it wanted friendly relations with the USA.
- 6) HOWEVER like in Korea it was agreed to SPLIT VIETNAM along the 17th parallel
- 7) The NORTH was Communist led by HO CHI MINH
- 8) The SOUTH was ruled by a capitalist DICTATORSHIP led by DIEM
- 9) The USA deeply feared that Vietnam would fall to Communism. They feared this would lead to a DOMINO EFFECT with countries like Cambodia, Laos, Thailand etc falling next.
- 10) In the 1950's PRESIDENT EISENHOWER, gave MONEY, WEAPONS and 'MILITARY ADVISORS' (soldiers) to South Vietnam
- 11) PRESIDENT KENNEDY continued this support .. Sending 16,000 'advisors' by 1964



EISENHOWER

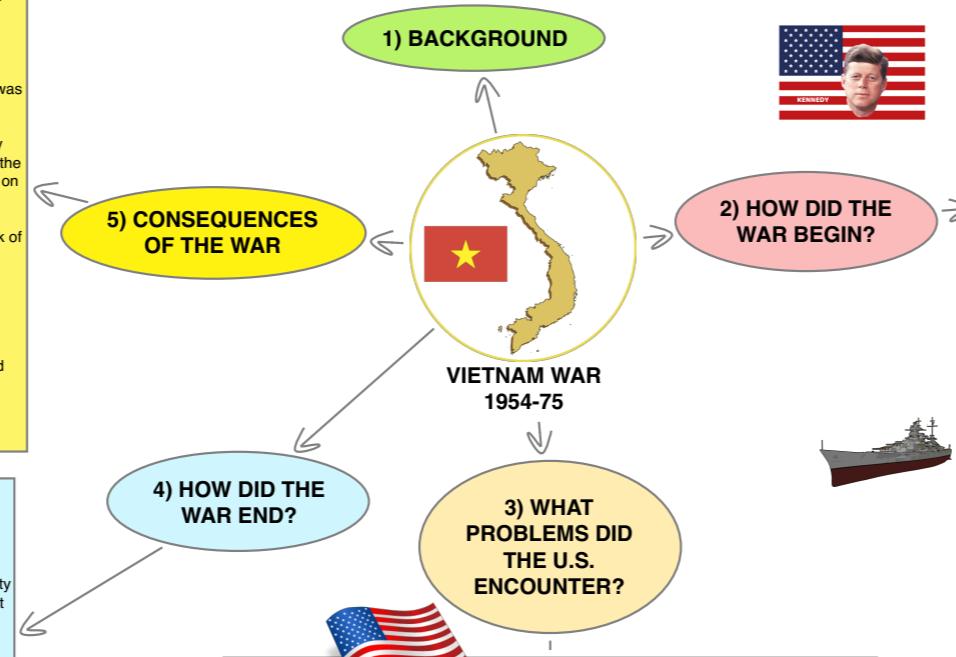


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KEY STEPS TO WAR:

- 1) As in Korea, the division in the country was only meant to be temporary until a solution could be found. Elections were meant to take place to decide the future. However, the South feared a vote favouring communism. Therefore no vote ever took place and both sides aimed to reunify Vietnam under communism or capitalism
- 2) **SOUTH VIETNAM** was CAPITALIST but NOT a democracy. It was corrupt and unpopular. DIEM was a dictator. He had the support of Catholic landowners who owned most of Vietnam's land. The majority of the people there were poor BUDDHIST farmers.
- 3) THE VIETCONG were an armed Communist group set up in South Vietnam and controlled by HO CHI MINH. They wanted to UNITE Vietnam under a COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT . They were popular among poor South Vietnamese farmers and the Buddhist population who resented Diem's regime.
- 4) The Vietcong set about attacking South Vietnamese soldiers in a series of attacks.
- 5) DIEM was ASSASSINATED in 1963
- 6) In 1964 the TONKIN INCIDENT took place: this was when a U.S. warship (USS MADDOX) was supposedly attacked by a North Vietnamese gunboat in the Gulf of Tonkin.
- 7) The U.S. PRESIDENT, Lyndon Baines JOHNSON (LBJ) used the attack as an excuse to massively increase the American military in Vietnam. He was determined to control the country and sent in over 500,000 U.S. troops. This became known as THE TONKIN RESOLUTION. It massively increased U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war.



KEY POINTS

- 1) The U.S. UNDERESTIMATED their opponents. The U.S. were by far the most militarily capable with hi tech weaponry and a well financed military. However, the VIETCONG and VIETMINH were fighting in their own country and with their own people. They were very difficult to defeat.
- 2) The VIETCONG were a GUERRILLA ARMY- this meant they did not wear uniforms or fight face to face. Instead they favoured using the jungle and organising raids against American forces. They used sophisticated TUNNEL networks to live and survive. This also helped them get behind enemy lines, confusing American forces.
- 3) Many of the U.S. forces were YOUNG, INEXPERIENCED CONSCRIPTS. There was ill discipline, drug use and many were unmotivated to fight and confused and angry about Vietcong guerrilla tactics.
- 4) U.S. PUBLIC OPINION turned against the war. People were horrified about the death toll and high level of US casualties. TELEVISION was becoming hugely popular and showed people the death and destruction. Well organised campaigns demonstrated against the war including support from celebrities like Muhammad Ali. People burnt their DRAFT CARDS (which called them up for war).
- 5) HIGH PROFILE WAR CRIMES such as the MY LAI MASSACRE of 350 Vietnamese civilians lost the hearts and minds of the people in the USA.
- 6) They also lost the HEARTS AND MINDS of the South Vietnamese who were very angry at constant American patrols and indiscriminate bombs and shootings. The use of horrific weapons like NAPALM - liquid petroleum (which caused horrific deaths) and AGENT ORANGE a highly toxic chemical used to destroy the jungle but also causing disease and hunger through destroying crops.



KEY PEOPLE IN THE VIETNAM WAR



HO CHI MINH (Vietnamese communist leader)



HO DIEM
South Vietnamese pro US leader

VIETMINH - North Vietnamese Communist forces

VIETCONG - US nickname for Communists in South Vietnam