

THE VIETNAM WAR

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~ ~ TIMELINE ~ ~

1946 – Start of the war between Ho Chi Minh's Vietnamese nationalists and French colonial troops.

1954 – Vietnamese communists defeat the French. The country is divided into North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

1961 – South Vietnamese ask for military advice from the US to combat Viet Cong guerrillas.

1963 – South Vietnamese government is overthrown. Viet Cong increase their activities.

1964 – War breaks out between North Vietnam (backed by the Soviets) and South Vietnam (backed by the US).

1965 – The US sends combat troops to South Vietnam.

1966 – Australian troops arrive in Vietnam to fight with the Americans. The first antiwar demonstrations take place in US

1967 – First efforts are made toward peace, but they fail. Antiwar demonstrations increase and spread to other countries.

1968 – North Vietnamese & Viet Cong launch the Tet offensive against the South.

1969 – US withdraws 25,000 of its 540,000 troops. The fighting, and the antiwar protests, continues.

1970 – US invades Cambodia to support an anticommunist government & prevent supplies from reach North Vietnam.

1971 – Fighting spreads to Laos.

1972 – Peace talks begin again.

1973 – Cease-fire is agreed and the US withdraws its troops. Vietnamese continue to fight.

1975 – Communists take control of the whole of Vietnam.

1976 – Vietnam is reunited under a communist government.



Vietnam, together with Cambodia and Laos, was part of the French colony of Indochina. It was occupied by the Japanese in World War II and during this time the Viet Minh league, led by the communist Ho Chi Minh, declared Vietnam independent.



After World War II, France refused to recognize Ho Chi Minh's government and war broke out between the French and Vietnamese. This war ended in defeat for the French at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. An international agreement then divided Vietnam into communist North and noncommunist South.

Almost immediately civil war broke out between the two countries. From 1959, communist guerrillas in the South, known as the Viet Cong, were helped by North Vietnam. The US, worried about the spread of communism, sent military aid to help the South Vietnamese. As the conflict escalated, the US began sending troops to help the South from 1965. The Viet Cong's guerrilla tactics made it very difficult to defeat them. In an attempt to cut off their supply lines, US planes began bombing North Vietnam. At the same time, whole villages in the south and vast areas of forest were sprayed with chemicals to destroy the Viet Cong hiding places.

By 1966, antiwar demonstrations had begun and in 1968, the Viet Cong's major Tet offensive on the South convinced Americans that the war could not be won. In 1969 the US began to withdraw its troops and a cease-fire was agreed upon in 1973. Fighting continued until 1975, when the North brought the South under its control.

Viet Cong soldiers used guerrilla warfare to defeat the enemy. One tactic was to dig a maze of secret tunnels. More than 16,000 soldiers lived underground, attacking US troops from their hiding place. US soldiers were expecting to fight a traditional war, with large scale battles between two sides. They had to adapt to the Viet Cong's guerrilla tactics using small groups to mount surprise attacks.

The Vietnam War was the first to be covered on television. People through the world, but especially in the U.S. were able to see events as they happened. As growing numbers of troops were killed or injured and large parts of Vietnam destroyed, people took to the streets in protest. By 1967, the protests had spread beyond the U.S. and the strength of antiwar feeling helped persuade President Nixon to withdraw from the war.

From the Vietnam War reading, answer the following questions:

1. What European nation had colonized Vietnam?
2. When was Vietnam divided into two nations?
3. The communist Soviet Union backed _____ Vietnam in the war.
The United States backed _____ Vietnam war.
4. Why did the United States back the South Vietnamese?
5. What North Vietnamese (Viet Cong) tactics made it difficult for U.S. troops to defeat them?
6. What popular invention "brought the war into America's living rooms"?
7. What was the significance of television in the Vietnam War?
8. How did the war end?
9. In what year were North and South Vietnam reunited under one government?
10. What type of government does Vietnam now have?