

Notes from Viet Nam: The War that Divided America
#1 Early Involvement

1
-- During WWII Japan occupies Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh, a nationalist leader and later the communist leader of North Vietnam, fights against the Japanese and is supported in his efforts by the United States. Ho's forces, the Viet Minh, help defeat the Japanese in 1945. However, they are not given a share of the power in postwar Indo-China. France, the country that had controlled Viet Nam since the 19th century reasserted its power and reoccupied Vietnam. Ho and the Viet Minh begin a guerilla war against the French colonialists. 1st Indochina war begins 1946-1954

--- 1949 Bao Dai, the former Emporer of Vietnam is asked to return to power as the President of the Associated States of Indochina, which includes the countries in the French sphere of influence, Laos, Cambodia and the southern part of Vietnam.

--- Harry Truman authorized the spending of 10 million in direct military aid to South Vietnam

2
--- From 1950 to 1954 the U.S. supported virtually the entire French war effort against Ho's forces. The U.S. sends planes and tanks.

--- 1954 200 Americans are in Vietnam as advisors

--- Eisenhower states Domino Theory: If one country in a region is allowed to fall to communism it is only a matter of time before the other countries in the region fall as well, like dominos.

Eisenhower supports a stand against the communists in Vietnam based on the theory.

--- U. S. support for the French does not insure victory. The French cannot trust their So. Vietnamese allies. Many are disloyal. Others defect to the Viet Minh.

--- The Viet Minh are extremely allusive. The French find it difficult to engage the enemy under conditions favorable to them. They are constantly being ambushed. They attempt to draw the enemy out at Dien Bien Phu by reenforcing the garrison there. The strategy works. After 56 days of fighting the French are beaten in Vietnam.

3
--- 1954 the Geneva conferencé decides to split Vietnam along the 17th parallel with the communists controlling the north under Ho and the anticommunists under Dai in control in the south. Elections in 1956 are planned to unify Vietnam. Both Ho and Dai think they are the rightful ruler of all Vietnam.

--- Ngo Dinh Diem is given the post of Prime Minister in South Vietnam with the support of the U.S..

--- Jan. 1955 U.S. agrees to funnel funds directly to the Saigon government and not through the French. We also agree to train So. Vietnamese armed forces.

--- Diem names himself dictator. There is a vote... But it is a joke. nobody gets 98% of the vote. Diem has little popular support. Ho does have support in the north.

--- The French get the heck out of the Vietnamese quagmire.

4
--- The U.S. steps further into the Vietnamese quagmire. Somebody needs to sink in Vietnam.

--- 1956 election year with no elections. Diem, with Ike's support cancels them. If you can't beat 'em don't run.

--- 1960 Diem's government is challenged by the National

Liberation Front. This is the communist movement in So. Viet Nam. Its military arm is known as the Viet Cong. The Viet Cong want U.S. to get out, the reunification of Viet Nam and the over throw of Diem.

- 5
- War is stepped up to counter Viet Cong efforts.
 - Kennedy 1961 agrees to increase American aid.
 - Dec. 11 1961 helicopter and ground crews arrive in Saigon. American forces in Vietnam now number 1500. The growing U. S. involvement is kept secret because it violates the Geneva agreements.
 - 1962 & '63 U. S. sends alot of Huey's to Viet Nam.
 - 1963 6000 Americans are in the quagmire. Many are assigned to lead So. Vietnamse forces in combat. Some die.
 - 1963 63% of Americans pay little or no attention to Vietnam.
 - Kennedy's actions limited the actions of those who came after him.

#2 U.S. Escalation

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- In June 1963 a 73 year old Buddhist monk burns himself in protest of the Diem government. A number of other Buddhists join in the festivities. The Buddhists form a substantial portion of Viet Nam. They oppose Diem because he is a Cathloc and his sister - in - law ridicules them. He also loses support because of his policies that place peasants behind enclosures.
 - Nov. 1963 a coup, sanctioned by the U.S. government overthrows Diem and then kills him and his brother.
 - Diem is followed by a half a dozen really lousy rulers in Vietnam.
- 7
- Truman ---- Kennedy "Limited Invlvement" U.S. refuses to commit to all out war or a pull out. For too long both options were put aside in favor of the untenable middle road.
 - 1964 22,000 U. S. advisors are in Vietnam. U. S. spends 2 million daily in the conflict.
 - 1964 activity on the Ho Chi Minh trail increases.
 - August 4, 1964 two U.S. destroyers are attacked? in the Gulf of Tonkin. There was no damage and no injuries. The U. S. responds by bombing No. Vietnamese petroleum and naval facilities. 64 raids. Destroyers are called Maddox and Seaturner Joy
 - Was attack an error in radar reading? Trumped up? Why were the destroyers there anyway?
 - 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution is adopted almost unanimously by the congress. It authorized Johnson to take any measure to repel attacks against U. S. troops. American personnel continue to go on patrols with the So. Vietnamese
- 8
- 1964 Johnson wins 64 election by a huge margin. He could have deescalated the conflict but he chose not to.
 - Feb. 7, 1965 8 Americans are killed 20 aircraft are damaged or destroyed at Plai Khu.
 - Americans retaliate with air raids against the north.
 - Operation Rolling Thunder is adopted: the systematic and continuous bombing of No. Vietnam
 - Early March 1965 American ground troops land at Da Nang without a declaration of war o. ked by the congress.
 - April 1965 56,000 Americans are in Vietnam, 23,000 advisors,

33,000 combat troops.

--- Johnson did not seek a declaration of war because: neither the cause nor the aims in the war were clear enough to warrant one; he feared a declaration might provoke Russia or China; he feared that it would divert attention away from his domestic policies-- The Great Society

--- Public opinion polls were behind Johnson

9 --- June 65 Thieu and Ki, military leaders assume power in So. Vietnam. A civilian government is no longer viable in the country.

--- June 65 Dong Quay So. Vietnamese troops are routed. American disenchantment with the performance of the So. Vietnamese grows.

--- July 65 75,000 Americans are in the quagmire. Johnson claimed that the increase in numbers did not mean a change in U. S. policy. The Americans were there to protect American installations and interests. The So. Vietnamese armies were to undertake all offensive actions.

--- Fall 65 large increase in the number of American troops. By end of 67 U.S. troop strength is 500,000 men. The U.S. is doing most of the fighting by now. 1965 1000 U.S. casualties 1967 12,000 casualties.

10 --- Opposition to the war grows at home partially because of the draft that had been required by the increase in American troop strength. Large demonstrations are marked by draft card burning youths. Most of the nation saw the demonstrations as outrageous, being carried on by greasy haired young rebels. Flag burning and draft dodging is unacceptable to many Americans. Later many people are persuaded that the war is immoral and cruel. Why? (1) Defoliation and destruction of agriculture (2) napalm burned bodies (3) tortured prisoners (4) search and destroy missions left villages burned out and millions of refugees in the countryside.

--- 1968 the war is deadlocked. American efforts produce only death and destruction on both sides. There seem to always be fresh No. Vietnamese troops.

--- American troops do not hold territory that they gain. They seek out the enemy and the enemy resists but then vanishes into the jungles. The battle lines are unclear and the guerilla warfare tactics used by the Viet Cong is frustrating and confusing.

--- Meanwhile back home in the U.S. the Hawks and the Doves are further apart than ever.

#3 Reaction Back Home

Jan. 30 1968 - The North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong launched a massive attack on virtually every city and town in South Vietnam, including 3/4 of all the 11 district capitals and on American army bases. The attack occurs during a holiday called Tet and is known as the Tet offensive. The Tet offensive was a military failure for the communists. However, the sight of the V.C. at the American embassy at Saigon (it took six hours for U.S. soldiers to repel them) had a distinct negative psychological impact upon the American psyche. Most Americans thought we were winning the war at this point. That is what the government had said. Tet proved this wrong and weakened America's resolve to fight.

After Tet, Johnson's popularity dropped sharply. He was caught between those who wanted to win the war and those who wanted us to get out. Johnson nearly loses to the peacenik Eugene McCarthy in an early primary in New Hampshire. What to do? What to do?

Johnson orders a halt to the bombing in North Vietnam and asks North Vietnam to come to the peace table. He also says he doesn't want to be President any longer. One of the most prolific presidents in terms of domestic policy was destroyed by a war 10,000 miles away.

May - Dec. 1968. While peace talks are going on 8000 Americans are killed in Vietnam.

Nov. 1968, Richard Nixon is elected president promising to bring an end to the misery in South East Asia.

Peace talks continue... so does the killing

Nixon announces policy of Peace with Honor. This is the idea that the U.S. should get out of Vietnam but without being embarrassed. Nixon hasn't given up on the idea of a free, independent South Vietnam.

1969, Nixon's policy for peace with honor becomes more clear. It is in three parts:

1. Bomb the heck out of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong.
2. Continue vigorous peace talks. Henry Kissinger, his Secretary of State is in charge.
3. Vietnamization: get the South Vietnamese army to fight their own war.

July 1969, Americans begin to pull out of Vietnam

Unrest in the United States grows by 1970-71. Why?
1) America isn't fighting to win but simply to survive. 2) War is seen as immoral and cruel. American soldiers are seen as beasts for killing civilians in Vietnam. In 1968 details of the My Lai