

The Vietnam War and its Four Stages of Conflict



The Living Room War

TIMELINE

- 
- **1946 The first Vietnam War begins**
 - France attempts to reassert its imperial control over Vietnam
 - Vietnamese nationalists led by Ho Chi Minh
 - **1955-1960 STAGE 1**
 - US begins advisory role in Vietnam
 - Thousands of US military advisors sent to train South Vietnamese army
 - Vietcong Guerilla attacks begin in south
 - **1965-1968 STAGE 3**
 - US begins combat role in Vietnam
 - First official combat troops arrive leading to dramatic escalation of the war
 - January 30, 1968 "Tet Offensive"
 - March 16, 1968 "My Lai Massacre"
 - **1954 Geneva Conference**
 - Ends first Vietnam war and "temporarily" divides the country at the 17th parallel
 - North Vietnam controlled by Ho Chi Minh and communist supporters
 - South Vietnam controlled by Ngo Kinh Diem and democratic supporters (US)
 - **1961-1964 STAGE 2**
 - US begins counterinsurgency role in Vietnam
 - Green Berets sent in and secrete military operations begin
 - November 1, 1963 Diem assassinated in US supported military coup
 - November 22, 1963 JFK assassinated
 - August, 1964 Gulf of Tonkin
 - **1968-1975 STAGE 4**
 - Vietnamization
 - US troop strength decreases slowly
 - Bombing raids stepped up secretly (Cambodia % Laos)
 - Anti war protests increase
 - Woodstock
 - Kent State



- Born Nguyen Sinh Cung, and known as "Uncle Ho," he led the Democratic Republic of Vietnam from 1945-69. Ho embraced communism while living abroad in England and France from 1915-23; in 1919, he petitioned the powers at the Versailles peace talks for equal rights in Indochina. He later moved to Hong Kong, where he founded the Indochinese Communist Party. After adopting the name Ho Chi Minh, or "He Who Enlightens," he returned to Vietnam in 1941 and declared the nation's independence from France. Ho led a nearly continuous war against the French and, later, the Americans until his death in 1969.



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The Language of War: Important terms to keep in mind!!

- **RVN:** Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
- **ARVN:** Army of the Republic of Vietnam (Army of South Vietnam)
- **VIETCONG:** Communist forces fighting the South Vietnamese government
- **VIETMINH:** Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi, or the Vietnamese Independence League
- **CHARLIE, CHARLES, CHUCK:** Vietcong--short for the phonetic representation Victor Charlie
- **SEARCH AND DESTROY:** offensive operations designed to find and destroy enemy forces rather than establish permanent government control; also, called "Zippo missions"
- **FRIENDLY FIRE:** euphemism used during the war in Vietnam to describe air, artillery, or small-arms fire from American forces mistakenly directed at American positions
- **FRAGGING:** assassination of an officer by his own troops, usually by means of a grenade
- **FOR A MORE COMPLETE LISTING OF TERMS GO TO:**
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/refer/language.html>

The First Vietnam War (1946-1954)

- Also known as the First French-Indochina War
- Since the 1860's Vietnam had been considered a colony of France
- During WW II Vietnam was invaded by Japan
 - During this time Ho Chi Minh was actually an ally of the US
- After WW II Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnamese independence (Sept 2, 1945: **Full text:** <http://www.vwip.org/articles/declar01.htm>)
- At this time France made plans to reestablish its imperial control.
- The US, needing France's help in fighting the Cold War in Europe, agreed to ally itself (financially) with France, along with Great Britain and China, in Vietnam



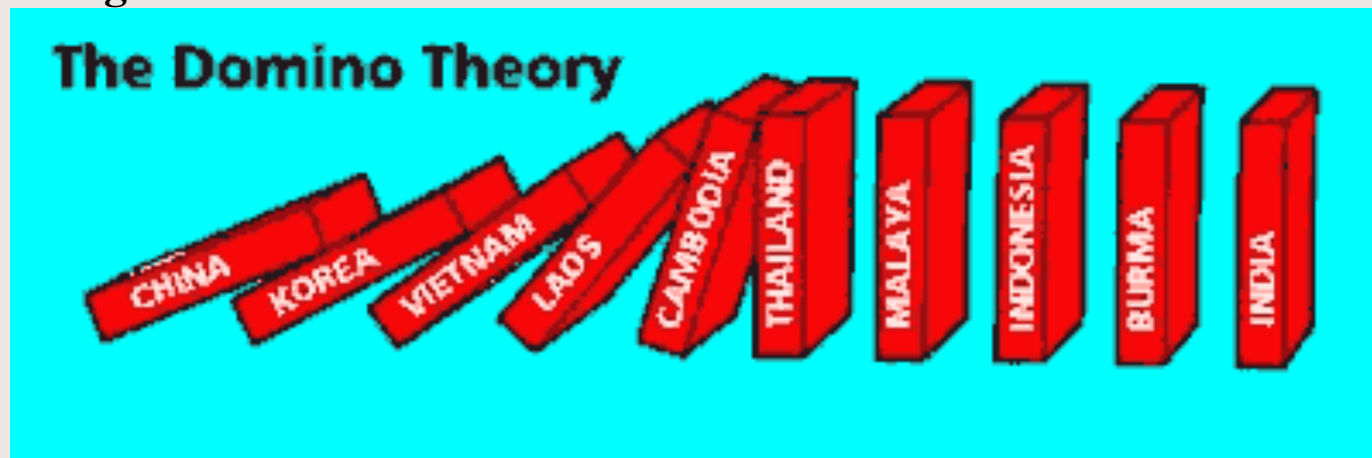
The First Vietnam War (1946-1954)

- By the end of the first war, US military/economic aid accounted for 80% of the total war costs(\$2.6 billion)
- The French, unable to successfully combat the guerilla tactics of the Viet Minh (Ho and his communist supporters), agreed to come to terms at the Geneva Peace Conference (1954)
- As a result, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were given their independence, and Vietnam was temporarily divided at the 17th parallel with country wide elections to be held in two years to choose a government and reunify the country permanently (US backed govt. refused to sign)
- During this time Ho's communist government would control the north while a democratic government under the leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem, chosen and supported by the US, would control the South



Reasons for US Involvement

- There were both public and private reasons for US involvement in Vietnam.
- **PUBLIC REASON**
 - The establishment of the 'Iron Curtain' in Europe after the second World War, the communist take-over of China, the Korean War and the communist victory over the French in Vietnam - all led many Americans to fear that the communists were taking over the world and must be stopped. Many people believed in the '*Domino Theory*', *suggesting that if one Asian country fell to the Communists the others would quickly follow.* **(REASON)** The US government believed that by helping the South Vietnamese government resist the attacks of the communist North they were helping to prevent the spread of communism throughout the world.



Reasons for US Involvement

- **PRIVATE REASONS: Privately, there were several reasons to support war:**
 - It was believed that communist control of all of Southeast Asia would seriously jeopardize US security interests in this area
 - A communist victory would make it extremely difficult to prevent Japan's eventual fall to communism because of its dependence on rice from this area
 - Southeast Asia was (and is) immensely wealthy in raw materials desirable to the US (rice, rubber, coal, iron ore, tin, & petroleum)



STAGE 1: Advisory Role (1955-1960)

- **GOALS:**
 - Make the ARVN (South Vietnamese Army) a model of our military
 - Stabilize the Diem government and gain support in south
 - Combat increasing guerrilla attacks against Diem and his supporters
- **IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS:**
 - Ho seen by US as an international leader of communism(Soviet ally)
 - 1956: Free elections denied by Diem (decision supported by US)
 - 1957-58: The first Vietcong(VC) guerrilla attacks begin in South Vietnam
 - About 2,000 so called “military advisors” are sent to Vietnam (although “officially” only 675)
 - 1960: US drops first bombs of war on VC strongholds in South



Cecil
Dykes

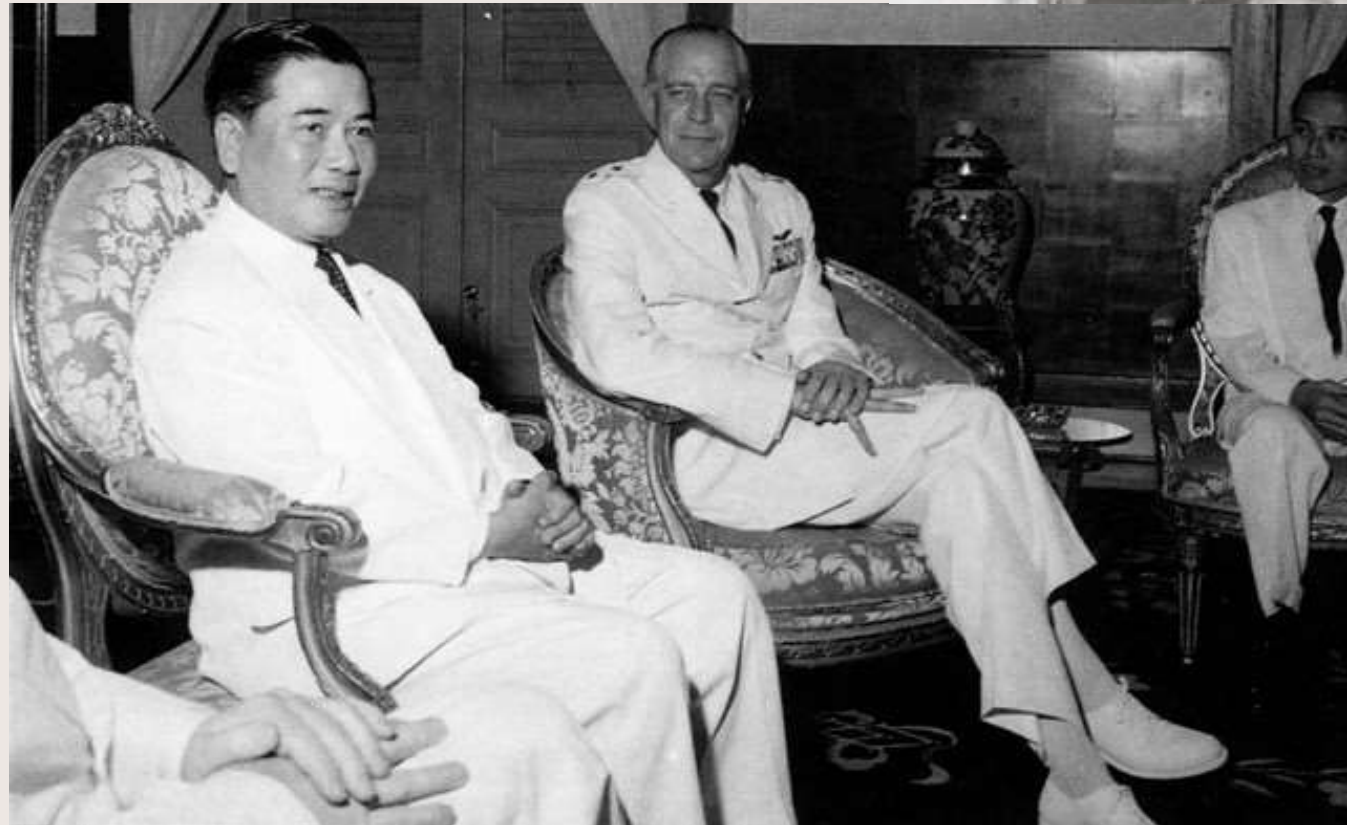
ARVN Scout
Lum

James
Henderson

B Co. 2nd Plt. 1/22 4th Div
LZ Niagara Apr 1970



- After refusing Ho Chi Minh's invitation to join the Communist movement, Ngo Dinh Diem led South Vietnam from 1954 to 1963, when he was killed by his generals in a coup. His autocratic rule, exemplified by the imprisonment and execution of hundreds of Buddhists, and his refusal to institute land reforms probably contributed to increasing popular support for Ho Chi Minh.
- (OBVIOUS & IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES!!) A rich, Catholic landowning president in a predominantly poor, peasant, Buddhist country who ruled like a dictator and refused to give land to the peasants (who were promised land by “Uncle Ho” – who looked and acted like a peasant and promised economic equality.)



STAGE 2: Counterinsurgency Role (1961-1964)

- **GOALS:**

- JFK takes office and vows to continue Eisenhower's Vietnam policies
- Fix the Diem "problem" as his autocratic rule leads to increased demonstrations and opposition in the South
- Use covert operations in North Vietnam to engage in sabotage and light harassment of NVA

- **IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS:**

- VC widen their attacks against ARVN soldiers and raid villages sympathetic to Diem and the US
 - **GUERRILLA TACTICS:**
<http://www.pbs.org/battlefieldvietnam/guerrilla/index.html>
- The # of "military advisors" (now including Green Beret's) increases dramatically to over 16,000. Although there officially to advise and train the ARVN, many participate in combat missions with the ARVN.
- Military aid increases, including American-piloted armed helicopters, to combat VC attacks





NVA/VC Tunnel Complex Basics



Entrance



Inside

STAGE 2: Counterinsurgency Role (1961-1964)

- ***IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS:***
 - Spring, 1963: Buddhist monks demonstrate opposition to Diem by self-immolation (ignoring US demands, he burned their temples and imprisoned those who opposed his rule)
 - Nov 1, 1963: Diem, after losing confidence of Americans and his own people, is assassinated by his own military (supported by US)
 - 21 days later JFK is assassinated in Dallas and LBJ is sworn in as president (**NEWS CLIPS**)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQX4cBV5Kfw>



rage against the machine



Gulf of Tonkin

- August 7, 1964: After N.Vietnam gunboats attacked American warships in the Gulf of Tonkin, Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution giving the president broad war making powers in Vietnam (a so called “blank check” to escalate the war)

**EXCERPTS FROM PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S ADDRESS
TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC
AUGUST 4, 1964
11:37 P.M.**

"My fellow Americans, as President and Commander in Chief, it is my duty to the American people to report that renewed hostile actions against United States ships on the high seas have today required me to order the military forces of the United States to take action in reply.

"The destroyers and supporting aircraft acted at once on the orders I gave after the initial act of aggression. We believe at least two of the attacking boats were sunk. There were no United States losses. The performance of commanders and crews in this engagement is in the highest tradition of the United States Navy.

"But repeated acts of violence against the armed forces of the United States must be met, not only with alert defense, but with positive reply.

"That reply is being given as I speak to you tonight. Air action is now in execution against gunboats and certain supporting facilities in North Vietnam which have been used in these hostile operations.

"The determination of all Americans to carry out our full commitment to the people and to the government of South Vietnam will be redoubled by this outrage. Yet our response for the present will be limited and fitting.

"We Americans know--although others appear to forget--the risk of spreading conflict. We still seek no wider war. I have instructed the Secretary of State to make this position clear to friends and to adversaries, and, indeed, to all.

"I have today met with leaders of both parties in the Congress of the United States and I have informed them that I shall immediately request the Congress to pass a resolution making it clear that our government is united in its determination to take all necessary measures in support of freedom and peace in Southeast Asia.

"I have been given encouraging assurance by those leaders of both parties that such a resolution will be promptly introduced, freely and expeditiously debated, and passed with overwhelming support.

"It is a solemn responsibility to have to order even limited military action by the forces whose over-all strength is as vast and as awesome as those of the United States of America. But it is my considered conviction, shared throughout your government, that firmness in the

STAGE 3: Combat Role (1965-1968)

- **GOALS:**

- Continually bomb North Vietnam to pressure VC to stop attacks
- N.Vietnam (Ho) adopts new “protracted war strategy” intended to bog down and frustrate US military, intended to force a negotiated peace

- **IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS:**

- August, 1965: After the VC attacked two US Army bases LBJ orders the start of Operation Rolling Thunder (lasts 3 yrs.)
- March 8, 1965: The first official US combat troops arrive- Marines **PHOTO JOURNEY OF A MARINE:** <http://www.woodlot.com/vietnam/html/pat1.html>
- As a result, VC target American civilian and military personnel
- March-April: The first NVA combat troops arrive in the south & play limited role helping VC

Operation Rolling Thunder

<http://www.war-stories.com/b52-sqd.htm>





The Famous Ho Chi Minh Trail, Probably Near Ban Ban Laos, 1969



NVA Troops



STAGE 3: Combat Role (1965-1968)

• *GOALS:*

- Dramatic escalation of war intended to combat increased VC/NVA attacks
- Difficulty in determining who the enemy was led the US to begin several “pacification” tactics, including the use of “free-fire zones” and “search and destroy missions”
- Bombing halted in north – not south (March 31, 1968) by LBJ in order to “seek peace” before the end of his term
- 1968: Peace talks begin in Hanoi

• *IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS:*

- US winning major battles but losing war (public being told the US winning the war-almost over)
- Jan 30, 1968: NVA, with help from VC, launch surprise Tet Offensive. Together they attack every southern city at once, including the US Embassy in Saigon (capital of South Vietnam)
- NVA/VC: Lost overall battle but won a psychological victory as TV coverage proves US not really winning the war (credibility gap created)
- March, 1968: My Lai Massacre

Saigon during the war



Tet Offensive



American soldiers during the Tet Offensive



My Lai

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/mylai/mylai.htm>



STAGE 4: Vietnamization (1969-1975)

- **Goals:**
 - Nov 3, 1969: President Nixon adopts the “Vietnamization” program
 - intended to gradually transfer combat operations in Vietnam entirely to the South Vietnamese army
 - Intended to bring the fighting to an “honorable end”
- **IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS:**
 - By 1970, peak American troop levels of 543,400 fell to 334,600
 - Military suffering morale problems, including increased drug abuse and racial tension
 - US expansion of war into Laos and Cambodia leads to increased violent demonstrations on college campuses (EX: Kent State)—Anti-War
 - Slowly (as a result of huge VC casualty rates) the bulk of the fighting in the south shifted from VC guerrilla units to well trained NVA troops between 1969-1970



Kent State Summary

Four Kent State University students were killed and nine were injured on May 4, 1970, when members of the Ohio National Guard opened fire on a crowd gathered to protest the Vietnam War. The tragedy was a watershed moment for a nation divided by the conflict in Southeast Asia.

In its immediate aftermath, a student-led strike forced the temporary closure of colleges and universities across the country. Some political observers believe the events of that day in northeast Ohio tilted public opinion against the war and may have contributed to the downfall of President Richard Nixon.

Kent State



Kent State



Photo © John Filo

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MAY 4 SHOOTINGS?

- Who was responsible for the violence in downtown Kent and on the Kent State campus in the three days prior to May 4th? As an important part of this question, were "outside agitators" primarily responsible? Who was responsible for setting fire to the ROTC building?
- Should the Guard have been called to Kent and Kent State University? Could local law enforcement personnel have handled any situations? Were the Guard properly trained for this type of assignment?
- Would the shootings have been avoided if the rally had not been banned? Did the banning of the rally violate First Amendment rights?
- Who was ultimately responsible for the events of May 4, 1970?

STAGE 4: Vietnamization (1969-1975)

- *IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS:*
 - 1973: Paris Peace Treaty ends war between North Vietnam and the US. The US agrees to pull the rest of its troops out of the south by end of 1973.
 - US tells the south it would continue to supply it with weapons to fight the north after its combat troops were gone – IT LIED!!
 - The treaty is practically the same as the one proposed by the north at the beginning of the talks in 1968 (US, in effect, capitulates)
 - 1975: North Vietnam launches final offensive of war into the south, leading to the fall of Saigon and unification of Vietnam
 - The unification is dictated by force and entirely by the communist north

Why Did America Lose?

America was the most powerful military nation in the world, yet it lost the war in Vietnam to an army of straw-hatted peasants. There are a number of reasons for this:

- **The South Vietnamese government was widely unpopular because of its corruption and failure to introduce land reforms.** This meant the Vietcong had widespread support amongst the ordinary peasants, and the brutal methods used by the Americans to fight the war actually increased that support - they lost the battle for the 'hearts and minds' of the Vietnamese people.
- **The Americans severely under-estimated the Vietcong.** The derogatory names such as 'dink' and 'gook' show this attitude. The Americans were over-confident and didn't take the Vietcong seriously until it was too late.

Why Did America Lose?

- **The American army was trained to fight a conventional war of 'set-piece' battles against large armies where it could bring its superior fire-power to bear.** It had difficulty adapting to the low-scale guerrilla tactics adopted by the Vietcong, which were perfectly suited to the difficult jungle terrain in Vietnam.
- **Vietnam was the first media war - widespread television coverage showing the bloody reality of war undermined support for the war in America, leading to massive anti-war demonstrations and unrest at home.** Deaths of student protesters like those at Ohio University in 1970 sickened many Americans and eventually forced the government to make peace.

Why Did America Lose?

- **The Vietnamese cleverly exploited opposition to the war in America.** The Tet Offensive of 1968 was considered a victory by the Vietnamese, even though they were actually defeated in battle. The television coverage of the massive American casualties convinced many Americans that the war could not be won, and Nixon was elected President on the promise to end the war



1. Which country fought a war in Vietnam just before the United States?

A. England

B. Germany

C. Japan

D. France



2. Which of the following countries IS NOT located in Southeast Asia?


A. Cambodia

B. China

C. Laos


D. Vietnam

E. None




3. Who was the Vietnamese nationalist that became the leader of North Vietnam and the Vietcong during the Vietnam War?

- A. Mao Tse-Tung
- B. Tu Thong
- C. Ho Chi Minh
- D. Ngo Dinh Diem



4. Who was president in 1955 when the US began acting as an advisor to the government and military of South Vietnam?

- A. Harry S. Truman
- B. Dwight D. Eisenhower
- C. John F. Kennedy
- D. Richard M. Nixon




6. What Cold War theory was used by leaders of the US government to justify our involvement in Vietnam?

- A. Red Menace Theory
- B. Iron Curtain Theory
- C. House of Cards Theory
- D. Domino Theory

5. The 1954 Geneva Conference ended the first Vietnam war and temporarily divided Vietnam at what location?

- A. The 17th parallel
- B. The 38th parallel
- C. The Yalu River
- D. The Gulf of Tonkin




8. How best would you describe the climate and geography of Vietnam?

A. Cold, dry and flat

B. Dry, barren and desert like

C. Wet, humid and mountainous



7. What type of warfare did the Vietcong use against US forces during the Vietnam War?

A. Germ

B. Chemical


C. Guerilla

D. Tank



9. Which part of Vietnam was controlled by the US and used as its military base of operations?

- A. North Vietnam
- B. East Vietnam
- C. West Vietnam
- D. South Vietnam



10. The US reached its peak troop strength in the spring of 1968. How many troops do you think were in Vietnam at this high point?

A. 543,400

B. 385,600

C. 687,500

D. 290,900

Interesting Sites to Explore

- **Vietnam War**

Myths:

http://www.rjsmith.com/war_myth.html

- **The Vietnam War**

Photo Album

- http://www.geocities.com/~nam_album/

Works Cited

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