The Vietnam War
1954 - 1975
Darrell Duncan/ Susan Pojer
Merroll Hyde Magnet/

Background to the War

- France controlled “Indochina” since the late 19th century
- Japan took control during World War II
- With U.S. aid, France attempted re-colonization in the postwar period

Background to the War

- The French lost control to Ho Chi Minh’s Viet Minh forces in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu
- President Eisenhower declined to intervene on behalf of France.

Background to the War

- International Conference at Geneva
  - Vietnam was divided at 17th parallel
    - Ho Chi Minh’s nationalist forces controlled the North
    - Ngo Dinh Diem, a French-educated, Roman Catholic claimed control of the South

Background to the War

- A date was set for democratic elections to reunify Vietnam
- Diem backed out of the elections, leading to military conflict between North and South

U.S. Military Involvement Begins

- Repressive dictatorial rule by Diem
  - Diem’s family holds all power
  - Wealth is hoarded by the elite
  - Buddhist majority persecuted
  - Torture, lack of political freedom prevail
- The U.S. aided Diem’s government
  - Ike sent financial and military aid
Early Protests of Diem's Government

Self-Emolation by a Buddhist Monk

U.S. Military Involvement Begins

- Kennedy elected 1960
- Increases military “advisors” to 16,000
- 1963: JFK supports a Vietnamese military coup d'état - Diem and his brother are murdered (Nov. 2)
- Kennedy was assassinated just weeks later (Nov. 22)

Johnson Sends Ground Forces

- Remembers Truman’s “loss” of China → Domino Theory revived
- “I’m not going to be the president who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went.”

Johnson Sends Ground Forces

- Advised to rout the communists by Secretary of State, Robert S. McNamara
- Tonkin Gulf Incident → 1964 (acc. to Johnson, the attacks were unprovoked)
- Tonkin Gulf Resolution → “The Blank Check” *

U.S. Troop Deployments in Vietnam

U.S. Troop Deployments in Vietnam


The Ground War 1965-1968

- No territorial goals
- Body counts on TV every night (first “living room” war)

- Viet Cong supplies over the Ho Chi Minh Trail
The Air War 1965-1968

- 1965: Sustained bombing of North Vietnam
- Operation Rolling Thunder (March 2, 1965)
- 1966-68: Ongoing bombing of Hanoi nonstop for 3 years! Esp. targets the Ho Chi Minh Trail.
- Downed Pilots: P.O.W.s
- Carpet Bombing - napalm

Who Is the Enemy?

- Vietcong:
  - Farmers by day; guerillas at night.
  - Very patient people willing to accept many casualties.
  - The US grossly underestimated their resolve and their resourcefulness.

Who Is the Enemy?

The guerilla wins if he does not lose, the conventional army loses if it does not win. -- Mao Zedong

The Ground War 1965-1968

- General Westmoreland, late 1967:

We can see the "light at the end of the tunnel."
The Tet Offensive, January 1968

- N. Vietnamese Army + Viet Cong attack South simultaneously (67,000 attack 100 cities, bases, and the US embassy in Saigon)
- Take many major southern cities
- U.S. + ARVN beat back the offensive
- Viet Cong destroyed
- N. Vietnamese army debilitated
- BUT...it's seen as an American defeat by the media

Impact of the Tet Offensive

- Domestic U.S. Reaction: Disbelief, Anger, Distrust of Johnson Administration
- Hey, Hey LBJ! How many kids did you kill today?

Johnson announces (March, 1968):
- Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.

Johnson's popularity dropped in 1968 from 48% to 36%.
American Morale Begins to Dip

- Disproportionate representation of poor people and minorities.
- Severe racial problems.
- Major drug problems.
- Officers in combat 6 mo.; in rear 6 mo. Enlisted men in combat for 12 mo.

Are We Becoming the Enemy?

Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry

- Mylai Massacre, 1968
- 200-500 unarmed villagers

Lt. William Calley, Platoon Leader

Anti-War Demonstrations

Columbia University 1967

Hell no, we won't go!
Anti-War Demonstrations

Democratic Convention in Chicago, 1968

Student Protestors at Univ. of CA in Berkeley, 1968

Jane Fonda: Traitor?

“Hanoi Jane”

Anti-War Demonstrations

May 4, 1970
- 4 students shot dead.
- 11 students wounded

Kent State University

May 10, 1970
- 2 dead; 12 wounded

Nixon on Vietnam

Nixon’s 1968 Campaign promised an end to the war: Peace with Honor
- Appealed to the great “Silent Majority”

Vietnamization

Expansion of the conflict → The “Secret War”
- Cambodia
- Laos

Agent Orange (chemical defoliant)
Former defense analyst Daniel Ellsberg leaked govt. docs. regarding war efforts during Johnson’s administration to the New York Times.

- Primary reason for fighting not to eliminate communism, but to avoid humiliating defeat.

Peace Negotiations

US & Vietnamese argue for 5 months over the size of the conference table!

Dr. Henry Kissinger & Le Duc Tho

Peace with honor (President Nixon)

The Fall of Saigon

South Vietnamese Attempt to Flee the Country

The Fall of Saigon

April 30, 1975

America Abandons Its Embassy

The Ceasefire, 1973

- Peace is at hand → Kissinger, 1972
  - North Vietnam attacks South
  - Most Massive U.S. bombing commences

- 1973: Ceasefire signed between
  - U.S., South Vietnam, & North Vietnam

- Peace with honor (President Nixon)

Conditions:
1. U.S. to remove all troops
2. North Vietnam could leave troops already in S.V.
3. North Vietnam would resume war
4. No provision for POWs or MIAs

Last American troops left South Vietnam on March 29, 1973
1975: North Vietnam defeats South Vietnam
Saigon renamed Ho Chi Minh City
The Fall of Saigon

North Vietnamese at the Presidential Palace

A United Vietnam

Formerly Saigon

The Costs

1. 3,000,000 Vietnamese killed
2. 58,000 Americans killed; 300,000 wounded
3. Under-funding of Great Society programs
4. $150,000,000,000 in U.S. spending
5. U.S. morale, self-confidence, trust of government, decimated

The Impact

- 26th Amendment: 18-year-olds vote
- Nixon abolished the draft → all-volunteer army
- War Powers Act, 1973
  - President must notify Congress within 48 hours of deploying military force
  - President must withdraw forces unless he gains Congressional approval within 90 days
- Disregard for Veterans → seen as “baby killers”
- POW/MIA issue lingered

Some American POWs Returned from the “Hanoi Hilton”

Senator John McCain (R-AZ)

2,583 American POWs / MIAs still unaccounted for today.
And
In the End....

Ho Chi Minh:
If we have to fight, we will fight. You will kill ten of our men and we will kill one of yours, and in the end it will be you who tires of it.

Lessons for Future American Presidents

1. Wars must be of short duration.
2. Wars must yield few American casualties.
3. Restrict media access to battlefields.
4. Develop and maintain Congressional and public support.
5. Set clear, winnable goals.
6. Set deadline for troop withdrawals.

The Vietnam Memorial, Washington, D.C.

Memorial to US Servicemen in Vietnam

58,000

Memorial to US Nurses in Vietnam
President Clinton formally recognized Vietnam on July 11, 1995

Where Were You in the War, Daddy?

This war haunts us still!

AND TODAY.....
The “Light” at the End of This Tunnel?

2003 to ?: “Operation Iraqi Freedom”
4000+ American dead and counting...?

Another Vietnam?

OR

A transformation of the Middle East?

Only time & history can tell!

Bibliography

- A myriad of web sites on the internet