

## **Chronology of the Vietnam War:**

### **The Prelude to the Vietnam War**

**1940 Sep** Japan occupied French Indochina.

**1941** Ho Chi Minh, a Vietnamese Nationalist and a Communist, returned to Indochina and forms the Viet Minh to fight against the Japanese and the French.

**1945 Mar** Bao Dai, the former emperor under French rule, proclaimed independence for Vietnam, now, under Japanese rule.

**12 Apr** President Roosevelt died. Vice President Harry Truman became President of the United States. The new President was not in a strong position to oppose the re-establishment of the British and French empires of non-white people. Roosevelt's vision of self-determination died with him, and the emergence of the Soviet Union as a "Superpower." Truman sought conciliation with western European Powers and Britain in the face of growing Soviet power.

**8 May** Germany surrenders.

**Jul** At the Potsdam Conference, the British are designated to take the surrender of the Japanese in Vietnam south of the 16th parallel, and the Chinese Nationalists to take the surrender north of the 16th parallel.

**6 & 9 Aug** The United States destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan with the first atomic bombs.

**15 Aug** Japan surrendered, ending World War II.

**18 Aug** The Japanese transferred power in Indochina to Ho Chi Minh's Vietminh.

**23 Aug** Bao Dai abdicated.

**2 Sep** Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam's independence from France. The Japanese formally signed the instrument of surrender on the decks of the *USS Missouri*.

### **The French War in Vietnam**

**13 Sep** British forces arrived to take control of south Vietnam. The British, who are concerned with reclaiming and retaining their own colonial empire, permitted the French into Indochina territories under British control.

**1946 Feb** The French and Chinese Nationalists reach an agreement that permitted the French to retake control of all Indochina under Chinese control.

**Mar** French and Vietminh reach accord. French recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) as a "free state" within the French Union. French troops return to Indochina.

**Mar-Nov** Ho Chi Minh and the French disagreed on what the term "free state" means. Negotiations failed. Tension increased.

**23 Nov** French warships bombarded Haiphong.

**Dec** Ho Chi Minh and his forces attacked a French garrison in Hanoi, and withdrew to the country side to build a rural base for operations. The French Vietnam war starts.

**1947 May** Under the "Truman Doctrine" the US Congress voted funds to aid Greece and Turkey in their fight against Communist insurgency.

**5 Jun** Secretary of State George Marshall promulgated the "Marshall Plan" to rebuild war torn Europe and construct a bulwark against Communist expansion.

**Jul** George Kennan of the State Department publishes an article, under the pseudonym "X," that conceptualized the "Policy of Containment," which influenced American foreign and military policies for the next fifty years.

**Aug** British officially recognized the independence of India and Pakistan, signaling the beginning of the end of European imperialism, and the start of inter-state conflict between the two new nations.

**Dec** Bao Dai, who was living abroad, negotiated and reached an understanding with the French that grants Vietnam limited independence.

**1948 Apr** Tensions increased between the Soviet Union and the United States. Soviets blockade the land route to Berlin. Truman initiates the Berlin air lift to provide the citizens of Berlin with food and heating fuel.

**Nov** Truman narrowly won the presidential election.

**1949 Mar** Bao Dai signed agreement with French making Vietnam an "associated state."

**Apr** Bao Dai returned to Vietnam to establish his government. Bao Dai was a puppet of the French, and was recognized as such.

**Aug** The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a mutual defense organization between the United States, Canada, Britain, and ten Western European nations, was formed. USSR exploded its first atomic weapon, shocking the Truman administration and the American people.

**Oct** The Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) of Mao Tse Tung defeated the Chinese Nationalist force of Chiang Kai Shek. The Nationalists escaped to island of Formosa, where they remain to this day, protected by the US Navy. The People's Republic of China (PRC) was formed.

**1950 Jan** Ho Chi Minh declared the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) is the only legal government. The PRC, USSR, and Soviet bloc states recognized the DRV. The PRC begins

supporting the DRV's war against the "Imperialists." The Truman administration concluded that Ho Chi Minh was part of the "Communist Monolithic" controlled by the USSR.

**Feb** U.S. and Britain recognized Bao Dai's government. US started supporting the French war in Indochina.

**Jun** North Korea invaded South Korea.

**Jul** Truman allocated \$15 million in military aid to the French for the war in Indochina.

**Oct** The US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was formed in Vietnam to monitor the French and Vietnamese use of American aid, and provide intelligence to Washington.

**1951 Sep** US provided direct economic assistance to Vietnam.

**1952 Jan** French casualties exceeded ninety thousand.

**Jan-Apr** Truman's National Security Council conceptualized the "Domino theory," "the loss of any of the countries of Southeast Asia to Communist aggression would have critical psychological, political, and economic consequences."

**Nov** Eisenhower was elected President of the United States.

**1953 Mar** Stalin died.

**Jul** Armistice agreement in Korea signed. Eisenhower expanded on Truman's policy of support to the French in Indochina.

**Oct** France recognized the full independence of Laos.

**1954 Jan** US, Britain, France, and USSR agreed to hold a conference at Geneva on Korea and Indochina.

**Mar** The Vietminh and French armies began the climactic and decisive battle of Dienbienphu.

**Apr** Eisenhower decided not to intervene in the French Indochina war, "without allies and associates."

**May** The French were defeated at Dienbienphu. The Geneva Conference opened.

**Jun** Bao Dai selected Ngo Dinh Diem as prime minister.

**Jul** An agreement was reached to end the shooting war. Vietnam was divided at the 17th parallel, pending elections. Bao Dai's government was established in the south and Ho Chi Minh's government in the north. The US did not accept the agreement, but orally acknowledges that it will

not disturb the agreement. The Geneva Conference produced no lasting agreement between the conflicting "-isms" of colonialism vs. nationalism and Communism vs. Capitalism.

**Sep** The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), a loosely worded mutual defense pact between the US, Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, and Philippines, was formed.

**Oct** French forces departed Vietnam.

## **The United States War in Vietnam**

### **The Advisory Decade**

**1955 Jan** The US started to providing direct aid and assistance to the government of South Vietnam, and agree to train the South Vietnamese Army.

**Jul** Diem rejected the Geneva agreement, and refused to participate in a nationwide election. The US supported his decision. The USSR and PRC agreed to support the DRV.

**Oct** Diem replaced Bao Dai as head of state, and proclaims the Republic of Vietnam (RVN).

**1956** The US assumed full responsibility for training and equipping the new Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). The US Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) was expanded.

**1957 Oct** Communist insurgency began in South Vietnam with the organization of company size units in the Mekong delta. Guerrilla warfare and terrorism campaigns were initiated.

**1959 May** The Ho Chi Minh trail was opened. The DRV initiated continuous, direct support for the insurgency in the RVN.

**Jul** The first Americans were killed in the Vietnam war.

**1960 Nov** John F. Kennedy was elected president. Robert McNamara became Secretary of Defense. Kennedy adopts General Maxwell Taylor's strategic doctrine of "Flexible Response," increased the size of the US Army, and initiates the development of a counter-insurgency operational doctrine. Special Forces units, the Green Beret, were created.

**Dec** The DRV forms the National Liberation Front (NLF) in south Vietnam, called the "Viet Cong" by the government of the RVN--a derogatory term for Communist Vietnamese.

**1961 Apr** The Bay of Pigs operation, an American backed attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro in Cuba, failed, causing President Kennedy to believe he received bad advice from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and to henceforth, distrust their counsel. McNamara's influence with the President increased.

**May** Vice President Lyndon Johnson visited Vietnam and recommended more aid and assistance. The Geneva Conference on Laos opened. President de Gaulle of France warned Kennedy that Vietnam is a "bottomless military and political swamp."

**Oct** General Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow visited Vietnam and recommended the expansion of the role of American combat troops as advisers, and a large increase in the number of US advisers. Kennedy partially accepted their recommendations, but was not willing to go as far as Taylor advises. Premier Khrushchev announced that the USSR will support Communist insurgencies fighting wars of national liberation in developing countries. The Berlin Crisis began. The Soviets began the construction of the Berlin Wall, and threaten to close the single western land route to Berlin.

**1962 Feb** The American Military Assistance Command was formed in South Vietnam (MACV). American advisers increased from 700 to 1200.

**May** DRV and NLF organized battalions in central Vietnam. The communist occupation and transformation of South Vietnam advanced.

**Oct** The Cuban missile crisis end with the withdrawal of Soviet missiles. McNamara's success in this crisis caused him to adopt it as a model for managing the Vietnam conflict. The Strategic Hamlet pacification program was initiated.

**1963 Jan** ARVN were defeated in battle with VC

**Jun** Buddhist monks conducted demonstrations against Diem's government by committing suicide by self-immolation. The astonishing scenes were carried on national television influencing American public opinion.

**Aug** Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge arrived in Saigon to take charge of the situation.

**Sep** Lodge supported coup against Diem.

**Nov** Diem was assassinated by mutinous generals with the approval and support of the American government. Twenty days later, 22 November, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson became President. Johnson retained Kennedy's team of advisers.

**Dec** 15,000 American servicemen were serving in Vietnam as advisers, and the United States had expended \$500 million to aid RVN. At the same time the DRV decided to move to the next phase of the People's war.

**1964 Jan** General Nguyen Khanh seized power in Saigon. He received the support of the Johnson administration.

**Mar** Secretary of State Dean Rusk, McNamara, and others met in Honolulu and agreed to increase aid to Vietnam. They also initiated work on a strategy to apply "graduated pressure" to the Communist government DRV through bombing. Bombing was seen as a form of communication, a tool to convince the Communist to give up their efforts to achieve victory in South Vietnam. Airpower was not employed as it was in World War II, to destroy the enemy's armed forces and means of production.

**Jun** General Taylor was selected to replace Lodge as ambassador to South Vietnam.

**Jul** RVN began covert maritime operations off the coast of North Vietnam.

**Aug** The US Destroyer *USS Maddox* was attacked by North Vietnamese patrol boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. Two days later a second, questionable, attack on the destroyers *USS Turner Joy* and *USS Maddox* was reported. President Johnson retaliated by bombing North Vietnam for the first time. Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin resolution empowering the president to "take all necessary measures to repel an armed attack against the forces of the United States and prevent further aggression." The resolution gave the president full discretionary power, and removed Congress from its Constitutional role in regard to war and the use of the armed forces.

**Oct** VC attacked American air base at Bienhoa. Johnson rejected the recommendation of his military advisers to retaliate. Johnson was primarily concerned with the election, and was unwilling to take actions that appear too "hawkish."

**Nov** Johnson defeated Senator Barry Goldwater in the presidential election.

**Dec** VC bombed an American military billet, the Brinks Hotel, in Saigon. Johnson again rejected retaliation. Operation Barrel Roll begins—air attacks in Laos.

### **Americanization of the War**

**1965 Feb** VC again attacked American installations. Johnson authorized the bombing of NV. Operation Rolling Thunder, a graduated, tightly controlled bombing campaign was initiated.

**Mar** American ground forces were deployed to South Vietnam ostensibly to guard American air bases, billets, and installations. Two battalions of Marines were initially deployed.

**Apr** Johnson gave a speech at Johns Hopkins University in which he offers Ho Chi Minh a vast Southeast Asian development program in return for a negotiated settlement. Johnson attempts to buy peace. The government of DRV promptly rejected his proposal.

**Jun** The US government authorized the conduct of ground combat operations. The government of the RVN changed again. Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky took over as prime minister of South Vietnam. Regular army units of People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) were identified in South Vietnam, indicating a new phase in DRV operations.

**Jul** Johnson became dissatisfied with Taylor's advice, and reappoints Lodge ambassador to South Vietnam. Taylor opposed the deployment of American ground forces. Johnson approved General Westmoreland's request for forty-four additional combat battalions. The mission of American ground forces changed from the defense of American facilities and personnel to offensive operations against the VC and PAVN. Westmoreland tried to stabilize the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam.

**Sep** PRC Defense Minister Lin Biao of China indicated that the PRC would not intervene directly in Vietnam as long as the United States did not invade North Vietnam.

**Oct** The American 1st Cavalry Division, mounted in helicopter, battled regiments of the PAVN in the Ia Drang River Valley. The "Big Unit" war began. Eventually the PAVN withdrew. Both sides suffered heavy casualties. America's first major battle in Vietnam confirmed for Westmoreland the effectiveness of his operational and tactical doctrine, "Search and Destroy." Westmoreland adopted an attrition strategy because political leaders would not permit offensive operations into Laos, Cambodia, or North Vietnam.

**Dec** American forces in Vietnam numbered nearly 200,000. Johnson stopped the bombing campaign temporarily in order to communicate to the DRV his willingness to negotiate.

**1966 Jan** Johnson resumed bombing.

**Feb** Johnson Administration emphasized to the government of South Vietnam the necessity of stability in government and the pacification of South Vietnam. The "other war" for the "hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people had to be won for real victory to be achieved.

**Dec** American forces in Vietnam numbered 400,000.

**1967 Jan** DRV Foreign Minister stated the US must stop bombing North Vietnam before peace talks can be initiated.

**Mar** Johnson met in Guam with Ky and Thieu. DRV revealed that Johnson and Ho Chi Minh had exchanged letters.

**Apr** Johnson conferred with Westmoreland in Washington, and Westmoreland addressed Congress the next day.

**May** Ellsworth Bunker replaced Lodge as ambassador to South Vietnam.

**Aug** McNamara in testimony before a Senate subcommittee stated that the bombing of North Vietnam was ineffective.

**Sep** Nguyen Van Thieu elected President and Ky Vice-President of South Vietnam. PAVN and NLF launched a major campaign that culminated in the Tet Offensive in January 1968. Westmoreland fortified the Marines surrounded at Khe Sanh. Johnson again offered to stop bombing in exchange for "productive discussions."

**Nov** Westmoreland expressed optimism in public statements while in the US—"the light at the end of the tunnel."

**Dec** DRV announced talks can begin once the bombing stops. US forces numbered almost 500,000. Protests against the war increased across the US.

**1968 Jan** Tet offensive began. During the Tet holiday the VC and PAVN conducted major offensives in three-fourths of the 44 provincial capitals of SV. The American embassy in Saigon was also attacked. U.S. and ARVN forces launched counterattacks. Intense battles were shown on national television in the United States. It appeared to many Americans that the US was losing the war. War is ugly and all the television cameras were on one side of the battlefield. All the images were negative. The Johnson Administration and the Pentagon seemed surprised, and took too few actions to explain what was happening to the American people. Many historians believe the Vietnam War was lost in 1968.

**Feb** Westmoreland requested 206,000 additional troops, based on discussions with General Wheeler. Clark Clifford replaced McNamara as Secretary of Defense. Clifford opposed Westmoreland's troop request and the expansion of the war. He sought withdrawal, and initiated actions to get the U.S. out of the war. The man Johnson thought was a "Hawk," turned into a "Dove."

### **Vietnamization of the War**

**Mar** Westmoreland was named the next Chief of Staff of the Army. General Creighton Abrams was designated to replace him. Senator Robert F. Kennedy announced he would run for president. The "Wise Men," a group of distinguished American leaders, met in Washington to advise Johnson. They advised him against further escalation. Johnson announced partial bombing halt, offered to negotiate, and told the American people he would not seek another term.

**Apr** Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis. Disorder broke-out across much of the country.

**May** American and DRV delegations arrived in Paris for peace negotiations. Averell Harriman led the American delegation.

**Jun** Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles.

**Aug** Richard Nixon won the Republican nomination for president in Miami. Vice-President Hubert Humphrey won the Democratic nomination in Chicago where riots broke-out in protest to the war and draft. Johnson stopped all bombing of North Vietnam, and continued to seek a negotiated settlement.

**Nov** Nixon was elected President of the United States. Nixon promises to end the war.

**Dec** Henry Kissinger was selected to be Nixon's national security adviser. American forces in Vietnam numbered 540,000, and in the US protests against the war intensified. The nation was in turmoil, caused by the war, the Civil Rights movement, and the general feeling that America was disintegrating.

**1969 Jan** Paris Peace talks were expanded to include government of SV and NLF representatives. Melvin Laird replaced Clark Clifford as Secretary of Defense and adopted Clifford's withdrawal policy.

**Mar** Nixon began the secret bombing of Cambodia. Melvin Laird, Secretary of Defense, invented the term "Vietnamization" to describe Nixon's policy of withdrawing American troops and replacing them with South Vietnamese troops. Abrams initiated "small unit war," seeking to complete the destruction of the VC insurgency.

**Apr** US military personnel in Vietnam peaked at 543,400.

**May** President Nixon proposed a peace plan that called for the simultaneous withdrawal of US and PAVN forces.

**Jun** Nixon met with Thieu on Midway Island, and announced the withdrawal of 25,000 American troops.

**Aug** Kissinger met secretly in Paris with the DRV negotiator Xuan Thuy.

**Sep** Ho Chi Minh died. He was seventy-nine.

**Oct** President Nixon allowed draft deferments for graduate students. Massive anti-war demonstration took place in Washington, and other cities.

**Nov** Nixon gave his "silent majority" speech. Another antiwar demonstration took place in Washington. Over 250,000 demonstrators participated, the largest such demonstration to date. The My Lai massacre was revealed by the *New York Times*.

**Dec** The first draft lottery since 1942 was held by the Selective Service Board. American forces in Vietnam declined to 475,200. 40,024 US servicemen had been killed to date.

**1970 Feb** Kissinger began secret talks with Le Duc Tho in Paris. The Nixon administration began its policy of duplicity.

**Apr** Nixon announced Cambodian "incursion." US and ARVN forces attacked Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia.

**May** National Guardsmen killed four students at Kent State University in Ohio during a nationwide antiwar demonstration.

**Oct** Nixon proposed "standstill cease fire," but also repeated mutual withdrawal plan.

**Nov** Lieutenant William Calley went on trial at Fort Benning, Georgia for the My Lai massacre.

**Dec** US military forces in Vietnam declined to 334,600. 44,245 Americans have been killed to date.

**1971 Feb** ARVN conducted raids into Laos.

**Mar** Calley was convicted of the premeditated murder of South Vietnamese civilians at My Lai. He received a life sentence. Nixon reduced the sentence to three years.

**Jun** *New York Times* began publication of the Pentagon Papers. Supreme Court ruled that the publication was legal.

**Dec** US forces declined to 156,800. 45,626 Americans have been killed.

**1972 Jan** Nixon revealed that Kissinger had been secretly negotiating with the DRV.

**Feb** Nixon arrived in China.

**Mar** PAVN launched major offensive across the DMZ. US delegates in Paris announced an indefinite suspension of peace talks until DRV delegates and NLF representatives were willing to enter into "serious discussion."

**Apr** Nixon responded with an intensive bombing campaign, "Linebacker," of Hanoi and Haiphong harbor after a four-year lull. Antiwar demonstrators responded to Nixon's escalation of the bombing campaign with hundreds of protest demonstrations across the country.

**Jun** Break-in at the Democratic National Committee office at the Watergate complex in Washington caused the arrest of five men.

**Aug** Kissinger met again with Le Duc Tho in Paris to work-out an agreement.

**Oct** Kissinger met with Thieu in Saigon. Thieu opposed the draft agreement worked out by Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. DRV announced over radio broadcast the details of the agreement. This was an effort to pressure Kissinger, who had to convince Thieu.

**Nov** Nixon was re-elected president, defeating Senator George McGovern in a landslide victory. Kissinger presents Le Duc Tho with 69 amendments to the agreement demanded by Thieu. Talks break down.

**Dec** Nixon ordered the intensive bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong to pressure the DRV to return to the talks, Linebacker II. The DRV agreed to resume negotiations after bombing halts. US military forces declined to 24,200. 45,926 Americans have been killed.

**1973 Jan** Kissinger and Le Duc Tho met. The draft agreement was initialed. As a result Nixon stopped all US offensive actions against the DRV and NLF, and the peace agreement was signed in Paris by the US, DRV, NLF, and SV. To get Thieu to accept the agreement Nixon made numerous promises of military and economic assistance to the government of SV. The US military draft ended. The All-Volunteer Force was initiated. Elliot L. Richardson replaced Melvin Laird as Secretary of Defense.

### **The Vietnamese Civil War (Phase Four)**

**Mar** Last US troops leave Vietnam.

**Apr** "Last" US POW released.

**Jun** Watergate hearings started.

**Jul** Existence of White House tapes revealed.

**Aug** US stops bombing Cambodia in compliance with congressional prohibition. Nixon announced the appointment of Kissinger as Secretary of State.

**Oct** Vice President Agnew resigned. He was replaced by Representative Gerald Ford.

**Nov** Congress overrode Nixon's veto of the "War Powers Act," a law limiting the power of the president to deploy American combat forces.

**1974 Jan** Thieu declared that the war had begun again. Nixon was not able to honor the promises he made to Thieu and South Vietnam.

**May** House Judiciary Committee began impeachment hearings on Nixon. Nixon was powerless to assist SV, and congress had taken control of the use of American military forces, and aid to Indochina.

**Jun** DRV build-up in SV intensified in violation of the peace agreement.

**Jul** House Judiciary Committee voted to recommend impeaching Nixon.

**Aug** Nixon resigns. Ford became President. Nixon was proven to be a liar.

**Sep** Ford pardons Nixon.

**1975 Jan** DRV offensive began in SV. Thieu called for US assistance. He begged for help. But no help came.

**Mar** Thieu abandoned the northern provinces to consolidate his forces. It did not help.

**Apr** Ford called the war "finished." US evacuated its embassy in Saigon. Thieu departed Saigon for Taiwan. Saigon was captured. The war was over. The United States and South Vietnam lost.

**1977 Jan** Carter pardons 10,000 draft dodgers. Total American dead 57,690 (This figure is updated periodically as the remains of American servicemen are discovered).