

The Vietnam War November 1, 1955-May 15, 1975: History of Vietnam

The following vocabulary words are defined in bold in the reading material below: allies, dynasty, occupation, Ho Chi Minh, civil war, depleted, 17th parallel, Viet Cong, diplomatic relations

The Vietnam War was a long conflict lasting from 1955 to 1975. It began when the United States President Dwight Eisenhower sent advisors to Vietnam and ended with the fall of Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam in 1975. Over 2.5 million American troops were involved in the war. The war pitted the communist government of North Vietnam along with a group in Southern Vietnam called the Viet Cong against the democratic government of South Vietnam and its ally, the United States. **[Allies are nations that help each other during wartime]**

However, one of the reasons for the Vietnam War began 200 years ago!

In the 1400s, the countries of Europe were curious about the rest of the world. Spain, Portugal, England, and France were the most curious. For example, in 1492, Christopher Columbus was sent by Spain to sail west across the Atlantic Ocean to find a new trading route. Instead, he found the continent of North America which Europe didn't know existed.

France sent explorers mainly to Africa and later to Asia. In 1858, France took over Vietnam which is a small country in Asia. Before 1858 dynasties had ruled Vietnam for hundreds of years. **[Dynasty: A family of rulers who rule over a country for a long period of time]** France ended the rule of the dynasties. It began an occupation that lasted over 100 years. **[Occupied and Occupation: To take control of a place, especially a country by military conquest or settlement]** The Vietnamese people had to learn to speak, read, and write French. They had to adopt French customs. However, many Vietnamese were against the occupation. The French and Vietnamese fought constantly during this time but France was a stronger nation and continued to occupy Vietnam.

During WWII, Japan sent soldiers into Vietnam and soon had control of the country; however, they preferred to leave the French in charge of running the country because so many of their own soldiers were fighting in WWII. Ho Chi Minh led a communist army of Vietnamese, supported by the Soviet Union and China, to overthrow the Japanese. **[Ho Chi Minh: The name of a famous Vietnamese person who was a leader and a president of Vietnam. He died in 1969]** At the end of WWII, his army seized the northern city of Hanoi in Vietnam and declared the independence of Vietnam from the Japanese. The Declaration started a Civil War in Vietnam between Ho Chi Minh in the north of Vietnam and the French in the south of Vietnam. **[Civil War: A war between citizens of the same country]** Two hundred and fifty thousand (250,000) French soldiers fought against Ho Chi Minh's

army in the north. The United States helped the French by sending them money and weapons to fight the war.

Why did the United States become involved in this war? One of the main reasons was a fear of communism. During WWII, France and the United States were allies. France did not have the resources to pay for a war in Vietnam. Both France and the United States were strongly against communism. The United States decided to help its friend, France, stop Ho Chi Minh from establishing a communist government in Viet Nam. Many countries were very afraid of communism. After WWII, the United States believed the Soviet Union wanted communism to take over the world. At that time, the Soviet Union influenced many countries in Asia to become communist. For example, after WWII, China became a communist country. The United States watched governments in Asia turn communist one by one. The US worried that a domino effect was taking place. It worried the domino effect would bring communism to the United States. Therefore, the United States tried to stop communism from spreading in Asia. It began to send economic and military aid to non-communist countries in Asia. The United States also used spies to find out the expansion plans of the Soviet Union and China, the two largest communist countries in the world.

In 1954, Ho Chi Minh's army defeated the French in a 57 day assault at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu when 40,000 Vietnamese soldiers surrounded the base camps that were a stronghold for the French. After losing this battle, the French government sought an end to the fighting. An official settlement was negotiated at an international conference in Geneva. and the French finally left Vietnam. The Geneva Treaty negotiations divided Vietnam along the 17th parallel into two countries, North Vietnam and South Vietnam. [**Parallel: An imaginary line on the earth's surface to help determine the location of a country**] Ho Chi Minh became president of North Vietnam and Ngo Dinh Diem, who was a strong anti-communist, became the president of South Vietnam. The Geneva Treaty also stated that in 1956 Vietnam must hold an election to decide if Vietnam would unite again into one country or stay separate as two countries.

The United States continued to send military personnel to South Vietnam. These United States military advisors told South Vietnam not to hold the election. This decision violated the Geneva Treaty and international law. Why did the United States violate the law? The United States believed the election would unite North and South Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh would become president. It did not want South Vietnam to become another communist country in Asia.

The United States continued to support South Vietnam. By 1962 there were 9,000 American soldiers in South Vietnam. And by 1965, there were 82,000 American soldiers in Vietnam ready to go into battle. The number of American soldiers in battle in Vietnam soon rose to 500,000 in the next few years.

Many South Vietnamese people worked for the government of South Vietnam or helped the United States fight against North Vietnam. However, there were also many South Vietnamese people who did not care about communism. They just wanted their country to be united and independent. These South Vietnamese joined the National Liberation Front, which formed their own army called the Viet Cong. **[Viet Cong: Citizens of South Vietnam who formed a group to fight American soldiers]** The Viet Cong and Ho Chi Minh's North Vietnamese army had the same goal: unite North and South Vietnam. In conclusion, there were two enemies the United States had to identify and fight against: the Viet Cong in the south and Ho Chi Minh's army in the north.

The Viet Cong and Ho Chi Minh's army fought hard against South Vietnam and the American troops. More than two million Vietnamese and 58,000 Americans died in the War. Many more were wounded.

In 1973 the United States combat units were withdrawn at the signing of the Paris Peace Accords. From 1973 to 1975, twelve million South Vietnamese citizens who worked for the South Vietnam government or helped the United States during the war, fled to the United States, France, and other countries. They were afraid of being imprisoned or killed by the Viet Cong after the war ended. In 1975, the North Vietnamese army invaded South Vietnam and united North and South Vietnam into one communist country.

The United States and Vietnam remained enemies for fifteen years after the war ended. In the 1990s, the two countries began trading with each other and eventually established diplomatic relations. **[Diplomatic Relations: The relationships that countries have with each other by sending ambassadors to other countries to solve problems and keep peace. Ambassadors can also be called diplomats]**

Today, citizens of both countries freely visit each other.