The Vietnam Conflict: 1954-1973

By Mikhaela Barnes
Beginnings; independence from France
Background

- In 1887 the French had founded a colony in Indochina, Vietnam.
- They had taken over the Loas and Cambodia Empires which had originally been independent empires.
- It had taken France a total of 350 years to conquer Vietnam completely.
- French missionaries had originally come to Indochina to convert the native people.
**Ho Chi Minh**

- Born: May 19, 1890, French Indochina
- Died: September 2, 1969, Hanoi, Vietnam
- Originally Nguyen That Thanh
- His wife was Zeng Xueming (m. 1926–1969)
- Ho Chi Minh was a leader in the revolution against France.
- Communist (had organized the French Communist Party in 1920)
The Rise of a Revolution

- In the 1920’s Ho Chi Minh had organized French Communist Party in 1920
- In 1923 he moved to Moscow, Comintern, an organisation created by Lenin to promote worldwide revolution, where he learned new revolutionary tactics and took an active role in the Communist International.
The Rise of a Revolution

- In 1924 he went to China to gather exiled communists.
- With their support, he founded the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in 1930.
- After the Japanese had invaded in 1941 Ho returned home.
- When he had returned home in 1941, after the Japanese had invaded China, he founded the Viet Minh, a communist-dominated independence movement, to fight the Japanese.
- It was then that he adopted the name Ho Chi Minh which means “Bringer of Light”.
- This new group favored guerilla tactics when fighting.
The Rise of a Revolution

- In 1940 Japan combined forces with France to collaborate take down Ho Chi Minh's forces.
- Meanwhile was able to contact the allied forces and aided them in fighting against the Japanese in Southern China.
- In early 1945, Japan drove out the French administration in Vietnam and executed many of their French officials.
The Beginnings of a Revolution

- After Japan had finally surrendered to the Allies on September 2, 1945 Ho finally saw his opportunity to declare the independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam.
- France had bombarded the city of Haiphong after attempting to have open talks with Vietnamese communist had failed.
The Beginnings of a Revolution

- The beginnings of the IndoChina war had started when Viet Minh responded to the Haiphong massacre with an attack against French forces in Hanoi on December 19, 1945.
- Mao Zedong’s Chinese communists supported the Viet Minh, while the United States aided the French and anti-communist Vietnamese forces during the first eight years of the war.
Starting Over

- In 1954, after suffering a tremendous defeat in Dien Bien Phu, which is located in Northwest Vietnam, the French were unable to promote peace negotiations the division of Vietnam along the 17th parallel at a conference in Geneva.
- It was there that Vietnam was divided into Northern Vietnam, with Ho as its leader, and Southern Vietnam, with Bao Dai as its emperor.
How it Affected the Rest of the World

- In 1950 Ho organized a communist guerilla movement called Viet Cong.
- This organization was able to withstand the US-southern vietnam opposing regimes.
- In 1964, Viet cong withstood a decade of United States military intervention.
- Ho Chi Minh died on September 2, 1969, six years before the reuniting of Northern and Southern Vietnam and 25 after the declaration of Vietnam from France.
U.S. Support through the Kennedy Administration
John F. Kennedy

- Born: May 29, 1917.
- 35th President of the United States.
- Joined the Navy in 1940, after graduating Harvard.
- Spouse: Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis (m. 1953–1963)
- Part of the Democratic party
Ngo Dinh Diem

- Born: January 3, 1901
- Assassinated: November 2, 1963
- Was president of Southern Vietnam during the Vietnam conflict.
- Worked with the U.S. government to eliminate communist forces in Southern Vietnam.
- Spouse: Ngo Dinh Nhu
Aiding Southern Vietnam

- President John F. Kennedy had decided to aid Southern Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem after an exchange of public letters.
- The letters themselves strongly stated that major Northern Vietnamese Communist advances had been made.
- This concerned Kennedy, so he chose to help Southern Vietnam before the communism in the North grew to be too strong.
Aiding Southern Vietnam

- After returning from their trip in Saigon U.S. Chief military adviser, Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, and Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Walt W. Rostow implored the president to support Diem in aiding Southern Vietnam both in military and economically.
Aiding Southern Vietnam

- Taylor and Rostow suggested the following for aid: Significant increase in airplanes, helicopters, and support personnel, the deployment of 8,000 American combat troops, and intensive training of local self-defense troops by American military advisers.
- Taylor and Rostow suggested that the forces were to be called a “flood control team.”
Aiding Southern Vietnam

- In return of U.S. military and economic support, Kennedy demanded that Diem liberalize his regime, institute land reform and other measures to win the support of his people.
- At first, Diem rejected these demands, but after Kennedy stated that he would only receive half of what support was needed, Diem accepted the demands of the United States.
The Death of Diem and Kennedy

- On November 2, 1963, Diem was murdered during a coup by his generals.
- Shortly after, on November 22, 1963, Kennedy was assassinated.
LBJ’s Policies and Challenges
Lyndon B. Johnson

- Born: August 27, 1908
- Died: January 22, 1973
- Became the 36th president of the United States after the brutal assassination of President John F. Kennedy.
- Spouse: Rebekah Baines Johnson
- He was a Texan who served in both the House of Representatives as well as in the Senate.
LBJ’s Policies

- On November 22, 1963, the same day as Kennedy's assassination, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as president of the United States.
- A couple days after being sworn in, LBJ states that he fully intends to keep JFK’s Vietnam policies in place.
- When asked as to whether or not he would support the new leader of Southern Vietnam, General Khanh, in the fight against Northern Vietnam, LBJ stated that he would not engage the U.S. in any big changes until the U.S. presidential election of 1964 was over.
The U.S. Fights Back

- Two U.S. destroyers, who were stationed on the Gulf of Tonkin in Vietnam, said they had been fired on by Northern Vietnam forces in early August 1964.

- This gave LBJ more than enough reason to initiate bombing raids on Northern Vietnam.
U.S. Fights Back

- Congress gave Johnson near enough total support for his actions (Senate 88 to 2 and House 416 to 0).
- Operation “Rolling Thunder” was initiated on February 24, 1965. This operation allowed for the wholesale bombing of Northern Vietnam NLF (National Liberation Front, aka Viet Cong).
- This operation, which was supposed to only last for eight weeks, had continued for 3 years.
U.S. Fights Back

- In response to Operation Rolling Thunder, NLF attacked U.S. air bases in Southern Vietnam.
- U.S. advisor in the South, General Westmoreland, implored LGJ to deploy more men to Vietnam because U.S. forces were barely able to fight off NLF attacks.
- In response to this, Johnson deployed 3, 500 US Marines combat troops on March 8th, 1965.
- In order to keep the public’s favor, he stated that this deployment was to protect the American people.
- During his term as president, LBJ had deployed 500,000 troops into Vietnam, which as a result, rapidly escalated the war.
Nixon and the Wind Down
Richard M. Nixon

- Born: January 9, 1913
- Died: April 22, 1994
- Was the 37th president of the United States.
- Served as both a U.S. Representative and Senator from California.
- Spouse: Patricia “Pat” Nixon
Implementing Vietnamization

- Upon taking office in 1969, Nixon introduced the idea of Vietnamization. Vietnamization was an idea that aimed at ending American involvement in the Vietnam war.
- So far, a total of 31,000 American lives had been lost, and still, very little progress had been made in removing communist forces in Northern Vietnam.
- In order to accomplish this goal, Nixon believed that the Southern Vietnamese military needed to be strengthened so that when the U.S. retracted its forces, Southern Vietnam would be able to withstand attacks from NLF.
Implementing Vietnamization

- He stated that this plan contrasted LBJ’s plan of Americanization.
- “In the previous administration, we Americanized the war in Vietnam. In this administration, we are Vietnamizing the search for peace.”
Implementing Vietnamization

- Not only did Nixon intend on modernizing the southern Vietnamese army, he also intended on implementing programs that would help improve politics.
- Despite Nixon's attempt to put Vietnamization in place, U.S. forces in southern Asia grew rapidly. For example, Nixon had secretly authorized bombing campaigns and a ground invasion of neutral Cambodia.
- When this act had been brought to public attention, Nixon assured the people that it was in fact necessary. However, this did not reassure the people of the U.S. and slowly but surely the American people began to oppose the war.
Implementing Vietnamization

- Nixon attempted to enforce Vietnamization through several steps. First he slowly began to pull out troops. In 1969 there were 549,000 troops in Vietnam, in 1972 there were only 69,000.
- Knowing that the U.S. was slowly pulling out of Vietnam, northern forces unleashed several attacks against southern forces, in which the poor quality of southern forces was emphasized.
Effectiveness of Vietnamization

- The agreement was that Northern Vietnam would recognize the legitimacy of Southern Vietnam's government and would cease conflict with them. Any other conflict would be submitted to international commission to be settled. In return, the U.S. would withdraw all troops within 60 days.
- Northern Vietnam agreed to these conditions and Vietnamization was declared complete. However, in 1975, communist forces had taken over Southern Vietnam.
U.S. Domestic Reaction; Protests
1965

- Opposition to the war was mainly brought upon by peace activists and leftist intellectuals. It wasn’t until 1965 when the U.S. began to bomb North Korea that the people of the U.S. saw the war in a negative context.
- Anti-war marches and protests began to increase and attract more people over the course of the next three years.
- Many of these protest were organized by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).
- By the end of 1965 a liberal minority, consisting of many students as well as prominent artists and intellectuals, members of the hippie movement, a increasing number of young people who rejected authority and embraced the drug culture.
- By November 1967 the war had resulted in 15,058 casualties and 109,527 wounded along with it costing $25 billion a year.
- With 40,000 men being drafted almost monthly, and U.S. casualties only increasing, strong opposition to the war grew throughout the nation.
1967

- One of the most prominent anti-war protests took place on October 21, 1967 with 100,000 protestors at the Lincoln memorial, and later that night 30,000 at the Pentagon. After a brutal confrontation with officers, hundreds of protesters were arrested, one of them being famous author, Norman Mailer.
- Martin Luther King has openly protested against the war claiming that the government was unnecessarily spending money on the war and that a large amount of casualties had been African American.
1968

- Northern Vietnam's use of Tet offense, which greatly wounded U.S. and Southern Vietnam forces started a wildfire of discontent and anger across the United States causing an intense period of anti-war protests.
- In February 1968, a poll showed that 33% of U.S. citizens approved of how LBJ was handling the situation in Vietnam, 50% did not approve of LBJ’s actions in Vietnam, and the rest did not have an opinion.
- An anti-war organization called Vietnam Veterans against the War. This organization mainly consisted of wounded veterans. Men in crutches and wheelchairs often lined the streets during protests.
1968-1969

- Robert Nixon had won the 1968 campaign because he promised to restore “law and order”.
- However, his war further divided the country; In December of 1969, the first U.S. lottery draft was enacted because so many men had fled to Canada to avoid conscription.
On April 30, 1970, after Nixon had announced to the public the events that took place on his orders, on the nation was in an uproar.

As a result, Kent State University in Ohio launched a large protest that included setting fire to the ROTC building on campus. This forced the governor of Ohio to dispatch 900 National Guardsmen.

After an altercation on May 4, 1970 the crowd was fired on by twenty-eight guardsmen. As a result, four students were killed and nine were wounded.
1971

- In mid-1971, the publication of the first Pentagon Papers—which revealed previously confidential details about the war’s conduct.
- By 1973 Nixon had declared the U.S.’s relations with Vietnam to be over.
In Washington D.C., veterans protest the fighting in Indochina by discarding their medals and uniforms over the fence at the U.S. Capitol.
Origin

- This photo was taken during a protest on white house during the time of the Vietnam War.
- Content: “veterans protest the fighting in Indochina by discarding their medals and uniforms over the fence at the U.S. Capitol.”
Purpose

- This picture gives the audience an idea as to how much the citizens of the United States were against the war.
- This text also gives the audience an idea as to how U.S. citizens dealt with their protest against the war.
- Content: “In Washington D.C., veterans protest the fighting in Indochina by discarding their medals and uniforms over the fence at the U.S. Capitol.”
Value

- This text accurately shows the rage and dissatisfaction that U.S. citizens felt towards the war.
- By displaying a soldier as a protestor, the author is conveying the idea that even those who were willing to sacrifice their lives for their country were not satisfied.
- The peace sign on the man's back show just how desperate the protesters were for an era of peace.
- Content: “In Washington D.C., veterans protest the fighting in Indochina by discarding their medals and uniforms over the fence at the U.S. Capitol.”
Limitation

- This picture only shows how the people were dissatisfied, not how the war helped Vietnam.
- This man in this text is unknown, and what he served as in the war is unknown so the significance of his rebellion is minimal.
- Content: “In Washington D.C., veterans protest the fighting in Indochina by discarding their medals and uniforms over the fence at the U.S. Capitol.”
Paris Peace Conference
Paris Peace Conference

- On January 27, 1973 North Korea, the United States, Southern Vietnam and Viet Cong (NLF) all signed a treaty ending the Vietnam War.
- The terms of the treaty included ceasing fire in Vietnam, all U.S. advisors and military had to withdraw from Vietnam, as well as dismantling all U.S. bases within a sixty day period. North Korea agreed to release all U.S. prisoners of war. Both sides have to withdraw from Laos and Cambodia. It was agreed that the DMZ at the 17th Parallel would remain a provisional dividing line.
Paris Peace Conference

- Northern Vietnam agreed to recognize Southern Vietnam's government.
- However, Southern Vietnam had to sign a separate document that did not mention the Viet Cong government. This was mainly because Southern Vietnam refused to acknowledge Viet Cong as a form of government or as a participant in the conference.
Paris Peace Conference
CIA Influence
The Secret War- Laos

- U.S. involvement with Laos began in the 1950’s when the U.S. began to send military support to Laos in order to fight off communist rebels.
- The U.S. military seemed fairly ineffective so the CIA believed that Hmong tribesmen (then commonly called Meo), a mountain tribe living in the Plain of Jars region in northern Laos, would be suitable for guerrilla attacks.
- The Laos operation had gratifying results for both the agency and its political masters.
- The bombing in Laos was known as the heaviest bombing in military history.
The Secret War- Laos

- For the CIA, Laos meant bigger pay rolls, richer budgets and a stronger influence, even if they had lost the war.
- Laos was a way for the U.S. government to receive money and wield power.
The Secret War- Laos

- Massive escalation of bombing in Laos in 1968 and 1969 — a tenfold increase, from 20 or 30 strikes a day to 300 or more.
- When LBJ halted the bombing in Northern Vietnam, the air force was diverted to Laos.
- The U.S. had even created a mission having to do with the Ho Chi Minh trail, a mission that had nothing to do with stopping the war or with Northern Vietnam.
- The Laotian forces were used for everything except fighting Northern Vietnamese communist.
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