

# The Vietnam War

## A Synopsis for Students

### TIMELINE

**September 2, 1945** - Vietnam declares independence from France. Neither France nor the U.S. recognizes this claim. President Harry S. Truman aids France with military equipment to fight the rebels known as Viet Minh.

**May 1954** - The Battle of Dien Bien Phu results in serious defeat for the French and peace talks in Geneva. The Geneva Accords end the French Indochina War.

**July 21, 1954** - Vietnam signs the Geneva Accords and divides into two countries at the 17th parallel, the Communist-led north and U.S.-supported south.

**1957-1963** - North Vietnam and the Viet Cong fight South Vietnamese troops. Hoping to stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, the U.S. sends more aid and military advisors to help the South Vietnamese government. The number of U.S. military advisors in Vietnam grows from 900 in 1960 to 11,000 in 1962.

**1964-1969** - By 1964, the Viet Cong, the Communist guerrilla force, has 35,000 troops in South Vietnam. The U.S. sends more troops to fight the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, with the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam peaking at 543,000 in April 1969. Anti-war sentiment in the U.S. grows stronger as the troop numbers increase.

**August 2, 1964** - Gulf of Tonkin - The North Vietnamese fire on a U.S. destroyer anchored in the Gulf of Tonkin. After President Lyndon Johnson falsely claims that there had been a second attack on the destroyer, Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which authorizes full-scale U.S. intervention in the Vietnam War. Johnson orders the bombing of North Vietnam in retaliation for the Tonkin attack.

**August 5, 1964** - President Johnson asks Congress for the power to go to war against the North Vietnamese and the Communists for violating the Geneva Accords against South Vietnam and Laos. The request is granted August 7, 1964

**January 30, 1968** - Tet Offensive - The North Vietnamese launch a massive surprise attack during the festival of the Vietnamese New Year, called Tet. The attack hits 36 major cities and towns in South Vietnam. Both sides suffer heavy casualties, but the offensive demonstrates that the war will not end soon or easily.

**April 1970** - Invasion of Cambodia - President Richard Nixon orders U.S. and South Vietnamese troops to invade border areas in Cambodia and destroy supply centers set up by the North Vietnamese. The invasion sparks more anti-war protests, and on June 3, 1970, Nixon announces the completion of troop withdrawal.

**February 8, 1971** - Invasion of Laos - Under orders from President Nixon, U.S. and South Vietnamese ground troops, with the support of B-52 bombers, invade southern Laos in an effort to stop the North Vietnamese supply routes through Laos into South Vietnam. This action is done without consent of Congress and causes more anti-war protests in the U.S.

**January 27, 1973** - A cease-fire is arranged after peace talks.

**March 29, 1973** - The last American ground troops leave. Fighting begins again between North and South Vietnam, but the U.S. does not return.

**April 30, 1975** - South Vietnam surrenders to North Vietnam as North Vietnamese troops enter Saigon, now called Ho Chi Minh City.

## **CAUSES OF VIETNAM WAR**

1883-1945 - Cochinchina, southern Vietnam, and Annam and Tonkin, central and northern Vietnam, along with Cambodia and Laos make up colonial empire French Indochina.

1946 - Communists in the north begin fighting France for control of the country.

1949 - France establishes the State of Vietnam in the southern half of the country.

1951 - Ho Chi Minh becomes leader of Dang Lao Dong Vietnam, the Vietnam Worker's Party, in the north.

1954 - North Vietnamese begin helping South Vietnamese rebels fight South Vietnamese troops, thus begins the Vietnam conflict.

## **OTHER INFORMATION**

North Vietnam was communist. South Vietnam was not. North Vietnamese Communists and South Vietnamese Communist rebels, known as the Viet Cong, wanted to overthrow the South Vietnamese government and re-unite the country.

North Vietnamese guerrilla forces used the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a network of jungle paths and mountain trails, to send supplies and troops into South Vietnam.

The bombing of North Vietnam surpassed the total tonnage of bombs dropped on Germany, Italy, and Japan in World War II.

The war was estimated to cost about \$200 billion.

Today, Vietnam is a communist state.

### **\*U.S. Troop Statistics:**

8,744,000 – Total number of U.S. Troops served worldwide during Vietnam

3,403,000 – served in Southeast Asia

2,594,000 – served in South Vietnam

2,646 – U.S. personnel listed as POW/MIA at the end of the war

1,587 – U.S. personnel unaccounted for as of September 2019

### **\*U.S. Deaths:**

Battle: 47,434

Non-Battle: 10,786

Total In-Theatre: 58,220

Total military deaths for all countries involved: 1.3 million

Total civilian deaths: 1 million



\*Source: Department of Defense