

Vietnam War Vocab

Army of the Republic of Vietnam - Also known as the ARVN, it was the military of South Vietnam. It was poorly trained and poorly armed.

Ho Chi Minh Trail - A trail that was used by the North Vietnamese military to help supply the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. This trail went through North Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam.

Vietcong - A group in South Vietnam that believed that communism was best for Vietnam's government and fought for communism against the South Vietnamese military and the U.S. military.

Agent Orange - A chemical substance that caused extreme damage to plants. It was mainly used by the U.S. military to get rid of the jungle and to poison the food supply for the Viet Cong. However, Agent Orange caused around 400,000 deaths or maiming of people and also around 500,000 children were born with birth defects due to this chemical.

Napalm - A liquid-solid material that was highly flammable and the material stuck to many surfaces, and when set on fire, the surface or thing that was stuck by the material was immediately burned. It was mainly used in bombs and flamethrowers.

Timeline:

- **1887:** France imposes a colonial system over Vietnam, calling it French Indochina. The system includes Tonkin, Annam, Cochin China and Cambodia. Laos is added in 1893.
- **February 1930:** Ho Chi Minh founds the Indochinese Communist Party at a meeting in Hong Kong.
- **June 1940:** Nazi Germany takes control of France.
- **September 1940:** Japanese troops invade French Indochina and occupy Vietnam with little French resistance.
- **May 1941:** Ho Chi Minh and communist colleagues establish the League for the Independence of Vietnam. Known as the Viet Minh, the movement aims to resist French and Japanese occupation of Vietnam.
- **August 1945:** Japan is defeated by the Allies in World War II, leaving a power vacuum in Indochina. France begins to reassert its authority over Vietnam.
- **September 1945:** Ho Chi Minh declares an independent North Vietnam.
- **October 1949:** Following a civil war, Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong declares the creation of the People's Republic of China.

- **January 1950:** The People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union formally recognize the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam and both begin to supply economic and military aid to communist resistance fighters within the country.
- **February 1950:** Assisted by the Soviet Union and the newly Communist China, the Viet Minh step up their offensive against French outposts in Vietnam.
- **June 1950:** The United States, identifying the Viet Minh as a Communist threat, steps up military assistance to France for their operations against the Viet Minh.
- **March-May 1954:** French troops are humiliated in defeat by Viet Minh forces at Dien Bien Phu. The defeat solidifies the end of French rule in Indochina.
- **July 1954:** The Geneva Accords establish North and South Vietnam with the 17th parallel as the dividing line.
- **1955:** Catholic nationalist Ngo Dinh Diem emerges as the leader of South Vietnam, with U.S. backing, while Ho Chi Minh leads the communist state to the north.
- **May 1959:** North Vietnam forces begin to build a supply route through Laos and Cambodia to South Vietnam in an effort to support guerrilla attacks against Diem's government in the south. The route becomes known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail and is greatly expanded and enhanced during the Vietnam War.
- **December 1960:** The National Liberation Front (NLF) is formed with North Vietnamese backing as the political wing of the anti government insurgency in South Vietnam. The United States views the NLF as an arm of North Vietnam and starts calling the military wing of the NLF the Viet Cong—short for Vietnam Cong-san, or Vietnamese communists.
- **May 1961:** President John F. Kennedy sends helicopters and 400 Green Berets to South Vietnam and authorizes secret operations against the Viet Cong.
- **January 1962:** In Operation Ranch Hand, U.S. aircraft start spraying Agent Orange and other herbicides over rural areas of South Vietnam to kill vegetation that would offer cover and food for guerrilla forces.
- **November 1963:** The United States backs a South Vietnam military coup against the unpopular Diem, which ends in the brutal killing of Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. Between 1963 and 1965, 12 different governments take the lead in South Vietnam as military coups replace one government after another.
- **August 1964:** USS Maddox is allegedly attacked by North Vietnamese patrol torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin (the attack is later disputed), leading President Johnson to call for air strikes on North Vietnamese patrol boat bases. Two U.S. aircraft are shot down and one U.S. pilot, Everett Alvarez, Jr., becomes the first U.S. airman to be taken prisoner by North Vietnam.
- **August 1964:** The attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin spur Congress to pass the Gulf Of Tonkin Resolution, which authorizes the president to "take all necessary measures, including the use of armed force" against any aggressor in the conflict.

• **January 1968:** The Tet Offensive begins, encompassing a combined assault of Viet Minh and North Vietnamese armies. Attacks are carried out in more than 100 cities and outposts across South Vietnam, including Hue and Saigon, and the U.S. Embassy is invaded. The effective, bloody attacks shock U.S. officials and mark a turning point in the war and the beginning of a gradual U.S. withdrawal from the region.

• **March 16, 1968:** At the U.S. massacre at Mai Lai, more than 500 civilians are murdered by U.S. forces. The massacre happens amid a campaign of U.S. search-and-destroy operations that are intended to find enemy territories, destroy them and then retreat.

• **January 27, 1973:** President Nixon signs the Paris Peace Accords, ending direct U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. The North Vietnamese accept a cease fire. But as U.S. troops depart Vietnam, North Vietnamese military officials continue plotting to overtake South Vietnam.

April 1975: In the Fall of Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam is seized by communist forces and the government of South Vietnam surrenders. U.S. Marine and Air Force helicopters transport more than 1,000 American civilians and nearly 7,000 South Vietnamese refugees out of Saigon in an 18-hour mass evacuation effort.

• **July 1975:** North and South Vietnam are formally unified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam under hardline communist rule.

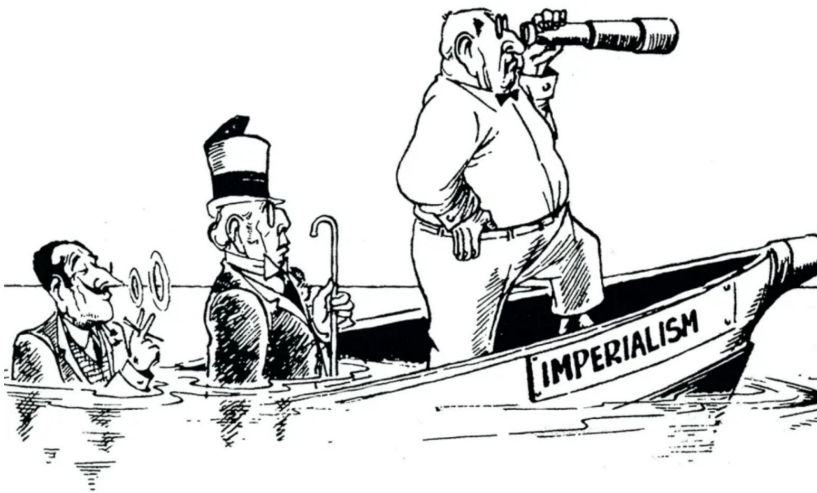
• **The War Dead:** By the end of the war, more than 58,000 Americans lose their lives. Vietnam would later release estimates that 1.1 million North Vietnamese and Viet Cong fighters were killed, up to 250,000 South Vietnamese soldiers died and more than 2 million civilians were killed on both sides of the war.

Article #1:

How to Tell When the Rebels Have Won

Eqbal Ahmad

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History confirms the sovereignty of the human factor in revolutionary warfare. In Vietnam, the signs are clear. The South Vietnamese regime has no legitimacy, and no government backed by a Western power can hope for popular support in a country where the Communists have capitalized on the nationalist appeal of restoring independence and unity. The massacre of civilians began as early as 1960. It has since escalated. The intellectuals and moderates have deserted or defected. And North Vietnam is subjected to daily bombings. America and its South Vietnamese allies

have lost the revolutionary war because they could not win the support of the Vietnamese people, and now their moral isolation is total.

As an Asian, I am aware of the appeals and threat of communism, and I would support policies likely to prevent its expansion. But I do not believe that communism is the wave of the future, and therefore I am neither panicked nor paralyzed. I believe that Vietnam is a unique case—culturally, historically and politically. I hope that the United States will not repeat its Vietnam blunders elsewhere. I do not subscribe to the domino theory and I am anguished by Americans who call Vietnam a test case.

Vietnam is the only country in the world where the nationalist movement for independence was led by the Communists during its most crucial and heroic decades. In new countries where institutional loyalties are still weak, the legitimacy and popularity of a regime derives from its nationalist heroes and martyrs. Unfortunately for the free world the George Washington of Vietnam, its Gandhi, was a Communist nationalist. Ho Chi Minh and his associates are understandably considered the founding fathers of modern Vietnam. It was morbid optimism to expect an absentee aristocrat to supplant a leader who had devoted a lifetime to the liberation of his country, and to defeat a leadership and cadres whose organic ties with the peasants were cemented by the bitter struggle for independence.

Vietnam is also the only country in which the United States gave substantial support to a colonial power in a war of independence. This could not have endeared America to the Vietnamese people. Then in the “Southern zone” America replaced France. To most Vietnamese the present war, therefore, is a continuation of the struggle for independence. I know how Asians feel about America’s action. They call it neo-colonialism; some think it is imperialism. I know this is very wrong because Americans are naturally sympathetic to peoples’ struggles for freedom and justice, and they would like to help if they could. I prefer the term “maternalism” for American policy in countries like Vietnam, because it reminds me of the story of an elephant who, as she strolled benignly in the jungle, stepped on a mother partridge and killed her. When she noticed the orphaned siblings, tears filled the kind elephant’s eyes. “Ah, I too have maternal instincts,” she said turning to the orphans, and sat on them.

Article #2:

The Vietnam War, as Seen by the Victors

How the North Vietnamese remember the conflict 40 years after the fall of Saigon

Elisabeth Rosen Apr 16, 2015



HANOI, VIETNAM—Forty years ago, on April 30, 1975, Nguyen Dang Phat experienced the happiest day of his life.

That morning, as communist troops swept into the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon and forced the U.S.-backed government to surrender, the North Vietnamese Army soldier marked the end of the war along with a crowd of people in Hanoi. The city was about to become the

capital of a unified Vietnam. “All the roads were flooded by people holding flags,” Nguyen, now 65, told me recently. “There were no bombs or airplane sounds or screaming. The happy moment was indescribable.”

The event, known in the United States as the fall of Saigon and conjuring images of panicked Vietnamese trying to crowd onto helicopters to be evacuated, is celebrated as Reunification Day here in Hanoi. The holiday involves little explicit reflection on the country’s 15-year-plus conflict, in which North Vietnam and its supporters in the South fought to unify the country under communism, and the U.S. intervened on behalf of South Vietnam’s anti-communist government. More than 58,000 American soldiers died in the fighting between 1960 and 1975; the estimated number of Vietnamese soldiers and civilians killed on both sides varies widely, from 2.1 million to 3.8 million during the American intervention and in related conflicts before and after.

In the United States, the story of America and South Vietnam’s defeat is familiar. But North Vietnam’s war generation experienced those events differently, and several told me recently what it was like to be on the “winning” side.

Decades after what’s known here as the “American War,” Vietnam remains a communist state. But it has gradually opened to foreign investment, becoming one of the fastest-growing economies in East Asia. As an American who has lived in the Vietnamese capital for three years, I rarely hear the conflict discussed. At Huu Tiep Lake, which is located at the quiet junction of two residential alleys, vendors sell fresh produce without glancing at the wreckage of a B-52 that was shot down there in 1972 and still juts out of the water as a memorial. Nor do many passersby stop to read the plaque that describes, in both English and Vietnamese, the “outstanding feat of arm” that brought down the bomber of the “US imperialist.”



A worker rests near Huu Tiep Lake in Hanoi. (Reuters)

It’s rare to find such marks of the communist triumph on the streets of Hanoi. Kham Thien Street, a broad avenue in the city center, bustles with motorbikes and shops selling clothing and iPhones. There’s little evidence that some 2,000 homes were destroyed and nearly 300 people killed nearby during the 1972 “Christmas bombing,” the heaviest bombardment of the war, ordered by the Nixon administration to force the North to negotiate an end to the conflict.

“There were body parts everywhere,” recalled Pham Thai Lan, who helped with the relief effort as a medical student. It was the first time she’d seen so many corpses outside the hospital. Now a cheerful 66-year-old, she grew somber as she talked about that day. As Nguyen, the veteran, told me: “Talking about war is to talk about loss and painful memories.”

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When I talk to Hanoi residents about their experiences “during the war,” they often ask me which one I mean. For members of Nguyen’s generation, the American War was one violent interlude amid several decades of fear and conflict, falling between a fight for independence from the French beginning in the 1940s and a month-long border war with China in 1979.

“The U.S. tried to inscribe the war in Vietnam into its Cold War campaign,” Thomas Bass, a historian and journalism professor at University at Albany, State University of New York, told me. “North Vietnamese were evil communists, and the free and independent people of the South were to be protected.”

But I’ve rarely heard Vietnamese speak in these terms. Nguyen Dang Phat, the North Vietnamese Army veteran, told me: “On the news at the time, they said that this war was a fight for independence. All the people wanted to stand up and fight and protect the country. Everyone wanted to help the South and see the country unite again.” Do Xuan Sinh, 66, who worked in the military-supply department, placed the American War in the context of a long history of struggle against foreign interference, from “fighting the Chinese for 1,000 years”—a reference to the Chinese occupation of the country from 111 B.C. to 938 A.D.—to the war with the French. “All Vietnamese understood that the [Communist] Party helped Vietnam win independence from France. Then in the American War, we understood the party could help us win independence again.”

Those who did speak out against the war put themselves in danger. A former political prisoner who asked that his name not be used told me that when he started an organization to protest the war, he was jailed for several years. As a teenager in Hanoi, he had listened illegally to BBC radio broadcasts. When the fighting started, he gathered a handful of friends to print pamphlets saying, as he told me, that “the purpose of the war was not for the benefit of Vietnamese people, just for the authorities in the North and South.”

“Others called it the American War, but I saw it as a civil war between the North and South of Vietnam. America only took part in this war to support the South to fight communism,” he said. This regional divide persists. “The country has been unified for 40 years, but the nation is yet to be reconciled,” said Son Tran, 55, a business owner in Hanoi with relatives in the South. “Vietnamese media have shown many pictures of American soldiers hugging North Vietnamese soldiers. But you never see any pictures of a North Vietnamese soldier hugging a South Vietnamese soldier.”

In the meantime, a generation has grown up with no experience of the war. A 56-year-old banh mi vendor in Hanoi who gave her name as Thuan complained about how much society has changed: “Young people today are a little bit lazy. They are not willing to experience poverty, like being a waiter or a housemaid. They didn’t experience war, so they don’t know how people back then suffered a lot. They just want to be [in a] high position without working too much.”

Her son, a burly 26-year-old limping from a post-soccer brawl, interrupted to ask for a banh mi. Thuan split a roll with scissors and spread it with a layer of pâté.

“She keeps talking on and on about the war. It’s really boring, so I don’t really listen,” he said.

Nguyen Manh Hiep, a North Vietnamese Army veteran who recently opened Hanoi’s first private war museum in his home, remains preoccupied by the conflict and his need to teach the younger generation about it. He displays artifacts from both sides, collected over eight years of fighting and two decades of return trips to the battlefield. The items range from American uniforms and radio transmitters to the blanket his superior gave him when he was wounded by a bullet. He showed me a coffee filter that one of his fellow soldiers had made from the wreckage of an American plane that had crashed. We drank tea in his courtyard, surrounded by plane fragments and missile shells.

“I want to save things from the war so that later generations can understand it,” he told me. “They don’t know enough.”