

The Vietnam War [Revision Cascade]

The Vietnam War: why the US became involved	French driven out of Vietnam, 1954	After 1945, the French failed to re-conquer Indo- China; the Geneva Agreement (1954) divided Vietnam into a Communist north and a 'democratic' south
	Communist National Liberation Front, 1960	After 1960, the Communist National Liberation Front (the 'Vietcong' – VC) began a guerrilla war to try to conquer South Vietnam
	Hatred of Communism	America was committed to 'contain' Communism (e.g. the McCarthy 'witch-hunt' of the 1950s); also the US 'military-industrial complex' wanted war
	Domino theory	The Diem government of South Vietnam was unpopular and weak, but the US believed that if one country fell to communism in the region, others would follow
	Escalation	Once they got involved, the USA found that they were being attacked by the VC and had to respond:
How the US got involved: events	Thich Quang Duc, Oct 1963	In October 1963, a Buddhist monk named Thich Quang Duc burned himself to death in protest at the Diem government's persecution of Buddhism
	Diem was assassinated, Nov 1963	In November 1963, the CIA arranged a military coup, and Diem was assassinated
	USS Maddox incident, 2 Aug 1964	The USS Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin claimed it had been attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats.
	Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, 7 Aug 1964	US Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, giving President Johnson the power to order military action
	Operation Rolling Thunder, Feb 1965	After the VC attacked US air bases, Johnson ordered Operation Rolling Thunder and the USA sent increasing numbers of troops (500,000 by 1969)
The theory of guerrilla warfare	To defeat a more powerful enemy	Guerrilla warfare is used by small, poorly-equipped groups fighting a more powerful enemy
	On Guerrilla Warfare, 1937	Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong explained: 1, get the support of the people; 2, harass and weaken the enemy; 3. drive them out in a conventional war
	The only rule is no rules	The only rule to guerrilla warfare, said Mao Zedong, is that there are no rules
	Ho Chi Minh fought Japan and France	Ho Chi Minh used guerrilla tactics against the Japanese during the Second World War, and then to drive out the French

	Vo Nguyen Giap defeated the USA	The Vietnamese military leader Vo Nguyen Giap and the North Vietnamese army (NVA) used guerrilla tactics against the Americans, 1964–1975
Guerrilla tactics, 1964–1968: facts	Surprise attacks and sabotage	The VC fought in ordinary peasant pyjamas so that they could not be distinguished from the ordinary population
	Cu Chi tunnels	After attacking, they used a vast network of tunnels to escape (e.g. the 75-mile Cu Chi network near Saigon)
	Booby traps, tripwires and landmines	Booby traps, tripwires and landmines (e.g. 'Bouncing Betty')
	Hanging onto the belt	The tactic of 'hanging onto the belt' – staying close to the Americans so they could not use air or artillery
	Ho Chi Minh Trail	The Vietcong were supplied by China and Russia (SAM-guided missiles and MiG planes) via the Ho Chi Minh Trail supply line through Laos/Cambodia
The US response: events	Operation Rolling Thunder, 1965–1968	150,000 B52 bomber raids, dropping 864,000 tonnes of bombs on places where they thought there were Vietcong units
	la Drang, 1965	US Commander General William Westmoreland lured the NVA to attack American troops at la Drang, then destroyed them with a massive air strike
	Operation Crimp, 1966	In 1966, Operation Crimp tried to destroy the Cu Chi tunnels by bombing, followed by a search-and-destroy raid involving 8000 troops. It failed
	My Lai Massacre, 1968	Charlie Company of the 23rd Infantry Division, led by Second Lieutenant William Calley, went berserk and raped and massacred a Vietnamese village
	Operation Phoenix, 1968–1972	The CIA arrested and interrogated suspected VC
The US response: tactics	Bombing	e.g. Operation Rolling Thunder, fibre-glass cluster bombs
	High-tech weapons	e.g. artillery, 'hueys' (helicopters), napalm (a petrol-based goo which burned) and Agent Orange (a defoliant to strip the leaves from the trees)
	Strategic Hamlets programme	Hundreds of thousands of peasants were moved from Vietcong-controlled areas to live in 'safe' villages (which were, in effect, concentration camps)
	Search-and-destroy	The aim of these patrols was to draw the Vietcong into an attack, when they could be destroyed by US air and artillery – they deteriorated into 'Zippo Raids'
	Hearts and minds	The US hoped to win 'hearts and minds' by building schools, roads and sewers, but the foreign occupation, strategic hamlets and atrocities made this impossible

My Lai Massacre, 1968: causes	Tet Offensive, Jan–May 1968	The incident took place during the US counter-attack after Phase I of the Tet offensive – i.e. in a battle situation
	Hiding the 48th guerrillas	US army intelligence believed that the Son My villagers were hiding the 48 th Battalion of the VC (which had attacked US forces in Quang Ngai province)
	Captain Medina’s briefing	Medina briefed the soldiers that by 7am all the villagers would have left for market so that only VC guerrillas would be left; they were ordered to ‘wipe them out’
	Young soldiers	The average age of US infantry was 19; particularly the inexperienced ‘cherries’ were unfit to fight the experienced and ruthless VC
	Broken morale	By 1968, especially after the success of the Tet offensive, US infantry morale was broken, with drugs common and instances of fragging and ‘working it out’
My Lai Massacre: events and aftermath	Lt Calley and Charlie Company, 16 Mar 1968	Calley and ‘C’ Company attacked the My Lai 4 hamlet of Son My village and massacred about 80 villagers
	My Lai and My Khe	Other platoons, over the next two days, attacked other hamlets and killed villagers; in all 504 villagers were killed (US estimate 347)
	Hugh Thompson	Hugh Thompson and his helicopter crew tried to prevent the massacre
	Initial cover-up for the press	The initial press briefings claimed the company had done an ‘outstanding job’ killing ‘128 Viet Cong and 22 civilians’ during a ‘fierce fire fight’
	Seymour Hersh, Nov 1969	Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh published the story of the massacre in the US, leading to Calley’s conviction
US failures during the Vietnam War	Body count and kill ratio	US generals focused on ‘body count’ and ‘kill ratio’ – they made no progress towards defeating the enemy
	Mistakes	US tactics often misfired – for instance when US bombers dropped napalm on ‘friendly’ villages by mistake
	Zippo Raids	Search and Destroy was simply using US infantry as ‘bait’ (US morale fell); the raids often deteriorated into ‘Zippo Raids’
	Atrocities	There were a number of atrocities (e.g. the My Lai Massacre, 1968)
	Hearts and minds failed	Foreign occupation, strategic hamlets, Operation Phoenix and atrocities such as My Lai made the US hated, however many hospitals they built

Media coverage of the war: facts	The Green Berets, 1968	Up to 1968, the media (e.g. the film The Green Berets with John Wayne) showed American soldiers as kind humanitarians fighting a brutal and cruel enemy
	Walter Cronkite during the Tet Offensive, Jan 1968	Seeing Vietcong guerrillas capture the American Embassy in Saigon, TV newsman Walter Cronkite said: 'What the hell is going on? I thought we were winning'
	Life in the V Ring, Feb 1968	In February 1968, John Wheeler wrote Life in the V Ring, describing the hardship and anger of the American troops in Vietnam
	Seymour Hersh, Nov 1969	Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh published the story of the My Lai massacre; it undermined the US's 'moral right' to be in Vietnam
	Credibility gap	A 'credibility gap' opened up between what the US government was saying about the war, and what the public felt about it
US protest movements, 1968–1973	Vietnam Day Committee, 1965	In 1965, a student group called Vietnam Day Committee held a 'teach-in' against the war; in 1967, 100,000 people went on a protest march to the Lincoln Memorial
	Martin Luther King, 4 Apr 1967	In 1967, Martin Luther King opposed the war on the ground of its cost; the money should be spent on reducing poverty at home, he said
	Muhammad Ali refused the draft, 28 Apr 1967	The Nation of Islam asked why black boys should die for a country which would not grant them equal rights; NOI member Muhammad Ali refused to be drafted
	Kent State University, 1970	In 1970, students at Kent State University, Ohio, protested against the US bombing of Cambodia
	War veterans, 1971	In 1971, war veterans went on an anti-war march, and threw away their medals
Public reaction to My Lai: events	Initial complaints were ignored, 1968–1969	Thompson's report and letters written by other witnesses to President Nixon, Senators and Army chiefs were ignored
	Seymour Hersh, Nov 1969	Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh published the story of My Lai; the US public were horrified – it undermined the US's 'moral right' to be in Vietnam
	Calley's court martial, Nov 1970	A number of officers were charged but only one stood trial (he was acquitted) – Calley was found guilty of murder and sentenced to hard labour for life
	Nixon released Calley, Mar 1971	80% of Americans disapproved of Calley's conviction, and President Nixon stepped in to reduce his sentence to 3½ years house arrest
	Medina standard, Aug 1971	Although Captain Medina was found not guilty, the court declared that a soldier, being aware of a war crime, is criminally liable (and not just his commander)

Kent State protest, 1970: causes	Seymour Hersh, Nov 1969	Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh had published the My Lai story; it outraged student opinion and undermined the US's 'moral right' to be in Vietnam
	President Nixon's draft lottery, Dec 1969	In order to reduce anger at the unfairness of the draft, Nixon had introduced a lottery system; this had led students to hope the war was coming to an end
	Weathermen bombings, Mar 1970	Anti-Vietnam protests reached a high with a bombing campaign waged by an extreme student group called the 'Weather Underground'
	Cambodia incursion, 30 Apr 1970	US forces escalated the war, attacking Vietcong bases in Cambodia
	Anti-war demonstrations, 2 May 1970	There were violent anti-war demonstrations at universities across the US
Kent State protest: events	Cambodia incursion, 30 Apr 1970	US forces escalated the war, attacking Vietcong bases in Cambodia
	Friday: Demonstration and riots, 1 May 1970	A peaceful demonstration of about 500 students was followed by riots that night in town; the police declared a state of emergency
	Saturday: the National Guard, 2 May 1970	Protestors set fire to the Reserve Officer Training Corps building and stoned police and firemen; Governor Rhodes called in the National Guard
	Sunday: bayonets, 3 May 1970	A demonstration was dispersed with tear gas; a curfew was announced and at 11pm students were forced back into their dorms at bayonet-point (some were stabbed)
	Monday: 4 shot dead, 4 May 1970	When a violent crowd of 2000 refused to disperse, 29 Guardsmen fired 67 rounds into the crowd, killing four (including 2 bystanders) and wounding 9
Kent State protest: results	Public response	Most Americans blamed the students; President Nixon said they were Communists; in New York construction workers held a 'Hard Hat Riot' in support of the war
	Student strike	4 million students went on strike at 900 universities
	Washington demonstrations, 9 May	100,000 people protested in Washington; the protest became so violent that the President had to go to Camp David
	President's Commission on Campus Unrest, Jun 1970	It found the Guardsmen guilty of indiscipline and ordered that the National Guard should never be issued with loaded rifles confronting students
	Wisconsin bombing, Aug 1970	Anti-war protests became much more violent; in August 1970, a van filled with explosives was blown up at the University of Wisconsin

The Fulbright Hearings: events	Capitol bombing, Mar 1971	A Weatherman bomb in the Capitol in Washington caused \$300,000 damage
	Veterans against the War, Apr 1971	Vietnam veterans camped in Washington, and threw away their medals
	22 hearings on 7 proposals, Apr–May 1971	The Senate Foreign Relations Committee held 22 hearings on 7 proposals to withdraw from Vietnam
	Fulbright's opening remarks, 20 Apr 1971	The Chairman, William Fulbright, openly opposed the war, and denied the right of the president to have taken the US into the war in 1964
	Troop withdrawals, 1972	After the hearings, Nixon began to withdraw troops from Vietnam; by the end of 1972, only 30,000 remained
Why the US lost the Vietnam War	High-tech tactics	American high-tech tactics failed to destroy the VC guerrilla forces
	8,000 miles away	America was fighting and supplying a war 8000 miles away
	Failure to win hearts and minds	The South Vietnamese government was weak, brutal, corrupt and hated; the Americans' cruelty and atrocities failed to 'win hearts and minds'
	Drugs, fragging and working it out	US soldiers (especially the 'cherries') had low morale, with US soldiers going AWOL, taking drugs, 'fragging' (killing their officers) and 'working it out' (negotiating orders)
	Opposition in America to the war	Particularly horror at soldiers being returned home in body bags and incidents such as the My Lai massacre and the Kent State shootings
Why the Vietcong won the war	Vietcong guerrilla tactics	VC guerrilla tactics won the war
	Supplies from China and Russia	The VC were supplied by China and Russia down the Ho Chi Minh trail
	Patriotism and motivation	The Vietnamese were fighting a patriotic war of liberation
	Ruthless and experienced soldiers	The VC had been at war since 1945; they were fanatically dedicated fighters, surviving horrific conditions in the tunnels
	South Vietnamese peasants helped them	South Vietnamese peasants supported and helped the VC

The Tet Offensive, 1968: facts	General Thanh's offensive	VC militants, led by General Thanh, argued that the guerrilla war being waged by General Nguyen Giap was too slow, and called for a large-scale attack
	Vietnamese New Year	The Vietcong had offered a truce for the Vietnamese New Year (Tet) celebrations, so half the South Vietnamese army (ARVN) was on leave
	Tet attack, 31 Jan 1968	On 31 January 1968, 84,000 Vietcong troops attacked a hundred towns and cities across South Vietnam; they mounted two more attacks in May and August
	Initial success – Saigon and Hue	At first, the attack was spectacularly successful: a 15-man suicide squad captured the American Embassy in Saigon, and Hue was captured and held for 25 days
	Failure	The Americans could defeat a conventional, non-guerrilla attack; the Vietcong lost 58,000 killed, including many officers
The Tet Offensive: results	Vietcong losses	The Vietcong lost 58,000 killed, including many officers
	Vietcong capacity damaged	It was months before they could mount a military operation, and morale was damaged. The NVA declared: 'Never again will we risk our entire army.'
	South Vietnamese deaths and refugees	The South Vietnamese lost 14,300 civilians killed, 70,000 homes destroyed and had to cope with 627,000 refugees
	American loss of confidence	The Americans suffered relatively light military losses, but public confidence had a huge setback, and Americans realised they would never 'win' the war
	Both sides lost	It was the only battle that both sides lost
US withdrawal: facts	Nixon Doctrine – Vietnamisation, 1969	Looking for a way out, Nixon began 'Vietnamisation' – i.e. leaving the war to the South Vietnamese army (the ARVN), but with US financial support
	Cambodia incursion, 1970	US forces escalated the war, attacking Vietcong bases in Cambodia
	Laos, 1971	US forces attacked Vietcong supply lines in Laos
	The Madman theory, 1972	The 'madman theory'; Nixon tried to awe the Vietnamese into peace by making them believe he was capable of anything; he mounted a huge bombing campaign
	Paris Peace Agreement, 1973	The Paris Peace Agreement (negotiated by Henry Kissinger) was signed; the US withdrew, American prisoners of war were released

Paris Peace Conference, 1973: facts	Secret peace negotiations, Aug 1969	Secret peace negotiations between US National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, and North Vietnamese government member Le Duc Tho
	VC Easter Offensive failed, Summer 1972	The VC had tried a conventional invasion which had been repulsed; the North realised it could not drive the Americans out by force
	Draft Peace Agreement, Oct 1972	Tho made an agreement that allowed the South Vietnamese government to stay in power, but withdrew when South Vietnamese President Thieu rejected the peace
	Christmas bombing campaign, Dec 1972	Nixon mounted a huge bombing campaign to force the North Vietnamese back to the Peace Conference (the 'madman' theory)
	Paris Peace Agreement, 23 Jan 1973	The Paris Peace Agreement (negotiated by Henry Kissinger) was signed; the US withdrew, and American prisoners of war were released
The fall of Saigon, 1975	Paris Peace Agreement, 23 Jan 1973	The Paris Peace Agreement (negotiated by Henry Kissinger) was signed; the US withdrew, and American prisoners of war were released
	North Vietnamese invasion, Mar 1975	The NVA attacked South Vietnam ('Campaign 275'); at first the ARVN fought back – refugees (the 'Convoy of Tears') fled south
	Congress refused military aid, 17 Apr 1975	The US Congress refused to fund President Ford's request for a \$1bn military and aid package for South Vietnam
	Thieu fell from power, 21 Apr 1975	South Vietnamese President Thieu fell from power, blaming the Americans for breaking their promise
	Fall of Saigon, 30 Apr 1975	After a short war, the North Vietnamese entered Saigon – panic as Americans and pro-US Vietnamese tried to helicopter out