

Chapter 22 The Vietnam War Years

Sec 1 Moving Toward Conflict

Roots of American Involvement

1. France ruled Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) from the late 1800s until WWII, despite numerous revolts from the Vietnamese
2. Ho Chi Minh – leader of the Indochinese Communist Party, forced to flee the country in 1930
3. Vietminh – formed in 1941 by Ho Chi Minh, combination of Vietnamese Communists and other national groups
 - a. Sought Vietnam's independence from foreign rule
4. French troops returned to Vietnam in 1946 driving the Vietminh into the northern half of the country
5. French Indochina War – France's attempt to reestablish its rule in Vietnam after WWII
 - a. Seeking to prevent the spread of communism the U.S. provided the French with massive amounts of economic and military aid
 - b. Sought to maintain an ally against the growing Soviet presence in Europe
6. Domino Theory – if one nation falls under Communist control, nearby nations will also fall under control

7. Dien Bien Phu – French outpost in northwestern Vietnam, overrun by the Vietminh in May of 1954 delivering the final blow to the French
8. Geneva Accords – 1954 agreement that divided Vietnam into Communist controlled N. Vietnam and non-Communist controlled S. Vietnam until unification elections could be held in 1956

United States Steps In

1. Ngo Dinh Diem – S. Vietnam’s president and strong anti-communist refuses to take part in countrywide elections in 1956
 - a. Fears the growing popularity of Ho Chi Minh
 - b. Diem suppresses any political opposition in the south and limits Buddhists practices
2. Vietcong – Communist opposition group in the south which began attacking the Diem government, later known as the National Liberation Front (NLF)
3. Ho Chi Minh Trail – network of paths used by N. Vietnam to transport supplies to the Vietcong in S. Vietnam
4. Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations chose to “sink or swim” with Diem
5. Diem instituted the strategic hamlet program (moving all villagers to protected areas) and continued to oppress Buddhists
6. Nov 1, 1963 – U.S. supported military coup topples the Diem regime

The South Grows More Unstable

1. A string of military leaders attempt to lead the country unsuccessfully, while the Vietcong grow stronger
2. For political reasons, Johnson didn't want to be accused of "losing Vietnam"

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

1. Aug 2, 1964 – N. Vietnamese patrol boat fires a torpedo at an American destroyer patrolling in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of N. Vietnam
2. Tonkin Gulf Resolution – adopted by Congress in 1964, giving Johnson the broad powers to wage war in Vietnam
 - a. Johnson had been secretly leading raids in N. Vietnam before the Gulf of Tonkin incident
3. Operation Rolling Thunder – Feb 1965, first sustained bombing of N. Vietnam, response to a Vietcong attack killing 8 Americans
4. By June 1965 more than 50,000 U.S. soldiers were battling the Vietcong

Sec 2 U.S. Involvement and Escalation

Election of 1964

1. Lyndon Johnson (Dem) vs. Barry Goldwater (Rep)

2. Goldwater was an extreme anti-communist and many feared that he may push the U.S. into war with the Soviet Union
3. Johnson soundly defeats Goldwater

The Decision to Escalate

1. Johnson worked closely with Robert McNamara (Sec of State) and Dean Rusk (Sec of State) and decided to dispatch thousands of U.S. troops to Vietnam in March 1965
2. Congress as well as many Americans supported Johnson's decision
3. By the end of 1965 more than 180,000 troops had been sent to Vietnam
4. General William Westmoreland – U.S. commander in S. Vietnam, continued to request more troops
5. By 1967, 500,000 U.S. troops were in Vietnam

War in the Jungle

1. Vietcong used hit and run tactics and their knowledge of the jungle to their advantage
2. Many U.S. enemies lived amongst civilians
3. Countryside was laced with booby traps and land mines
4. Vietcong had an elaborate tunnel system allowing them to launch surprise attacks and disappear quickly

Frustrating War of Attrition

1. U.S. underestimated the Vietcong's ingenuity and its resolve
2. Westmoreland's strategy was to gradually wear down the enemy through continuous harassment
3. Vietcong relied on supplies from China and the Soviet Union
4. U.S. viewed the war as a military struggle, but the to the Vietcong, it was a struggle for their very existence

The Battle for "Hearts and Minds" – American strategy to keep the Vietcong from winning the support of S.

Vietnam's rural population

1. Napalm – gasoline-based bombs that set fire to the jungle
2. Agent Orange – leaf killing toxic chemical devastated the landscape
3. Both wounded villagers and left villages in ruins
4. Search and Destroy Missions – intended to root out villagers with ties to Vietcong by destroying their livestock and burning their villages

Sinking Morale

1. Frustrations of guerrilla warfare, brutal jungle conditions, and the failure to make substantial progress against the enemy took its toll
2. Soldiers turned to alcohol, drugs, and some even murdered their commanding officers

3. S. Vietnamese gov't was marred by corruption and instability

The Early War at Home

1. Inflation rate tripled
2. In order to finance the war, Johnson had to cut his Great Society programs
3. By 1967, most Americans still supported the war
4. Was America's 1st "living room" war
5. Credibility Gap – public distrust of statements made by the gov't

Sec 3 A Nation Divided

A Working Class War

1. Most soldiers who fought in the war were from the lower economic classes of American society (80%)
2. Most soldiers who fought were drafted, but many found ways to avoid the draft
 - a. Medical Excuses
 - b. Joined the National Guard or Coast Guard
 - c. College Deferment
3. African Americans served in disproportionate numbers in ground combat troops – accounted for 20% of deaths
4. Thousands of females served as Army and Navy nurses

The Roots of Opposition

1. New Left – youth dominated political movement of the 1960s which demanded sweeping changes in American society
 - a. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) – a New Left group established in 1960 that called for greater individual freedom and responsibility
 - b. Free Speech Movement (FSM) – 1964 New Left organization that focused its criticism on what it called the American “machine” (nation’s faceless powerful business and gov’t institutions)
2. College campuses across the country joined together to protest the war

Protest Movement Emerges

1. Most youths who opposed the war believed that the conflict was a civil war and the U.S. military had no business there
2. Some argued that the U.S. could not police the world and the war was draining U.S. strength in Europe and the Middle East
3. Others believed the war was morally unjust
4. Spring of 1967 – 500,000 protesters of all ages gathered in Central Park and tossed their draft cards into a bonfire
5. 200,000 men were accused of draft offenses and nearly 4,000 were imprisoned
6. 10,000 Americans fled to Canada to avoid the draft

War Divides the Nation

1. Doves – strongly opposed the war and believed the U.S. should withdraw its forces
2. Hawks – believed U.S. should unleash a greater show of military force to end the war
3. 1967 – 2/3 of Americans still believed the war was justified
 - a. 70% of Americans believed war protests were “acts of disloyalty”
4. Johnson continued his policy of slow escalation despite criticism from both the Doves and the Hawks
 - a. By the end of 1967 the war began to create turmoil in his administration and Sec of Defense McNamara resigned

Sec 4 A Tumultuous Year

The Tet Offensive Turns the War

1. Tet – Jan 30, 1968, New Year’s Eve to the Vietnamese
2. Tet Offensive – massive surprise attack by the Vietcong on South Vietnamese towns and cities early in 1968
 - a. Took a month for U.S. and S. Vietnamese forces to regain control of the cities
 - b. Military Standpoint – Vietcong lost 32,000 lives, U.S./ARVN lost 3,000

- c. Psychological/Political Standpoint – shook an American public that believed the enemy was close to defeat
3. Media began to openly criticize the war and American support for the war rapidly declined
4. Clark Clifford – close friend of Johnson who replaced McNamara as Sec of Defense
 - a. Concluded that the war was unwinnable
5. Johnson's approval rating plummeted

Days of Loss and Rage

1. Antiwar coalition in the Democratic party takes steps to unseat Johnson by backing Eugene McCarthy who was a strong critic of the war
2. Johnson defeated McCarthy by only a small margin in the NH primaries – viewed as a defeat for Johnson
3. Robert Kennedy – Democratic Senator from NY who declared his candidacy for President on the same antiwar platform as McCarthy
4. March 31, 1968 – Johnson announces that the U.S. would seek negotiations to end the war ending the U.S. policy of escalation
 - a. Johnson also announces that he will not run for president
5. April 4, 1968 – Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated sparking riots in several major U.S. cities

6. June 4, 1968 – Robert Kennedy, who had become the front runner in the Democratic primary, was assassinated by Sirhan Sirhan
7. Nation's college campuses continued to erupt in protest

Turbulent Race for President

1. Turmoil in Chicago – location of the Democratic primary which had come down to VP Hubert Humphrey and Eugene McCarthy
 - a. Humphrey was to receive the nomination which upset many antiwar activists
 - b. 10,000 protesters showed up hoping to pressure Democrats into adopting an antiwar platform
 - c. Aug 28 – with cameras watching, police moved into a group of protesters, spraying them with Mace and beating them with nightsticks
 - d. Democrats had etched an image as a party in disorder in the minds of millions of Americans
2. Richard Nixon, who had made one of the greatest political comebacks in history, won the Republican nomination
 - a. Appealed to the middle-class by promising to restore law and order to the U.S. and also promised in vague words to end the war
3. George Wallace – former Alabama Senator who ran on the American Independent Party ticket

- a. Long-time believer in school segregation and states' rights
4. Nixon wins the election but only captures 43% of the popular vote

Sec 5 The End of the War and its Legacy

President Nixon and Vietnamization

1. Jan 1969 – Negotiations begun by the Johnson Administration were going nowhere
2. Vietnamization – Nixon's strategy for ending U.S. involvement in Vietnam
 - a. Called for the gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops and their replacement with S. Vietnamese forces
 - b. By Aug 1969 25,000 U.S. troops had returned home
3. "Peace with Honor" – Nixon intended to maintain U.S. dignity in the face of its withdrawal from war
 - a. Nixon secretly orders massive bombings on N. Vietnamese supply lines and neighboring countries (Laos & Cambodia)

Trouble Continues on the Home Front

1. Silent Majority – moderate, mainstream Americans who quietly supported the president's strategy
2. My Lai Massacre – U.S. troops rounded up 100 (mostly women and children) innocent Vietnamese and shot them

3. Invasion of Cambodia – launched on April 30, 1970 in order to clear out N. Vietnamese and Vietcong supply centers
 - a. 1.5 million students closed down 1,200 campuses because of protests
 - b. Nixon bombed and invaded Cambodia w/o notifying Congress
 - c. Dec 31, 1970 Congress repealed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution which granted the president near independence in conducting Vietnam policy
4. Kent State – May 4, 1970 massive student protest led to the burning of an ROTC building
 - a. National Guard responded by firing into the crowd wounding 9 and killing 4
5. Pentagon Papers – document leaked to the press in June of 1971 by Daniel Ellsberg
 - a. Johnson drew up plans for entering the war as he promised not to send U.S. troops to Vietnam
 - b. There was never any plan to end the war as long as the N. Vietnamese persisted

America's Longest War Ends

1. Polls showed that more than 60% of Americans felt that the U.S. should withdraw all troops from Vietnam
2. Henry Kissinger – national security advisor who served as Nixon's top negotiator in Vietnam

- a. Oct 26, 1972 – one week before the presidential election, Kissinger announces “Peace is at hand”
3. After Nixon is reelected, peace talks break off and Nixon resumes the bombing of N. Vietnam on Dec 16, 1972 – “Christmas Bombings”
4. Jan 27, 1973 – U.S. signs an agreement ending the war
 - a. N. Vietnamese troops would remain in S. Vietnam
 - b. Nixon promised to respond with full force to any violation of the treaty
 - c. March 29, 1973 – the last U.S. combat troops left for home
5. April 30, 1975 – N. Vietnamese tanks rolled into Saigon and captured the city forcing S. Vietnam to surrender

The War’s Painful Legacy

1. 58,000 Americans were killed, 365,000 wounded
2. N. Vietnam and S. Vietnam deaths topped 1.5 million
3. As many veterans returned home they faced indifference and hostility from an America still torn and bitter about the war
4. Communists imprisoned more than 400,000 S. Vietnamese in reeducation or labor camps
5. Khmer Rouge – Communist group that seized power in Cambodia in 1975

- a. Executed as many as 2 million Cambodians
- 6. War Powers Act – passed in Nov 1973, stipulated that a president must inform Congress within 48 hours if U.S. forces are sent into a hostile area w/o a declaration of war
- 7. Vietnam Syndrome – Americans now pause and consider possible risks to their own interests before deciding whether to intervene in foreign affairs
- 8. Americans began to grow suspicious of gov't since they had been provided so much misleading info