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**Dates:** November 1, 1955 - April 30, 1975

The Vietnam War was fought between [communist](http://www.ducksters.com/history/cold_war/communism.php) North [Vietnam](http://www.ducksters.com/geography/country/vietnam.php) and the government of Southern Vietnam. The North was supported by communist countries such as the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. The South was supported by anti-communist countries, primarily the United States.

The United States lost the Vietnam War. It lasted for twenty years, something the US never expected when it joined in the fight. Not only did the US lose the war and the country of Vietnam to the communists, the US lost prestige in the eyes of the world.

**Before the War**

Prior to World War II Vietnam had been a colony of the French. During World War II the Japanese took control of the area. When the war ended there was a power vacuum. Vietnamese revolutionary and communist Ho Chi Minh wanted freedom for the country of Vietnam. However, the Allies all agreed that Vietnam belonged to the French.

**Containment**

Eventually Ho Chi Minh and his rebels began to fight the French. Ho's soldiers in the north were called the Viet Minh. Ho tried to get US help, but they didn't want Ho to succeed as they were worried about communism spreading throughout Southeast Asia. When Ho began to have success against the French, the US became more concerned. In 1950 they began sending aid to the French in Vietnam.

**The US Enters the War**

In 1954 the French lost a major battle to the Vietnamese. They decided to pull out of Vietnam. The country was divided up into a communist Northern Vietnam and a Southern Vietnam. It was supposed to be reunited under a single election in 1956. However, the United States did not want the country to become communist. They helped Ngo Dinh Diem get elected in the South.

**President Johnson's War Plan**

[President Lyndon Johnson](http://www.ducksters.com/biography/uspresidents/lyndonbjohnson.php) had the plan to help the Southern Vietnamese get strong enough to fight the North rather than having the US win the war for them. By putting limits on the troops and not allowing them to attack Northern Vietnam from 1965 to 1969, the US had no chance to win.

**A Difficult War**

Not only were the US troops limited in what they could do strategically by President Johnson, the jungles of Vietnam proved a difficult place to fight a war. It was very difficult to find the enemy in the jungles and also difficult to determine who was the enemy. The troops had to deal with booby traps and constant ambushes from people they thought they were fighting for.

**The US Exits the War**

When [Richard Nixon](http://www.ducksters.com/biography/uspresidents/richardmnixon.php) became president he decided to end US involvement in the war. He first began removing troops from Vietnam in July of 1969. On January 27, 1973 a peace fire was negotiated. A few months later in March the final US troops were removed from Vietnam. In April of 1975 South Vietnam surrendered to North Vietnam. Soon the country became officially unified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Vietnam was now a communist country. The US had lost the Vietnam War and also taken a major blow in the Cold War.

**Facts About the Vietnam War**

* The Viet Cong were Vietnamese rebels in the South who fought against the Southern Vietnam government and the United States.
* North and South Vietnam were divided at the 17th parallel.
* Ho Chi Minh died during the war in 1969. The city of Saigon was later renamed to Ho Chi Minh City in his honor.
* The US chosen president of the South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, was not a good leader. He was hated by many Vietnamese and was executed in November of 1963. This was not a good sign for the US hopes in the area.
* 58,220 US soldiers died in the Vietnam War. It is estimated that millions of Vietnamese died either in battle or as civilians caught in the crossfire.

**Major Events During the War**

* March 1959 - Ho Chi Minh declared all out war in order to unite Vietnam under one rule.
* December 1961 - US military advisors begin to take a direct role in the war.
* August 1964 - The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution is passed by the US Congress after two US Destroyers were attacked by the North Vietnamese. This allowed US troops to use armed force in the area.
* March 8, 1965 - The first official US combat troops arrive in Vietnam. The US begins a bombing campaign of Northern Vietnam called Operation Rolling Thunder.
* January 30, 1968 - North Vietnam launches the Tet Offensive attacking around 100 cities in Southern Vietnam.
* July 1969 - President Nixon begins the withdrawal of US troops.
* March 1972 - The North Vietnamese attack across the border in the Easter Offensive.