

**The Vietnam War: 1968-1973**



- I. Turning Point in Public Support for Vietnam – The **Tet Offensive**
  - a. The night of January 30, 1968, more than 70,000 Communist troops staged a coordinated attack on main urban areas of South Vietnam (violating a truce agreed to allow for the celebration of Tet, the lunar New Year.)
  - b. What was the outcome for:
    - i. The North Vietnamese/Viet Cong?
    - ii. The U.S.?
  - c. Vietnam was the first televised war in history - scenes of the Tet offensive reached the American homes in a matter of hours. How did this influence Americans and their support of the war?
  - d. After Tet Offensive, more Americans opposed the war – polls showed majority opposed the war.
  - e. What was the impact on presidential politics?
- I. Getting out of Vietnam:
  - a. **LBJ**: Grew increasingly unpopular over the course of his term. In 1968, his popularity dropped from 48% to 36%. As his term was coming to an end, he cut back on the bombing of North Vietnam and called for peace negotiations. Paris Peace Talks began in May 1968, failed to produce an agreement

- b. **Nixon:** Claimed in the 1968 election that he had a secret plan to end the war. Promised Americans what? “\_\_\_\_\_.” June 1969, he announced a new policy known as **Vietnamization** (DEFINE):

- i. By 1972, American troop strength had decreased from over 500,000 to \_\_\_\_\_.
- ii. Nixon wanted to end protests at home, but he also did not want to lose the war.
- iii. So while he withdrew American troops from Vietnam, he also ordered secret bombing raids on major targets in North Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Also widened the war from Vietnam to **Cambodia** by invading Cambodia.
  1. Goal:
    2. Knew invasion of Cambodia wouldn't win the war but thought it would help when bargaining (to strengthen US position) = brought chaos and civil war in Cambodia and new wave of protests at home.

II. **Pentagon Papers** (1971): Former defense analyst Daniel Ellsberg leaked govt. docs. regarding war efforts during Johnson's administration to the *New York Times*. Significance?

III. End of the War – FINALLY!

- a. In 1970, what did Congress do to cut off support and funds for the war?

b. **Paris Peace accords, 1973:**

- i. January 1973, the U.S., South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the Viet Cong signed a formal agreement in Paris. Ironically, LBJ died the day before the treaty was signed.
- ii. Provisions included:
  1. US would withdraw all its forces from South Vietnam within \_\_\_\_\_.
  2. All prisoners of war would be released.
  3. All countries would end military activities in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
  4. The \_\_\_\_\_ would continue to divide North and South Vietnam until the country could be reunited.
- iii. American involvement ended in 1973 but fighting between North and South continued for another 2 years.
- iv. Between 1973 and 1975, fighting continued between North and South Vietnam.
- v. April 30th, North Vietnam conquered Saigon and the S. Vietnamese govt surrendered = Vietnam was finally one nation under a Communist govt.

IV. Aftermath of the war in Southeast Asia:

- a. The U.S. was initially involved in Vietnam because of the \_\_\_\_\_ = after the Vietnam War, 2 other dominos did fall – Laos and Cambodia both became communist.
- b. Cambodian suffering was tremendous as a result of the war. In April 1975, Cambodia fell to the communist Khmer Rouge led by Pol Pot.
  - i. In the previous 5 years of fighting, Cambodia had lost 1/2 million civilian casualties (mostly by American bombs). Khmer Rouge declared war on anyone tainted by Western ways and killed roughly 1.5 million Cambodians (1/4 of the population). Many were shot, others died from starvation, disease, mistreatment in labor camps, or on forced marches.
- c. Vietnam's new leaders forced 100s of thousands of S. Vietnamese soldiers, govt workers, and other professionals into "re-education camps."
- d. 1.5 million Vietnamese fled Vietnam by boat, leaving all possessions behind in escape. (Many Cambodians and Laotians also fled their homelands making their way to the US.)

V. Cost of war:

- a. More than \_\_\_\_\_ Americans were killed in battle and 300,000 wounded.
- b. More than 2,500 POWs (\_\_\_\_\_) and MIAs (\_\_\_\_\_) at the end of the war – many are still unaccounted for.
- c. Veterans - HOW WERE THEY TREATED? (Give 2-3 ex.)
  
- d. Vietnam was the longest and most unsuccessful war in US history.
  - i. US spent at least \$\_\_\_\_\_ on the war which led to growing inflation (11%) and economic instability, and decreased funding for domestic programs to address poverty.
  - ii. Americans lost their sense of self-confidence and invincibility. After WWII Americans believed they could defend the world from communism anywhere with the help of American resolve, \$ and technology – WRONG!
- e. Vietnam suffered as well – more bombs hit Vietnam than did all of the Axis powers in WWII. Number of dead and wounded soldiers ran into the millions, 3 million Vietnamese were killed (many of whom were civilians.)

VI. The impact:

- a. U.S. morale, self-confidence, trust of government, destroyed
- b. 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment: lowered the voting age to 18-years-olds
- c. Nixon abolished the draft → all-volunteer army
- d. **War Powers Act** (1973): President must notify Congress within 48 hours of deploying military and must check in regularly with Congress while forces are overseas.

VII. Healing: In 1979, a group of veterans started planning the **Vietnam Veterans Memorial**. They held a contest to design the memorial, which a 21-year-old college student won. The memorial was completed in 1982.

*"If we have to fight, we will fight. You will kill ten of our men and we will kill one of yours, and in the end it will be you who tires of it."*  
- Ho Chi Minh