

“When is a war not a war? When the President decides it isn’t, and Congress goes along.”

Kenneth C. Davis, *Don’t Know Much About History*

The Vietnam War – A Tragedy in 5 Acts

I. Truman

- A. 1950 - 1953
- B. Containment
- C. US fighting in Korea
- D. US Finances French war in Indochina
 - 1. civil war / colonial war
 - 2. Viet Minh rebels led by Ho Chi Minh
 - 3. US ultimately funds 75 – 80% of military costs

II. Eisenhower

- A. Continued & increased financial support
- B. The Domino Theory emerges
- C. 1954 – Battle of Dienbienphu
 - 1. French stronghold
 - 2. overrun by rebels
 - 3. France withdraws from Indochina
- D. Ike Lets France lose by not committing ground troops
- E. Ike can do this due to respect as military leader
- F. Geneva Conference
 - 1. May 1954
 - 2. Vietnam divided at 17th parallel
 - 3. political settlement over division to be decided by future election
 - 4. the election never takes place
- G. US continues direct involvement in Vietnam
 - 1. sends \$100 million in aid to SV
 - 2. installs SV Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem
- H. 1955
 - 1. US provide SV aid & military training
 - 2. Vietnam, Laos & Cambodia get > \$200 million in aid
- I. First US Casualties
 - 1. Major Dale Buis & Master Sergeant Chester Ovnard
 - 2. killed by Vietcong at Bienhoa
- J. 1959 – 760 US military personnel in Vietnam

III. JFK

- A. Send money & advisors to the South
 - 1. advisors recommend 8,000 troops
 - 2. 1962 – 3,205 US military personnel in Vietnam
- B. American Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV)
 - 1. established 2/6/62
 - 2. based in Saigon
- C. Thailand
 - 1. May 1962
 - 2. JFK Sends
 - a. 5,000 Marines
 - b. 50 jets
 - 3. counter Communists expansion in Laos
- D. established Green Berets – elite force for flexibility

- E. send to Vietnam begin small scale ground war
- F. US advisors increases to 12,000
- G. Turning Point – 1963
 - 1. Battle of Ap Bac
 - a. SV suffers major defeat
 - b. smaller Vietcong forces
 - 2. Anti-Gov't Demonstrations
 - a. Buddhist monks
 - b. Provoke violent reprisals
 - c. Protest: monks set themselves afire
 - 3. Diem Gov't overthrown
 - a. November
 - b. CIA backed coup
 - c. General Duong Van Minh seizes power
 - d. Diem killed
 - 4. US advisors in SV total 16,300
 - 5. US aid to SV \$500 million in 1963 alone
 - 6. CIA begins training SV guerillas
- IV. LBJ – “Guns or Butter”
 - A. Lt. Gen. William Westmorland made commander of MACV
 - B. General Nguyen Khanh seizes power in Saigon
 - C. Gulf of Tonkin Incident
 - 1. *USS Maddox*
 - a. Destroyer
 - b. Conducting surveillance
 - c. 10 mi of NV coast
 - d. 9/2/64
 - 2. NV torpedo boats pursue Maddox
 - 3. *Maddox* fires on boats
 - 4. Boats launch torpedoes & miss
 - 5. *Maddox* calls for air support from *USS Ticonderoga*
 - 6. 3 US fighters attack boats
 - 7. one patrol boat is sunk, two others crippled
 - 8. *USS Maddox* withdraws
 - 9. *Maddox* & *USS Turner Joy* ordered to return
 - a. 9/4/64
 - b. to “reassert freedom of international waters”
 - 10. LBJ tells Congress a second attack on the Maddox has occurred – 9/4/64
 - a. attack never confirmed
 - b. later proven not to have happened
 - 11. US planes bomb NV in retaliation
 - a. Called “limited in scale”
 - b. > 60 sorties are flown
 - c. destroyed oil depots & patrol boats
 - d. Everett Alvarez is shot down
 - i. 1st US POW
 - ii. held in Hanoi for > 8 years
 - 12. Gulf of Tonkin Resolution Aug. 7, 1964
 - a. Unanimous vote in House
 - b. 2 dissenting in Senate

- c. LBJ given power to, “ take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against forces of the US and to prevent further aggression.”
 - d. LBJ: “it was like grandma’s nightshirt – it covered everything.”
- D. Thought war would be quick & short
- E. Defeats Barry Goldwater in 1964 electoral landslide
- F. Operation Rolling Thunder
 - 1. follows Operation Flaming Dart I & II
 - 2. sustained bombing of NV
- G. Escalation of War
 - 1. US Marines land in Vietnam
 - a. 2 battalions
 - b. assigned to protect Danang airbase
 - c. first US combat troops in Vietnam
 - 2. Under LBJ: US ground troops > 540,000 sent
 - 3. pentagon asks for 200,000 more – LBJ says no
 - 4. advisors total 23,300
- H. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)
 - 1. April 15, 1965
 - 2. sponsor large anti-war rally in DC
- I. Ia Drang Valley – 11/14 – 16/65
 - 1. 1st major conventional clash
 - 2. US defeats NV
- J. LBJ suspends bombing
 - 1. Dec 1965
 - 2. to get NV to negotiate
- K. by end of 1965:
 - 1. 636 US combat deaths
 - 2. draft quotas doubled
 - 3. Average age of soldier – 19
- L. US resumes bombing
 - 1. Jan 1966
 - 2. announces use of Agent Orange & other chemical defoliants
- M. by end of 1966:
 - 1. 5,008 US combat deaths
 - 2. 30,093 wounded
 - 3. Since 1961: 6,664 killed, 37,738 wounded
- N. Anti-War protests grow at home:
 - 1. 10/21-22/67 in DC
 - 2. subject of Norman Mailer’s *Armies of the Night*
 - 3. protests become more organized & active
 - a. Dr. Benjamin Spock
 - i. Convicted of conspiracy to aid draft evasion
 - ii. Later overturned
 - b. Allen Ginsburg
- O. Battle of Khe Sanh
 - 1. strategic US stronghold
 - 2. heavily fortified
 - 3. future staging point for attacks on Ho Chi Minh Trail
 - 4. NK & VC attack Jan 1968
 - 5. Seen in US as similar to Battle of Dienbienphu
 - 6. US order B-52 Bombings to end siege

7. Americans watch unfold nightly on TV
 8. fought during Tet Offensive (see below)
 9. Seige lasts until April, US victory
 10. Casualties:
 - a. 10,000 – 15,000 NV & VC
 - b. 205 US
 11. illustrates NV & VC resolve
 12. Khe Sanh abandoned by US in 1969
- P. *USS Pueblo*
1. intelligence vessel
 2. captured by North Korea
- Q. The Tet Offensive
1. January 31, 1968
 2. truce set to celebrate Vietnamese lunar New Year
 3. VC launch major offensive throughout SV
 4. US embassy in Saigon attacked
 5. most attacks repulsed
 6. seen in US as
 - a. a defeat
 - b. symbol of VC's ability to strike at will anywhere
 7. damages optimistic view of short war
 8. Hue
 - a. City in SV
 - b. Recaptured during Tet
 - c. Mass graves discovered
 - d. Retreating VC & NV killed 1000s of civilians suspected of supporting SV
- R. LBJ addresses US on TV
1. March 31, 1968
 2. announces partial bombing halt
 3. offers peace talks
 4. stuns US by announcing he will not seek reelection
- S. Paris Peace Talks begin – 5/10/68
- T. Columbia University
1. SDS seize 5 buildings
 2. protest University's involvement in war-related research
- U. Election of 1968
1. Robert F. Kennedy
 - a. Assassinated 6/6/68
 - b. Sirhan Sirhan
 2. Democratic National Convention
 - a. Chicago
 - b. Huge anti-war protests
 - c. Violent police response
 - d. Near anarchy
 3. Nixon d. Hubert Humphrey (George Wallace-3rd Party)
- V. Most casualties occur during LBJ
- V. Nixon
- A. War is Politics
1. Nixon wants to keep US popular support for war
 2. US support is no more than 100 dead boys per week

- B. Cambodia
 - 1. March 1969
 - 2. Nixon orders secret bombings
- C. Vietnamization
 - 1. Turn war over to South Vietnamese
 - 2. calls for simultaneous withdrawal from SV of US & NV
 - 3. Announces withdrawal of 25,000 US troops
- D. Ho Chi Minh dies in Hanoi – 79 years old
- E. Congressional Opposition grows
 - 1. 10 bills submitted
 - 2. all call for immediate withdrawal from Vietnam
- F. “Moratorium”
 - 1. first of many nationwide protests
 - 2. designed to expand peace movement
 - 3. from campuses to cities
 - 4. led by Coretta Scott King
 - 5. 250,000 protestors march on DC
 - 6. Nixon’s Response: “Silent Majority Speech”
- G. My Lai
 - 1. 1968 massacre
 - 2. US kills Vietnamese civilians & buries them in mass ditch
 - 3. Lt. William L. Calley is tried & convicted
 - 4. discredits war & US
 - 5. Leads to popular support against war
- H. Draft Lottery
 - 1. instituted 12/1/1969
 - 2. to reduce criticism that draft is unfair
 - 3. “rich man’s war, poor man’s fight”
 - 4. it ends student draft deferment
- I. “The Chicago Seven”
 - 1. Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, et al
 - 2. 1970 - acquitted of charges of conspiracy to incite riot
 - 3. convicted of lesser charges
 - 4. later overturned
- J. Kissenger secretly negotiates in Paris to end the war – 1970
- K. 1973 we take same deal as 1970
- L. Nixon admits to bombing Cambodia – 4/30/70
- M. Kent State
 - 1. 5/4/70
 - 2. Ohio University
 - 3. anti-war demonstrations held
 - 4. national guardsmen open fire on students
 - 5. 4 killed
 - 6. Jackson State College, Mississippi
 - a. 5/14/70
 - b. predominantly African American College
 - c. 2 more students killed protesting
- N. By end of 1970 US troops fall to 280,000
- O. “The Pentagon Papers”
 - 1. top-secret history of US involvement in Vietnam
 - 2. Daniel Ellsberg

- a. Pentagon employee
 - b. turned papers over to Neil Sheehan, *NY Times*
 - 3. June 13, 1971 *NY Times* begins publishing Papers
 - 4. Nixon tries to stop publication
 - 5. Supreme Court rules *Times & Post* can publish
 - 6. Nixon orders investigation of Ellsberg
 - 7. Group is set up, “plumbers”, to stop “leaks”
 - 8. “plumbers” expand activities to a campaign aimed at Nixon’s “enemies list”
 - a. “plan break-in at the Democratic National Committee Offices
 - b. The Watergate Office Building
 - c. June 17, 1972: 5 men arrested for breaking in
 - d. Work for CREEP – Committee to Reelect the President
 - e. G. Gordon Liddy & E. Howard Hunt arrested
 - f. White House Cover-up begins to unravel
 - P. by end of 1971 US troops fall to 139,000
 - Q. Nixon resumes carpet bombing of NV
 - 1. response to large scale NV incursion into SV
 - 2. dropped more bombs than all participants in WWII
 - 3. NV agree to resume peace talks when bombing stops
 - R. Fragging – order had broken down, disarray & drugs
 - S. Cease-fire Agreement
 - 1. signed Jan. 27, 1973
 - 2. Draft ends (2.2 million had been drafted for war)
 - 3. last US ground troops leave Vietnam – March 29, 1973
 - 4. POWs released from Hanoi – April 1, 1973
 - T. The War Powers Act
 - 1. restricts President’s power to commit troops
 - 2. must get Congressional approval for > 90 days
 - 3. passed over Nixon’s Veto
 - U. The longest War in US History Ends – or does it?
- VI. The Encore
- A. SV President Thieu announce war has begun again – 1/74
 - B. Nixon resigns, Ford becomes President - 8/9/74
 - C. In a Six month offensive NV & VC capture SV
 - D. Cambodia
 - 1. Pnompnh
 - a. capital of Cambodia
 - b. falls to the Khmer Rouge
 - c. April 17, 1975
 - 2. rename Cambodia, “Kampuchea”
 - 3. Mass Genocide & War with Vietnamese ensues
 - E. Ford calls war “finished” – April 23, 1975
 - F. April 29, 1975 – Last Americans evacuate Saigon
 - G. April 30, 1975 – Communists take Saigon
 - H. January 21, 1976
 - 1. President Jimmy Carter
 - 2. Unconditionally pardons most of the 10,000 men who evaded the draft (CN)
 - I. The Vietnam Memorial
 - 1. unveiled 11/11/82
 - 2. Washington DC
 - 3. commemorates the 58,000 American lives lost in Vietnam between 1959 & 1975