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TOUR 365

HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM
Office of the Commander
APO San Francisco 96222

Your tour of duty with the United States Army, Vietnam, is ended. May your trip home and reunion with family and friends be the pleasant, happy occasion you have anticipated. You go home with my best wishes.

As veterans of this war, you can now look back with perspective on your experiences and know the trying and difficult tasks inherent in fighting to protect the freedom of peace-loving people against Communist invaders. You know of the local Viet Cong terrorists who kill and maim their own neighbors, and appreciate the terror and destruction they spread. Having served here, you understand better than many of our countrymen the meaning of aggression against South Vietnam.

You have fought beside soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam and many other nations in a common struggle. You have been more than just a combat ally to the South Vietnamese soldier. Many of you have worked with his people in hamlet improvement and pacification programs and been looked upon as a teacher and builder, as well as a fighter.

People at home will want to hear your story of the war. Tell it. Whether you served in a combat or combat support role, part of your story is reflected in the pages of this magazine. I hope this publication will serve to assist you.

I extend my sincere appreciation for your help in accomplishing our task in Vietnam, and my thanks for a job well done. Good luck in the future.



CREIGHTON W. ABRAMS
General, United States Army
Commanding

TOUR 365

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USARV Returnee Magazine



The loss of South Vietnam would set in motion a crumbling process that could, as it progressed, have consequences for us and for freedom.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower
1959

... the United States is determined to help Vietnam preserve its independence, protect its people against Communist assassins, and build a better life through economic growth.

President John F. Kennedy
1961



The central issue of the conflict there is the aggression by North Vietnam against the brave and independent people of South Vietnam. If that aggression is stopped, the people and government of South Vietnam will be free to settle their own future—and get on with the great tasks of national development.

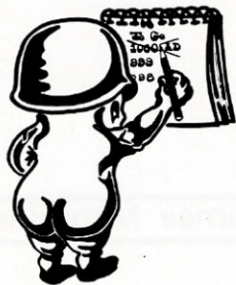
President Lyndon B. Johnson
1965

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Vietnam In Retrospect

To understand the war it is best to understand Vietnam's past. The Vietnamese people have been struggling for independence for nearly 2,000 years.

After centuries of Chinese domination, the invaders were driven from the Red River Delta in 938 A.D. at the battle of Bach Dang. Chinese attempts to retake the area were repelled. In 946, though by no means out of danger from the Chinese, an independent Vietnam became a reality. With the exception of a 20-year interlude of Chinese re-occupation in the early 15th Century, Vietnam remained independent for the next 900 years.

The Ly Dynasty, established in 1009, was the first great Vietnamese dynasty and, after an interval of confusion, ushered in a period of population growth, cultural development, territorial expansion, prosperity and stability. The Ly rulers gave the government the form it retained until the French conquest in the 19th Century.

The role of emperor was dominant. He was the father of the nation-family—the absolute temporal monarch in whom all power of state resided. And he was the religious head of the realm acting as intermediary between it and heaven. A civil bureaucracy, called the mandarin, performed the functions of administering the country.

In mid-13th Century Kublai Khan tried to invade Dai-Viet, as Vietnam was then called. Three times his armies were

repelled, the last time in 1287 under General Tran Hung Dao.

The Vietnamese realized that their independence and survival depended on their relationship with China. Knowing their own weakness and making the appropriate gestures to the Chinese, the Vietnamese were allowed to enjoy the maximum degree of independence, but always as a tributary state to China.

THE EUROPEAN INFLUENCE

European influence reached Vietnam in 1535 when Portuguese Captain Antonio de Faria arrived in Da Nang Bay. For a century the Portuguese dominated commerce in Vietnam. Confronted by a strongly organized state power and a sophisticated officialdom, they were unable to impose their will on the Vietnamese, as they had the West Indians.

The first Catholic missionaries entered Vietnam during the 16th Century. After the decline in trade, they remained almost the only Europeans in the country. Confucian-oriented officials had their misgivings about the new religion. They suspected it as the forerunner of conquest, and feared its effect upon the traditional order which had been the foundation of the state for centuries.

Missionary activities spread, despite a loosely enforced ban. Christianity was embraced by a substantial portion of the Vietnamese population over the years.



The cathedral at Tay Ninh is the Holy See of the Cao Dai Church. Founded in 1926, Cao Daism is a blend of Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity, the major religions of Vietnam.



Rice Farming

THE FRENCH ARRIVE

Toward the middle of the 19th Century, pressure mounted in France for the government to take positive action to establish a position on Vietnam. This pressure resulted from envy of the power other European nations were establishing in Asia and a desire to protect missionaries who were, at times, being persecuted.

In 1858 the French captured the city of Da Nang and in July 1861 they took Saigon. By June the Vietnamese court at Hue ceded Saigon and the adjacent area to the French and agreed to pay an indemnity. In 1867 the western part of the southern delta was annexed, and the area known as Cochin China (the extreme southern portion of Vietnam) was under French control.

For the next 30 years the French expanded their control over all of Indochina, or what today is North and South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

The basic political structure of French Indochina was completed by 1900. Each of Vietnam's three regions were treated separately although basic policy decisions were made in Paris.

The emperor and the mandarin remained in both central and north Vietnam; Cochin China was administered directly by the French. The old structure of government remained; however, all major decisions were made by French authorities.

French rule demoralized the emperors and mandarin, tending to turn them into self-seekers and yes men.

French colonialism also had profound economic effects on the region. Absentee ownership grew as large scale agricultural and rubber plantations appeared. Prosperous Vietnamese moved into the cities, and more and more of the land was tilled by peasants who did not own it. Large scale canal systems were dug in the Mekong Delta to exploit rice production. By the early 20th Century the French had managed to produce a rice surplus.

European ideas and culture permeated the country, especially among the mandarin classes. Western thought also stimulated another movement—growing Vietnamese nationalism.

THE RISE OF NATIONALISM

Early in the 20th Century nationalist movements began to develop, initially among urban intellectuals. Numerous anti-French secret societies developed, however most were loosely organized and had no well-defined political objectives.

Leadership of the clandestine nationalist movement in Vietnam was eventually taken over by the Indochinese Communist Party (Dong Duong Cong San Dang). Formed in Hong Kong in 1930, it united several existing independent Communist groups under the leadership of Nguyen Ai Quoc—later known as Ho Chi Minh.

JAPANESE OCCUPATION (1940-1945)

When France fell to Germany in June of 1940, the Vichy government acceded to the demands of the Japanese. All of French Indochina came under Japanese control however the French administration was permitted to remain intact with many lucrative agreements being made between wealthy French interests in Vietnam and the occupying forces.

Meanwhile, Ho Chi Minh had become the leading national political figure in Vietnam. His party adopted a policy of collaboration with all non-Communist nationalists to broaden the social and political base of its activities. This united front organization was known as the Vietnam Independency League (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh) or the Viet Minh.

One of the first actions of the Viet Minh was to form guerrilla bands under the direction of Vo Nguyen Giap, operating in Vietnamese territory against the Japanese and French. Although Ho Chi Minh was jailed in 1941, the activities of the Viet Minh continued. Working in nationalist guise, Ho effectively strengthened the organization of Communist cells throughout Vietnam.

In August, 1945, Emperor Bao Dai, fearing the French would return once Japan surrendered, abdicated his throne



The stern faces of victor and vanquished are shown in this photo, taken shortly after the fall of Dien Bien Phu.



The Geneva Conference opens in April, 1954. Negotiations on Indochina began May 8: the participants included Communist China, Laos, Cambodia, South Vietnam, and North Vietnam.

and handed over power to Ho Chi Minh. French troops were once again in Vietnam in September.

The Viet Minh and French conducted negotiations for a year in an effort to assure some form of independence for Vietnam. By December 1946, the Viet Minh decided that the only way to achieve an independent Vietnam was through a "war of liberation."

For the next eight years the French fought the Viet Minh. On May 7, 1954 the French army was decisively defeated at Dien Bien Phu.

THE GENEVA CONFERENCE

The day after the battle of Dien Bien Phu the Geneva Conference turned its attention to the French-Indochina War. The conference had been called by the Big Four to discuss the Korean and Indochina problems.

The agreement reached for Vietnam fixed a provisional demarcation line roughly along the 17th parallel and provided for the total evacuation of French military forces, as well as the removal of Viet Minh forces from the South. Freedom of movement between the two sections was guaranteed for 300

days. An International Control Commission was formed to supervise the truce agreements, its members coming from Canada, India and Poland. Finally a provision was made for the holding of general elections throughout Vietnam in 1956.

The French proceeded to hand over the controls and administration to the non-Communist Vietnamese with their capital in Saigon. In Hanoi, Ho began the total communization of the nation north of the 17th parallel. He later turned his attention southward.

Despite the cease-fire agreement, a well-organized Viet Minh underground was deliberately left behind in the south. This underground network formed the nucleus of subsequent Communist insurgency, originated in Hanoi and directed against the Saigon government.

Vietnam was left divided—the South had a pro-Western government struggling to establish a non-Communist society. In the North Ho Chi Minh was busy organizing a Communist state which would be the base for the realization of his ultimate dream of a unified Communist Vietnam.