

STUDY GUIDE

HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR

The purpose of this study guide is to familiarize yourself with the terms you will study in class. This study guide alone will not allow you to pass your exam. You must attend the prep-course.



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Instructions:

- Read the study guide.
- Print and complete the sample test. ***If you don't know the answer, don't guess.*** Each question on the sample test references a page number (i.e., 3) where the answer can be located within the study guide. If you are unsure of an answer, go back to the page referenced and find the correct answer.
- Correct your test and review the incorrect items.
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Roots of the War

Before the Vietnam War, there were decades of unrest. For nearly six decades, Vietnam was under French colonial rule. **By 1941, there were two foreign powers occupying Vietnam after Japan had invaded parts of Vietnam in 1940.** Ho Chi Minh, a revolutionary leader, spent 30 years traveling around the world when he returned to Vietnam with the mindset to rid the country of the foreign powers. **He set up his command center in a cave in northern Vietnam and announced his main objective of making Vietnam independent with a new government known as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).** The French did not want to lose control over their colony and a war ensued. **Ho Chi Minh wanted the United States to support him against the French, but since the Cold War foreign policy meant preventing the spread of Communism, the United States gave aid to the French in 1950.** When the French decided to leave Vietnam after a huge loss in 1954, the Geneva Conference comprised of many nations came about to reach an agreement about how the French could withdraw peacefully. **The Geneva Accords was born out of the conference which meant that a cease fire would go into effect while French forces withdrew.** A division of Vietnam also occurred dividing the country into communist North Vietnam and non-communist South Vietnam.

After the French withdrew, a general democratic election was to take place in order to bring North and South Vietnam back together. The United States was against the election because of the possibility of the communists winning. **They decided to help South Vietnam carry out their own election and Ngo Dinh Diem was elected.** His administration was full of fraud and bribery. An agreement to free general elections was conceived in Geneva, but Diem refused them as president. Revealing himself as a horrible leader, Diem was killed in 1963 during a rebellion that was supported by the United States. **A group of communist sympathizers in South Vietnam came together, and were led by the National Liberation Front, also known as the Viet Cong.** The National Liberation Front (NLF) was stationed in the North. The Viet Cong was known to use guerrilla warfare against the South Vietnamese.

United States Military and Economic Aid

During Eisenhower's presidency, he aided the Republic of South Vietnam with military advisors. When John F. Kennedy became President he increased the number of Military advisors. These two presidents stood their ground on not having military involved in the physical fighting on ground. On November 22, 1963, just three weeks after the execution of Diem, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

The advisors sent in by both presidents were called Special Forces, who were trained in guerilla warfare, later became known as the Green Berets because they had their specialized branches pinned on the green berets they wore. Unaware to American citizens, the Green Berets had participated in the fighting and eventually American pilots were used to aid in parachuting Green Berets into Vietcong regions. The growing presence of American Military, including flight observations secret bombing missions, were a threat to North Vietnam.

Lyndon B. Johnson Goes to War

Lyndon B. Johnson took oath after Kennedy's assassination. He wanted to show a strong presence against communism, but had no reason to directly attack Vietnam. This all changed on August 2, 1964 when Johnson was told that the naval destroyers that were in Northern Vietnam waters were attacked. The destroyers were there in secret to collect information about radar towers and naval bases. The United States defended its position saying that their location, which was 4 miles off an island base for North Vietnamese patrol boats were international waters. **"On August 7, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution which had the same effect as a declaration of war"**. It authorized President Johnson "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attacks against the forces of the United States". It also authorized him "to take all necessary steps including the use of armed force to assist South Vietnam" (Lawson, 1981, pg. 26).

The United States was now at war and Johnson's strategy was to use aerial bombardment. Johnson figured it would take American Soldiers away from ground combat and end the war sooner. **Operation Rolling Thunder was a bombing crusade and was put into effect**. This operation started on March of 1965 and it targeted bridges, railroads, highways, airfields, power plants, and anything that would aid in supplies for the North Vietnam war effort. Johnson would put a stop to the bombing for a few days in case Ho Chi Minh wanted to talk peace, but this never happened and Johnson ended Operation Rolling Thunder on October 31, 1968.

America's Enemy

Fighting in Vietnam was much different than any other war. The Guerilla tactics used were not familiar to the United States military. **The troops that were sent in were in for a surprise because "Charlie," the name they gave for Vietcong enemies, was not recognized immediately as a threat.** Charlie was dressed in what looked like worn out pajamas and sandals. Their tactics included flying mud bombs and punji stakes. **Flying mud bombs were made out of wicker baskets with dozens of bamboo stakes sticking out and then covered with mud.** These bombs once dried would be hung at the end of a rope and triggered by a trip wire that would send it flying and cutting down anything in its way. The punji stakes were bamboo stakes that were placed in covered pits or rice paddies.

At first, the weapons Charlie used were older model guns taken from French soldiers during the war, but then they had been supplied with the Russian Rifle known as the AK-47. U.S. military were often sent on reconnaissance patrols. Their main objective was to find out where the Viet Cong were hiding. The Viet Cong were trained at laying ambushes for soldiers on patrol. Early in the war, American ground troops had been easily detected in the jungles because they had not learned how valuable complete silence was. American troops also learned to carry their grenades in front on their chest due to jungle vines and branches lifting the grenade pins when they carried them in their packs on their backs.

American Firepower and Air Power

Majority of the U.S. army and Marine infantry lacked the knowledge of the jungle and relied on firepower and technology. They would destroy villages that were thought to be hiding Vietcong. The Vietcong would have escape tunnels under huts that would allow for them to escape if they were under attack. The United States realized they would just retreat into the jungle and decided to destroy their cover. **They used a chemical called Agent Orange that would kill all the leaves and expose guerilla bases and supply routes. They also dropped bombs containing Napalm that burned anything it touched.** Napalm also sucked the oxygen out of the air and caused injury or death by the inability to breathe. They would use Navy flame boats nicknamed "Zippos" to shoot out flaming napalm up to 300 yards away. Zippos were named after the popular cigarette lighters of that time. **Hovercrafts were also used to cross swamps and rice paddies to help bring troops in for surprise attack missions.**

Helicopters played a big role in the war. Before the Vietnam War, helicopters were primarily used for exploration and airlifting the wounded. During the Vietnam War, they were improved and outfitted with more gun power. **They were used to bring soldiers into action, firing onto the Vietcong's known positions, and transporting equipment and supplies.** Helicopters created an advantage over the Viet Cong because they did not have any.

Advanced technology included televisions. It was the first war that brought the actual picture of the horrors going on during wartime into the homes of American citizens. When the war was first reported, journalists would bring back news in favor of the war. The government used the daily press conferences to only give favorable news to the press, which made the journalists question the information they were getting. Towards the end of the war, the press had revealed information and secrets that brought the belief to many American citizens that the war should end.

The Tet Offensive

Tet, is a national holiday that occurs at the beginning of the New Year in Vietnam. Tet is usually celebrated with days of parades, parties and religious worship. In the past, a ceasefire has always been in place during Tet. Ho Chi Minh wanted the United States to think he was willing to stop the war by agreeing to a ceasefire and peace talks during Tet, but only if the United States would cease bombing weeks before the holiday. Johnson agreed to the terms eager for the war to end and bombing ceased which helped the North Vietnamese strengthen troops for the upcoming offensive. The North Vietnamese and Vietcong had used Tet as a surprise attack on many cities and towns of South Vietnam. This included the American embassy in Saigon, the South Vietnamese Presidential Palace, city of Hue, other government buildings, many headquarters for the Army of the Republic of South Vietnam (ARVN), and the American airfield at Da Nang. **The old imperial capital, Hue, was held onto by the North Vietnamese and Vietcong for 25 days** and this battle cost the United States the lives of over 200 soldiers and nearly 400 South Vietnamese troops. This led to a great shift in the eyes of the Americans and brought more citizens against the war. Khe Sanh, a major American base, was also attacked. **It is said that the capture of Khe Sanh was one of the main goals of the Tet Offensive,** and an estimated 20,000 North Vietnamese troops and Vietcong were sent there to do the job. The few thousand troops at the base were able to hold their ground and endured 72 days of heavy firing. The Tet offensive was defeated and all the cities and towns that were captured by the North were all recaptured.

American Home Front

There were many demonstrations as the war went on. At first they were peaceful, and the supporters and those opposed to the war would debate their stance. Some of these demonstrations would include thousands of protestors, famous entertainers, and politicians that would speak out against the war. Many of these protests themselves are famous for the actions that occurred or the leaders who brought them together. **In 1967, a peace rally in Chicago of 5000 people led by Martin Luther King Jr. demanded an end to the war.** In Ohio at Kent State University, an Ohio national guardsman shot and killed four students and wounded others. It was discovered that some of the students killed were not even a part of the demonstration, but students walking to class. This discovery led to a nationwide student strike and subsequently closed down many campuses. Later in the month, two more students were shot to death by police at Jackson State College, in Mississippi.

Lyndon B. Johnson knew he was losing the support of the American people, and he also knew he needed their support to win the war. Therefore, **in March of 1968, Johnson announced his decision not to run for re-election.** On November 5, 1968, Richard M. Nixon was elected as President.

Vietnamization of the War

Nixon's plan to win the war and gain back the support of the American people was known as Vietnamization. He planned on giving back the war to the South Vietnamese. He only wanted to improve training and continue to arm the South Vietnam military. He also wanted to start pulling troops out of Vietnam. The number of American troops in Vietnam, by the spring of 1969, had reached 543,000. Nixon believed that the draft was a major reason for American opposition to the war and he planned to bring the amount of draft calls down and then do away with the draft completely. He also stated that he planned to have all troops out of Vietnam by 1970 or 1971. This actually lowered soldier's morale because as troops were being pulled from Vietnam, the soldiers heading out to battle were losing hope of a victory and wanted to be out of the war as well. **The last major battle fought by American troops in Vietnam was Hamburger hill on May 10, 1969.**

One of the big problems of Vietnamization, was that the war would drag on unless something else were to be done, because President Van Thieu of South Vietnam felt his troops would only be able to defend South Vietnam and an attack would not be in their future. **Henry Kissinger, the foreign policy advisor,** along with Nixon, would also agree and the solution they all came to was more aerial bombing of North Vietnam. The threat of increased bombing, or the death of Ho Chi Minh on September 3, 1969 may have been enough to push talks of peace. Terms could not be reached of peace and the new North Vietnamese Leader Le Duc Tho refused any talks of peace until the United States completely withdrew from Vietnam. It became evident to U.S. leaders that the North was still planning on uniting Vietnam under one leader by overtaking South Vietnam and so the war raged on.

Peace is at Hand

In Paris, during the fall of 1972, the North Vietnamese were willing to revive the conversation of peace once again. Nixon was ready and willing to bring peace to the nation and was hoping for a November resolve since he was running for reelection. Nixon won his re-election, but lost the negotiations for peace. The North refused to release the American prisoners of war and South Vietnam leader accused the United States of agreeing to peace at any cost especially to South Vietnam.

Nixon grew tired of North Vietnam and their demands. He accused them of stalling and ordered a huge bombardment on Hanoi. He ordered Hanoi to be bombed for 24 hours a day for several days in a row. He also ordered several areas to be bombed that were previously prohibited from bombing for fear of hitting North Vietnam allies Russia and China. This incessant bombing worked. China and Russia secretly urged North Vietnam to come to terms with ending the war. On January 27, 1973, Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho signed a cease fire agreement. The American prisoners of war in North Vietnam were all released between February and April of that year. By the spring of 1973, all but a few hundred marines left to guard the American embassy in Saigon, had returned to the United States. This cease fire had been broken by the North Vietnamese for sending in soldiers to support the Vietcong, and the United states for continuing to aid South Vietnam. In August of 1973, the United States Congress refused any type of aid to South Vietnam.

The Aftermath

After the Watergate scandal, Nixon resigned and on August 8, 1974, Gerald Ford was sworn in as President. Ford appealed to Congress and asked for funding to once again aid South Vietnam, but Congress denied his appeals and thus led to an absolute end to United States aid in Vietnam.

The conflict in Vietnam raged on after the U.S. left the ARVN to fight off the North solo. In January of 1975, the North Vietnamese had moved to the outskirts of Saigon. President Van Thieu had resigned and left the country and on April 30, the new president General Duong Van Minh had surrendered Saigon. United States helicopters flew onto the roof of the U.S. embassy and brought the remaining marines and U.S. officials to safety. There were some South Vietnamese government and army officers that were flown to safety as well. America watched on their televisions as North Vietnam took over Saigon. Saigon was eventually renamed Ho Chi Minh city and a Communist government took over Vietnam as whole.

Practice Exam

1. In 1941, these two foreign powers were occupying Vietnam. (pg. 4)
 - a. Japan and Russia
 - b. Japan and France
 - c. France and Russia
 - d. France and the U.S.

2. What was the name of the government that Ho Chi Minh developed? (pg. 4)
 - a. Communist Regime
 - b. Democratic Republican Party
 - c. Democratic Republic of Vietnam
 - d. Democratic Communist Regime

3. What foreign policy prevented the United States from supporting Ho Chi Minh? (pg. 4)
 - a. The Cold War
 - b. The World War
 - c. The Soviet
 - d. The Russian

4. The _____ was born out of the conference which meant that a cease fire would go into effect while French forces withdrew. (pg. 4)
 - a. Geneva Conference
 - b. Geneva treaty
 - c. peace treaty
 - d. Geneva Accords

5. Who was elected President of South Vietnam after the French withdrew? (pg. 4)
 - a. Ho Chi Minh
 - b. Luc Do
 - c. Ngo Dinh Diem
 - d. Johnson

6. A group of communist sympathizers in South Vietnam came together, and were led by the National Liberation Front, they are also known as the _____. (pg. 4)
 - a. Viet Cong
 - b. Republic of South Vietnam
 - c. Congos
 - d. Vietnamese republic

7. What were the military advisors sent in by Eisenhower and Kennedy known as? (pg. 4)
 - a. Green packers
 - b. Green Berets
 - c. Orange Agents
 - d. Orange Rebels

8. On August 7, Congress passed the _____ which had the same effect as a declaration of war. (pg. 5)
- a. Gulf of Hanoi Treaty
 - b. Gulf of Saigon Resolution
 - c. Gulf of Tonkin Resolution
 - d. Gulf of Vietnam Treaty
9. What was Operation Rolling Thunder? (pg. 5)
- a. a bombing crusade
 - b. a booby trap
 - c. an assassination plot
 - d. an overthrow of Ho Chi Minh
10. _____ is the name American troops gave for Vietcong enemy. (pg. 5)
- a. Chuck
 - b. Charlie
 - c. Charles
 - d. Chucky
11. _____ were made out of wicker baskets with dozens of bamboo stakes sticking out and then covered in mud. (pg. 5)
- a. Flying mud bombs
 - b. Wicker bombs
 - c. basket bombs
 - d. mud bombs

12. The United States used a chemical called _____ to kill all the leaves and expose guerilla bases and supply routes. (pg. 6)
- a. Agent Green
 - b. Agent Red
 - c. Agent Orange
 - d. Agent Black
13. The United States also dropped bombs containing _____ that burned anything it touched. (pg. 6)
- a. Zippos
 - b. Palm
 - c. Napalm
 - d. lighters
14. _____ were also used to cross swamps and rice paddies to help bring troops in for surprise attack missions. (pg. 6)
- a. Speed boats
 - b. hovercrafts
 - c. skis
 - d. jet skis
15. _____ were used to bring soldiers into action, firing onto the Vietcong's known positions, and transporting equipment and supplies. (pg. 6)
- a. hovercrafts
 - b. trains
 - c. trucks
 - d. helicopters

16. _____ is a national holiday that occurs at the beginning of the New Year in Vietnam. (pg. 6)
- a. Trest
 - b. Tet
 - c. Chet
 - d. Dechet
17. The old imperial capital, _____, was held onto by the North Vietnamese and Vietcong for 25 days. (pg. 6)
- a. Saigon
 - b. Ke Sanh
 - c. Hanoi
 - d. Hue
18. _____ was one of the main goals of the Tet Offensive. (pg.7)
- a. Khe Sanh
 - b. Saigon
 - c. Hanoi
 - d. Hue
19. In 1967, a peace rally in Chicago of 5000 people led by _____ demanded an end to the war. (pg. 7)
- a. Students
 - b. Bob Dylan
 - c. Martin Luther King Jr.
 - d. Malcolm X

20. In March of 1968, Johnson announced his decision not _____. (pg. 7)
- a. to run for re-election
 - b. to bomb Vietnam
 - c. to end the war
 - d. to aid Vietnam
21. Nixon's plan to win the war and gain back the support of the American people is known as _____. (pg. 7)
- a. Victimization
 - b. Vietnamization
 - c. Revitalizing Vietnam
 - d. Enhancing Vietnam
22. The last major battle fought by American troops in Vietnam was _____ on May 10, 1969. (pg. 7)
- a. Blueberry hill
 - b. French Hill
 - c. Sandwich hill
 - d. Hamburger hill
23. Henry Kissinger is the _____. (pg. 7)
- a. Foreign aid minister
 - b. Vice president
 - c. Foreign policy advisor
 - d. War advisor

24. After the _____, Nixon resigned. (pg. 8)
- a. Watergate scandal
 - b. pentagon papers scandal
 - c. bombardment on Hanoi
 - d. Paris Treaty
25. On August 8, 1974 _____ was sworn in as President, succeeding Nixon. (pg. 8)
- a. Johnson
 - b. Kennedy
 - c. Ford
 - d. Carter

Answer Key

1. B) Japan and France
2. C) Democratic Republic of Vietnam
3. A) The Cold War
4. D) Geneva Accords
5. C) Ngo Dinh Diem
6. A) Viet Cong
7. B) Green Berets
8. C) Gulf of Tonkin Resolution
9. A) a bombing crusade
10. B) Charlie
11. A) Flying mud bombs
12. C) Agent Orange
13. C) Napalm
14. B) hovercrafts
15. D) helicopters
16. B) Tet
17. D) Hue
18. A) Khe Sanh
19. C) Martin Luther King Jr.
20. A) to run for re-election
21. B) Vletnamization
22. D) Hamburger Hill
23. C) Foreign Policy Advisor
24. A) Watergate Scandal

25. C) Ford

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Murray, Stuart. 2005. Eyewitness Vietnam War. New York: DK Publishing