

# Events in Vietnam

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The Vietnam War was the costliest and longest war fought in U.S. history. More bomb tonnage was dropped on North Vietnam than on Germany, Italy, and Japan during all of World War II. Over 50,000 American troops died in Vietnam. How did the U.S. become involved in the war and what was the outcome? These and other issues are addressed in the various sections below.

**Beginnings** During WW II, Japan invaded French Indochina. After the war, the communist Vietminh seized the capital city, Hanoi, and declared the Democratic Republic of Vietnam or North Vietnam. France supported Emperor Bao Dai and helped to establish a new state of Vietnam, or South Vietnam, with a capital at Saigon. The United States recognized the Saigon government. Meanwhile, the French and the Vietminh were at war. In 1954, at the battle of Dien Bien Phu, the French suffered defeat and withdrew their forces. Under accords drawn at a meeting in Geneva, France and North Vietnam agreed to a truce and future free elections for reunification. Neither side honored the accords, however, and civil war continued. In 1954 the U.S. offered direct economic aid to South Vietnam. The following year U.S. military advisers were sent to train Vietnamese soldiers.

**Domino Theory** When Kennedy came into office, his predecessor, President Eisenhower, warned him that if the U.S. allowed South Vietnam to fall to the Communists, the next in line would be Laos, Cambodia, Burma, and on into the Subcontinent. This Domino Theory worried Kennedy, and he pledged to help South Vietnam remain independent. U.S. economic and military aid increased. In 1961, 400 army personnel were sent to Saigon to operate two noncombat helicopter units. By 1962 more than 10,000 U.S. military men were in place.

**Gulf of Tonkin** After President Kennedy was assassinated, President Johnson vowed not to lose Vietnam to communism. On August 2, 1964, it was reported that the USNS Maddox, a U.S. destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin, had been attacked by North Vietnam. This incident led Congress to pass a resolution allowing the president to use U.S. troops without a formal declaration of war or approval from Congress. The president ordered jets to begin retaliatory bombing of military targets in North Vietnam. In March of 1965, the first ground-force combat units of marines brought the level of U.S. troops to 27,000. By the end of the year there were almost 200,000 American combat forces in Vietnam.

**Tet Offensive** North Vietnam and its Viet Cong allies launched a huge surprise attack on major cities in the South on January 30, 1968. Because it began during Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, the attack was called the Tet Offensive. The U.S. counterattack was successful, but both sides suffered massive casualties.

**Peace Talks** Following the Tet Offensive the U.S. halted bombing in Vietnam, and peace talks were initiated in Paris. No agreement could be reached at that time. Early in 1969 President Nixon announced his plan for Vietnamization of the war, and for a gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces. By September of 1969, 55,000 American soldiers had left Vietnam. Secret peace talks between Henry Kissinger of the U.S. and Le Duc Tho of North Vietnam began in Paris in 1970. The talks continued for three years, as did the fighting in Vietnam. Finally, in January of 1973, a cease fire agreement was reached. The U.S. and its allies withdrew from Vietnam in March of that year.

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## Suggested Activity

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**Research** Have students find out more about the following people and places associated with the Vietnam war.

My Lai Massacre

Lt. Calley

General William Westmoreland

Danang

Haiphong Harbor

Ho Chi Minh Trail

Laos

Cambodia

POWS

The fall of Saigon

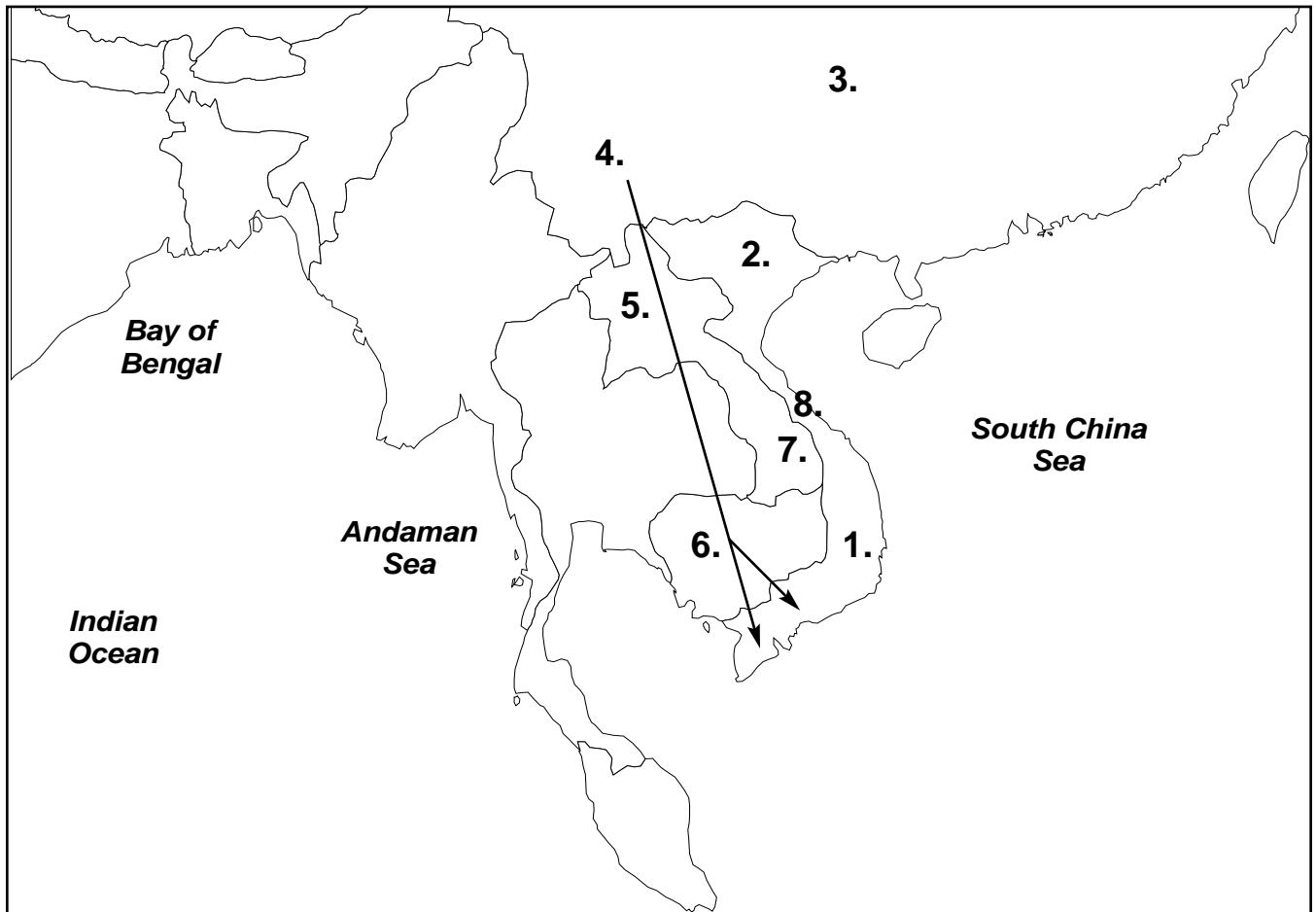
Allies of the U.S.

Allies of North Vietnam

# Mapping the Terrain

The terrain and climate of Vietnam was unfamiliar territory to most American soldiers. After all, Vietnam was mostly jungle with thick growths of shrubs and trees. Conditions there were unlike any other ever encountered by the military. Learn more about Vietnam with this mapping activity. Read the story and write the names of the locations on the lines provided.

After the Vietcong defeated combat regiments in May and June of 1965, the government of 1.\_\_\_\_\_ collapsed. The United States began pouring in more troops and continued bombing 2.\_\_\_\_\_. Supported by the Soviet Union and 3.\_\_\_\_\_, guerilla forces multiplied. Reinforcements and munitions were smuggled along the 4.\_\_\_\_\_ through 5.\_\_\_\_\_ and 6.\_\_\_\_\_ into South Vietnam. By mid-1967, there were no signs of the war ending. All U.S. strategy had failed and American combat casualties rose dramatically. On January 31, 1968, the communists launched surprise attacks on every major South Vietnamese village and city. At 7.\_\_\_\_\_, American soldiers found mass graves of people killed by the Vietcong. The Vietcong eventually withdrew from Hue, but fighting for 8.\_\_\_\_\_ raged on for 75 days. By the time the offensive had been defeated in March, the U.S. counted 2,000 soldiers dead, the South Vietnamese 4,000, and the North Vietnamese 40,000. Still, the fighting continued.



**Answers** (cover before copying)

1. South Vietnam 2. North Vietnam 3. Communist China 4. Ho Chi Minh Trail 5. Laos 6. Cambodia 7. Hue 8. Khesanh

# A Vietnam Interview

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Interview an individual who was a teenager or adult during the Vietnam War.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

1. What do you know about the Vietnam War? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What were you doing during the Vietnam War? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Did you or anyone else you know serve in Vietnam? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. If you did not serve in Vietnam, how did you feel about those who did? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Did you know anyone who evaded the draft? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How did you feel about draft evaders? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Did you ever protest against the war in Vietnam? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Do you think the U.S. should have become involved in Vietnam? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Have your views changed since the war ended? If so, how? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. If the U.S. became involved in a war today, would you serve in the armed forces? Defend your response. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# “Hell No, We Won’t Go”

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Read the following paragraphs about the draft. Answer the questions that follow. Use the back of this page, if necessary.

When two battallions of Marines were sent to guard the Danang air base on March 8, 1965, there were already some 20,000 troops in Vietnam. By the end of the year the number had reached 200,000. In order to provide ever-increasing numbers of troops, the army used the draft to force men into military service. Not everyone supported the draft, however. The prospect of dying in a combat zone was very real. Demonstrations and antiwar rallies were held on college campuses across the nation. “Hell no, we won’t go,” became a national anthem among protestors. Students were required to register for the draft. If they attended school, they automatically received a deferment or postponement of their service. Some young men burned their registration cards, an act that was against the law. An estimated 250,000 avoided registration. Many of them fled to Canada and Europe where they participated in huge demonstrations against U.S. involvement in Vietnam. They remained outside the U.S. until President Carter pardoned them in 1977.

## Questions

1. Was the draft fair? Why or why not? Defend your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

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2. The draft did not apply to women. Should women be exempt from the draft? \_\_\_\_\_

Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

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3. How were the problems of this draft similar to the draft during the Civil War?

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