

# VIETNAM

## (PEOPLES' REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM / REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM)

### A Personal Introduction

It is extremely difficult to find any sort of historical material relating to the history of Vietnam that does not treat it as a single nation. This is absurd! For well over two thousand years, the region currently identified as Vietnam existed as at least two separate and distinct entities. The area around the Red River delta encompassing the modern cities of Hanoi and Haiphong was known as "Annam" by the Chinese. The area stretching South from about the region identified with the infamous "17th Parallel" to the bottom of the Mekong Delta had no clearly established name. I have used the word "Champa" to describe it, as it was a name I regularly heard used by the native population of the Central Highlands to describe their homeland during the Vietnam War.

The people of Annam came under the domination of the "Han" Chinese quite early in their cultural development and share many religious, cultural, and linguistic traditions with the Chinese. The Cham people, however, fiercely resisted the Chinese and were never permanently absorbed by them, and continued to maintain cultural, religious, and linguistic ties primarily to neighboring Angkor and India. Lumping the Northern and Southern Vietnamese peoples together as a single ethnic group is a mistake, albeit a politically correct one.

Much of the propaganda related to the "Vietnam Wars of Liberation" hammered home the idea that the Vietnamese were a single people, yearning to be united under a single sovereignty. This was simply untrue. Almost the only thing North Vietnamese troops and South Vietnamese insurgents had in common at that time was Maoist political philosophy and a desire to eject any and all foreigners from their territory. In fact, even today, North and South Vietnam continue to struggle with one another over control of governmental policy and distribution of resources. Only time will tell if the two peoples will ever become truly united or will find their differences ultimately irreconcilable, leading Champa to once more assert its independence from Annam.

### Legendary Beginnings

According to the most authoritative legends, the history of Vietnam begins with King De Minh, a descendant of a divine Chinese ruler who was also the legendary father of Chinese agriculture. De Minh and an immortal fairy of the mountains produced Kinh Duong, ruler of the Land of Red Demons, who married the daughter of the Dragon Lord of the Sea. Their son, Lac Long Quan (the "Dragon Lord of Lac"), is regarded as the first authentic Vietnamese king. To make peace with the Chinese, Lac Long Quan married Au Co, a Chinese immortal, who bore him one hundred sons. Later, the king and queen separated. Au Co moved with fifty sons into the mountains, while Lac Long Quan and the other fifty continued to rule over the lowlands. Lac Long Quan's eldest son succeeded him as the first of the Hung (or Hong Bang) kings, the first Vietnamese dynasty. This legend describes the fusion, conflicts, and separation of the Vietnamese into northern and southern groups as well as mountain and the coastal-lowland communities. The retreat of Au Co and fifty of her sons into the mountains may well be a mythical record of a separation among the ancient Vietnamese.

Also according to legend, the Hung dynasty had eighteen kings. Their country, called Van Lang ("Land of the Tattooed Men"), is said to have included not only the Red River delta but also much of southern China. The last of the Hung kings was overthrown in 257 BC by a neighboring warlord. In 207 BC, this state was incorporated by a former Chinese general, Trieu Da (Zhao Do in Chinese), into the kingdom of Nam Viet (or Southern Yueh).

### Nam Viet and Chinese Rule

Nam Viet covered much of southern China and was ruled from the present site of Canton. Its population consisted chiefly of the Viet who had earlier been driven by the Chinese from their kingdoms south of the Yangtze River. Nam Viet included not only the Red River delta but also the coastal plain as far south as modern-day Da Nang (but no farther). After almost a hundred years of diplomatic and military duels with the Han empire, Nam Viet was conquered in 111 BC. Thus, the territories occupied by the ancestors of the Vietnamese fell under Chinese rule. Nam Viet became the Chinese province Jiao Qi, which was divided into nine military districts.

The three southernmost of these covered the northern half of what is now Vietnam. The Chinese ruled North Vietnam for over a thousand years and their effect on the Annamese manifested itself in two important ways. The first of these was the introduction of advanced civilization, including both technical and administrative innovation as well as the introduction of sophisticated Chinese learning. These quickly made Annam the most advanced society on mainland Southeast Asia. A second factor was the effort of Chinese administrators to achieve complete Sinicization of Annam through the imposition of Chinese culture, customs, and political institutions.

Soon after extending their domination over North Vietnam, the Chinese constructed roads, waterways, and harbors to facilitate communications within the region and to ensure their administrative and military control over it. They brought with them new tools and weapons, advanced the art of pottery, and introduced advanced agricultural and mining techniques. For more than a century after annexing Nam Viet, however, the Chinese abstained from interfering with the local administration. In the Chinese province of Jiao Qi, hereditary lords exercised control over the peasant population, just as they had done while Jiao Qi was a province of Nam Viet. Thus, although Vietnam was divided into military districts headed by Chinese governors, it remained, in fact, a leniently governed Chinese protectorate.

### The "Ly" Dynasty

The first major rebellion against Chinese rule broke out in 40 AD, led by the noblewoman Trung Trac and her sister, Trung Nhi. These women were able to gather together a force of tribal chiefs and their armed followers that attacked and overwhelmed various Chinese strongholds, and had themselves proclaimed queens of an independent Vietnamese kingdom. Three years later a powerful army sent by the Han reestablished Chinese rule. As a result, the local aristocracy was deprived of all power, Vietnam was given a centralized Chinese administration, and Sinicization was resumed with much greater intensity. The Trung sisters were put to death. Chinese rule was challenged several more times over the next eight centuries, but remained secure so long as China itself was stable. When the T'ang dynasty began to decline, a new series of uprisings broke out, resulting in a restoration of independence around 939 AD.

Ngo Quyen, the Vietnamese nobleman responsible for the Chinese defeat, became the first head of the new state. For more than a half century, however, independence brought neither peace nor political stability to the country. It was the early 11th century before various contentious factions were brought together under a centralized administration by Ly Thai To, founder of the "Ly" dynasty in 1009. The Ly established their capital at Hanoi, in the heart of the Red River delta, modernized local agriculture, and replaced petty feudal lords with a system of state officials trained in a civil service institute set up on the Chinese model in 1076.

The new state, "Dai Viet", made considerable political, economic, and cultural progress, but soon encountered problems with its neighbor to the south, the Islamic, Indianized state of Champa. Dai Viet and Champa fought several wars in the 12th and 13th centuries without anything being accomplished by either side. Dai Viet also clashed with the greatest power in Southeast Asia at the time, the Khmer state of Angkor with equal futility.

#### The "Tran" dynasty

The Ly dynasty was replaced by the "Tran" dynasty in 1225. The Tran maintained many of the same policies that had made the country strong under the Ly. And though they continued to clash with Champa, they were also able to arrange several long periods of peace. Their success, however, came to a sudden end with the advent of the Mongol "Yuan" dynasty in neighboring China in 1279, when 300,000 Mongol soldiers restored Chinese rule. The Tran resisted stubbornly, taking to the hills and forests and eventually were able to convince the Chinese that the possession of Dai Viet was not worth the cost of occupying it. Though victorious, years of war had drained Dai Viet's resources and brought on a deep economic and social crisis leading to the overthrow of the Tran dynasty in 1400. The deposed rulers appealed to "Ming" China to help them regain the throne. China readily complied and again invaded Vietnam in 1407. The Ming set up a direct Chinese administration, and its officials resumed their program of assimilation and Sinicization.

#### The "Le" dynasty.

In 1408 the "Le" clan under "Le Thai To" led a war of resistance against the Ming that lasted ten years and was ultimately successful. Between 1418 and 1788, and through various political upheavals, the Le dynasty generally made up the ruling class in the Red River delta. Like the better rulers of the Ly and Tran dynasties, Le Thai To and some of his successors introduced many reforms, but the problem of landlessness among the peasant class remained acute due to population increases and the limited amount of arable land available within the borders of Dai Viet.

In response, the Le dynasty pursued a policy of territorial expansion. This was the chief motive behind their efforts to drive the Chams from the small but fertile deltas to the south. Most of Champa was conquered in 1471 under the leadership of Le Thanh Tong. Vietnamese soldiers were settled in newly established villages from the vicinity of Da Nang to the neighborhood of Nha Trang, in what became the first of many Vietnamese invasions of the south. The elimination of Champa was followed by incursions into Cambodian territory in the Mekong delta, which the declining Khmer empire could no longer protect.

Saigon became Vietnamese shortly before 1700, and the rest of the south was pacified during the next sixty years. With the exception of the southern province of Soc Trang, which was not annexed until 1840, Vietnam reached its present size by 1757. The country's chief characteristic up to this point had been the existence of a strong central power at the head of a unified administration. Sudden expansion ended this. Vietnam could no longer be ruled efficiently from Hanoi and was subsequently divided into semi-independent districts that warred with each other for decades.

#### Divisions

The first division of the new Vietnam occurred soon after the elimination of Champa. The governor at Hanoi, Mac Dang Dung, made himself master of the central government by a coup in 1527. The deposed Le and generals loyal to them gathered an army and regained control of the lands south of the Red River delta in 1545, but it would take another fifty years of civil war before they returned to full power.

Of much longer duration and greater historical significance was a second division of the country, which occurred around 1620, when the noble Nguyen family, who had governed the rich southern provinces from Hue since 1558, rejected Hanoi's authority. In Hanoi the Le monarchs were rulers in name only after the country was reunited following its first division. Real power was now in the hands of the Trinh family, who had made themselves hereditary national administrators. For the next fifty years the Trinh tried in vain to regain control of the southern half of the country by military means. The failure of their last campaign in 1673 was followed by a one hundred-year truce, during which both the Nguyen and the Trinh paid lip service to Vietnamese unity under the nearly powerless Le dynasty but maintained separate governments; one in the north, one in the south.

It took another thirty years of revolutionary conflict, political chaos, and civil war, before unity was again restored. This time, the conflict was led by three brothers, whose name in history--Tay Son--was that of their native village. The Tay Sons overthrew the southern regime in 1777 killing nearly every member of the ruling family. After finishing off the survivors, they defeated the Trinh in the north in 1786 and occupied Hanoi, briefly reuniting the country.

In 1788 the Chinese tried to exploit the chaos created, but the Tay Sons, who had abolished the Le dynasty, were able to defeat them. During the same year, however, Nguyen Anh succeeded, with French military assistance, in re-occupying Saigon and the Mekong delta. In a series of campaigns that lasted fourteen years, Nguyen Anh defeated the Tay Sons and gained control of the entire country. When Hue and Hanoi fell to his armies in 1802, he proclaimed himself emperor, under the name Gia Long, of a united Vietnam.

#### Empire

The rule of Gia Long and his successors brought few political innovations. The basic character of the Vietnamese state had already been firmly established by the Ly emperors during the 11th century. The Ly had successfully fought the revival of local feudalism, common before the coming of the Chinese, and from the 11th century, Vietnam remained a centralized state headed by a monarch wielding absolute power. The Ly established a fixed hierarchy of state officials that followed the Chinese model. It consisted of nine degrees of civil and military mandarins who were appointed by the emperor and responsible to him alone.

The very concept of a "division of powers" was alien to the regime. The emperor was not only the supreme lawmaker and head of all civil and military institutions, but also the sole dispenser of justice in both criminal and civil cases. Even public functions of a religious character were the sole prerogative of the emperor and his representatives. No military caste ever exercised control over the state, no religious hierarchy existed outside the mandarins, and no aristocracy with political influence was allowed to establish itself. Titles of nobility, bestowed as honors, were not hereditary. Gia Long, and his successor Minh Mang, theoretically owned all the land in the empire, and it was by imperial decree that the settlers on newly conquered territories received their plots in the villages that sprang up from the Red River delta south to the Mekong delta

#### Enter The West

In 1516, Portuguese seafarers arrived, inaugurating the era of Western involvement in Vietnamese affairs. They were followed in 1527 by visiting Dominican missionaries, and eight years later a Portuguese port and trading center was established at Faifo (modern Hoi An), south of Da Nang. More Portuguese missionaries arrived, to be followed by other Europeans. The best-known of these was

the French Jesuit missionary Alexandre de Rhodes, who completed a transcription of the Vietnamese language into Roman script that later was adopted by the Vietnamese as their official writing system, the *quoc ngu* (national tongue).

By the end of the 17th century, however, the two rival Vietnamese states had lost interest in maintaining relations with European countries. For decades the French had tried without success to retain some influence. Only at the end of the 18th century was a missionary named Pigneau de Béhaine able to restore a French presence by assisting Nguyen Anh in wresting control of the country from the Tay Sons.

Once Nguyen Anh (now Gia Long) felt secure on the throne, he abandoned his French and Christian allies. Under his strongly anti-Western successor, Minh Mang, all French advisers were dismissed, while seven French missionaries and an unknown number of Vietnamese Christians were executed. After 1840, Vietnamese Roman Catholics openly demanded French military intervention to prevent persecution. In 1847 the French took reprisals against Minh Mang's regime for expelling additional missionaries, but ten years passed before Paris was prepared to mount a military expedition against Vietnam.

#### Enter the French

Napoleon III decided to invade Vietnam in July 1857, as a result of both missionary concerns and an upsurge of French capitalism after 1850. There was a need for overseas markets and demands for a larger French share in Asian colonial territory. The French naval commander in East Asia, Rigault de Genouilly, long an advocate of French military action against Vietnam, was ordered to attack Tourane (modern Da Nang) and to turn it into a French military base. Genouilly arrived at Tourane in August 1858 with fourteen vessels and 2,500 men. The French stormed the harbor defenses on September 1st and occupied the town a day later. Genouilly soon recognized, however, that he could make no further progress around Tourane and decided to attack Saigon. Leaving a small garrison behind to hold Tourane, he sailed southward in February 1859 and seized Saigon two weeks later.

Vietnamese resistance prevented the French from advancing beyond Saigon, and it took French troops, under new command, until 1861 to occupy the three adjacent provinces. The Vietnamese, unable to mount effective resistance to the invaders and their modern weapons, concluded a peace treaty in June 1862, ceding the conquered territories to France. Five years later additional territories in the south were placed under French rule. The entire colony was named "Cochinchina."

It took the French slightly more than eight years to make themselves masters of Cochinchina (a protectorate already had been imposed on Cambodia in 1863). It took them an additional sixteen years to extend their control over the rest of the country. They made their first attempt to enter the Red River delta in 1873 after the French naval officer and explorer, Francis Garnier, had shown that the Mekong River could not serve as a trade route into southwestern China. Garnier had some support from the French governor of Cochinchina, but when he was killed in a battle with Chinese pirates near Hanoi, the attempt to conquer the north collapsed.

Within a decade, the French were back. In April 1882, Saigon sent two hundred-fifty men to Hanoi under Captain Henri Rivière who was killed in a skirmish. This was followed by a larger force in August 1883. A treaty was then signed with the Vietnamese turning northern Vietnam (named Tonkin by the French) and central Vietnam (now called Annam) into French protectorates. The French later annexed Laos and added it to their "Indochinese Union" in 1887, that now included this territory, Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin, and Cambodia.

#### French Administration

The French now moved to impose a Western-style administration and open Indochina to economic development. Under Governor-General Paul Doumer, who arrived in 1897, French rule was imposed directly on all levels of administration, leaving the Vietnamese bureaucracy powerless. All important positions were staffed with officials imported from France. Even in the 1930s, after several reforms and concessions to local nationalist sentiments, Vietnamese officials were employed only in minor positions.

Doumer's economic and social policies also determined the path of development in French Indochina. Railroads, highways, harbors, bridges, canals, and other public works built by the French were nearly all begun under Doumer, whose aim was a rapid and systematic exploitation of Indochina's potential wealth. Vietnam was to become a source of raw materials and a market for tariff-protected goods of French manufacture. The exploitation of natural resources was the chief purpose of all French investments, with rice, coal, rare minerals, and later rubber as the main exports. Doumer and his successors up to the eve of World War II were not interested in promoting industry, the development of which was limited to the production of goods for immediate local consumption.

#### Resistance

Certain local officials refused to collaborate with the French. Some even led guerrilla groups composed of the remnants of Vietnam's defeated armies. Early Vietnamese attempts at forming anti-French nationalist political movements never gained much importance, however, since they were mainly orientated toward the past. Nationalist leaders wanted to be rid of the French primarily in order to reestablish the old empire. This held little attraction for the country's youth, who were in love with the idea of progress and progressive socialism.

This younger generation founded its own national movement led by Phan Boi Chau. His group rejected French rule but not Western ideas, science, or technology. In 1905 Chau went to Japan to gather support. He was partly successful in this and later smuggled hundreds of young Vietnamese into Japan, where they studied the sciences and underwent training in clandestine organization, political propaganda, and terrorist action. Inspired by Chau's writing, nationalist intellectuals in Hanoi opened the "Free School of Tonkin" in 1907. This soon became a hotbed of anti-French agitation. Phan Boi Chau next went to the new "Republic of China" in 1910, setting up a government-in-exile there. The French were able to arrange for his arrest and imprisonment by the Chinese in 1914. The movement declined. In 1925, Chau was seized by French agents in Shanghai and brought back to Vietnam where he died under house arrest in 1940.

After World War I, efforts at national liberation intensified. At first, intellectuals pursued political concessions through collaboration with the French. When these attempts failed, there was a revival of clandestine revolutionary groups. Among these was the "Vietnamese Nationalist Party" (VNP) founded in 1927. The VNP was mainly a terrorist group with a plan to oust the French in a military uprising. In 1930, they arranged for the troops of a single native garrison in Tonkin to mutiny and kill their French officers. The French arrested and summarily executed them the very next day. A wave of repression followed that took hundreds of lives and sent thousands to prison camps. The VNP was virtually destroyed, and for the next fifteen years it existed mainly as a group of exiles in China supported by the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guo Min Dang).

#### Communism

In 1925, Nguyen Ai Quoc, better known by the alias "Ho Chi Minh," founded the "Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam." Ho, who had left Vietnam as a merchant sailor in 1911, traveled widely before settling in Paris in 1917. He joined the "Communist Party of France" in 1920 and later spent several years in Moscow and China building a support network among communist leaders there. On returning home, he used his influence abroad to make the Revolutionary Youth League the most powerful clandestine resistance group in Vietnam. By 1930 he was able to intimidate leaders of various competing communist organizations, dropped the VNP "cover" name, and established the "Indochinese Communist Party" with himself as leader.

A first-class opportunity for creating political havoc presented itself that very year when severe crop failures created widespread famine over large areas of central Vietnam. Ho staged a broad peasant uprising, during which numerous Vietnamese officials and many landlords were killed. People's "Soviets" were set up in several provinces of Annam. It took the French nearly a year to suppress this movement and reestablish their own control. There was a lot of blood shed on both sides.

Unlike the dispersed and disoriented leadership of the VNP, the Indochinese Communist Party recovered quickly from the setback of 1931, relying on cadres trained in the Soviet Union and China. After 1936, when the French extended some political concessions to its colonies, the party skillfully exploited this opportunity for the creation of legal front organizations, through which its influence on intellectuals, workers, and peasants was increased. When political freedoms were again curtailed at the outbreak of World War II, the Communist Party, now a well-disciplined organization, was forced back into hiding (but only temporarily).

#### World War II and Its Aftermath

On Sept. 22, 1940, Jean Decoux, the "Vichy" governor general, concluded an agreement permitting the Japanese to station 30,000 troops in Indochina and deploy large numbers of combat aircraft to Vietnamese airfields, making Indochina the premier Japanese military base in Southeast Asia. French collaboration with the Japanese continued long after the liberation of France itself and did not come to an end until the Japanese, fearing treachery, disarmed the French garrison in March, 1945. The Japanese then allowed Bao Dai, the last French-appointed emperor of Vietnam, to proclaim himself an independent ruler. All real power, however, remained in the hands of the Japanese Army.

Meanwhile, in May 1941, Ho Chi Minh formed a new nationalist alliance called the "League for the Independence of Vietnam" (Viet Minh). At first, Ho ingratiated himself to the Allies by providing information on Japanese troop movements in Indochina and sought recognition for himself as the legitimate representative of Vietnamese nationalist aspirations. After the Japanese surrender, Ho ordered a general communist uprising. There was little opposition, and he was quickly able to seize power in Hanoi. Bao Dai abdicated a few days later. The "Democratic Republic of Vietnam" had arrived. The French, however, were determined to restore their colonial administration. With the aid of British occupation forces, they seized control of Cochinchina. By the beginning of 1946, there were two Vietnams: a communist north and a non-communist south.

Negotiations between the French and Ho Chi Minh led to an agreement in March 1946 that appeared to promise a peaceful solution. Under this agreement, France recognized the Viet Minh and gave Vietnam the status of a free state within the French Union. French troops would remain in Vietnam, but would be withdrawn over the next five years. Ho took advantage of this peaceful period to consolidate his dominance over the competition. The peace could not last. French and Viet Minh policies were basically irreconcilable. The French aimed to reestablish colonial rule. Ho wanted total independence. Things came to a head when the French proclaimed Cochinchina an autonomous republic in June 1946. In late November, after a breakdown in negotiations, French naval vessels bombarded Haiphong. In retaliation, Viet Minh forces attacked the French garrison in Hanoi in December. This is generally considered the beginning of the 'First Indochina War'.

#### The French-Indochina War

The French were initially supremely confident. They had defeated Vietnamese nationalists before, and there was no reason to believe this uprising would be any different. The French leadership fundamentally underestimated Ho Chi Minh and the communists, however. They assumed that once they reestablished peace, improved the colony's economic well being, and agreed to certain political concessions, resistance would subside. They never understood the fact that Ho Chi Minh had built a fanatic, almost religious, cult following, and that he was prepared to sacrifice every man, woman, and child in Vietnam to guarantee communist domination there.

In 1949, the French reunited Cochinchina with the rest of Vietnam, proclaiming the "Associated State of Vietnam," appointing the former emperor Bao Dai as chief of state. Meanwhile, the Viet Minh waged an increasingly successful guerrilla war, aided by the communist government in China. The United States, fearful of the spread of communism in Asia, sent large amounts of aid to the French. But they were shaken by the fall of their garrison at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, and agreed to negotiate an end to the war at an international conference in Geneva that same year.

*(For further coverage of the French-Indochina War, see the chapter on France, elsewhere in this work.)*

#### Two Vietnams

The "Geneva Accords" of 1954 set up a cease-fire and "temporary" division of the country into two military zones at latitude 17° N (the 17th Parallel). All Viet Minh forces were to withdraw north of that line. French and Associated State of Vietnam troops were to remain south of it. Permission was granted for refugees to move from one zone to the other within a given time limit. An international commission was established, composed of Canadian, Polish, and Indian troops and administrators under an Indian chairman, to supervise execution of the agreement. The "Accords" also provided for elections, supervised by the commission, to be held throughout Vietnam in July 1956 in order to unify the country permanently. The United States and South Vietnam would not approve these elections, however, and they were never held.

The two Vietnams now began to reconstruct their war-ravaged countries. With assistance from the Soviet Union and China, the Hanoi government in the north embarked on a ruthless program of state-controlled industrialization. They also began confiscating privately owned land and collectivize North Vietnamese agriculture. In the south a new government appointed Ngo Dinh Diem, a Roman Catholic, as prime minister and succeeded, with American support, in stabilizing the anti-communist regime in Saigon. Diem quickly eliminated pro-French elements in the military and abolished the local autonomy of several religious-political groups. Then, in a government-controlled referendum in October 1955, Diem removed Emperor Bao Dai as chief of state and made himself president of the "Republic of Vietnam."

Diem's early successes in consolidating power did not last. His plans for land reform were sabotaged. Economic reform was stifled by entrenched French monopolies. Instead, with the financial backing of the United States, the regime's chief energies were directed toward building up the military and a variety of intelligence and security forces were established to counter Viet Minh efforts to

destabilize it. Favoritism shown to Roman Catholics alienated the majority Buddhist population. Loyalty to the president and his family was made a paramount duty. Ho Chi Minh's communists (now called the Viet Cong) launched new efforts to seize power. These efforts appeared close to succeeding when Diem's army overthrew him in November 1963. Diem and his brother Nhu were killed in the coup.

#### The Vietnam War

The government that seized power was no more effective than its predecessor. A period of political instability followed. This came to an end only when the South Vietnamese military firmly seized control in June 1965 under Nguyen Cao Ky. Militant Buddhists who had helped overthrow Diem opposed Ky as well, but he was able to break their resistance. Civil liberties were restricted, neutralists and pro-communists imprisoned, and political parties allowed to operate only if they did not openly criticize government policy. The character of the regime remained largely unchanged after presidential elections were held in September 1967, when General Nguyen Van Thieu became president.

The Saigon regime proved unable to cope with the Viet Cong. Aided by a steady infiltration of weapons and advisers from the north, their fighting strength grew from about 30,000 men in 1963 to about 150,000 in 1965. In the opinion of many American intelligence analysts, the survival of the Saigon regime was now seriously threatened. In addition, the political opposition to the Saigon Government became much more strident. The National Liberation Front (NLF) had been organized in late 1960. Within four years it had bribed, murdered, and lied its way to a huge following.

#### Enter the Americans

Until 1960 the United States had supported the Saigon regime and its army only with military equipment, financial aid, and advisers. The number of these advisers, seven hundred at first, reached 17,000 by the end of 1963, and included large numbers of American helicopter pilots. This assistance, however, proved insufficient to halt the Viet Cong. In February 1965, President Lyndon Johnson ordered the bombing of North Vietnam, hoping to prevent further infiltration of arms and troops into the south. Four weeks after the bombing began, the United States started sending combat forces to assist the Vietnamese. By July the number of US troops had reached 75,000, and stood at more than 500,000 by early 1968. Fighting beside the Americans were some 600,000 regular South Vietnamese troops and regional and self-defense forces, as well as contingents from South Korea, Thailand, Australia, and New Zealand.

Three years of intensive bombing of the north and fighting in the south followed. Infiltration of personnel and supplies down the infamous Ho Chi Minh Trail continued at an escalated level, and regular North Vietnamese troops, now estimated at more than 100,000, began to play the dominant role in the war. Slowly, with little fanfare, the US and South Vietnamese forces began to gain the upper hand. The North Vietnamese became desperate. They gambled everything on a single massive offensive timed to achieve the greatest possible effect on American political resolve. This offensive, the so-called Tet Offensive of February 1968, included attacks on more than one hundred cities, towns, and military bases, holding on to some for several weeks.

The initial effect was the nearly complete annihilation of existing Viet Cong forces and decimation of the North Vietnamese forces. But, in the long run, the Tet Offensive was overwhelmingly successful. American politicians were faced with a growing conviction, rightly or wrongly, on the part of the US electorate that continuing the war at the current levels was no longer politically acceptable. President Johnson was forced to order restrictions on the bombing of North Vietnam and to open negotiations with Hanoi in Paris in May 1968. After bombing was halted over the entire north in November 1968, the Paris talks were enlarged to include representatives of the NLF and the Saigon regime. The war continued under a new American president, Richard Nixon. Nixon began to withdraw US troops gradually, but public opposition to the war escalated after he ordered attacks on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and Viet Cong sanctuaries inside Cambodia.

In January 1973, the United States and all three Vietnamese parties signed a peace treaty. It provided for the complete withdrawal of US troops within sixty days and created a political process for the peaceful resolution of the conflict in the south. Nothing was said, however, about the presence of more than 100,000 North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam. The signing of the Paris Agreement did not bring an end to the fighting. The Saigon regime made a determined effort to eliminate those communist forces remaining in the south, while northern leaders continued to strengthen their own military forces in preparation for a possible future confrontation. By late 1974, the communist leadership in Hanoi decided it was ready. Early in 1975, North Vietnamese troops launched a major offensive against the south. Saigon's forces retreated. President Thieu ordered the abandonment of several northern provinces, but it was too late. On April 30th, 1975, communist tanks entered Saigon in triumph. The Vietnam War was over.

*(For further coverage of the Vietnam War, see the chapter on the United States of America, elsewhere in this work.)*

#### A Vietnam War Timeline

03/09/45: Japanese occupation forces declare Vietnam an independent state, with Emperor Bao Dai as leader.  
09/02/45: Ho Chi Minh seizes power in the North, declaring the "Democratic People's Republic of Vietnam" (GRDV).  
09/22/45: French troops return to Indo-China.  
03/06/46: France recognizes GRDV as an autonomous state within Indo-Chinese Federation.  
12/19/46: French Indo-China War begins.  
03/08/49: "Independent" Vietnam declared by French.  
05/08/50: US begins sending military and economic aid to pro-France Vietnam.  
05/07/54: French surrender at Dien Bien Phu.  
07/21/54: Vietnam partitioned along 17th Parallel. Ngo Dinh Diem is chosen as premier in the South.  
09/08/54: "Southeast Asia Treaty Organization" (SEATO) established as Asian equivalent of NATO.  
10/24/54: President Eisenhower begins official US Vietnam aid program.  
05/10/55: Vietnam formally requests US military instructors.  
10/23/55: Bao Dai deposed. President Diem declared president of "Republic of Vietnam" (RVN).  
04/28/56: US "Military Assistance Advisory Group" (MAAG) established. Last French troops leave Vietnam.  
07/08/59: First official American casualties reported during attack on base camp at Bien Hoa.  
12/01/60: Communist "National Liberation Front" (NLF) established in South Vietnam. Its military wing is called the "Viet Cong" (VC).  
09/01/61: Viet Cong begin series of attacks in Kontum Province. Phuoc Vinh (the provincial capitol) seized on 09/18.  
11/16/61: President Kennedy increases military aid to RVN.  
02/07/62: US troop strength in RVN reaches 4,000.

08/01/62: Australian "Military Aid Forces" (MAF) begin arriving "in country."  
01/02/63: US suffers first military defeat in Vietnam. South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) forces and US advisors beaten at Ap Bac.  
05/08/63: Riots in Hue. Buddhists protest government suppression of Buddha's birthday celebration. Riots continue through August.  
11/02/63: Military coup deposes, then murders, President Diem.  
11/15/63: US forces in Vietnam now number 15,000.  
11/22/63: Kennedy assassinated.  
08/02/64: First "Tonkin Gulf" incident. US destroyer *Maddox* reports attack by enemy torpedo boats.  
08/04/64: Destroyer *Turner Joy* reports similar attack.  
08/07/64: "Gulf of Tonkin Resolution" authorizes President Johnson to take whatever measures he considers necessary in retaliation.  
12/31/64: US forces in Vietnam now number 23,000.  
01/08/65: First South Korean troops arrive "in country."  
02/07/65: First Viet Cong (VC)/North Vietnamese Army (NVA) attack on US base at Pleiku.  
02/08/65: First US air attacks against North Vietnam.  
03/02/65: Sustained aerial bombardment of North Vietnam (Operation Rolling Thunder) begins.  
03/08/65: US 1st MARDIV begins arriving at Da Nang.  
05/03/65: US 173rd Airborne Brigade arrives "in country," launching major offensive northeast of Saigon on 06/27.  
06/18/65: First B-52 strikes begin from bases on Guam.  
06/27/65: US forces in Vietnam now number 50,000.  
10/27/65: "Ia Drang Valley" campaign begins. This is the first really big "combined offensive" of the war and continues for over a month.  
11/01/65: First large anti-war protest demonstrations begin in the US.  
12/31/65: US forces in Vietnam now number 181,000.  
01/31/66: Communists gain control of Ashau Valley, re-opening "Ho Chi Minh Trail."  
03/02/66: US forces in Vietnam now number 235,000.  
05/12/66: First B-52 strikes on North Vietnam.  
10/01/66: First Filipino troops arrive "in country."  
12/31/66: US forces in Vietnam now number 385,000.  
01/08/67: First US offensive against "Iron Triangle."  
02/22/67: Largest US offensive to date (Operation Junction City) begins in Tay Ninh Province.  
02/28/67: "Mekong Delta Mobile Riverine Force" established.  
05/01/67: US forces in Vietnam now number 436,000.  
09/29/67: First Thai troops arrive "in country."  
10/04/67: North Vietnamese siege of Con Thien broken. Mass graves show NVA death toll much larger than previously imagined.  
01/22/68: Siege of Khe Sanh Begins. 15-20,000 NVA versus 4-5,000 US troops.  
01/30/68: Tet Offensive begins. Attacks continue until late February.  
04/07/68: Siege of Khe Sanh broken. 100,000 tons of bombs dropped. Mass graves reveal massive NVA death toll.  
03/16/68: My Lai massacre.  
03/31/68: President Johnson announces he will not run for re-election.  
04/15/68: Evidence shows Viet Cong crippled beyond recovery. After Tet, enemy forces consist of NVA troops almost exclusively.  
05/04/68: Second wave of weaker attacks takes place against 109 South Vietnamese cities, towns, and bases.  
05/13/68: Having failed to win militarily, North Vietnamese delegates meet US delegates in Paris for first formal peace talks.  
10/31/68: North Vietnamese diplomats gain a significant victory by convincing President Johnson to halt bombing of North Vietnam.  
11/10/68: First major North Vietnamese victory. President Nixon pledges to withdraw US forces from South Vietnam.  
12/31/68: US forces in Vietnam now number 536,100.  
01/25/69: Formal truce negotiations begin in Paris.  
02/24/69: NVA bombards 115 cities, towns, and bases in South Vietnam in bid to strengthen US anti-war movement.  
06/05/69: Paris talks bog down. Nixon resumes bombing of North Vietnam. North Vietnamese resume negotiations.  
07/08/69: First large scale US withdrawal of troops (25,000) between this date and 08/29.  
09/04/69: Radio Hanoi reports Ho Chi Minh's death.  
11/15/69: Major NVA offensives in Laos and Cambodia. Massive anti-war demonstrations succeed in distracting US media attention.  
12/18/69: Congress cuts off funds, preventing deployment of US combat troops to Laos. Resistance to the NVA invasion collapses.  
12/21/69: Thailand announces withdrawal from Vietnam. Filipinos have already left.  
12/31/69: US forces in Vietnam now number 474,000.  
03/27/70: First US/ARVN incursions into Cambodia attack NVA base camps.  
05/02/70: Anti-war demonstrations take place at colleges and universities in US.  
05/09/70: Four demonstrators killed at Kent State University by Ohio National Guard. Demonstrations spread to four hundred schools.  
06/29/70: US troops withdraw from Cambodia.  
12/31/70: "Tonkin Gulf Resolution" repealed. US forces in Vietnam now number 335,800.  
04/07/71: President Nixon announces 100,000 troops will be withdrawn from Vietnam by 12/31.  
04/24/71: 500,000 anti-war demonstrators descend on Washington D.C. 150,000 gather in San Francisco.  
06/13/71: *New York Times* releases "Pentagon Papers." Congress blocks prosecution for violation of "National Security" laws.  
08/18/71: Australia and New Zealand withdraw forces from Vietnam.  
09/09/71: South Korea announces withdrawal of most combat troops by 06/72.  
11/12/71: President Nixon announces withdrawal of another 45,000 US troops.  
12/26/71: NVA forces begin build-up for new offensive. Nixon resumes bombing of North Vietnam, ordering heaviest raids since 1968.  
01/13/72: President Nixon announces further troop withdrawals.  
03/30/72: North Vietnam drops pretense of Vietnam War as internal conflict and "officially" invades South Vietnam.  
05/01/72: Quang Tri city falls to NVA. US forces in Vietnam now number 69,000.

05/08/72: US begins mining Hanoi and other North Vietnamese harbors.  
 06/12/72: Siege of An Loc broken by ARVN forces.  
 08/12/72: Last US combat troops leave Vietnam. Support units remain.  
 12/18/72: Paris Peace Talks break down. President Nixon resumes bombing of North Vietnam.  
 12/31/72: North Vietnam returns to bargaining table. President Nixon orders bombing halt. US non-combat forces now number 27,000.  
 01/15/73: US suspends all operations against North Vietnam. Temporary truce allows NVA to build up forces without interference.  
 03/29/73: Last US troops leave Vietnam. Defense Attaché office remains.  
 04/01/73: Last US prisoners of war leave North Vietnam and arrive in Philippines.  
 01/04/74: NVA forces begin probing attacks throughout South Vietnam.  
 03/05/75: NVA launches major offensive in Central Highlands.  
 04/30/75: NVA forces enter Saigon. South Vietnam surrenders unconditionally. North Vietnamese conquest of South Vietnam complete.  
 12/31/75: "Vietnamese Workers Party" changes its name to "Communist Party of Vietnam." Membership peaks at 3% of population.  
 01/12/76: First wave of Vietnamese refugee "Boat People" begins arriving in Cambodia and Thailand. Mass arrests begin in Saigon.  
 (For yet more coverage of the Vietnam War, see the sections on Australia, South Korea, and France, elsewhere in this work.)

#### The Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Vietnam remained theoretically divided until July 2nd, 1976. At this time the "Socialist Republic of Vietnam" was officially proclaimed, with its capital at Hanoi. With peace came formidable problems. In the south alone, millions of people had been made homeless by the war, and more than one-seventh of the population had been killed or wounded. In the north the damage was in some ways even worse. Casualties, especially in the Tet Offensive, had been crippling. The late Ho Chi Minh's promise that he would unite Vietnam even if he had to kill every man, woman, and child in it, very nearly came to pass. Plans to reconstruct the country called for the expansion of industry in the north and of agriculture in the south. Within two years, however, it became clear that communist Vietnam would have a long way to go before realizing these goals.

Hanoi had been at war for more than a generation. Indeed, Ho Chi Minh had died in 1969. The bureaucracy he built, basically an extension of his own personality, was poorly trained to act on its own initiative or deal with the problems inherent in building a peacetime economy. Considerable resistance came, particularly from the huge metropolis of Saigon (renamed Ho Chi Minh City in 1976). Leaders of the city's commercial sector, many of whom were ethnic Chinese, sought to avoid cooperating with ruthless Maoist economic policies and resisted assignment to "new economic zones" in the countryside. During the late 1970s the country also suffered both floods and drought that severely reduced food production. When the regime suddenly announced a program calling for the collectivization of industry and agriculture in the south in early 1978, hundreds of thousands of people (mainly Chinese) fled the country any way they could, often by boat (the Vietnamese "Boat" people).

Things were made even worse by problems in foreign affairs. The new regime decided to form close alliances with the revolutionary governments in neighboring Laos and Cambodia (Kampuchea). This risked angering not only the United States but the mainland Chinese as well, who had their own interests in those countries. Sino-Vietnamese relations soured. Hanoi turned to Moscow, signing a treaty of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union. In the meantime, relations with the "Khmer Rouge" in Cambodia rapidly deteriorated when they refused Hanoi's offer of close ties among the three countries of the Indochinese Peninsula. In Khmer eyes, the Vietnamese were simply taking over where the French left off. Savage border fighting culminated in a Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December 1978. The Khmer Rouge were dislodged from power, and a pro-Vietnamese (colonial) government was installed in Phnom Penh. Khmer Rouge forces then took refuge in isolated areas of the country and began a guerrilla war against the new government, which was supported by 200,000 Vietnamese troops. In 1979, China launched a brief but fierce punitive invasion along the Sino-Vietnamese border to take some of the pressure off the Cambodians. During this month-long war, Chinese destroyed major Vietnamese towns and inflicted heavy damage in the frontier zone. Casualties were heavy on both sides.

Vietnam was now almost completely isolated diplomatically. Apart from its "protégé" regime in Phnom Penh and a "puppet" government propped up by Vietnamese financial support in Laos, Vietnam was at odds with every other country in the region. The "Association of Southeast Asian Nations" (ASEAN) opposed the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia and joined with China in supporting Khmer Rouge resistance forces as well as various non-communist Cambodian groups. The United States and most other Western countries imposed a trade embargo. Only the Soviet Union and its colonies in eastern Europe stood by Vietnam.

The country also continued to suffer internal economic failures. The cost of war in Cambodia and of maintaining powerful forces along the Chinese border were especially galling. To make matters worse, the regime encountered continuing problems in integrating the south into an economy dominated by Hanoi. In the early 1980s the government announced a number of "reforms" aimed at bringing the "Southern Block" into line. Then, in 1986, the party launched a major program patterned after the Soviet "Perestroika" (restructuring). Vietnam even offered a number of concessions to Cambodia.

#### The State of the Army

During the 1970s, General Giap made a considerable effort to shift the emphasis of Vietnamese military doctrine from guerrilla operations to territorial defense. By fighting the larger Chinese Army to a draw in 1979, the Vietnamese demonstrated the effectiveness of this shift. Moreover, the final conquest of the South and the invasion of Cambodia in 1978 showed the Vietnamese Army to be equally effective in large-scale offensive operations. Indeed, many analysts at the time referred to the Vietnamese as the "Wehrmacht" of southeast Asia. (Whatever happened to them?)

The Vietnamese Army was active in suppressing anti-government guerrillas in Laos, fought the Khmer Rouge throughout its thirteen-year occupation of Cambodia, and performed well in both these campaigns. As a consequence, it must be assumed that it was well trained and led, possessing a solid core of junior officers and NCOS at that time. However, only limited training has been possible since 1991. Removal of Soviet support and funds may well have reduced it to little more than a self-defense force with little offensive capability. Like any communist military establishment, the Vietnamese Army has a political as well as military role. It continues to be staunchly conservative and uncomfortable with the destabilizing effects of economic reform. When party interests and military expediency conflict, the party invariably wins, taking precedence over any economic or non-communist political agenda.

### **FOREIGN WEAPONS**

Type 63, K-63, YW531 - CH; 75mm m20 RcR, M41, M113 - US; All other foreign weapons in North Vietnamese (NVA) service are of Russian origin/design.

**TABLES OF ORGANIZATION AND EQUIPMENT  
THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM  
VIET MINH INFANTRY REGIMENT: FRENCH-INDOCHINA WAR**

**Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 00, Class: Conscripts, Base Determination Factor: 25%**

Infantry Company: 3xTL1 Infantry(B)  
Support Company: 1-3xTL1 Support(A), 0-1x75mm M20 RcR  
Mortar Company: 2-3x82mm M43 Mortar(1+)  
Engineer/Sapper Company: 3xTL1 Engineer(B)  
Recon Company: 3xTL1 Infantry(R)

Infantry Battalion: 1xTL1 Infantry(B) HQ, 3xInfantry Company, 1xSupport Company, 1xMortar Company

Infantry Regiment: 1xTL1 Infantry(B) GHQ, 3xInfantry Battalion, 0-1xRecon Company, 0-1xEngineer Company

Available Support Units: (One or more of these units or parts thereof, may appear in a particular action at your discretion.)  
Anti-Aircraft Battery: 1-2x14.5mm ZPU-1 or 37mm M39/Cart  
Heavy Mortar Company: 3x120mm M43 Mortar(1+)  
Machinegun Company: 3xTL1 Support(A)  
Artillery Battalion: 3x76mm M42(2)/Limber

Notes: 1) Through most of the war the Viet Minh were able to maintain eighteen such Infantry Regiments in the field. By 1955, this number had swelled to twenty Infantry Regiments and as many as forty "Regional" Infantry Battalions of varying quality.  
2) The Viet Minh were extremely resourceful and made use of whatever weapons came to hand. Various WWII Japanese and American weapons, including artillery, armored cars and even tanks may be used by them. However, you must pay double the standard point cost for these weapons due to difficulties encountered in maintaining and finding spares for foreign equipment.

**NORTH VIETNAMESE (NVA) REGIMENT: 1962-1980**

**Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 20, Class: Conscripts, Base Determination Factor: 35%**

Infantry Company: 3xTL2 Infantry(B), 1xTL2 Support  
Machinegun Company: 2-3xTL2 Support  
Mortar Company: 3x82mm M43 Mortar(1+)  
Engineer (Sapper) Company: 3xTL2 Engineer  
Tank Company: 2-3xPT-76 or Type 63  
Armored Transport Company: 3xAPC

Infantry Battalion: 1xTL2 Infantry(B) HQ, 3xInfantry Company, 1xMachinegun Company, 1xMortar Company  
Armored Battalion: 1-2xTank Company, 2xArmored Transport Company, 0-1x14.5mm ZPU-2/Truck  
Mortar Battalion: 3x120mm M43 Mortar(3)  
Rocket Battery: 6x122mm Rocket(1) or 300mm BM-14(8) or 122mm BM-21(12)

Infantry Regiment: 2xTL2 Infantry(B) GHQ, 2-4xInfantry Battalion, 1xEngineer Company, 1xMortar Battalion, 1xRocket Battery

Available Support Units: (One or more of these units or parts thereof, may appear in a particular action at your discretion.)  
Anti-Aircraft Battery: 1-2x14.5mm ZPU-1 or 37mm M39/Cart  
Transport Company: 12xTL1 Infantry(D) (Locally Conscripted Porters)  
Recon Company: 3xTL2 Infantry(R)  
Anti-Tank Company: 0-2x82mm B-10 RcR or 107mm B-11 RcR  
Armored Anti-Tank Company: 3xSu-76 or Su-100  
Artillery Battalion: 3xArtillery Battery/Truck  
SAM Battery(1965+): 1xSA-2 (Static)

Air Support: MiG-15s, MiG-17s, Il-28s and M-21s (All after 1965).

Notes: 1) This unit represents the most common enemy "conventional" force encountered by the U.S. and its allies in Vietnam.  
2) One of the "GHQ" stands represents the "Communist Party" GHQ. This stand is senior to its military counterpart.  
3) NVA APCs may include BTR-40s, BTR-152s, BTR-60s, or Chinese K-63/YW531s  
4) NVA Armored Battalions were first encountered during the 1968 "Tet Offensive".  
5) NVA Artillery Batteries may contain 85mm D44(3), 76mm M42(3), 122mm M38(3), 130mm M46(3), or 152mm D20(3).  
6) Soviet AT-3 "Sagger" ATGMs and SA-7 "Grail" SAMs become available in limited numbers after 1971.  
7) The NVA fielded ten Divisions during the Vietnam war. However, independent Regiments were ten times as common.  
8) NVA Divisions were commonly deployed in the 1979 "Border War" with China. These consisted of 2-4xInfantry Regiments plus the "Available Support Units" above.

**NORTH VIETNAMESE (NVA) ASSAULT REGIMENT: VIETNAM WAR**

**Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 20, Class: Professionals, Base Determination Factor: 40%**

Infantry Company: 3xTL2 Infantry(A), 1xTL2 Support  
Infantry Support Company: 1x82mm M43 Mortar(1), 2xTL2 Support, 1xTL2 Engineer  
Engineer (Sapper) Company: 3xTL2 Engineer Infantry

Infantry Battalion: 1xTL2 Infantry(A) HQ, 3xInfantry Company, 1xSupport Company  
Mortar Battalion: 3x82mm M43 Mortar(3)  
Heavy Mortar Battalion: 3x120mm M43 Mortar(3)/TL1 Infantry(F) "Porters"  
Engineer Battalion: 1xTL2 Infantry(A) HQ, 3xEngineer Company, 9xTL1 Infantry(F) "Porters"  
Rocket Battalion: 2x122mm Rocket(6)/TL1 Infantry(F) "Porters", 6x140mm Rocket(1)/TL1 Infantry(F) "Porters"

Regiment: 2xTL2 Infantry(A) GHQ, 10xInfantry Battalion, 1xEngineer Battalion, 2xMortar Battalion, 1xHeavy Mortar Battalion, 1xRocket Battalion

- Notes:
- 1) This organization represents the heavy "Assault" regiments used in the 1968 and 1972 offensives.
  - 2) These units more closely resemble divisions than regiments and packed a lot of firepower.
  - 3) One of the "GHQ" stands represents the "Communist Party" GHQ. This stand is senior to its military counterpart.
  - 4) "Porter" stands are used to transport other stands. Each "Porter" stand has a cargo capacity of 8 points.

**VIET CONG (VC) FORCES: VIETNAM WAR**

**Generation: I, Air Superiority Rating: 00, Class: Conscripts, Base Determination Factor: 25%**

The Vietcong tactical organization was extremely flexible and catered to specific "Mission Requirements". It is important to note that by the time of the 1968 "Tet" offensive, Vietcong forces had been largely eliminated. They continued to exist for political reasons. In reality VC units had become NVA units under another name, manned and commanded by North Vietnamese soldiers.

Infantry Company: 3-4xTL2 Infantry(B)  
Support Company: 1-3xTL2 Support  
Mortar Battery: 1x82mm M43 Mortar(3)  
Rocket Battery: 1x122mm Rocket(6) + "Porters"

"VC" Infantry Battalion: 1-6xInfantry Company, 1xMortar Battery + "Porters" as needed

"VC" Infantry Regiment: 2xTL2 Infantry(B) GHQ, 2-4xInfantry Battalion, 1-3xRocket Battery + "Porters" as needed

- Notes:
- 1) One of the "GHQ" stands is the "Communist Party" GHQ and is senior to its military counterpart.
  - 2) "Porter Infantry" stands are used to transport other stands. Each "Porter" stand has a cargo capacity of 14 points.

**NORTH VIETNAMESE (NVA) ARMORED REGIMENT/BRIGADE: 1968-2000**

**Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 25, Class: Professionals, Base Determination Factor: 40%**

Medium Tank Company: 3xMedium Tank  
Light Tank Company: 3xLight Tank[R]  
Recon Company: 3xTL3 Infantry(R)/APC

Tank Battalion: 3xMedium Tank Company, 1xMedium Tank[R]  
Recon Battalion: 1xLight Tank Company, 2xRecon Company

Armored Regiment: 1xTL3 Infantry(B) GHQ/APC, 3xTank Battalion, 0-1xRecon Battalion  
Armored Brigade (1973+): 1xTL3 Infantry(B) GHQ/APC, 4-5xTank Battalion, 1xRecon Battalion,

- Notes:
- 1) NVA "Medium" Tanks may include T34/85s, PT-76s, Type 63s
  - 2) Soviet built T-54s were first deployed in 1972, T-62s in the 1980s.
  - 3) NVA "Light" Tanks may include T34/85s, PT-76s, and Type 63s, as well as a few captured ARVN M41s until the late 1980s.
  - 3) NVA APCs may include BTR-40s, BTR-152s, BTR-50s, BTR-60PAs, Chinese K-63/YW531s, and captured ARVN M113s.
  - 4) There are currently ten of these units, distributed to Infantry Divisions on an "as needed" basis.
  - 5) There is currently one Vietnamese Armored Division, based in the south. It is primarily an administrative unit. The largest standard Vietnamese armored unit remains the Armored Brigade.
  - 6) Vietnam's fifty recently upgraded M113s are all found in the single Armored Division.

**VIETNAMESE INFANTRY DIVISION: 2000**

**Generation: III, Air Superiority Rating: 30, Class: Conscripts, Base Determination Factor: 30%**

Infantry Company: 3xTL3 Infantry(B), 1x82mm M43 Mortar(1+)  
Support Company: 3xTL3 Support, 1x107mm B-11 RcR  
Engineer Company: 3xTL3 Engineer  
Tank Company: 3xT54/55  
Light Tank Company: 3xType 63[R]  
Recon Company: 3xTL3 Infantry(R)/BTR-60PB  
Anti-Tank Missile Company: 3xBRDM-2/AT-3

Infantry Battalion: 1xTL3 Infantry(B) HQ, 3xInfantry Company, 1xSupport Company  
 Engineer Battalion: 3xEngineer Company  
 Recon Battalion: 1xLight Tank Company, 2xRecon Company  
 Anti-Tank Battalion: 3xAnti-Tank Missile Company or 3x100mm T12 ATG/Truck  
 Anti-Aircraft Battalion: 9xTowed Anti-Aircraft Gun Stands  
 Tank Regiment: 3xTank Company, 1xZSU-23/4 or ZSU-57/2  
 Mortar Battalion: 3x120mm M43 Mortar(3)  
 Artillery Battalion(A): 3x122mm D-30(3)/Truck  
 Artillery Battalion(B): 3x152mm D-20(3)/Truck

Infantry Regiment: 1xTL3 Infantry(B) GHQ, 3xInfantry Battalion, 1xEngineer Company, 1xMortar Battalion  
 Artillery Regiment: 2xArtillery Battalion(A), 1xArtillery Battalion(B)

Infantry Division: 3xInfantry Regiment, 1xArtillery Regiment, 1xTank Regiment, 1xAnti-Tank Battalion, 1xEngineer Battalion, 1xAnti-Aircraft Battalion, 1xRecon Battalion

Available Support Units: (One or more of these units or parts thereof, may appear in a particular action at your discretion.)

SAM Battery: 1xSA-2 or SA-3 or SA-6  
 Light Multiple Rocket Battalion: 3x107mm/Type63(12)  
 Multiple Rocket Battalion: 3x122mm BM-21(12)  
 Heavy Artillery Battalion: 3x130mm M46(3)/Truck  
 Heavy Mortar Battalion: 3x160mm M160 Mortar(3)/Truck

Notes:

- 1) The divisional TO&E above represents a "standard" unit. There are wide variations from this standard. Many divisions currently exist only as cadres. Others are primarily used as a national labor pool for public works projects.
- 2) Though there are several mechanized units and truck transport is becoming more common, much of the Vietnamese army remains a "foot" infantry force.
- 3) Weapon standardization also remains a problem, any combination of weapons from the "Current Vietnamese Arsenal" below may be used.

#### FOREIGN WEAPONS

All foreign weapons in South Vietnamese (ARVN) service are of US origin.

#### THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

##### SOUTH VIETNAMESE (ARVN) INFANTRY DIVISION: 1964-1975

**Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 65, Class: Conscripts, Base Determination Factor: 20-30%**

Infantry Company: 3xTL2 Infantry(B), 0-1x81mm M1 Mortar(2)  
 Engineer Company: 3xTL2 Engineer  
 Support Company: 1x4.2" M1 Mortar(2)/Truck, 1-2x106mm M40 RcR/Jeep  
 Motor Transport Company: 15xTruck  
 Tank Company: 4xM-41 or 4xM-48  
 Cavalry Troop: 1xTL2 Infantry(R)/M113, 2xM41[R], 1x81mm M125(1)

Infantry Battalion: 1xTL2 Infantry(B) HQ, 3xInfantry Company, 1xSupport Company  
 Artillery Battalion: 3x105mm M101(3)/Truck  
 Heavy Artillery Battalion: 3x155mm M114(3)/Truck

Infantry Regiment: 1xTL2 Infantry(B) GHQ, 3xInfantry Battalion  
 Artillery Regiment: 2-3xArtillery Battalion, 1xHeavy Artillery Battalion

Infantry Division: 3xInfantry Regiment, 1xArtillery Regiment, 0-1xTank Company, 1xCavalry Troop, 1xEngineer Company, 1xMotor Transport Company

Available Support Units: (One or more of these units or parts thereof, may appear in a particular action at your discretion.)

Ranger Company: 4xTL3 Infantry(A)[R]  
 Artillery Battalion: 3x155mm M114(3)/Truck  
 Heavy Artillery Battalion: 3x175mm M107(2)  
 Anti-Aircraft Company: 3xM42 Duster or 3xM55 /50cal. Mobile Quad  
 Assault Helicopter Squadron: 4xUH-1H "Huey"  
 Transport Helicopter Squadron: 8xCH-47 "Chinook"  
 Gunship Squadron: 5xAC119K "Puff"

Air Support: AD-1/6 "Skyraider", F-5E "Tiger"

Notes:

- 1) TL2 ARVN troops may be upgraded to TL3 beginning in 1972.
- 2) One Jeep/TOWI stand may be added to each ARVN Regiment beginning in 1972.

- 3) I have often heard the AD-1/6 "Skyraider" affectionately referred to as "Sandy". Everyone I knew called it the "Spad".
- 4) The ARVN 1st and 2nd Divisions were designated "Heavy" divisions in that their infantry regiments had four battalions each, as opposed to the standard three. In practice only three battalions per regiment served in the field. The fourth battalion was an organic "training" formation, allowing the division to maintain a pool of replacements with sufficient training to be easily assimilated into the "Line" battalions. This has the effect of raising the cohesion level of the battalions in these divisions by 2.

#### **SOUTH VIETNAMESE (ARVN) TANK BRIGADE: 1972-1975**

**Generation: II, Air Superiority Rating: 85, Class: Conscripts, Base Determination Factor: 20-30%**

Cavalry Squadron:	3x <u>TL3</u> Infantry(R)/M113 (CAV), 1x81mm M125(1+)
Cavalry Tank Squadron:	3xM41 Walker Bulldog
Tank Company:	4xM48A3
"Tank Marine" Company:	3x <u>TL3</u> Infantry(R)
Cavalry Regiment:	1x <u>TL3</u> Infantry(R) HQ/M577, 2xCavalry Squadron, 1xCavalry Tank Squadron, 1x4.2" M106(2), 1xV150/20mm[R], 1xM113 "Flamethrower"
Armored Regiment:	1xM48A3 (HQ), 3xTank Company, 1x"Tank Marine" Company, 2x <u>TL3</u> Infantry(R)/ M113 (CAV), 1x4.2" M106(2)
Tank Brigade(A):	1x <u>TL3</u> Infantry(B) GHQ/M577, 4xCavalry regiment, 1xArmored Regiment
Tank Brigade(B):	1x <u>TL3</u> Infantry(B) GHQ/M577, 6xCavalry regiment

- Notes: 1) "Tank Marines" were carried on the backs of tanks as protection against ambush. Tanks may carry one stand each.  
2) There were three (A) Tank Brigades and one (B) Brigade. These were Corps assets deployed on an "as needed" basis.

*(In my humble opinion, the South Vietnamese army never received the respect it deserved. South Vietnamese (ARVN) soldiers often exhibited tremendous courage and determination in the face of a ruthless, politically astute, enemy. They did this in spite of being saddled with an ally that was never satisfied with their performance and whose support proved, in the end, fatally unreliable.)*

#### **TACTICAL NOTES**

ARVN: The Army of Vietnam was capable of performing a wide range of "combined arms" tasks. It was short on air-support and heavy artillery, but otherwise well equipped. Scenarios involving ARVN forces can be built around defending base camps or sweeps through enemy territory, but these lack the level of excitement that makes for good wargaming. We have found that the 1968 "Tet Offensive" and the final NVA offensives that took place between 1972 and 1975 provide the kind of dramatic backdrop required for games to be consistently interesting. Remember to include US air-support as a balancing factor.

NVA: The above advice holds true for the North Vietnamese Army as well. But you shouldn't forget actions fought against the Americans, such as Khe Sanh, Hue City, and "Hamburger Hill". In addition, there is much to be learned from re-fighting the battles of the French-Indochina War. This was truly a "transitional" conflict and may be seen as a preview to the much larger Vietnam War that followed. Also, the "Sino-Vietnamese War" of 1979 illustrates the doctrinal changes implemented by General Giap after the Vietnam war and, how these compared with the tactical evolution of the Chinese "People's Liberation Army" during the same period.

Finally, pitting the current Vietnamese Army against the current Chinese armed forces (possibly over the Spratly Islands) can provide insight into where these nations military establishments are headed in the new century. This sort of conjecture is what got me involved in wargaming in the first place, over forty-five years ago!

#### **RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

The Vietnamese government faced daunting economic challenges at the end of the 1990s. Despite official forecasts of another strong year and for annual growth to continue at between nine and ten percent through 2000, independent analysts indicated that growth was slowing to a possible low of five percent by 1998. Central bank authorities were forced to devalue the Vietnamese "Dong" twice during the year. Serious worries about the banking system also emerged after several banks, including the largest state-owned commercial bank, "Vietcombank", defaulted on letters of credit! In 1997, the National Assembly rejected the nomination of Cao Si Kiem to remain as governor of the central bank. Disenchantment continues to grow among foreign investors, dismayed by Vietnam's maze of bureaucratic red tape, corruption, flagging zeal for reform, and lack of an adequate legal infrastructure. Unprofitable government-owned firms remain a major drain on the economy.

#### Clinton Era Diplomacy

Vietnam gained a substantial diplomatic victory when Admiral Prueher, commander in chief - US Pacific Command, visited Hanoi in 1997, followed three months later by Madeleine Albright. Do Muoi traveled to China in July. The next month China and Vietnam held talks on their simmering maritime and border disputes, including conflicting claims on the Spratly Islands. In November, French President Chirac paid a state visit to Vietnam, on the eve of a summit of French-speaking nations and territories in Hanoi.

Diplomatic inroads by the US and other Western nations should not be taken too seriously, though. Some Vietnamese party leaders are worried that too much foreign influence, especially economic influence, will lead to economic liberalization that will weaken their power base and introduce "decadent" ideas into Vietnamese society. There have been a number of crackdowns, especially in the "sex" industry, as well as on "poisonous" books, videos and CDs. The average annual income among Vietnam's eighty million people remains at US\$390. This tends to keep them safely away from the worst effects of real "decadence".

In April, 2001 Nong Duc Manh was picked as Secretary-General of Vietnam's communist party. Manh is still in his early sixties, young for a Vietnamese leader, and is regarded as a modernizer. He is the first secretary-general with no direct experience in the "Wars of Independence". Manh said that after his election he would step up the fight against corruption and unnecessary bureaucracy in his country, saying he wanted to focus on economic development, turning Vietnam into an industrialized country by 2020. Manh also said Vietnam would continue to be a reliable partner to all, but would give priority to regional and socialist countries.

### Traditional Divisions

Vietnam remains divided along north-south lines, despite government efforts to unite the two parts of the country. Southern industry remains the heart of the economy and has retained many Western connections. This only serves to aggravate the anger produced by endemic hunger, disease, and poverty plaguing the north. Yet the people are resilient and have lived through harsher times. Civil unrest continues to simmer over pro-democracy movements both in exile and within Vietnam, elements of the Buddhist community, and the long suppressed "Champa" hill tribes.

Vietnam, like China, refuses to even consider an end to single party politics, while experimenting with liberal, market oriented economics. The end of the US trade embargo and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the US in June 1995 have afforded additional economic and political advantages, but this has run up against stolid resistance by Maoist "hard-liners". As is the case with most socialist economies, official exchange rates bear little relation to reality. Consequently, estimates of Vietnam's economic performance vary widely. However, the real world is catching up with Vietnam. Communist party leader, Le Kha Phieu, said in 2000 that the party's failure to counter corruption and bureaucracy had led to a decline in the people's trust in the party and the state and allowed 'hostile forces' to gain a foothold. The party has launched a massive anti-corruption campaign.

Before the Soviet collapse, Vietnam benefited from substantial Soviet aid. The loss of this support has forced a substantial reduction in Vietnam's military structure and undoubtedly hastened Vietnamese withdrawal from Laos and Cambodia. Oddly enough, Vietnam is probably more secure today than at any time since reunification as a result of these withdrawals. Thailand, and indeed all of the ASEAN nations, are now Vietnamese allies and Vietnam has patched up relations with China as well.

In March 2000 William Cohen became the first US Defense Secretary to visit Vietnam in over twenty-six years. Cohen met with Tran Duc Luong, Vietnam's president, as well as visiting Ho Chi Minh city. Both Cohen and his Vietnamese counterparts assured each other that there was no longer any bitterness between the two countries over the Vietnam War and they expressed the hope for increased co-operation. Cohen also used his visit to call on Vietnam and its southeast Asian neighbors to use their collective leverage to contain China.

### Anti-Communist Rumbblings

In 2001 a Vietnamese court convicted thirty-seven people on terrorism charges, accusing them of being part of an anti-communist group run by overseas Vietnamese opposed Vietnam's communist government. The group's leader Nguyen Hu Canh lives in the US and many of those on trial were based in Thailand and Cambodia. The group's leader in Vietnam, Le Kim Hung, was given a twenty year sentence. The others were given lesser prison terms. Prosecutors claimed that among the group's planned missions was a grenade attack on a religious festival in the south of the country.

### Disputes With the People's Republic of China

Vietnam and China may finally be on the verge of sorting out their borders, disputed since the Franco-Chinese convention of 1887. Soon after independence in 1945, Hanoi claimed that Paris had been over-generous in handing over Vietnamese territory to China. The communist government in Beijing, after taking power in 1949, replied that it was an unequal treaty anyway! During the Vietnam War the disagreement remained firmly on a back-burner. But, following the conquest of South Vietnam, Hanoi openly accused Beijing of profiting from the conflict by secretly moving demarcation pillars to its advantage and changing the location of the boundary on its maps. Border clashes erupted in 1974, followed by talks three years later. These were broken off in 1978 resulting in the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979. After the six-week war, negotiations started again. However, the talks foundered on the inability of the two sides to agree on how to demarcate the border. Vietnam suggested using the 1887 convention as a baseline for sorting out conflicting claims. The Chinese pressed for a return to the situation as it was in the 1950s.

In recent years, however, buoyed by a more favorable international climate, significant progress has been made. At a landmark summit meeting in November 1991 leaders from the two countries formally reestablished political ties and announced their intention to resolve all outstanding disputes through peaceful negotiation, rather than force. The first round of border discussions was held in October 1993, when a Joint Boundary Working Group (JBWG) was established and a number of Confidence Building Measures (CBMS) were put in place. Following the second meeting of the JBWG in June/July 1994 it was agreed to use the 1887 agreement as a basis for redefining the border in areas where demarcation stones had mysteriously disappeared.

Then came an announcement in December 1999 that China and Vietnam were signing an agreement demarcating their long-disputed 1,300 km land border. However, their maritime boundaries remained unresolved, with competing claims to the Spratly and Paracel island groups remaining potential flashpoints. So far, negotiations over the countries' maritime border in the Gulf of Tonkin have not progressed at quite the same speed. As with the land dispute, talks started in 1977. But, disagreements between China and Vietnam over the Paracel and Spratly islands continue to complicate relations between the two countries in this sensitive and potentially oil-rich region.

### What Are "Spratlys" Anyway?

The Spratly Islands consist of over 400 islets of varying sizes, and are claimed in their entirety by China, Taiwan and Vietnam. Brunei, Malaysia, and the Philippines also have at least partial claims. The seas around the islands have long been suspected of being rich in oil, but neither Chinese nor Vietnamese sponsored exploration has so far located commercially viable quantities there. The Spratlys are also adjacent to busy shipping lanes of strategic importance to the region. It is likely, therefore, that claimant nations are now focused mainly on territorial considerations. Only thirty or so of the islets are permanently above water! Nations establishing sovereignty over such islets could have a strong case under international law to pursue rights over associated territorial waters, exclusive economic zones, and continental shelves.

Philippine Air Force (PAF) reconnaissance flights reportedly detected new Vietnamese construction activity on at least seven atolls in the Spratlys during 1999/2000. In October of 1999, Vietnamese troops on one such atoll (Tennent Reef) opened fire on a low-flying PAF OV-10 "Bronco". The PAF says there was no damage.

Vietnam now occupies at least twenty-five islets in the group, and Vietnamese media have stepped up coverage of the Spratlys. Also, Vietnamese Navy patrols of the sea approaches to the Spratly Islands have intensified, a trend that seems certain to continue. The US is thought to view an enhanced Vietnamese presence at sea as a brake on China's maritime ambitions. The Americans are expected to provide assistance in upgrading the Vietnamese Navy as a consequence. Stay Tuned!

### Weapons Upgrades

Reports in April 2001 suggested that Hanoi possessed several hundred US made M113s, captured during the Vietnam War.

Singapore Automotive Engineering (SAE) won a contract in late 1998 to upgrade fifty of these at a per-unit cost of \$100,000. The main element in this proposed upgrade was a re-engining that would see the original gasoline-driven power plant replaced by a diesel engine. Washington blocked the program under the terms of a continuing embargo on defense-related sales to Vietnam, retained when the US lifted its economic sanctions in 1994. The ban applies to all military equipment of US origin, including spare parts, components and material produced in a third country but incorporating US technology. SAE has so far been unable to bypass the ban. The basic overhaul of these fifty platforms is now underway at Vietnam People's Army base Z-751, which is situated in Ho Chi Minh City. Parts have been obtained through commercial sources and weapon systems will be installed from captured stocks, with the APCs eventually due to be deployed with Vietnam's single armored division.

The US government has donated US\$1.8 million worth of mine clearance equipment, including mine detectors, protective equipment, global positioning systems and medical trauma kits, to the People's Army of Vietnam. Vietnam received the donation after becoming a member of the US "Global Humanitarian Demining Program" in June 2000. In October, the US government also gave US\$1.4 million to the "Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation" to conduct an initial survey to locate unexploded Vietnam War ordnance.

In 1999, Vietnam obtained a quantity of Surface-to-Surface Missiles (SSMs) from North Korea to supplement its inventory of Russian-made SS-1 "Scud-B" missiles. The new SSMs are described as "modified Scuds", but the specific designation of the weapons and the quantity are still unknown. Phrasing suggests they may be longer ranged "Scud Cs", which North Korea began to develop in 1984.

#### Enter "Drugs"!

Drug-related crime was up by ten percent in Vietnam during 2002, with heroin featuring in high-profile drug-smuggling cases that have ignited diplomatic tensions with Australia. Between November 2001 and November 2002, Vietnamese police uncovered about 14,000 drug trafficking cases. Police figures show the quantity of heroin seized over the year was up sixty-two percent. Vietnam is on an international drug route linking Laos and Cambodia to Europe, Australia, and the US.

Vietnam currently boasts over 110,000 registered drug addicts, a number that is expected to rise by eight to ten percent per year for the foreseeable future. Australians of Vietnamese descent have been at the center of many recent heroin smuggling cases. In early 2003, an Australian woman was executed by a Vietnamese firing squad for attempting to smuggle 882 grams (about two pounds) of heroin to Sydney from Vietnam in November 2001. Three Australian sisters, aged 12, 14 and 24 also faced charges of smuggling heroin to Sydney and a 34-year-old Australian of Vietnamese origin was awaiting sentencing after being arrested in January, 2003 for a similar charge.

Despite public campaigns including billboards in cities warning of the dangers of drugs, Vietnam continues to face a frightful rise in illegal drug use. This has prompted donor countries like Britain to offer help to combat the problem. In 2002, the British Embassy in Hanoi funded a computer network to collect and analyze drug control information across the country. Vietnam itself has invested over 500 billion dong (US\$32.55 million) to upgrade and build detoxification centers in its biggest city, Ho Chi Minh City, to treat 23,000 addicts. For many years Vietnam made enormous profits catering to the Western drug market. But it was only a matter of time before the country's export drug industry spawned a domestic drug problem. The Vietnamese leadership assumed that drug abuse was purely a Western phenomenon, fostered by permissiveness and too much individual freedom. Current numbers of Vietnamese heroin addicts, however, simply do not support this smug assumption.

#### **2002 VIETNAMESE ARSENAL**

Vehicles:	250+T-62, 600xT-54/55, 200xT-34/85, & 100xType 59 MBTs, 600xPT-76 & Type 62 Light Tanks, 80xBRDM Scout Cars, 1,500xBTR-40/-50/-60/-152, Type 56, & K-63 APCs
Anti-Tank:	75mm Type 52/57, 82mm B-10, & 107mm B-11 RcRs, 90x85mm D-48 ATGs, K-11 (AT-3) & AT-4 ATGMs, 2500xRPG-2/7 ATGLs
Artillery:	300x(76mm, 85mm, 100mm, & 122mm), 200x130mm & 100x152mm Towed Gun/Howitzers, 107mm Type 63 MRLs, 122mm & 140mm Rockets, 81mm, 107mm, 120mm & 160mm Mortars
SSMs:	Scud B/C
Anti-Aircraft:	23mm, 37mm, 85mm, 100mm, & 130mm Towed AA Guns, ZSU-23/4 & ZSU-57/2 SPAA, 180xSA-2, 180xSA-3, 45xSA-6, some SA-7 & SA-9 SAMs
Combat Aircraft:	126xMiG-21F, 12xSu27SK/BK, 40xSu-22
Helicopters:	10xMi-6, 60xMi-8, 35xMi-24, 15xKa-25
Small Arms:	7.62mm Tokarev & Type 68 Pistols, 7.62mm SKS, Type 56, AK-47, AKM, & K-50M Rifles, 7.62mm MAT-49, PPSH, Type 53/67, DPM/RPD, SGM, & 12.7mm DSHK Machineguns, 40mm M79, M203, & Mk19 Model 3 SMAW Grenade Launchers

- Notes:
- 1) All figures are compiled from unofficial sources and should be treated as estimates.
  - 2) The Vietnamese Army currently consists of 50xInfantry Divisions, many of which exist only as cadres.
  - 3) There are also 1xArmored Division, 7xEngineer Divisions(?), 4xEngineer Brigades, 10xArmored Brigades, 5xArtillery Regiments, 3xSpecial Operations Brigades, as well as various AA and Construction units.
  - 4) The Vietnamese Air Force has 3xCombat Divisions, each of 2-3xCombat Regiments and 1xTransport Regiment.
  - 5) Fifty US built M113 APCs, captured during the Vietnam War, are currently being upgraded.
  - 6) Vietnam is trying to purchase 12xSu-30K fighters from Russia, as part of a plan to deploy 36xSu-27/-30 fighters by 2010.
  - 7) A small number of captured US M48 tanks are also available, but these suffer from old age and severe parts shortages.
  - 8) The small number of RPGs available appears to reflect a greater dependence on Recoilless Rifles and ATGMs than previously. Remember, all figures are estimates.

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