



The Mini Page

Betty Debnam, Founding Editor and Editor at Large



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50 Years Ago

The War in Vietnam

Have you ever heard the expression “stuck between a rock and a hard place”? It means that there are no good choices available.

In the late 1950s, leaders of the United States found themselves in this position when trying to decide what to do about Vietnam, a country in Asia.

Finally, in March 1965, the United States entered into a war in that country. You may have a grandparent or other relative or friend who served in the Vietnam War.

This week, The Mini Page explores the causes of the war, how it was different from earlier conflicts, and how it affected Americans.

Wary of communism

After World War II ended, leaders in the United States became worried about the spread of **communism**, a political system under which all property is publicly owned, and people work for and are paid by the government. China and the Soviet Union were trying to expand communism in Asia and beyond.

U.S. officials believed that if one country became communist, nearby countries might be taken over too. They called this a “domino effect,” like dominoes falling into one another.



World leaders met in Switzerland in 1954. The Geneva Accords divided Vietnam into North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

A divided Vietnam

North Vietnam was under the rule of Ho Chi Minh, a communist. The agreement declared that after two years, the two countries would be reunited and would have free and fair elections.

But the leader of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, was brutal and dishonest. Some people in the south joined a **guerrilla*** group called the Viet Cong that worked against Diem.

The Viet Cong controlled a lot of South Vietnam by the late 1950s. North Vietnam helped support the Viet Cong.

* **Guerrillas are independent, small groups fighting against larger forces.**

A rock and a hard place

U.S. President John F. Kennedy had a hard decision to make: He didn't want to support the communist government of North Vietnam, but he also didn't want to send American troops to fight for the hated Diem.

Then, in November 1963, Diem was captured and killed by the South Vietnamese Army. Just weeks later, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas.

Johnson makes his move

After he became president, Lyndon Johnson had to decide what should be done in Vietnam. American advisers were helping the South Vietnamese, but there were no U.S. troops there.

But in August 1964, the U.S. government declared that two American warships in the Gulf of Tonkin had been attacked by a North Vietnamese torpedo boat.



photo by Cecil Stoughton, courtesy U.S. National Archives

The U.S. Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in August 1964, allowing Johnson to do anything he could to stop the communist threat in Vietnam.

In this photo, Johnson signs the resolution.

A Long History

Centuries of conflict

Vietnam has spent most of its modern history fighting for independence — from Japan and from France.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Europe was the center of power in the world. The United Kingdom, France and other European nations gained power by conquering foreign lands and establishing colonies.

France controlled Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in the late 1800s. The territory was called French Indochina.

The French forced the native people to adopt Catholicism and modern styles of education. The Vietnamese fought against France, but France kept control of Vietnam until World War II.



World War II

When Germany invaded France in 1940, control of Vietnam was shifted to Japan. By the end of the war in 1945, a communist group, the

Viet Minh, was trying to gain independence from Japan. The United States supported the Viet Minh and its leader, Ho Chi Minh.

But as soon as the war was over,

France moved back in. President Harry Truman turned American support to France, but the Viet Minh gained territory. Finally, in 1954, the French were defeated by the Viet Minh.

With the Geneva Accords, world leaders hoped to unify Vietnam. But its conflicts were not over.

Vietnam today

Today, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is controlled by the Communist Party. However, the government encourages privately owned business.



Flag of Vietnam

The country produces rice, cashews, black pepper and coffee, along with other agricultural products. People also work in the oil industry and in high-tech and manufacturing jobs.

Capital: Hanoi (huh-NOY)
Population: 90 million people
Currency: dong



photo by Franzfoto

The village of Mai Chau is in the northwest part of Vietnam.

Ready Resources



The Mini Page provides ideas for websites, books or other resources that will help you learn more about this week's topics.

On the Web:

- bensguide.gpo.gov/3-5/symbols/vietnam.html

At the library:

- "The Vietnam War" by Peter Benoit
- "Vietnam War" by Martin Gitlin
- "Vietnam War" by Stuart Murray
- "The Vietnam War: A History Just for Kids!" by KidCaps

Vietnam War



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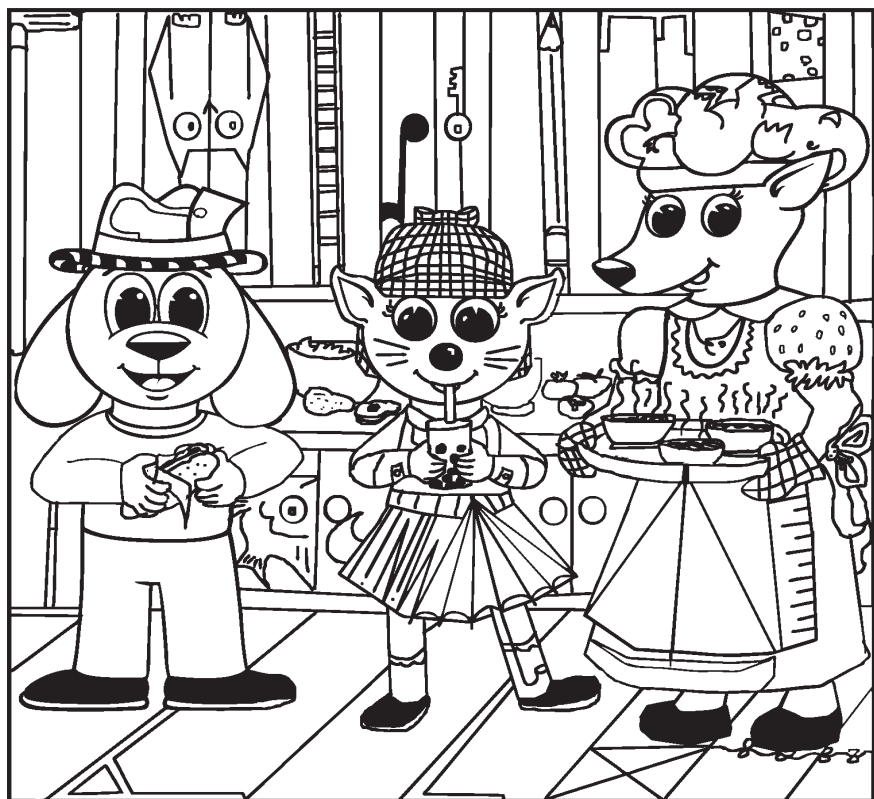
Words that remind us of the Vietnam War are hidden in the block above. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find: ACCORDS, ASIA, COMMUNISM, DOMINO, DRAFT, FRENCH, GENEVA, HANOI, INDOCHINA, JAPAN, JUNGLE, NORTH, OPPOSE, PROTEST, SOUTH, TELEVISION, TONKIN, TREATY, VIET CONG, VIETNAM, WAR.



Mini Spy

Mini Spy and her friends love Vietnamese food. See if you can find:

<input type="checkbox"/> musical note	<input type="checkbox"/> number 3		
<input type="checkbox"/> letter A	<input type="checkbox"/> umbrella	<input type="checkbox"/> strawberry	<input type="checkbox"/> kite
<input type="checkbox"/> cheese	<input type="checkbox"/> sailboat	<input type="checkbox"/> candy cane	<input type="checkbox"/> owl
<input type="checkbox"/> ruler	<input type="checkbox"/> letter T	<input type="checkbox"/> question mark	<input type="checkbox"/> key
<input type="checkbox"/> golf club	<input type="checkbox"/> word MINI	<input type="checkbox"/> ladder	<input type="checkbox"/> fish
<input type="checkbox"/> pencil	<input type="checkbox"/> number 7	<input type="checkbox"/> butterfly	
<input type="checkbox"/> elephant	<input type="checkbox"/> letter E	<input type="checkbox"/> man in the moon	



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Rookie Cookie's Recipe Apricot Cobbler

You'll need:

- 1/3 cup milk
- 1 cup all-purpose baking mix
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 can apricot halves, undrained

What to do:

1. Mix all ingredients except the apricot halves. Stir with a fork to form a dough.
 2. Spread mixture evenly on the bottom of an 8-by-8-inch baking dish.
 3. Pour the apricots and their juice over the batter.
 4. Bake in a preheated 400-degree oven for 30 to 35 minutes.
 5. Serve warm in bowls with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Serves 6.
- You will need an adult's help with this recipe.*

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Meet Mike Whitla



photo by John Blacker

Mike Whitla is the leader of the Rock'n'Rainbow band. Their latest album is "Let's Boogie!" Mike sings and plays lead guitar as the character Purple Stardust.

Mike's company, Rainbow Songs, has offered music classes for kids and parents in Toronto, Canada, for 15 years. His Rainbow Songs video "Dinostory — The Ultimate Dinosaur Rock Opera" has received more than 12 million views on YouTube.

When Mike was 10, he and his family moved to England for a year. There, his family sang together in a choir. In high school, Mike was in many plays and played tuba in the band. In college, he studied jazz guitar and music from India.

Mike and his wife, Lisa Haberman, founded Rainbow Songs Foundation, a charity that puts on music programs for people in family shelters throughout Toronto. Mike loves taking long bike rides on the trails in Toronto's parks.

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Tom Brady

Gus
Goodsport's
Supersport



Height: 6-4
Age: 37
Hometown:
San Mateo,
California

New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady has played in plenty of important games during his 15 seasons in the National Football League. He holds NFL quarterback records in career playoff appearances (29), wins (21) and playoff touchdown passes (53), and has led his team to a record six Super Bowls.

On Feb. 2, Tom's Patriots trailed the Seattle Seahawks 24-14 to begin the fourth quarter. On his next two possessions, Tom completed 14 of 16 passes with two touchdowns to give his team a 28-24 lead with two minutes to play. New England's defense then came through with an interception at the 1-yard line to seal the victory and clinch the Patriots' fourth Super Bowl title.

Tom earned his third Super Bowl Most Valuable Player honor and joined NFL Hall of Famers Joe Montana and Terry Bradshaw as the only quarterbacks to win four Super Bowls.



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Mighty Funny's Mini Jokes

All the following jokes have something in common. Can you guess the common theme or category?

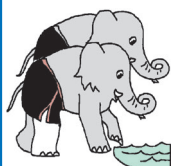
Philip: Why do you keep doing the backstroke?

Patty: I just had lunch and don't want to swim on a full stomach!



Paul: Why can't two elephants go into a swimming pool at the same time?

Perry: Because they only have one pair of trunks!



Pete: Where do swimmers sit to eat dinner?

Patrick: At pool tables!



A Different Kind of War

President Johnson didn't immediately use the war powers given to him by the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. But things got worse in Vietnam after Diem's death. North Vietnamese forces kept moving south.

Operation Rolling Thunder

In March 1965, U.S. airplanes and ground troops began bombing military centers, highways, bridges and factories in North Vietnam. But the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army kept fighting.

Gen. William Westmoreland, the commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, asked Johnson for more troops. By the end of 1965, there were more than 180,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam.

Watching at home

Many people in the United States supported the war at the start. They thought it would be a short war and the United States would overwhelm the enemy.

Vietnam was called the first "television war" because people could watch the horrors of the fighting on their television sets at home. Seeing the war close up, some Americans began to **oppose**, or disagree with, U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

Many thought that Americans, some as young as 18 years old, shouldn't be asked to give their lives for a struggle among people so far away.



Soldiers carry a wounded comrade through a swampy area in Vietnam in 1969.

Difficult fighting

Military leaders used their experience in World War II to plan strategy for Vietnam. But the war there was **unconventional**, or unfamiliar.

For example, in Vietnam there were no defined front lines. North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops hid in the jungle. They dug tunnels to store supplies and gave machine guns to regular citizens to fire at American aircraft.

American soldiers spent a lot of time on "patrol," walking through the jungle looking for the enemy. They had to avoid booby traps and **land mines**, or explosives buried in the ground. U.S. forces burned down entire villages when they suspected the enemy of hiding there.

There's much more to learn about the Vietnam War. Interview older family members or friends about what they remember about the war.

Building an army

During most of the history of the United States, young men have been required to register to serve in the military. This means that if the U.S. goes to war and doesn't have enough forces, it can **draft** more people, or require them to serve.

As the war in Vietnam continued, more and more people protested against the draft. Some young men refused to serve.



War protesters at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

In 1968, during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, people protesting against the war were beaten by police officers.

Peace?

When Richard Nixon was sworn in as president in early 1969, there were about 540,000 troops in Vietnam. Nixon began slowly withdrawing troops, but the war continued there for six more years.

After many more battles, the U.S., North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the Viet Cong signed a peace treaty in January 1973. The last U.S. troops left Vietnam in March, but North Vietnam and South Vietnam continued fighting.

Finally, in April 1975, South Vietnam surrendered, ending the war.

Next week, The Mini Page finds out what being a citizen scientist is all about.

The Mini Page Staff

Betty Debnam - Founding Editor and Editor at Large Lisa Tarry - Managing Editor Lucy Lien - Associate Editor Wendy Daley - Artist