

The Vietnam WarText by Angela Weeks
Illustrations by Dick Weigall**The Vietnam War**

Set 14 (441 words)

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Special words

Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, guerrilla, determined, Europe, sure, their, only, soldiers, routes, period, through, poor, during, campaign, signed

Words where the vowel says its name:

communist, minds, overthrow, United, torpedo, reprisals, unit, kind, uniform, communication, local communities, Australian, explosive

The communist threat dominated the minds of American politicians in the 1960s. Their concerns increased when Ho Chi Minh, leader of the communist government of North Vietnam, launched a guerrilla campaign against South Vietnam. Ho's goal was to overthrow the government of the south and unite the country under communist rule.

Determined to stop the spread of Communism, the United States began by training the South Vietnamese army and providing military advisors to help combat the guerrillas. However, the attack on a US warship by North Vietnamese torpedo boats led to US reprisals and in 1965, US aircraft began bombing targets in North Vietnam and the first American fighting troops arrived.

The Vietnam War was very different from previous wars in Europe and America, which had been mainly fought by big armies facing off against each other. While there, were small delete battles like Long Tan, the Viet Cong made sure that most of the action took place in the sweltering jungle of South Vietnam

and involved small unit action. For the Americans, and their Australian allies, not only was the territory unfamiliar, but they were ill- prepared and ill- equipped for this kind of warfare.

The Viet Cong had another advantage. They had access to a vast network of connecting tunnels that spread across the country. As well as providing soldiers with places to hide during combat, the tunnels served as communication and supply routes, hospitals, somewhere to hide food and weapons and sleeping quarters and kitchens for the fighters from North Vietnam.

The tunnels were well hidden. And so were most of the fighters, who were active at night, did not wear uniforms and blended into the local communities during the day.

The tunnels were also well protected. To deter American and Australian troops from entering them, the Viet Cong set up explosive booby traps and Punji stake pits with devastating results.

In 1973, after five years of diplomatic wrangling, a peace accord was signed in Paris ending the conflict. America and Australia began to withdraw their troops. However, this did not end the war.

A brief period of peace followed, but in late 1974, North Vietnamese forces recommenced hostilities. They captured Saigon on April 30 , 1975, drove a tank through the gates of the Presidential Palace and raised their flag. With this symbolic act, the Vietnam War came to an end. South Vietnam was forced to surrender, and the country was reunited under Communist rule.

Forty years have passed since the Vietnam war ended. Vietnam is still a very poor country but in recent years, it has become more stable and now has a growing economy.

Questions

After reading the text, or the relevant page, ask students one or more of the following questions. If students are working in pairs, alternate Partner 1, then Partner 2.

- Who was Ho Chi Minh? Why did he want to overthrow the government of South Vietnam?
- Why did the United States of America go to war in Vietnam? Which country supported America?
- Young men in the US and Australia were conscripted into the armed forces. What does conscripted mean. Find out how they were selected.
- Name one way that the Vietnam War was different from previous wars in Europe and America?
- How do you think soldiers in guerrilla warfare would feel? What would it be like creeping through jungle that was riddled with hidden booby traps and surrounded by the enemy, so well camouflaged you have no idea where they are? What might you see? What might you hear? What might you feel?