



**Battlefield: Timeline**



**1954**

**May 7, 1954**

Vietnamese forces occupy the French command post at Dien Bien Phu and the French commander orders his troops to cease fire. The battle had lasted 55 days. Three thousand French troops were killed, 8,000 wounded. The Viet Minh suffered much worse, with 8,000 dead and 12,000 wounded, but the Vietnamese victory shattered France's resolve to carry on the war.



Vietnamese forces celebrate their victory over the French

**1959**

**During 1959**

A specialized North Vietnamese Army unit, Group 559, is formed to create a supply route from North Vietnam to Vietcong forces in South Vietnam. With the approval of Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, Group 559 develops a primitive route along the Vietnamese/Cambodian border, with offshoots into Vietnam along its entire length. This eventually becomes known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

**1961**

**Late 1961**

President John F. Kennedy orders more help for the South Vietnamese government in its war against the Vietcong guerrillas. U.S. backing includes new equipment and more than 3,000 military advisors and support personnel.



President John F. Kennedy

**December 11, 1961**

American helicopters arrive at docks in South Vietnam along with 400 U.S. personnel, who will fly and maintain the aircraft.

**1962**

**January 12, 1962**

In Operation Chopper, helicopters flown by U.S. Army pilots ferry 1,000 South Vietnamese soldiers to sweep a NLF stronghold near Saigon. It marks America's first combat missions against the Vietcong.



U.S. Army helicopter on an Operation Chopper mission

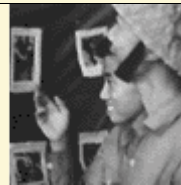
**Early 1962**

Operation Ranchhand begins. The goal of Ranchhand is to clear vegetation alongside highways, making it more difficult for the Vietcong to conceal themselves for ambushes. As the war continues, the scope of Ranchhand increases. Vast tracts of forest are sprayed with "Agent Orange," an herbicide containing the deadly chemical Dioxin. Guerrilla trails and base areas are exposed, and crops that might feed Vietcong units are destroyed.

**1963**

**January 2, 1963**

At the hamlet of Ap Bac, the Vietcong 514th Battalion and local guerrilla forces ambush the South Vietnamese Army's 7th division. For the first time, the Vietcong stand their ground against American machinery and South Vietnamese soldiers. Almost 400 South Vietnamese are killed or wounded. Three American advisors are slain.



The victory at Ap Bac raised morale and drove recruitment for the Vietcong

**1964**

**April - June 1964**

American air power in Southeast Asia is massively reinforced. Two aircraft carriers arrive off the Vietnamese coast prompted by a North Vietnamese offensive in Laos.

**July 30, 1964**

On this night, South Vietnamese commandos attack two small North Vietnamese islands in the Gulf of Tonkin. The U.S. destroyer Maddox, an electronic spy ship, is 123 miles south with orders to electronically simulate an air attack to draw North Vietnamese boats away from the commandos.

**August 4, 1964**

The captain of the U.S.S. Maddox reports that his vessel has been fired on and that an attack is imminent. Though he later says that no attack took place, six hours after the initial report, a retaliation against North Vietnam is ordered by President Johnson. American jets bomb two naval bases, and destroy a major oil facility. Two U.S. planes are downed in

the attack.

### **August 7, 1964**

The U.S. congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, giving President Johnson the power to take whatever actions he sees necessary to defend southeast Asia.



President Johnson signs the Resolution

### **October 1964**

China, North Vietnam's neighbor and ally, successfully tests an atomic bomb.

### **November 1, 1964**

Two days before the U.S. presidential election, Vietcong mortars shell Bien Hoa Air Base near Saigon. Four Americans are killed, 76 wounded. Five B-57 bombers are destroyed, and 15 are damaged.



American aircraft burn on the ground at Bien Hoa

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**1967**

**January - May 1967**

Two North Vietnamese divisions, operating out of the DMZ that separates North and South Vietnam, launch heavy bombardments of American bases south of the DMZ. These bases include Khe Sanh, the Rockpile, Cam Lo, Dong Ha, Con Thien and Gio Linh.

**January 8, 1967**

American forces begin Operation Cedar Falls, which is intended to drive Vietcong forces from the Iron Triangle, a 60 square mile area lying between the Saigon River and Route 13. Nearly 16,000 American troops and 14,000 soldiers of the South Vietnamese Army move into the Iron Triangle, but they encounter no major resistance. Huge quantities of enemy supplies are captured. Over 19 days, 72 Americans are killed, victims mostly of snipers emerging from concealed tunnels and booby traps. Seven hundred and twenty Vietcong are killed.



Looking out from a patrol boat during Operation Cedar Falls

**February 21, 1967**

In one of the largest air-mobile assaults ever, 240 helicopters sweep over Tay Ninh province, beginning Operation Junction City. The goal of Junction City is to destroy Vietcong bases and the Vietcong military headquarters for South Vietnam, all of which are located in War Zone C, north of Saigon. Some 30,000 U.S. troops take part in the mission, joined by 5,000 men of the South Vietnamese Army. After 72 days, Junction City ends. American forces succeed in capturing large quantities of stores, equipment and weapons, but there are no large, decisive battles.



Junction City was one of the largest helicopter assaults ever staged

**April 24, 1967**

American attacks on North Vietnam's airfields begin. The attacks inflict

heavy damage on runways and installations. By the end of the year, all but one of the North's Mig bases has been hit.

### May 1967

Desperate air battles rage in the skies over Hanoi and Haiphong. America air forces shoot down 26 North Vietnamese jets, decreasing the North's pilot strength by half.

### Late May 1967

In the Central Highlands of South Vietnam, Americans intercept North Vietnamese Army units moving in from Cambodia. Nine days of continuous battles leave hundreds of North Vietnamese soldiers dead.



Soldiers fighting in the central highlands

### Autumn 1967

In Hanoi, as Communist forces are building up for the Tet Offensive, 200 senior officials are arrested in a crackdown on opponents of the Tet strategy.

## 1968

### Mid-January 1968

In mid-January 1968 in the remote northwest corner of South Vietnam, elements of three NVA divisions begin to mass near the Marine base at Khe Sanh. The ominous proportions of the build-up lead the U.S. commanders to expect a major offensive in the northern provinces.

### January 21, 1968

At 5:30 a.m., a shattering barrage of shells, mortars and rockets slam into the Marine base at Khe Sanh. Eighteen Marines are killed instantly, 40 are wounded. The initial attack continues for two days.



Vietcong artillery

### January 30 - 31, 1968

On the Tet holiday, Vietcong units surge into action over the length and breadth of South Vietnam. In more than 100 cities and towns, shock attacks by Vietcong sapper-commandos are followed by wave after wave of supporting troops. By the end of the city battles, 37,000 Vietcong troops deployed for Tet have been killed. Many more had been wounded or captured, and the fighting had created more than a half million civilian refugees. Casualties included most of the Vietcong's best fighters, political officers and secret organizers; for the guerillas, Tet is nothing less than a catastrophe. But for the Americans, who lost 2,500 men, it is a serious blow to public support.



Military police defend the US Embassy

## February 23, 1968

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Over 1,300 artillery rounds hit the Marine base at Khe Sanh and its outposts, more than on any previous day of attacks. To withstand the constant assaults, bunkers at Khe Sanh are rebuilt to withstand 82mm mortar rounds.

## March 6, 1968

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While Marines wait for a massive assault, NVA forces retreat into the jungle around Khe Sanh. For the next three weeks, things are relatively quiet around the base.

## March 11, 1968

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Massive search and destroy sweeps are launched against Vietcong remnants around Saigon and other parts of South Vietnam.

## March 16, 1968

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In the hamlet of My Lai, U.S. Charlie Company kills about two hundred civilians. Although only one member of the division is tried and found guilty of war crimes, the repercussions of the atrocity is felt throughout the Army. However rare, such acts undid the benefit of countless hours of civic action by Army units and individual soldiers and raised unsettling questions about the conduct of the war.

## March 22, 1968

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Without warning, a massive North Vietnamese barrage slams into Khe Sanh. More than 1,000 rounds hit the base, at a rate of a hundred every hour. At the same time, electronic sensors around Khe Sanh indicate NVA troop movements. American forces reply with heavy bombing.



Artillery slams into Khe Sanh

## April 8, 1968

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U.S. forces in Operation Pegasus finally retake Route 9, ending the siege of Khe Sanh. A 77 day battle, Khe Sanh had been the biggest single battle of the Vietnam War to that point. The official assessment of the North Vietnamese Army dead is just over 1,600 killed, with two divisions all but annihilated. But thousands more were probably killed by American bombing.

## June 1968

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With strong, highly mobile American forces now in the area, and the base no longer needed for defense, General Westmoreland approves the abandonment and demolition of Khe Sanh.

**November 1, 1968**

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After three-and-a-half years, Operation Rolling Thunder comes to an end. In total, the campaign had cost more than 900 American aircraft. Eight hundred and eighteen pilots are dead or missing, and hundreds are in captivity. Nearly 120 Vietnamese planes have been destroyed in air combat or accidents, or by friendly fire. According to U.S. estimates, 182,000 North Vietnamese civilians have been killed. Twenty thousand Chinese support personnel also have been casualties of the bombing.

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**1969**

**January 1969**

President Richard M. Nixon takes office as the new President of the United States. With regard to Vietnam, he promises to achieve "Peace With Honor." His aim is to negotiate a settlement that will allow the half million U.S. troops in Vietnam to be withdrawn, while still allowing South Vietnam to survive.



President Richard M. Nixon

**February 1969**

In spite of government restrictions, President Nixon authorizes Operation Menu, the bombing of North Vietnamese and Vietcong bases within Cambodia. Over the following four years, U.S. forces will drop more than a half million tons of bombs on Cambodia.

**February 22, 1969**

In a major offensive, assault teams and artillery attack American bases all over South Vietnam, killing 1,140 Americans. At the same time, South Vietnamese towns and cities are also hit. The heaviest fighting is around Saigon, but fights rage all over South Vietnam. Eventually, American artillery and airpower overwhelm the Vietcong offensive.



An American soldier leaps into a bunker during a Vietcong assault

**April 1969**

U.S. combat deaths in Vietnam exceed the 33,629 men killed in the Korean War.

**June 8, 1969**

President Nixon meets with South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu on Midway Island in the Pacific, and announces that 25,000 U.S. troops will be withdrawn immediately.





## 1970

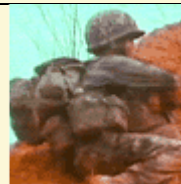
**April 29, 1970**

South Vietnamese troops attack into Cambodia, pushing toward Vietcong bases. Two days later, a U.S. force of 30,000 -- including three U.S. divisions -- mount a second attack. Operations in Cambodia last for 60 days, and uncover vast North Vietnamese jungle supply depots. They capture 28,500 weapons, as well as over 16 million rounds of small arms ammunition, and 14 million pounds of rice. Although most Vietcong manage to escape across the Mekong, there are over 10,000 casualties.

## 1971

**February 8, 1971**

In Operation Lam Son 719, three South Vietnamese divisions drive into Laos to attack two major enemy bases. Unknowingly, they are walking into a North Vietnamese trap. Over the next month, more than 9,000 South Vietnamese troops are killed or wounded. More than two thirds of the South Vietnamese Army's armored vehicles are destroyed, along with hundreds of U.S. helicopters and planes.



A South Vietnamese soldier crouches behind a hill in Operation Lam Son 719

**Summer 1971**

While herbicides containing Dioxin were banned for use by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1968, spraying of Agent Orange continues in Vietnam until 1971. Operation Ranchhand has sprayed 11 million gallons of Agent Orange -- containing 240 pounds of the lethal chemical Dioxin -- on South Vietnam. More than one seventh of the country's total area has been laid waste.

## 1972

**January 1, 1972**

Only 133,000 U.S. servicemen remain in South Vietnam. Two thirds of America's troops have gone in two years. The ground war is now almost exclusively the responsibility of South Vietnam, which has over 1,000,000 men enlisted in its armed forces.

**March 30, 1972**

Massed North Vietnamese Army artillery open a shattering barrage, targeting South Vietnamese positions across the DMZ. Upwards of 20,000 NVA troops cross the DMZ, forcing the South Vietnamese units into a retreat. The Southern defense is thrown into complete chaos. Intelligence reports had predicted a Northern attack, but no one had expected it to come on the DMZ.



South Vietnamese defend ineffectively against the North

### **April 1, 1972**

North Vietnamese soldiers push toward the city of Hue, which is defended by a South Vietnamese division and a division of U.S. Marines. But by April 9, the NVA are forced to halt attacks and resupply.

### **April 13, 1972**

In an assault spearheaded by tanks, NVA troops manage to seize control of the northern part of the city. But the 4,000 South Vietnamese men defending the city, reinforced by elite airborne units, hold their positions and launch furious counterattacks. American B-52 bombers also help with the defense. A month later, Vietcong forces withdraw.



Civilians flee from Hue in the face of the North Vietnamese's advance

### **April 27, 1972**

Two weeks after the initial attack, North Vietnamese forces again battle toward Quang Tri City. The defending South Vietnamese division retreats. By April 29, the NVA takes Dong Ha, and by May 1, Quang Tri City.

### **July 19, 1972**

With U.S. air support, the South Vietnamese Army begins a drive to recapture Binh Dinh province and its cities. The battles last until September 15, by which time Quang Tri has been reduced to rubble. Nevertheless, the NVA retains control of the northern part of the province.

### **December 13, 1972**

In Paris, peace talks between the North Vietnamese and the Americans breakdown.



Peace talks in Paris

### **December 18, 1972**

By order of the president, a new bombing campaign starts against the North Vietnamese. Operation Linebacker Two lasts for 12 days, including a three day bombing period by up to 120 B-52s. Strategic surgical strikes are planned on fighter airfields, transport targets and supply depots in and around Hanoi and Haiphong. U.S. aircraft drop more than 20,000 tons of bombs in this operation. Twenty-six U.S. planes are lost, and 93 airmen are killed, captured or missing. North Vietnam admits to between 1,300 and 1,600 dead.



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### 1973

January 8, 1973

North Vietnam and the United States resume peace talks in Paris.

January 27, 1973

All warring parties in the Vietnam War sign a cease fire.



Henry Kissenger's initials on the Cease Fire

March 1973

The last American combat soldiers leave South Vietnam, though military advisors and Marines, who are protecting U.S. installations, remain. For the United States, the war is officially over. Of the more than 3 million Americans who have served in the war, almost 58,000 are dead, and over 1,000 are missing in action. Some 150,000 Americans were seriously wounded.

### 1974

January 1974

Though they are still too weak to launch a full-scale offensive, the North Vietnamese have rebuilt their divisions in the South, and have captured key areas.



North Vietnamese resupply and fortify their forces

August 9, 1974

President Richard M. Nixon resigns, leaving South Vietnam without its strongest advocate.

December 26, 1974



The 7th North Vietnamese Army division captures Dong Xoai.

## 1975

**January 6, 1975**

In a disastrous loss for the South Vietnamese, the NVA take Phuoc Long city and the surrounding province. The attack, a blatant violation of the Paris peace agreement, produces no retaliation from the United States.



The North Vietnamese flag flies over Phuoc Long

**March 1, 1975**

A powerful NVA offensive is unleashed in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam. The resulting South Vietnamese retreat is chaotic and costly, with nearly 60,000 troops dead or missing.

**During March**

Another NVA offensive sends 100,000 soldiers against the major cities of Quang Tri, Hue and Da Nang. Backed by powerful armored forces and eight full regiments of artillery, they quickly succeed in capturing Quang Tri province.



North Vietnamese armored forces

**March 25, 1975**

Hue, South Vietnam's third largest city, falls to the North Vietnamese Army.

**Early April 1975**

Five weeks into its campaign, the North Vietnamese Army has made stunning gains. Twelve provinces and more than eight million people are under its control. The South Vietnamese Army has lost its best units, over a third of its men, and almost half its weapons.

**April 29, 1975**

U.S. Marines and Air Force helicopters, flying from carriers off-shore, begin a massive airlift. In 18 hours, over 1,000 American civilians and almost 7,000 South Vietnamese refugees are flown out of Saigon.



A helicopter lifts off from inside the U.S. Embassy grounds

**April 30, 1975**

At 4:03 a.m., two U.S. Marines are killed in a rocket attack at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport. They are the last Americans to die in the Vietnam War. At dawn, the last Marines of the force guarding the U.S. embassy lift off. Only hours later, looters ransack the embassy, and North Vietnamese tanks roll into Saigon, ending the war. In 15 years, nearly a

million NVA and Vietcong troops and a quarter of a million South Vietnamese soldiers have died. Hundreds of thousands of civilians had been killed.