



THE VIETNAM WAR

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NORTH AMERICAN LITERATURE

Edited by **BRENDA M. BOYLE**

B L O O M S B U R Y

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Edited by
Brenda M. Boyle

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MAP



A 1960s map of Viet Nam given to all US service people.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1897 After decades of colonizing and warring, France makes itself the government of the Indochina Union.
- 1917 In "Fourteen Points," US President Woodrow Wilson insists all nations should be self-determining.
- 1919 Nguyen Ai Quoc (aka Ho Chi Minh) petitions the WWI Versailles Peace Conference for Vietnamese independence.
- 1930 The Vietnamese Nationalist Party, founded in 1927, is suppressed by the French colonial government. Subsequently, Ho Chi Minh founds the Indochinese Communist Party.
- 1940 Japan occupies Viet Nam, retaining the French Vichy administration.
- 1941 The Indochinese Communist Party creates its military arm, the Viet Minh. US President Franklin D. Roosevelt insists in "Atlantic Charter" that all nations should be self-determining.
- 1944 Roosevelt advocates a "trusteeship" for Viet Nam in preparation for its freedom from French governance.
- 1945 Japan expels French officials from Viet Nam and recognizes Emperor Bao Dai as the head of Viet Nam's government. Roosevelt dies; Vice President Harry S. Truman becomes President. Ho Chi Minh declares the independence of the "Democratic Republic of Viet Nam" and asks for President Truman's acknowledgment.
- 1946 The First Indochina War begins: France versus the Viet Minh.

- 1947 In the "Truman Doctrine," Truman promises to support people seeking independence from outsiders.
- 1948 The US indirectly supports the French in Viet Nam financially.
- 1949 France recognizes Emperor Bao Dai as the head of the new State of Vietnam, and grants Viet Nam independence only within the French Union.
- 1950 The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China recognize the (northern) Democratic Republic of Vietnam as the legitimate state of Viet Nam; the United States and Great Britain recognize as legitimate the (southern) State of Vietnam, headed by Bao Dai. The United States directly provides economic and military aid to France in its war with the Viet Minh. US military personnel: about 60.
- 1953 US President Dwight D. Eisenhower grants financial aid to the French war effort, totaling 80% of the French war costs.
- 1954 Eisenhower formulates the "domino theory"; France surrenders to the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu, ending the First Indochina War. Emperor Bao Dai appoints Ngo Dinh Diem as prime minister of the (southern) State of Vietnam. The Geneva Peace Agreement temporarily partitions Viet Nam into north and south, guarantees elections in 1956, and facilitates moving hundreds of thousands of (mostly Catholic) refugees from north to south.
- 1955–1956 Graham Greene publishes his novel *The Quiet American*.
- 1957 Diem visits the United States, where he is hailed by *Life* magazine as the "Tough Miracle Man of Vietnam." As a Catholic, Diem especially is lauded by US Catholics, including Cardinal Spellman.
- 1958 With US help, Ngo Dinh Diem deposes Bao Dai, creates the (southern) Republic of Vietnam, and becomes President. Eugene Burdick and William Lederer publish their novel, *The Ugly American*.

- 1959 The Democratic Republic of Vietnam begins building the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos. Two US advisers become the first US casualties of the Second Indochina War, part of which is known to Americans later as the Vietnam War.
- 1960 The National Liberation Front (NLF) is formed in southern Viet Nam by the Communist Party of northern Viet Nam. The NLF's military arm is referred to derogatorily as "Viet Cong." US military personnel: about 900.
- 1961 US President John F. Kennedy refuses to send US combat units to Viet Nam. Bernard Fall publishes his account of the French in Viet Nam, *Street Without Joy*. US military personnel: about 3200.
- 1962 US Military Assistance Command (MACV) is established in South Vietnam. US military personnel: 11,300.
- 1963 In January, South Vietnamese military forces are soundly defeated at Ap Bac. In June, protesting Diem's oppression of Buddhists, Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc immolates himself on a Saigon street. In early November, the US supports a coup against Diem that ends in the deaths of Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. Three weeks after the coup and deaths, US President John F. Kennedy is assassinated and Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson becomes President. US military personnel: 16,300.
- 1964 North Vietnamese allegedly attack US Navy destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. With the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, the US Congress authorizes President Johnson to use armed force in Viet Nam. US military personnel: 23,300.
- 1965 In March, after an attack on US forces at Pleiku, Johnson authorizes "Operation Rolling Thunder," the bombing of North Vietnam that persists for 3.5 years. Johnson also authorizes the use of combat units in South Vietnam: an American Marine

- brigade lands at Da Nang in March. Anti-War activities begin at the University of Michigan and in a Washington, DC protest organized by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). In November, the first meeting of US and North Vietnamese military forces occurs in the Battle of Ia Drang. Robin Moore publishes his novel *The Green Berets*. US military personnel: 184,300.
- 1966 Buddhists lead anti-government demonstrations in cities all over South Vietnam. The US Senate Foreign Relations Committee begins public hearings about the War. Barry Sadler and Robin Moore's song, "The Ballad of the Green Berets" becomes a hit; Bernard Fall publishes *Hell In a Very Small Place*, his account of the Dien Bien Phu siege of the French in 1954. US military personnel: 385,300.
- 1967 In early April, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers "A Time to Break Silence." Weeks later, US-wide anti-War demonstrations are held, including a rally of 300,000 in New York City. In October, 50,000 anti-War protestors march on the Pentagon. In November, the commander of US forces in Viet Nam, General William Westmoreland, declares the end of the War is near. David Halberstam publishes his novel *One Very Hot Day*. US military personnel: 485,600.
- 1968 In January, the siege at Khe Sanh begins simultaneous to the Tet Offensive. Following the Offensive's conclusion in February, respected journalist Walter Cronkite opines the United States should negotiate an end to the War. The massacre at My Lai occurs in March but is kept from the US public until November, 1969. Johnson announces in March he will not seek re-election, and days later, Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated. On the November day when Robert F. Kennedy wins the Democratic presidential primary, he, too, is assassinated. Just before the elections that make

Richard M. Nixon President, Johnson ends “Rolling Thunder,” 3.5 years after it began. The Doors release “The Unknown Soldier.” Film adaptation of *The Green Berets* is released, featuring John Wayne. US military personnel: 536,100.

1969 Secret US bombing of Cambodia begins, as does “Vietnamization” of the War. In the “Nixon Doctrine,” President Nixon announces that while the United States will support allies, they must defend themselves. Ho Chi Minh dies, massive anti-War demonstrations occur across the United States, the My Lai massacre is publicly revealed, and the US Selective Service begins a draft lottery. David Rabe’s play, “Sticks and Bones,” is premiered; Creedence Clearwater Revival releases single “Fortunate Son.” US military personnel: 475,200.

1970 A draw-down of US forces in Viet Nam is planned. US military actions in Cambodia spur widespread protests. Protesting students at Kent State and Jackson State are killed by National Guardsmen and police. The US Senate repeals the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Edwin Starr releases his single “War”; Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young release their singles, “Ohio” and “Find the Cost of Freedom.” US military personnel: 334,600.

1971 1LT William Calley is found guilty of murder in the My Lai massacre. Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) stage the Winter Soldier Investigations in Detroit and, in “Dewey Canyon III,” throw their medals on the steps of the US Capitol Building. More nationwide anti-War protests gather hundreds of thousands of people. Daniel Ellsberg leaks the “Pentagon Papers” to *The New York Times*. Plans for more US troop reductions in South Vietnam. David Rabe’s play, “The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel,” is premiered; Marvin Gaye releases album “What’s Going On”; Ronald J. Glasser publishes his memoir as a US Army doctor in Vietnam, *365 Days*. US military personnel: 156,800.

- 1972 Nixon meets separately with leaders of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. National Security Advisor (and, in 1973, also the Secretary of State) Henry Kissinger announces "peace is at hand"; months later, peace talks break down and the US bombs the North Vietnamese cities Hanoi and Haiphong. US military personnel: 24,200.
- 1973 Peace talks resume, resulting in the Paris Peace Accords of January 27, 1973. The US draft lottery ends, American POWs are released, US military personnel leave Viet Nam by the end of March, and Congress ends the President's unilateral authority to send US forces into combat. The "Vietnam War" is over. US Vice President Spiro T. Agnew resigns and President Nixon appoints Gerald Ford. Congress blocks further funding of the war in Viet Nam. Tim O'Brien publishes his memoir *If I Die in a Combat Zone*. US military personnel: 240.
- 1974 The South Vietnamese military—the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN)—continues to war against the (northern) People's Army of Viet Nam (PAVN), but without US military aid. Although Calley was sentenced to life in prison for his part in the My Lai massacre, President Nixon pardons him. In August, Nixon resigns as a result of the Watergate Scandal and Vice President Gerald Ford becomes President. Robert Stone publishes *Dog Soldiers*, which shares the 1975 National Book Award.
- 1975 In early March, the PAVN begins its Spring Offensive in the South, quickly overcoming city after city. The US Congress rejects Ford's request for emergency military aid to ARVN. As PAVN and Viet Cong troops enter Saigon, the remaining Americans and some Vietnamese allies evacuate the city by helicopter. Saigon is renamed Ho Chi Minh City; the country is reunified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam; and the Second Indochina War ends. The US cuts all ties to Viet Nam.

- 1976 Jimmy Carter is elected as President of the United States; he extends amnesty to Vietnam War draft resisters. US bicentennial celebrations occur nationwide. Ron Kovic publishes his memoir, *Born on the Fourth of July*.
- 1977 The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is admitted to the United Nations. Philip Caputo publishes his memoir, *A Rumor of War*, and Michael Herr publishes his journalism in *Dispatches*.
- 1978 Dire conditions and oppression force many Vietnamese to flee Viet Nam by boat. Their hazardous flights and squalid conditions in refugee camps across Southeast Asia call attention to the plight of the "Boat People." People's Republic of China discontinues aid to Viet Nam because of its discrimination against ethnic Chinese people living in Viet Nam. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) form an alliance. Viet Nam invades Cambodia. James Webb publishes *Fields of Fire* and Tim O'Brien publishes *Going After Cacciato*, which wins the 1979 National Book Award. The films *The Deer Hunter*, *Coming Home*, and *Go Tell the Spartans* are released.
- 1979 The United States and the People's Republic of China establish diplomatic relations. China attacks Viet Nam, remaining there for a month. The film *Apocalypse Now* is released.
- 1980 Ronald Reagan is elected President of the United States. During the campaign, he coins the term "Vietnam Syndrome" and argues that the War was "a noble cause." In response to symptoms displayed by veterans of the war, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is added to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM III). Charles Coleman publishes the first novel about PTSD, *Sergeant Back Again*.

- 1982 The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC is dedicated. John Del Vecchio publishes *The 13th Valley*.
- 1983 Stephen Wright publishes a novel, *Meditations in Green*. Lynda Van Devanter publishes her memoir, *Home Before Morning*.
- 1984 Vietnam War veterans win a settlement against Dow Chemical for its manufacture of Agent Orange. Louise Erdrich publishes a novel, *Love Medicine*.
- 1985 Bobbie Ann Mason publishes a novel, *In Country*.
- 1986 Larry Heinemann publishes his novel, *Paco's Story*, which wins the 1987 National Book Award. The film *Platoon* is released and is awarded Best Picture and Director in the 1987 Oscars.
- 1987 The film *Full Metal Jacket* is released.
- 1988 Dương Thu Hương publishes her novel, *Paradise of the Blind* in Vietnamese; its English translation is published in 1993.
- 1989 The Socialist Republic of Vietnam withdraws its military from Cambodia after 11 years. Le Ly Hayslip publishes her memoir, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*. The film adaptation of *Born on the Fourth of July* is released and wins the 1990 Oscar for Best Director.
- 1990 Tim O'Brien publishes his novel, *The Things They Carried*. Bảo Ninh publishes his novel, *The Sorrow of War* in Vietnamese; its English translation is published in 1994. Dương Thu Hương publishes *Novel Without a Name* in Vietnamese; its French translation is published in 1994, and its English translation in 1995.
- 1991 Before launching the Persian Gulf War, President George H. W. Bush pledges "it will not be another Vietnam." At the 5-week-long war's conclusion, Bush exalts "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all!"
- 1993 The Vietnam Women's Memorial is dedicated in Washington, DC.

- 1994 US President Bill Clinton ends the decades-long US embargo against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Tim O'Brien publishes his novel, *In the Lake of the Woods*.
- 1995 Dương Thu Hương publishes *Novel Without a Name* in English. The United States normalizes diplomatic relations with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.
- 1997 Lan Cao publishes *Monkey Bridge*, the first "Vietnamese American" novel.
- 1998 President Clinton signs the Iraq Liberation Act, authorizing the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq.
- 2001 In an attack by Al Qaeda operatives on September 11, two passenger planes crash into the World Trade Center towers in NYC, one crashes into the Pentagon, and a fourth crashes into a Pennsylvania field. The US invades Afghanistan in October; plans to invade Iraq begin in November. Critics worry that war in Iraq will be another Vietnam War.
- 2003–2011 In March 2003, United States and allied forces invade Iraq. In early 2004, reports surface of prisoner abuse by US military police at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. In November 2004, a plaque is added to the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, commemorating veterans who die after the War; an education center has been authorized for the Memorial site. Allied forces remain in Iraq until 2011; US forces plan to leave Afghanistan in 2014. Estimates for costs of the three wars (including Pakistan, which the US funds) run up to US\$4.4 trillion and the deaths of 330,000 people directly from war violence. In 2007, Denis Johnson publishes his Vietnam War novel, *Tree of Smoke*, which wins the 2007 National Book Award. Early in 2010, Karl Marlantes publishes *Matterhorn* and Tatjana Solis publishes *The Lotus Eaters*.

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