

# Vietnam War: 50th anniversary

On April 30, 1975, the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon fell to Communist forces, ending a war that had raged on for nearly two decades, taking millions of lives and leaving thousands displaced



**Ho Chi Minh:** North Vietnam's communist leader sought reunification of country. Inspired and supported **Viet Cong** – communist guerilla movement in South

**Vo Nguyen Giap:** Commander of North Vietnamese Army, masterminded historic victory over French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954

U.S. tactics initially restrained by risk of war with Soviet Union and China – suppliers of North Vietnam's large arsenal

**President Lyndon B. Johnson:** Escalated John F. Kennedy's support for South Vietnamese army

**General William Westmoreland:** Boosted troop count to avoid repeat of French loss



**B52 Stratofortress**  
USAF "carpet-bombs" vast areas with over 2.5m tonnes of bombs

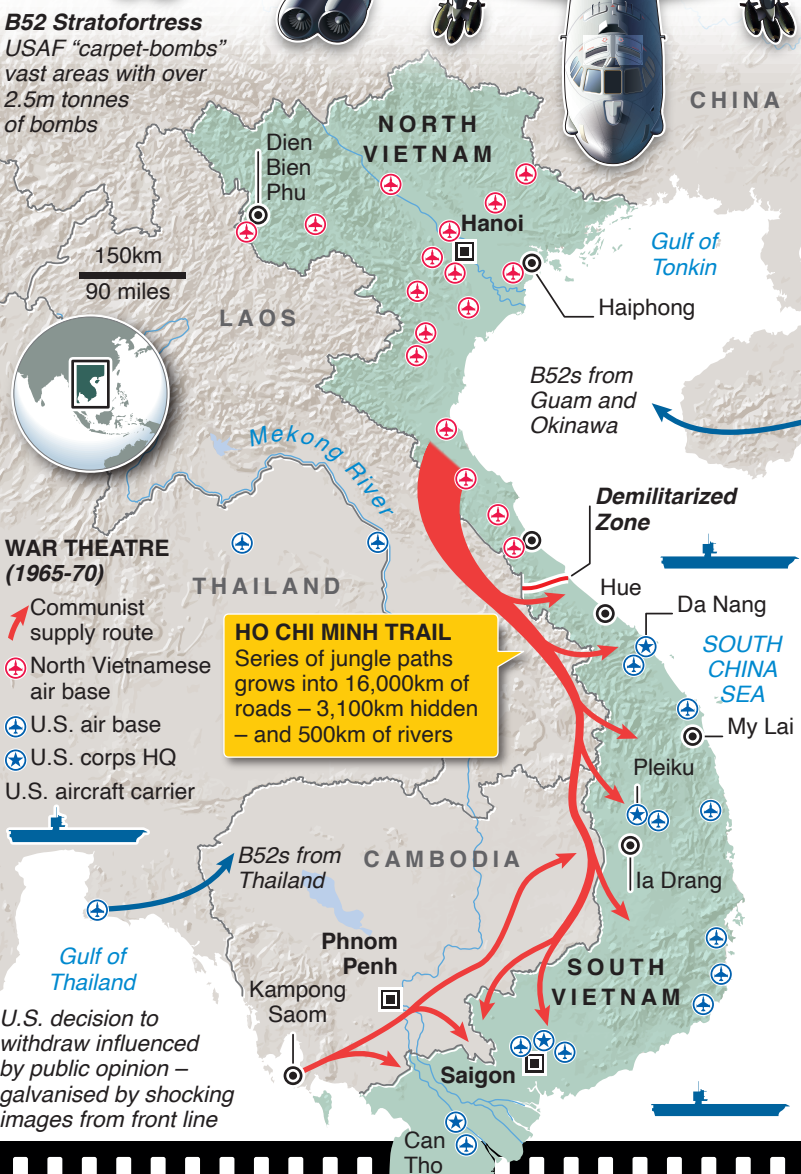
## KEY EVENTS (1954-75)

- **1954:** French withdrawal ends First Indochina War. Vietnam split between communist north and pro-U.S. south
- **1957:** Communist insurgency begins in South Vietnam against government of President **Ngô Đình Diệm**
- **1960:** U.S. increases aid to Diem
- **1963:** **Viet Cong** guerrillas defeat units of South Vietnamese army. Diem overthrown and assassinated by dissident generals
- **1964:** North Vietnamese torpedo boats attack U.S. destroyer – triggering U.S. bombing raids on North
- **1965:** U.S. intensifies aerial bombing campaign. First 200,000 U.S. combat troops arrive in South Vietnam – rising to 540,000 by 1968
- **1968:** North Vietnamese army and Viet Cong launch **Tet Offensive** on over 100 cities in South including Saigon and Hue. U.S. troops kill 500 civilians in My Lai massacre
- **1969:** President **Richard Nixon** begins withdrawal of ground troops
- **1970:** U.S. National Security advisor, **Henry Kissinger**, and **Le Duc Tho**, for Hanoi government, start talks in Paris
- **1972:** Nixon orders unrestricted bombing of North to force resumption of on-off talks
- **Jan 27, 1973:** Ceasefire signed – last U.S. combat troops withdrawn March 29
- **Apr 30, 1975:** Saigon falls to North Vietnamese forces

## CASUALTIES (Approximate)

North Vietnamese and Viet Cong	1.1m
South Vietnamese	250,000
U.S.	58,220
Allies	5,000
Vietnamese civilians	2 million

**Over 3 million people still suffer serious health issues associated with exposure to Agent Orange – chemical used by U.S. forces during conflict**



U.S. decision to withdraw influenced by public opinion – galvanised by shocking images from front line

