

By Dawn Powell Camp

Even though I was young, I remember a very tumultuous time in American History. Some called it a “conflict” because the United States did not actually declare the “war.” However, as I began researching events for a commemorative display I found it mostly referred to as the “The Vietnam War.”

Big cities and small towns all over our country were touched in one way or another by the tragedy of this war. Washington County was no exception. Many young men born and raised here were called to fight in jungles they had most likely never even heard of. Just farm and country boys from the “The Crossroads of America” the “Hoosier State.” Indiana. Good ole’ boys and some girls fresh out of high school. At first glance they probably seemed very normal, nothing spectacular. You know the type. Maybe folks even said “they would give you the shirt off their back.”

But to die? Probably never crossed their minds... until they were in the thick of it. Many did in fact die before their time. They gave up their futures because they were called upon. Some chose to go... others told to go. Regardless of how they got there they fought for freedom of South Vietnam. They fought against Communism. They fought for their lives. A few likely didn’t even know what they were fighting for. I still call them heroes! Some returned home their lives changed forever only to be targets of protests for merely serving their country. Just doing their duty. Thankfully today we support the men and women of the military even if we don’t always agree with the fight they are embroiled in.

Our new display at the Stevens Museum commemorates 50 years since America’s total involvement in Vietnam. We have some very interesting artifacts on loan from a couple of donors who were in Vietnam in the 1960’s. Men who served their country proudly. There is also a guestbook and we want to invite Vietnam Veterans to sign in and let us know when and where they were during the War.

Please come by and take a look... and remember to thank military personnel and veterans whenever you get the chance.

The Vietnam Timeline

1945 Japanese surrender. Ho Chi Minh declares independence and unification of French colonial provinces as Vietnam.

1946 Nationalist Chinese, French, and Viet Minh compete for control over Viet territory. Negotiations fail and French forces bombard the Viet Minh at Hanoi’s harbor.

1946–1954 French-Viet Minh war (also known as First Vietnam War). China and the USSR support Ho Chi Minh; United States supports France as a way to contain the spread of communism in Southeast Asia.

1954 French defeat at Dien Bien Phu leads to Geneva negotiations. Geneva Agreements divide Vietnam at 17th parallel, with national elections to be held in two years.

1955–56 Ngo Dinh Diem returns from exile in America and deposes former emperor Bao Dai after a rigged referendum; declares himself President of (South) Vietnam. Diem refuses to hold national elections. Gains support from United States, which begins sending military advisors.

1960 National Liberation Front, or Viet Cong, formed as an anti-Diem and anti-United States force in the South.

1963 United States supports military coup against the unpopular President Diem; His death results in a succession of leadership changes in the South.

1964 North Vietnamese patrol boat attacks a United States destroyer in Gulf of Tonkin. United States President Lyndon Johnson given war powers.

1965 United States combat troops arrive in Vietnam, beginning (Second) Vietnam War. General Nguyen Van Thieu assumes control of the South.

1968 Tet Offensive launched by Ho Chi Minh and Viet Cong in South. Counter-offensive by United States results in massacre at My Lai.

1969 Richard Nixon assumes presidency in United States and begins "Vietnamization" policy (removing United States ground troops in exchange for increased funding of South Vietnamese) and secret bombing of Viet Cong inside Cambodian borders. Ho Chi Minh dies.

1973 Paris Peace Agreements negotiated by Nixon and Kissinger. United States withdraws troops rapidly following Agreement, but war continues unabated in the South.

1974 Nixon resigns after Watergate scandal; President Gerald Ford reluctant to sustain aid to South Vietnamese forces.

1975 Communists take Saigon. Last remaining United States citizens evacuated. Vietnam unified under Communist rule. Saigon renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

1978 Vietnam invades Cambodia and usurps rule from Khmer Rouge. Tensions with China, which supported Khmer Rouge, increase.

1986 Vietnam commits to "doi moi" (renovation), a program of social and market reforms.

1995 Diplomatic relations normalized between United States and Vietnam.