The Vietnam War – Overview

**BLUF:** The Vietnam War was a proxy conflict between communist and anti-communist forces in Southeast Asia. The United States supported the South Vietnamese government, while the Soviet Union supported communist North Vietnam. The undeclared war was fought between 1954 and 1975, with more than three million people dying. The U.S. provided over 500,000 troops to the conflict, with over 58,000 military deaths. Opposition to the war in the United States bitterly divided Americans, even after U.S. forces' withdrawal in 1973. Communist forces ended the war by seizing control of South Vietnam in 1975 and unifying the country as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

**GENERAL STORY:** Before World War II, Vietnam was part of French-controlled Indo-China. After the war, the region again became a French mandate. Following continuous political-ideological fighting, Vietnam was divided at the 17th parallel by the Geneva Agreement in 1954. Ho Chi Minh formed a government backed by the Soviets in the north, while the French relinquished power in the south to corrupt anti-communist politician Ngo Dinh Diem. The U.S. supported Diem by sending military advisors to South Vietnam.

Between 1954 and 1965, U.S. involvement increased as the Soviets boosted aid to Ho Chi Minh. In 1964, the U.S. committed over 180,000 troops to protect South Vietnam following the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. U.S. troop strength peaked with the Tet Offensive in 1968 at 536,000 men. After 1968, the war became more difficult to justify to the American people.


**MARINE STORY:** In 1965, the Marine Corps was the first of the U.S. Armed Services to deploy large ground combat units to South Vietnam. The Marines operated in the northern I Corps regions of South Vietnam, fighting a constant guerilla war against the Viet Cong and conventional warfare against North Vietnamese Army regulars. Marines also conducted the less well-known Combined Action Program that implemented unconventional techniques for counterinsurgency warfare. The primary Marine Corps presence was withdrawn in 1971 but returned briefly in 1975 to evacuate Saigon. During the conflict, 13,091 Marines were killed and 88,594 wounded during the war. The Marines in Vietnam suffered more casualties than WWI and WWII combined, and 58 Marines were awarded the Medal of Honor.

**QUESTIONS**
1. Why did the Vietnam War begin?
2. What caused the U.S. to escalate its actions in Vietnam?
3. What was the role of the Marine Corps in Vietnam?

**SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**