

THE REPUBLIC OF

VIETNAM



North and South Vietnam existed as a united political entity formed by the union of the French protectorates of Tonkin and Annam and the French Colony of Cochinchina only from 1949 to 1954. The country was wracked by anti-colonial and civil war from the end of World War II in 1945 until 1954 when a treaty was signed dividing the country at the 17th parallel into two states: the Communist-controlled "Democratic Republic of Vietnam" (North Vietnam), and the "Republic of Vietnam" (South Vietnam). The peace that followed this treaty was short-lived, however, and soon the United States found itself involved in what was first referred to as a police action but since has developed into a full-fledged, though restrained, war which is called simply, "The War in Vietnam."

The Vietnamese people are thought to have been Chinese in original ancestry. They migrated down from China to settle mainly in the Tonkin Gulf area and intermarried with the tribes already settled there. In the fifteenth century they began pushing southward finally reaching and colonizing the Mekong Delta area in the seventeenth century. Vietnam was under periodic Chinese rule until 1428 when they finally drove the Chinese out. A civil war broke out in the seventeenth century dividing the country into two states, Tonkin and Annam. Except for certain short periods of peace, it is the animosity initiated in the seventeenth century that continues today between North and South Vietnam. The Portuguese, Spanish, and Italians tried to colonize Vietnam, but it wasn't until the French came into the country that any lasting effect was felt, but even the French failed.

The Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) covers an area of 65,451 square miles and has a population of about 14 million people, 80 percent of whom live in the populated Mekong Delta region. There is a large Chinese minority of about 700,000 persons and about half a million indigenous Indonesian tribesmen in the hills to the northwest, but the majority of South Vietnam's people are Vietnamese.

South Vietnam's capital and principal port city, Saigon, has a population of about 3 million persons. Hue, the former capital, has about 200,000 inhabitants.

