

Fact Sheet 1: Introduction- the Vietnam War

Between June 1964 and December 1972 around 3500 New Zealand service personnel served in South Vietnam. Unlike the First and Second World Wars New Zealand's contribution in terms of personnel was not huge. At its peak in 1968 the New Zealand force only numbered 543. Thirty-seven died while on active service and 187 were wounded.

The **Vietnam War** – sometimes referred to as the **Second Indochina War** – lasted from 1959 to 1975. In Vietnam it is referred to as the **American War**. It was fought between the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and its allies, and the US-supported Republic of Vietnam in the south. It ended with the defeat of South Vietnam in April 1975. Nearly 1.5 million military personnel were killed in the war, and it is estimated that up to 2 million civilians also died.

This was the first war in which New Zealand did not fight with its traditional ally, Great Britain. Our participation reflected this country's increasingly strong defence ties with the United States and Australia. New Zealand's involvement in Vietnam was highly controversial and attracted protest and condemnation at home and abroad.

A study of New Zealand's involvement in the Vietnam War raises a number of issues. As a historical study we want to find out what happened, why it happened and how it affected people's lives. This war meant different things to different people. The Vietnam War was, and still is, an important part of the lives of many New Zealanders. It is central to some people's sense of personal identity.

An outline has been included to show how this topic relates to the objectives of the New Zealand curriculum. It is over 30 years since the Vietnam War ended so some readers might appreciate some background information to better understand the conflict and New Zealand's role in it. While who, what, where, why and how are obvious starting places, a series of fact sheets have been provided to help you to determine the most appropriate angle for your own class.

After the war Vietnam and New Zealand slowly re-established diplomatic relations. In 1995 the New Zealand embassy was opened in Hanoi and its Consulate was opened in Ho Chi Minh City. Vietnam's embassy was opened in New Zealand in May 2003.

There have been numerous visits from political leaders from both countries to establish bilateral cooperation between the two countries in a number of areas. In May 2005 during an official visit to New Zealand the Vietnamese Prime Minister, Phan Van Khai, and New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark signed a 'Declaration on cooperation between Vietnam and New Zealand'. Both countries confirmed their determination to cooperate in the future to 'establish a comprehensive, long - standing and stable partnership'.