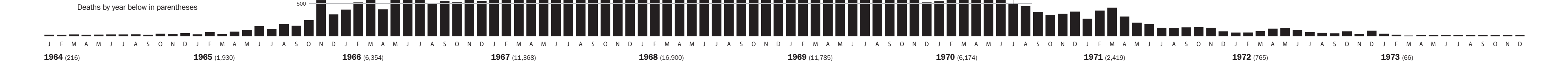


The fallen

Monthly U.S. death totals from the Vietnam War rose steadily until peaking in 1968. Casualty totals mirrored the U.S. buildup of military personnel in Vietnam, which peaked at 536,000 in 1968. Both began to decline as South Vietnam's combat role increased.



American deaths peaked at more than 16,000 in 1968, with 2,415 killed in May. The communists' Tet offensive began in January across South Vietnam. The battle of Hue, which lasted nearly a month, and the siege of Khe Sanh took heavy tolls.

While President Nixon began withdrawing troops in 1969, casualties remained high. The communists in early 1969 began another major offensive, targeting U.S. bases across South Vietnam. The battle at Hamburger Hill cost 72 U.S. lives in May.

Americans joined South Vietnam's push into Cambodia in 1970, attacking North Vietnamese Army installations. Heavy fighting at Fire Support Base Ripcord near the DMZ resulted in heavy casualties in July.

Total American deaths:1964-1973

57,977

A quarter-century of conflict in Vietnam

1950

With the Korean War just getting under way, President Harry S. Truman authorizes \$15 million in military aid to France in its struggle to retain a grip on its former colony of Vietnam. U.S. officials believe involvement is necessary to counter the spread of communism because of Chinese and Soviet support for Ho Chi Minh's government.

1954

France is defeated by Vietnamese forces on the battlefield and agrees to exit. The embattled country is partitioned at the 17th Parallel with the idea that unification would follow elections. But each side blames the other for failing to follow through with elections, and North and South Vietnam begin efforts to undermine each other.

1957

President Dwight D. Eisenhower pledges direct U.S. military aid and training for South Vietnam's army, as communist guerrillas begin a campaign of bombings and assassinations. Americans' role, mostly behind the scenes, continues to grow.

1959

On July 8, Army Maj. **Dale Buis**, a native of Pender, Neb., and a soldier from Texas are killed by gunfire 20 miles north of Saigon. Buis' name for years was the first of the 58,000-plus American dead listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Other names, which had been omitted earlier, since have been added on a panel to its left.

1962

Viet Cong guerrillas capture and kill Staff Sgt. **Wayne Marchand**, who attended schools in Plattsmouth and Bellevue. He is one of the first members of the Army's elite Special Forces, the Green Berets. A World-Herald editorial later notes about his death: "The guerrilla fighting in Vietnam is not on the scale of the conflict in Korea, but the stakes are as large, or perhaps larger. Having virtually lost Laos to the Communists, the United States appears to be trying desperately to hold the other flank of the Free World's line in Southeast Asia. We say 'appears to be trying' because there is no official explanation of America's grand strategy."

1963

A military coup, with CIA involvement, removes corrupt South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, who is killed. But the change does nothing to provide stability, and by the end of the year, more than 16,000 American military advisers are in the country.

1964

An American destroyer comes under fire in August, under disputed circumstances, during a naval operation off the coast of North Vietnam. Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, authorizing the use of force to prevent attacks on U.S. forces and allowing for rapid expansion of the war.

1965

Viet Cong assaults in February on Pleiku and Qui Nhon lead the United States to begin Operation Rolling Thunder, a bombing campaign against North Vietnam that lasts until 1968. The Strategic Air Command unleashes its B-52s from Andersen Air Force Base on Guam as part of the effort. The 1st Marine Division, the first major ground combat unit to arrive, lands at the Da Nang air base a month later and is in heavy action by summer. The first major battle of the war occurs in August when U.S. Marines at Chu Lai attack Viet Cong positions, killing nearly 700 enemy soldiers. By the end of 1965, more than 180,000 American troops are stationed in South Vietnam.



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Hovering U.S. Army helicopters pour machine-gun fire into the tree line to cover the advance of South Vietnamese ground troops in a 1965 attack on a Viet Cong camp northwest of Saigon near the Cambodian border. The U.S. used the Huey helicopter for assaults, for moving troops and equipment and for evacuating casualties during the war. About 5,000 helicopter pilots and crew members died during the war.

1966

North Vietnamese troops cross the Demilitarized Zone in May and battle Marines at Dong Ha in the largest battle of the war at that point. SAC reports in June that its B-52s are dropping about 8,000 tons of bombs each month. By the end of the year, American forces in Vietnam number 385,000 men, with 60,000 sailors stationed offshore. More than 6,000 Americans are killed during the year, more than triple the year before.

1967

An estimated 400,000 march in April in New York City to protest the war. Appearing on Capitol Hill, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara testifies that U.S. bombing raids against North Vietnam have not achieved their objectives. Years later, Leo Geyza of Omaha, a Marine lance corporal in Vietnam, described fighting along the DMZ between North and South Vietnam: "We could not cross into North Vietnam or Laos, and it was frustrating for assault grunts to be defensive."

1968

Viet Cong forces attack more than 100 cities and towns across Vietnam — including Gen. William Westmoreland's U.S. command headquarters — on the Tet holiday in January. "We were on full alert for several days," recalled **Bill Gilmore** of Omaha, an Air Force sergeant at the time. "This time frame was very scary, and I recall getting off duty and being assigned to a perimeter site with helmet, battle gear and M16." The city of Hue is overrun by North Vietnamese troops, resulting in the deaths of thousands of civilians, many of them executed before the city is recaptured a month later. U.S. forces end the siege of Khe Sanh in April after 77 days of fighting, the war's biggest battle at that point. While the Tet offensive is a military disaster for the Communists, it damages U.S. public support for the war. A month after the attacks, a Gallup survey indicates that 50 percent of Americans disapprove of President Lyndon Johnson's handling of the conflict. Johnson announces that he won't seek re-election. In March, American soldiers kill more than 300 unarmed civilians at the village of My Lai. News of the atrocities reaches the U.S. later, further damaging support for the war.



Bill Gilmore, center, during a visit to a Montagnard village in the Central Highlands of Vietnam in 1968. The village was used for gathering and relaying enemy troop movements.

1969

Melvin Laird, newly elected President Richard Nixon's secretary of defense, describes a policy of "Vietnamization" in congressional testimony in January. The objective is to shift the burden of fighting to South Vietnam and lessen the combat role of U.S. forces. In March, Nixon authorizes the covert Operation Breakfast bombing program to destroy enemy supply routes and camps in Cambodia. In April, U.S. combat deaths surpass the 33,742 killed in Korea from 1950 to 1953.

1970

South Vietnamese troops move into Cambodia in April, followed by three U.S. divisions two days later. **Noel Knotts** of Omaha, who served SAC headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base, targets transportation, power and defense facilities around the North Vietnamese capital of Hanoi and the port city Haiphong. Operation Linebacker II becomes the largest bombing raid since World War II by the time Nixon ends it Dec. 29. The next day, the North Vietnamese government requests a resumption of truce negotiations. The incursion against Viet Cong bases is a military success but causes a diplomatic uproar and ignites student protests in the United States. Ohio National Guardsmen shoot and kill four students at Kent State University during a demonstration in May, and the escalating protests prompt a number of campuses to shut down. Hundreds of students occupy the Military and Naval Science Building at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln but leave the next day.

1972

Peace talks in Paris, which had begun in 1968, near an agreement in October, but South Vietnam objects to the terms. The North breaks away from the talks in early December, and Nixon orders Operation Linebacker II to begin Dec. 18. The bombing operation, directed from SAC headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base, targets transportation, power and defense facilities around the North Vietnamese capital of Hanoi and the port city Haiphong. Operation Linebacker II becomes the largest bombing raid since World War II by the time Nixon ends it Dec. 29. The next day, the North Vietnamese government requests a resumption of truce negotiations.

1973

A cease-fire is signed on Jan. 27, bringing an end to America's combat role in Vietnam. The final U.S. combat units exit South Vietnam in March, leaving behind only military advisers and Marines protecting U.S. installations. American prisoners of war return home.

1975

North Vietnamese tanks roll into Saigon on April 29, marking the fall of South Vietnam. **Darwin Judge**, from Marshalltown, Iowa, and another Marine stationed in a guard post at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Airport are killed in a rocket attack. They are the last two American servicemen to die by hostile fire in Vietnam. **SOURCES:** The World-Herald's "At War, At Home: The Cold War," Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Wikipedia, KoreanWar.com, PBS.org, U.S. Defense Department

A shifting battleground

The Vietnam War had no battle lines. It instead was fought in hundreds of quick strikes at enemy positions. Even nations' boundaries were blurred, with communist forces using Vietnam's neighbors for sanctuary.

LAOS

A pro-Western government offered little opposition to North Vietnamese supplies and troops moving south within its borders on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. South Vietnamese forces drove into Laos in 1971 to attack North Vietnamese bases, but the operation was a disaster. The loss of lives, equipment and morale left the South unable to launch another major offensive.

DEMILITARIZED ZONE

The narrow strip of land marked the border between North and South Vietnam. North Vietnamese troops were able to launch attacks across the DMZ, then pull back without fear of U.S. and South Vietnamese forces following.

THAILAND

The nation's pro-Western government allowed the U.S. Air Force to use bases within its borders to launch most of the raids on North Vietnam. Thai troops also saw action in Vietnam and Laos.

CAMBODIA

Officially neutral at first, the country was used as a sanctuary for Viet Cong guerrillas. Political upheaval later led to a North Vietnamese invasion to assist Khmer Rouge guerrillas fighting the pro-West government. In 1970, South Vietnamese troops invaded, followed shortly by U.S. troops.



GUAM

The Strategic Air Command launched B-52 strikes from Andersen Air Force Base on the island, about 2,600 miles from Hanoi.

Reflections

The World-Herald in 2012 solicited memories from veterans for use in the book "At War, At Home: The Cold War." Vietnam vets provided these thoughts, four decades after their tours had ended:



"I had a lot of trouble accepting (and still haven't totally) that the North took Saigon. For the young people out there, please respect your flag and honor the soldiers young and old who have sacrificed so much for you. Above all, don't waste the gift of life."

Monte F. Marten (bottom row, third from left), served with the U.S. Army

"I encountered the best of times and the worst of times, and everything in between. Most of all, I experienced the true meaning behind the phrase, 'brothers in war.'"

Daniel Joseph Kubat, served with the U.S. Army

"I met some of the finest 'brothers' while in country. I still am in contact with many of them. The heroes are the ones who died in Vietnam."



"If only the politicians were veterans of war, maybe there would be less war. I am happy that today the citizens of this country honor the military and recognize their sacrifices."

Louie Kazor, served in a U.S. Army field hospital

Dennis I. Swedberg, served with the U.S. Army