

VIETNAM WAR DOCUMENT PACKET

1. Letter from President Kennedy to President Diem of the Republic of Viet-Nam

December 14, 1961

Dear Mr. President:

I have received your recent letter in which you described so cogently the dangerous conditions caused by North Viet-Nam's efforts to take over your country. The situation in your embattled country is well known to me and to the American people. We have been deeply disturbed by the assault on your country. Our indignation has mounted as the deliberate savagery of the Communist program of assassination, kidnapping, and wanton violence became clear.

Your letter underlines what our own information has convincingly shown—that the campaign of force and terror now being waged against your people and your Government is supported and directed from the outside by the authorities at Hanoi. They have thus violated the provisions of the Geneva Accords designed to ensure peace in Viet-Nam and to which they bound themselves in 1954.

At that time, the United States, although not a party to the Accords, declared that it "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security." We continue to maintain that view.

In accordance with that declaration, and in response to your request, we are prepared to help the Republic of Viet-Nam to protect its people and to preserve its independence. We shall promptly increase our assistance to your defense effort as well as help relieve the destruction of the floods which you describe. I have already given the orders to get these programs underway.

The United States, like the Republic of Viet-Nam, remains devoted to the cause of peace and our primary purpose is to help your people maintain their independence. If the Communist

authorities in North Viet-Nam will stop their campaign to destroy the Republic of Viet-Nam, the measures we are taking to assist your defense efforts will no longer be necessary. We shall seek to persuade the Communists to give up their attempts of force and subversion. In any case, we are confident that the Vietnamese people will preserve their independence and gain the peace and prosperity for which they have sought so hard and so long.

John F. Kennedy

Source: PBS Learning Media (2018). The Presidents - Primary Source: Letter from JFK to Ngo Dinh Diem, 1961. Retrieved from <https://oeta.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/arct14.soc.amexjfkngo/jfk-primary-resources-letter-from-kennedy-to-ngo-dinh-diem-1961/#.W2CS-tJKi9I>

2. Joint Resolution of Congress

August 10, 1964

H.J. RES 1145 – promote the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

Section 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

Section 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by the international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.

Source: The National Archives (n.d.). Tonkin Gulf Resolution 8/10/1964. DocsTeach. Retrieved from <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/tonkin-gulf-resolution>

3. Testimony of John Kerry to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

April 23, 1971

I would like to talk, representing all those veterans, and say that several months ago in Detroit, we had an investigation at which over 150 honorably discharged and many very highly decorated veterans testified to war crimes committed in Southeast Asia, not isolated incidents but crimes committed on a day-to-day basis with the full awareness of officers at all levels of command.

It is impossible to describe to you exactly what did happen in Detroit, the emotions in the room, the feelings of the men who were reliving their experiences in Vietnam, but they did. They relived the absolute horror of what this country, in a sense, made them do...

...In our opinion, and from our experience, there is nothing in South Vietnam, nothing which could happen that realistically threatens the United States of America. And to attempt to justify the loss of one American life in Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos by linking such loss to the preservation of freedom, which those misfits supposedly abuse, is to us the height of criminal hypocrisy, and it is that kind of hypocrisy which we feel has torn this country apart...

...We found that not only was it a civil war, an effort by a people who had for years been seeking their liberation from any colonial influence whatsoever, but also we found that the Vietnamese whom we had enthusiastically molded after our own image were hard put to take up the fight against the threat we were supposedly saving them from.

We found most people didn't even know the difference between communism and democracy. They only wanted to work in rice paddies without helicopters strafing them and bombs with napalm burning their villages and tearing their country apart. They wanted everything to do with the war, particularly with this foreign presence of the United States of America, to leave them alone in peace, and they practiced the art of survival by siding with whichever military force was present at a particular time, be it Vietcong, North Vietnamese, or American...

...We are asking Americans to think about that because how do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?...

...We are here in Washington also to say that the problem of this war is not just a question of war and diplomacy. It is part and parcel of everything that we are trying as human beings to communicate to people in this country, the question of racism, which is rampant in the military, and so many other questions also, the use of weapons, the hypocrisy in our taking umbrage at the Geneva Conventions and using that as justification for a continuation of this war, when we are more guilty than any other body of violations of those Geneva Conventions, in the use of free fire zones, harassment interdiction fire, search and destroy missions, the bombings, the torture of prisoners, the killing of prisoners, accepted policy by many units in South Vietnam. That is what we are trying to say. It is part and parcel of everything.

Source: National Public Radio (2006). Transcript: Kerry Testifies Before Senate Panel, 1971.

Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=3875422>

4. 250,000 War Protesters Stage Peaceful Rally in Washington: Militants Stir Clashes Later

By Joan Herbers

Washington, Nov. 15. 1969—A vast throng of Americans, predominantly youthful and constituting the largest mass march in the nation's capital, demonstrated peacefully in the heart of the city today, demanding a rapid withdrawal of United States troops from Vietnam.

The District of Columbia Police Chief, Jerry Wilson, said a "moderate" estimate was that 250,000 had paraded on Pennsylvania Avenue and had attended an antiwar rally at the Washington Monument. Other city officials said aerial photographs would later show that the crowd had exceeded 300,000.

Until today, the largest outpouring of demonstrators was the gentle civil rights march of 1963, which attracted 200,000. Observers of both marches said the throng that appeared today was clearly greater than the outpouring of 1963.

At dusk, after the mass demonstration had ended, a small segment of the crowd, members of radical splinter groups, moved across Constitution Avenue to the Labor and Justice Department buildings, where they burned United States flags, threw paint bombs and other missiles and were repelled by tear gas released by the police.

There were a number of arrests and minor injuries, mostly the result of the tear gas...

...Among the black leaders marching here today were Mrs. Coretta Scott King, widow of Dr. King; Phil Hutchings, a former officer of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, who is a columnist for The Guardian; George Wiley, head of the National Welfare Rights Organization, and Dick Gregory, the comedian-turned-activist.

Among the performing artists: Mary, of the Peter, Paul, and Mary singing group; the actor-playwright Adolphe Green, and Leonard Bernstein, the composer and former conductor of the

New York Philharmonic, who looked out at the crowd around the Monument this afternoon and said, "I'm with you. You're beautiful."

Senator Goodell, the only Republican officeholder who took an active part in the demonstration, said: "We are told that a United States pullout would result in a bloodbath in South Vietnam."

"This assumes," he said, "That one million South Vietnamese under arms will be slaughtered by a force of 200,000. And what in the world has been going on for the last six and a half years if not a bloodbath?..."

... "We are here to break the war and begin the peace."

Source: Herbers, J. (1969). 250,000 war protesters stage peaceful rally in Washington; militants stir clashes later. The New York Times On this Day. Retrieved from <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/1115.html#article>

5. At Quang Nam, a Raid and a Reckoning

By Marsh Carter

Jan. 24, 2017

In January 1967, I was a 26-year-old Marine Corps captain commanding a 224-man rifle company – Company C, First Battalion, First Regiment, First Marine Division – near Danang, near the North Vietnamese border. I had been in the field for four months and was getting to be relatively experienced in small-unit combat operations. In a rifle company – clearly the pointed end of the spear of American policy – there isn't a lot of strategic thinking. Our day-to-day tactical responsibilities, designed to achieve our military objectives, dictated our activities.

Daily life was focused on continuous small patrols of 15 to 45 men with the mission of finding and killing or capturing Vietcong guerrillas. We would establish a base camp that could be defended by a third of our company, and the rest would be on patrols or, if it was rice harvest season, provide security for the farmers in the villages. We bathed from our helmets and ate a combat ration of canned meals that needed no cooking or heating. These were protein-fortified; our three full meals a day provided about 3,500 calories. Every few days armored vehicles would resupply us with food, clean clothing and mail, as well as ammunition, grenades, land mines, barbed wire, sandbags and replacement parts for broken or damaged weapons.

We were responsible for security in a roughly 10-square-mile district and carried out all sorts of tasks, including providing medical care to villagers and backing up the local Vietnamese militia, police and regular military forces. But our primary job was seeking out the Vietcong. One key to our operations was mobility: We carried everything we needed on our backs.

At the outset of 1967, it seemed to me that the war was entering a dangerous new phase. We had begun encountering hardened North Vietnamese Army soldiers who had come down the Ho Chi Minh Trail starting in mid-1965, after President Lyndon B. Johnson said he had no plans to physically invade North Vietnam. So now our challenge was multiplied: We faced local Vietcong guerrillas, who posed a substantial threat to Vietnamese civilians, while remaining

ready to engage in conventional infantry combat with North Vietnamese regular units. Ho Chi Minh's objective had always been to reunify his country, and he needed his regular army in South Vietnam to counter the aggressive tactics of the United States and South Vietnamese forces...

...At this point in the war, we still felt confident that we could defeat the guerrillas and the North Vietnamese Army units. But it was also apparent that not enough was being done by the government of South Vietnam to remove the causes of the insurgency or the conditions that had driven so many Vietnamese to want to live under Communism. When, later, I had a few moments to think strategically, the nagging thought arose: Yes, we can win on the battlefield, but is that enough to win the war?...

Source: Carter, M. (2017). At Quang Nam, a raid and a reckoning. The New York Times Opinion Page. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/24/opinion/at-quang-nam-a-raid-and-a-reckoning.html>

6. Our Vietnam War Never Ended

By Viet Thanh Nguyen

April 24, 2015

LOS ANGELES—THURSDAY, the last day of April, is the 40th anniversary of the end of my war. Americans call it the Vietnam War, and the victorious Vietnamese call it the American War. In fact, both of these names are misnomers, since the war was also fought, to great devastation, in Laos and Cambodia, a fact that Americans and Vietnamese would both rather forget.

In any case, for anyone who has lived through a war, that war needs no name. It is always and only “the war,” which is what my family and I call it. Anniversaries are the time for war stories to be told, and the stories of my family and other refugees are war stories, too. This is important, for when Americans think of war, they tend to think of men fighting “over there.” The tendency to separate war stories from immigrant stories means that most Americans don’t understand how many of the immigrants and refugees in the United States have fled from wars – many of which this country has had a hand in.

Although my family and other refugees brought our war stories with us to America, they remain largely unheard and unread, except by people like us. Compared with many of the four million Vietnamese in the diaspora, my family has been lucky. None of my relatives can be counted among the three million who died during the war, or the hundreds of thousands who disappeared at sea trying to escape by boat. But our experiences in coming to America were difficult...

Source: Nguyen, V. T. (2015). Our Vietnam War never ended. The New York Times Opinion Page. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/26/opinion/sunday/our-vietnam-war-never-ended.html>