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The Vietnam War

During the 20th century, there were many wars and battles which occurred, a specific example being the Vietnam War. Although the Vietnam War wasn’t as big as either of the World Wars or other Wars, it still led to many casualties and also caused changes on both sides of the war. To put it shortly, the Vietnam War originated in 1954 as North Vietnam, which was communist, sought to reunify the country under a Communist regime, while South Vietnam, which was Democratic, didn’t want that to happen. North Vietnam was supported by fellow communist countries such as China and the Soviet Union, whereas South Vietnam was supported by anti-communist allies like the United States. This war started in the 1954 and ended in 1975, meaning it was fought for 21 years.

In terms of brutality, the Vietnam War was a very brutal war, with the total amount of reported deaths being about 3,400,000. The deaths were distributed with about 2,000,000 civilians, 1,100,000 North Vietnam and Viet Cong Fighters, between 200,000 and 250,000 South Vietnamese Soldiers, 58,000 U.S. armed force members, and about 4,000 South Korean Soldiers (Britannica). To emphasize the brutality of this war, on the 16th of March 1968, between 347 and 504 unarmed Vietnamese civilians were gunned down by U.S. soldiers, an event which became recognized as the My Lai Massacre (NPR, 2013). Of those killed, most were women, children, or older men. The massacre only came to an end when an Army helicopter pilot by the name of Hugh Thompson noticed the hundreds of dead bodies on the village mostly being infants, women, and older men, and as a result landed his helicopter between the soldiers and villagers and threatened the soldiers to open fire if they continued attacking the villagers. As a result of his actions, the kill count isn’t much higher and in 1998, Thompson and two other members of his crew received the Soldier’s Medal, the highest award for bravery not involving direct contact with the enemy (History.com, 2023).

In the early 1970s, the US started to shift their strategy towards “Vietnamization”, which was the act of transferring the responsibility of combat to the South Vietnam forces, while at the same time withdrawing troops. This is because the US saw that the casualties fell too high and the war was too much for the US to bear with. In 1973, the Paris Peace Accords were signed, which fully ended the involvement of the U.S. in the war. The war, however, was not over until April 1975, the fall of Saigon, where South Vietnam’s capital was fully captured by North Vietnamese forces. This led to the reunification of Vietnam following communist control.

Overall, the Vietnam War proved to be a very brutal and long war. There were many losses on both sides of the war and ultimately Vietnam was left destroyed and dislocated. The war also heavily affected American society, as after the war there was a sense of discontent among citizens due to government transparency and military engagement, and as a result, there were nationwide protests and a shift in public sentiment. The war also affected U.S. foreign policies and their involvement in wars in other countries. The war shows how easily a nation can be divided based on different beliefs and goals, and how this can lead to ultimate brutality.

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