

KEY HISTORICAL EVENTS

This timeline is to help you contextualize the stories being shared during your conversations. This chronology is not intended to be a comprehensive list of historical events.

MAY 1954

THE BATTLE OF ĐIỆN BIÊN PHỦ

The Viet Minh won the battle at Điện Biên Phủ, resulting in a French withdrawal from Việt Nam and setting the stage for the Second Indochina War, also known as the Việt Nam War or the American War.

JULY 1954

GENEVA CONFERENCE

As part of the agreement, the French agreed to withdraw their troops from northern Việt Nam. A temporary division into North and South at the 17th parallel was enacted, pending elections within two years to choose a president and reunite the country. Between 600,000 and one million internally displaced refugees moved from the north to the south, the vast majority of whom were Vietnamese Catholics.

MAY 1959

HỒ CHÍ MINH TRAIL

North Việt Nam forces began to build a supply route through Laos and Cambodia to South Việt Nam. The route became known as the Hồ Chí Minh Trail and was greatly expanded and enhanced during the War.

AUGUST 1964

GULF OF TONKIN RESOLUTION

U.S. Congress authorized President Lyndon Johnson to initiate the U.S.'s full-scale involvement in Việt Nam's civil war.

MARCH 1965

OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER

The U.S. initiated its aerial bombing campaign of North Việt Nam, which would last until October 1968. Soon after, President Johnson sent the first U.S. combat troops to fight in Việt Nam. There had been U.S. involvement as early as 1961 but nothing as cohesive and authoritative until 1965.

JANUARY 1968

TẾT OFFENSIVE

North Việt Nam and Việt Troops launched a series of coordinated attacks against South Việt Nam and U.S. military targets during the Lunar New Year ("Tết") holiday.

JANUARY 1973

PARIS PEACE ACCORDS SIGNED

Temporary cease-fire of the war and the beginning of United States withdrawal of its troops from Việt Nam.

MARCH 1975

CAPTURE OF ĐÀ NẴNG AIR BASE

North Việt Nam captured Huế and all of Quảng Trị, Thừa Thiên, Quảng Nam and Quảng Ngãi Provinces, isolating Đà Nẵng.

APRIL 1975

OPERATION BABYLIFT BEGINS

The U.S government transported Vietnamese orphans and other children out of Việt Nam.

APRIL 30, 1975

FALL OF SÀI GÒN

South Việt Nam's capital, Sài Gòn, fell to the North, effectively ending the War.

THE FIRST WAVE OF EXODUS

In the final days before the Fall of Sài Gòn, South Vietnamese officials and family members were evacuated from the country. The U.S.-organized evacuations were followed by a

smaller exodus of civilians who found their own way out by boat. More than 175,000 Vietnamese refugees fled to the U.S. during the first two years. A large majority were processed in Guam during Operation New Life and then were transferred to makeshift refugee camps on U.S. military bases.

**JUNE 1975
REEDUCATION CAMPS**

Việt Nam was unified as the Socialist Republic of Việt Nam. The new regime set up reeducation camps, where former South Vietnamese military officers, government workers and supporters were imprisoned and forced to do manual labor ranging from months to years.

1976

NEW ECONOMIC ZONES

The Socialist Republic of Việt Nam launched a new program that resettled and redistributed citizens to the countryside into new economic zones set up across the country.

A SECOND WAVE OF EXODUS

Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese refugees fled increasing political repression and dire living conditions in Việt Nam. By 1978, the number of Vietnamese refugees fleeing by boat had quadrupled and by 1979, neighboring countries issued a warning that they had reached the limit and would no longer accept any new arrivals, expressing what is known as 'compassion fatigue.'

JULY 1979

GENEVA CONFERENCE AND ORDERLY DEPARTURE PROGRAM

More than 65 countries, including Việt Nam, met in Geneva at the invitation of the UNHCR to discuss the boat refugee exodus. Việt Nam established the Orderly Departure Program, which sought to decrease the number of boat refugees seeking refuge in first asylum countries, by allowing Vietnamese to apply to leave Việt Nam for the U.S. from within the country. Former reeducation camp prisoners emigrated through the Humanitarian Operation, a subprogram of the Orderly Departure Program.

THE EXODUS CONTINUED

Despite the Orderly Departure Program, the Vietnamese boat exodus continued throughout the 1980s and surged again in 1987-88, after the Orderly Departure Program was halted.

MARCH 1988

AMERASIAN HOMECOMING ACT

The American Homecoming Act or Amerasian Homecoming Act was an Act of Congress giving preferential immigration status to Vietnamese children fathered by a U.S. citizen.

**DECEMBER 1988
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

UNHCR and Việt Nam signed a Memorandum of Understanding, whereby Việt Nam would allow for the voluntary return of its citizens without penalizing them for having fled.

JULY 1995

**THE U.S. AND VIỆT NAM
NORMALIZE RELATIONS**

Under President Bill Clinton, the U.S. and Việt Nam re-established formal diplomatic relations.

From 1975 to the 1990s, millions of people fled Việt Nam, some through clandestine escapes, others through organized departure programs. Today the Vietnamese diaspora community is scattered across different countries and consists of multiple generations.