

The Vietnam War

Episode Descriptions



Episode One – “Déjà Vu” (1858-1961)

After a long and brutal war, Vietnamese revolutionaries led by Ho Chi Minh end nearly a century of French colonial occupation. With the Cold War intensifying, Vietnam is divided in two at Geneva. Communists in the north aim to reunify the country, while America supports Ngo Dinh Diem’s untested regime in the south.

Episode Two – “Riding the Tiger” (1961-1963)

President Kennedy inspires idealistic young Americans to serve their country and wrestles with how deeply to get involved in South Vietnam. As the increasingly autocratic Diem regime faces a growing communist insurgency and widespread Buddhist protests, a grave political crisis unfolds.

Episode Three – “The River Styx” (January 1964-December 1965)

With South Vietnam in chaos, hardliners in Hanoi seize the initiative and send combat troops to the south, accelerating the insurgency. Fearing Saigon’s collapse, President Johnson escalates America’s military commitment, authorizing sustained bombing of the north and deploying ground troops in the south.

Episode Four – “Resolve” (January 1966-June 1967)

Defying American airpower, North Vietnamese troops and materiel stream down the Ho Chi Minh Trail into the south, while Saigon struggles to “pacify the countryside.” As an antiwar movement builds back home, hundreds of thousands of soldiers and Marines discover that the war they are being asked to fight in Vietnam is nothing like their fathers’ war.

Episode Five – “This Is What We Do” (July 1967-December 1967)

American casualties and enemy body counts mount as Marines face deadly North Vietnamese ambushes and artillery south of the DMZ and Army units chase an elusive enemy in the central highlands. Hanoi lays plans for a massive surprise offensive, and the Johnson Administration reassures the American public that victory is in sight.

Episode Six – “Things Fall Apart” (January 1968-July 1968)

On the eve of the Tet holiday, North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces launch surprise attacks on cities and military bases throughout the south, suffering devastating losses but casting grave doubt on Johnson’s promise that there is “light at the end of the tunnel.” The president decides not to run again and the country is staggered by assassinations and unrest.

Episode Seven – “The Veneer of Civilization” (June 1968-May 1969)

Public support for the war declines, and American men of draft age face difficult decisions and wrenching moral choices. After police battle with demonstrators in the streets of Chicago, Richard Nixon wins the presidency, promising law and order at home and peace overseas. In Vietnam, the war goes on and soldiers on all sides witness terrible savagery and unflinching courage.

Episode Eight – “The History of the World” (April 1969-May 1970)

With morale plummeting in Vietnam, President Nixon begins withdrawing American troops. As news breaks of an unthinkable massacre committed by American soldiers, the public debates the rectitude of the war, while an incursion into Cambodia reignites antiwar protests with tragic consequences.

Episode Nine – “A Disrespectful Loyalty” (May 1970-March 1973)

South Vietnamese forces fighting on their own in Laos suffer a terrible defeat. Massive U.S. airpower makes the difference in halting an unprecedented North Vietnamese offensive. After being re-elected in a landslide, Nixon announces Hanoi has agreed to a peace deal. American prisoners of war will finally come home – to a bitterly divided country.

Episode Ten – “The Weight of Memory” (March 1973-Onward)

While the Watergate scandal rivets Americans’ attention and forces President Nixon to resign, the Vietnamese continue to savage one another in a brutal civil war. When hundreds of thousands of North Vietnamese troops pour into the south, Saigon descends rapidly into chaos and collapses. For the next 40 years, Americans and Vietnamese from all sides search for healing and reconciliation.