

# Vietnam May End Just Where

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Special to The Examiner

PARIS — The end of the Vietnam war's long, tragic road may be finally in sight, and history may record ironically that the Southeast Asian jungle conflict began and ended in the western sophisticated atmosphere of Paris.

Researchers, in fact, trace the beginning of the war to the cosmopolitan Left Bank of Paris in 1920, when a young Vietnamese student who gave his name as Nguyen Van Thanh became a charter member of the then-forming French Communist Party.

The name, however, was one of at least a dozen pseudonyms used by Ho Chi Minh, who was later to lead a guerrilla uprising against France, become president of Communist North Vietnam, and years later to wage war against the awesome might of the United States.

## Circle of History

In a full and possibly unique circle of history, it appears that an agreement to end the Vietnam war will be signed in Paris, too, in a conference room within

walking distance of where Ho Chi Minh lived and worked as a youth.

The 52 years between Ho Chi Minh's enlistment in the party and the expected agreement have marked an especially bitter period in the cruel history of Vietnam, a country that has known little peace in its 3000 years of recorded existence.

Ho Chi Minh left Paris two years after getting his party membership card, and went to Moscow to study Marxist ideology. His next stop was Canton, China, where he joined the budding Chinese Communist movement — and took the fateful step of forming the "Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League."

This led to the formation, in 1930, of the Communist Party — organized on strict, Moscow - style lines. This eventually formed the anti-French, Viet Minh guerrilla army and ultimately the Viet Cong, a force unforgettable to thousands of GIs.

## French Action

The Indo-Chinese Communist Party tried to establish agricultural communes, or "Soviets" in the farmlands of Vietnam in the early

1930s, but the effort collapsed under a swift, harsh crackdown by French authorities.

Ho Chi Minh was in Hong Kong at the time, and thus escaped the fate of many of his colleagues, who were imprisoned by the French. He was jailed briefly by the British, however, who were suspicious of his revolutionary background.

Ho returned to Vietnam with plans for a revolt against France, which had absorbed the country into its colonial empire in the 19th Century. In World War II this mission was interrupted, when Vietnam was occupied by Japan.

Ho organized a guerrilla army, the Viet Minh, to fight the Japanese, who had eliminated French power from the country. When the war ended, in 1945, the French sought to return, but found themselves opposed by Ho — whose guerrillas were the sole effective force in Vietnam.

## New War

Gradually, though, a modern French army was reintroduced to Vietnam — and the pre-war French states of Laos and Cambodia



HO CHI MINH

Full circle

—and a new guerrilla war began. On Sept. 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh unilaterally declared Vietnam an independent Communist state, a move that enraged the late President Charles de Gaulle.

De Gaulle, however, recognized the state — the Democratic Republic of Vietnam — on March 6, 1946, as a "free state within the French union," a subtlety that escaped the Viet Minh guerrillas. On Dec. 16,

## It Began

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1946, Ho Chi Minh attacked French forces throughout the country.

France sought to divert attention from Ho Chi Minh by turning to ex-Emperor of Vietnam Bao Dai, who became a rallying point for anti-Communists in the country. With French support, Bao Dai formed the state of Vietnam on July 1, 1949.

The U.S. recognized the state on Feb. 7, 1950. To aid the new country President Harry Truman took the historically decisive step of announcing, on June 27, 1950, that the U.S. was sending a 35-man Military Assistance Advisory Group to train Vietnamese troops in the use of modern, U.S.-supplied weapons.

## First GIs

These 35 men were the first U.S. servicemen to go to Vietnam. They were the forerunners of a great army that eventually reached a peak strength, in February, 1969, of 542,500 men.

On Dec. 23, 1951, the U.S. signed a "mutual defense assistance agreement" with Vietnam, and the massive, blood-stained story of

American military involvement in Southeast Asia had begun.

In May, 1954, the French fortress of Dien Bien Phu in the northern part of Vietnam fell to Ho Chi Minh's guerrillas, signalling the end of French power in Southeast Asia. From May 8 to July 21, 1954, the fate of the region was debated at the famed "Geneva Conference."

The conference was attended by the U.S., France, Britain, Russia, Communist China, Laos, Cambodia — and the two parts of divided Vietnam, north and south. An eventual agreement — which extended de facto recognition to North Vietnam — was signed by all of these countries, except the U.S. and South Vietnam.

## Deposed

On Feb. 12, 1955, President Eisenhower agreed to step up U.S. training of the South Vietnamese army.

On Oct. 23, 1955, President Bao Dai was deposed by politician Ngo Dien Diem, who said elections aimed at reunifying the country were impossible due to Communist intimidation of North Vietnamese voters.

In Dec., 1960, North Vietnam announced the formation of the "National Liberation Front" — the Viet Cong — in South Vietnam, and acts of guerrilla terror in the south began. On Dec. 14, 1961, President John F. Kennedy declared the U.S. would help South Vietnam preserve its independence.

Selected American "advisers" — including the highly trained "Green Berets" — went into action alongside South Vietnamese troops for the first time, and anti-war political sentiment began to rise in the U.S.

On Dec. 22, 1961, Army Specialist 4 James Davis, of Livingstone, Tenn., was killed in action during fighting with the Viet Cong. President Lyndon B. Johnson later called Davis "the first American to fall in the defense of our freedom in Vietnam."

## Hostile Acts

On June 2, 1962, a majority report of the Vietnam "International Control Commission" — made up of India, Poland and Canada — said North Vietnam was supporting, organizing and carrying out hostile acts in South Vietnam.

In December, 1962, there

were 4000 U.S. servicemen in South Vietnam. A year later this had grown to 15,000 and a year later after that it was 23,000. In February, 1965, the U.S. began continuous bombing of North Vietnam.

On June 8, 1965, American troops were authorized to go into combat as units — and not, as hitherto, only in an advisory role.

By November, 1966, there were 385,000 U.S. servicemen in Vietnam, including Marines and paratroopers, many of them involved in bitter and protracted jungle warfare of a kind unknown since the gory Pacific island battles of World War II.

The U.S. had become involved — bit by bit — in the most controversial war in its history, and more than 50,000 Americans would die before it was over.