

The Vietnam War

New Zealand and the Vietnam War



NZ 161 Battery,
1969

Between June 1964 and December 1972 around 3500 New Zealand military personnel served in South Vietnam. In contrast to the First and Second World Wars, this country's contribution was modest. At its peak in 1968 the New Zealand force only numbered 543. Thirty-seven died while on active service and 187 were wounded.

The Vietnam War – sometimes referred to as the Second Indochina War – lasted from 1959 to 1975. In Vietnam it is often referred to as the American War. It was fought between the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and its allies, and the US-backed Republic of Vietnam in the south. It ended with the defeat of South Vietnam in April 1975. Nearly 1.5 million soldiers and perhaps 2 million civilians died during the war.

This was the first war in which New Zealand did not fight with its traditional ally, Great Britain. Instead, our participation reflected this country's increasingly strong defence ties with the United States and Australia.

New Zealand's involvement in Vietnam was highly controversial and attracted protest and condemnation at home and abroad. Few New Zealanders waved placards in the streets in 1965, but by the end of the decade thousands were marching against the war. For a growing number of young New Zealanders, this country's participation in the conflict triggered a re-examination of our foreign policy and identity.

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How to cite this page: 'The Vietnam War', URL: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/vietnam-war>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 10-Jun-2008

MCH, 2008b

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