

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
A Reader's Guide to <i>The Vietnamese War</i>	xv
1. The Vietnamese War: Introduction	3
2. Postlude —An overview of the three decades of war.	10
3. Prelude —The origins of revolution during the colonial period. Landlordism and colonialism create the conditions for a revolution. The early Communist Party in My Tho is comprised of two groups that coexist uneasily; one is a coalition of anti-colonial rural elites drawn by patriotism and the other is the poor peasants driven by both patriotism and poverty.	16
4. Revolution —The August 1945 revolution and its consequences in My Tho, where, as in the rest of the country, the Viet Minh, controlled by the Communist Party, emerges as the strongest force in the greatest political upheaval in Vietnam's history. Within the Communist Party's own ranks, the Southern-based Vanguard group comprised of intellectuals and rural elites is displaced in the leadership of My Tho's Resistance forces by the Liberation group, comprised mainly of poor peasants and more responsive to the national Party leadership based in North Vietnam.	41
5. Resistance —The 1946–54 struggle against the French reconquest. A powerful patriotic anti-colonial sentiment sustains the revolution through nine years of protracted struggle. Acting in the name of nationalism, the Viet Minh pursue the goal of independence, enlisting broad popular participation but ruling the villages with an iron hand. The French manage temporarily to “pacify” the Mekong Delta by allying with the religious sect forces of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. This anticommunist coalition fell apart as a result of conflicts of interest and a collapse of the French position in other areas of Vietnam. A rapid recovery in 1953–54 from the near-total suppression of the revolutionary movement in My Tho and the Mekong Delta in 1951–52 prefigures a similar resurgence in 1972.	62

6. **Six Years of Peace: 1954–59**—Gradual disintegration of the revolutionary movement after the Geneva Accords, and consolidation of power by Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam and My Tho. The authoritarianism of the Diem administration creates widespread resentment in My Tho. Most of those who fought in the Resistance are jailed or detained for “reeducation,” and, in effect, barred from full citizenship rights and any political role in Diem’s Government of the Republic of Vietnam (GVN), leaving armed opposition as their only recourse. 85

7. **The Tiger Wakes**—The renewed insurgency in 1959–60 and the debate within the Party over the role of armed struggle in the revolution as seen from My Tho. From a small group of several hundred cadres, the revolution rebounded to challenge the Saigon government for control of most of My Tho province. Political and psychological factors, as well as terror and coercion, play a greater role than actual armed forces in this early stage of the revived revolutionary movement. 111

8. **Forged by the Hammer of the Party**—The political organization of the revolution. Purge of Resistance cadres and recruitment of youth into the Party. 137

9. **Creating an Armed Strike Force: Military Expansion, 1961–63**—Early growth of the guerrilla warfare movement and adjustment to Saigon’s military and pacification programs formulated by the Kennedy administration. The Party devises a new symbiosis of military and political struggle that protects the zones of revolutionary control despite the military superiority of the Saigon forces. 162

10. **Going for Broke**—Revolutionary upsurge following the death of Ngo Dinh Diem, 1963–64. The Party gambles that an all out push to gain power will succeed before the United States can intervene. The revolution’s attempt to maintain military pressure throughout all of South Vietnam stretches thin its forces in the Mekong Delta, and leads to a strategy in the delta that stressed using psychological tactics and deception to protect revolutionary-controlled areas, while attacking Saigon towns in periodic offensives aimed more at keeping the GVN off balance than toward a decisive military result. In some ways this is a precursor of the concept underlying the Tet Offensive. 194

11. **Year of the Big Change: 1965**—The revolution nears victory in 1965, but this prompts U.S. military intervention, which changes the strategic context of the conflict. A second big change is a radical, though brief, move to the left in policy toward the peasantry as the Party, faced with a growing rural reaction to the intensification of the war and the impositions of the draft and taxation, turns to the poorest peasants and tries to reward those who stand to gain the most from a revolutionary victory. Escalation increases burdens on the peasantry, leading to a refugee exodus from “liberated” areas. This is the beginning of a vast social dislocation and the point at which the Party began to lose its ability to control the direction of social transformation in the Mekong Delta. 221

- 12. Winning Hearts and Minds**—Early U.S.-Saigon pacification efforts, 1965–66. 249
- 13. Stalemate**—Arrival of U.S. troops in Mekong Delta changes the nature of the war but does not turn the tide. Prospects of a long war and increasing dangers of living in a revolutionary zone strain relations between cadres and villagers, but the cadre structure and guerilla units continue to be effective. Late 1966–1967. 276
- 14. Tet: the Untold Story of the “General Offensive and General Uprising”**—How My Tho fits into the larger picture of this turning point of the “Vietnam War” and what the evidence from this province tells us about the still murky decision-making process that led to the Tet Offensive. The unnoticed brief, but massive, popular uprising in the countryside of My Tho during the 1968 Tet Offensive. Major damage inflicted on the revolutionaries came mainly after the Tet Offensive, but ultimately led to an increasing role for North Vietnamese troops in the delta and a change in the character of guerrilla war. 301
- 15. Tragic Farewell**—Vast destruction and depopulation of the countryside during the post-Tet period, and ultimate withdrawal of U.S. troops, 1968–70. American military operations are effective but cause an unprecedented number of civilian casualties. A “new optimism” arises among American observers of the security changes in the Mekong Delta, reviving the hope that the revolution could be defeated. The Party’s Central Committee Office of South Vietnam persists in a high-cost offensive strategy despite the reservations of local military and civilian cadres. Notwithstanding heavy military losses, the revolution’s military forces continue to operate in My Tho, but in smaller numbers and at a lower level of effectiveness. 331
- 16. Holding On**—A lull in the conflict during 1971 as the revolutionaries await final U.S. withdrawal finds the revolutionary movement at its lowest ebb. Many key village cadres had been killed or left the movement, and many civilian supporters of the revolution were displaced as refugees or temporarily inactive. The Party orders a “stand-down” and pursues an economy of forces strategy, waiting for the United States to leave. The Saigon government belatedly attempts to undercut the revolution with its own revamped land reform program. 357
- 17. Civil War**—The 1972 Spring Offensive challenges “Vietnamization,” erodes Saigon’s grip over the countryside, and leads to a cease-fire agreement. Heavy fighting in other areas diverts Government of the Republic of Vietnam troops from the Mekong Delta, which provides breathing room for a resurgence of the guerilla movement there. 389

18. The Final Chapter—Covers the final years of the conflict 1973–75. Was the revival of the revolutionary movement in the delta the key to final victory in South Vietnam? Was it accomplished by imported troops from North Vietnam, or did the local movement reconstitute itself? 417

Notes 441

Appendix A: The Human Cost 469

Appendix B: Reflections 470

Bibliography 481

Index 491