

## Unit 3 The globalising world (1945 – the present)

# Political crisis: The Vietnam War

The Vietnam War erupted as tensions over the conflicting political ideals of communism and capitalism reached their peak. The global political crisis surrounding the Vietnam War would lead Australia to become involved in one of its longest military commitments, stretching from 1962 until 1973. The political impact of this war was felt not just in Vietnam where the fighting took place but all over the world. For those who experienced the war and its aftermath, the effects can still be felt today.

Differing views on Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War divided families and communities, and many expressed their opposition through mass anti-war rallies and

**OVERMATTER**



## chapter 16

**Source 1** The seventh battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment waiting to be picked up by US helicopters. Australia and the US were allies during the Vietnam War.

### 16A

Why did Australia become involved in the Vietnam War between 1965 and 1973?

- 1 In the six years after the end of the Second World War (1945–1951) many of the countries of Eastern Europe and closer to Australia in Asia fell under the control of communism. Suggest why in the 1960s the Australian government and people may have feared that communism would take over Australia as well.

### 16B

What was the nature of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War?

- 1 Between 1965 and 1973, approximately 60 000 Australian troops and support staff served in Vietnam. Just over 500 were killed and about 3000 suffered injuries.
- 2 Over the same period, nearly 10 million US soldiers served in the Vietnam conflict and nearly 60 000 died. How would you explain the different loss of life between the two nations?

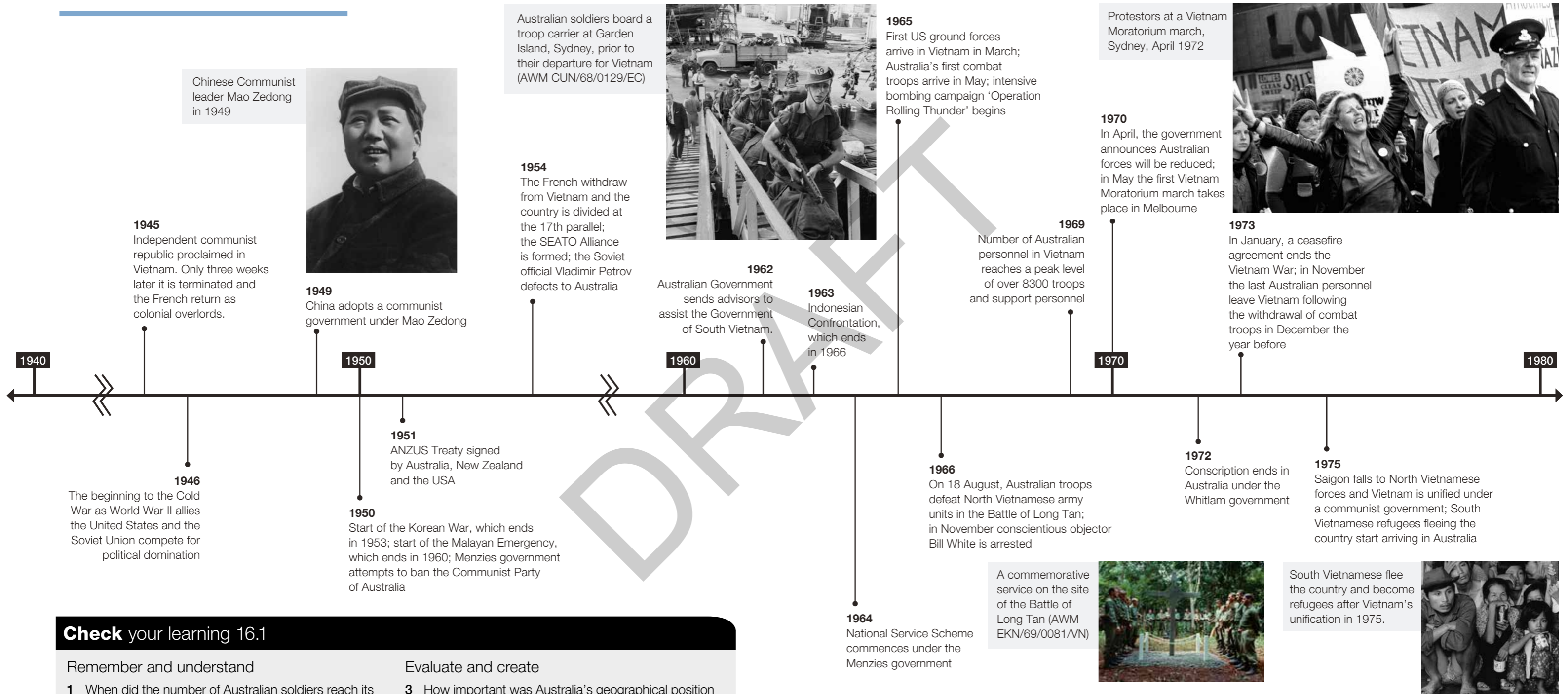
### 16C

How was Australia changed as a result of involvement in the Vietnam War?

- 1 The Vietnam War caused great divisions in Australia. Some supported the war throughout the period while some opposed it all along. A further group changed their attitudes as the war continued. Suggest two influences that could have caused some people to change their minds over the course of the war.



# 16.1 Australia in the Vietnam War era: a timeline



## Check your learning 16.1

### Remember and understand

- 1 When did the number of Australian soldiers reach its peak in Vietnam?

### Apply and analyse

- 2 Look at the points on the timeline up to 1965. What do these points have in common that suggests a motivation for Australia's entry into the Vietnam War?

### Evaluate and create

- 3 How important was Australia's geographical position in explaining many of the events on this timeline?

**Source 1** A timeline of the key events of the Vietnam War

## 16.2 French Indochina

Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were gradually colonised by France in the late 19th century. By 1898, the area was known as French Indochina. The colonies provided France with a steady supply of rubber, coal, silk and rice. However, the rights and wellbeing of the Indochinese people suffered under the French.

### The French Legacy

The influence of the French undermined the social system of Vietnam. Large plantations replaced peasant farms and many former peasants were forced to work in dangerous and unhealthy factories and mines. The French promoted the Catholic religion over the local beliefs of Buddhism and Confucianism. They also encouraged the Chinese to take over merchant and shopkeeper roles from the Vietnamese in the towns and cities.

However, the French claimed to have made some positive contributions to Vietnam. These included the development of infrastructure, a Western education system and Western-style medical care. Unfortunately, access to these modern developments was denied to most Vietnamese.



Source 2 Ho Chi Minh



Source 1 The capture of Nam Dinh, 1883, was one of the earliest conflicts that helped the French take control of Tonkin (northern Vietnam). The French colonised Vietnam as part of Indochina from the late 19th century up until 1954.

### Ho Chi Minh

Ho Chi Minh is Vietnam's greatest national hero. Ho was from a middle-class family and educated in French schools in Vietnam. In 1917, he went to Paris to continue his studies. Here, Ho Chi Minh learned about nationalist and communist ideas. By the time he returned to Vietnam, in 1940, he had developed a plan for Vietnam's independence. During the Second World War, Ho Chi Minh founded the Vietnamese Independence League, or **Vietminh**. This communist group organised the resistance against French colonisation and Japanese occupation.

### The Second World War

Following the German occupation of France in May 1940, the French position in Vietnam was weakened. In the same month, the Japanese invaded Vietnam, wanting to use its rich natural resources for their war effort. Throughout the Japanese occupation, the Vietminh used their members to perform organised military attacks, or **guerrilla warfare**, on the Japanese to undermine their control and assist the allies to defeat Japan in the Pacific war.

The fight against the Japanese also made the Vietminh more and more popular among the Vietnamese people. By 1945, the Vietminh was strong in the north and was gaining increasing support in the south. When the war ended in August 1945, Ho

Chi Minh believed that the USA, Britain and France would support Vietnamese independence. After all, the Vietnamese had helped them to win a war against Japanese oppression. On 2 September 1945 Ho Chi Minh declared the Independent Republic of Vietnam.

Unfortunately, this declaration came at the beginning of the **Cold War**, a period of political crisis between the USA and the Soviet Union after World War II. Neither side actually fought each other, but there was extreme tension over their conflicting political ideals, specifically that of **communism** and **capitalism** (see Source 3).

Source 3 Comparison of the key features of capitalist and communist economic systems

	Capitalism	Communism
Government control	Belief that government should not interfere in the economy any more than necessary.	Belief that the government should control the economy for the benefit of all citizens.
Competition	Competition is healthy and encourages individuals to be the best that they can be.	Competition puts people against each other. All should work together for the common good.
Profit	Profits are a fair reward for owners of business. Different wages and salaries for different jobs are fair and encourage people to aim higher.	Profits kept in the hands of a few represents the exploitation of workers.

Fear of communism among the Western powers was strong. As the Vietnamese nationalists were also communist, Western powers felt their republic could not continue without threatening Western political stability. Just three weeks after Vietnam's declaration of independence, French forces, with the support of the USA, returned to Vietnam to re-establish control.

For eight years a war was fought between the French and the Vietminh. The French fought a traditional war but were no match for the guerrilla tactics of the Vietminh. This war ended with the defeat and humiliation of the French at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. For the second time in nine years, the Vietnamese declared their independence.

### The partition of Vietnam

In July 1954, at peace talks in Geneva, Vietnam was officially divided from Indochina and given its borders (see Source 4). Both North and South Vietnam agreed to hold elections to form one government that would

reunify Vietnam. However, once again the plans for an independent Vietnam were crushed. The elections were never held. The idea was opposed by the USA, as it feared a victory by the communists, led by Ho Chi Minh. The country remained divided and the conflict continued.

VIETNAM IN 1954



Source 4 Vietnam was officially divided at peace talks in 1954.

### Check your learning 16.2

#### Remember and understand

- 1 Identify the two occasions on which the Vietnamese people had reason to believe they had gained independence.
- 2 Look at Source 3 and explain why you think that Vietnam was divided at the 17th parallel and not at some other place.

#### Apply and analyse

- 3 Conduct some further research into the Battle of Dien Bien Phu and explain why the Vietnamese forces were so successful.
- 4 What conclusions can you draw from the fact that Ho Chi Minh was not educated in Indochina?

#### Evaluate and create

- 5 Construct a diagram that shows the negative and positive consequences of French colonisation for the Vietnamese people. You may include consequences not mentioned here.



# 16.3 Fear of communism in Australia

The rapid spread of communism after the Second World War was the backdrop to many of the tensions and conflicts of the 1950s and 1960s. It was an important factor in Australia's decision to become involved in the Vietnam War. Communism was seen as a threat to the Australian way of life and to have the potential to destabilise the whole country.

## The spread of communism in Asia

After the Second World War, the focus of Australia's foreign policy had shifted. Despite a continued connection to Europe, there was an increasing awareness of Asia. The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and communist threats in Korea, Malaya (Malaysia) and Vietnam were thought to pose a real threat to Australia.

These fears led to the **domino theory** – the idea that if one country in South-East Asia fell to communism, others in the region would follow. This theory was readily accepted by many Australians because of the Second World War experience. They had witnessed the Japanese 'island hopping' through China, Indochina, Malaysia, Indonesia and to Australia's northern shores between 1940 and 1942. If the Japanese could achieve this within a few years, then many assumed that Chinese communists would be able to do the same.

## Australian responses to the threat of communism

The Australian government's response to the domino theory was 'forward defence'. This meant that they would send troops into

**Source 1** Communism in Asia, after the Second World War

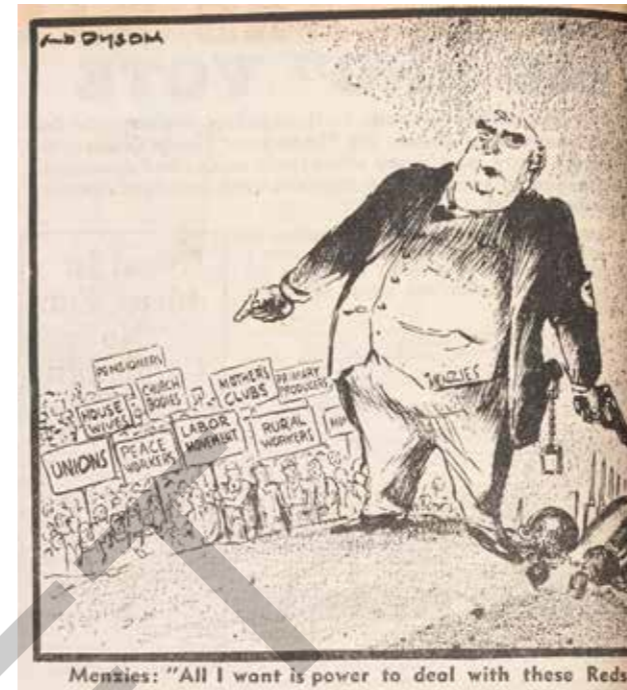


conflicts, to meet any possible communist threat before it came too close to Australian shores. This strategy was followed by the Menzies Government in its decisions to send forces to the conflicts in Korea (1950–53) and Malaya (1950–60).

The Menzies Government also responded to the fear of communism by establishing the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) in 1949. Its main purpose was to watch and report on people suspected of being communists.

The government also attempted to ban the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). The party had been formed in Australia in the 1920s but it had never really been popular. By the early 1950s, the party had fewer than 7000 members. Nevertheless, many people still believed the CPA was a real threat that might take over Australia.

In April 1950, the Australian Parliament, under the leadership of Prime Minister Robert Menzies,



**Source 2** 'All I want is the power to deal with these reds!', Ambrose Dyson, published in The Guardian, 2 August 1951 (Reds was the term used to describe communists).

passed the Communist Party Dissolution Bill, to outlaw the Communist Party. When the bill was declared unconstitutional by the High Court, Menzies introduced a referendum for everyone in Australia to vote on the issue. The idea was again defeated by a narrow margin. While many Australians opposed and feared communism, they were also uncomfortable with the idea of banning a political party or limiting the freedom to hold an opinion.

## The Petrov case

In 1954, fear of communism was again brought to public attention by the Petrov case. An official at the

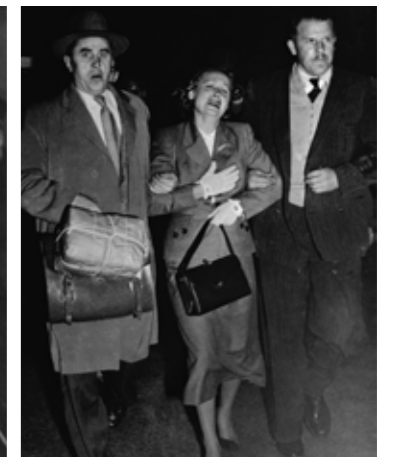
Soviet Embassy, Vladimir Petrov, defected (changed his allegiance to Australia) and asked to stay in Australia. In return, Petrov provided the Australian government with information about Soviet spying.

The news that Soviet agents had been spying on Australia raised anxiety about communism to an extreme level. The Petrov defection came on the eve of a federal election – an election that the Menzies Government had been tipped to lose. Menzies campaigned on the claim that his government could deal with the communist threat more effectively than the Labor Party. The Menzies Liberal Government won a resounding victory.

When Petrov defected, Soviet officials swooped on his wife Evdokia and placed her on a plane to Moscow. However, the plane had to stop in Darwin for refueling and ASIO officials took the opportunity to snatch Mrs Petrov. The case attracted enormous publicity. It helped to create a climate in which any action seemed acceptable if it was designed to combat communism.



**Source 3** Vladimir Petrov



**Source 4** Vladimir Petrov's wife, Evdokia, being escorted to a waiting plane by Soviet officials

## Check your learning 16.3

- Briefly explain the domino theory.
  - In which countries did Australian forces fight in the 1950s?
- Apply and analyse
- List all of the factors that contributed to a fear of communism in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. Explain which you believe was the most important factor and why?

## Evaluate and create

- Conduct further research on Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov and write a newspaper article on their experience as Soviet defectors.
- Examine Source 2. What point is the cartoon making about Menzies and about the people who opposed banning the communist party?



# 16.4 Australia's initial involvement

With the fear of communism in the region, it is not surprising that the Australian government was eventually to become involved in the conflict in Vietnam.

Following the division of Vietnam in 1954, two separate governments were established. The South was officially democratic and became the Republic of Vietnam, under the Presidency of Ngo Dinh Diem. The communist North became the Democratic Republic of Vietnam under the Presidency of Ho Chi Minh. The subsequent war over whether Vietnam should be communist or democratic was to continue for almost 30 years.

## Australia's alliances

After the Second World War II, Australia joined two alliances that would have a major influence on foreign policy decisions during the 1950s and 1960s.

The first was the ANZUS Treaty, signed by Australia, New Zealand and the USA in 1951. ANZUS is a military alliance between the three countries, formed in response to China becoming a communist republic. It was also a long-held desire of Australia to formalise an alliance with the USA. Nevertheless, some people questioned the fact that Australia had entered a defence alliance that did not include Britain. Because the USA was by far the most powerful of the three countries, Australia felt a certain obligation to comply with US policy in the region.



Source 1 The ANZUS logo

Australia also became part of SEATO, the South East Asian Treaty Organisation, in 1954. Like ANZUS, the organisation was formed because of the fear of communism, however it was much bigger. The USA, Britain, France, Pakistan, the Philippines and New Zealand joined Australia in pledging to support each other to resist the spread of communism in South-East Asia.

Australia was also a founding member of the United Nations (UN). During the Cold War period, the UN initiated a number of peacekeeping missions and military operations to resolve conflicts. The first example of the UN's use of military intervention was in the Korean War (1950–53).

## Australia's initial commitment to South Vietnam

By 1962, the USA had more than 16000 advisers based in South Vietnam. They were not officially there to take part in combat, but to help train the Army of South Vietnam to fight against the North. A further role taken on by the USA was to help win over the 'hearts and minds' of the South Vietnamese villagers and encourage them to be loyal to the government of South Vietnam. They did this by providing civilian aid such as medical help and construction work.

In July 1962, in response to requests for assistance from President Diem and because of treaty obligations with the USA, the Australian Government agreed to send 30 advisers to South Vietnam. These advisers made up the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV), also known as just 'the Team'. Their duties were to provide security and military assistance to help the government of South Vietnam fight against communism. However, they were under strict instructions to not attend any military operations run by the Vietnamese forces they were training.



Source 2 The first Australian Army personnel arrive in Saigon in August 1962.

### Check your learning 16.4

Remember and understand

- 1 What were the names of the two Vietnamese republics and their leaders after the partition in 1954?
- 2 Identify the countries that Australia formed alliances with during the early 1950s.

Apply and analyse

- 3 US and Australian troops sent into Vietnam in 1962 had two main roles. Explain each role and suggest which you think was seen as more important.

Evaluate and create

- 4 Using the Internet to research the 'hearts and minds' strategy, develop a table like the one below evaluating the benefits and difficulties of providing civilian aid during the Vietnam War.

Benefits associated with 'hearts and minds'	Difficulties of 'hearts and minds'



## 16.5 Commitment of ground troops to the Vietnam War

For three years after 1962, Australia maintained a small, advisory force in Vietnam. By early 1965 it was obvious that the advisers were not making much of a difference in the fight against communism. A series of events in the USA and in Australia led to the commitment of ground troops. Australia and the USA changed from having just an advisory role to having an active military role in the Vietnam War.

### The US decision to send troops to Vietnam

In August 1964, an unsuccessful attack was made on the US destroyer *Maddox*, off the coast of North Vietnam. In retaliation, the *Maddox* attacked three North Vietnamese patrol boats, damaging two and sinking the third. Despite this, the USA saw the attack on the *Maddox* as an act of aggression and became more involved in Vietnam. The US Congress passed a resolution on 7 August 1964 allowing the air force to begin bombing North Vietnam. Soon afterwards, the decision was made to commit two battalions of ground troops to fight on Vietnamese soil. They landed in Vietnam in March 1965.

### Australia's decision to send troops to Vietnam

Less than two months later, Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies announced that Australia would follow the USA and commit one infantry battalion to South Vietnam. This decision was influenced by a number of situations within Australia and in the Asia-Pacific region. Among these were:

- general fears about communism and the speed with which it was spreading
- particular fears about the threat of communism spreading down through South-East Asia to Australia – the domino theory
- the Indonesian 'Confrontation' with Malaysia in 1963, which heightened fears of a communist takeover in Australia's nearest neighbour, Indonesia
- Australia's obligations as a member of the United Nations and of ANZUS and SEATO.

The Menzies Government also argued that the decision to commit troops was in response to an invitation from the government of South Vietnam (see Source 1). It has since emerged that this was only partly true. The decision to send troops to Vietnam without being asked by the South Vietnamese government had the potential to create diplomatic and media problems for the Menzies Government. Therefore, the Australian government asked the South Vietnamese government to issue a formal request for troops. The request was duly sent and on 29 April, Menzies made his announcement.

#### Source 1

The Australian Government is now in receipt of a request from the Government of South Vietnam for further military assistance. We have decided – and this has been done after close consultation with the Government of the United States – to provide an infantry battalion for service in South Vietnam ...

We have not, of course, come to this decision without the closest attention to the question of defence priorities. We do not, and must not, overlook the point that our alliances, as well as providing guarantees and assurances for our security, make demands upon us ...

Assessing all this, it is our judgment that our decision to commit a battalion in South Vietnam represents the most useful additional contribution which we can make to the defence of the region at this time. The takeover of South Vietnam would be a direct military threat to Australia and all the countries of South and South-East Asia. It must be seen as a thrust by China between the Pacific and Indian oceans.

Prime Minister Menzies' announcement in the House of Representatives that 800 men of the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment would be sent to Vietnam, 29 April 1965

The announcement that Australia was to send troops to Vietnam was met with mixed reactions. A poll conducted in September 1965 showed that 56% of Australians supported the war and 16% were undecided.



Source 2 Australian soldiers in Vietnam

Only 28% were directly opposed to Australia's involvement. Although the majority of people supported the war in 1965, there was already a small

but determined opposition that was to grow steadily over the next seven years.

### Check your learning 16.5

Remember and understand

- 1 What was the official role of the forces that the USA and Australia based in Vietnam between 1962 and 1965?
- 2 What incident prompted the USA to agree to send ground troops to Vietnam?

Apply and analyse

- 3 We now know that Prime Minister Menzies was not telling the full story when he announced that he had received an invitation to send troops to Vietnam.

Give and support your opinion as to whether this was justified.

Evaluate and create

- 4 Create a circular flow chart showing the process of events that led from the end of the Second World War to the arrival of Australian ground troops in Vietnam. You may also consult the timeline and earlier units in this chapter. Your flow chart should have 'Fear of Communism' as its centre.



# 16.6 Conscription

Controversy about Australia's role in the Vietnam War was heightened by the issue of **conscription**. People who were conscripted, or chosen for compulsory military service, had no choice but to go to war. Conscription for 20 year olds, chosen by ballot, was introduced in November 1964. Initially, it was not expected that Australian conscripts would be sent overseas, but this changed in 1965. Throughout the Vietnam War, conscription was to cause bitterness, division and protest.



**Source 1** The conscription ballot takes place.

## History of conscription in Australia

Australia had traditionally resisted sending conscripts into overseas wars. During the First World War, the nation was bitterly divided on the issue of conscription and two referenda on the matter were defeated. In the Second World War, Australia was under threat from Japan and required more troops overseas. Prime Minister John Curtin (1941–45) announced that the nation's borders would be extended to include Australia's Overseas Territories, such as New Guinea. Conscripts could be sent to these territories, without technically being sent 'overseas'.

## Support for conscription

The Menzies Liberal Government, the Democratic Labor Party and many older Australians supported conscription. Former Minister for the Army Jim Forbes was interviewed in 2014. In this interview, he argued that the system was necessary because the regular army was not attracting sufficient recruits. He also believed that the method was fair.

### Source 2

It (conscription) was never terribly popular, but it was a very fair system, and I had to take the burden for that. It never worried me ... because I was completely convinced that we had to do it and it was a very fair system. A lot of people mocked the idea of putting marbles in a ballot box ... It was very Australian way of doing it, and we never got the credit for doing it. People got knocked off in Vietnam, and it became very unpopular.

Former Liberal Minister Jim Forbes, 2014

**Source 3** Results of the conscription scheme in Australia, known as the National Service Scheme

Results of the National Service Scheme	Number of men
20 year olds registered for national service between 1964 and 1972	804286
20 year olds selected and enlisted in the army	63740
National servicemen who served in Vietnam	15381
Exemptions from national service (including students and ministers of religion and for reasons of physical or mental disability. Or conscientious objection determined by court)	3563
Indefinite deferments from national service (including 20502 married between selection and call-up; being a married man entitled you to a deferment)	35548
Imprisoned after refusing to obey a call-up notice	14

## Opposition to conscription

Opposition to conscription during the Vietnam War became stronger in May 1965, when the federal government announced that national servicemen (conscripts) could be sent overseas to fight. Even

some who supported the war, expressed doubts about the morality of sending conscripts overseas to fight against their will. Between 1965 and 1972, over 15000 conscripts served in Vietnam and approximately 200 lost their lives.

During the war, opposition to conscription increased steadily. Organisations including the Draft Resisters' Union and the Youth Campaign Against Conscription (YCAC) were largely supported by those in the age group who were at risk of being conscripted. In June 1965 the YCAC, in an open letter to *The Australian*, urged the government: 'not to pursue the murderous path to world conflict through prolonging the slaughter in Vietnam.' Some young men went into hiding, refusing to register for the ballot. By 1972, 14 'draft dodgers' had been imprisoned. One of the most famous of these was Bill White, whose arrest was photographed and published in several daily newspapers.

However, it was not just young people who opposed conscription. Increasingly, parents, war veterans and people who had never been engaged in protest before began to express opposition to conscription. The most famous of these opponents was Save Our Sons, a group of women whose sons were of conscription age and in danger of being sent to war. They demonstrated peacefully, using placards and handing out leaflets, often outside national service registration sites. The efforts of the protesters met both support and hostility. Five members of Save Our Sons were imprisoned in 1971 for handing out leaflets to men coming to register for the ballot. They spent 11 days in Fairlea Women's Prison and became known as the Fairlea Five.



**Source 4** Conscientious objector Bill White, a school teacher, was dismissed from the public service and arrested outside his home in Gladestville in November 1966 after refusing to serve in the national service.

## The end of conscription

By 1971, public opinion was swinging against the Vietnam War and even more strongly against conscription. In the 1972 election campaign Labor Party Leader Gough Whitlam pledged to end conscription. One of the first actions of the new government, elected in December 1972, was to free the seven draft resisters still in prison and to bring conscription to an end.



**Source 5** Members of the Save Our Sons movement typically held silent demonstrations.

## Check your learning 16.6

Remember and understand

- 1 What was the Australian government policy on conscription in the First World War, the Second World War and during the Vietnam War?
- 2 Identify three organisations that opposed conscription during the Vietnam War.

Apply and analyse

- 3 Why did some people who supported Australia's participation in Vietnam still oppose conscription?

Evaluate and create

- 4 Construct a dialogue between two mothers. One has a son in the regular army, serving in Vietnam. The other has a son who is in the age group to be conscripted. Each mother has a different viewpoint on the issues of the war and conscription. Each mother should speak at least four times and must present and support arguments to support her point of view.



## 16A rich task

# The referendum on communism

In March 1951, the High Court declared that the Communist Party Dissolution Bill was unconstitutional. Six months later a referendum was held to change the constitution. The question that voters were asked was:

Do you approve of the proposed law for the alteration of the Constitution entitled 'Constitution Alteration (Powers to deal with Communists and Communism) 1951'?

Campaigning on both sides of this issue was fierce and many posters were produced, for and against the proposal.



Source 1 A NO poster for the referendum on communism



Source 2 A poster released by the Communist Party of Australia, against the Communist Party Dissolution Bill referendum, 1951



Source 3 Election poster, 1950s

## skilldrill

### Analysing propaganda posters

Propaganda is anything that has been deliberately created to influence an audience's beliefs or actions. It can provide historians with lots of information about the period being investigated. However, it needs to be very carefully analysed and evaluated. Use the following steps to guide your analysis of a propaganda poster.

**Step 1** Establish the intended audience – that is, who the producer of the poster intended to influence.

**Step 2** Check the context of the poster. Consider:

- other events that may have been happening at the time and might have influenced the producer of the poster
- the political environment at the time the poster was created
- the common prejudices and social norms that existed at the time, which may have influenced the producer of the poster.

**Step 3** Check the message that is being conveyed. Consider:

- the main images on the poster and what they seem to suggest or represent
- any text written on the poster – what it says or whether the message is direct or suggestive
- the persuasive techniques used – these can



Source 4 A poster for the Yes case in the communism referendum

include:emotional appeals

- generalisations
- stereotypes
- name calling (direct or indirect)
- repetition
- social disapproval (that is, the suggestion that attitudes or actions contrary to what is being promoted in the poster will result in social rejection or disapproval).

**Step 4** Establish the intended effect on the audience – what the producer of the poster hopes the audience will think/do/feel.

**Step 5** Establish the overall purpose served by the poster.

### Apply the skill

- 1 Choose one poster supporting a Yes vote and one supporting a No vote and analyse them, using the steps above as a guide.
- 2 Which of the four posters do you believe would have been most effective in convincing a wavering voter to vote one way or the other? Support your answer with reference to features of all four posters.

## Extend your understanding

- 1 Propaganda is not always untrue, but it is often exaggerated and one sided, to convince the audience of a particular point of view. Think of an example from modern advertising where the truth is exaggerated and other features of a product or service are downplayed (e.g. an advertisement for a sale, which emphasises lower prices for certain goods but ignores the fact that most prices are unchanged). Describe the advertisement and identify examples of exaggeration or omission.
- 2 Create a propaganda poster designed to influence public opinion on one of the following:
  - an environmental issue
  - a building or development issue
  - a social issue such as the acceptance of refugees or stopping bullying.



## 16.7 Where did Australians fight?

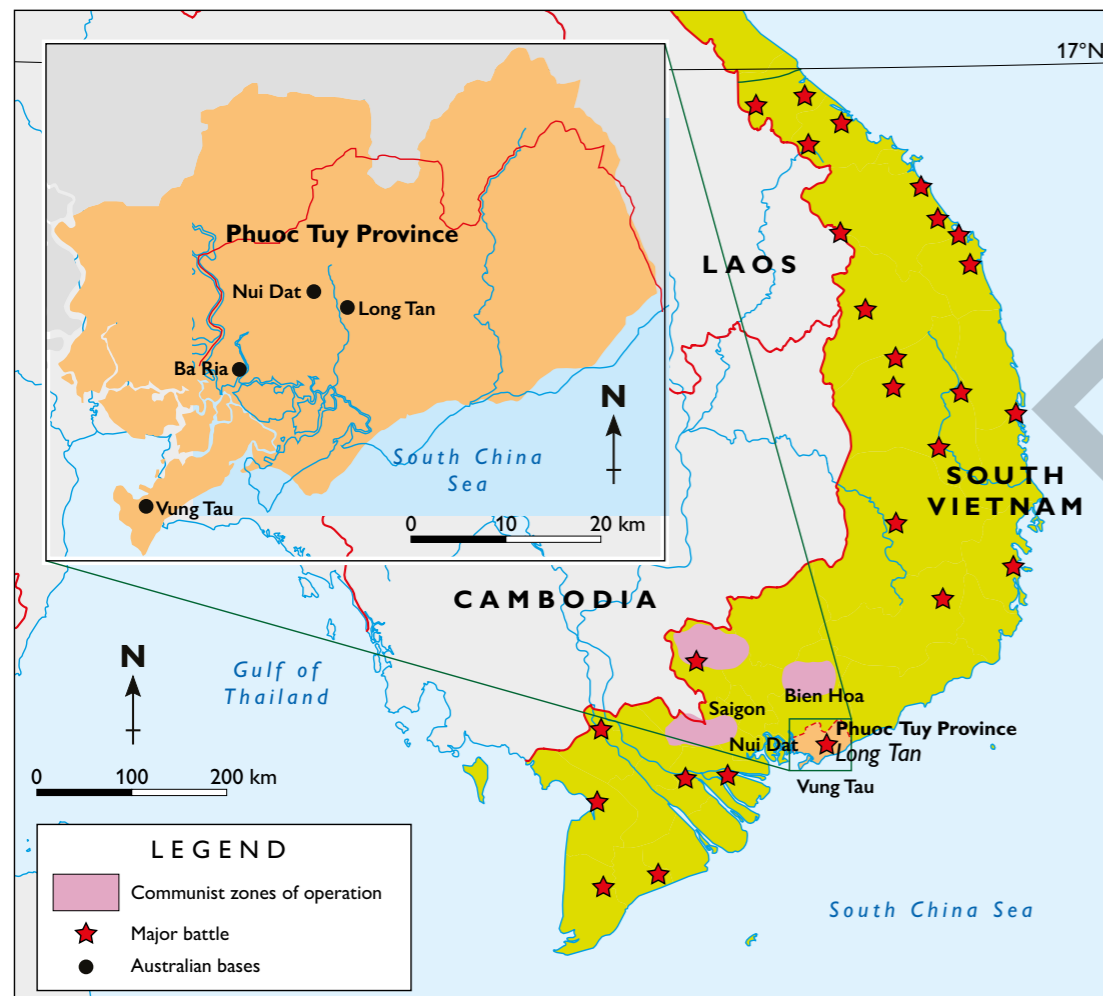
The Vietnam War between 1962 and 1973 was really two wars fought at the same time. There was one war between the armies of the North and the South. The North was largely supported by China and the South by the USA and its allies.

The other war took place *within* the south. A guerrilla campaign was waged by the South Vietnamese communists (known as Viet Cong) against the army of the Republic of Vietnam and its supporters. It was in this latter war that Australian troops were largely involved. They were supporting the Army of the Republic of Vietnam in its fight against communism not only in the north and also in the south.

### Australian bases

The first group of 800 combat troops from Australia arrived in May 1965. They were sent to Bien Hoa province, north of Saigon, in South Vietnam. Initially this first battalion operated under US control, serving with a US airborne brigade.

In May 1966, the Australian Task Force was established at Nui Dat in Phuoc Toy province. Soldiers lived and trained at Nui Dat when they were not on patrol operations. For the first time, Australian operations were conducted independently of US command. A Logistical Task Force was also set up at Vung Tau on the coast. This was also where wounded soldiers were sent to recover, and where troops went for their rest and recreation periods. The main base for the Australian air force was also located at Vung Tau.



**Source 1** The location of Australian bases in Phuoc Tuy province, Vietnam

### Source 2

The majority of Australian servicemen and women served in Phuoc Tuy province, south-east of Saigon ... The Australians were given this province to control because it allowed good access by air and sea, and so could be reinforced or evacuated easily if necessary.

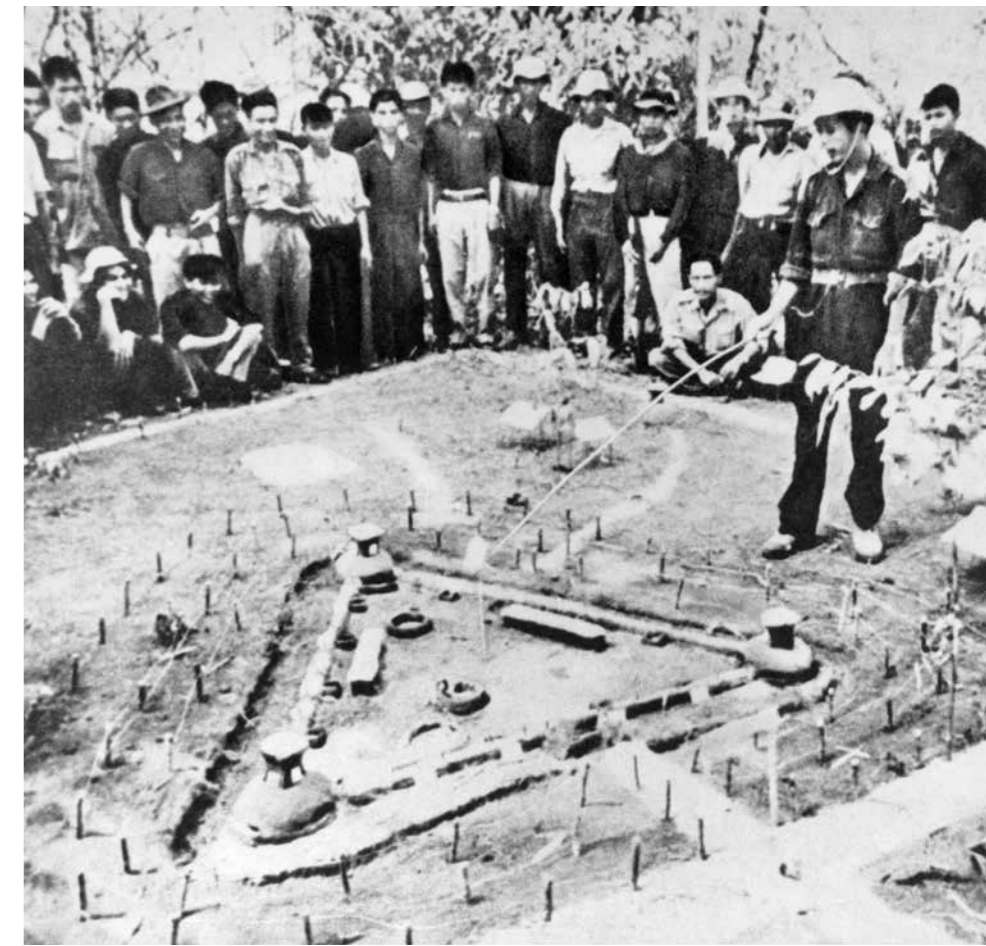
Extract from *Australia and the Vietnam War*, Department of Veteran Affairs, 2007, p. 30

### Fighting the Viet Cong

In the Australian area of operations, Phuoc Tuy province, the enemy was referred to as Viet Cong, or VC. The term Viet Cong was coined by US command and referred to Vietnamese communists in the south. However, most VC would have referred to themselves as Vietminh. The Viet Cong was not one single group but a range of people with different skills and expectations.

Some were soldiers of regular Viet Cong army units who were well-trained and equipped. They lived in bases away from their home villages. Others were guerrilla fighters, part-time soldiers, who were not as well-trained or equipped as the regular soldiers. They could be farmers or skilled workers in local villages. The villagers went about their normal occupations by day, and took part in guerrilla warfare activities at night. These could be ambushes or attacks on Australian soldiers or their local Vietnamese supporters, sabotage or intelligence gathering.

In addition to ground troops, the Royal Australian Air Force had a limited role in Australia's war effort. Helicopters and a squadron of Canberra bombers provided support for the fighting units. The aircraft transported equipment and personnel, and the helicopters helped with evacuations. Bombers launched raids on strategic targets in the south, serving alongside the USA's Tactical Fighter Wing.



**Source 3** Viet Cong army personnel planning for an attack on a South Vietnamese target

### Check your learning 16.7

Remember and understand

- 1 What were the two wars going on in Vietnam at the same time?
- 2 Where were most Australians based and why?

Apply and analyse

- 3 The Viet Cong was not just one group but a range of groups with different techniques and skill levels. Would this have made them an easier or a more difficult enemy? Explain and support your answer with examples.

Evaluate and create

- 4 Conduct some further research on the town of Vung Tau. Explain why it was developed as a base for American and Australian soldiers to enjoy 'rest and recreation' leave.



# 16.8 The nature of warfare in Vietnam

## Guerrilla tactics

For the most part, the Vietnam War was a guerrilla war. This means that instead of fighting on a battlefield, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong armies used 'hit and run tactics', specialising in raids and ambushes. US tactics included a massive bombing campaign, known as Operation Rolling Thunder. Its aim was to bomb strategic targets in the north, especially supply lines to the south. They also used helicopters to locate and attack enemy positions. Their approach was to draw the enemy out and engage them in battle. This often resulted in high US and enemy casualties.

**Source 1** An Australian soldier uses a mine detector to search a village for booby traps that may have been left by the Viet Cong, while another soldier stands guard. Australian troops had evacuated then destroyed the village, which had been dominated by the Viet Cong. The villagers were resettled.



## The Australian army's counter-guerrilla warfare tactics

Australian military leaders preferred a different approach. While the aim of the US operations was to destroy the enemy, the main purpose of Australian operations was to stop enemy soldiers from receiving supplies and other support. One of the main ways of doing this was to patrol their area of operation in small units. They used stealth to locate and ambush enemy camps. They blocked off villages between dusk and dawn, to block Viet Cong access to food supplies and other support. In some cases, they grouped into larger forces for 'search and destroy' missions on enemy bases.

## Historians' evaluations of different approaches to guerrilla warfare

### Source 2

There were significant differences in operational techniques between [the US and Australian] forces. The United States Army had vast resources of men, equipment and firepower at its disposal, which the Australians could never hope to have. The Americans were trained to deploy all these resources quickly to rapidly overwhelm the enemy and kill as many as possible. The Australians, with their tradition of jungle warfare and counter-revolutionary operations, had a more patient doctrine of patrolling and ambush, with less fire support. Their way caused fewer enemy casualties as well as restricting their own losses – vitally important in such a small army.

Extract from Richard Pelvin, *Vietnam: Australia's Ten Year War 1962–1972*, Hardie Grant Books, 2013, p. 41

### Source 3

For some Viet Cong leaders there was no doubt the Australian jungle warfare approach was effective. One former Viet Cong leader is quoted as saying; 'Worse than the Americans were the Australians. The Americans style was to hit us, then call for planes and artillery. Our response was to break contact and disappear if we could ... The Australians were more patient than the Americans, better guerrilla fighters, better at ambushes. They liked to stay with us instead of calling in the planes. We were more afraid of their style.'

Extract from David Chanoff & Doan Van Toai, *Vietnam: A Portrait of its People at War*, Taurus & Co., London (1996), p. 108

## Chemical warfare

One of the problems facing the South Vietnamese Army and its allies was the density of the jungle. From the air it was very difficult to pick out villages, let alone places where the Viet Cong could be hiding or storing supplies.

From as early as 1961, US advisers began using chemical sprays to kill the jungle vegetation. By the late 1960s, the use of chemical agents known as **defoliants** had become a major weapon. The main chemical used was **Agent Orange**, which contained the dangerous poison dioxin. Large areas of South Vietnam were stripped of vegetation and agricultural land was made



**Source 4** Australian service personnel in the Vietnam War

barren. The most serious consequence of the spraying of these chemical agents was its impact on humans. Cancers, miscarriages, birth defects, skin diseases and other illnesses have all been attributed to the use of these chemicals.

Another chemical widely used in Vietnam was napalm. This is a jelly-like substance that sticks to the skin and causes unbearably painful burns. At first, napalm was used in bombs directed at military and infrastructure targets. However, as the war progressed, it was increasingly used against the enemy. As the US and Australian soldiers had no way of knowing which villagers were Viet Cong, whole village populations were killed or injured by napalm.

One of the most famous and disturbing images of the Vietnam War is the picture of Kim Phuc, a 9-year-old girl running naked from her village after a napalm attack (see Source 5).





**Source 5** Nine-year-old Kim Phuc (centre) and family members run for help after being severely burnt in a napalm (a petrol-like substance used in bombs) attack, 8 June 1972.

## Battle of Long Tan

The Battle of Long Tan was different to the typical guerrilla and counter guerrilla tactics of the Vietnam War. On the night of 16 August 1966, the Australian base at Nui Dat was attacked by mortar fire (short-range shells lobbed at targets). On 18 August, 105 Australian soldiers moved into the Long Tan rubber plantation, believed to be the source of the mortar shelling. The Australians immediately came under attack by up to 3000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops.

The fighting at Long Tan went on for four hours, until the Australians received backup. The accuracy of the Australian artillery fire had a devastating effect on the enemy. The Viet Cong retreated, carrying many of their dead and wounded with them. The Australians counted 245 enemy dead on the battlefield, while 18

Australians were killed and 24 wounded. Later research revealed that the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong losses were as high as 800 deaths and 1000 wounded.

For many years, commentators believed the initial attack had been part of a Viet Cong plan to tempt the Australians out of their base and into an ambush. Evidence now suggests that the Australians had not been lured into an ambush but had in fact come across a regular North Vietnamese Army regiment who were moving in for a full-scale attack on the Nui Dat base. The battle probably saved the Australian Task Force at Nui Dat from a major attack from the combined North Vietnamese and Viet Cong armies. After this battle, the Viet Cong had far less power in the area.

## Civilian aid

From 1967, Australian personnel were also involved in providing aid to the South Vietnamese. Civilian aid had two purposes. One was a genuine attempt to assist the people, with medical and dental care and other necessities. The other was described as a 'hearts and minds' policy. It was hoped that by providing care and support for villagers, they would be won over to the anti-communist side and would no longer support the Viet Cong. There is little evidence that this policy was successful. Nevertheless, thousands of South Vietnamese people benefitted from the many civilian aid projects initiated by the Australian Army.

**Source 6** Australia's service personnel in Vietnam

<b>Total number of Australians who served in Vietnam</b>	Almost 60000 (including around 15000 National Servicemen)
<b>Greatest number of servicemen in Vietnam at the one time</b>	7672
<b>Usual length of service</b>	12 months
<b>Dead</b>	520 (including 185 National Servicemen)
<b>Wounded</b>	3000

**Source** An Australian soldier guards a captured Viet Cong soldier found hiding on the battlefield on the day after the Battle of Long Tan.



## Check your learning 16.8

### Remember and understand

- 1 What chemicals were used in the Vietnam War and for what purposes?
- 2 How many Australians were killed or wounded in Vietnam?
- 3 What were the two purposes of civilian aid?

### Apply and analyse

- 4 Explain the main tactics used by Australian soldiers?
- 5 Why do you think the Battle of Long Tan is seen as one of the most important engagements for the Australian Army during the Vietnam War?

### Evaluate and create

- 6 Using the text and sources in this unit and additional research, prepare a class debate on the topic: 'The Australian approach in Vietnam was more suited to jungle warfare than the US approach.'
- 7 The napalm girl, Kim Phuc, is still alive and her life story is an amazing example of resilience. Conduct further research into her life and write a newspaper article or blog titled 'Success against all odds'.



## 16.9 The Australian withdrawal from Vietnam



**Source 1** A South Vietnamese chief of police fires his pistol at a suspected Viet Cong official during the Tet Offensive, Saigon. This image was shown on the TV news.

In January 1973, after nearly eight years of war, the Australian government announced plans for the final withdrawal of troops from Vietnam. It was November 1973 before the last Australian personnel were withdrawn and Australia's involvement in the war could truly be over.

The decision to end Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War came down to a number of reasons. The war had become increasingly unpopular and there were widespread protests, especially after 1968. However, there were other factors including the increasing death and injury toll. Australia had also realised the war was becoming increasingly unwinnable. Peace talks to end the war had begun in May 1968 and the USA had started to wind down the number of its troops in Vietnam.

### Growing opposition to the war

In 1967, a poll showed that 62% of Australians supported the nation's participation in the Vietnam War. By 1970, this figure had fallen to 42%. The nature of opposition to the war had also changed. In the early years, most anti-war protests involved university students, the Labor Party, trade unionists and some religious groups. By 1970, opposition had become more mainstream and the range of anti-war arguments broader. By 1970, 389 young Australian men had lost their lives in Vietnam and several thousand had been

injured. There was also a growing recognition that many returned soldiers were suffering post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) as a result of the horror and trauma they had witnessed and experienced at war.

Even those not directly touched by losses were brought into contact with the harsh reality of war through television. Most nights, graphic footage of events in Vietnam was beamed into living rooms across the nation.

#### Source 2

It was the novelty of seeing war for the first time that led many Australians to oppose it ... In this sense, the technology, the TV – and not the messengers, the reporters – lost support for the war. Had TV cameras filmed the bombing of Dresden or Tokyo, viewers may similarly have turned away in horror. Western viewers weaned on the notion of war as heroic ... and 'just' were suddenly seeing thousands of dead, millions of refugees, unspeakable suffering ... in short, the things common to all wars.

Extract from Paul Ham, *Vietnam: The Australian War*, Harper Collins, 2007, p. 413

### The Tet Offensive

One of the most significant influences on changing attitudes is believed to have been the Tet Offensive. The Tet Offensive was a well-planned, surprise attack by the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese army on South Vietnamese, US and Australian forces. It took place during the celebration of Tet (New Year) in early 1968, at a time when there was supposed to be a truce in fighting. The attack by the Viet Cong was very successful but the success lasted only a few days before the USA retaliated. Ironically, it was the ruthless suppression of the Tet Offensive that led many people to question the war. Films of public executions of Viet Cong leaders horrified many Australians who had previously been supportive of the war.

### Protest

Some say it was the anti-war protests that swept across the USA and Australia from 1968 that brought the war to an end. The various rallies, marches, sit-ins and songs played an important role in changing public attitudes and in convincing governments that the war was losing voter support.



**Source 3** An anti-war rally in Sydney, c. 1970





Source 4 Part of the crowd at a Vietnam War Moratorium march, Melbourne, 1970

As early as October 1966, Melbourne students rallied to protest against the Vietnam War during the visit of US President Lyndon Johnson. Two brothers, one at secondary school and one at university, threw red and green paint over the president's car. By 1968, the anti-war movement had become bigger and better organised. In the USA, in November 1969, millions of Americans across the nation paused and gathered to express their opposition to the war.

The term '**moratorium**' was adopted for these protests. Traditionally, a moratorium is an agreed pause in normal activity. It is most often used to describe a temporary break in debt repayments, or an agreed

delay in meeting legal requirements. The leaders of the November 1969 protest in the USA used the term 'moratorium' because they wanted the nation to pause and reassess its commitment to the war.

Moratoriums were held across Australia during 1970. Hundreds of thousands of people brought the centres of capital cities to a halt. They carried banners, sang songs and chanted slogans. One of the most popular refrains was John Lennon's 'All we are saying, is give peace a chance'. By 1970 the anti-war movement had become more mainstream, involving middle-class people, mothers with prams, businesspeople in suits, teenagers in school uniforms, 'tradies', nuns and priests.

## Government decisions

The anti-war marches that took place across Australia during 1970 sent a message to the government that this was an unpopular war. However, protest alone would not have been enough to achieve an end to the Vietnam commitment. Peace talks had begun in Paris in 1969 and, in that same year, the USA began to withdraw troops. President Nixon also began the policy of 'Vietnamisation'. This involved providing the South Vietnamese army with further training and resources, with the expectation that it would eventually be able to continue the fight without needing any help from the USA.

In Australia, Prime Minister John Gorton and his Liberal Government began the withdrawal of troops in 1970. In 1971, the base at Nui Dat was handed over to the South Vietnamese Army. Following the election of the Whitlam Labor Government, in December 1972, the commitment to Vietnam was finally ended and the last advisers returned to Australia in November 1973.

Australia's withdrawal from the Vietnam War was met with mixed reactions. While anti-war and conscription protesters were glad Australia was no longer part of the war, Source 5 shows the frustration felt by many soldiers who thought they were abandoning the South Vietnamese people.

### Source 5

...it very simply wasn't finished the way it should have been. I'm not saying we should have won. That would have been preferable of course to losing, but the way it was done ... we left many, many good South Vietnamese people in the lurch and it was like turning your back on your best mate and walking away. It shouldn't have happened. That is politics though... Nothing to do with us, but it left a very nasty, dirty taste in a lot of people's mouths. It still does.

Corporal Anthony Hughes, 7RAR



Source 6 A Vietnam Moratorium badge. The words around the edge of the badge are 'Vietnam Moratorium. Withdraw all troops now'.

## Check your learning 6.9

### Remember and understand

- 1 List the various influences that combined to bring Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War to an end.
- 2 What is meant by the term 'moratorium' and why was it adopted by anti-war protesters?

### Apply and analyse

- 3 Examine the posters in Source 3. If you did not know anything about the war, who would you think was the enemy? Can you explain this?
- 4 What do you believe was the main reason why Australian troops were withdrawn from Vietnam? Support your answer.

### Evaluate and create

- 5 Design an anti-war badge or poster.
- 6 During the Vietnam War many popular songs reflected an anti-war or a pro-peace message. They included 'Masters of war', 'Blowin' in the wind' and 'The times they are a changin'' by Bob Dylan, 'Give peace a chance' by John Lennon, 'The universal soldier' by Buffy Saint Marie, and 'The eve of destruction' by Barry McGuire.
  - Look up the lyrics of at least three of these songs and list all of the anti-war ideas and arguments used. For each idea, record a brief quote.
  - Write your own anti-war or pro-peace song or poem.



## 16B rich task

## Entertaining the troops

Over the course of the Vietnam War, more than 100 entertainers and groups travelled to Vietnam to entertain the troops. Their concerts played a very important role in keeping up morale among the soldiers. Entertainers went to Vietnam for a variety of reasons – patriotism, a spirit of adventure, even career prospects. Some entertainers supported the war and others opposed it, but still wanted to support the soldiers.

Many popular Australian acts performed in Vietnam. Among those who entertained in Vietnam were Little Pattie, Lorrae Desmond, Ian Turpie, Col Joye, Patti McGrath, Joy Yates, Denise Drysdale, Johnny O'Keefe and many others. Norman (Normie) Rowe, an Australian singer, was a conscripted soldier who often joined the entertainers. The Indigenous singing group the Sapphires was a popular act and the story of the group was told in the 2012 film *The Sapphires*.

**Source 3**

LORRAE DESMOND: "So we came back from America and then a really interesting thing happened when the Australian Dance Band asked me if I would go with them to Vietnam. And, of course, having entertained troops from other countries, suddenly all those young men are my babies. And I kept going back and forth until I'd been there five times.

... whenever I had a few weeks spare, I mean, I didn't sit around. I'd say, 'Let's go out to the boys.'

... But then when I got to Vietnam, they were my boys and they still are my boys. They even gave me a plaque saying, 'To the mother of all Vietnam veterans' which I love.

PETER THOMPSON: It seems to have affected many performers that way. That those that have gone to these war zones to perform fuelled an incredibly special relationship with those that they performed for.

LORRAE DESMOND: Do you know, you get letters like about 50 years afterwards saying thank you ... That's very special that you stay in somebody's life for that long.

Extract from the program 'Talking Heads', ABC, 14<sup>th</sup> April 2008.



**Source 1** The real Sapphires: sisters Laurel Robinson and Lois Peeler and their cousins Beverley Briggs and Naomi Mayers, 2012



**Source 2** The Sapphires in the 2012 movie

**skilldrill**

## Creating and delivering an audio-visual presentation

One of the most popular and engaging ways to present the findings of an historical inquiry is through an audio-visual presentation. To prepare and present a successful audio-visual presentation there are several steps to follow.

**Step 1** Develop the question or questions that your audio-visual presentation will explore.

**Step 2** Gather your research.

Use the images in this text along with other texts and internet resources. Make sure that you record the dates and reference details of all sources.

**Step 3** Plan and create your presentation.

Once you have gathered your research, plan your presentation to make sure that it addresses the question or questions that you wish to explore. If yours is a group presentation, make sure that the workload is distributed evenly. Decide on the format that you will use – PowerPoint, Prezi, a short film, a website, a talk supported by a poster, etc. You could also use suitable and relevant music.

**Step 4** Deliver your presentation.

- Make sure that you have rehearsed your presentation so that you can deliver it with confidence.
- Engage your audience by speaking slowly and clearly and making eye contact. You may begin by posing one or two questions to the audience to get them involved from the start.
- Finish strongly. Your presentation should finish on a high note.
- Prepare for the worst by having a back-up plan in case technology lets you down.
- Encourage your audience to comment or ask questions at the end of the presentation.

## Apply the skill

- 1 Research a number of Australian performers who entertained the troops in Vietnam. Develop an overarching question such as:

What role did visiting entertainers play in keeping morale high during the Vietnam War?

OR

Why were entertainers willing to travel to Vietnam to perform for the troops and what impact did the experience have on them?

- 2 Develop a series of questions to guide your research such as:
  - What had the entertainers achieved before going to Vietnam?
  - What motivated the entertainers to go to Vietnam?
  - What were their experiences of the travel, performing conditions, dangers, etc.?
  - What songs did they perform?
  - How were they received by the troops?
  - How do they now look back on the experience?
- 3 Collect a range of visual resources and short quotes and prepare your audio-visual presentation. Present your finished product to the class.

**Extend your understanding**

The Australian film *The Sapphires* (2012) tells the story of a group of Indigenous Australian entertainers who travelled to Vietnam to entertain the American troops. It was based on a play written by Tony Briggs. Briggs based the story on the experience of his mother and aunt, who had been entertainers in Vietnam. View the film and complete the following tasks:

- 1 Conduct some research into the true story of the Sapphires.
- 2 What can you learn from the film about values relating to Indigenous people, to women and to the war in the 1960s?
- 3 There are some differences between the real story and the film. One of the main differences is that Naomi and Beverley refused to go to Vietnam because they opposed the war. Identify other differences. Why do you think that these changes were made? Do you think that it matters that the true story was not told?
- 4 Use the material you have researched to answer the following question, in essay form:

To what extent is *The Sapphires* a useful historical resource about the Vietnam War era?



# 16.10 Impact of the war on Vietnam veterans

The homecoming for Vietnam veterans was very different from the experiences of their grandfathers and fathers who served in the First and Second World Wars. The Vietnam War had become so unpopular that there was no real welcome home. To avoid protestors, returning troops were often flown into Australian airports after dark. Some marched in parades in their home towns and cities on their return, but there was no official parade or welcome for the Vietnam veterans until 1987 (see Source 1).

## Health problems

Some veterans returned with physical injuries – wounds, lost limbs, skin rashes, hearing problems or respiratory problems. In some ways, they were better off than those with psychological issues, because their problems were visible, they received sympathy and there were medical treatments available.

Those who returned with stress disorders were given very little sympathy from the public. At the time, the population did not really understand the seriousness of poor mental health. Returned soldiers felt like no one understood the fear and anxiety that they were experiencing. Sometimes family and friends made matters worse, by telling veterans how lucky they were to have survived the war unscathed. By the 1990s, it had been established that the suicide rate for Vietnam veterans was higher than that for all Australian males in the same age group.



**Source 1** For many Vietnam veterans, the October 1987 Welcome Home Parade in Sydney was the first official parade or welcome since their return from Vietnam.

### Source 2

One minute I was in Vietnam and the next minute I was home, and I was totally lost ... I know my mum and dad found it very hard to handle me ... In fact, they told me quite plainly that I wasn't the same person any more. I was prone to get violent, punch walls, get into rages very quickly. I've never slept right since the day I came home.

Michael Scrase, from Stuart Rintoul, *Ashes of Vietnam: Australian Voices*, William Heinemann Australia, 1987, pp. 181, 182, 184

As a response to the sense of neglect felt by many Vietnam veterans, the Vietnam Veterans Association was formed in 1979 to actively represent the interests of those who served in the Vietnam War. Since then, there has been increasing awareness of the psychological impact of war and great improvements in the treatments available to returned soldiers. Most Vietnam veterans are now in their seventies and eighties.

## Exposure to chemicals

One of the main concerns of Vietnam veterans was the possible harmful effect of their exposure to chemical pesticides including Agent Orange. Exposure was thought to lead to higher instances of certain diseases and cancers, as well as birth defects in some children of Vietnam veterans. It was a source of anger and disappointment among Vietnam veterans when governments were slow to react to their concerns.

### Source 3

This study provides good evidence that Australian male veterans of the Vietnam War have an increased rate of cancer overall [compared to the general male population] ... Rates of melanoma and ... prostate cancer were consistently elevated ... The reason for these increases is unclear. In addition to exposure to known carcinogens [substances that cause cancer], lifestyle changes, including alcohol and tobacco consumption may play a role. For several other malignancies [cancers] ... Australian Vietnam War veterans have rates lower than the rate in the Australian population.

Extract from 'Cancer incidence in Australian Vietnam War Veterans Study 2005', Department of Veterans' Affairs, in Bruce Davies, *Vietnam: The Complete Story of the Australian War*, Allen & Unwin, 2012, p. 583



**Source 4** Many of Australia's Vietnam veterans returned from war with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

## Check your learning 16.10

### Remember and understand

- 1 What problems faced some returned servicemen after the Vietnam War?
- 2 What are some of the health problems believed to have been caused by Agent Orange?

### Apply and analyse

- 3 Why do you think the welcome given to returned Vietnam soldiers was different from that given to returning soldiers at the end of the First and Second World Wars?
- 4 Michael Scrase says 'One minute I was in Vietnam and the next minute I was home'. How does this statement help us to understand some of the distress faced by returned soldiers? How could the situation have been better handled?

### Evaluate and create

- 5 Read Source 4.
  - a What claims does the document make about the incidence of cancer in Vietnam veterans?
  - b What reasons does the report offer for these cancer rates?
  - c How might you explain the lower rate for some cancers?
- 6 Conduct further research into the Vietnam Veterans Association. Prepare a pamphlet that outlines the work of the Association and the ways in which it can be of assistance to returned soldiers. The pamphlet is to be made available in the Returned and Services League (RSL) branches, doctors' waiting rooms and hospital entrances.



# 16.11 The impact of war on the Vietnamese people

The long years of conflict in Vietnam had a devastating effect on both North and South Vietnam. By the time the war ended, the Vietnamese people had been living in a war zone since 1940. Bombing had destroyed much of the nation's infrastructure, and hundreds of thousands of hectares of rich agricultural land had been rendered useless. There was also an enormous human toll, not just in terms of people who had lost their lives but also those affected by injury and displacement.



**Source 1** The entrance to a 'friendship village' in Van Canh commemorating child victims of Agent Orange poisoning. The monument was built in 1998 by French, American, English, German, Japanese and Vietnamese war veterans.

## The human toll

The number of soldiers killed on both sides reached the hundreds of thousands. An unknown number of civilians, possibly over a million, also died as a result of the armed conflicts, bombings and assassinations. An even greater number would suffer from the effects of Agent Orange and other chemical agents sprayed by allied forces. Many villages in the south had been deliberately destroyed in an attempt to force Viet Cong out of hiding. The people were relocated to newly built settlements, but many felt great sorrow about their separation from traditional lands and the graves of their ancestors.

The economy of Vietnam was also in ruins. Despite the destruction, during the war, the presence of foreign troops had been good for the economy, especially in the south. The American and Australian troops spent lots

of money on food, drink and accommodation, taxis, entertainment and recreation. When the soldiers left, many businesses collapsed and many people were left without a job. The economy was made worse by the US decision, in 1975, to stop trading with Vietnam and to cease foreign aid.

## The new regime

After Australian and US troops withdrew from Vietnam in 1973, the North Vietnamese advanced southwards. After a further two years of fighting, their tanks rolled into the former Presidential Palace in Saigon on 29 April 1975. Vietnam was finally unified as a communist country. Any South Vietnamese who had worked with or supported the West were regarded as suspect by the communist government. These included South Vietnamese army personnel and also the translators, administrative support staff and guides who had helped the US and Australian troops.

People who were thought to be influenced by the West were imprisoned in 're-education camps'. It is estimated that about one million Vietnamese were imprisoned in these camps, most without a trial. Many were tortured and about 165 000 people died in these camps. Most people in the camps were imprisoned for periods of three to 10 years, but some people were held for up to 17 years.

**Source 2** Numbers of Vietnamese casualties in the Vietnam War

Type of casualty	Number of people
South Vietnamese troops killed or missing in action	220 357
South Vietnamese troops wounded	1.17 million
North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops killed	660 000
South Vietnamese civilian casualties	325 000–1 million
North Vietnamese civilian casualties from US bombings	65 000
Civilians assassinated by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong	166 000
Vietnamese affected by chemical agents	3 million

Source: Paul Ham, *Vietnam: The Australian War*, Harper Collins, 2000



**Source 3** Desperate South Vietnamese scale the wall of the US Embassy in Saigon, trying to reach evacuation helicopters as the last Americans departed from Vietnam, 29 April 1975.

## Check your learning 16.11

### Remember and understand

- 1 Study Source 3. Which section of Vietnam, North or South, suffered most as a result of the Vietnam War?
- 2 What were the negative consequences of the village destruction and relocation program?

### Apply and analyse

- 3 List all of the consequences of the war for Vietnam and the Vietnamese people. Which outcome do you believe to be the most negative? Explain your decision.
- 4 Explain why the USA cut off trade and foreign aid to Vietnam after the communist victory.

### Evaluate and create

- 5 Imagine you were a Vietnamese shopkeeper who traded with Australian soldiers during the Vietnam War. After the war, you are charged with disloyalty and could be sent to a re-education camp. Prepare a speech in which you argue that you should not be imprisoned. You must provide at least two different arguments.
- 6 Conduct some further research on the direct and longer-term impacts of chemicals such as Agent Orange. Use the information and images to create a poster with the message 'Chemical Warfare is NEVER justified!'



# 16.12 Immigration and 'boat people'

Many Vietnamese families, whose lives had been disrupted by the war and the communist takeover, became desperate to leave the country. Some chose to leave because they feared political persecution. Others saw fewer opportunities under a communist system.

## Boat people

In the months following the fall of Saigon in April 1975, thousands of Vietnamese began fleeing their country, many of them in unseaworthy fishing boats. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) recognised the tragedy that was unfolding. Refugee camps were established in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia to process the claims of Vietnamese fleeing their country. From these camps, refugees were processed and resettled in countries willing to accept them.

The Australian government's response to this wave of refugees was cautious at first. Only the Vietnamese spouses and children of Australian citizens were to be accepted. Later in 1975, two airlifts brought nearly 300 war orphans to Australia for adoption. It was not until the election of the Fraser Government in December 1975 that a slightly more welcoming attitude was adopted.



**Source 2** A refugee camp in Asia for Vietnamese refugees

The first five Vietnamese 'boat people' arrived in Darwin Harbour on 26 April 1976. After several weeks of debate, the group was given permission to stay. However, this generous response was to change in coming years as the numbers of boat people increased. By 1977, over 1000 refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia had arrived by boat, and public opinion was turning against them. Through the UNHCR, over 3000 refugees were brought in by air, from camps in Malaysia and Thailand.

Different opinions developed in Australia on the issue of accepting refugees. Some believed that boat people should be welcomed. Others thought that only people coming through 'official channels' should be accepted. This dilemma was reflected in *The Age*, on 15 November 1977: 'while Australia can afford to be generous, it cannot be expected to play host to every unscheduled refugee.'

**Source 1** Vietnamese refugees arriving at Sydney Airport in June 1975. Many were accepted as refugees by the Australian government after the war and flown to Australia.



### Source 3

To flee one's country is not an easy choice to make. You're leaving behind your homes, your relatives and friends, your culture, your possessions, your memories, your childhood. Fleeing a country on a boat is also a dangerous affair. People speak of the savagery of being looted, raped and killed by pirates at sea. People talk about the unspeakable horrors of resorting to cannibalism of the dead to regain enough strength to fix the boat's engine. Many of us had knowledge of this so why did we take the risk? We seek freedom because the government we were escaping did not respect our freedom. You will find this is a common story among refugees.

Extract from a talk by Minh Nguyen given to high school students at St Scholastica's College, Glebe, Sydney, 8 March 2004



## Vietnamese Australians

Over 130 000 Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees were settled in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s. These people, their children and now their grandchildren are making an outstanding contribution to the richness of Australian life. Vietnamese Australians are to be found in all fields of life and work – medicine, education, business, construction, sport and the arts. One of the most high profile Vietnamese Australians is Anh Do, who arrived in Australia as a refugee on a flimsy fishing boat when he was a baby. Anh completed a combined business law degree and is now a comedian, writer, actor and painter. His first book, *The Happiest Refugee*, chronicles his family's journey to Australia and his life growing up here as a refugee.



**Source 5** Anh Do is one of the many Vietnamese refugees who have made a better life in Australia.

**Source 4** Vietnamese asylum seekers arrive in Darwin Harbour in 1981.

## Check your learning 16.12

### Remember and understand

- 1 What factors led so many Vietnamese to want to leave their country after the fall of Saigon?

### Apply and analyse

- 2 The decision to airlift Vietnamese orphaned babies to Australia was praised by some and criticised by others. Suggest two arguments in support of this program and two against it.
- 3 Using the text, Source 1 and other research on Vietnamese boat people to make a list of the qualities and characteristics that such people demonstrated in their attempts to find a new life in Australia.

### Evaluate and create

- 4 One of the five Vietnamese people who first landed by boat in Darwin was Lam Tac Tam. In 2013 he took part in an interview to mark the 35th anniversary of his arrival in Australia. The interview can be found on the SBS website at [www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2011/04/27/anniversary-first-vietnam-boat-marked](http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2011/04/27/anniversary-first-vietnam-boat-marked) or via a link in your obook. Read the interview and answer the following:
  - a What does the interview tell you about the difficulties that the five faced on their journey?
  - b How were the five received in Australia? How does this compare with attitudes to boat arrivals today?
  - c Was there anything that you learnt through the interview that surprised or even shocked you?



# 16.13 Australia's growing relationship with South-East Asia

At the end of the Second World War, Australians still felt more closely aligned with Britain than with Asia. Australia has had a history of suspicion towards its Asian neighbours, dating back to the goldrush days of the 1850s.

During the 1950s, many Australians still felt the threat of an Asian invasion, which was heightened by Japan's show of military strength during the Second World War and the communist takeover in China. The White Australia Policy was still firmly in place and the vast majority of post-war immigrants came from Britain, southern or eastern Europe. Britain was still seen by many as the 'Mother Country' and the visit of the Queen in 1954 saw one of the largest celebrations that the nation had experienced.

## Changing attitudes

Despite this dominant European focus, Australians were increasingly forced to recognise the country's position in the Asia-Pacific region. Even before the Vietnam War, the wars and conflicts in Korea, Malaysia and Indonesia turned the attention of the government and the military towards the local region.

By the late 1960s, Australians had experienced a decade of further change. The generation born after the Second World War was growing up and had more progressive ideas about gender, race, human rights, war and peace. Views were changing about the role of women and there was a relaxation of the White Australia Policy under the Holt Government. The



Source 1 The 25th gathering of APEC leaders, October 2013

campaigns against conscription and the Vietnam War led some to question the role of government and also contributed to greater political awareness.

These changes played a role in the election of Gough Whitlam's Government in 1972, the first Labor government in Australia in 23 years.

The Whitlam Government established diplomatic relations with China and the unified government in Vietnam. The White Australia Policy was officially ended and Australia began to welcome immigrants from Asia, including Vietnamese refugees. As a result, Australian society became much more culturally diverse. A new era of cooperation and trade with Asia was also established and Australia became a member of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), firmly placing itself as a part of Asia.

Today, China is Australia's most important trading partner and one of the country's largest sources of tourism. Asian countries are also among the most popular destinations for Australian tourists, and hundreds of thousands of Asian students come to Australia each year to complete their education.

## The legacy of the Vietnam War

It is now more than 40 years since the last Australian soldiers left Vietnam, and since the conscription policy was terminated. The White Australia Policy is officially over and Vietnamese immigrants form a vital and respected part of Australian society.

However, many of the issues that characterised the Vietnam War period still resonate today. There is still suspicion, in some quarters, of immigrants who do not fit the 'traditional Australian' mould. Since the late 1990s, there has been growing suspicion and negativity about refugees and asylum seekers who arrive on Australia's shores, especially by boat. The Australian Prime Minister John Howard said in his 2001 election speech, 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.' Issues such as multiculturalism, the flag and the republican movement are still debated. It appears that a significant percentage of the population, mainly but not exclusively older Australians, still clings to the notion that Australia is predominantly a British nation.



Source 2 This cartoon by Bill Leak represents former Prime Minister John Howard as Captain Cook arriving in Australia.

## Check your learning 16.13

### Remember and understand

- 1 What evidence is there that Australia has a heritage of suspicion towards Asian immigration?
- 2 How did Australia's relationship with Asia change from the late 1960s and through the 1970s?

### Apply and analyse

- 3 Explain the social changes that took place in the 1960s that led to new attitudes towards war, race, gender and human rights.
- 4 Thousands more people seeking asylum arrive in Australia by aeroplane than by boat. Many of them arrive on visitor visas then seek to stay on. Yet, the boat people are still regarded with more suspicion and hostility. How do you explain the different attitudes towards these two groups?

### Evaluate and create

- 5 Analyse Source 2. Use the following questions as the basis for your analysis:
  - Explain the context for this cartoon (i.e. what had been happening that prompted Leak to draw this particular cartoon?).
  - What points is the cartoon making and what techniques are used to make these points?
  - How effective do you think this cartoon would have been in reinforcing or changing attitudes?
- 6 Prepare a speech to be delivered at a school assembly. The topic for your speech is: 'The 21st century will be Australia's Asian century.'



## 16C rich task

SBS and the *Thoi Su* controversy

A large proportion of Vietnamese Australians are either refugees or related to the refugees who fled to Australia after the collapse of the South Vietnamese government. Many of them are still haunted by the ill treatment and persecution they received from the communist government before they escaped.

In October 2003, many members of the Vietnamese community were upset when the multicultural broadcaster SBS began screening a Vietnamese language current affairs program called *Thoi Su*. The program is produced by the state-run (communist) Vietnamese news service.

The decision to screen *Thoi Su* caused a mixed reaction in Australia. One of the first to object was Trung Doan, National President of the Vietnamese Community in Australia (VCA). He wrote an article in the Melbourne *Herald Sun*.

**Source 1**

SBS TV's target audience are Vietnamese Australians, the great majority refugees or their reunited relatives. Many were among the one million put into labour camps when Saigon fell, or the millions whose houses and other properties were confiscated by the regime. They do not have to go far to see their former tormentors' faces and propaganda – it's right there, in their home.

... I have met and heard of scores of non-viewers around Australia who have lost sleep or had nightmarish flashbacks just because they know the program is there.

Extract from 'Every Day SBS Twists the Knife', Trung Doan, *Herald Sun*, 16 October 2003

Over the following two months, thousands of Vietnamese Australians protested outside SBS's offices in Melbourne and Sydney to demand an end to the *Thoi Su* broadcasts.

SBS Television initially resisted the complaints. The broadcaster argued that the vast majority of the Vietnamese Australian population would not find the program offensive.

SBS Managing Director Nigel Milan appeared before a Senate Estimates Committee where he argued for the station's right to freely show any program they saw fit. He suggested that VCA did not represent the majority of the Vietnamese.

**Source 2**

Mr Milan: It is a bit hard to say in terms of individuals because the no campaign is highly organised. There are coupons to cut out on the front of the Vietnamese language newspapers and send in to SBS, whereas the yes campaign is –

Senator Conroy: Are you suggesting that this is like *TV Week* – one person is cutting out 10 coupons and sending them in? Is that what you think is happening?

Mr Milan: Yes. The switchboard identified 23 calls from the same person on one evening. So it is quite an organised campaign. Up until this week, the numbers have been running substantially in favour of the no vote (i.e. don't withdraw the program), probably on a 10 to one ratio, but since the demonstration and the issue getting broader community awareness, the yes vote is beginning to increase.

Extract from a meeting of the Senate Environment Communications Information Technology and the Arts Legislation Committee, 3 November 2003

The campaign against *Thoi Su* was well organised and had the support of high profile conservative media commentators, including Alan Jones and Andrew Bolt. VCA delegations visited the offices of at least 20 MPs, including Communications Minister Daryl Williams and Labor's spokesman Lindsay Tanner.

In December 2003 SBS conceded to pressure and withdrew *Thoi Su* from broadcast. It also amended its code of practice 'to provide guidance for future additions to the WorldWatch line-up'.

**Source 3**

[SBS] Television really acted very much as a broadcaster, you know: 'We will determine what goes to air based on quality and our charter', and they never really talked directly to people. What the Vietnamese were trying to say was, 'We'd really like to talk before you put something like that on the air!' They're not saying, 'Never, ever put this on, or else!' They were trying to have a conversation with us.

SBS Radio presenter Olya Booyar. Quotation from *The SBS Story: The Challenge of Cultural Diversity*, Ien Ang, Gay Hawkins and Lamia Dabboussy, 2008, page 43



**Source 4** Members of the Vietnamese community protesting outside the SBS office in Sydney, 2003

**skilldrill**

## Identify the origin, context and purpose of primary and secondary sources

Historians use primary and secondary sources to gather evidence about the past. Both primary and secondary sources are useful, but sources will almost always reflect the perspective of the person who created them, as well as the attitudes and beliefs of the time in which they were created.

When considering the value of sources, the student of history should ask the following questions:

- What is the context – that is, what was going on at the time that led to the creation of the source?
- Who created the source – what do you know about the creator? Did the creator have reasons for presenting a particular point of view?
- Where did the source appear – a mainstream newspaper, a special focus publication, a family memoir, a public place, etc.? What does this tell you about its reliability?

- Is it an eyewitness account or was it produced later?
- What was the purpose of the source – to inform, to persuade, to entertain, to provide an alternative viewpoint, to gain support, to discredit another viewpoint, etc.?

Having considered the source in the light of these questions, the student of history should be able to assess its value as a piece of historical evidence.

## Apply the skill

- 1 Using the questions above, analyse Source 1.
- 2 Which of the four sources do you believe to be most helpful in explaining the *Thoi Su* controversy? Why?
- 3 Which of the four sources do you believe is most likely to be accurate and reliable? Explain your choice.
4. Suggest one additional source or piece of information that would help you to understand whether the program *Thoi Su* should have been withdrawn or allowed to continue.

**Extend your understanding**

- 1 The *Thoi Su* controversy spread outside the Vietnamese-Australian community and led to members of the general public arguing both for and against its continued broadcast. Write a letter to the editor presenting your opinion on the issue. You may draw

on the sources on these pages and any additional information that you can gather. Your argument should take into account the perspectives presented by both sides.