The inter-connectedness between Asia and Europe were evident in French Indo-China during World War II. After the Nazis defeated the French in June of 1940, a rump collaborationist state known as Vichy France (named for the capital city) was created. It maintained the French colonial possessions in Southeast Asia even as the Japanese Empire invaded Vietnam in September 1940. The Vichy French, at first negotiated an agreement with the Japanese for base and troop limitations. The ink was barely dry, before a Japanese division crossed over into Vietnam from China. Hostilities were short-lived, as Emperor Hirohito ordered the Army to respect the agreement reached between the two countries.

From this point, the Japanese and Vichy French colonial government maintained an uneasy joint control. By July 1941, although the French maintained the appearances of administrative control, the Japanese had full freedom to position troops in any numbers wherever they wished, and effectively policed the people. Japan also was guaranteed nearly all of Vietnam’s rice and rubber production.

Japanese and French continued to quarrel over sovereignty and economic issues, and they vied for the affections of Vietnamese people. The French encouraged the Vietnamese to forget their colonial brutal policies and reminded the people of their past domination by their neighbors. The Japanese played on the idea of “Asia for Asians” and the removal of Western influences. The Vietnamese people wanted independence.

As the resistance to the French and Japanese grew, different nationalist groups formed. Once that tried to organize all the disparate groups was known as the Viet Minh (The League for the Independence of Vietnam). Led by Ho Chi Minh, the Viet Minh set aside their more blatant communist ideas of land redistribution, and instead, focused on independence, setting up guerilla camps to liberate the country.

Until after the invasion of North Africa, when Vichy France ceased to be an effective military power, the United States faced a quandary in regard to Vietnam. The US recognized Vichy France’s rights in Vietnam mainly to prevent any move by the Germans. President Roosevelt opposed the restoration of the European colonies in Asia, but we could not give the Vichy French a propaganda victory – or disrupt relations with the Free French – by openly supporting independence.

Through its contacts in China, the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) encouraged and aided Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh in their war against the Japanese. Even so, Roosevelt’s anti-colonial stand angered
Great Britain’s Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who worried that if France’s colonies could be disposed of, what about the
their own.

Colonial independence or empire were minor issues at the Potsdam Conference, much as they were at the Paris Peace
Conference of 1919. The new president, Harry S. Truman, while adhering to an anti-
colonial sentiment considered European issues paramount. Again, Ho wrote Truman
seeking his support for an independent Vietnam, and again there is no evidence that
the US Chief Executive ever received them.

Instead, the Allies agreed that Vietnam would be split at the 16th parallel. The
Japanese would surrender to the Chinese north of that line, and to the British to the
south. Second, the French – seated at table at Potsdam, got agreement that, following the
removal of the Japanese, their French Indo-
Chinese colonies be returned to them.

Even before the guns went silent in Europe, French troops sailed on American
transports for Indo-China. With the end of
the war in the Pacific, French forces took
control from the British and Chinese and
began restoring their empire.

Undaunted, on September 2, 1945, Ho
Chi Minh proclaimed Vietnamese
independence using the same language as
America’s Declaration from 1776. As the
Cold War began between the western allies and the Soviet Union, Vietnam would shift in
importance and slowly events would unfold
to bring the US into the French colonial war.

Further Reading:
James H. Willbanks, Abandoning Vietnam: How
America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War
(Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas,
2008).
Frederik Logevall, Embers of War: The Fall of
an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam
Michael MacLear, The Ten Thousand Day War:
Vietnam: 1945 – 1975 (New York: St. Martin’s
Lewis Sorley, Thunderbolt, from the Battle of the
Bulge to Vietnam and Beyond: General
Creighton Abrams and the Army of His Times
Dixee Bartholomew-Feis, The OSS and Ho Chi
Minh: Unexpected Allies in the War Against
Japan (Lawrence, KS: University Press of
Kansas, 2006).
Robert D. Schulzinger, A Time for War: The
United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975 (New
York: Oxford University Press, 1997)

Announcements:
Twin Cities Civil War Round Table -
Feb. 19, 2013 Lincoln & Emancipation
www.tccwrt.com

info @ tccwrt.com
St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - Feb. 25, 2013
St. Croix Valley in Civil War - Steve Anderson - 715-
386-1268 - steveandhaines@comcast.net
Rochester WWII History Round Table – 507-280-9970;
www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org
Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium 13 April 2013,
http://www.tccwrt.com/symposium.html or
tccwrt@yahoo.com
Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000
Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345; 320-616-6050,
http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/
Air Show - Eden Prairie - July, 13-14, 2013;
http://www.airexpo-mn.org/ - 952-746-6100
Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail -
651-338-2717
CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafinn.org or
Bill at 952-201-8400
Minnesota Air Guard Museum -
www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523
Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.com
Fagen Museum in Granite Falls,
www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org. 320-564-6644
World War II Weekend, Historic Fort Snelling, 8-9
June 2013, ftnselling@mnhs.org
Civil War Weekend, Historic Fort Snelling, 17-18
August 2013, ftmselling@mnhs.org

Round Table Schedule 2013
14 Mar. Military Intelligence Language
School
28 Mar. WW2 in the Middle East
11 Apr. Mobilization of the National Guard in
World War II (Topic change.)
9 May Kampgruppe Peiper at Malmedy

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one
of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at
cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Areas under Japanese Control when Japan Surrendered.

Japan’s Centrifugal Offensive in SE Asia, 1941
USMA History Department Map Atlas online