
The Round Tablette

Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)

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Welcome to the February meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight's speaker is James H. Willbanks, who holds the General of the Army George C. Marshall Chair of Military History, and is Director of the Department of Military History U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He is the author of the book, *Abandoning Vietnam*. Our panel of veterans will demonstrate the linkage of World War II to the American involvement in Southeast Asia.

For America, the connection between World War II and the Vietnam conflict began at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the place where most of the travails of the twentieth century began. Heartened by the idealistic call for democracy, national self-determination, and anti-colonialism embedded in President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, an arrogant young Ho Chi Minh petitioned Wilson to help remove imperialist France from what was then known as Indo-China. The President, far more worried about German reparations, French security and the League of Nations, never received the future North Vietnamese leader's letter. Unsuccessful at liberating his homeland, Ho did become a national hero.

After World War I the French retained their colonial possessions, and Vietnamese nationalist forces intensified their efforts toward independence. During the late 1920s, these efforts expanded from agitation to assassination. French repression of dissent splintered the independence movement in the 1930s.

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 re-distribution, and instead, focused on independence, setting up guerrilla 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* (New York: Random House, 2012).

Michael MacLear, *The Ten Thousand Day War: Vietnam: 1945 – 1975* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981).

Lewis Sorley, *Thunderbolt, from the Battle of the Bulge to Vietnam and Beyond: General Creighton Abrams and the Army of His Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

Dixie 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 – rossandhaines@comcast.net
Rochester WWII History Round Table –507-280-9970;
www.wv2roundtable-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.com - 651-338-2717

CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafmn.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

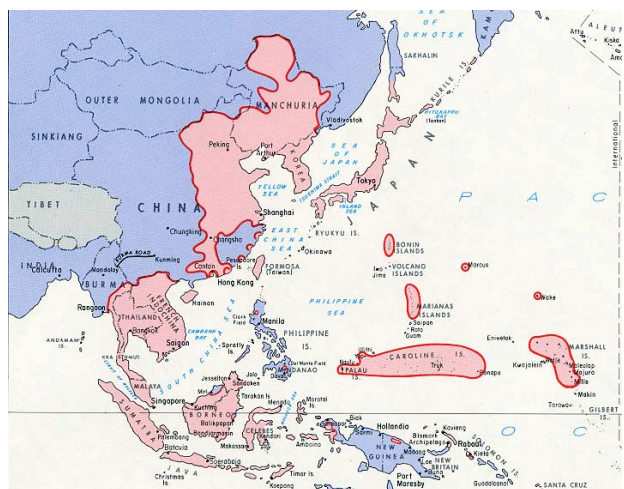
World War II Weekend, Historic Fort Snelling, 8-9 June 2013, ftnselling@mnhs.org

Civil War Weekend, Historic Fort Snelling, 17-18 August 2013, ftnselling@mnhs.org

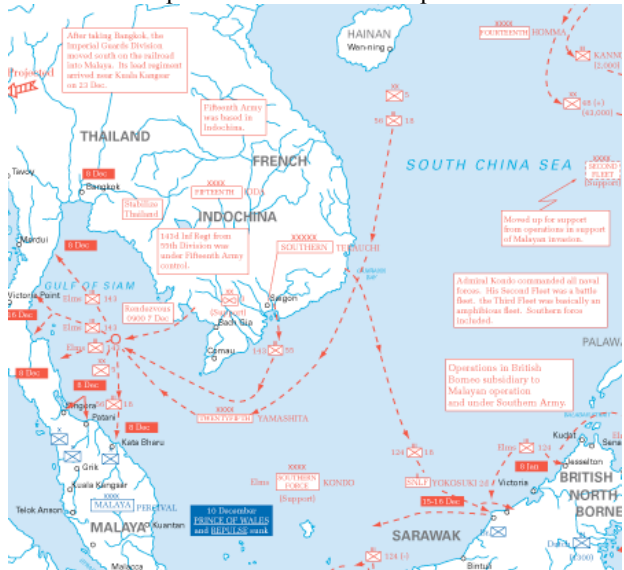
Round Table Schedule 2013

- 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 Kampfgruppe 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