

The Vietnam War



The Bitter End 1969 - 1975

1969

January 1, 1969 - Henry Cabot Lodge, former American ambassador to South Vietnam, is nominated by President-elect Nixon to be the senior U.S negotiator at the Paris peace talks.

January 20, 1969 - Richard M. Nixon is inaugurated as the 37th U.S. President and declares "...the greatest honor history can bestow is the title of peacemaker. This honor now beckons America..." He is the fifth President coping with Vietnam and had successfully campaigned on a pledge of "peace with honor."

January 22, 1969 - Operation Dewey Canyon, the last major operation by U.S. Marines begins in the Da Krong valley.

January 25, 1969 - Paris peace talks open with the U.S., South Vietnam, North Vietnam and the Viet Cong all in attendance.

February 23, 1969 - Viet Cong attack 110 targets throughout South Vietnam including Saigon.

February 25, 1969 - 36 U.S. Marines are killed by NVA who raid their base camp near the Demilitarized Zone.

March 4, 1969 - President Nixon threatens to resume bombing North Vietnam in retaliation for Viet Cong offenses in the South.

March 15, 1969 - U.S. troops go on the offensive inside the Demilitarized Zone for the first time since 1968.

March 1969 - Letters from Vietnam veteran Ronald Ridenhour result in a U.S. Army investigation into the My Lai massacre.

March 17, 1969 - President Nixon authorizes Operation Menu, the secret bombing of Cambodia by B-52s, targeting North Vietnamese supply sanctuaries located along the border of Vietnam.

April 9, 1969 - 300 anti-war students at Harvard University seize the administration building, throw out eight deans, then lock themselves in. They are later forcibly ejected.

April 30, 1969 - U.S. troop levels peak at 543,400. There have been 33,641 Americans killed by now, a total greater than the Korean War.

May 1969 - The *New York Times* breaks the news of the secret bombing of Cambodia. As a result, Nixon orders FBI wiretaps on the telephones of four journalists, along with 13 government officials to determine the source of news leak.

May 10-May 20 - Forty-six men of the 101st Airborne die during a fierce ten-day battle at 'Hamburger Hill' in the A Shau Valley near Hue. 400 others are wounded. After the hill is taken, the troops are then ordered to abandon it by their commander. NVA then move in and take back the hill unopposed.

The costly assault and its confused aftermath provokes a political outcry back in the U.S. that American lives are being wasted in Vietnam. One Senator labels the assault "senseless and irresponsible."

It is the beginning of the end for America in Vietnam as Washington now orders MACV Commander Gen. Creighton Abrams to avoid such encounters in the future. 'Hamburger Hill' is the last major search and destroy mission by U.S. troops during the war. Small unit actions will now be used instead.

A long period of decline in morale and discipline begins among American draftees serving in Vietnam involuntarily. Drug usage becomes rampant as nearly 50 percent experiment with marijuana, opium, or heroin which are easy to obtain on the streets of Saigon. U.S. military hospitals later become deluged with drug related cases as drug abuse casualties far outnumber casualties of war.

May 14, 1969 - During his first TV speech on Vietnam, President Nixon presents a peace plan in which America and North Vietnam would simultaneously pull out of South Vietnam over the next year. The offer is rejected by Hanoi.

June 8, 1969 - President Nixon meets South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu at Midway Island and informs him U.S. troop levels are going to be sharply reduced. During a press briefing with Thieu, Nixon announces "Vietnamization" of the war and a U.S. troop withdrawal of 25,000 men.

June 27, 1969 - *Life* magazine displays portrait photos of all 242 Americans killed in Vietnam during the previous week, including the 46 killed at 'Hamburger Hill.' The photos have a stunning impact on Americans nationwide as they view the once smiling young faces of the dead.

July 1969 - President Nixon, through a French emissary, sends a secret letter to Ho Chi Minh urging him to settle the war, while at the same time threatening to resume bombing if peace talks remain stalled as of November 1. In August, Hanoi responds by repeating earlier demands for Viet Cong participation in a coalition government in South Vietnam.

July 8, 1969 - The very first U.S. troop withdrawal occurs as 800 men from the 9th Infantry Division are sent home. The phased troop withdrawal will occur in 14 stages from July 1969 through November 1972.

July 17, 1969 - Secretary of State William Rogers accuses Hanoi of "lacking humanity" in the treatment of American POWs.

July 25, 1969 - The "Nixon Doctrine" is made public. It advocates U.S. military and economic assistance to nations around the world struggling against Communism, but no more Vietnam-style ground wars involving American troops. The emphasis is thus placed on local military self-sufficiency, backed by U.S. air power and technical assistance to assure security.

July 30, 1969 - President Nixon visits U.S. troops and President Thieu in Vietnam. This is Nixon's only trip to Vietnam during his presidency.

August 4, 1969 - Henry Kissinger conducts his first secret meeting in Paris with representatives from Hanoi.

August 12, 1969 - Viet Cong begin a new offensive attacking 150 targets throughout South Vietnam.

September 2, 1969 - Ho Chi Minh dies of a heart attack at age 79. He is succeeded by Le Duan, who publicly reads the last will of Ho Chi Minh urging the North Vietnamese to fight on "until the last Yankee has gone."

September 5, 1969 - The U.S. Army brings murder charges against Lt. William Calley concerning the massacre of Vietnamese civilians at My Lai in March of 1968.

September 16, 1969 - President Nixon orders the withdrawal of 35,000 soldiers from Vietnam and a reduction in draft calls.

October 1969 - An opinion poll indicates 71 percent of Americans approve of President Nixon's Vietnam policy.

October 15, 1969 - The 'Moratorium' peace demonstration is held in Washington and several U.S. cities.

Demonstration organizers had received praises from North Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, who stated in a letter to them "...may your fall offensive succeed splendidly," marking the first time Hanoi publicly acknowledged the American anti-war movement. Dong's comments infuriate American conservatives including Vice President Spiro Agnew who lambastes the

protesters as Communist "dupes" comprised of "an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals."

November 3, 1969 - President Nixon delivers a major TV speech asking for support from "the great silent majority of my fellow Americans" for his Vietnam strategy. "...the more divided we are at home, the less likely the enemy is to negotiate at Paris...North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that."

November 15, 1969 - The 'Mobilization' peace demonstration draws an estimated 250,000 in Washington for the largest anti-war protest in U.S. history.

November 16, 1969 - For the first time, the U.S. Army publicly discusses events surrounding the My Lai massacre.

December 1, 1969 - The first draft lottery since World War II is held in New York City. Each day of the year is randomly assigned a number from 1-365. Those with birthdays on days that wind up with a low number will likely be drafted.

December 15, 1969 - President Nixon orders an additional 50,000 soldiers out of Vietnam.

December 20, 1969 - A frustrated Henry Cabot Lodge quits his post as chief U.S. negotiator at the Paris peace talks.

By year's end, America's fighting strength in Vietnam has been reduced by 115,000 men. 40,024 Americans have now been killed in Vietnam. Over the next few years, the South Vietnamese Army will be boosted to over 500,000 men in accordance with 'Vietnamization' of the war in which they will take over the fighting from Americans.

1970

February 2, 1970 - B-52 bombers strike the Ho Chi Minh trail in retaliation for the increasing number of Viet Cong raids throughout the South.

February 21, 1970 - Although the official peace talks remain deadlocked in Paris, behind the scenes, Henry Kissinger begins a series of secret talks with North Vietnam's Le Duc Tho, which will go on for two years.

March 18, 1970 - Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia is deposed by General Lon Nol.

Sihanouk, who had been out of the country at the time of the coup, then aligns with Cambodian Communists, known as the Khmer Rouge, in an effort to oust Lon Nol's regime.

The Khmer Rouge are led by an unknown figure named Pol Pot, who eagerly capitalizes on the enormous prestige and popularity of Prince Sihanouk to increase support for his Khmer Rouge movement among Cambodians. Pol Pot will later violently oust Lon Nol then begin a radical

experiment to create an agrarian utopia, resulting in the deaths of 25 percent of the country's population (2,000,000 persons) from starvation, overwork and systematic executions.

March 20, 1970 - Cambodian troops under Gen. Lon Nol attack Khmer Rouge and North Vietnamese forces inside Cambodia. At the White House, Nixon and top aides discuss plans to assist Lon Nol's pro-American regime.

March 31, 1970 - The U.S. Army brings murder charges against Captain Ernest L. Medina concerning the massacre of Vietnamese civilians at My Lai in March of 1968.

April 20, 1970 - President Nixon announces the withdrawal of another 150,000 Americans from Vietnam within a year.

April 30, 1970 - President Nixon stuns Americans by announcing U.S. and South Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia "...not for the purpose of expanding the war into Cambodia but for the purpose of ending the war in Vietnam and winning the just peace we desire." The announcement generates a tidal wave of protest by politicians, the press, students, professors, clergy members, business leaders, and many average Americans against Nixon and the Vietnam War.

The incursion is in response to continuing Communist gains against Lon Nol's forces and is also intended to weaken overall NVA military strength as a prelude to U.S. departure from Vietnam.

May 1, 1970 - May Day, the traditional Communist holiday. A combined force of 15,000 U.S. and South Vietnamese soldiers attack NVA supply bases inside Cambodia. However, throughout this offensive, NVA and Viet Cong carefully avoid large-scale battles and instead withdraw westward, further into Cambodia, leaving behind their base camps containing huge stores of weapons and ammunition.

May 1, 1970 - President Nixon calls anti-war students "bums blowing up campuses."

May 2, 1970 - American college campuses erupt in protest over the invasion of Cambodia.

May 4, 1970 - At Kent State University in Ohio, National Guardsmen shoot and kill four student protesters and wound nine.

In response to the killings, over 400 colleges and universities across America shut down. In Washington, nearly 100,000 protesters surround various government buildings including the White House and historical monuments. On an impulse, President Nixon exits the White House and pays a late night surprise visit to the Lincoln Memorial and chats with young protesters.

May 6, 1970 - In Saigon over the past week, 450 civilians were killed during Viet Cong terrorist raids throughout the city, the highest weekly death toll to date.

June 3, 1970 - NVA begin a new offensive toward Phnom Penh in Cambodia. The U.S. provides air strikes to prevent the defeat of Lon Nol's inexperienced young troops.

June 22, 1970 - American usage of jungle defoliants in Vietnam is halted.

June 24, 1970 - The U.S. Senate repeals the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

June 30, 1970 - U.S. troops withdraw from Cambodia. Over 350 Americans died during the incursion.

August 11, 1970 - South Vietnamese troops take over the defense of border positions from U.S. troops.

August 24, 1970 - Heavy B-52 bombing raids occur along the Demilitarized Zone.

September 5, 1970 - Operation Jefferson Glenn, the last U.S. offensive in Vietnam begins in Thua Thien Province.

October 7, 1970 - During a TV speech, President Nixon proposes a "standstill" cease-fire in which all troops would stop shooting and remain in place pending a formal peace agreement. Hanoi does not respond.

October 24, 1970 - South Vietnamese troops begin a new offensive into Cambodia.

November 12, 1970 - The military trial of Lt. William Calley begins at Fort Benning, Georgia, concerning the massacre of Vietnamese civilians at My Lai.

November 20, 1970 - American troop levels drop to 334,600.

December 10, 1970 - President Nixon warns Hanoi that more bombing raids may occur if North Vietnamese attacks continue against the South.

December 22, 1970 - The Cooper-Church amendment to the U.S. defense appropriations bill forbids the use of any U.S. ground forces in Laos or Cambodia.

American troop levels drop to 280,000 by year's end. During the year, an estimated 60,000 soldiers experimented with drugs, according to the U.S. command. There were also over 200 incidents of "fragging" in which unpopular officers were attacked with fragmentation grenades by men under their command. In addition, many units are now plagued by racial unrest, reflecting the disharmony back home.

1971

January 4, 1971 - President Nixon announces "the end is in sight."

January 19, 1971 - U.S. fighter-bombers launch heavy air strikes against NVA supply camps in Laos and Cambodia.

January 30-April 6 - Operation Lam Son 719, an all-South Vietnamese ground offensive, occurs as 17,000 South Vietnamese soldiers attack 22,000 NVA inside Laos in an attempt to sever the Ho Chi Minh trail. Aided by heavy U.S. artillery and air strikes, along with American helicopter lifts, South Vietnamese troops advance to their first objective but then stall thus allowing the NVA time to bring in massive troop reinforcements. By battle's end, 40,000 NVA pursue 8000 South Vietnamese survivors back across the border. The South Vietnamese suffer 7682 casualties, nearly half the original force. The U.S. suffers 215 killed, over 100 helicopters lost, and over 600 damaged while supporting the offensive. NVA losses are estimated up to 20,000 as a result of the intense American bombardment. Also among those killed was *Life* magazine photographer Larry Burrows who had been working in Vietnam for ten years.

Although an upbeat President Nixon declares after the battle that "Vietnamization has succeeded," the failed offensive indicates true Vietnamization of the war may be difficult to achieve.

March 1971 - Opinion polls indicate Nixon's approval rating among Americans has dropped to 50 percent, while approval of his Vietnam strategy has slipped to just 34 percent. Half of all Americans polled believe the war in Vietnam to be "morally wrong."

March 1, 1971 - The Capitol building in Washington is damaged by a bomb apparently planted in protest of the invasion of Laos.

March 10, 1971 - China pledges complete support for North Vietnam's struggle against the U.S.

March 29, 1971 - Lt. William Calley is found guilty of the murder of 22 My Lai civilians. He is sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labor, however, the sentence is later reduced to 20 years, then 10 years. Out of 16 military personnel charged with offenses concerning the My Lai massacre, only five were actually court-martialed, and only Calley was ever found guilty.

April 1, 1971 - President Nixon orders Calley released pending his appeal.

April 19, 1971 - 'Vietnam Veterans Against the War' begin a week of nationwide protests.

April 24, 1971 - Another mass demonstration is held in Washington attracting nearly 200,000.

April 29, 1971 - Total American deaths in Vietnam surpass 45,000.

April 30, 1971 - The last U.S. Marine combat units depart Vietnam.

May 3-5 - A mass arrest of 12,000 protesters occurs in Washington.

June 1971 - During a college commencement speech, Senator Mike Mansfield labels the Vietnam war "a tragic mistake."

June 13, 1971 - The *New York Times* begins publication of the 'Pentagon Papers,' a secret Defense Department archive of the paperwork involved in decisions made by previous White

House administrations concerning Vietnam. Publication of the classified documents infuriates President Nixon.

June 15, 1971 - Nixon attempts to stop further publication of the Pentagon Papers through legal action against the *Times* in the U.S. District Court.

June 18, 1971 - The *Washington Post* begins its publication of the Pentagon Papers.

The *Times* and *Post* now become involved in legal wrangling with the Nixon administration which soon winds up before the U.S. Supreme Court.

June 22, 1971 - A non-binding resolution passed in the U.S. Senate urges the removal of all American troops from Vietnam by year's end.

June 28, 1971 - The source of the Pentagon Papers leak, Daniel Ellsberg, surrenders to police.

June 30, 1971 - The U.S. Supreme Court rules 6-3 in favor of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* publication of the Pentagon Papers.

June 1971 - George Jackson replaces William Colby as head of CORDS.

July 1, 1971 - 6100 American soldiers depart Vietnam, a daily record.

July 15, 1971 - President Nixon announces he will visit Communist China in 1972, a major diplomatic breakthrough.

July 17, 1971 - The 'Plumbers' unit is established in the White House by Nixon aides John Ehrlichman and Charles Colson to investigate Daniel Ellsberg and to 'plug' various news leaks. Colson also compiles an 'enemies list' featuring the names of 200 prominent Americans considered to be anti-Nixon.

August 2, 1971 - The U.S. admits there are some 30,000 CIA-sponsored irregulars operating in Laos.

August 18, 1971 - Australia and New Zealand announce the pending withdrawal of their troops from Vietnam.

September 22, 1971 - Captain Ernest L. Medina is acquitted of all charges concerning the massacre of Vietnamese civilians at My Lai.

October 3, 1971 - Running un-opposed, President Thieu of South Vietnam is re-elected.

October 9, 1971 - Members of the U.S. 1st Air Cavalry Division refuse an assignment to go out on patrol by expressing "a desire not to go." This is one in a series of American ground troops engaging in "combat refusal."

October 31, 1971 - The first Viet Cong POWs are released by Saigon. There are nearly 3000 Viet Cong prisoners.

December 17, 1971 - U.S. troop levels drop to 156,800.

December 26-30 - The U.S. heavily bombs military installations in North Vietnam citing violations of the agreements surrounding the 1968 bombing halt.

1972

January 25, 1972 - President Nixon announces a proposed eight point peace plan for Vietnam and also reveals that Kissinger has been secretly negotiating with the North Vietnamese. However, Hanoi rejects Nixon's peace overture.

February 21-28 - President Nixon visits China and meets with Mao Zedong and Prime Minister Zhou Enlai to forge new diplomatic relations with the Communist nation. Nixon's visit causes great concern in Hanoi that their wartime ally China might be inclined to agree to an unfavorable settlement of the war to improve Chinese relations with the U.S.

March 10, 1972 - The U.S. 101st Airborne Division is withdrawn from Vietnam.

March 23, 1972 - The U.S. stages a boycott of the Paris peace talks as President Nixon accuses Hanoi of refusing to "negotiate seriously."

March-September - The Eastertide Offensive occurs as 200,000 North Vietnamese soldiers under the command of General Vo Nguyen Giap wage an all-out attempt to conquer South Vietnam. The offensive is a tremendous gamble by Giap and is undertaken as a result of U.S. troop withdrawal, the strength of the anti-war movement in America likely preventing a U.S. retaliatory response, and the poor performance of South Vietnam's Army during Operation Lam Son 719 in 1971.

Giap's immediate strategy involves the capture of Quang Tri in the northern part of South Vietnam, Kontum in the mid section, and An Loc in the south.

North Vietnam's Communist leaders also hope a successful offensive will harm Richard Nixon politically during this presidential election year in America, much as President Lyndon Johnson had suffered as a result of the 1968 Tet Offensive. The Communists believe Nixon's removal would disrupt American aid to South Vietnam.

March 30, 1972 - NVA Eastertide attack on Quang Tri begins.

April 2, 1972 - In response to the Eastertide Offensive, President Nixon authorizes the U.S. 7th Fleet to target NVA troops massed around the Demilitarized Zone with air strikes and naval gunfire.

April 4, 1972 - In a further response to Eastertide, President Nixon authorizes a massive bombing campaign targeting all NVA troops invading South Vietnam along with B-52 air strikes against North Vietnam. "The bastards have never been bombed like they're going to be bombed this time," Nixon privately declares.

April 10, 1972 - Heavy B-52 bombardments ranging 145 miles into North Vietnam begin.

April 12, 1972 - NVA Eastertide attack on Kontum begins in central South Vietnam. If the attack succeeds, South Vietnam will effectively be cut in two.

April 15, 1972 - Hanoi and Haiphong harbor are bombed by the U.S.

April 15-20 - Protests against the bombings erupt in America.

April 19, 1972 - NVA Eastertide attack on An Loc begins.

April 27, 1972 - Paris peace talks resume.

April 30, 1972 - U.S. troop levels drop to 69,000.

May 1, 1972 - South Vietnamese abandon Quang Tri City to the NVA.

May 4, 1972 - The U.S. and South Vietnam suspend participation in the Paris peace talks indefinitely. 125 additional U.S. warplanes are ordered to Vietnam.

May 8, 1972 - In response to the ongoing NVA Eastertide Offensive, President Nixon announces Operation Linebacker I, the mining of North Vietnam's harbors along with intensified bombing of roads, bridges, and oil facilities. The announcement brings international condemnation of the U.S. and ignites more anti-war protests in America.

During an air strike conducted by South Vietnamese pilots, Napalm bombs are accidentally dropped on South Vietnamese civilians, including children. Filmed footage and a still photo of a badly burned nude girl fleeing the destruction of her hamlet becomes yet another enduring image of the war.

May 9, 1972 - Operation Linebacker I commences with U.S. jets laying mines in Haiphong harbor.

May 1, 1972 - NVA capture Quang Tri City.

May 15, 1972 - The headquarters for the U.S. Army in Vietnam is decommissioned.

May 17, 1972 - According to U.S. reports, Operation Linebacker I is damaging North Vietnam's ability to supply NVA troops engaged in the Eastertide Offensive.

May 22-30 - President Nixon visits the Soviet Union and meets with Leonid Brezhnev to forge new diplomatic relations with the Communist nation. Nixon's visit causes great concern in Hanoi that their Soviet ally might be inclined to agree to an unfavorable settlement of the war to improve Soviet relations with the U.S.

May 30, 1972 - NVA attack on Kontum is thwarted by South Vietnamese troops, aided by massive U.S. air strikes.

June 1, 1972 - Hanoi admits Operation Linebacker I is causing severe disruptions.

June 9, 1972 - Senior U.S. military advisor John Paul Vann is killed in a helicopter crash near Pleiku. He had been assisting South Vietnamese troops in the defense of Kontum.

June 17, 1972 - Five burglars are arrested inside the Watergate building in Washington while attempting to plant hidden microphones in the Democratic National Committee offices. Subsequent investigations will reveal they have ties to the Nixon White House.

June 28, 1972 - South Vietnamese troops begin a counter-offensive to retake Quang Tri Province, aided by U.S. Navy gunfire and B-52 bombardments.

June 30, 1972 - General Frederick C. Weyand replaces Gen. Abrams as MACV commander in Vietnam.

July 11, 1972 - NVA attack on An Loc is thwarted by South Vietnamese troops aided by B-52 air strikes.

July 13, 1972 - Paris peace talks resume.

July 14, 1972 - The Democrats choose Senator George McGovern of South Dakota as their presidential nominee. McGovern, an outspoken critic of the war, advocates "immediate and complete withdrawal."

July 18, 1972 - During a visit to Hanoi, actress Jane Fonda broadcasts anti-war messages via Hanoi Radio.

July 19, 1972 - South Vietnamese troops begin a major counter-offensive against NVA in Binh Dinh Province.

August 1, 1972 - Henry Kissinger meets again with Le Duc Tho in Paris

August 23, 1972 - The last U.S. combat troops depart Vietnam.

September 16, 1972 - Quang Tri City is recaptured by South Vietnamese troops.

September 29, 1972 - Heavy U.S. air raids against airfields in North Vietnam destroy 10 percent of their air force.

October 8, 1972 - The long-standing diplomatic stalemate between Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho finally ends as both sides agree to major concessions. The U.S. will allow North Vietnamese troops already in South Vietnam to remain there, while North Vietnam drops its demand for the removal of South Vietnam's President Thieu and the dissolution of his government.

Although Kissinger's staff members privately express concerns over allowing NVA troops to remain in the South, Kissinger rebuffs them, saying, "I want to end this war before the election."

October 22, 1972 - In Saigon, Kissinger visits President Thieu to discuss the peace proposal.

Meetings between Kissinger and Thieu go badly as an emotional Thieu adamantly opposes allowing North Vietnamese troops to remain indefinitely in South Vietnam. An angry Kissinger reports Thieu's reaction to President Nixon, who then threatens Thieu with a total cut-off of all American aid. But Thieu does not back down. Kissinger then returns to Washington.

October 22, 1972 - Operation Linebacker I ends. U.S. warplanes flew 40,000 sorties and dropped over 125,000 tons of bombs during the bombing campaign which effectively disrupted North Vietnam's Eastertide Offensive.

During the failed offensive, the North suffered an estimated 100,000 military casualties and lost half its tanks and artillery. Leader of the offensive, legendary General Vo Nguyen Giap, the victor at Dien Bien Phu, was then quietly ousted in favor of his deputy Gen. Van Tien Dung. 40,000 South Vietnamese soldiers died stopping the offensive, in the heaviest fighting of the entire war.

October 24, 1972 - President Thieu publicly denounces Kissinger's peace proposal.

October 26, 1972 - Radio Hanoi reveals terms of the peace proposal and accuses the U.S. of attempting to sabotage the settlement. At the White House, now a week before the presidential election, Henry Kissinger holds a press briefing and declares "We believe that peace is at hand. We believe that an agreement is in sight."

November 7, 1972 - Richard M. Nixon wins the presidential election in the biggest landslide to date in U.S. history.

November 14, 1972 - President Nixon sends a letter to President Thieu secretly pledging "to take swift and severe retaliatory action" if North Vietnam violates the proposed peace treaty.

November 30, 1972 - American troop withdrawal from Vietnam is completed, although there are still 16,000 Army advisors and administrators remaining to assist South Vietnam's military forces.

December 13, 1972 - In Paris, peace negotiations between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho collapse after Kissinger presents a list of 69 changes demanded by President Thieu.

President Nixon now issues an ultimatum to North Vietnam that serious negotiations must resume within 72 hours. Hanoi does not respond. As a result, Nixon orders Operation Linebacker II, eleven days and nights of maximum force bombing against military targets in Hanoi by B-52 bombers.

December 18, 1972 - Operation Linebacker II begins. The so called 'Christmas bombings' are widely denounced by American politicians, the media, and various world leaders including the Pope. North Vietnamese filmed footage of civilian casualties further fuels the outrage. In addition, a few downed B-52 pilots make public statements in North Vietnam against the bombing.

December 26, 1972 - North Vietnam agrees to resume peace negotiations within five days of the end of bombing.

December 29, 1972 - Operation Linebacker II ends what had been the most intensive bombing campaign of the entire war with over 100,000 bombs dropped on Hanoi and Haiphong. Fifteen of the 121 B-52s participating were shot down by the North Vietnamese who fired 1200 SAMs. There were 1318 civilian deaths from the bombing, according to Hanoi.

1973

January 8, 1973 - Kissinger and Le Duc Tho resume negotiations in Paris.

January 9, 1973 - All remaining differences are resolved between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho.

President Thieu, once again threatened by Nixon with a total cut-off of American aid to South Vietnam, now unwillingly accepts the peace agreement, which still allows North Vietnamese troops to remain in South Vietnam. Thieu labels the terms "tantamount to surrender" for South Vietnam.

January 23, 1973 - President Nixon announces that an agreement has been reached which will "end the war and bring peace with honor."

January 27, 1973 - The Paris Peace Accords are signed by the U.S., North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the Viet Cong. Under the terms, the U.S. agrees to immediately halt all military activities and withdraw all remaining military personnel within 60 days. The North Vietnamese agree to an immediate cease-fire and the release of all American POWs within 60 days. An estimated 150,000 North Vietnamese soldiers presently in South Vietnam are allowed to remain. Vietnam is still divided. South Vietnam is considered to be one country with two governments, one led by President Thieu, the other led by Viet Cong, pending future reconciliation.

January 27, 1973 - Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird announces the draft is ended in favor of voluntary enlistment.

January 27, 1973 - The last American soldier to die in combat in Vietnam, Lt. Col. William B. Nolde, is killed.

February 12, 1973 - Operation Homecoming begins the release of 591 American POWs from Hanoi.

March 29, 1973 - The last remaining American troops withdraw from Vietnam as President Nixon declares "the day we have all worked and prayed for has finally come."

America's longest war, and its first defeat, thus concludes. During 15 years of military involvement, over 2 million Americans served in Vietnam with 500,000 seeing actual combat. 47,244 were killed in action, including 8000 airmen. There were 10,446 non-combat deaths. 153,329 were seriously wounded, including 10,000 amputees. Over 2400 American POWs/MIAs were unaccounted for as of 1973.

April 1973 - President Nixon and President Thieu meet at San Clemente, California. Nixon renews his earlier secret pledge to respond militarily if North Vietnam violates the peace agreement.

April 1, 1973 - Captain Robert White, the last known American POW is released.

April 30, 1973 - The Watergate scandal results in the resignation of top Nixon aides H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman.

June 19, 1973 - The U.S. Congress passes the Case-Church Amendment which forbids any further U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia, effective August 15, 1973. The veto-proof vote is 278-124 in the House and 64-26 in the Senate.

The Amendment paves the way for North Vietnam to wage yet another invasion of the South, this time without fear of U.S. bombing.

June 24, 1973 - Graham Martin becomes the new U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam.

July 1973 - The U.S. Navy removes mines from ports in North Vietnam which had been installed during Operation Linebacker.

July 16, 1973 - The U.S. Senate Armed Forces Committee begins hearings into the secret bombing of Cambodia during 1969-70.

July 17, 1973 - Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger testifies before the Armed Forces Committee that 3500 bombing raids were launched into Cambodia to protect American troops by targeting NVA positions. The extent of Nixon's secret bombing campaign angers many in Congress and results in the first call for Nixon's impeachment.

August 14, 1973 - U.S. bombing activities in Cambodia are halted in accordance with the Congressional ban resulting from the Case-Church amendment.

August 22, 1973 - Henry Kissinger is appointed by President Nixon as the new Secretary of State, replacing William Rogers.

September 22, 1973 - South Vietnamese troops assault NVA near Pleiku.

October 10, 1973 - Political scandal results in the resignation of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew. He is replaced by Congressman Gerald R. Ford.

November 7, 1973 - Congress passes the Powers Resolution requiring the President to obtain the support of Congress within 90 days of sending American troops abroad.

December 3, 1973 - Viet Cong destroy 18 million gallons of fuel stored near Saigon.

1974

May 9, 1974 - Congress begins impeachment proceedings against President Nixon stemming from the Watergate scandal.

August 9, 1974 - Richard M. Nixon resigns the presidency as result of Watergate. Gerald R. Ford is sworn in as the 38th U.S. President, becoming the 6th President coping with Vietnam.

September 1974 - The U.S. Congress appropriates only \$700 million for South Vietnam. This leaves the South Vietnamese Army under-funded and results in a decline of military readiness and morale.

September 16, 1974 - President Gerald R. Ford announces a clemency program for draft evaders and military deserters. The program runs through March 31, 1975, and requires fugitives to take an oath of allegiance and also perform up to two years of community service. Out of an estimated 124,000 men eligible, about 22,500 take advantage of the offer.

October - The Politburo in North Vietnam decides to launch an invasion of South Vietnam in 1975.

November 19, 1974 - William Calley is freed after serving 3 1/2 years under house arrest following his conviction for the murder of 22 My Lai civilians.

December 13, 1974 - North Vietnam violates the Paris peace treaty and tests President Ford's resolve by attacking Phuoc Long Province in South Vietnam. President Ford responds with diplomatic protests but no military force in compliance with the Congressional ban on all U.S. military activity in Southeast Asia.

December 18, 1974 - North Vietnam's leaders meet in Hanoi to form a plan for final victory.

1975

January 8, 1975 - NVA general staff plan for the invasion of South Vietnam by 20 divisions is approved by North Vietnam's Politburo. By now, the Soviet-supplied North Vietnamese Army is the fifth largest in the world. It anticipates a two year struggle for victory. But in reality, South Vietnam's forces will collapse in only 55 days.

January 14, 1975 - Testifying before Congress, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger states that the U.S. is not living up to its earlier promise to South Vietnam's President Thieu of "severe retaliatory action" in the event North Vietnam violated the Paris peace treaty.

January 21, 1975 - During a press conference, President Ford states the U.S. is unwilling to re-enter the war.

February 5, 1975 - NVA military leader General Van Tien Dung secretly crosses into South Vietnam to take command of the final offensive.

March 10, 1975 - The final offensive begins as 25,000 NVA attack Ban Me Thuot located in the Central Highlands.

March 11, 1975 - Ban Me Thuot falls after half of the 4000 South Vietnamese soldiers defending it surrender or desert.

March 13, 1975 - President Thieu decides to abandon the Highlands region and two northern provinces to the NVA. This results in a mass exodus of civilians and soldiers, clogging roads and bringing general chaos. NVA then shell the disorganized retreat which becomes known as "the convoy of tears."

March 18, 1975 - Realizing the South Vietnamese Army is nearing collapse, NVA leaders meet and decide to accelerate their offensive to achieve total victory before May 1.

March 19, 1975 - Quang Tri City falls to NVA.

March 24, 1975 - Tam Ky over-run by NVA.

March 25, 1975 - Hue falls without resistance after a three day siege. South Vietnamese troops now break and run from other threatened areas. Millions of refugees flee south.

March 26, 1975 - Chu Lai is evacuated.

March 28, 1975 - Da Nang is shelled as 35,000 NVA prepare to attack.

March 30, 1975 - Da Nang falls as 100,000 South Vietnamese soldiers surrender after being abandoned by their commanding officers.

March 31, 1975 - NVA begin the 'Ho Chi Minh Campaign,' the final push toward Saigon.

April 9, 1975 - NVA close in on Xuan Loc, 38 miles from Saigon. 40,000 NVA attack the city and for the first time encounter stiff resistance from South Vietnamese troops.

April 20, 1975 - U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin meets with President Thieu and pressures him to resign given the gravity of the situation and the unlikelihood that Thieu could ever negotiate with the Communists.

April 21, 1975 - A bitter, tearful President Thieu resigns during a 90 minute rambling TV speech to the people of South Vietnam. Thieu reads from the letter sent by Nixon in 1972 pledging "severe retaliatory action" if South Vietnam was threatened. Thieu condemns the Paris Peace Accords, Henry Kissinger and the U.S. "The United States has not respected its promises. It is inhumane. It is untrustworthy. It is irresponsible." He is then ushered into exile in Taiwan, aided by the CIA.

April 22, 1975 - Xuan Loc falls to the NVA after a two week battle with South Vietnam's 18th Army Division which inflicted over 5000 NVA casualties and delayed the 'Ho Chi Minh Campaign' for two weeks.

April 23, 1975 - 100,000 NVA soldiers advance on Saigon which is now overflowing with refugees. On this same day, President Ford gives a at Tulane University stating the conflict in Vietnam is "a war that is finished as far as America is concerned."

April 27, 1975 - Saigon is encircled. 30,000 South Vietnamese soldiers are inside the city but are leaderless. NVA fire rockets into downtown civilian areas as the city erupts into chaos and widespread looting.

April 28, 1975 - 'Neutralist' General Duong Van "Big" Minh becomes the new president of South Vietnam and appeals for a cease-fire. His appeal is ignored.

April 29, 1975 - NVA shell Tan Son Nhut air base in Saigon, killing two U.S. Marines at the compound gate. Conditions then deteriorate as South Vietnamese civilians loot the air base. President Ford now orders Operation Frequent Wind, the helicopter evacuation of 7000 Americans and South Vietnamese from Saigon, which begins with the radio broadcast of the song "White Christmas" as a pre-arraigned code signal.

At Tan Son Nhut, frantic civilians begin swarming the helicopters. The evacuation is then shifted to the walled-in American embassy, which is secured by U.S. Marines in full combat gear. But the scene there also deteriorates, as thousands of civilians attempt to get into the compound.

Three U.S. aircraft carriers stand by off the coast of Vietnam to handle incoming Americans and South Vietnamese refugees. Many South Vietnamese pilots also land on the carriers, flying American-made helicopters which are then pushed overboard to make room for more arrivals. Filmed footage of the \$250,000 choppers being tossed into the sea becomes an enduring image of the war's end.

April 30, 1975 - At 8:35 a.m., the last Americans, ten Marines from the embassy, depart Saigon, concluding the United States presence in Vietnam. North Vietnamese troops pour into Saigon and encounter little resistance. By 11 a.m., the red and blue Viet Cong flag flies from the presidential palace. President Minh broadcasts a message of unconditional surrender. The war is over.