

The Vietnam War

Seeds of Conflict 1945 - 1960

1941

Communist activist Ho Chi Minh secretly returns to Vietnam after 30 years in exile and organizes a nationalist organization known as the Viet Minh (Vietnam Independence League). After Japanese troops occupy Vietnam during World War II, the U.S. military intelligence agency Office of Strategic Services (OSS) allies with Ho Chi Minh and his Viet Minh guerrillas to harass Japanese troops in the jungles and to help rescue downed American pilots.

1945

March 9, 1945 - Amid rumors of a possible American invasion, Japanese oust the French colonial government which had been operating independently and seize control of Vietnam, installing Bao Dai as Vietnam ruler.

Summer - Severe famine strikes Hanoi and surrounding areas eventually resulting in two million deaths from starvation out of a population of ten million. The famine generates political unrest and peasant revolts against the Japanese and remnants of French colonial society. Ho Chi Minh capitalizes on the turmoil by successfully spreading his Viet Minh movement.

July 1945 - Following the defeat of Nazi Germany, World War II Allies including the U.S., Britain, and Soviet Union, hold the Potsdam Conference in Germany to plan the post-war world. Vietnam is considered a minor item on the agenda.

In order to disarm the Japanese in Vietnam, the Allies divide the country in half at the 16th parallel. Chinese Nationalists will move in and disarm the Japanese north of the parallel while the British will move in and do the same in the south.

During the conference, representatives from France request the return of all French pre-war colonies in Southeast Asia (Indochina). Their request is granted. Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia will once again become French colonies following the removal of the Japanese.

August 1945 - Japanese surrender unconditionally. Vietnam's emperor, Bao Dai, abdicates. Ho Chi Minh's guerrillas occupy Hanoi and proclaim a provisional government.

September 2, 1945 - Japanese sign the surrender agreement in Tokyo Bay formally ending World War II in the Pacific. On this same day, Ho Chi Minh proclaims the independence of Vietnam by quoting from the text of the American Declaration of Independence which had been supplied to him by the OSS -- "We hold the truth that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This

immortal statement is extracted from the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. These are undeniable truths."

Ho declares himself president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and pursues American recognition but is repeatedly ignored by President Harry Truman.

September 13, 1945 - British forces arrive in Saigon, South Vietnam.

In North Vietnam, 150,000 Chinese Nationalist soldiers, consisting mainly of poor peasants, arrive in Hanoi after looting Vietnamese villages during their entire march down from China. They then proceed to loot Hanoi.

September 22, 1945 - In South Vietnam, 1400 French soldiers released by the British from former Japanese internment camps enter Saigon and go on a deadly rampage, attacking Viet Minh and killing innocent civilians including children, aided by French civilians who joined the rampage. An estimated 20,000 French civilians live in Saigon.

September 24, 1945 - In Saigon, Viet Minh successfully organize a general strike shutting down all commerce along with electricity and water supplies. In a suburb of Saigon, members of Binh Xuyen, a Vietnamese criminal organization, massacre 150 French and Eurasian civilians, including children.

September 26, 1945 - The first American death in Vietnam occurs, during the unrest in Saigon, as OSS officer Lt. Col. A. Peter Dewey is killed by Viet Minh guerrillas who mistook him for a French officer. Before his death, Dewey had filed a report on the deepening crisis in Vietnam, stating his opinion that the U.S. "ought to clear out of Southeast Asia."

October 1945 - 35,000 French soldiers under the command of World War II General Jacques Philippe Leclerc arrive in South Vietnam to restore French rule. Viet Minh immediately begin a guerrilla campaign to harass them. The French then succeed in expelling the Viet Minh from Saigon.

1946

February 1946 - The Chinese under Chiang Kai-shek agree to withdraw from North Vietnam and allow the French to return in exchange for French concessions in Shanghai and other Chinese ports.

March 1946 - Ho Chi Minh agrees to permit French troops to return to Hanoi temporarily in exchange for French recognition of his Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Chinese troops then depart.

May-September - Ho Chi Minh spends four months in France attempting to negotiate full independence and unity for Vietnam, but fails to obtain any guarantee from the French.

June 1946 - In a major affront to Ho Chi Minh, the French high commissioner for Indochina proclaims a separatist French-controlled government for South Vietnam (Republic of Chochinchina).

November 1946 - After a series of violent clashes with Viet Minh, French forces bombard Haiphong harbor and occupy Hanoi, forcing Ho Chi Minh and his Viet Minh forces to retreat into the jungle.

December 19, 1946 - In Hanoi, 30,000 Viet Minh launch their first large-scale attack against the French. Thus begins an eight year struggle known as the First Indochina War. "The resistance will be long and arduous, but our cause is just and we will surely triumph," declares Viet Minh military commander Vo Nguyen Giap. "If these [people] want a fight, they'll get it," French military commander Gen. Etienne Valluy states.

1947

October 7- December 22 - The French conduct Operation Lea, a series of attacks on Viet Minh guerrilla positions in North Vietnam near the Chinese border. Although the Viet Minh suffer over 9000 casualties, most of the 40,000 strong Viet Minh force slips away through gaps in the French lines.

1949

March 8, 1949 - The French install Bao Dai as head of state in South Vietnam.

July 1949 - The French establish the (South) Vietnamese National Army.

October 1949 - Mao Zedong's Communist forces defeat Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Army in the Chinese civil war. Mao's victory ignites American anti-Communist sentiment regarding Southeast Asia and will result in a White House foreign policy goal of "containment" of Communist expansion in the region.

1950

January 1950 - The People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union recognize Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

China then begins sending military advisors and modern weapons to the Viet Minh including automatic weapons, mortars, howitzers, and trucks. Much of the equipment is American-made and had belonged to the Chinese Nationalists before their defeat by Mao. With the influx of new equipment and Chinese advisors, General Giap transforms his guerrilla fighters into conventional army units including five light infantry divisions and one heavy division.

February 1950 - The United States and Britain recognize Bao Dai's French-controlled South Vietnam government.

February 1950 - Viet Minh begin an offensive against French outposts in North Vietnam near the Chinese border.

February 7, 1950 - In America, the era of 'McCarthyism' erupts as Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin gives a speech claiming the U.S. State Department harbors Communists. As a consequence of McCarthyism, no U.S. politician is willing to appear to be 'soft' on Communism.

June 30, 1950 - President Harry S. Truman orders U.S. ground troops into Korea following Communist North Korea's invasion of the South. In his message to the American people, Truman describes the invasion as a Moscow-backed attack by "monolithic world Communism."

July 26, 1950 - United States military involvement in Vietnam begins as President Harry Truman authorizes \$15 million in military aid to the French.

American military advisors will accompany the flow of U.S. tanks, planes, artillery and other supplies to Vietnam. Over the next four years, the U.S. will spend \$3 Billion on the French war and by 1954 will provide 80 percent of all war supplies used by the French.

September 16, 1950 - General Giap begins his main attack against French outposts near the Chinese border. As the outposts fall, the French lose 6000 men and large stores of military equipment to the Viet Minh.

September 27, 1950 - The U.S. establishes a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Saigon to aid the French Army.

1951

January 13, 1951 - 20,000 Viet Minh under Gen. Giap begin a series of attacks on fortified French positions in the Red River Delta (extending from Hanoi to the Gulf of Tonkin). The open areas of the Delta, in contrast to the jungle, allow French troops under the new command of Gen. Jean de Lattre to strike back with devastating results from the 'De Lattre Line' which encircles the region. 6000 Viet Minh die while assaulting the town of Vinh Yen near Hanoi in the first attack, causing Giap to withdraw.

March 23-28 - In the second attack, Giap targets the Mao Khe outpost near Haiphong. But Giap withdraws after being pounded by French naval gunfire and air strikes. 3000 Viet Minh are killed.

May 29-June 18 - Giap makes yet another attempt to break through the De Lattre Line, this time in the Day River area southeast of Hanoi. French reinforcements, combined with air strikes and armed boat attacks result in another defeat for Giap with 10,000 killed and wounded. Among the French casualties is Bernard de Lattre, the only son of General De Lattre.

June 9, 1951 - Giap begins a general withdrawal of Viet Minh troops from the Red River Delta.

September 1951 - Gen. De Lattre travels to Washington seeking more aid from the Pentagon.

November 16, 1951 - French forces link up at Hoa Binh southwest of Hanoi as Gen. De Lattre attempts to seize the momentum and lure Giap into a major battle.

November 20, 1951 - Stricken by cancer, ailing Gen. De Lattre is replaced by Gen. Raoul Salan. De Lattre returns home and dies in Paris two months later, just after being raised to the rank of Marshal.

December 9, 1951 - Giap begins a careful counter-offensive by attacking the French outpost at Tu Vu on the Black River. Giap now avoids conventional warfare and instead wages hit and run attacks followed by a retreat into the dense jungles. His goal is to cut French supply lines.

By year's end, French casualties in Vietnam surpass 90,000.

1952

January 12, 1952 - French supply lines to Hoa Binh along the Black River are cut. The road along Route Coloniale 6 is also cut.

February 22-26 - The French withdraw from Hoa Binh back to the De Lattre Line aided by a 30,000 round artillery barrage. Casualties for each side surpassed 5000 during the Black River skirmishes.

October 11, 1952 - Giap now attempts to draw the French out from the De Lattre Line by attacking along the Fan Si Pan mountain range between the Red and Black Rivers.

October 29, 1952 - The French counter Giap's move by launching Operation Lorraine targeting major Viet Minh supply bases in the Viet Bac region. But Giap outsmarts the French by ignoring their maneuvers and maintains his position along the Black River.

November 14-17 - The French cancel Operation Lorraine and withdraw back toward the De Lattre Line but must first fight off a Viet Minh ambush at Chan Muong.

1953

January 20, 1953 - Dwight D. Eisenhower, former five-star Army general and Allied commander in Europe during World War II, is inaugurated as the 34th U.S. President.

During his term, Eisenhower will greatly increase U.S. military aid to the French in Vietnam to prevent a Communist victory. U.S. military advisors will continue to accompany American supplies sent to Vietnam. To justify America's financial commitment, Eisenhower will cite a 'Domino Theory' in which a Communist victory in Vietnam would result in surrounding countries falling one after another like a "falling row of dominoes." The Domino Theory will be used by a succession of Presidents and their advisors to justify ever-deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

March 5, 1953 - Soviet leader Josef Stalin dies. The outspoken Nikita Khrushchev succeeds him.

July 27, 1953 - The Korean War ends as an armistice is signed dividing the country at the 38th parallel into Communist North and Democratic South. The armistice is seen by many in the international community as a potential model for resolving the ongoing conflict in Vietnam.

November 20, 1953 - The French under their new commander Gen. Henri Navarre begin Operation Castor, the construction of a series of entrenched outposts protecting a small air base in the isolated jungle valley at Dien Bien Phu in northwest Vietnam.

Gen. Giap immediately begins massing Viet Minh troops and artillery in the area, sensing the potential for a decisive blow against the French. Giap's troops manually drag 200 heavy howitzers up rugged mountain sides to target the French air base. The French, aware of Giap's intentions, mass their own troops and artillery, preparing for a showdown, but have grossly underestimated Giap's strength.

1954

March 13, 1954 - Outnumbering the French nearly five-to-one, 50,000 Viet Minh under Gen. Giap begin their assault against the fortified hills protecting the Dien Bien Phu air base.

Giap's artillery pounds the French and shuts down the only runway, thus forcing the French to rely on risky parachute drops for re-supply. Giap's troops then take out their shovels and begin construction of a maze of tunnels and trenches, slowly inching their way toward the main French position and surrounding it.

March 30-May 1 - The siege at Dien Bien Phu occurs as nearly 10,000 French soldiers are trapped by 45,000 Viet Minh. French troops soon run out of fresh water and medical supplies.

The French urgently appeal to Washington for help. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff now consider three possible military options: sending American combat troops to the rescue; a massive conventional air strike by B-29 bombers; the use of tactical atomic weapons.

President Eisenhower dismisses the conventional air raid and the nuclear option after getting a strong negative response to such actions from America's chief ally, Britain. Eisenhower also decides against sending U.S. ground troops to rescue the French, citing the likelihood of high casualty rates in the jungles around Dien Bien Phu. No action is taken.

May 7, 1954 - At 5:30 p.m., 10,000 French soldiers surrender at Dien Bien Phu. By now, an estimated 8000 Viet Minh and 1500 French have died. The French survivors are marched for up to 60 days to prison camps 500 hundred miles away. Nearly half die during the march or in captivity.

France proceeds to withdraw completely from Vietnam, ending a bitter eight year struggle against the Viet Minh in which 400,000 soldiers and civilians from all sides had perished.

May 8, 1954 - The Geneva Conference on Indochina begins, attended by the U.S., Britain, China, the Soviet Union, France, Vietnam (Viet Minh and representatives of Bao Dai), Cambodia and Laos, all meeting to negotiate a solution for Southeast Asia.

July 21, 1954 - The Geneva Accords divide Vietnam in half at the 17th parallel, with Ho Chi Minh's Communists ceded the North, while Bao Dai's regime is granted the South. The accords also provide for elections to be held in all of Vietnam within two years to reunify the country. The U.S. opposes the unifying elections, fearing a likely victory by Ho Chi Minh.

October 1954 - Following the French departure from Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh returns after spending eight years hiding in the jungle and formally takes control of North Vietnam.

In the South, Bao Dai has installed Ngo Dinh Diem as his prime minister. The U.S. now pins its hopes on anti-Communist Diem for a democratic South Vietnam. It is Diem, however, who predicts "another more deadly war" will erupt over the future of Vietnam.

Diem, a Roman Catholic in an overwhelmingly Buddhist country, encourages Vietnamese Catholics living in Communist North Vietnam to flee south. Nearly one million leave. At the same time, some 90,000 Communists in the south go north, although nearly 10,000 Viet Minh fighters are instructed by Hanoi to quietly remain behind.

1955

January 1955 - The first direct shipment of U.S. military aid to Saigon arrives. The U.S. also offers to train the fledgling South Vietnam Army.

May 1955 - Prime Minister Diem wages a violent crackdown against the Binh Xuyen organized crime group based in Saigon which operates casinos, brothels and opium dens.

July 1955 - Ho Chi Minh visits Moscow and agrees to accept Soviet aid.

October 23, 1955 - Bao Dai is ousted from power, defeated by Prime Minister Diem in a U.S.-backed plebiscite which was rigged. Diem is advised on consolidating power by U.S. Air Force Col. Edward G. Lansdale, who is attached to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

October 26, 1955 - The Republic of South Vietnam is proclaimed with Diem as its first president. In America, President Eisenhower pledges his support for the new government and offers military aid.

Diem assigns most high level government positions to close friends and family members including his younger brother Ngo Dinh Nhu who will be his chief advisor. Diem's style of leadership, aloof and autocratic, will create future political problems for him despite the best efforts of his American advisors to popularize him via American-style political rallies and tours of the countryside.

December 1955 - In North Vietnam, radical land reforms by Communists result in land owners being hauled before "people's tribunals." Thousands are executed or sent to forced labor camps during this period of ideological cleansing by Ho Chi Minh.

In South Vietnam, President Diem rewards his Catholic supporters by giving them land seized from Buddhist peasants, arousing their anger and eroding his support among them. Diem also allows big land owners to retain their holdings, disappointing peasants hoping for land reform.

1956

January 1956 - Diem launches a brutal crackdown against Viet Minh suspects in the countryside. Those arrested are denied counsel and hauled before "security committees" with many suspects tortured or executed under the guise of 'shot while attempting escape.'

April 28, 1956 - The last French soldier leaves South Vietnam. The French High Command for Indochina is then dissolved.

July 1956 - The deadline passes for the unifying elections set by the Geneva Conference. Diem, backed by the U.S., had refused to participate.

November 1956 - Peasant unrest in North Vietnam resulting from oppressive land reforms is put down by Communist force with more than 6000 killed or deported.

1957

January 1957 - The Soviet Union proposes permanent division of Vietnam into North and South, with the two nations admitted separately to the United Nations. The U.S. rejects the proposal, unwilling to recognize Communist North Vietnam.

May 8-18 - Diem pays a state visit to Washington where President Eisenhower labels him the "miracle man" of Asia and reaffirms U.S. commitment. "The cost of defending freedom, of defending America, must be paid in many forms and in many places...military as well as economic help is currently needed in Vietnam," Eisenhower states.

Diem's government, however, with its main focus on security, spends little on schools, medical care or other badly needed social services in the countryside. Communist guerrillas and propagandists in the countryside capitalize on this by making simple promises of land reform and a better standard of living to gain popular support among peasants.

October 1957 - Viet Minh guerrillas begin a widespread campaign of terror in South Vietnam including bombings and assassinations. By year's end, over 400 South Vietnamese officials are killed.

1958

June 1958 - A coordinated command structure is formed by Communists in the Mekong Delta where 37 armed companies are being organized.

1959

March 1959 - The armed revolution begins as Ho Chi Minh declares a People's War to unite all of Vietnam under his leadership. His Politburo now orders a changeover to an all-out military struggle. Thus begins the Second Indochina War.

May 1959 - North Vietnamese establish the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) to oversee the coming war in the South. Construction of the Ho Chi Minh trail now begins.

The trail will eventually expand into a 1500 mile-long network of jungle and mountain passes extending from North Vietnam's coast along Vietnam's western border through Laos, parts of Cambodia, funneling a constant stream of soldiers and supplies into the highlands of South Vietnam. In 1959, it takes six months to make the journey, by 1968 it will take only six weeks due to road improvements by North Vietnamese laborers, many of whom are women. In the 1970s a parallel fuel pipeline will be added.

July 1959 - 4000 Viet Minh guerrillas, originally born in the South, are sent from North Vietnam to infiltrate South Vietnam.

July 8, 1959 - Two U.S. military advisors, Maj. Dale Buis and Sgt. Chester Ovnand, are killed by Viet Minh guerrillas at Bien Hoa, South Vietnam. They are the first American deaths in the Second Indochina War which Americans will come to know simply as The Vietnam War.

1960

April 1960 - Universal military conscription is imposed in North Vietnam. Tour of duty is indefinite.

April 1960 - Eighteen distinguished nationalists in South Vietnam send a petition to President Diem advocating that he reform his rigid, family-run, and increasingly corrupt, government. Diem ignores their advice and instead closes several opposition newspapers and arrests journalists and intellectuals.

November 1960 - A failed coup against President Diem by disgruntled South Vietnamese Army officers brings a harsh crackdown against all perceived 'enemies of the state.' Over 50,000 are arrested by police controlled by Diem's brother Nhu with many innocent civilians tortured then executed. This results in further erosion of popular support for Diem.

Thousands who fear arrest flee to North Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh will later send many back to infiltrate South Vietnam as part of his People's Liberation Armed Forces. Called Viet Cong by Diem, meaning Communist Vietnamese, Ho's guerrillas blend into the countryside, indistinguishable from South Vietnamese, while working to undermine Diem's government.

December 20, 1960 - The National Liberation Front is established by Hanoi as its Communist political organization for Viet Cong guerrillas in South Vietnam.

America Commits 1961 - 1964

1961

January 1961 - Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev pledges support for "wars of national liberation" throughout the world. His statement greatly encourages Communists in North Vietnam to escalate their armed struggle to unify Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh.

January 20, 1961 - John Fitzgerald Kennedy is inaugurated as the 35th U.S. President and declares "...we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to insure the survival and the success of liberty." Privately, outgoing President Eisenhower tells him "I think you're going to have to send troops..." to Southeast Asia.

The youthful Kennedy administration is inexperienced in matters regarding Southeast Asia. Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, 44-year-old Robert McNamara, along with civilian planners recruited from the academic community, will play a crucial role in deciding White House strategy for Vietnam over the next several years. Under their leadership, the United States will wage a limited war to force a political settlement.

However, the U.S. will be opposed by an enemy dedicated to total military victory "...whatever the sacrifices, however long the struggle...until Vietnam is fully independent and reunified," as stated by Ho Chi Minh.

May 1961 - Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson visits President Diem in South Vietnam and hails the embattled leader as the 'Winston Churchill of Asia.'

May 1961 - President Kennedy sends 400 American Green Beret 'Special Advisors' to South Vietnam to train South Vietnamese soldiers in methods of 'counter-insurgency' in the fight against Viet Cong guerrillas.

The role of the Green Berets soon expands to include the establishment of Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) made up of fierce mountain men known as the Montagnards. These groups establish a series of fortified camps strung out along the mountains to thwart infiltration by North Vietnamese.

Fall - The conflict widens as 26,000 Viet Cong launch several successful attacks on South Vietnamese troops. Diem then requests more military aid from the Kennedy administration.

October 1961 - To get a first-hand look at the deteriorating military situation, top Kennedy aides, Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow, visit Vietnam. "If Vietnam goes, it will be exceedingly difficult to hold Southeast Asia," Taylor reports to the President and advises Kennedy to expand the number of U.S. military advisors and to send 8000 combat soldiers.

Defense Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend instead a massive show of force by sending six divisions (200,000 men) to Vietnam. However, the President decides against sending any combat troops.

October 24, 1961 - On the sixth anniversary of the Republic of South Vietnam, President Kennedy sends a letter to President Diem and pledges "the United States is determined to help Vietnam preserve its independence..."

President Kennedy then sends additional military advisors along with American helicopter units to transport and direct South Vietnamese troops in battle, thus involving Americans in combat operations. Kennedy justifies the expanding U.S. military role as a means "...to prevent a Communist takeover of Vietnam which is in accordance with a policy our government has followed since 1954." The number of military advisors sent by Kennedy will eventually surpass 16,000.

December 1961 - Viet Cong guerrillas now control much of the countryside in South Vietnam and frequently ambush South Vietnamese troops. The cost to America of maintaining South Vietnam's sagging 200,000 man army and managing the overall conflict in Vietnam rises to a million dollars per day.

1962

January 11, 1962 - During his State of the Union address, President Kennedy states, "Few generations in all of history have been granted the role of being the great defender of freedom in its maximum hour of danger. This is our good fortune..."

January 15, 1962 - During a press conference, President Kennedy is asked if any Americans in Vietnam are engaged in the fighting. "No," the President responds without further comment.

February 6, 1962 - MACV, the U.S. Military Assistance Command for Vietnam, is formed. It replaces MAAG-Vietnam, the Military Assistance Advisory Group which had been established in 1950.

February 27, 1962 - The presidential palace in Saigon is bombed by two renegade South Vietnamese pilots flying American-made World War II era fighter planes. President Diem and his brother Nhu escape unharmed. Diem attributes his survival to "divine protection."

March 1962 - Operation Sunrise begins the Strategic Hamlet resettlement program in which scattered rural populations in South Vietnam are uprooted from their ancestral farmlands and resettled into fortified villages defended by local militias. However, over 50 of the hamlets are soon infiltrated and easily taken over by Viet Cong who kill or intimidate village leaders.

As a result, Diem orders bombing raids against suspected Viet Cong-controlled hamlets. The air strikes by the South Vietnamese Air Force are supported by U.S. pilots, who also conduct some of the bombings. Civilian casualties erode popular support for Diem and result in growing peasant hostility toward America, which is largely blamed for the unpopular resettlement program as well as the bombings.

May 1962 - Viet Cong organize themselves into battalion-sized units operating in central Vietnam.

May 1962 - Defense Secretary McNamara visits South Vietnam and reports "we are winning the war."

July 23, 1962 - The Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos signed in Geneva by the U.S. and 13 other nations, prohibits U.S. invasion of portions of the Ho Chi Minh trail inside eastern Laos.

August 1, 1962 - President Kennedy signs the Foreign Assistance Act of 1962 which provides "...military assistance to countries which are on the rim of the Communist world and under direct attack."

August 1962 - A U.S. Special Forces camp is set up at Khe Sanh to monitor North Vietnamese Army (NVA) infiltration down the Ho Chi Minh trail.

1963

January 3, 1963 - A Viet Cong victory in the Battle of Ap Bac makes front page news in America as 350 Viet Cong fighters defeat a large force of American-equipped South Vietnamese troops attempting to seize a radio transmitter. Three American helicopter crew members are killed.

The South Vietnamese Army is run by officers personally chosen by President Diem, not for their competence, but for their loyalty to him. Diem has instructed his officers to avoid casualties. Their primary mission, he has told them, is to protect him from any coups in Saigon.

May 1963 - Buddhists riot in South Vietnam after they are denied the right to display religious flags during their celebration of Buddha's birthday. In Hue, South Vietnamese police and army troops shoot at Buddhist demonstrators, resulting in the deaths of one woman and eight children.

Political pressure now mounts on the Kennedy administration to disassociate itself from Diem's repressive, family-run government. "You are responsible for the present trouble because you back Diem and his government of ignoramuses," a leading Buddhist tells U.S. officials in Saigon.

June-August - Buddhist demonstrations spread. Several Buddhist monks publicly burn themselves to death as an act of protest. The immolations are captured on film by news photographers and shock the American public as well as President Kennedy.

Diem responds to the deepening unrest by imposing martial law. South Vietnamese special forces, originally trained by the U.S. and now controlled by Diem's younger brother Nhu wage violent crackdowns against Buddhist sanctuaries in Saigon, Hue and other cities.

Nhu's crackdowns spark widespread anti-Diem demonstrations. Meanwhile, during an American TV interview, Nhu's wife, the flamboyant Madame Nhu, coldly refers to the Buddhist immolations as a 'barbecue.' As the overall situation worsens, high level talks at the White House focus on the need to force Diem to reform.

July 4, 1963 - South Vietnamese General Tran Van Don, a Buddhist, contacts the CIA in Saigon about the possibility of staging a coup against Diem.

August 22, 1963 - The new U.S. ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge arrives in South Vietnam.

August 24, 1963 - A U.S. State Department message sent to Ambassador Lodge is interpreted by Lodge to indicate he should encourage the military coup against President Diem.

August 26, 1963 - Ambassador Lodge meets President Diem for the first time. Under instructions from President Kennedy, Lodge tells Diem to fire his brother, the much-hated Nhu, and to reform his government. But Diem arrogantly refuses even to discuss such matters with Lodge.

August 26, 1963 - President Kennedy and top aides begin three days of heated discussions over whether the U.S. should in fact support the military coup against Diem.

August 29, 1963 - Lodge sends a message to Washington stating "...there is no possibility, in my view, that the war can be won under a Diem administration." President Kennedy then gives Lodge a free hand to manage the unfolding events in Saigon. However, the coup against Diem fizzles due to mistrust and suspicion within the ranks of the military conspirators.

September 2, 1963 - During a TV news interview with Walter Cronkite, President Kennedy describes Diem as "out of touch with the people" and adds that South Vietnam's government might regain popular support "with changes in policy and perhaps in personnel."

Also during the interview, Kennedy comments on America's commitment to Vietnam "If we withdrew from Vietnam, the Communists would control Vietnam. Pretty soon, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Malaya, would go..."

October 2, 1963 - President Kennedy sends Ambassador Lodge a mixed message that "no initiative should now be taken to give any encouragement to a coup" but that Lodge should "identify and build contacts with possible leadership as and when it appears."

October 5, 1963 - Lodge informs President Kennedy that the coup against Diem appears to be on again.

The rebel generals, led by Duong Van "Big" Minh, first ask for assurances that U.S. aid to South Vietnam will continue after Diem's removal and that the U.S. will not interfere with the actual coup. This scenario suits the White House well, in that the generals will appear to be acting on their own without any direct U.S. involvement. President Kennedy gives his approval. The CIA in Saigon then signals the conspirators that the United States will not interfere with the overthrow of President Diem.

October 25, 1963 - Prompted by concerns over public relations fallout if the coup fails, a worried White House seeks reassurances from Ambassador Lodge that the coup will succeed.

October 28, 1963 - Ambassador Lodge reports a coup is "imminent."

October 29, 1963 - An increasingly nervous White House now instructs Lodge to postpone the coup. Lodge responds it can only be stopped by betraying the conspirators to Diem.

November 1, 1963 - Lodge has a routine meeting with Diem from 10 a.m. until noon at the presidential palace, then departs. At 1:30 p.m., during the traditional siesta time, the coup begins as mutinous troops roar into Saigon, surround the presidential palace, and also seize police headquarters. Diem and his brother Nhu are trapped inside the palace and reject all appeals to surrender. Diem telephones the rebel generals and attempts, but fails, to talk them out of the coup. Diem then calls Lodge and asks "...what is the attitude of the United States?" Lodge responds "...it is four thirty a.m. in Washington, and the U.S. government cannot possibly have a view." Lodge then expresses concern for Diem's safety, to which Diem responds "I am trying to restore order."

At 8 p.m., Diem and Nhu slip out of the presidential palace unnoticed and go to a safe house in the suburbs that belongs to a wealthy Chinese merchant.

November 2, 1963 - At 3 a.m., one of Diem's aides betrays his location to the generals. The hunt for Diem and Nhu now begins. At 6 a.m., Diem telephones the generals. Realizing the situation is hopeless, Diem and Nhu offer to surrender from inside a Catholic church. Diem and Nhu are then taken into custody by rebel officers and placed in the back of an armored personnel carrier. While traveling to Saigon, the vehicle stops and Diem and Nhu are assassinated.

At the White House, a meeting is interrupted with the news of Diem's death. According to witnesses, President Kennedy's face turns a ghostly shade of white and he immediately leaves the room. Later, the President records in his private diary, "I feel that we must bear a good deal of responsibility for it."

Saigon celebrates the downfall of Diem's regime. But the coup results in a power vacuum in which a series of military and civilian governments seize control of South Vietnam, a country that becomes totally dependent on the United States for its existence. Viet Cong use the unstable political situation to increase their hold over the rural population of South Vietnam to nearly 40 percent.

November 22, 1963 - President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas. Lyndon B. Johnson is sworn in as the 36th U.S. President. He is the fourth President coping with Vietnam and will oversee massive escalation of the war while utilizing many of the same policy advisors who served Kennedy.

November 24, 1963 - President Johnson declares he will not "lose Vietnam" during a meeting with Ambassador Lodge in Washington.

By year's end, there are 16,300 American military advisors in South Vietnam which received \$500 million in U.S. aid during 1963.

1964

January 30, 1964 - General Minh is ousted from power in a bloodless coup led by General Nguyen Khanh who becomes the new leader of South Vietnam.

March 1964 - Secret U.S.-backed bombing raids begin against the Ho Chi Minh trail inside Laos, conducted by mercenaries flying old American fighter planes.

March 6, 1964 - Defense Secretary McNamara visits South Vietnam and states that Gen. Khanh "has our admiration, our respect and our complete support..." and adds that, "We'll stay for as long as it takes. We shall provide whatever help is required to win the battle against the Communist insurgents."

Following his visit, McNamara advises President Johnson to increase military aid to shore up the sagging South Vietnamese army. McNamara and other Johnson policy makers now become focused on the need to prevent a Communist victory in South Vietnam, believing it would damage the credibility of the U.S. globally. The war in Vietnam thus becomes a test of U.S. resolve in fighting Communism with America's prestige and President Johnson's reputation on the line.

The cost to America of maintaining South Vietnam's army and managing the overall conflict in Vietnam now rises to two million dollars per day.

March 17, 1964 - The U.S. National Security Council recommends the bombing of North Vietnam. President Johnson approves only the planning phase by the Pentagon.

May - President Johnson's aides begin work on a Congressional resolution supporting the President's war policy in Vietnam. The resolution is shelved temporarily due to lack of support in the Senate, but will later be used as the basis of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution.

Summer - As 56,000 Viet Cong spread their successful guerrilla war throughout South Vietnam, they are reinforced by North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars pouring in via the Ho Chi Minh trail.

Responding to this escalation, President Johnson approves Operation Plan 34A, CIA-run covert operations using South Vietnamese commandos in speed boats to harass radar sites along the coastline of North Vietnam. The raids are supported by U.S. Navy warships in the Gulf of Tonkin including the destroyer *U.S.S. Maddox* which conducts electronic surveillance to pinpoint the radar locations.

July 1, 1964 - General Maxwell D. Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is appointed by President Johnson as the new U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam. During his one year tenure, Taylor will have to deal with five successive governments in politically unstable South Vietnam.

President Johnson also appoints Lt. Gen William C. Westmoreland to be the new U.S. military commander in Vietnam. Westmoreland is a West Point graduate and a highly decorated veteran of World War II and Korea.

July 16-17 - Senator Barry Goldwater is chosen as the Republican nominee for president at the Republican National Convention in San Francisco. During his acceptance speech Goldwater declares, "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice."

Goldwater is an arch conservative and virulent anti-Communist whose campaign rhetoric will impact coming White House decisions concerning Vietnam. Above all, Johnson's aides do not want the President to appear to be 'soft on Communism' and thus risk losing the November presidential election. But at the same time, they also want the President to avoid being labeled a 'war monger' concerning Vietnam.

July 31, 1964 - In the Gulf of Tonkin, as part of Operation Plan 34A, South Vietnamese commandos in unmarked speed boats raid two North Vietnamese military bases located on islands just off the coast. In the vicinity is the destroyer *U.S.S. Maddox*.

August 2, 1964 - Three North Vietnamese patrol boats attack the American destroyer *U.S.S. Maddox* in the Gulf of Tonkin ten miles off the coast of North Vietnam. They fire three torpedoes and machine-guns, but only a single machine-gun round actually strikes the *Maddox* with no casualties. U.S. Navy fighters from the carrier *Ticonderoga*, led by Commander James Stockdale, attack the patrol boats, sinking one and damaging the other two.

At the White House, it is Sunday morning (twelve hours behind Vietnam time). President Johnson, reacting cautiously to reports of the incident, decides against retaliation. Instead, he sends a diplomatic message to Hanoi warning of "grave consequences" from any further "unprovoked" attacks. Johnson then orders the *Maddox* to resume operations in the Gulf of Tonkin in the same vicinity where the attack had occurred. Meanwhile, the Joints Chiefs of Staff put U.S. combat troops on alert and also select targets in North Vietnam for a possible bombing raid, should the need arise.

August 3, 1964 - The *Maddox*, joined by a second destroyer *U.S.S. C. Turner Joy* begin a series of vigorous zigzags in the Gulf of Tonkin sailing to within eight miles of North Vietnam's coast, while at the same time, South Vietnamese commandos in speed boats harass North Vietnamese defenses along the coastline. By nightfall, thunderstorms roll in, affecting the accuracy of electronic instruments on the destroyers. Crew members reading their instruments believe they have come under torpedo attack from North Vietnamese patrol boats. Both destroyers open fire on numerous apparent targets but there are no actual sightings of any attacking boats.

August 4, 1964 - Although immediate doubts arise concerning the validity of the second attack, the Joint Chiefs of Staff strongly recommend a retaliatory bombing raid against North Vietnam.

Press reports in America greatly embellish the second attack with spectacular eyewitness accounts although no journalists had been on board the destroyers.

At the White House, President Johnson decides to retaliate. Thus, the first bombing of North Vietnam by the United States occurs as oil facilities and naval targets are attacked without warning by 64 U.S. Navy fighter bombers. "Our response for the present will be limited and fitting," President Johnson [tells Americans](#) during a midnight TV appearance, an hour after the attack began. "We Americans know, although others appear to forget, the risk of spreading conflict. We still seek no wider war."

Two Navy jets are shot down during the bombing raids, resulting in the first American prisoner of war, Lt. Everett Alvarez of San Jose, California, who is taken to an internment center in Hanoi, later dubbed the "Hanoi Hilton" by the nearly six hundred American airmen who become POWs.

August 5, 1964 - Opinion polls indicate 85 percent of Americans support President Johnson's bombing decision. Numerous newspaper editorials also come out in support of the President.

Johnson's aides, including Defense Secretary McNamara, now lobby Congress to pass a White House resolution that will give the President a free hand in Vietnam.

August 6, 1964 - During a meeting in the Senate, McNamara is confronted by Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon who had been tipped off by someone in the Pentagon that the *Maddox* had in fact been involved in the South Vietnamese commando raids against North Vietnam and thus was not the victim of an "unprovoked" attack. McNamara responds that the U.S. Navy "...played absolutely no part in, was not associated with, was not aware of, any South Vietnamese actions, if there were any..."

August 7, 1964 - In response to the two incidents involving the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy*, the U.S. Congress, at the behest of President Johnson, overwhelmingly passes the [Gulf of Tonkin Resolution](#) put forward by the White House allowing the President "to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force" to prevent further attacks against U.S. forces. The Resolution, passed unanimously in the House and 98-2 in the Senate, grants enormous power to President Johnson to wage an undeclared war in Vietnam from the White House.

The only Senators voting against the Resolution are Wayne Morse, and Ernest Gruening of Alaska who said "all Vietnam is not worth the life of a single American boy."

August 21, 1964 - In Saigon, students and Buddhist militants begin a series of escalating protests against General Khanh's military regime. As a result, Khanh resigns as sole leader in favor of a triumvirate that includes himself, Gen. Minh and Gen. Khiem. The streets of Saigon soon disintegrate into chaos and mob violence amid the government's gross instability.

August 26, 1964 - President Johnson is nominated at the Democratic National Convention.

During his campaign he declares "We are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves."

September 7, 1964 - President Johnson assembles his top aides at the White House to ponder the future course of action in Vietnam.

September 13, 1964 - Two disgruntled South Vietnamese generals stage an unsuccessful coup in Saigon.

October 14, 1964 - Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev is ousted from power, replaced by Leonid Brezhnev as leader of the U.S.S.R.

October 16, 1964 - China tests its first Atomic Bomb. China, by this time, has also massed troops along its border with Vietnam, responding to U.S. escalation.

November 1, 1964 - The first attack by Viet Cong against Americans in Vietnam occurs at Bien Hoa air base, 12 miles north of Saigon. A pre-dawn mortar assault kills five Americans, two South Vietnamese, and wounds nearly a hundred others. President Johnson dismisses all recommendations for a retaliatory air strike against North Vietnam.

November 3, 1964 - With 61 percent of the popular vote, Democrat Lyndon B. Johnson is re-elected as President of the United States in a land-slide victory, the biggest to date in U.S. history, defeating Republican Barry Goldwater by 16 million votes. The Democrats also achieve big majorities in both the U.S. House and Senate.

December 1964 - 10,000 NVA soldiers arrive in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh trail, carrying sophisticated weapons provided by China and the Soviet Union. They shore up Viet Cong battalions with the weapons and also provide experienced soldiers as leaders.

December 1, 1964 - At the White House, President Johnson's top aides, including Secretary of State Dean Rusk, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, and Defense Secretary McNamara, recommend a policy of gradual escalation of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam.

December 20, 1964 - Another military coup occurs in Saigon by the South Vietnamese army. This time Gen. Khanh and young officers, led by Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu, oust older generals including Gen. Minh from the government and seize control.

December 21, 1964 - An angry Ambassador Taylor summons the young officers to the U.S. embassy then scolds them like schoolboys over the continuing instability and endless intrigues plaguing South Vietnam's government. Americans, he had already warned them, are "tired of coups."

Taylor's behavior greatly offends the young officers. Gen. Khanh retaliates by lashing out in the press against Taylor and the U.S., stating that America is reverting to "colonialism" in its treatment of South Vietnam.

December 24, 1964 - Viet Cong terrorists set off a car bomb explosion at the Brinks Hotel, an American officers' residence in downtown Saigon. The bomb is timed to detonate at 5:45 p.m., during 'happy hour' in the bar. Two Americans are killed and 58 wounded. President Johnson dismisses all recommendations for a retaliatory air strike against North Vietnam.

By year's end, the number of American military advisors in South Vietnam is 23,000. There are now an estimated 170,000 Viet Cong/NVA fighters in the 'People's Revolutionary Army' which has begun waging coordinated battalion-sized attacks against South Vietnamese troops in villages around Saigon.

1965

January 20, 1965 - Lyndon B. Johnson takes the oath as president and declares, "We can never again stand aside, prideful in isolation. Terrific dangers and troubles that we once called "foreign" now constantly live among us..."

January 27, 1965 - General Khanh seizes full control of South Vietnam's government.

January 27, 1965 - Johnson aides, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, send a memo to the President stating that America's limited military involvement in Vietnam is not succeeding, and that the U.S. has reached a 'fork in the road' in Vietnam and must either soon escalate or withdraw.

January 1965 - Operation Game Warden begins U.S. Navy river patrols on South Vietnam's 3000 nautical miles of inland waterways.

February 4, 1965 - National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy visits South Vietnam for the first time. In North Vietnam, Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin coincidentally arrives in Hanoi.

February 6, 1965 - Viet Cong guerrillas attack the U.S. military compound at Pleiku in the Central Highlands, killing eight Americans, wounding 126 and destroying ten aircraft.

February 7-8 - "I've had enough of this," President Johnson tells his National Security advisors. He then approves Operation Flaming Dart, the bombing of a North Vietnamese army camp near Dong Hoi by U.S. Navy jets from the carrier *Ranger*.

Johnson makes no speeches or public statements concerning his decision. Opinion polls taken in the U.S. shortly after the bombing indicate a 70 percent approval rating for the President and an 80 percent approval of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. Johnson now agrees to a long-standing recommendation from his advisors for a sustained bombing campaign against North Vietnam.

In Hanoi, Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin is pressured by the North Vietnamese to provide unlimited military aid to counter the American "aggression." Kosygin gives in to their demands. As a result, sophisticated Soviet surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) begin arriving in Hanoi within weeks.

February 18, 1965 - Another military coup in Saigon results in General Khanh finally ousted from power and a new military/civilian government installed, led by Dr. Phan Huy Quat.

February 22, 1965 - General Westmoreland requests two battalions of U.S. Marines to protect the American air base at Da Nang from 6000 Viet Cong massed in the vicinity. The President approves his request, despite the "grave reservations" of Ambassador Taylor in Vietnam who warns that America may be about to repeat the same mistakes made by the French in sending ever-increasing numbers of soldiers into the Asian forests and jungles of a "hostile foreign country" where friend and foe are indistinguishable.

March 2, 1965 - Operation Rolling Thunder begins as over 100 American fighter-bombers attack targets in North Vietnam. Scheduled to last eight weeks, Rolling Thunder will instead go on for three years.

The first U.S. air strikes also occur against the Ho Chi Minh trail. Throughout the war, the trail is heavily bombed by American jets with little actual success in halting the tremendous flow of soldiers and supplies from the North. 500 American jets will be lost attacking the trail. After each attack, bomb damage along the trail is repaired by female construction crews.

During the entire war, the U.S. will fly 3 million sorties and drop nearly 8 million tons of bombs, four times the tonnage dropped during all of World War II, in the largest display of firepower in the history of warfare.

The majority of bombs are dropped in South Vietnam against Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army positions, resulting in 3 million civilian refugees due to the destruction of numerous villages. In North Vietnam, military targets include fuel depots and factories. The North Vietnamese react to the air strikes by decentralizing their factories and supply bases, thus minimizing their vulnerability to bomb damage.

March 8, 1965 - The first U.S. combat troops arrive in Vietnam as 3500 Marines land at China Beach to defend the American air base at Da Nang. They join 23,000 American military advisors already in Vietnam.

March 9, 1965 - President Johnson authorizes the use of Napalm, a petroleum based anti-personnel bomb that showers hundreds of explosive pellets upon impact.

March 11, 1965 - Operation Market Time, a joint effort between the U.S. Navy and South Vietnamese Navy, commences to disrupt North Vietnamese sea routes used to funnel supplies into the South. The operation is highly successful in cutting off coastal supply lines and results in the North Vietnamese shifting to the more difficult land route along the Ho Chi Minh trail.

March 29, 1965 - Viet Cong terrorists bomb the U.S. embassy in Saigon.

April 1, 1965 - At the White House, President Johnson authorizes sending two more Marine battalions and up to 20,000 logistical personnel to Vietnam. The President also authorizes American combat troops to conduct patrols to root out Viet Cong in the countryside. His decision to allow offensive operations is kept secret from the American press and public for two months.

April 7, 1965 - President Johnson delivers his "[Peace Without Conquest](#)" Speech at Johns Hopkins University offering Hanoi "unconditional discussions" to stop the war in return for massive economic assistance in modernizing Vietnam. "Old Ho can't turn that down," Johnson privately tells his aides. But Johnson's peace overture is quickly rejected.

April 15, 1965 - A thousand tons of bombs are dropped on Viet Cong positions by U.S. and South Vietnamese fighter-bombers.

April 17, 1965 - In Washington, 15,000 students gather to protest the U.S. bombing campaign.

Student demonstrators will often refer to President Johnson, his advisors, the Pentagon, Washington bureaucrats, and weapons manufacturers, simply as "the Establishment."

April 20, 1965 - In Honolulu, Johnson's top aides, including McNamara, Gen. Westmoreland, Gen. Wheeler, William Bundy, and Ambassador Taylor, meet and agree to recommend to the President sending another 40,000 combat soldiers to Vietnam.

April 24, 1965 - President Johnson announces Americans in Vietnam are eligible for combat pay.

May 3, 1965 - The first U.S. Army combat troops, 3500 men of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, arrive in Vietnam.

May 11, 1965 - Viet Cong over-run South Vietnamese troops in Phuoc Long Province north of Saigon and also attack in central South Vietnam.

May 13, 1965 - The first bombing pause is announced by the U.S. in the hope that Hanoi will now negotiate. There will be six more pauses during the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign, all with same intention. However, each time, the North Vietnamese ignore the peace overtures and instead use the pause to repair air defenses and send more troops and supplies into the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail.

May 13, 1965 - Viet Cong attack the U.S. special forces camp in Phuoc Long. During the fighting, 2nd Lt. Charles Williams, earns the Medal of Honor by knocking out a Viet Cong machine-gun then guiding rescue helicopters, while wounded four times.

May 19, 1965 - U.S. bombing of North Vietnam resumes.

June 18, 1965 - Nguyen Cao Ky takes power in South Vietnam as the new prime minister with Nguyen Van Thieu functioning as official chief of state. They lead the 10th government in 20 months.

July 1, 1965 - Viet Cong stage a mortar attack against Da Nang air base and destroy three aircraft.

July 8, 1965 - Henry Cabot Lodge is reappointed as U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam.

July 21-28 - President Johnson meets with top aides to decide the future course of action in Vietnam.

July 28, 1965 - During a noontime press conference, President Johnson announces he will send 44 combat battalions to Vietnam increasing the U.S. military presence to 125,000 men. Monthly draft calls are doubled to 35,000. "I have asked the commanding general, General Westmoreland, what more he needs to meet this mounting aggression. He has told me. And we will meet his needs. We cannot be defeated by force of arms. We will stand in Vietnam."

"...I do not find it easy to send the flower of our youth, our finest young men, into battle. I have spoken to you today of the divisions and the forces and the battalions and the units, but I know them all, every one. I have seen them in a thousand streets, of a hundred towns, in every state in this union-working and laughing and building, and filled with hope and life. I think I know, too, how their mothers weep and how their families sorrow."

August 1965 - Combined Action Platoons are formed by U.S. Marines utilizing South Vietnamese militia units to protect villages and conduct patrols to root out Viet Cong guerrillas.

August 3, 1965 - The destruction of suspected Viet Cong villages near Da Nang by a U.S. Marine rifle company is shown on CBS TV and generates controversy in America. Earlier, seven Marines had been killed nearby while searching for Viet Cong following a mortar attack against the air base at Da Nang.

August 4, 1965 - President Johnson asks Congress for an additional \$1.7 billion for the war.

August 5, 1965 - Viet Cong destroy two million gallons of fuel in storage tanks near Da Nang.

August 8, 1965 - The U.S. conducts major air strikes against the Viet Cong.

August 18-24, 1965 - Operation Starlite begins the first major U.S. ground operation in Vietnam as U.S. Marines wage a preemptive strike against 1500 Viet Cong planning to assault the American airfield at Chu Lai. The Marines arrive by helicopter and by sea following heavy artillery and air bombardment of Viet Cong positions. 45 Marines are killed and 120 wounded. Viet Cong suffer 614 dead and 9 taken prisoner. This decisive first victory gives a big boost to U.S. troop morale.

August 31, 1965 - President Johnson signs a law criminalizing draft card burning. Although it may result in a five year prison sentence and \$1000 fine, the burnings become common during anti-war rallies and often attract the attention of news media.

October 16, 1965 - Anti-war rallies occur in 40 American cities and in international cities including London and Rome.

October 19, 1965 - North Vietnamese Army troops attack the U.S. Special Forces camp at Plei Me in a prelude to the Battle of Ia Drang Valley in South Vietnam's Central Highlands.

October 30, 1965 - 25,000 march in Washington in support of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The marchers are led by five Medal of Honor recipients.

November 14-16 - The Battle of Ia Drang Valley marks the first major battle between U.S. troops and North Vietnamese Army regulars (NVA) inside South Vietnam. American Army troops of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) respond to the NVA threat by using helicopters to fly directly into the battle zone. Upon landing, the troops quickly disembark then engage in fierce fire fights, supported by heavy artillery and B-52 air strikes, marking the first use of B-52s to assist combat troops. The two-day battle ends with NVA retreating into the jungle. 79 Americans are killed and 121 wounded. NVA losses are estimated at 2000.

November 17, 1965 - The American success at Ia Drang is marred by a deadly ambush against 400 soldiers of the U.S. 7th Cavalry sent on foot to occupy nearby Landing Zone 'Albany.' NVA troops that had been held in reserve during Ia Drang, along with troops that had retreated, kill 155 Americans and wound 124.

November 27, 1965 - In Washington, 35,000 anti-war protesters circle the White House then march on to the Washington Monument for a rally.

November 30, 1965 - After visiting Vietnam, Defense Secretary McNamara privately warns that American casualty rates of up to 1000 dead per month could be expected.

December 4, 1965 - In Saigon, Viet Cong terrorists bomb a hotel used by U.S. military personnel, killing eight and wounding 137.

December 7, 1965 - Defense Secretary McNamara tells President Johnson that the North Vietnamese apparently "believe that the war will be a long one, that time is their ally, and that their staying power is superior to ours."

December 9, 1965 - The *New York Times* reveals the U.S. is unable to stop the flow of North Vietnamese soldiers and supplies into the South despite extensive bombing.

December 18-20 - President Johnson and top aides meet to decide the future course of action.

December 25, 1965 - The second pause in the bombing of North Vietnam occurs. This will last for 37 days while the U.S. attempts to pressure North Vietnam into a negotiated peace. However, the North Vietnamese denounce the bombing halt as a "trick" and continue Viet Cong terrorist activities in the South.

By year's end U.S. troop levels in Vietnam reached 184,300. An estimated 90,000 South Vietnamese soldiers deserted in 1965, while an estimated 35,000 soldiers from North Vietnam infiltrated the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail. Up to 50 percent of the countryside in South Vietnam is now under some degree of Viet Cong control.

Time Magazine chooses General William Westmoreland as 1965's 'Man of the Year.'

1966

January 12, 1966 - During his State of the Union address before Congress, President Johnson comments that the war in Vietnam is unlike America's previous wars, "Yet, finally, war is always the same. It is young men dying in the fullness of their promise. It is trying to kill a man that you do not even know well enough to hate...therefore, to know war is to know that there is still madness in this world."

January 28-March 6 - Operation Masher marks the beginning of large-scale U.S. search-and-destroy operations against Viet Cong and NVA troop encampments. However, President Johnson orders the name changed to the less aggressive sounding 'White Wing' over concern for U.S. public opinion. During the 42 day operation in South Vietnam's Bon Son Plain near the coast, troopers of the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) once again fly by helicopters directly into battle zones and engage in heavy fighting. 228 Americans are killed and 788 wounded. NVA losses are put at 1342.

The term 'search-and-destroy' is used by the media to describe everything from large scale Airmobile troop movements to small patrols rooting out Viet Cong in tiny hamlets. The term eventually becomes associated with negative images of Americans burning villages.

January 31, 1966 - Citing Hanoi's failure to respond to his peace overtures during the 37 day bombing pause, President Johnson announces bombing of North Vietnam will resume.

January 31, 1966 - Senator Robert F. Kennedy criticizes President Johnson's decision to resume the bombing, stating that the U.S. may be headed "on a road from which there is no turning back, a road that leads to catastrophe for all mankind." His comments infuriate the President.

February 1966 - The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by Sen. J. William Fulbright, holds televised hearings examining America's policy in Vietnam. Appearing before the committee, Defense Secretary McNamara states that U.S. objectives in Vietnam are "not to destroy or overthrow the Communist government of North Vietnam. They are limited to the destruction of the insurrection and aggression directed by North Vietnamese against the political institutions of South Vietnam."

February 3, 1966 - Influential newspaper columnist Walter Lippmann lambastes President Johnson's strategy in Vietnam, stating, "Gestures, propaganda, public relations and bombing and more bombing will not work." Lippmann predicts Vietnam will divide America as combat casualties mount.

February 6-9 - President Johnson and South Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky meet in Honolulu.

March 1, 1966 - An attempt to repeal the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution fails in the U.S. Senate by a vote of 92 to 5. The attempt was led by Sen. Wayne Morse.

March 9, 1966 - The U.S. reveals that 20,000 acres of food crops have been destroyed in suspected Viet Cong villages. The admission generates harsh criticism from the American academic community.

March 10, 1966 - South Vietnamese Buddhists begin a violent campaign to oust Prime Minister Ky following his dismissal of a top Buddhist general. This marks the beginning of a period of extreme unrest in several cities in South Vietnam including Saigon, Da Nang and Hue as political squabbling spills out into the streets and interferes with U.S. military operations.

March 26, 1966 - Anti-war protests are held in New York, Washington, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston and San Francisco.

April 12, 1966 - B-52 bombers are used for the first time against North Vietnam. Each B-52 carries up to 100 bombs, dropped from an altitude of about six miles. Target selections are closely supervised by the White House. There are six main target categories; power facilities, war support facilities, transportation lines, military complexes, fuel storage, and air defense installations.

April 13, 1966 - Viet Cong attack Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon causing 140 casualties while destroying 12 U.S. helicopters and nine aircraft.

May 2, 1966 - Secretary of Defense McNamara privately reports the North Vietnamese are infiltrating 4500 men per month into the South.

May 14, 1966 - Political unrest intensifies as South Vietnamese troops loyal to Prime Minister Ky over-run renegade South Vietnamese Buddhist troops in Da Nang. Ky's troops then move on to Hue to oust renegades there. Ky's actions result in a new series of immolations by Buddhist monks and nuns as an act of protest against his Saigon regime and its American backers. Buddhist leader Tri Quang blames President Johnson personally for the situation. Johnson responds by labeling the immolations as "tragic and unnecessary."

June 4, 1966 - A three-page anti-war advertisement appears in the *New York Times* signed by 6400 teachers and professors.

June 25, 1966 - Political unrest in South Vietnam abates following the crackdown on Buddhist rebels by Prime Minister Ky, including the arrest of Buddhist leader Tri Quang. Ky now appeals for calm.

June 29, 1966 - Citing increased infiltration of Communist guerrillas from North Vietnam into the South, the U.S. bombs oil depots around Hanoi and Haiphong, ending a self-imposed moratorium.

The U.S. is very cautious about targeting the city of Hanoi itself over concerns for the reactions of North Vietnam's military allies, China and the Soviet Union. This concern also prevents any U.S. ground invasion of North Vietnam, despite such recommendations by a few military planners in Washington.

July 6, 1966 - Hanoi Radio reports that captured American pilots have been paraded through the streets of Hanoi through jeering crowds.

July 11, 1966 - The U.S. intensifies bombing raids against portions of the Ho Chi Minh trail winding through Laos.

July 15, 1966 - Operation Hastings is launched by U.S. Marines and South Vietnamese troops against 10,000 NVA in Quang Tri Province. This is the largest combined military operation to date in the war.

July 30, 1966 - For the first time, the U.S. bombs NVA troops in the Demilitarized Zone, the buffer area separating North and South Vietnam.

August 9, 1966 - U.S. jets attack two South Vietnamese villages by mistake, killing 63 civilians and wounding over 100.

August 30, 1966 - Hanoi announces China will provide economic and technical assistance.

September 1, 1966 - During a visit to neighboring Cambodia, French President Charles de Gaulle calls for U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.

September 12, 1966 - The heaviest air raid of the war to date occurs as 500 U.S. jets attack NVA supply lines and coastal targets.

September 14-November 24 - Operation Attleboro occurs involving 20,000 U.S. and South Vietnamese soldiers in a successful search-and-destroy mission 50 miles north of Saigon near the Cambodian border. During the fighting, an enormous weapons cache is uncovered in a hidden base camp in the jungle. 155 Americans are killed and 494 wounded. North Vietnamese losses are 1106.

September 23, 1966 - The U.S. reveals jungles near the Demilitarized Zone are being defoliated by sprayed chemicals.

October 2-24, 1966 - The U.S. 1st Air Cavalry Division conducts Operation Irving to clear NVA from mountainous areas near Qui Nhon.

October 3, 1966 - The Soviet Union announces it will provide military and economic assistance to North Vietnam.

October 25, 1966 - President Johnson conducts a conference in Manila with America's Vietnam Allies; Australia, Philippines, Thailand, New Zealand, South Korea and South Vietnam. The Allies pledge to withdraw from Vietnam within six months if North Vietnam will withdraw completely from the South.

October 26, 1966 - President Johnson visits U.S. troops at Cam Ranh Bay. This is the first of two visits to Vietnam made during his presidency.

November 7, 1966 - Defense Secretary McNamara is confronted by student protesters during a visit to Harvard University.

November 12, 1966 - The *New York Times* reports that 40 percent of U.S. economic aid sent to Saigon is stolen or winds up on the black market.

December 8-9 - North Vietnam rejects a proposal by President Johnson for discussions concerning treatment of POWs and a possible exchange.

December 13-14 - The village of Caudat near Hanoi is leveled by U.S. bombers resulting in harsh criticism from the international community.

December 26, 1966 - Facing increased scrutiny from journalists over mounting civilian casualties in North Vietnam, the U.S. Defense Department now admits civilians may have been bombed accidentally.

December 27, 1966 - The U.S. mounts a large-scale air assault against suspected Viet Cong positions in the Mekong Delta using Napalm and hundreds of tons of bombs.

By year's end, U.S. troop levels reach 389,000 with 5008 combat deaths and 30,093 wounded. Over half of the American casualties are caused by snipers and small-arms fire during Viet Cong ambushes, along with handmade booby traps and mines planted everywhere in the countryside by Viet Cong. American Allies fighting in Vietnam include 45,000 soldiers from South Korea and 7000 Australians. An estimated 89,000 soldiers from North Vietnam infiltrated the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail in 1966.

1967

January 2, 1967 - Operation Bolo occurs as 28 U.S. Air Force F-4 Phantom jets lure North Vietnamese MiG-21 interceptors into a dogfight over Hanoi and shoot down seven of them. This leaves only nine MiG-21s operational for the North Vietnamese. American pilots, however, are prohibited by Washington from attacking MiG air bases in North Vietnam.

January 8-26 - Operation Cedar Falls occurs. It is the largest combined offensive to date and involves 16,000 American and 14,000 South Vietnamese soldiers clearing out Viet Cong from the 'Iron Triangle' area 25 miles northwest of Saigon. The Viet Cong choose not to fight and instead melt away into the jungle. Americans then uncover an extensive network of tunnels and for the first time use 'tunnel rats,' the nickname given to specially trained volunteers who explore the maze of tunnels. After the American and South Vietnamese troops leave the area, Viet Cong return and rebuild their sanctuary. This pattern is repeated throughout the war as Americans utilize 'in-and-out' tactics in which troops arrive by helicopters, secure an area, then depart by helicopters.

January 10, 1967 - U.N. Secretary-General U Thant expresses doubts that Vietnam is essential to the security of the West. On this same day, during his State of the Union address before Congress, President Johnson once again declares "We will stand firm in Vietnam."

January 23, 1967 - Senator J. William Fulbright publishes *The Arrogance of Power* a book critical of American war policy in Vietnam advocating direct peace talks between the South Vietnamese government and the Viet Cong. By this time, Fulbright and President Johnson are no longer on speaking terms. Instead, the President uses the news media to deride Fulbright, Robert Kennedy, and a growing number of critics in Congress as "nervous Nellies" and "sunshine patriots."

February 2, 1967 - President Johnson states there are no "serious indications that the other side is ready to stop the war."

February 8-10 - American religious groups stage a nationwide "Fast for Peace."

February 8-12 - A truce occurs during Tet, the lunar New Year, a traditional Vietnamese holiday.

February 13, 1967 - Following the failure of diplomatic peace efforts, President Johnson announces the U.S. will resume full-scale bombing of North Vietnam.

February 22-May 14 - The largest U.S. military offensive of the war occurs. Operation Junction City involves 22 U.S. and four South Vietnamese battalions attempting to destroy the NVA's Central Office headquarters in South Vietnam. The offensive includes the only parachute assault by U.S. troops during the entire war. During the fighting at Ap Gu, U.S. 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry is

commanded by Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Haig who will later become an influential White House aide. Junction City ends with 2728 Viet Cong killed and 34 captured. American losses are 282 killed and 1576 wounded. NVA relocate their Central Office headquarters inside Cambodia, thus avoiding capture.

March 8, 1967 - Congress authorizes \$4.5 billion for the war.

March 19-21 - President Johnson meets in Guam with South Vietnam's Prime Minister Ky and pressures Ky to hold national elections.

April 6, 1967 - Quang Tri City is attacked by 2500 Viet Cong and NVA.

April 14, 1967 - Richard M. Nixon visits Saigon and states that anti-war protests back in the U.S. are "prolonging the war."

April 15, 1967 - Anti-war demonstrations occur in New York and San Francisco involving nearly 200,000. Rev. Martin Luther King declares that the war is undermining President Johnson's Great Society social reform programs, "...the pursuit of this widened war has narrowed the promised dimensions of the domestic welfare programs, making the poor white and Negro bear the heaviest burdens both at the front and at home."

April 20, 1967 - U.S. bombers target Haiphong harbor in North Vietnam for the first time.

April 24-May 11 - Hill fights rage at Khe Sanh between U.S. 3rd Marines and the North Vietnamese Army resulting in 940 NVA killed. American losses are 155 killed and 425 wounded. The isolated air base is located in mountainous terrain less than 10 miles from North Vietnam near the border of Laos.

April 24, 1967 - General Westmoreland condemns anti-war demonstrators saying they give the North Vietnamese soldier "hope that he can win politically that which he cannot accomplish militarily." Privately, he has already warned President Johnson "the war could go on indefinitely."

May 1, 1967 - Ellsworth Bunker replaces Henry Cabot Lodge as U.S ambassador to South Vietnam.

May 2, 1967 - The U.S. is condemned during a mock war crimes tribunal held in Stockholm, organized by British philosopher Bertrand Russell.

May 9, 1967 - Robert W. Komer, a former CIA analyst, is appointed by President Johnson as deputy commander of MACV to form a new agency called Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) to pacify the population of South Vietnam. Nearly 60 percent of rural villages in South Vietnam are now under Viet Cong control. \$850 million in food, medical supplies, machinery, and numerous other household items, will be distributed through CORDS to the population in order to regain their loyalty in the struggle for the "hearts and minds" of common villagers. CORDS also trains local militias to protect their villages from the Viet Cong.

May 13, 1967 - In New York City, 70,000 march in support of the war, led by a New York City fire captain.

May 18-26 - U.S. and South Vietnamese troops enter the Demilitarized Zone for the first time and engage in a series of fire fights with NVA. Both sides suffer heavy losses.

May 22, 1967 - President Johnson publicly urges North Vietnam to accept a peace compromise.

June 1967 - The Mobile Riverine Force becomes operational utilizing U.S. Navy 'Swift' boats combined with Army troop support to halt Viet Cong usage of inland waterways in the Mekong Delta.

July 1967 - General Westmoreland requests an additional 200,000 reinforcements on top of the 475,000 soldiers already scheduled to be sent to Vietnam, which would bring the U.S. total in Vietnam to 675,000. President Johnson agrees only to an extra 45,000.

July 7, 1967 - North Vietnam's Politburo makes the decision to launch a widespread offensive against South Vietnam. Conceived in three phases, the first phase involves attacks against remote border areas in an effort to lure American troops away from South Vietnam's cities. The second phase (Tet Offensive) will be an attack against the cities themselves by Viet Cong forces aided by NVA troops, in the hope of igniting a "general uprising" to overthrow the government of South Vietnam. The third phase involves the actual invasion of South Vietnam by NVA troops coming from North Vietnam.

July 29, 1967 - A fire resulting from a punctured fuel tank kills 134 U.S. crewmen aboard the *USS Forrestal* in the Gulf of Tonkin, in the worst naval accident since World War II.

August 9, 1967 - The Senate Armed Services Committee begins closed-door hearings concerning the influence of civilian advisors on military planning. During the hearings, Defense Secretary McNamara testifies that the extensive and costly U.S. bombing campaign in Vietnam is failing to impact North Vietnam's war making ability in South Vietnam and that nothing short of "the virtual annihilation of North Vietnam and its people" through bombing would ever succeed.

August 18, 1967 - California Governor Ronald Reagan says the U.S. should get out of Vietnam citing the difficulties of winning a war when "too many qualified targets have been put off limits to bombing."

August 21, 1967 - The Chinese shoot down two U.S. fighter-bombers that accidentally crossed their border during air raids in North Vietnam along the Chinese border.

September 1, 1967 - North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong publicly states Hanoi will "continue to fight."

September 3, 1967 - National elections are held in South Vietnam. With 80 percent of eligible voters participating, Nguyen Van Thieu is elected president with Nguyen Cao Ky as his vice-president, the pair winning just 35 percent of the vote.

September 11-October 31 - U.S. Marines are besieged by NVA at Con Thien located two miles south of the Demilitarized Zone. A massive long-range artillery duel then erupts between NVA and U.S. guns during the siege as NVA fire 42,000 rounds at the Marines while the U.S. responds with 281,000 rounds and B-52 air strikes to lift the siege. NVA losses are estimated at over 2000.

October 1967 - A public opinion poll indicates 46 percent of Americans now believe U.S. military involvement in Vietnam to be a "mistake." However, most Americans also believe that the U.S. should "win or get out" of Vietnam. Also in October, *Life* magazine renounces its earlier support of President Johnson's war policies.

October 5, 1967 - Hanoi accuses the U.S. of hitting a school in North Vietnam with anti-personnel bombs.

October 21-23 - 'March on the Pentagon' draws 55,000 protesters. In London, protesters try to storm the U.S. embassy.

October 31, 1967 - President Johnson reaffirms his commitment to maintain U.S. involvement in South Vietnam.

November 3-December 1 - The Battle of Dak To occurs in the mountainous terrain along the border of Cambodia and Laos as the U.S. 4th Infantry Division heads off a planned NVA attack against the Special Forces camp located there. During the fighting, the 4th Battalion, 503rd Airborne Infantry earns a Presidential Unit Citation for bravery. Massive air strikes combined with U.S. and South Vietnamese ground attacks result in an NVA withdrawal into Laos and Cambodia. NVA losses are put at 1644. U.S. troops suffer 289 killed. "Along with the gallantry and tenacity of our soldiers, our tremendously successful air logistic operation was the key to the victory," states General Westmoreland.

November 11, 1967 - President Johnson makes another peace overture, but it is soon rejected by Hanoi.

November 17, 1967 - Following an optimistic briefing in the White House by General Westmoreland, Ambassador Bunker, and Robert Komer, President Johnson tells the American public on TV, "We are inflicting greater losses than we're taking...We are making progress."

In a *Time* magazine interview, General Westmoreland taunts the Viet Cong, saying "I hope they try something because we are looking for a fight."

November 29, 1967 - An emotional Robert McNamara announces his resignation as Defense Secretary during a press briefing, stating, "Mr. President...I cannot find words to express what lies in my heart today..." Behind closed doors, he had begun regularly expressing doubts over Johnson's war strategy, angering the President. McNamara joins a growing list of Johnson's top aides who resigned over the war including Bill Moyers, McGeorge Bundy and George Ball.

November 30, 1967 - Anti-war Democrat Eugene McCarthy announces he will be a candidate for President opposing Lyndon Johnson, stating, "...we are involved in a very deep crisis of leadership,

a crisis of direction and a crisis of national purpose...the entire history of this war in Vietnam, no matter what we call it, has been one of continued error and misjudgment."

December 4, 1967 - Four days of anti-war protests begin in New York. Among the 585 protesters arrested is renowned 'baby doctor' Dr. Benjamin Spock.

December 6, 1967 - The U.S. reports Viet Cong murdered 252 civilians in the hamlet of Dak Son.

December 23, 1967 - Upon arrival at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam, President Johnson declares "...all the challenges have been met. The enemy is not beaten, but he knows that he has met his master in the field." This is the President's second and final trip to Vietnam during his presidency.

By year's end, U.S. troop levels reach 463,000 with 16,000 combat deaths to date. By this time, over a million American soldiers have rotated through Vietnam, with length of service for draftees being one year, and most Americans serving in support units. An estimated 90,000 soldiers from North Vietnam infiltrated into the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail in 1967. Overall Viet Cong/NVA troop strength throughout South Vietnam is now estimated up to 300,000 men.

1968

January 5, 1968 - Operation Niagara I to map NVA positions around Khe Sanh begins.

January 21, 1968 - 20,000 NVA troops under the command of Gen. Giap attack the American air base at Khe Sanh. A 77 day siege begins as 5000 U.S. Marines in the isolated outpost are encircled. The siege attracts enormous media attention back in America, with many comparisons made to the 1954 Battle of Dien Bien Phu in which the French were surrounded then defeated.

"I don't want any damn Dinbinfoo," an anxious President Johnson tells Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Earle Wheeler. As Johnson personally sends off Marine reinforcements, he states "...the eyes of the nation and the eyes of the entire world, the eyes of all of history itself, are on that little brave band of defenders who hold the pass at Khe Sanh..." Johnson issues presidential orders to the Marines to hold the base and demands a guarantee "signed in blood" from the Joint Chiefs of Staff that they will succeed.

Operation Niagara II then begins a massive aerial supply effort to the besieged Marines along with heavy B-52 bombardment of NVA troop positions. At the peak of the battle, NVA soldiers are hit round-the-clock every 90 minutes by groups of three B-52s which drop over 110,000 tons of bombs during the siege, the heaviest bombardment of a small area in the history of warfare.

January 31, 1968 - The turning point of the war occurs as 84,000 Viet Cong guerrillas aided by NVA troops launch the Tet Offensive attacking a hundred cities and towns throughout South Vietnam.

The surprise offensive is closely observed by American TV news crews in Vietnam which film the U.S. embassy in Saigon being attacked by 17 Viet Cong commandos, along with bloody scenes from battle areas showing American soldiers under fire, dead and wounded. The graphic color film footage is then quickly relayed back to the states for broadcast on nightly news programs.

Americans at home thus have a front row seat in their living rooms to the Viet Cong/NVA assaults against their fathers, sons and brothers, ten thousand miles away. "The whole thing stinks, really," says a Marine under fire at Hue after more than 100 Marines are killed.

January 31-March 7 - In the Battle for Saigon during Tet, 35 NVA and Viet Cong battalions are defeated by 50 battalions of American and Allied troops that had been positioned to protect the city on a hunch by Lt. Gen. Fred C. Weyand, a veteran of World War II in the Pacific. Nicknamed the "savior of Saigon," Weyand had sensed the coming attack, prepared his troops, and on February 1 launched a decisive counter-attack against the Viet Cong at Tan Son Nhut airport thus protecting nearby MACV and South Vietnamese military headquarters from possible capture.

January 31-March 2 - In the Battle for Hue during Tet, 12,000 NVA and Viet Cong troops storm the lightly defended historical city, then begin systematic executions of over 3000 "enemies of the people" including South Vietnamese government officials, captured South Vietnamese officers, and Catholic priests. South Vietnamese troops and three U.S. Marine battalions counter-attack and engage in the heaviest fighting of the entire Tet Offensive. They retake the old imperial city, house by house, street by street, aided by American air and artillery strikes. On February 24, U.S. Marines occupy the Imperial Palace in the heart of the citadel and the battle soon ends with a North Vietnamese defeat. American losses are 142 Marines killed and 857 wounded, 74 U.S. Army killed and 507 wounded. South Vietnamese suffer 384 killed and 1830 wounded. NVA killed are put at over 5000.

February 1, 1968 - In Saigon during Tet, a suspected Viet Cong guerrilla is shot in the head by South Vietnam's police chief Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan, in full view of an NBC news cameraman and an Associated Press still photographer. The haunting AP photo taken by Eddie Adams appears on the front page of most American newspapers the next morning. Americans also observe the filmed execution on NBC TV.

Another controversy during Tet, and one of the most controversial statements of the entire war, is made by an American officer who states, 'We had to destroy it, in order to save it,' referring to a small city near Saigon leveled by American bombs. His statement is later used by many as a metaphor for the American experience in Vietnam.

February 2, 1968 - President Johnson labels the Tet Offensive "a complete failure."

For the North Vietnamese, the Tet Offensive is both a military and political failure in Vietnam. The "general uprising" they had hoped to ignite among South Vietnamese peasants against the Saigon government never materialized. Viet Cong had also come out of hiding to do most of the actual fighting, suffered devastating losses, and never regained their former strength. As a result, most of the fighting will be taken over by North Vietnamese regulars fighting a conventional war. Tet's only success, and an unexpected one, was in eroding grassroots support among Americans and in Congress for continuing the war indefinitely.

February 8, 1968 - 21 U.S. Marines are killed by NVA at Khe Sanh.

February 27, 1968 - Influential CBS TV news anchorman Walter Cronkite, who just returned from Saigon, tells Americans during his CBS Evening News broadcast that he is certain "the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate."

February 28, 1968 - Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Wheeler, at the behest of Gen. Westmoreland, asks President Johnson for an additional 206,000 soldiers and mobilization of reserve units in the U.S.

March 1, 1968 - Clark Clifford, renowned Washington lawyer and an old friend of the President, becomes the new U.S. Secretary of Defense. For the next few days, Clifford conducts an intensive study of the entire situation in Vietnam, discovers there is no concept or overall plan anywhere in Washington for achieving victory in Vietnam, then reports to President Johnson that the United States should not escalate the war. "The time has come to decide where we go from here," he tells Johnson.

March 2, 1968 - 48 U.S. Army soldiers are killed during an ambush at Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon.

March 10, 1968 - The *New York Times* breaks the news of Westmoreland's 206,000 troop request. The *Times* story is denied by the White House. Secretary of State Dean Rusk is then called before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and grilled for two days on live TV about the troop request and the overall effectiveness of Johnson's war strategy.

March 11, 1968 - Operation Quyet Thang begins a 28 day offensive by 33 U.S. and South Vietnamese battalions in the Saigon region.

March 12, 1968 - By a very slim margin of just 300 votes, President Johnson defeats anti-war Democrat Eugene McCarthy in the New Hampshire Democratic primary election. This indicates that political support for Johnson is seriously eroding.

Public opinion polls taken after the Tet Offensive revealed Johnson's overall approval rating has slipped to 36 percent, while approval of his Vietnam war policy slipped to 26 percent.

March 14, 1968 - Senator Robert F. Kennedy offers President Johnson a confidential political proposition. Kennedy will agree to stay out of the presidential race if Johnson will renounce his earlier Vietnam strategy and appoint a committee, including Kennedy, to chart a new course in Vietnam. Johnson spurns the offer.

March 16, 1968 - Robert F. Kennedy announces his candidacy for the presidency. Polls indicate Kennedy is now more popular than the President.

During his campaign, Kennedy addresses the issue of his participation in forming President John F. Kennedy's Vietnam policy by stating, "past error is no excuse for its own perpetuation."

March 16, 1968 - Over 300 Vietnamese civilians are slaughtered in My Lai hamlet by members of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry U.S. Army, while participating in an airborne assault against suspected Viet Cong encampments in Quang Ngai Province. Upon entering My Lai and

finding no Viet Cong, the Americans begin killing every civilian in sight, interrupted only by helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson who lands and begins evacuating civilians after realizing what is happening.

March 28, 1968 - The initial report by participants at My Lai states that 69 Viet Cong soldiers were killed and makes no mention of civilian casualties.

The My Lai massacre is successfully concealed for a year, until a series of letters from Vietnam veteran Ronald Ridenhour spark an official Army investigation that results in Charlie Company Commander, Capt. Ernest L. Medina, First Platoon Leader, Lt. William Calley, and 14 others being brought to trial by the Army. A news photo of the carnage, showing a mass of dead children, women and old men, remains one of the most enduring images of America's involvement in Vietnam.

March 23, 1968 - During a secret meeting in the Philippines, Gen Wheeler informs Gen. Westmoreland that President Johnson will approve only 13,500 additional soldiers out of the original 206,000 requested. Gen. Wheeler also instructs Westmoreland to urge the South Vietnamese to expand their own war effort.

March 25, 1968 - Clark Clifford convenes the "Wise Men," a dozen distinguished elder statesmen and soldiers, including former Secretary of State Dean Acheson and World War II General Omar Bradley at the State Department for dinner. They are given a blunt assessment of the situation in Vietnam, including the widespread corruption of the Saigon government and the unlikely prospect for military victory "under the present circumstances."

March 26, 1968 - The "Wise Men" gather at the White House for lunch with the President. They now advocate U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, with only four of those present dissenting from that opinion.

March 31, 1968 - President Johnson stuns the world by announcing his surprise decision not to seek re-election. He also announces a partial bombing halt and urges Hanoi to begin peace talks. "We are prepared to move immediately toward peace through negotiations." As a result, peace talks soon begin. The bombing halt only affects targets north of the 20th parallel, including Hanoi.

April 1, 1968 - The U.S. 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) begins Operation Pegasus to reopen Route 9, the relief route to the besieged Marines at Khe Sanh.

April 4, 1968 - Civil rights leader Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King is assassinated in Memphis. Racial unrest then erupts in over 100 American cities.

April 8, 1968 - The siege of Khe Sanh ends with the withdrawal of NVA troops from the area as a result of intensive American bombing and the reopening of Route 9. NVA losses during the siege are estimated up to 15,000. U.S. Marines suffered 199 killed and 830 wounded. 1st Cavalry suffered 92 killed and 629 wounded reopening Route 9. The U.S. command then secretly shuts down the Khe Sanh air base and withdraws the Marines. Commenting on the heroism of U.S. troops that defended Khe Sanh, President Johnson states "...they vividly demonstrated to the enemy

the utter futility of his attempts to win a military victory in the South." A North Vietnamese official labels the closing of Khe Sanh air base as America's "gravest defeat" so far.

April 11, 1968 - Defense Secretary Clifford announces Gen. Westmoreland's request for 206,000 additional soldiers will not be granted.

April 23, 1968 - Anti-war activists at Columbia University seize five buildings.

April 27, 1968 - In New York, 200,000 students refuse to attend classes as a protest.

April 30-May 3 - The Battle of Dai Do occurs along the Demilitarized Zone as NVA troops seek to open an invasion corridor into South Vietnam. They are halted by a battalion of U.S. Marines nicknamed "the Magnificent Bastards" under the command of Lt. Col. William Weise. Aided by heavy artillery and air strikes, NVA suffer 1568 killed. 81 Marines are killed and 297 wounded. 29 U.S. Army are killed supporting the Marines and 130 wounded.

For the time being, this defeat ends North Vietnam's hope of successfully invading the South. They will wait four years, until 1972, before trying again, after most of the Americans have gone. It will actually take seven years, until 1975, for them to succeed.

May 5, 1968 - Viet Cong launch "Mini Tet," a series of rocket and mortar attacks against Saigon and 119 cities and military installations throughout South Vietnam. The U.S. responds with air strikes using Napalm and high explosives.

May 10, 1968 - An NVA battalion attacks the Special Forces camp at Kham Duc along the border of Laos. The isolated camp had been established in 1963 to monitor North Vietnamese infiltration. Now encircled by NVA, the decision is made to evacuate via C-130 transport planes. At the conclusion of the successful airlift, it is discovered that three U.S. Air Force controllers have accidentally been left behind. Although the camp is now over-run by NVA and two C-130s have already been shot down, Lt. Col. Joe M. Jackson pilots a C-123 Provider, lands on the air strip under intense fire, gathers all three controllers, then takes off. For this, Jackson is awarded the Medal of Honor.

May 10, 1968 - Peace talks begin in Paris but soon stall as the U.S. insists that North Vietnamese troops withdraw from the South, while the North Vietnamese insist on Viet Cong participation in a coalition government in South Vietnam. This marks the beginning of five years of on-again off-again official talks between the U.S. and North Vietnam in Paris.

June 5, 1968 - Robert F. Kennedy is shot and mortally wounded in Los Angeles just after winning the California Democratic presidential primary election.

July 1968 - Congress passes a ten percent income tax surcharge to defray the ballooning costs of the war.

July 1, 1968 - General Westmoreland is replaced as U.S. commander in Vietnam by General Creighton W. Abrams.

July 1, 1968 - The Phoenix program is established to crush the secret Viet Cong infrastructure (VCI) in South Vietnam. The VCI, estimated at up to 70,000 Communist guerrillas, has been responsible for a long-standing campaign of terror against Americans, South Vietnamese government officials, village leaders and innocent civilians.

However, the Phoenix program, which is controlled through CORDS under the direction of Robert Komer, generates huge controversy in America concerning numerous alleged assassinations of suspected Viet Cong operatives by South Vietnamese trained by the U.S. The controversy, generated in part through North Vietnamese propaganda, eventually results in Congressional hearings. Testifying in 1971 before Congress, Komer's successor William E. Colby states, "The Phoenix program was not a program of assassination. The Phoenix program was a part of the overall pacification program." Colby admits that 20,587 Viet Cong had been killed "mostly in combat situations...by regular or paramilitary forces."

July 3, 1968 - Three American prisoners of war are released by Hanoi.

July 19, 1968 - President Johnson and South Vietnam's President Thieu meet in Hawaii.

August 8, 1968 - Richard M. Nixon is chosen as the Republican presidential candidate and promises "an honorable end to the war in Vietnam."

August 28, 1968 - During the Democratic national convention in Chicago, 10,000 anti-war protesters gather on downtown streets and are then confronted by 26,000 police and national guardsmen. The brutal crackdown is covered live on network TV. 800 demonstrators are injured.

The United States is now experiencing a level of social unrest unseen since the American Civil War era, a hundred years earlier. There have been 221 student protests at 101 colleges and universities thus far in 1968.

September 30, 1968 - The 900th U.S. aircraft is shot down over North Vietnam.

October 1968 - Operation Sealord begins the largest combined naval operation of the entire war as over 1200 U.S. Navy and South Vietnamese Navy gunboats and warships target NVA supply lines extending from Cambodia into the Mekong Delta. NVA supply camps in the Delta and along other waterways are also successfully disrupted during the two-year operation.

October 21, 1968 - The U.S. releases 14 North Vietnamese POWs.

October 27, 1968 - In London, 50,000 protest the war.

October 31, 1968 - Operation Rolling Thunder ends as President Johnson announces a complete halt of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam in the hope of restarting the peace talks.

Throughout the three and a half year bombing campaign, the U.S. dropped a million tons of bombs on North Vietnam, the equivalent of 800 tons per day, with little actual success in halting the flow of soldiers and supplies into the South or in damaging North Vietnamese morale. In fact, the opposite has occurred as the North Vietnamese have patriotically rallied around their Communist

leaders as a result of the onslaught. By now, many towns south of Hanoi have been leveled with a U.S. estimate of 52,000 civilian deaths.

During Rolling Thunder, North Vietnam's sophisticated, Soviet-supplied air defense system managed to shoot down 922 U.S. aircraft during 2380 sorties flown by B-52 bombers and over 300,000 sorties by U.S. Navy and Air Force fighter-bombers.

November 1968 - William E. Colby replaces Robert Komer as head of CORDS.

November 5, 1968 - Republican Richard M. Nixon narrowly defeats Democrat Hubert Humphrey in the U.S. presidential election.

November 27, 1968 - President-elect Nixon asks Harvard professor Henry Kissinger to be his National Security Advisor. Kissinger accepts.

By year's end, U.S. troop levels reached 495,000 with 30,000 American deaths to date. In 1968, over a thousand a month were killed. An estimated 150,000 soldiers from North Vietnam infiltrated the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail in 1968. Although the U.S. conducted 200 air strikes each day against the trail in late 1968, up to 10,000 NVA supply trucks are en route at any given time.

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 [War 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 [speech 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.