

## Vietnam by day March

### MARCH 1

#### **1965 U.S. informs South Vietnam of intent to send Marines**

Ambassador Maxwell Taylor informs South Vietnamese Premier Phan Huy Quat that the United States is preparing to send 3,500 U.S. Marines to Vietnam to protect the U.S. airbase at Da Nang.

Three days later, a formal request was submitted by the U.S. Embassy, asking the South Vietnamese government to "invite" the United States to send the Marines. Premier Quat, a mere figurehead, had to obtain approval from the real power, Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu, chief of the Armed Forces Council. Thieu approved, but asked that the Marines be "brought ashore in the most inconspicuous way feasible." Rumors of the imminent arrival of American troops soon circulated in Saigon, but there was no official word from either government until March 6 when the Johnson administration publicly confirmed that it would be sending the Marines to South Vietnam.

#### **1971 Bomb explodes in Capitol building**

A bomb explodes in the Capitol building in Washington, D.C., causing an estimated \$300,000 in damage but hurting no one. A group calling itself the "Weather Underground" claimed credit for the bombing, which was done in protest of the ongoing U.S.-supported Laos invasion. The so-called Weathermen were a radical faction of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS); the Weathermen advocated violent means to transform American society. The philosophical foundations of the Weathermen were Marxist in nature; they believed that militant struggle was the key to striking out against the state to build a revolutionary consciousness among the young, particularly the white working class. Their primary tools to achieving these ends were arson and bombing. Among the other targets of Weathermen bombings were the Long Island Court House, the New York Police Department headquarters, the Pentagon, and the State Department. No one was killed in these bombings, because the bombers always called in an advanced warning. However, three members of the Weather Underground died on March 6, 1970, when the house in which they were constructing the bombs exploded.

#### **1968 Clifford replaces McNamara**

Clark Clifford replaces Robert McNamara as Secretary of

Defense. McNamara, who had first taken office under President John F. Kennedy, left amid a debate over Vietnam policy precipitated by the Tet Offensive. In the summer of 1967, McNamara had become convinced that the United States should seek an end to the war through a negotiated settlement. In a memorandum submitted to President Johnson, he recommended that the U.S. freeze its troop levels, cease the bombing of North Vietnam, and turn over responsibility for the ground war to South Vietnam. Johnson rejected these proposals outright. After the communists launched the Tet Offensive in January 1968, an increasingly demoralized McNamara left Washington after eight years as Defense Secretary to become the president of the World Bank. Clifford, a successful Washington lawyer and Democratic Party powerbroker, served as Defense Secretary until January 1969, when he departed with the rest of the Johnson administration.

## **MARCH 2**

### **1965 First Rolling Thunder raid conducted**

Operation Rolling Thunder begins with more than 100 United States Air Force jet bombers striking an ammunition depot at Xom Bang, 10 miles inside North Vietnam. Simultaneously, 60 South Vietnamese Air Force propeller planes bombed the Quang Khe naval base, 65 miles north of the 17th parallel.

Six U.S. planes were downed, but only one U.S. pilot was lost. Capt. Hayden J. Lockhart, flying an F-100, was shot down and became the first Air Force pilot to be taken prisoner by the North Vietnamese. Lockhart was released in 1973 when U.S. POWs were returned under provisions of the Paris Peace Accords.

The raid was the result of President Lyndon B. Johnson's decision in February to undertake the sustained bombing of North Vietnam that he and his advisers had been considering for more than a year. The goal of Rolling Thunder was to interdict North Vietnamese transportation routes in the southern part of North Vietnam and the slow infiltration of personnel and supplies into South Vietnam. In July 1966, Rolling Thunder was expanded to include North Vietnamese ammunition dumps and oil storage facilities as targets and in the spring of 1967 it was further expanded to include power plants, factories, and airfields in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

The White House closely controlled Operation Rolling Thunder and President Johnson occasionally selected the targets himself. From 1965 to 1968, about 643,000 tons of bombs were dropped on North Vietnam. A total of nearly 900 U.S. aircraft were lost during Operation Rolling Thunder. The operation continued, with occasional suspensions, until President Johnson halted it on October 31, 1968, under increasing domestic political pressure.

### **1967 Kennedy proposes plan to end the war**

Senator Robert Kennedy (D-New York) proposes a three-point plan to help end the war. The plan included suspension of the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam and the gradual withdrawal of U.S. and North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam with replacement by an international force. Secretary of State Dean Rusk rejected Kennedy's proposal because he believed that the North Vietnamese would never agree to withdraw their troops.

Kennedy had been Attorney General under his brother, President John F. Kennedy. When the elder Kennedy was assassinated, Robert stayed on to serve his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, but resigned his post in 1964 to run for the Senate. In the Senate, Kennedy initially continued to support U.S. efforts in Vietnam despite his growing apprehension about the war, especially the massive bombing of North Vietnam, because he was reluctant to disagree with the Johnson administration and its handling of the war. As racial strife and urban violence intensified along with mounting antiwar sentiment, however, Kennedy found it increasingly difficult to remain silent. The presidential campaign of 1968 opened the door for him to act on his concern. When President Johnson announced that he would not seek re-election, Kennedy entered the race, quickly emerging as a serious contender for the presidency. On June 4, 1968, he won the all-important California primary, thereby becoming his party's front-runner. That night, after addressing his supporters at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, he was shot by Sirhan Sirhan. He died the following day at the age of 42.

## **MARCH 3**

### **1971 U.S. 5th Special Forces Group withdraws**

The U.S. Army's 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) departs South Vietnam. The Special Forces were formed to organize and train guerrilla bands behind enemy lines. President John F. Kennedy, a strong believer in the potential of the Special Forces in counterinsurgency operations, had visited the Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg to review the program and authorized the Special Forces to wear the headgear that became their symbol, the Green Beret.

The 5th Group was sent to Vietnam in October 1964 to assume control of all Special Forces operations in Vietnam. Prior to this time, Green Berets had been assigned to Vietnam only on temporary duty. The primary function of the Green Berets in Vietnam was to organize the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) among South Vietnam's Montagnard population. The Montagnards--"mountain people" or "mountaineers"--were a group of indigenous people from several tribes, such as the Rhade, Bru, and Jarai, who lived mainly in the highland areas of

Vietnam. These tribes were recruited to guard camps in the mountainous border areas against North Vietnamese infiltration. At the height of the war the Green Berets oversaw 84 CIDG camps with more than 42,000 CIDG strike forces and local militia units. The CIDG program ended in December 1970 with the transfer of troops and mission to the South Vietnamese Border Ranger Command. The Green Berets were withdrawn as part of the U.S. troop reductions in Vietnam.

### **1965 U.S. jets bomb Ho Chi Minh Trail**

More than 30 U.S. Air Force jets strike targets along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. Since such raids had become common knowledge and were being reported in the American media, the U.S. State Department felt compelled to announce that these controversial missions were authorized by the powers granted to President Johnson in the August 1964 Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

The Johnson administration came under increasing criticism at home and abroad because of the bombing raids. Congressional opponents of the Johnson administration thought the president was escalating the war without authorization. Overseas, there was also an immediate response. Not surprisingly, the communists roundly criticized Johnson's actions. In Havana, Premier Fidel Castro condemned the United States and promised that Cuba would aid North Vietnam. On March 4, about 2,000 students attacked the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. There was also a reaction in non-communist capitals. Prime Minister Lester Pearson of Canada expressed concern about the risk of escalation, but said that Canada understood the U.S. position. In Britain, however, there was mounting criticism of the government's support of U.S. policies in Vietnam. In New York City, Women Strike for Peace members demonstrated outside the United Nations to urge an end to the war.

## **MARCH 4**

### **1968 Task Force sends memo to the president**

In a draft memorandum to the president, the Ad Hoc Task Force on Vietnam advises that the administration send 22,000 more troops to Vietnam, but make deployment of the additional 185,000 men previously requested by Gen. William Westmoreland (senior U.S. commander in Vietnam) contingent on future developments.

The Task Force was a group of senior policy advisors including Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford; Central Intelligence Agency Director Richard Helms; General Maxwell Taylor; Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs William Bundy; and Paul Warnke, head of the Pentagon's politico-military policy office. President Johnson requested that the Task Force study a

request by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and General Westmoreland for more than 200,000 additional troops to augment U.S. forces in Vietnam and to strengthen U.S. security in other parts of the world.

President Johnson asked that the memorandum be sent to General Westmoreland, who, in a reply four days later, welcomed the additional 22,000 troops, but insisted that he still needed the full requested reinforcements by year's end. Ultimately, President Johnson and his advisers, seeking a way to disengage from the war, refused Westmoreland's request for more troops.

## **MARCH 5**

### **1971 "Blackhorse" departs South Vietnam**

The U.S. 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, less its 2nd Squadron, withdraws from Vietnam. The "Blackhorse Regiment" (named for the black horse on the regimental shoulder patch) first arrived in Vietnam in September 1966 and consisted of three squadrons, each with three armored cavalry troops, a tank troop and a howitzer battery, making it a formidable fighting force. Upon arriving in Vietnam, the regiment had 51 tanks, 296 armored personnel carriers, 18 self-propelled 155-mm howitzers, nine flamethrower vehicles, and 18 helicopters.

While in Vietnam, Blackhorse conducted combat operations in the 11 provinces surrounding Saigon and participated in the Cambodian incursion in 1970. During its combat service in Vietnam, Blackhorse suffered 635 troopers killed in action and 5,521 wounded in action. Three of its troopers won the Medal of Honor for bravery on the battlefield.

Upon its departure from Vietnam, the group was sent to Europe where it was assigned to guard the frontier in West Germany. The regiment's 2nd Squadron remained in Vietnam until March 1972, when it departed to join the rest of the regiment in Germany.

Also on this day: Premier Chou En-lai of the People's Republic of China visits Hanoi. After lengthy consultations, Chou and North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong issued a joint communique on March 10, which vowed continued Chinese support for the North Vietnamese struggle against the United States. This support was instrumental in providing the North Vietnamese with weapons and equipment needed for the major offensive they launched in the spring of 1972.

### **1964 U.S.A.F. advisory team sent to Laos**

The Joint Chiefs of Staff order a U.S. Air Force air commando training advisory team to Thailand to train Lao pilots in

counterinsurgency tactics. Laos had won its independence from French control in July 1949 but the country quickly became a battleground as various factions vied for control of the government. One of the factions was the Neo Lao Hak Sat (Lao Liberation Front), communist insurgents more popularly known as the Pathet Lao. President Dwight Eisenhower believed that Laos was "the key to the entire area of Southeast Asia" and was concerned that the government would fall to the communists. The situation was defused somewhat when a conference in Geneva in July 1952 set up a coalition government for Laos and officially proclaimed the neutrality of the country. This eventually proved to be a farce when the North Vietnamese Army moved 80,000 soldiers into Laos to assist the Pathet Lao. The United States then increased its support to the Royal Lao government.

The mission of the American air commandos was to train the Laotian pilots in the conduct of close air support for the Royal Lao ground forces. Since Laos was officially neutral, the training efforts were conducted in Thailand with that government's permission. The training did not result in sufficient numbers of trained Laotian pilots, so in December 1964, U.S. pilots in American planes began flying support missions for the Laotian ground troops as part of Operation Barrel Roll. The mission continued until February 1973.

## **MARCH 6**

### **1971 Operation Lam Son 719 continues**

Operation Lam Son 719 continues as reinforced South Vietnamese forces push into Tchepone, a major enemy supply center located on Route 9 in Laos. The base was deserted and almost completely destroyed as a result of American bombing raids.

The operation, begun on February 8, included a limited incursion by South Vietnamese forces into Laos to disrupt the communist supply and infiltration network in Laos along Route 9, adjacent to the two northern provinces of South Vietnam. The operation was supported by U.S. airpower (aviation and airlift) and artillery (firing across the border from firebases inside South Vietnam).

Observers described the drive on North Vietnam's supply routes and depots in Laos as some of the "bloodiest fighting" of the war. Enemy resistance was light at first as a 12,000-man spearhead of the South Vietnamese army thrust its way across the border into the communists' deepest jungle stronghold toward Tchepone. However, resistance stiffened in the second week of February as the North Vietnamese rushed reinforcements to the area. On February 23, the big push bogged down around 16 miles from the border after bloody fighting in which the communist troops overran two South Vietnamese battalions.

The fierce fighting continued into March and the South Vietnamese finally reached Tchepone. However, fighting near the Vietnam border intensified and in the second week of March, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu gave the order for his troops to withdraw as casualties soared on both sides.

However, withdrawing the ground task force under heavy North Vietnamese pressure was a difficult task. The South Vietnamese fought for two weeks to get back inside their own border and losses were heavy. The South Vietnamese suffered some 9,000 casualties, almost 50 percent of the force. In supporting the South Vietnamese, the U.S. sustained 1,462 casualties and lost 168 helicopters.

### **1965 U.S. is sending Marines to South Vietnam**

The White House confirms reports that, at the request of South Vietnam, the United States is sending two battalions of U.S. Marines for security work at the Da Nang air base, which will hopefully free South Vietnamese troops for combat. On March 1, Ambassador Maxwell Taylor informed South Vietnamese Premier Phan Huy Quat that the United States was preparing to send 3,500 U.S. Marines to Vietnam. Three days later, a formal request was submitted by the U.S. Embassy, asking the South Vietnamese government to "invite" the United States to send the Marines. Premier Quat, a mere figurehead, had to obtain approval from the real power, Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu, chief of the Armed Forces Council. Thieu approved, but asked that the Marines be "brought ashore in the most inconspicuous way feasible." The Marines began landing near Da Nang on March 8.

## **MARCH 7**

### **1967 Republic of Korea forces operation launch**

The largest South Korean operation to date starts, forming a link-up of two Korean division areas of operations along the central coastal area of South Vietnam.

South Korean forces had been in South Vietnam since August 1964, when Seoul sent a liaison unit to Saigon. The South Korean contingent was part of the Free World Military Forces, an effort by President Lyndon B. Johnson to enlist allies for the United States and South Vietnam. By securing support from other nations, Johnson hoped to build an international consensus behind his policies in Vietnam. The effort was also known as the "many flags" program. The first South Korean contingent was followed in February 1965 by engineer units and a mobile hospital. Although initially assigned to non-combat duties, they came under fire on April 3 when the Viet

Cong attacked them.

In September 1965, in response to additional pleas from Johnson, the South Korean government greatly expanded its troop commitment to Vietnam, agreeing to send combat troops. By the close of 1969 there were over 47,800 Korean soldiers actively involved in combat operations in South Vietnam. Seoul began to withdraw its troops in February 1972, following the lead of the United States as it drastically reduced its troop commitment to South Vietnam.

### **1966 U.S. jets launch heaviest air raids of the war**

In the heaviest air raids since the bombing began in February 1965, U.S. Air Force and Navy planes fly an estimated 200 sorties against North Vietnam. The objectives of the raids included an oil storage area 60 miles southeast of Dien Bien Phu and a staging area 60 miles northwest of Vinh.

### **1972 Jets engage in aerial combat**

In the biggest air battle in Southeast Asia in three years, U.S. jets battle five North Vietnamese MiGs and shoot one down 170 miles north of the Demilitarized Zone. The 86 U.S. air raids over North Vietnam in the first two months of this year equaled the total for all of 1971.

## **MARCH 8**

### **1965 U.S. Marines land at Da Nang**

The USS *Henrico*, *Union*, and *Vancouver*, carrying the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade under Brig. Gen. Frederick J. Karch, take up stations 4,000 yards off Red Beach Two, north of Da Nang.

First ashore was the Battalion Landing Team 3/9, which arrived on the beach at 8:15 a.m. Wearing full battle gear and carrying M-16s, the Marines were met by sightseers, South Vietnamese officers, Vietnamese girls with leis, and four American soldiers with a large sign stating: "Welcome, Gallant Marines." Gen. William Westmoreland, senior U.S. military commander in Saigon, was reportedly "appalled" at the spectacle because he had hoped that the Marines could land without any fanfare. Within two hours, Battalion Landing Team 1/3 began landing at Da Nang air base.

The 3,500 Marines were deployed to secure the U.S. airbase, freeing South Vietnamese troops up for combat. On March 1, Ambassador Maxwell Taylor had informed South Vietnamese Premier Phan Huy Quat that the United States was preparing to

send the Marines to Vietnam. Three days later, a formal request was submitted by the U.S. Embassy, asking the South Vietnamese government to "invite" the United States to send the Marines. Premier Quat, a mere figurehead, had to obtain approval from the real power, Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu, chief of the Armed Forces Council. Thieu approved, but, like Westmoreland, asked that the Marines be "brought ashore in the most inconspicuous way feasible." These wishes were ignored and the Marines were given a hearty, conspicuous welcome when they arrived.

### **1975 Thieu orders force withdrawal**

South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu orders the withdrawal of South Vietnamese forces from the Central Highlands. In late January 1975, just two years after the cease-fire had been established by the Paris Peace Accords, the North Vietnamese launched Campaign 275. The objective of this campaign was the capture of Ban Me Thuot in the Central Highlands. The battle began on March 4 and the North Vietnamese quickly encircled the city. As it became clear that the communists would take the city and probably the entire Darlac province, Thieu decided to withdraw his forces in order to protect the more critical populous areas. Accordingly, he ordered his forces in the Central Highlands to pull back from their positions. Abandoning Pleiku and Kontum, the South Vietnamese forces began to move toward the sea, but what began as an orderly withdrawal soon turned into panic. The South Vietnamese forces rapidly fell apart. The North Vietnamese were successful in both the Central Highlands and further north at Quang Tri, Hue, and Da Nang. The South Vietnamese soon collapsed as a cogent fighting force and the North Vietnamese continued the attack all the way to Saigon. South Vietnam surrendered unconditionally on April 30.

## **MARCH 9**

### **1965 Marines continue to land at Da Nang**

The 3,500 Marines of the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade under Brig. Gen. Frederick J. Karch continue to land at Da Nang. The Marines had begun disembarking from the USS *Henrico*, *Union*, and *Vancouver* on March 8 and were the first U.S. combat troops in South Vietnam. Among the arrivals on this day were the first U.S. armor in Vietnam--a tank of the 3rd Marine Tank Battalion. More tanks, including those with flame-throwing capability, followed in a few days. There was scattered firing from Viet Cong soldiers hidden ashore as the Marines landed, but no Marines were hit. The Marines were at once assigned to protect the U.S. base at Da Nang, both from the immediate perimeter and from the high ground along a ridge to the west.

Many others eventually joined this initial contingent of Marines. During the course of the war, the Marine Corps deployed one corps-level headquarters, two Marine divisions, two additional Marine regimental landing teams and a reinforced Marine aircraft wing, plus a number of battalion-size Marine special landing forces afloat with the 7th Fleet. Present at the beginning of U.S. commitment to the Vietnam War, the Marine Corps was also there at the end. In 1975, Marine Corps elements took part in the final evacuation of South Vietnam as the country fell to the North Vietnamese.

### **1970 Marines hand over control of I Corps region**

The U.S. Marines turn over control of the five northernmost provinces in South Vietnam to the U.S. Army. The Marines had been responsible for this area since they first arrived in South Vietnam in 1965. The change in responsibility for this area was part of President Richard Nixon's initiative to reduce U.S. troop levels as the South Vietnamese accepted more responsibility for the fighting. After the departure of the 3rd Marine Division from Vietnam in late 1969, the 1st Marine Division was the only marine division left operating in South Vietnam.

## **MARCH 10**

### **1970 Army captain charged with My Lai war crimes**

The U.S. Army accuses Capt. Ernest Medina and four other soldiers of committing crimes at My Lai in March 1968. The charges ranged from premeditated murder to rape and the "maiming" of a suspect under interrogation. Medina was the company commander of Lt. William Calley and other soldiers charged with murder and numerous crimes at My Lai 4 in Song My village.

The My Lai massacre became the most publicized war atrocity committed by U.S. troops in Vietnam. Allegedly, a platoon had slaughtered between 200 and 500 unarmed villagers at My Lai 4, a cluster of hamlets in the coastal lowlands of I Corps Tactical Zone. This was a heavily mined region where Viet Cong guerrillas were firmly entrenched and numerous members of the participating platoon had been killed or maimed during the preceding month.

The company had been conducting a search-and-destroy mission. In search of the 48th Viet Cong (VC) Local Force Battalion, the unit entered My Lai but found only women, children, and old men. Frustrated by unanswered losses due to snipers and mines, the soldiers took out their anger on the villagers. During the attack, several old men were bayoneted, some women and children praying outside the local temple were shot in the back of the head, and at least one girl was raped before being killed. Many villagers were systematically

rounded up and led to a nearby ditch where they were executed.

Reportedly, the killing was only stopped when Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson, an aero-scout helicopter pilot, landed his helicopter between the Americans and the fleeing South Vietnamese, confronting the soldiers and blocking them from further action against the villagers. The incident was subsequently covered up, but eventually came to light a year later. An Army board of inquiry headed by Lt. Gen. William Peers investigated the massacre and produced a list of 30 people who knew of the atrocity. Only 14, including Calley and Medina, were eventually charged with crimes. All eventually had their charges dismissed or were acquitted by courts-martial except Calley, who was found guilty of murdering 22 civilians. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, but his sentence was reduced to 20 years by the Court of Military Appeals and further reduced later to 10 years by the Secretary of the Army. Proclaimed by much of the public as a "scapegoat," Calley was paroled in 1974 after having served about three years.

### **1975 Communists surround Ban Me Thuot**

The North Vietnamese surround and attack the city of Ban Me Thuot, as heavy fighting erupts in the Central Highlands. This action, initiated in late January 1975, just two years after a cease-fire was established by the Paris Peace Accords, was part of what the North Vietnamese called Campaign 275. The battle for Ban Me Thuot began on March 4, when North Vietnamese encircled the city with five main force divisions and effectively cut it off from outside support. The South Vietnamese 23rd Division was vastly outnumbered and quickly succumbed to the communists.

As it became clear that the communists would take the city and probably the entire province, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu decided to withdraw his forces in order to protect the more critical populous areas. Accordingly, he ordered his forces in the Central Highlands to pull back from their positions. Abandoning Pleiku and Kontum, the South Vietnamese forces began to move toward the sea, but what started out as an orderly withdrawal soon turned into panic and the South Vietnamese forces rapidly fell apart. The North Vietnamese were successful in both the Central Highlands and further north at Quang Tri, Hue, and Da Nang. The South Vietnamese soon collapsed as a cogent fighting force and the North Vietnamese continued the attack all the way to Saigon. South Vietnam surrendered unconditionally on April 30.

## **MARCH 11**

### **1967 Heavy battle rages during Operation Junction City**

U.S. 1st Infantry Division troops engage in one of the heaviest battles of Operation Junction City. The fierce fighting resulted in 210 reported North Vietnamese casualties.

Operation Junction City was an effort to smash the communist stronghold in Tay Ninh Province and surrounding areas along the Cambodian border northwest of Saigon. The purpose of the operation was to drive the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops away from populated areas and into the open, where superior American firepower could be more effectively used. Junction City was the largest operation of the war to date, involving more than 25,000 troops.

The first day's operation was supported by 575 aircraft sorties, a record number for a single day in South Vietnam. The operation was marked by one of the largest airmobile assaults in history when 240 troop-carrying helicopters descended on the battlefield. In one of the few airborne operations of the war, 778 "Sky Soldiers" parachuted into the Junction City area of operations 28 miles north of Tay Ninh City.

There were 2,728 enemy casualties by the end of the operation on March 17.

## **MARCH 12**

### **1968 McCarthy does well in the Democratic primary**

Senator Eugene McCarthy (D-Minnesota), an outspoken critic of the Johnson administration's policies in Vietnam, polls 42 percent of the vote in New Hampshire's Democratic presidential primary. President Lyndon B. Johnson got 48 percent. A Harris poll later showed that anti-Johnson, rather than antiwar, sentiment provided the basis for McCarthy's surprisingly strong performance.

McCarthy had been a contender to be President Lyndon B. Johnson's running mate in the 1964 election, but since then he had become increasingly disenchanted with Johnson's policies in Vietnam and the escalation of the war. In 1967, he published *The Limits of Power*, an assessment of U.S. foreign policy that was very critical of the Johnson administration. McCarthy announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination in January 1968, saying that he hoped to harness the growing antiwar sentiment in the country, particularly among the young. His showing in the New Hampshire primary astonished most of the political pundits. Johnson, frustrated with his inability to reach a solution in Vietnam and stunned by his narrow victory in New Hampshire, announced on March 31, 1968, that he would neither seek nor accept the nomination of his party for re-election.

The rest of McCarthy's campaign was almost an anticlimax.

Senator Robert Kennedy of New York entered the race and won most of the Democratic primaries until his assassination in June. When the Democratic National Convention opened in Chicago, a conflict immediately erupted over the party's Vietnam platform. While demonstrations against the war took place in the streets outside the convention hall, Vice President Hubert Humphrey won the party nomination.

Humphrey was defeated in the general election by Republican Richard Nixon. McCarthy retired from the Senate in 1971, but his surprising showing in the primary was evidence of the strong antiwar sentiment in the country.

### **1972 Australians withdraw from South Vietnam**

The last remnants of the First Australian Task Force withdraw from Vietnam. The Australian government had first sent troops to Vietnam in 1964 with a small aviation detachment and an engineer civic action team. In May 1965, the Australians increased their commitment with the deployment of the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (RAR). The formation of the First Australian Task Force in 1966 established an Australian base of operations near Ba Ria in Phuoc Tuy province. The task force included an additional infantry battalion, a medium tank squadron, and a helicopter squadron, as well as signal, engineer, and other support forces. By 1969, Australian forces in Vietnam totaled an estimated 6,600 personnel.

The Australian contingent was part of the Free World Military Forces, an effort by President Lyndon B. Johnson to enlist allies for the United States and South Vietnam. By securing support from other nations, Johnson hoped to build an international consensus behind his policies in Vietnam. The effort was also known as the "many flags" program.

Australia began to withdraw its troops in 1970, following the lead of the United States as it drastically reduced its troop commitment to South Vietnam.

## **MARCH 13**

### **1975 Ban Me Thuot falls**

Ban Me Thuot, capital of Darlac Province in the Central Highlands, falls to North Vietnamese troops.

In late January 1975, just two years after the cease-fire established by the Paris Peace Accords, the North Vietnamese launched Campaign 275. The objective of this campaign was to capture Ban Me Thuot in the Central Highlands. The battle began on March 4 and the North Vietnamese quickly encircled the city with five main force divisions, cutting it off from outside

support.

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### **1954 Viet Minh attack French garrison**

A force of 40,000 Viet Minh with heavy artillery surrounded 15,000 French troops at Dien Bien Phu. French General Henri Navarre had positioned these forces 200 miles behind enemy lines in a remote area adjacent to the Laotian border. He hoped to draw the communists into a set-piece battle in which he hoped superior French firepower would destroy the enemy. He underestimated the enemy.

Viet Minh General Vo Nguyen Giap entrenched artillery in the surrounding mountains and massed five divisions around the French positions. The battle began with a massive Viet Minh artillery barrage, followed by an infantry assault. Fierce fighting continued to rage until May 7, 1954, when the Viet Minh overran the last French positions. The shock of the fall of Dien Bien Phu led France, already plagued by public opposition to the war, to agree to the independence of Vietnam at the Geneva Conference in 1954.

## **MARCH 14**

### **1965 Allies launch second wave of Rolling Thunder**

Twenty-four South Vietnamese Air Force planes, led by Vice-Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky and supported by U.S. jets, bomb the barracks and depots on Con Co ("Tiger") Island, 20 miles off the coast of North Vietnam. The next day, 100 U.S. Air Force jets and carrier-based bombers struck the ammunition depot at Phu Qui, 100 miles south of Hanoi. This was the second set of raids in Operation Rolling Thunder and the first in which U.S. planes used napalm.

Operation Rolling Thunder was a result of President Lyndon B. Johnson's decision in February to undertake the sustained

bombing of North Vietnam that he and his advisers had been contemplating for a year. The operation was designed to interdict North Vietnamese transportation routes in the southern part of North Vietnam and slow infiltration of personnel and supplies into South Vietnam. In July 1966, Rolling Thunder was expanded to include the bombing of North Vietnamese ammunition dumps and oil storage facilities, and in the spring of 1967, it was further expanded to include power plants, factories, and airfields in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

The White House closely controlled operation Rolling Thunder and President Johnson sometimes personally selected the targets. From 1965 to 1968, about 643,000 tons of bombs were dropped on North Vietnam. A total of nearly 900 U.S. aircraft were lost during Operation Rolling Thunder. The operation continued, with occasional suspensions, until President Johnson, under increasing domestic political pressure, halted it on October 31, 1968.

### **1969 Nixon discusses the possibility of U.S. troop withdrawals**

At a news conference, President Richard Nixon says there is no prospect for a U.S. troop reduction in the foreseeable future because of the ongoing enemy offensive. Nixon stated that the prospects for withdrawal would hinge on the level of enemy activity, progress in the Paris peace talks, and the ability of the South Vietnamese to defend themselves. Despite these public comments, Nixon and his advisers were secretly discussing U.S. troop withdrawals. On June 8, at a conference on Midway Island with South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, Nixon formally announced a new policy that included intensified efforts to increase the combat capability of the South Vietnamese armed forces so that U.S. forces could be gradually withdrawn. This program became known as "Vietnamization." The first U.S. troop withdrawals occurred in the fall of 1969 with the departure of the headquarters and a brigade from the 9th Infantry Division.

## **MARCH 15**

### **1965 Army Chief of Staff reports on South Vietnam**

Gen. Harold K. Johnson, Army Chief of Staff, reports on his recent visit to Vietnam to President Lyndon B. Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. He admitted that the recent air raids ordered by President Johnson had not affected the course of the war and said he would like to assign an American division to hold coastal enclaves and defend the Central Highlands.

General Johnson also advocated creating a four-division force of Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and U.S.

troops to patrol the Demilitarized Zone along the border separating North and South Vietnam and Laos. Nothing ever came of General Johnson's recommendation on the SEATO troops, but President Johnson ordered the 173rd Airborne Brigade to Vietnam in May 1965 and followed it with the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) in September of the same year. These forces, along with the first contingent of U.S. Marines--which had arrived in March--were only the first of a massive American build up. By 1969, there were more than 540,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam.

### **1973 President Nixon hints at reintervention**

President Nixon hints that the United States might intervene again in Vietnam to prevent communist violations of the truce. A cease-fire under the provisions of the Paris Peace Accords had gone into effect on January 27, 1973, but was quickly and repeatedly violated by both sides as they jockeyed for control of territory in South Vietnam. Very quickly, both sides resumed heavy fighting in what came to be called the "cease-fire war."

Nixon had been instrumental in convincing the reluctant South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu to sign the peace treaty, promising him repeatedly that, "We will respond with full force should the settlements be violated by North Vietnam." As the fighting continued throughout 1973 and into 1974, Thieu appealed to Nixon to make good on his promises. For his part, Nixon was increasingly embroiled in the developing Watergate scandal, and resigned from office in August 1974. His successor, Gerald Ford, was unable to persuade a hostile Congress to provide the promised support to South Vietnam. The United States did nothing when the North Vietnamese launched their final offensive in the spring of 1975. South Vietnam was defeated in less than 55 days, surrendering unconditionally to the North Vietnamese on April 30.

## **MARCH 16**

### **1968 U.S. troops massacre South Vietnamese**

In what would become the most publicized war atrocity committed by U.S. troops in Vietnam, a platoon slaughters between 200 and 500 unarmed villagers at My Lai 4, a cluster of hamlets in the coastal lowlands of the northernmost region of South Vietnam.

My Lai 4 was situated in a heavily mined region where Viet Cong guerrillas were firmly entrenched and numerous members of the participating platoon had been killed or maimed during the preceding month. Lt. William L. Calley, a platoon leader, was leading his men on a search-and-destroy mission; the unit entered the village only to find women, children, and old men. Frustrated by unanswered losses due to snipers and mines, the

soldiers took out their anger on the villagers. During the ensuing massacre, several old men were bayoneted; some women and children praying outside the local temple were shot in the back of the head; and at least one girl was raped before being killed. Others were systematically rounded up and led to a nearby ditch where they were executed.

Reportedly, the killing was only stopped when Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson, an aero-scout helicopter pilot, landed his helicopter between the Americans and the fleeing South Vietnamese, confronting the soldiers and blocking them from further action against the villagers. The incident was subsequently covered up, but came to light a year later. An Army board of inquiry investigated the massacre and produced a list of 30 persons who knew of the atrocity. Only 14, including Calley and his company commander, Captain Ernest Medina, were charged with crimes. All eventually had their charges dismissed or were acquitted by courts-martial except Calley, who was found guilty of personally murdering 22 civilians and sentenced to life imprisonment. His sentence was reduced to 20 years by the Court of Military Appeals and further reduced later to 10 years by the Secretary of the Army. Proclaimed by much of the public as a "scapegoat," Calley was paroled in 1974 after having served about a third of his 10-year sentence.

### **1975 South Vietnamese flee Pleiku and Kontum**

The withdrawal from Pleiku and Kontum begins, as thousands of civilians join the soldiers streaming down Route 7B toward the sea. In late January 1975, just two years after the cease-fire established by the Paris Peace Accords, the North Vietnamese launched Campaign 275. The objective of this campaign was to capture the city of Ban Me Thuot in the Central Highlands. The battle began on March 4 and the North Vietnamese quickly encircled the city with five main force divisions, cutting it off from outside support. The South Vietnamese 23rd Division, which had been sent to defend the city, was vastly outnumbered and quickly succumbed to the communists.

As it became clear that the city--and probably the entire Darlac province--would fall to the communists, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu decided to withdraw his forces in order to protect the more critical populous areas to the south. Accordingly, he ordered his forces in the Central Highlands to pull back from their positions. Abandoning Pleiku and Kontum, the South Vietnamese forces began to move toward the sea. By March 17, civilians and soldiers came under heavy communist attack; the withdrawal, scheduled to take three days, was still underway on April 1. Only 20,000 of 60,000 soldiers ever reached the coast; of 400,000 refugees, only 100,000 arrived. The survivors of what one South Vietnamese general described as the "greatest disaster in the history of the ARVN [Army of the

Republic of Vietnam]" escaped down the coastal highway toward Saigon.

The North Vietnamese overran the South Vietnamese forces in both the Central Highlands and further north at Quang Tri, Hue, and Da Nang. The South Vietnamese collapsed as a cogent fighting force and the North Vietnamese continued the attack all the way to Saigon. South Vietnam surrendered unconditionally to North Vietnam on April 30 and the war was over.

## **MARCH 17**

### **1970 Results of Peers investigation announced**

After an investigation, the U.S. Army accuses 14 officers of suppressing information related to an incident at My Lai in March 1968.

Soldiers from a company had massacred Vietnamese civilians, including women and children, at My Lai 4, a cluster of hamlets in Quang Ngai Province, on March 16, 1968. The company had been conducting a search-and-destroy mission looking for the 48th Viet Cong (VC) Local Force Battalion. The unit entered My Lai, but found only women, children, and old men. Frustrated by unanswered losses due to snipers and mines, the soldiers took out their anger on the villagers, indiscriminately shooting people as they ran from their huts, and systematically rounding up and executing the survivors.

Reportedly, the killing was only stopped when Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson landed his helicopter between the Americans and the fleeing South Vietnamese, confronting the soldiers and blocking them from further action against the villagers. The incident was subsequently covered up, but eventually came to light a year later. The Army commissioned a board of inquiry, headed by Lieutenant General Peers.

After investigating, Peers reported that U.S. soldiers committed individual and group acts of murder, rape, sodomy, maiming and assault that took the lives of a large number of civilians--he concluded that a "tragedy of major proportions" occurred at My Lai. The Peers report said that each successive level of command received a more watered-down account of what had actually occurred; the higher the report went, the lower the estimate of civilians allegedly killed by Americans. Peers found that at least 30 persons knew of the atrocity, but only 14 were charged with crimes.

All eventually had their charges dismissed or were acquitted by courts-martial except Lt. William Calley, the platoon leader of the unit involved. He was found guilty of personally murdering 22 civilians and sentenced to life imprisonment, but his sentence was reduced to 20 years by the Court of Military Appeals and further reduced later to 10 years by the Secretary

of the Army. Proclaimed by much of the public as a "scapegoat," Calley was paroled in 1974 after having served about a third of his 10-year sentence.

### **1964 National Security Council reviews situation**

President Lyndon B. Johnson presides over a session of the National Security Council during which Secretary of Defense McNamara and Gen. Maxwell Taylor present a full review of the situation in Vietnam. During the meeting, various secret decisions were made, including the approval of covert intelligence-gathering operations in North Vietnam; contingency plans to launch retaliatory U.S. Air Force strikes against North Vietnamese military installations and against guerrilla sanctuaries inside the Laotian and Cambodian borders; and a long-range "program of graduated overt military pressure" against North Vietnam. President Johnson directed that planning for the bombing raids "proceed energetically."

A statement issued to the public afterwards stated that the United States would increase military and economic aid to support South Vietnamese President Nguyen Khanh's new plan for fighting the Viet Cong. Khanh's intention was to mobilize all able-bodied South Vietnamese males, raise the pay and status of paramilitary forces, and provide more equipment for the South Vietnamese armed forces.

## **MARCH 18**

### **1970 Lon Nol ousts Prince Sihanouk**

Returning to Cambodia after visits to Moscow and Peking, Prince Norodom Sihanouk is ousted as Cambodian chief of state in a bloodless coup by pro-western Lt. Gen. Lon Nol, premier and defense minister, and First Deputy Premier Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak, who proclaim the establishment of the Khmer Republic. Sihanouk had tried to maintain Cambodian neutrality, but the communist Khmer Rouge, supported by their North Vietnamese allies, had waged a very effective war against Cambodian government forces. After ousting Sihanouk and taking control of the government, Lon Nol immediately set about to defeat the communists. Between 1970 and 1975, he and his army, the Forces Armees Nationales Khmer (FANK), with U.S. support and military aid, would battle the Khmer Rouge communists for control of Cambodia.

When the U.S. forces departed South Vietnam in 1973, both the Cambodians and South Vietnamese found themselves suddenly fighting the communists alone. Without U.S. support, Lon Nol's forces succumbed to the Khmer Rouge in April 1975. The victorious Khmer Rouge evacuated Phnom Penh and began reordering Cambodian society, which resulted in a killing spree and the notorious "killing fields." Eventually, hundreds of

thousands of Cambodians were murdered or died from exhaustion, hunger, and disease. During the five years of bitter fighting for control of the country, approximately 10 percent of Cambodia's 7 million people died.

### **1969 U.S. bombs Cambodia for the first time**

U.S. B-52 bombers are diverted from their targets in South Vietnam to attack suspected communist base camps and supply areas in Cambodia for the first time in the war. President Nixon approved the mission--formally designated Operation Breakfast--at a meeting of the National Security Council on March 15. This mission and subsequent B-52 strikes inside Cambodia became known as the "Menu" bombings. A total of 3,630 flights over Cambodia dropped 110,000 tons of bombs during a 14-month period through April 1970. This bombing of Cambodia and all follow up "Menu" operations were kept secret from the American public and the U.S. Congress because Cambodia was ostensibly neutral. To keep the secret, an intricate reporting system was established at the Pentagon to prevent disclosure of the bombing. Although the *New York Times* broke the story of the secret bombing campaign in May 1969, there was little adverse public reaction.

## **MARCH 19**

### **1966 Seoul agrees to send additional troops**

The South Korean Assembly votes to send 20,000 additional troops to Vietnam to join the 21,000 Republic of Korea (ROK) forces already serving in the war zone. The South Korean contingent was part of the Free World Military Forces, an effort by President Lyndon B. Johnson to enlist allies for the United States and South Vietnam. By securing support from other nations, Johnson hoped to build an international consensus behind his policies in Vietnam. The effort was also known as the "many flags" program.

South Korean forces had been in South Vietnam since August 1964, when Seoul sent a liaison unit to Saigon. The first contingent was followed in February 1965 by engineer units and a mobile hospital. Although initially assigned to non-combat duties, they came under fire on April 3. In September 1965, in response to additional pleas from Johnson, the South Korean government greatly expanded its troop commitment to Vietnam and agreed to send combat troops. By the close of 1969, over 47,800 Korean soldiers were actively involved in combat operations in South Vietnam. Seoul began to withdraw its troops in February 1972, following the lead of the United States as it drastically reduced its troop commitment in South Vietnam.

### **1970 National emergency declared in Cambodia**

The National Assembly grants "full power" to Premier Lon Nol, declares a state of emergency, and suspends four articles of the constitution, permitting arbitrary arrest and banning public assembly. Lon Nol and First Deputy Premier Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak had conducted a bloodless coup against Prince Norodom Sihanouk the day before and proclaimed the establishment of the Khmer Republic.

Between 1970 and 1975, Lon Nol and his army, the Forces Armees Nationales Khmer (FANK), with U.S. support and military aid, fought the communist Khmer Rouge for control of Cambodia. When the U.S. forces departed South Vietnam in 1973, both the Cambodians and South Vietnamese found themselves fighting the communists alone. Without U.S. support, Lon Nol's forces succumbed to the Khmer Rouge in April 1975. The victorious Khmer Rouge evacuated Phnom Penh and began reordering Cambodian society, which resulted in a killing spree and the notorious "killing fields." Eventually, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians were murdered or died from exhaustion, hunger, and disease. During the five years of bitter fighting, approximately 10 percent of Cambodia's 7 million people died.

## **MARCH 20**

### **1954 Americans alarmed about impending French defeat**

After a force of 60,000 Viet Minh with heavy artillery had surrounded 16,000 French troops, news of Dien Bien Phu's impending fall reaches Washington.

French General Henri Navarre had positioned his forces 200 miles behind enemy lines in a remote area adjacent to the Laotian border. He hoped to draw the communists into a set-piece battle in which he supposed superior French firepower would prevail. He underestimated the enemy. Viet Minh General Vo Nguyen Giap entrenched artillery in the surrounding mountains and massed five divisions around the French positions. The battle, which far exceeded the size and scope of anything to date in the war between the French and the Viet Minh, began with a massive Viet Minh artillery barrage and was followed by an infantry assault.

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and other members of the Eisenhower administration were stunned at the turn of events and discussions were held to decide on a course of action. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Arthur Radford proposed the use of nuclear strikes against the Viet Minh. Other options included massive conventional air strikes, paratrooper drops, and the mining of Haiphong Harbor. In the end, President Eisenhower decided that the situation was too far gone and ordered no action to be taken to aid the French.

Fierce fighting continued at Dien Bien Phu until May 7, 1954, when the Viet Minh overran the last French positions. The shock at the fall of Dien Bien Phu led France, already plagued by public opposition to the war, to agree to grant independence to Vietnam at the Geneva Conference in 1954.

### **1968 Retired Marine Commandant comments on conduct of war**

Retired U.S. Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Shoup estimates that up to 800,000 men would be required just to defend South Vietnamese population centers. He further stated that the United States could only achieve military victory by invading the North, but argued that such an operation would not be worth the cost.

Also on this day: The *New York Times* publishes excerpts from General Westmoreland's classified end-of-year report, which indicated that the U.S. command did not believe the enemy capable of any action even approximating the Tet Offensive. This report, Shoup's comments, and other conflicting assessments of the situation in Vietnam contributed to the growing dissatisfaction among a large segment of American society with the Vietnam War. At the end of the previous year, Johnson administration officials had insisted that the United States had turned a corner in the war. The strength and scope of the Tet Offensive flew in the face of these claims, feeding a widening credibility gap. Despite administration assurances that the situation was getting better in Vietnam, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had launched a massive attack at 3:00 A.M. on January 31, 1968, simultaneously hitting Saigon, Da Nang, Hue, and other major cities, towns, and military bases throughout South Vietnam. One assault team got within the walls of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon before they were destroyed. In the end, the communist forces were resoundingly defeated, but the United States suffered a fatal strategic blow. The Tet Offensive cost the government the confidence of the American people and public opinion turned against the war.

## **MARCH 21**

### **1967 North Vietnam rejects Johnson overture**

The North Vietnamese press agency reports that an exchange of notes took place in February between President Lyndon B. Johnson and Ho Chi Minh. The agency said that Ho rejected a proposal made by Johnson for direct talks between the United States and North Vietnam on ending the war. The North Vietnamese demanded that the United States "stop definitely and unconditionally its bombing raids and all other acts of war against North Vietnam." The U.S. State Department confirmed the exchange of letters and expressed regret that Hanoi had divulged this information, since the secret letters were intended

as a serious diplomatic attempt to end the conflict. Nothing of any consequence came from Johnson's initiative.

Meanwhile, in South Vietnam, Operation Junction City produced what General Westmoreland described as "one of the most successful single actions of the year." In the effort, U.S. forces killed 606 Viet Cong in Tay Ninh Province and surrounding areas along the Cambodian border northwest of Saigon. The purpose of Operation Junction City was to drive the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops away from populated areas and into the open where superior American firepower could be more effectively used against them.

### **1972 Khmer Rouge shell Phnom Penh**

In Cambodia, more than 100 civilians are killed and 280 wounded as communist artillery and rockets strike Phnom Penh and outlying areas in the heaviest attack since the beginning of the war in 1970. Following the shelling, a communist force of 500 troops attacked and entered Takh Mau, six miles southeast of Phnom Penh, killing at least 25 civilians.

## **MARCH 22**

### **1968 Westmoreland to depart South Vietnam**

President Lyndon B. Johnson announces the appointment of Gen. William Westmoreland as Army Chief of Staff; Gen. Creighton Abrams replaced him as commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam. Westmoreland had first assumed command of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam in June 1964, and in that capacity was in charge of all American military forces in Vietnam. One of the war's most controversial figures, General Westmoreland was given many honors when the fighting was going well, but when the war turned sour, many Americans blamed him for problems in Vietnam. Negative feeling about Westmoreland grew particularly strong following the Tet Offensive of 1968.

As Westmoreland's successor, Abrams faced the difficult task of implementing the Vietnamization program instituted by the Nixon administration. This included the gradual reduction of American forces in Vietnam while attempting to increase the combat capabilities of the South Vietnamese armed forces.

### **1965 Officials confirm "non-lethal gas" was provided**

The State Department acknowledges that the United States had supplied the South Vietnamese armed forces with a "non-lethal gas which disables temporarily" for use "in tactical situations in which the Viet Cong intermingle with or take refuge among non-

combatants, rather than use artillery or aerial bombardment." This announcement triggered a storm of criticism worldwide. The North Vietnamese and the Soviets loudly protested the introduction of "poison gas" into the war. Secretary of State Dean Rusk insisted at a news conference on March 24 that the United States was "not embarking upon gas warfare," but was merely employing "a gas which has been commonly adopted by the police forces of the world as riot-control agents."

## **MARCH 23**

### **1970 Prince Sihanouk issues a call for arms**

From Peking, Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia issues a public call for arms to be used against the Lon Nol government in Phnom Penh and requests the establishment of the National United Front of Kampuchea (FUNK) to unite all opposition factions against Lon Nol. North Vietnam, the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong), and the communist Pathet Lao immediately pledged their support to the new organization.

Earlier in March, Sihanouk had been overthrown in a bloodless coup led by Cambodian Gen. Lon Nol. Between 1970 and 1975, Lon Nol and his army, the Forces Armees Nationale Khmer (FANK), with U.S. support and military aid, fought the Khmer Rouge and Sihanouk's supporters for control of Cambodia. During the five years of bitter fighting, approximately 10 percent of Cambodia's 7 million people died. When the U.S. forces departed South Vietnam in 1973, both the Cambodians and South Vietnamese found themselves fighting the communists alone. Without U.S. support, Lon Nol's forces succumbed to the communists in April 1975. The victorious Khmer Rouge evacuated Phnom Penh and began reordering Cambodian society, which resulted in a killing spree and the notorious "killing fields." Eventually, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians were murdered or died from exhaustion, hunger, and disease.

### **1961 U.S. plane shot down over Laos**

One of the first American casualties in Southeast Asia, an intelligence-gathering plane en route from Laos to Saigon is shot down over the Plain of Jars in central Laos. The mission was flown in an attempt to determine the extent of the Soviet support being provided to the communist Pathet Lao guerrillas in Laos. The guerrillas had been waging a war against the Royal Lao government since 1959. In a television news conference, President John F. Kennedy warned of communist expansion in Laos and said that a cease-fire must precede the start of negotiations to establish a neutral and independent nation.

## **MARCH 24**

### **1975 North Vietnamese launch "Ho Chi Minh Campaign"**

The North Vietnamese "Ho Chi Minh Campaign" begins. Despite the 1973 Paris Peace Accords cease fire, the fighting had continued between South Vietnamese forces and the North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam. In December 1974, the North Vietnamese launched a major attack against the lightly defended province of Phuoc Long, located north of Saigon along the Cambodian border. They successfully overran the provincial capital at Phuoc Binh on January 6, 1975.

President Richard Nixon had repeatedly promised South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu that the United States would come to the aid of South Vietnam if the North Vietnamese committed a major violation of the Peace Accords. However, by the time the communists had taken Phuoc Long, Nixon had resigned from office and his successor, Gerald Ford, was unable to convince a hostile Congress to make good on Nixon's promises to Saigon.

The North Vietnamese, emboldened by the situation, launched Campaign 275 in March 1975 to take the provincial capital of Ban Me Thuot in the Central Highlands. The South Vietnamese defenders fought very poorly and were quickly overwhelmed by the North Vietnamese attackers. Once again, the United States did nothing. President Thieu, however, ordered his forces in the Highlands to withdraw to more defensible positions to the south. What started out as a reasonably orderly withdrawal degenerated into a panic that spread throughout the South Vietnamese armed forces. They abandoned Pleiku and Kontum in the Highlands with very little fighting and the North Vietnamese pressed the attack from the west and north. In quick succession, Quang Tri, Hue, and Da Nang in the north fell to the communist onslaught. The North Vietnamese continued to attack south along the coast, defeating the South Vietnamese forces one at a time.

As the North Vietnamese forces closed on the approaches to Saigon, the Politburo in Hanoi issued an order to Gen. Van Tien Dung to launch the "Ho Chi Minh Campaign," the final assault on Saigon itself. By April 27, the North Vietnamese had completely encircled Saigon and by April 30, the North Vietnamese tanks broke through the gates of the Presidential Palace in Saigon and the Vietnam War came to an end.

### **1965 First teach-in conducted**

The first "teach-in" is conducted at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor; two hundred faculty members participate by holding special anti-war seminars. Regular classes were canceled, and rallies and speeches dominated for 12 hours. On March 26, there was a similar teach-in at Columbia University in New York

City; this form of protest eventually spread to many colleges and universities.

## **MARCH 25**

### **1968 Johnson meets with the "Wise Men"**

After being told by Defense Secretary Clark Clifford that the Vietnam War is a "real loser," President Johnson, still uncertain about his course of action, decides to convene a nine-man panel of retired presidential advisors. The group, which became known as the "Wise Men," included the respected generals Omar Bradley and Matthew Ridgway, distinguished State Department figures like Dean Acheson and George Ball, and McGeorge Bundy, National Security advisor to both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. After two days of deliberation the group reached a consensus: they advised against any further troop increases and recommended that the administration seek a negotiated peace. Although Johnson was initially furious at their conclusions, he quickly came to believe that they were right. On March 31, Johnson announced on television that he was restricting the bombing of North Vietnam to the area just north of the Demilitarized Zone. Additionally, he committed the United States to discuss peace at any time or place. Then Johnson announced that he would not pursue reelection for the presidency.

Also on this day: A Harris Poll reports that in the past six weeks "basic" support for the war among Americans declined from 74 percent to 54 percent. The poll also revealed that 60 percent of those questioned regarded the Tet Offensive as a defeat of U.S. objectives in Vietnam. Despite Gen. William Westmoreland's assurances in late 1967 that the United States was making headway in the war, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had launched a massive offensive during the Tet holiday that began in late January 1968. Although the communist forces were soundly defeated during this offensive, the scope and extent of the attacks won the communists a major psychological victory in the United States, where the events of Tet confirmed a growing disenchantment with the seemingly never-ending war for increasing numbers of Americans.

### **1967 Martin Luther King leads march against the war**

The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., leads a march of 5,000 antiwar demonstrators in Chicago. In an address to the demonstrators, King declared that the Vietnam War was "a blasphemy against all that America stands for." King first began speaking out against American involvement in Vietnam in the summer of 1965. In addition to his moral objections to the war, he argued that the war diverted money and attention from domestic programs to aid the black poor. He was strongly criticized by other prominent civil rights leaders for attempting to

link civil rights and the antiwar movement.

## **MARCH 26**

### **1975 Hue falls to the communists**

The city of Hue, in northernmost South Vietnam, falls to the North Vietnamese. Hue was the most recent major city in South Vietnam to fall to the communists during their new offensive. The offensive had started in December 1974, when the North Vietnamese had launched a major attack against the lightly defended province of Phuoc Long, located north of Saigon along the Cambodian border. The communists overran the provincial capital of Phuoc Binh on January 6, 1975.

President Richard Nixon had repeatedly promised South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu that the United States would come to the aid of South Vietnam if North Vietnam committed a major violation of the Peace Accords. However, by the time the communists had taken Phuoc Long, Nixon had already resigned from office and his successor, Gerald Ford, was unable to convince a hostile Congress to make good on Nixon's promises to Saigon.

This situation emboldened the North Vietnamese, who launched a campaign in March 1975 to take the provincial capital of Ban Me Thuot in the Central Highlands. The South Vietnamese defenders there fought very poorly and were overwhelmed by the North Vietnamese attackers. Once again, the United States did nothing. President Thieu ordered his forces in the Highlands to withdraw to more defensible positions to the south. What started out as a reasonably orderly withdrawal degenerated into a panic that spread throughout the South Vietnamese armed forces. They abandoned Pleiku and Kontum in the Highlands with very little fighting and the North Vietnamese pressed the attack from the west and north. In quick succession, Quang Tri and Hue fell. The communists then seized Da Nang, the second largest city in South Vietnam. Many South Vietnamese, both military and civilian, died in the general chaos while attempting to escape from the airport, docks, and beaches.

By this time, the South Vietnamese forces were in flight all over the northern half of South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese continued to attack south along the coast, overrunning city after city, methodically defeating the South Vietnamese forces. By April 27, the North Vietnamese had completely encircled Saigon and began to maneuver for their final assault, which became known as the "Ho Chi Minh Campaign." By the morning of April 30, it was all over. As the North Vietnamese tanks broke through the gates of the Presidential Palace in Saigon, the Vietnam War came to an end.

### **1969 Antiwar demonstration in Washington**

A group called Women Strike for Peace demonstrate in Washington, D.C., in the first large antiwar demonstration since President Richard Nixon's inauguration in January. The antiwar movement had initially given Nixon a chance to make good on his campaign promises to end the war in Vietnam. However, it became increasingly clear that Nixon had no quick solution. As the fighting dragged on, antiwar sentiment against the president and his handling of the war mounted steadily during his term in office.

## **MARCH 27**

### **1973 Bombing of Cambodia to continue**

The White House announces that, at the request of Cambodian President Lon Nol, the bombing of Cambodia will continue until communist forces cease military operations and agree to a cease-fire.

In March 1970, Lon Nol had overthrown Prince Norodom Sihanouk in a bloodless coup. Between 1970 and 1975, Lon Nol and his army, the Forces Armees Nationale Khmer (FANK), with U.S. support and military aid, fought the Khmer Rouge and Sihanouk's supporters for control of Cambodia. During the five years of bitter fighting, approximately 10 percent of Cambodia's 7 million people died. When the U.S. forces departed South Vietnam in 1973, both the Cambodians and South Vietnamese found themselves fighting the communists alone. Without U.S. support, Lon Nol's forces succumbed to the Khmer Rouge, surrendering to the communists in April 1975. The victorious Khmer Rouge evacuated Phnom Penh and began reordering Cambodian society, which resulted in a killing spree and the notorious "killing fields." Eventually, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians were murdered or died from exhaustion, hunger, and disease.

### **1965 South Vietnamese forces conduct combat operations in Cambodia**

Following several days of consultations with the Cambodian government, South Vietnamese troops, supported by artillery and air strikes, launch their first major military operation into Cambodia. The South Vietnamese encountered a 300-man Viet Cong force in the Kandal province and reported killing 53 communist soldiers. Two teams of U.S. helicopter gunships took part in the action. Three South Vietnamese soldiers were killed and seven wounded.

## **MARCH 28**

### **1961 Diem's popular support questioned**

A U.S. national intelligence estimate prepared for President

John F. Kennedy declares that South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem and the Republic of Vietnam are facing an extremely critical situation. As evidence, the reports cites that more than half of the rural region surrounding Saigon is under communist control and points to a barely failed coup against Diem the preceding November.

Not only were Diem's forces losing to the Viet Cong on the battlefield, the report alleged that he had not effectively dealt with the discontent among a large segment of South Vietnamese society, which had given rise to the coup against him. The report questioned Diem's ability to rally the people against the communists. Kennedy wondered what to do about Diem, who was staunchly anticommunist but did not have a lot of credibility with the South Vietnamese people because he was Catholic while the country was predominantly Buddhist. Kennedy and his advisers tried to convince Diem to put in place land reform and other measures that might build popular support, but Diem steadfastly refused to make any meaningful concessions to his opponents. He was assassinated in November 1963 during a coup by a group of South Vietnamese generals.

### **1967 American pacifists arrive in Haiphong**

The *Phoenix*, a private U.S. yacht with eight American pacifists aboard, arrives in Haiphong, North Vietnam, with \$10,000 worth of medical supplies for the North Vietnamese. The trip, financed by a Quaker group in Philadelphia, was made in defiance of a U.S. ban on American travel to North Vietnam. No charges were filed against the participants and the group made a second trip to North Vietnam later.

## **MARCH 29**

### **1971 Calley found guilty of My Lai murders**

Lt. William L. Calley is found guilty of premeditated murder at My Lai by a U.S. Army court-martial at Fort Benning, Georgia. Calley, a platoon leader, had led his men in a massacre of Vietnamese civilians, including women and children, at My Lai 4, a cluster of hamlets in Quang Ngai Province on March 16, 1968.

The unit had been conducting a search-and-destroy mission to locate the 48th Viet Cong (VC) Local Force Battalion. The unit entered Son My village but found only women, children, and old men. Frustrated by unanswered losses due to snipers and mines, the soldiers took out their anger on the villagers, indiscriminately shooting people as they ran from their huts. The soldiers rounded up the survivors and led them to a nearby ditch where they were shot.

Calley was charged with six specifications of premeditated murder. During the trial, Chief Army prosecutor Capt. Aubrey Daniel charged that Calley ordered Sgt. Daniel Mitchell to "finish off the rest" of the villagers. The prosecution stressed that all the killings were committed despite the fact that Calley's platoon had met no resistance and that he and his men had not been fired on.

The My Lai massacre had initially been covered up but came to light one year later. An Army board of inquiry, headed by Lt. Gen. William Peers, investigated the massacre and produced a list of 30 people who knew of the atrocity, but only 14 were charged with crimes. All eventually had their charges dismissed or were acquitted by courts-martial except Calley, whose platoon allegedly killed 200 innocents.

Calley was found guilty of personally murdering 22 civilians and sentenced to life imprisonment, but his sentence was reduced to 20 years by the Court of Military Appeals and further reduced later to 10 years by the Secretary of the Army. Proclaimed by much of the public as a "scapegoat," Calley was paroled in 1974 after having served about a third of his 10-year sentence.

### **1973 Last U.S. troops depart South Vietnam**

Under the provisions of the Paris Peace Accords signed on January 27, 1973, the last U.S. troops depart South Vietnam, ending nearly 10 years of U.S. military presence in that country. The U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam headquarters was disestablished. Only a Defense Attache Office and a few Marine guards at the Saigon American Embassy remained, although roughly 8,500 U.S. civilians stayed on as technical advisers to the South Vietnamese.

Also on this day: As part of the Accords, Hanoi releases the last 67 of its acknowledged American prisoners of war, bringing the total number released to 591.

## **MARCH 30**

### **1972 North Vietnamese launch Nguyen Hue Offensive**

A major coordinated communist offensive opens with the heaviest military action since the sieges of Allied bases at Con Thien and Khe Sanh in 1968. Committing almost their entire army to the offensive, the North Vietnamese launched a massive three-pronged attack into South Vietnam. Four North Vietnamese divisions attacked directly across the Demilitarized Zone in Quang Tri province. Thirty-five South Vietnamese soldiers died in the initial attack and hundreds of civilians and soldiers were wounded.

Following the initial assault in Quang Tri province, the North

Vietnamese launched two more major attacks: at An Loc in Binh Long Province, 60 miles north of Saigon; and at Kontum in the Central Highlands. With the three attacks, the North Vietnamese committed 500 tanks and 150,000 men, as well as thousands of Viet Cong, supported by heavy rocket and artillery fire.

After initial successes, especially against the newly formed South Vietnamese 3rd Division in Quang Tri, the North Vietnamese attack was stopped cold by the combination of defending South Vietnamese divisions (along with their U.S. advisers) and massive American airpower. Estimates placed the North Vietnamese losses at more than 100,000 and at least one-half of their tanks and large caliber artillery.

### **1965 Bomb explodes outside U.S. Embassy in Saigon**

A bomb explodes in a car parked in front of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, virtually destroying the building and killing 19 Vietnamese, 2 Americans, and 1 Filipino; 183 others were injured. Congress quickly appropriated \$1 million to reconstruct the embassy. Although some U.S. military leaders advocated special retaliatory raids on North Vietnam, President Lyndon B. Johnson refused.

## **MARCH 31**

### **1972 Fighting intensifies with North Vietnamese offensive**

After firing more than 5,000 rockets, artillery, and mortar shells on 12 South Vietnamese positions just below the Demilitarized Zone, the North Vietnamese Army launches ground assaults against South Vietnamese positions in Quang Tri Province. The attacks were thrown back, with 87 North Vietnamese killed. South Vietnamese fire bases Fuller, Mai Loc, Holcomb, Pioneer, and two smaller bases near the Demilitarized Zone were abandoned as the North Vietnamese pushed the defenders back toward their rear bases. At the same time, attacks against three bases west of Saigon forced the South Vietnamese to abandon six outposts along the Cambodian border.

These were a continuation of the opening attacks of the North Vietnamese Nguyen Hue Offensive, a major coordinated communist offensive initiated on March 30. Committing almost their entire army to the offensive, the North Vietnamese launched a massive three-pronged attack. In the initial attack, four North Vietnamese divisions attacked directly across the Demilitarized Zone into Quang Tri province. Following the assault in Quang Tri province, the North Vietnamese launched two more major attacks: at An Loc in Binh Long Province, 60 miles north of Saigon, and at Kontum in the Central Highlands. With the three attacks, the North Vietnamese had committed 500 tanks and 150,000 regular troops (as well as thousands of

Viet Cong) supported by heavy rocket and artillery fire.

After initial successes, especially against the newly formed South Vietnamese 3rd Division in Quang Tri, the North Vietnamese attack was stopped cold by the combination of defending South Vietnamese divisions (along with their U.S. advisers) and massive American airpower. Estimates placed the North Vietnamese losses at more than 100,000 and at least one-half of their tanks and large caliber artillery.

### **1965 Johnson publicly denies actions contemplated in Vietnam**

Responding to questions from reporters about the situation in Vietnam, President Johnson says, "I know of no far-reaching strategy that is being suggested or promulgated." Early in the month, Johnson had sent 3,500 Marines to Da Nang to secure the U.S. airbase there. These troops were ostensibly there only for defensive purposes, but Johnson, despite his protestations to the contrary, was already considering giving the authorization for the U.S. troops to go from defensive to offensive tactics. This was a sensitive area, since such an authorization could (and did) lead to escalation in the war and a subsequent increase in the American commitment to it.

### **1968 Johnson announces bombing halt**

In a televised speech to the nation, President Lyndon B. Johnson announces a partial halt of bombing missions over North Vietnam and proposes peace talks. He said he had ordered "unilaterally" a halt to air and naval bombardments of North Vietnam "except in the area north of the Demilitarized Zone, where the continuing enemy build-up directly threatens Allied forward positions." He also stated that he was sending 13,500 more troops to Vietnam and would request further defense expenditures--\$2.5 billion in fiscal year 1968 and \$2.6 billion in fiscal year 1969--to finance recent troop build-ups, re-equip the South Vietnamese Army, and meet "responsibilities in Korea." In closing, Johnson shocked the nation with an announcement that all but conceded that his own presidency had become another wartime casualty: "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president."