

# Vietnam by day May

**MAY 1**

## **1972 North Vietnamese troops capture Quang Tri**

North Vietnamese troops capture Quang Tri City, the first provincial capital taken during their ongoing offensive. The fall of the city effectively gave the communists control of the entire province of Quang Tri. As the North Vietnamese prepared to continue their attack to the south, 80 percent of Hue's population--already swollen by 300,000 refugees--fled to Da Nang to get out of the way. Farther south along the coast, three districts of Binh Dinh Province also fell, leaving about one-third of the province under communist control.

These attacks were part of the North Vietnamese Nguyen Hue Offensive (later called the "Easter Offensive"), a massive invasion by North Vietnamese forces designed to strike the blow that would win them the war. The attacking force included 14 infantry divisions and 26 separate regiments, with more than 120,000 troops and approximately 1,200 tanks and other armored vehicles. The main North Vietnamese objectives, in addition to Quang Tri in the north, were Kontum in the Central Highlands, and An Loc farther to the south.

Initially, the South Vietnamese defenders were almost overwhelmed, particularly in the northernmost provinces, where they abandoned their positions in Quang Tri. At Kontum and An Loc, the South Vietnamese were more successful in defending against the attacks, but only after weeks of bitter fighting. Although the defenders suffered heavy casualties, they managed to hold their own with the aid of U.S. advisers and American airpower. Fighting continued all over South Vietnam into the summer months, but eventually the South Vietnamese forces prevailed against the invaders, retaking Quang Tri in September. With the communist invasion blunted, President Nixon declared that the South Vietnamese victory proved the viability of his Vietnamization program, which he had instituted in 1969 to increase the combat capability of the South Vietnamese armed forces so U.S. troops could be withdrawn.

## **1969 Senator criticizes Nixon's handling of the war**

In a speech on the floor of the Senate, George Aiken (R-Vermont), senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, urges the Nixon administration to begin an immediate "orderly withdrawal" of U.S. forces from South Vietnam. Aiken said, "It should be started without delay." The speech was widely regarded as the end of the self-imposed moratorium on criticism that senators had been following since

the Nixon administration took office.

Nixon responded on several occasions that ending the Vietnam War was his "first priority." His first public act in response to the mounting criticism was to announce in June 1969 that he would begin an immediate withdrawal of 25,000 troops from South Vietnam with additional withdrawals to follow at specified intervals. In order to do this, he instituted his "Vietnamization" program, which was designed to increase the combat capability of the South Vietnamese forces so they could eventually assume responsibility for the entire war effort.

## **MAY 2**

### **1970 Joint forces continue attack into Cambodia**

American and South Vietnamese forces continue the attack into Cambodia that began on April 29. This limited "incursion" into Cambodia (as it was described by Richard Nixon) included 13 major ground operations to clear North Vietnamese sanctuaries 20 miles inside the Cambodian border. Some 50,000 South Vietnamese soldiers and 30,000 U.S. troops were involved, making it the largest operation of the war since Operation Junction City in 1967.

The operation began on April 29 with South Vietnamese forces moving into what was known as the "Parrot's Beak," the area of Cambodia that projects into South Vietnam above the Mekong Delta. During the first two days of the operation, an 8,000-man South Vietnamese task force, including elements of two infantry divisions plus four ranger battalions and four armored cavalry squadrons, killed 84 communist soldiers while suffering 16 dead and 157 wounded.

The second stage of the campaign began on May 2 with a series of joint U.S.-South Vietnamese operations aimed at clearing communist sanctuaries located in the densely vegetated "Fishhook" area of Cambodia (across the border from South Vietnam, 70 miles from Saigon). The U.S. 1st Cavalry Division and 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, along with the South Vietnamese 3rd Airborne Brigade, killed 3,190 communists in the action and captured massive amounts of war materiel, including 2,000 individual and crew-served weapons, 300 trucks, and 40 tons of foodstuffs. By the time all U.S. ground forces departed Cambodia on June 30, the Allied forces had discovered and captured or destroyed 10 times more enemy supplies and equipment than they had captured inside South Vietnam during the entire previous year.

Many intelligence analysts at the time believed that the Cambodian incursion dealt a stunning blow to the communists, driving main force units away from the border and damaging their morale, and in the process buying as much as a year for South Vietnam's survival. However, the incursion gave the antiwar movement in the United States a new rallying point.

News of the operation set off a wave of antiwar demonstrations, including one at Kent State University that resulted in the deaths of four students at the hands of Army National Guard troops. Another protest at Jackson State in Mississippi resulted in the shooting of two students when police opened fire on a women's dormitory. The incursion also angered many in Congress, who felt that Nixon was illegally widening the scope of the war; this resulted in a series of congressional resolutions and legislative initiatives that would thenceforth severely limit the executive power of the president.

### **1964 U.S. ship sunk in Saigon port**

An explosion of a charge assumed to have been placed by Viet Cong terrorists sinks the USNS *Card* at its dock in Saigon. No one was injured and the ship was eventually raised and repaired. The *Card*, an escort carrier being used as an aircraft and helicopter ferry, had arrived in Saigon on April 30.

## **MAY 3**

### **1965 173rd Airborne Brigade deploys to South Vietnam**

The lead element of the 173rd Airborne Brigade ("Sky Soldiers"), stationed in Okinawa, departs for South Vietnam. It was the first U.S. Army ground combat unit committed to the war. Combat elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade included the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Battalions, 503rd Infantry; the 3rd Battalion, 319th Airborne Artillery; Company D, 16th Armor; Troop E, 17th Cavalry; and the 335th Aviation company.

Headquartered at Bien Hoa Air Base near Saigon, the Brigade conducted operations to keep communist forces away from the Saigon-Bien Hoa complex. In February 1967, the Brigade conducted a combat parachute jump into a major communist base area to the north of Saigon near the Cambodian border. In November 1967, the Brigade was ordered to the Central Highlands, where they fought a major battle at Dak To against an entrenched North Vietnamese Army regiment on Hill 875. In some of the most brutal fighting of the war, the paratroopers captured the hill on Thanksgiving Day, winning the Presidential Unit Citation for bravery in action.

After more than six years on the battlefield, the Brigade was withdrawn from Vietnam in August 1971. During combat service, they suffered 1,606 killed in action and 8,435 wounded in action. Twelve paratroopers of the 173rd won the Medal of Honor for conspicuous bravery in battle.

### **1968 Paris is chosen as site for peace talks**

After 34 days of discussions to select a site, the United States and North Vietnam agree to begin formal negotiations in Paris on May 10, or shortly thereafter. Hanoi disclosed that ex-Foreign Minister Xuan Thuy would head the North Vietnamese delegation at the talks. Ambassador W. Averell Harriman was named as his U.S. counterpart. The start of negotiations brought a flurry of hope that the war might be settled quickly. Instead, the talks rapidly degenerated into a dreary ritual of weekly sessions, during which both sides repeated long-standing positions without seeming to come close to any agreement.

## **MAY 4**

### **1970 Four students killed at Kent State**

At Kent State University, 100 National Guardsmen fire their rifles into a group of students, killing four and wounding 11. This incident occurred in the aftermath of President Richard Nixon's April 30 announcement that U.S. and South Vietnamese forces had been ordered to execute an "incursion" into Cambodia to destroy North Vietnamese bases there. In protest, a wave of demonstrations and disturbances erupted on college campuses across the country.

At Kent State University in Ohio, student protesters torched the ROTC building on campus and Ohio Governor James Rhodes responded by calling on the National Guard to restore order. Under harassment from the demonstrators, the Guardsmen fired into the crowd, killing four and wounding 11. The Guardsmen were later brought to trial for the shootings, but found not guilty.

President Nixon issued a statement deploring the Kent State deaths, but said that the incident should serve as a reminder that, "When dissent turns to violence it invites tragedy." The shooting sparked hundreds of protests and college shutdowns, as well as a march on Washington, D.C., by 100,000 people. The National Student Association and former Vietnam Moratorium Committee leaders called for a national university strike of indefinite duration, beginning immediately, to protest the war. At least 100 colleges and universities pledged to strike. The presidents of 37 universities signed a letter urging President Nixon to show more clearly his determination to end the war.

### **1961 Rusk reports on Viet Cong strength**

At a press conference, Secretary of State Dean Rusk reports that Viet Cong forces have grown to 12,000 men and that they had killed or kidnapped more than 3,000 persons in 1960. While declaring that the United States would supply South Vietnam

with any possible help, he refused to say whether the United States would intervene militarily. At a press conference the next day, President John F. Kennedy said that consideration was being given to the use of United States forces. Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, did eventually commit more than 500,000 American troops to the war.

## **MAY 5**

### **1972 North Vietnamese turn back South Vietnamese relief column**

South Vietnamese troops from the 21st Division, trying to reach beleaguered An Loc in Binh Long Province via Highway 13, are again pushed back by the communists, who had overrun a supporting South Vietnamese firebase. The South Vietnamese division had been trying to break through to An Loc since mid-April, when the unit had been moved from its normal area of operations in the Mekong Delta and ordered to attack in order to relieve the surrounded city. The South Vietnamese soldiers fought desperately to reach the city, but suffered so many casualties in the process that another unit had to be sent to actually relieve the besieged city, which was accomplished on June 18.

This action was part of the southernmost thrust of the three-pronged Nguyen Hue Offensive (later known as the "Easter Offensive"), a massive invasion launched by North Vietnamese forces on March 30 to strike the blow that would win them the war. The attacking force included 14 infantry divisions and 26 separate regiments, with more than 120,000 troops and approximately 1,200 tanks and other armored vehicles. The main North Vietnamese objectives, in addition to An Loc in the south, were Quang Tri in the north and Kontum in the Central Highlands. Initially, the South Vietnamese defenders in each case were almost overwhelmed, particularly in the northernmost provinces, where government forces abandoned their positions in Quang Tri and fled south in the face of the enemy onslaught.

In Binh Long Province, the North Vietnamese forces had crossed into South Vietnam from Cambodia on April 5 to strike first at Loc Ninh. After taking Loc Ninh, the North Vietnamese forces then quickly encircled An Loc, the capital of Binh Long Province, which was only 65 miles from Saigon. The North Vietnamese held An Loc under siege for almost three months while they made repeated attempts to take the city. The defenders suffered heavy casualties, including 2,300 dead or missing, but with the aid of U.S. advisers and American airpower, they managed to hold An Loc against vastly superior odds until the siege was lifted on June 18. Fighting continued all over South Vietnam into the summer months, but eventually the South Vietnamese forces prevailed against the invaders and they retook Quang Tri in September. With the communist invasion blunted, President Nixon declared that the South Vietnamese victory proved the viability of his Vietnamization

program, which he had instituted in 1969 to increase the combat capability of the South Vietnamese armed forces.

### **1970 U.S. forces capture Snoul, Cambodia**

In Cambodia, a U.S. force captures Snoul, 20 miles from the tip of the "Fishhook" area (across the border from South Vietnam, 70 miles from Saigon). A squadron of nearly 100 tanks from the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and jet planes virtually leveled the village that had been held by the North Vietnamese. No dead North Vietnamese soldiers were found, only the bodies of four Cambodian civilians. This action was part of the Cambodian "incursion" that had been launched by U.S. and South Vietnamese forces on April 29.

In Washington, President Nixon met with congressional committees at the White House and gave the legislators a "firm commitment" that U.S. troops would be withdrawn from Cambodia in three to seven weeks. Nixon also pledged that he would not order U.S. troops to penetrate deeper than 21 miles into Cambodia without first seeking congressional approval. The last U.S. troops left Cambodia on June 30.

## **MAY 6**

### **1972 South Vietnamese defenders hold on to An Loc**

The remnants of South Vietnam's 5th Division at An Loc continue to receive daily artillery battering from the communist forces surrounding the city as reinforcements fight their way from the south up Highway 13.

The South Vietnamese had been under heavy attack since the North Vietnamese had launched their Nguyen Hue Offensive on March 30. The communists had mounted a massive invasion of South Vietnam with 14 infantry divisions and 26 separate regiments, more than 120,000 troops and approximately 1,200 tanks and other armored vehicles. The main North Vietnamese objectives, in addition to An Loc in the south, were Quang Tri in the north, and Kontum in the Central Highlands.

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months, but eventually the South Vietnamese forces prevailed against the invaders and they retook Quang Tri in September. With the communist invasion blunted, President Nixon declared that the South Vietnamese victory proved the viability of his Vietnamization program, which he had instituted in 1969 to increase the combat capability of the South Vietnamese armed forces.

### **1970 Students launch nationwide protest**

Hundreds of colleges and universities across the nation shut down as thousands of students join a nationwide campus protest. Governor Ronald Reagan closed down the entire California university and college system until May 11, which affected more than 280,000 students on 28 campuses. Elsewhere, faculty and administrators joined students in active dissent and 536 campuses were shut down completely, 51 for the rest of the academic year. A National Student Association spokesman reported students from more than 300 campuses were boycotting classes. The protests were a reaction to the shooting of four students at Kent State University by National Guardsmen during a campus demonstration about President Nixon's decision to send U.S. and South Vietnamese troops into Cambodia. Four days later, a student rally at Jackson State College in Mississippi resulted in the death of two students and 12 wounded when police opened fire on a women's dormitory.

## **MAY 7**

### **1954 French fall to Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu**

Dien Bien Phu falls to the Viet Minh. In March, a force of 40,000 Viet Minh troops with heavy artillery had surrounded 15,000 French soldiers, holding the French position under siege. The Viet Minh guerrillas had been fighting a long and bloody war with French colonial interests for control of Vietnam since 1946. In an attempt to score a decisive victory, French General Henri Navarre had positioned the large French force 200 miles behind enemy lines in a remote area adjacent to the Laotian border. He had planned to draw the communists into a set-piece battle in which he hoped superior French firepower would destroy the enemy, but he vastly underestimated his foe.

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. The tide of the battle quickly turned against the French.

U.S. 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 to rage until this day, when the Viet Minh overran the last French positions. During the siege, 1,600 French troops were killed, 4,800 were wounded, and 1,600 missing. The Viet Minh captured 8,000 French and marched them off on foot on a 500-mile trek to prison camps; fewer than half survived the march. Viet Minh casualties were estimated at approximately 7,900 killed and 15,000 wounded.

The battle of Dien Bien Phu marked the end of the French involvement in Southeast Asia. France had lost more than 35,000 men and 48,000 had been wounded in a war that was considered financially and militarily humiliating. The shock of the defeat at Dien Bien Phu led the French government, already plagued by public opposition to the war, to agree to the independence of Vietnam at the Geneva Conference in 1954.

## **MAY 8**

### **1972 Mining of North Vietnamese harbors is announced**

President Richard Nixon announces that he has ordered the mining of major North Vietnamese ports, as well as other measures, to prevent the flow of arms and material to the communist forces that had invaded South Vietnam in March. Nixon said that foreign ships in North Vietnamese ports would have three days to leave before the mines were activated; U.S. Navy ships would then search or seize ships, and Allied forces would bomb rail lines from China and take whatever other measures were necessary to stem the flow of material. Nixon warned that these actions would stop only when all U.S. prisoners of war were returned and an internationally supervised cease-fire was initiated. If these conditions were met, the United States would "stop all acts of force throughout Indochina and proceed with the complete withdrawal of all forces within four months."

Nixon's action was in response to the North Vietnamese Nguyen Hue Offensive. On March 30, the North Vietnamese had initiated a massive invasion of South Vietnam. Committing almost their entire army to the offensive, the North Vietnamese launched a three-pronged attack. In the initial attack, four North Vietnamese divisions attacked directly across the Demilitarized Zone into Quang Tri province. Following that assault, 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 regular troops (as well as

thousands of Viet Cong) supported by heavy rocket and artillery fire. The North Vietnamese, enjoying much success on the battlefield, did not respond to Nixon's demands.

The announcement that North Vietnamese harbors would be mined led to a wave of antiwar demonstrations at home, which resulted in violent clashes with police and 1,800 arrests on college campuses and in cities from Boston to San Jose, California. Police used wooden bullets and tear gas in Berkeley; three police officers were shot in Madison, Wisconsin; and 715 National Guardsmen were activated to quell violence in Minneapolis.

### **1970 Nixon defends invasion of Cambodia**

President Nixon, at a news conference, defends the U.S. troop movement into Cambodia, saying the operation would provide six to eight months of time for training South Vietnamese forces and thus would shorten the war for Americans. Nixon reaffirmed his promise to withdraw 150,000 American soldiers by the following spring.

The announcement that U.S. and South Vietnamese troops had invaded Cambodia resulted in a firestorm of protests and gave the antiwar movement a new rallying point. College students across the nation intensified their antiwar protests with marches, rallies, and scattered incidents of violence. About 400 schools were affected by strikes and more than 200 colleges and universities closed completely. The protests resulted in deaths at Kent State University and later at Jackson State in Mississippi.

Dissent was not limited to campus confrontations. More than 250 State Department and foreign aid employees signed a letter to Secretary of State William Rogers criticizing U.S. military involvement in Cambodia. In addition, there were a series of congressional resolutions and legislative initiatives that attempted to limit severely the executive war-making powers of the president. Senators John Sherman Cooper (R-Kentucky) and Frank Church (D-Idaho) proposed an amendment to the foreign military sales portion of a Defense Department appropriations bill that would have barred funds for future military operations in Cambodia. The bill passed in the Senate by a vote of 58 to 37, but was defeated 237 to 153 in the House. On December 29, 1970, Congress passed a modified version of the Cooper-Church Amendment barring the introduction of U.S. ground troops in Laos or Thailand.

## **MAY 9**

### **1974 House votes to initiate impeachment proceedings**

The House of Representatives Judiciary Committee opens

impeachment hearings against President Richard Nixon, voting to impeach him on three counts on July 30.

The impeachment was the result of the scandal involving the bungled burglary of the offices of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate apartment complex in Washington, D.C., on June 23, 1972. Eventually, it was learned that there was a criminal cover-up that went all the way to the White House. Nixon, facing the impeachment proceedings, resigned the presidency on August 8, 1974. His resignation had a major impact on the situation in Vietnam. Nixon had convinced South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu to consent to the provisions of the Paris Peace Accords by personally promising (on more than 30 occasions) that the United States would re-enter the conflict if the North Vietnamese violated the peace agreement. However, when Nixon resigned, his successor, Gerald R. Ford, was not able to keep Nixon's promises. Ford could not, despite Thieu's desperate pleas for help, get Congress to appropriate significant funds to help the South Vietnamese. Having lost its sole source of aid and support, South Vietnam fell to the North Vietnamese in April 1975.

### **1969 Reporter breaks the news of secret bombing in Cambodia**

William Beecher, military correspondent for the *New York Times*, publishes a front page dispatch from Washington, "Raids in Cambodia by U.S. Unprotected," which accurately described the first of the secret B-52 bombing raids in Cambodia. Within hours, Henry Kissinger, presidential assistant for national security affairs, contacted J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, asking him to find the governmental sources of Beecher's article. During the next two years, Alexander Haig, a key Kissinger assistant, transmitted the names of National Security Council staff members and reporters who were to have their telephones wiretapped by the FBI.

### **1970 Demonstrations held in Washington**

Between 75,000 and 100,000 young people, mostly from college campuses, demonstrate peacefully in Washington, D.C., at the rear of a barricaded White House. They demanded the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Vietnam and other Southeast Asian nations. Afterwards, a few hundred militants spread through surrounding streets, causing limited damage. Police attacked the most threatening crowds with tear gas

**MAY 10**

### **1969 Operation Apache Snow is launched**

The U.S. 9th Marine Regiment and the 3rd Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, along with South Vietnamese forces, commence Operation Apache Snow in the A Shau Valley in western Thua Thien Province. The purpose of the operation was to cut off the North Vietnamese and prevent them from mounting an attack on the coastal provinces.

The operation began with a heliborne assault along the Laotian border and then a sweep back to the east. First contact with the enemy was made by a rifle company from the 101st Airborne on the slopes of Hill 937, known to the Vietnamese as Ap Bia Mountain. Entrenched in prepared fighting positions, the North Vietnamese 29th Regiment repulsed the initial American assault and on May 14 beat back another attempt by the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry. An intense battle raged for the next 10 days and the mountain came under heavy Allied air strikes, artillery barrages, and 10 infantry assaults. On May 20, Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais, commanding general of the 101st, sent in two additional U.S. airborne battalions and a South Vietnamese battalion as reinforcements. The communist stronghold was finally captured in the 11th attack, when the American and South Vietnamese soldiers fought their way up to the summit of the mountain. In the face of the four-battalion attack, the North Vietnamese retreated to sanctuary areas in Laos.

During the intense fighting, 597 North Vietnamese were reported killed and U.S. casualties were 56 killed and 420 wounded. Due to the bitter fighting and the high loss of life, the battle for Ap Bia Mountain received widespread unfavorable publicity in the United States and American media dubbed it "Hamburger Hill," a name evidently derived from the fact that the battle turned into a "meat grinder." Since the operation was not intended to hold territory but rather to keep the North Vietnamese Army off-balance, the mountain was abandoned soon after the battle and occupied by the North Vietnamese a month later.

American public outrage over what appeared to be a senseless loss of American lives was exacerbated by publication in *Life* magazine of the pictures of the 241 U.S. soldiers killed the week of the Hamburger Hill battle. Gen. Creighton Abrams, commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, was ordered by the White House to avoid such battles. Because of Hamburger Hill, and other battles like it, the U.S. started to shift its policy towards Vietnamization, wherein primary responsibility for the fighting would be handed over to the South Vietnamese.

### **1972 Intense air war continues over North Vietnam**

President Richard Nixon's decision to mine North Vietnamese

harbors is condemned by the Soviet Union, China, and their Eastern European allies, and receives only lukewarm support from Western Europe. The mining was meant to halt the massive North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam that had begun on March 30.

In the continuing air war over North Vietnam, the United States lost at least three planes and the North Vietnamese 10, as 150 to 175 American planes struck targets over Hanoi, Haiphong, and along rail lines leading from China. Lt. Randy Cunningham and Lt. Willie Driscoll, flying a Navy F-4J Phantom from the USS *Constellation* knocked down three MiGs in one combat mission. Added to two previous victories, this made Cunningham and Driscoll the first American aces of the Vietnam War (and the only U.S. Navy aces of the war).

Also on this day: Air Force Capt. Charles B. DeBellevue of the 555th Tactical Fighter Squadron, flying with Capt. Richard S. Ritchie in a McDonnell Douglas F-4D, records his first aerial kill. Later, DeBellevue recorded four additional victories with pilot Ritchie--both men achieved the designation of ace (traditionally awarded for five enemy aircraft confirmed shot down in aerial combat). In August, DeBellevue, flying with Captain John A. Madden, Jr., shot down two more MiGs, becoming the leading American ace of the Vietnam War.

## MAY 11

### **1969 Paratroopers battle for "Hamburger Hill"**

U.S. and South Vietnamese forces battle North Vietnamese troops for Ap Bia Mountain (Hill 937), one mile east of the Laotian border. The battle was part of Operation Apache Snow, a 2,800-man Allied sweep of the A Shau Valley. The purpose of the operation was to cut off North Vietnamese infiltration from Laos and enemy threats to Hue and Da Nang. U.S. paratroopers pushing northeast found the communist forces entrenched on Ap Bia Mountain. In fierce fighting directed by Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais, the mountain came under heavy Allied air strikes, artillery barrages, and 10 infantry assaults. The communist stronghold was captured on May 20 in the 11th attack, when 1,000 troops of the 101st Airborne Division and 400 South Vietnamese soldiers fought their way to the summit of the mountain.

During the intense fighting, 597 North Vietnamese were reported killed and U.S. casualties were 56 killed and 420 wounded. Due to the bitter fighting and the high loss of life, the battle for Ap Bia Mountain was dubbed "Hamburger Hill" by the U.S. media.

### **1961 President Kennedy orders more troops to South Vietnam**

President Kennedy approves sending 400 Special Forces troops and 100 other U.S. military advisers to South Vietnam. On the same day, he orders the start of clandestine warfare against North Vietnam to be conducted by South Vietnamese agents under the direction and training of the CIA and U.S. Special Forces troops. Kennedy's orders also called for South Vietnamese forces to infiltrate Laos to locate and disrupt communist bases and supply lines there.

## **MAY 12**

### **1961 Lyndon B. Johnson visits South Vietnam**

Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson meets with South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon during his tour of Asian countries. Calling Diem the "Churchill of Asia," he encouraged the South Vietnamese president to view himself as indispensable to the United States and promised additional military aid to assist his government in fighting the communists. On his return home, Johnson echoed domino theorists, saying that the loss of Vietnam would compel the United States to fight "on the beaches of Waikiki" and eventually on "our own shores." With the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in November 1963, Johnson became president and inherited a deteriorating situation in South Vietnam. Over time, he escalated the war, ultimately committing more than 500,000 U.S. troops to Vietnam.

### **1971 Heavy fighting erupts in A Shau Valley**

The first major battle of Operation Lam Son 720 takes place as North Vietnamese forces hit the same South Vietnamese 500-man marine battalion twice in one day. Each time, the communists were pushed back after heavy fighting. Earlier, the South Vietnamese reportedly destroyed a North Vietnamese base camp and arms production facility in the A Shau Valley. On May 19, in a six-hour battle, South Vietnamese troops engaged the communists. Three Allied helicopters and a reconnaissance plane were downed by enemy ground fire. The fighting, air strikes, and artillery fire continued in the A Shau Valley through May 23; the South Vietnamese claimed the capture of more communist bunker networks and the destruction of large amounts of supplies and ammunition.

## **MAY 13**

### **1972 Heavy fighting continues at Quang Tri and Kontum**

Seventeen U.S. helicopters land 1,000 South Vietnamese marines and their six U.S. advisors behind North Vietnamese lines southeast of Quang Tri City in the first South Vietnamese counterattack since the beginning of the communist Nguyen Hue Offensive. The marines reportedly killed more than 300

North Vietnamese before returning to South Vietnamese-controlled territory the next day. Farther to the south, North Vietnamese tanks and troops continued their attacks in the Kontum area.

On May 1, North Vietnamese troops had captured Quang Tri City, the first provincial capital taken during their ongoing offensive. The fall of the city effectively gave the North Vietnamese control of the entire province of Quang Tri. Farther south along the coast, three districts of Binh Dinh Province also fell, leaving about one-third of that province under communist control.

These attacks were part of the North Vietnamese Nguyen Hue Offensive (later called the "Easter Offensive"), a massive invasion by North Vietnamese forces on March 30 to strike the blow that would win them the war. The attacking force included 14 infantry divisions and 26 separate regiments, with more than 120,000 troops and approximately 1,200 tanks and other armored vehicles. The main North Vietnamese objectives, in addition to Quang Tri in the north and Kontum in the Central Highlands, included An Loc farther to the south.

The situation at Quang Tri would not be rectified until President Nguyen Van Thieu relieved the I Corps commander and replaced him with Maj. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong, whom Gen. Bruce Palmer, Jr., later described as "probably the best field commander in South Vietnam." Truong effectively stopped the ongoing rout of South Vietnamese forces, established a stubborn defense, and eventually launched a successful counterattack against the North Vietnamese, retaking Quang Tri in September.

### **1971 Paris peace talks at standstill**

Still deadlocked, the Vietnam peace talks in Paris enter their fourth year. The talks had begun with much fanfare in May 1968, but almost immediately were plagued by procedural questions that impeded any meaningful progress. Even the seating arrangement was disputed: South Vietnamese Premier Nguyen Cao Ky refused to consent to any permanent seating plan that would appear to place the National Liberation Front (NLF) on an equal footing with Saigon. North Vietnam and the NLF likewise balked at any arrangement that would effectively recognize the Saigon as the legitimate government of South Vietnam. After much argument and debate, chief U.S. negotiator W. Averell Harriman proposed an arrangement whereby NLF representatives could join the North Vietnamese team but without having to be acknowledged by Saigon's delegates; similarly, South Vietnamese negotiators could sit with their American allies without having to be acknowledged by the North Vietnamese and the NLF representatives. Such

seemingly insignificant matters became fodder for many arguments between the delegations at the negotiations and nothing meaningful came from this particular round of the ongoing peace negotiations.

## **MAY 14**

### **1969 President Nixon responds to National Liberation Front proposal**

In his first full-length report to the American people concerning the Vietnam War, President Nixon responds to the 10-point plan offered by the National Liberation Front at the 16th plenary session of the Paris talks on May 8. The NLF's 10-point program for an "overall solution" to the war included an unconditional withdrawal of United States and Allied troops from Vietnam; the establishment of a coalition government and the holding of free elections; the demand that the South Vietnamese settle their own affairs "without foreign interference"; and the eventual reunification of North and South Vietnam.

In his speech, Nixon responded to the communist plan by proposing a phased, mutual withdrawal of major portions of U.S. Allied and North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam over a 12-month period. The remaining non-South Vietnamese forces would withdraw to enclaves and abide by a cease-fire until withdrawals were completed. Nixon also insisted that North Vietnamese forces withdraw from Cambodia and Laos at the same time and offered internationally supervised elections for South Vietnam. Nixon's offer of a "simultaneous start on withdrawal" represented a revision of the last formal proposal offered by the Johnson administration in October 1966--known as the "Manila formula"--in which the United States stated that the withdrawal of U.S. forces would be completed within six months after the North Vietnamese left South Vietnam. The communists' proposal and Nixon's counteroffer were diametrically in opposition to each other and neither side gave in, so nothing meaningful came from this particular round of diplomatic exchanges.

### **1970 South Vietnamese sustain second highest casualties of war**

Allied military officials announce that 863 South Vietnamese were killed from May 3 to 9. This was the second highest weekly death toll of the war to date for the South Vietnamese forces. These numbers reflected the changing nature of the war as U.S. forces continued to withdraw and the burden of the fighting was shifted to the South Vietnamese as part of Nixon's "Vietnamization" of the war effort.

## **MAY 15**

### **1967 U.S. positions south of the DMZ come under heavy fire**

U.S. forces just south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) come under heavy fire as Marine positions between Dong Ha and Con Thien are pounded by North Vietnamese artillery. At the same time, more than 100 Americans were killed or wounded during heavy fighting along the DMZ. On May 17 and 18, the Con Thien base was shelled heavily. Dong Ha, Gio Linh, Cam Lo, and Camp Carroll were also bombarded. On May 18, a force of 5,500 U.S. and South Vietnamese troops invaded the southeastern section of the DMZ to smash a communist build up in the area and to deny the use of the zone as an infiltration route into South Vietnam. On May 19, the U.S. State Department said the offensive in the DMZ was "purely a defensive measure" against a "considerable buildup of North Vietnam troops." The North Vietnamese government on May 21 called the invasion of the zone "a brazen provocation" that "abolished the buffer character of the DMZ as provided by the Geneva agreements."

### **1970 Air Force sergeant awarded Medal of Honor**

At the White House, President Richard Nixon presents Sgt. John L. Levitow with the Medal of Honor for heroic action performed on February 24, 1969, over Long Binh Army Post in South Vietnam. Then an Airman 1st Class, Levitow was the loadmaster on a Douglas AC-47 gunship. His aircraft had been supporting several Army units that were engaged in battle with North Vietnamese troops when an enemy mortar hit the aircraft's right wing, exploding in the wing frame. Thousands of pieces of shrapnel ripped through the plane's thin skin, wounding four of the crew. Levitow was struck forty times in his right side; although bleeding heavily from these wounds, he threw himself on an activated, smoking magnesium flare, dragged himself and the flare to the open cargo door, and tossed the flare out of the aircraft just before it ignited. For saving his fellow crewmembers and the gunship, Airman Levitow was nominated for the nation's highest award for valor in combat. He was the only enlisted airman to win the Medal of Honor in Vietnam and was one of only four enlisted airmen ever to win the medal, the first since World War II.

## **MAY 16**

### **1968 Navy Corpsman receives Medal of Honor for action**

Donald E. Ballard, Corpsman U.S. Navy, is awarded the Medal of Honor for action this date in Quang Tri Province. Ballard, from Kansas City, Missouri, was a corpsman with Company M, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, 3rd Marine Division. He had just finished evacuating two Marines with heatstroke when his unit was surprised by a Viet Cong ambush.

Immediately racing to the aid of a casualty, Ballard applied a field dressing and was directing four Marines in the removal of the wounded man when an enemy soldier tossed a grenade into the group. With a warning shout of, "Grenade!" Ballard vaulted over the stretcher and pulled the grenade under his body. The grenade did not go off. Nevertheless, he received the Medal of Honor for his selfless act of courage. Ballard was only the second man whose valor was rewarded despite the fact that the deadly missile did not actually explode.

### **1972 U.S. bombing destroys main fuel line**

A series of air strikes over five days destroys all of North Vietnam's pumping stations in the southern panhandle, thereby cutting North Vietnam's main fuel line to South Vietnam. These strikes were part of Operation Linebacker, an air offensive against North Vietnam that had been ordered by President Richard Nixon in early April in response to a massive communist offensive launched on March 30.

### **1965 Accident at Bien Hoa kills 27 U.S. servicemen**

What is described by the United States government as "an accidental explosion of a bomb on one aircraft which spread to others" at the Bien Hoa air base leaves 27 U.S. servicemen and 4 South Vietnamese dead and some 95 Americans injured. More than 40 U.S. and South Vietnamese planes, including 10 B-57s, were destroyed.

## **MAY 17**

### **1970 Operations continue in Cambodia**

A force of 10,000 South Vietnamese troops, supported by 200 U.S. advisers, aircraft and logistical elements, attack into what was known as the "Parrot's Beak," the area of Cambodia that projects into South Vietnam above the Mekong Delta. The South Vietnamese reached the town of Takeo in a 20-mile thrust. This action was part of the ongoing operation ordered by President Richard Nixon in April. U.S. and South Vietnamese forces launched a limited "incursion" into Cambodia that included 13 major ground operations to clear North Vietnamese sanctuaries 20 miles inside the Cambodian border in both the "Parrot's Beak" and the densely vegetated "Fishhook" area (across the border from South Vietnam, 70 miles from Saigon). Some 50,000 South Vietnamese soldiers and 30,000 U.S. troops were involved, making it the largest operation of the war since Operation Junction City in 1967.

In the United States, news of the incursion set off a wave of antiwar demonstrations, including one at Kent State University

that resulted in the killing of four students by Army National Guard troops. Another protest at Jackson State in Mississippi resulted in the shooting of two students when police opened fire on a women's dormitory. The incursion also angered many in Congress who felt that Nixon was illegally widening the scope of the war; this resulted in a series of congressional resolutions and legislative initiatives that would severely limit the executive power of the president.

### **1972 South Vietnamese reinforcements near An Loc**

Preceded by five B-52 strikes, which reportedly killed 300 North Vietnamese to the south, South Vietnamese forces arrive by helicopter to within two miles of An Loc in continuing efforts to relieve this besieged city. It had been surrounded by three North Vietnamese divisions since early April. The North Vietnamese had been holding An Loc under siege for almost three months while they made repeated attempts to take the city. The defenders suffered heavy casualties, including 2,300 dead or missing, but with the aid of U.S. advisors and American airpower, they managed to hold An Loc against vastly superior odds until the siege was finally lifted on June 18.

## **MAY 18**

### **1966 Laird charges "credibility gap"**

U.S. Representative Melvin Laird (R-Michigan) states that because the Johnson administration is not providing the American public with precise information on planned troop deployments to Vietnam, a "credibility gap" is developing. Informed sources reported that 254,000 U.S. troops were serving in Vietnam, and that another 90,000 were performing tasks directly concerned with the war. These numbers were higher than those provided by the government. This was emblematic of the gap between what the administration said and what it did, leading to a growing distrust of the government among a large part of American society. This mistrust also plagued Johnson's successor, Richard Nixon, who made Laird his secretary of defense. Like the Johnson administration, Nixon's administration was marked by attempts to manage the information released about the war. Under Nixon, this included the secret bombing campaign of Cambodia, which was kept from the American public until it was exposed by William Beecher, a military correspondent for the *New York Times*, in May 1969.

### **1969 Communists attack Xuan Loc**

More than 1,500 communist troops attack U.S. and South Vietnamese camps near Xuan Loc, located 38 miles east of Saigon. After five hours of intense fighting, the Viet Cong and

North Vietnamese forces were driven off. At the U.S. camp, 14 Americans were killed and 39 wounded; 24 enemy soldiers were killed in the action. At the South Vietnamese camp, 4 South Vietnamese were killed and 14 wounded, with 54 communist soldiers reported killed and 9 captured.

## **MAY 19**

### **1972 South Vietnamese fight to open road to An Loc**

Units of South Vietnam's 9th and 21st Divisions, along with several South Vietnamese airborne battalions, open new stretches of road south of An Loc and come within two miles of the besieged city. In the Central Highlands, North Vietnamese troops, preceded by heavy shelling, tried to break through the lines of South Vietnam's 23rd Division defending Kontum, but the South Vietnamese troops held firm. These actions were part of the North Vietnamese Nguyen Hue Offensive (later called the "Easter Offensive"), a massive invasion by North Vietnamese forces on March 30 to strike the blow that would win them the war. The attacking force included 14 infantry divisions and 26 separate regiments, with more than 120,000 troops and approximately 1,200 tanks and other armored vehicles. The main North Vietnamese objectives, in addition to Quang Tri in the north and Kontum in the Central Highlands, included An Loc farther to the south.

Initially, the South Vietnamese defenders were almost overwhelmed, particularly in the northernmost provinces, where they abandoned their positions in Quang Tri and fled south in the face of the enemy onslaught. At Kontum and An Loc, the South Vietnamese were more successful in defending against the attacks, but only after weeks of bitter fighting. Although the defenders suffered heavy casualties, they managed to hold their own with the aid of U.S. advisors and American airpower. Fighting continued all over South Vietnam into the summer months, but eventually the South Vietnamese forces prevailed against the invaders and retook Quang Tri in September. With the communist invasion blunted, President Nixon declared that the South Vietnamese victory proved the viability of his Vietnamization program, which he had instituted in 1969 to increase the combat capability of the South Vietnamese armed forces.

### **1964 U.S. Air Force begins Operation Yankee Team**

The United States initiates low-altitude target reconnaissance flights over southern Laos by U.S. Navy and Air Force aircraft. Two days later, similar flights were commenced over northern Laos. These flights were code-named Yankee Team and were meant to assist the Royal Lao forces in their fight against the communist Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese and Viet Cong allies.

## MAY 20

### 1969 Kennedy criticizes the "Hamburger Hill" battle

As part of a growing outcry over U.S. military policy in Vietnam, Edward Kennedy (D-Massachusetts), in a Senate speech, scorns the military tactics of the Nixon administration. He condemned the battle for Ap Bia Mountain, which had become known as "Hamburger Hill," as "senseless and irresponsible."

The battle in question had occurred as part of Operation Apache Snow in the A Shau Valley. Starting on May 10, paratroopers from the 101st Airborne had engaged a North Vietnamese regiment on the slopes of Hill 937, known to the Vietnamese as Ap Bia Mountain. Entrenched in prepared fighting positions, the North Vietnamese 29th Regiment repulsed the initial American assault, and beat back another attempt by the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry on May 14. An intense battle raged for the next 10 days as the mountain came under heavy Allied air strikes, artillery barrages, and 10 infantry assaults. On May 20, Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais, commanding general of the 101st, sent in two additional U.S. airborne battalions and a South Vietnamese battalion as reinforcements. The communist stronghold was finally captured in the 11th attack when the American and South Vietnamese soldiers fought their way to the summit of the mountain. In the face of the four-battalion attack, the North Vietnamese retreated to sanctuary areas in Laos.

During the intense fighting, 597 North Vietnamese were reported killed and U.S. casualties were 56 killed and 420 wounded. Due to the bitter fighting and the high loss of life, the battle for Ap Bia Mountain received widespread unfavorable publicity in the United States and was dubbed "Hamburger Hill" in the U.S. media, a name evidently derived from the fact that the battle turned into a "meat grinder." Since the operation was not intended to hold territory but rather to keep the North Vietnamese off balance, the mountain was abandoned soon after the battle and was occupied by the North Vietnamese a month later.

Senator Kennedy was not the only American who thought the battle had been futile and ill advised; there was widespread public outrage over what appeared to be a senseless loss of American lives. The situation was exacerbated by pictures published in *Life* magazine of 241 U.S. soldiers killed during the week of the Hamburger Hill battle. Gen. Creighton Abrams, commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, was ordered by the White House to avoid such battles. Because of Hamburger Hill, and other battles like it, U.S. emphasis was placed on "Vietnamization" (turning the war over to the South Vietnamese forces), rather than direct combat operations.

### **1953 French see "light at the end of the tunnel" in Vietnam**

Using a phrase that will haunt Americans in later years--"Now we can see [success in Vietnam] clearly, like light at the end of a tunnel"--Gen. Henri Navarre assumes command of French Union Forces in Vietnam. The French had been fighting a bloody war against communist insurgents in Vietnam since 1946. The insurgents, the Viet Minh, were fighting for independence and the French were trying to reassert their colonial rule in Indochina.

Upon assumption of command, Navarre addressed himself to the grave deterioration of the French military position, particularly in the North, by advancing a plan for a build up of French forces preparatory to a massive attack against the Viet Minh. He received more support from U.S. Secretary of State John F. Dulles in Washington than he did from Paris, but his operations during the summer only underscored the inadequacy of French military means and French inability to deal with Viet Minh tactics. Ultimately, the French were decisively defeated by the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954.

When the Americans took over the role of stopping communism in South Vietnam, they ran into the same kind of military problems that had plagued the French. Nevertheless, there was a widespread feeling that the United States would not make the same mistakes that the French had. In late 1967, Gen. William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, used similar language to Navarre's when he asserted that the U.S. "had turned the corner in the war." His credibility was seriously damaged on January 29, 1968, when the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese launched a massive attack that became known as the Tet Offensive. Conditioned by Westmoreland's overly optimistic assessments of the war's progress, many Americans were stunned that the communists could launch such a ferocious attack. In the end, the communists were defeated on the battlefield, but achieved a great psychological victory that caused many in America to question the wisdom of continuing U.S. involvement in the war.

## **MAY 21**

### **1969 Military spokesman defends "Hamburger Hill"**

A U.S. military command spokesman in Saigon defends the battle for Ap Bia Mountain as having been necessary to stop enemy infiltration and protect the city of Hue. The spokesman stated that the battle was an integral part of the policy of "maximum pressure" that U.S. forces had been pursuing for the prior six months, and confirmed that no orders had been received from President Nixon to modify that basic strategy. On May 20, the battle, described in the American media as the battle for "Hamburger Hill," had come under attack in Congress from Senator Kennedy (D-Massachusetts), who described the

action as "senseless and irresponsible."

On May 22 in Phu Bai, South Vietnam, Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais, commanding general of the 101st Airborne Division that took "Hamburger Hill," responded to continuing media criticism by saying that his orders had been "to destroy enemy forces" in the A Shau Valley and that he had not received any other orders to reduce casualties by avoiding battles.

The battle in question had occurred as part of Operation Apache Snow in the A Shau Valley. During that operation, which had begun on May 10, paratroopers had engaged a North Vietnamese regiment on the slopes of Hill 937, known to the Vietnamese as Ap Bia Mountain. Entrenched in prepared fighting positions, the North repulsed the initial American assault and on May 14, beat back another attempt by the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry. An intense battle raged for the next 10 days as the mountain came under heavy Allied air strikes, artillery barrages, and 10 infantry assaults. On May 20, Maj. Gen. Zais sent in two additional U.S. airborne battalions and a South Vietnamese battalion as reinforcements. The communist stronghold was finally captured in the 11th attack when the American and South Vietnamese soldiers fought their way to the summit of the mountain. In the face of the four-battalion attack, the North Vietnamese retreated to sanctuary areas in Laos.

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The news of the battle resulted in widespread public outrage over what appeared to be a senseless loss of American lives. The situation was exacerbated by pictures published in *Life* magazine of 241 U.S. soldiers killed during the week of the battle. Subsequently, Gen. Creighton Abrams, commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, was ordered to avoid such battles. Because of Hamburger Hill, and other battles like it, U.S. emphasis was placed on "Vietnamization" (turning the war over to the South Vietnamese forces), rather than direct combat operations.

## **MAY 22**

### **1964 Rusk warns North Vietnamese**

In a major speech before the American Law Institute in

Washington, D.C., Secretary of State Dean Rusk explicitly accuses North Vietnam of initiating and directing the aggression in South Vietnam. U.S. withdrawal, said Rusk, "would mean not only grievous losses to the free world in Southeast and Southern Asia but a drastic loss of confidence in the will and capacity of the free world." He concluded: "There is a simple prescription for peace--leave your neighbors alone." In the fall, there was incontrovertible evidence that North Vietnamese regular troops were moving down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to join the Viet Cong in their war against the Saigon government and its forces.

Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Thailand mobilized its border provinces against incursions by the communist Pathet Lao forces from Laos and agreed to the use of bases by the U.S. Air Force for reconnaissance, search and rescue, and even attacks against the Pathet Lao. By the end of the year, some 75 U.S. aircraft would be based in Thailand to assist in operations against the Pathet Lao. Eventually, Thailand permitted the United States to use its air bases for operations against the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese in South Vietnam, and ultimately to launch bombing raids against North Vietnam. In addition, Thailand sent combat troops to South Vietnam, numbering 11,000 at the height of the Thai commitment.

### **1969 Negotiators differ on diplomatic exchange**

Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, at the 18th plenary session of the Paris peace talks, says he finds common ground for discussion in the proposals of President Richard Nixon and the National Liberation Front. In reply, Nguyen Thanh Le, spokesman for the North Vietnamese, said the programs were "as different as day and night."

At the 16th plenary session of the Paris talks on May 8, the National Liberation Front had presented a 10-point program for an "overall solution" to the war. This proposal included an unconditional withdrawal of United States and Allied troops from Vietnam; the establishment of a coalition government and the holding of free elections; the demand that the South Vietnamese settle their own affairs "without foreign interference"; and the eventual reunification of North and South Vietnam.

In a speech to the American public on 14 May, President Nixon responded to the communist plan with a proposal of his own. He proposed a phased, mutual withdrawal of major portions of U.S. Allied and North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam over a 12-month period. The remaining non-South Vietnamese forces would withdraw to enclaves and abide by a cease-fire until withdrawals were completed. Nixon also insisted that North Vietnamese forces withdraw from Cambodia and Laos at the

same time and offered internationally supervised elections for South Vietnam. Nixon's offer of a "simultaneous start on withdrawal" represented a revision of the last formal proposal offered by the Johnson administration in October 1966. In the earlier proposal, known as the "Manila formula," the United States stated that the withdrawal of U.S. forces would be completed within six months after the North Vietnamese left South Vietnam.

In the end, Nguyen Thanh Le's observation was on target. The communists' proposal and Nixon's counteroffer were very different and there was, in fact, almost no common ground. Neither side relented and nothing meaningful came from this diplomatic exchange.

## **MAY 23**

### **1967 Congressman claims M-16 is defective**

A public controversy over the M-16, the basic combat rifle in Vietnam, begins after Representative James J. Howard (D-New Jersey) reads a letter to the House of Representatives in which a Marine in Vietnam claims that almost all Americans killed in the battle for Hill 881 died as a result of their new M-16 rifles jamming. The Defense Department acknowledged on August 28 that there had been a "serious increase in frequency of malfunctions in the M-16."

The M-16 had become the standard U.S. infantry rifle in Vietnam earlier in 1967, replacing the M-14. Almost two pounds lighter and five inches shorter than the M-14, but with the same effective range of over 500 yards, it fired a smaller, lighter 5.56-mm cartridge. The M-16 could be fired fully automatic (like a machine gun) or one shot at a time.

Because the M-16 was rushed into mass production, early models were plagued by stoppages that caused some units to request a reissue of the M-14. Technical investigation revealed a variety of causes for the defect, in both the weapon and ammunition design, and in care and cleaning in the field. With these deficiencies corrected, the M-16 became a popular infantry rifle that was able to hold its own against the Soviet-made AK-47 assault rifle used by the enemy.

### **1972 United States widens aerial campaign**

Heavy U.S. air attacks that began with an order by President Richard Nixon on May 8 are widened to include more industrial and non-military sites. In 190 strikes, the United States lost one plane but shot down four. The new strikes were part of the ongoing Operation Linebacker, an effort launched in response to the massive North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam on March 30. The purpose of the raids were to interdict

supplies from outside sources and the movement of equipment and supplies to the North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam. The strikes concentrated on rail lines around Hanoi and Haiphong, bridges, pipelines, power plants, troops and troop training facilities, and rail lines to China.

### **1971 North Vietnamese infiltrators attack U.S. base**

North Vietnamese demolition experts infiltrate the major U.S. air base at Cam Ranh Bay, blowing up six tanks of aviation fuel, which resulted in the loss of about 1.5 million gallons. U.S. commander Creighton Abrams criticized the inadequate security.

## **MAY 24**

### **1964 Goldwater suggests using atomic weapons**

Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Arizona), running for the Republican Party nomination in the upcoming presidential election, gives an interview in which he discusses the use of low-yield atomic bombs in North Vietnam to defoliate forests and destroy bridges, roads, and railroad lines bringing supplies from communist China. During the storm of criticism that followed, Goldwater tried to back away from these drastic actions, claiming that he did not mean to advocate the use of atomic bombs but was "repeating a suggestion made by competent military people." Democrats painted Goldwater as a warmonger who was overly eager to use nuclear weapons in Vietnam. Though he won his party's nomination, Goldwater was never able to shake his image as an extremist in Vietnam policies. This image was a key factor in his crushing defeat by opponent Lyndon B. Johnson, who took about 61 percent of the vote to Goldwater's 39 percent.

### **1971 Soldiers place controversial ad in antiwar newspaper**

At Fort Bragg, North Carolina, an antiwar newspaper advertisement signed by 29 U.S. soldiers supporting the Concerned Officers Movement results in controversy. The group had been formed in 1970 in Washington, D.C., by a small group of junior naval officers opposed to the war. The newspaper advertisement at Fort Bragg was in support of group's members, who had joined with antiwar activist David Harris and others in San Diego to mobilize opposition to the departure of the carrier USS *Constellation* for Vietnam. No official action was taken against the military dissidents at Fort Bragg and the aircraft carrier sailed on schedule from San Diego.

## **MAY 25**

### **1969 National Democratic Front formed in Saigon**

South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu assumes personal leadership of the National Social Democratic Front at its inaugural meeting in Saigon. Thieu said the establishment of this coalition party was "the first concrete step in unifying the political factions in South Vietnam for the coming political struggle with the communists," and emphasized that the new party would not be "totalitarian or despotic." The six major parties comprising the NSDF coalition were: the Greater Union Force, composed largely of militant Roman Catholic refugees from North Vietnam; the Social Humanist Party, successor to the Can Lao party, which had held power under the Ngo Dinh Diem regime; the Revolutionary Dai Viet, created to fight the French; the Social Democratic Party, a faction of the Hoa Hao religious sect; the United Vietnam Kuomintang, formed as an anti-French party; and the People's Alliance for Social Revolution, a pro-government bloc formed in 1968.

### **1968 Communist launch new offensive**

The communists launch their third major assault of the year on Saigon. The heaviest fighting occurred during the first three days of June, and again centered on Cholon, the Chinese section of Saigon, where U.S. and South Vietnamese forces used helicopters, fighter-bombers, and tanks to dislodge deeply entrenched Viet Cong infiltrators. A captured enemy directive, which the U.S. command made public on May 28, indicated that the Viet Cong saw the offensive as a means of influencing the Paris peace talks in their favor.

## **MAY 26**

### **1965 Australian troops depart for Vietnam**

Eight hundred Australian troops depart for Vietnam and New Zealand announces that it will send an artillery battalion.

The Australian government had first sent troops to Vietnam in 1964 in the form of a small aviation detachment and an engineer civic action team. They were increasing their commitment to the war with the deployment of the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (RAR). In 1966, the Australians once again increased their troop strength in Vietnam with the formation of the First Australian Task Force, which established a base of operations near Ba Ria in Phuoc Tuy province. The task force included two infantry battalions, 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 8,000 personnel.

New Zealand had initially sent a small engineer detachment to South Vietnam, but later sent an artillery battery in July 1965. Over time, the New Zealand contingent, which was placed

under the operational control of the First Australian Task Force, grew to over 1,000 men.

The Australian and New Zealand contingents were part of the Free World Military Forces, also known as the "many flags" program, which was 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.

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

### **1971 North Vietnamese seize Snoul, Cambodia**

In Cambodia, an estimated 1,000 North Vietnamese capture the strategic rubber plantation town of Snoul, driving out 2,000 South Vietnamese as U.S. air strikes support the Allied forces. Snoul gave the communists control of sections of Routes 7 and 13 that led into South Vietnam and access to large amounts of abandoned military equipment and supplies. On May 31, the Cambodian government called for peace talks if all North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces agreed to withdraw. The communists rejected the bid. Cambodia ultimately fell to the communist Khmer Rouge and their North Vietnamese allies in April 1975.

## **MAY 27**

### **1965 U.S. warships begin bombardment of Viet Cong targets**

Augmenting the vital role now being played by U.S. aircraft carriers, whose planes participated in many of the raids over South and North Vietnam, U.S. warships from the 7th Fleet begin to fire on Viet Cong targets in the central area of South Vietnam. At first, this gunfire was limited to 5-inch-gun destroyers, but other ships would eventually be used in the mission.

Organized into Task Group 70.8, the ships were assigned from the fleet's cruiser-destroyer command, from the carrier escort units and amphibious units, from the Navy-Coast Guard Coastal Surveillance Force, and from the Royal Australian Navy. Ships and weapons included the battleship *New Jersey*, with 16-inch guns; cruisers with 8-inch and 5-inch guns; destroyers with 5-inch guns, and inshore fire support ships and landing ships.

Naval gunfire support and shore bombardment ranged the entire coast of Vietnam, but most of the operations took place off the coast of the northernmost region of South Vietnam, just south of the Demilitarized Zone. During the 1968 Tet Offensive,

Task Group 70.8 had as many as 22 ships at a time on the gun line, offering invaluable naval gunfire support to ground forces.

In May 1972, as part of Operation Linebacker I, a 7th Fleet cruiser-destroyer group bombarded targets near Haiphong and along the North Vietnam coast, firing over 111,000 rounds at the enemy. One destroyer was hit by a MiG bombing attack and 16 ships were hit by communist shore batteries, but none were sunk.

### **1971 Sweden announces support to Viet Cong**

In Sweden, Foreign Minister Torsten Nilsson reveals that Sweden has been providing assistance to the Viet Cong, including some \$550,000 worth of medical supplies. Similar Swedish aid was to go to Cambodian and Laotian civilians affected by the Indochinese fighting. This support was primarily humanitarian in nature and included no military aid.

## **MAY 28**

### **1969 U.S. troops abandon "Hamburger Hill"**

U.S. troops abandon Ap Bia Mountain. A spokesman for the 101st Airborne Division said that the U.S. troops "have completed their search of the mountain and are now continuing their reconnaissance-in-force mission throughout the A Shau Valley."

This announcement came amid the public outcry about what had become known as the "Battle of Hamburger Hill." The battle was part of Operation Apache Snow in the A Shau Valley. The operation began on May 10 when paratroopers from the 101st Airborne engaged a North Vietnamese regiment on the slopes of Hill 937, known to the Vietnamese as Ap Bia Mountain. Entrenched in prepared fighting positions, the North Vietnamese 29th Regiment repulsed the initial American assault and beat back another attempt by the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry on May 14. An intense battle raged for the next 10 days as the mountain came under heavy Allied air strikes, artillery barrages, and 10 infantry assaults. On May 20, Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais, commanding general of the 101st, sent in two additional U.S. airborne battalions and a South Vietnamese battalion as reinforcements. The communist stronghold was finally captured in the 11th attack, when the American and South Vietnamese soldiers fought their way to the summit of the mountain. In the face of the four-battalion attack, the North Vietnamese retreated to sanctuary areas in Laos.

During the intense fighting, 597 North Vietnamese were reported killed and U.S. casualties were 56 killed and 420 wounded. Due to the bitter fighting and the high loss of life, the battle for Ap Bia Mountain received widespread unfavorable

publicity in the United States and was dubbed "Hamburger Hill" in the U.S. media, a name evidently derived from the fact that the battle turned into a "meat grinder." The purpose of the operation was not to hold territory but rather to keep the North Vietnamese off balance so the decision was made to abandon the mountain shortly after it was captured. The North Vietnamese occupied it a month after it was abandoned.

Outrage over what appeared to be a senseless loss of American lives was exacerbated by pictures published in *Life* magazine of 241 U.S. soldiers killed during the week of the battle. Gen. Creighton Abrams, commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, was ordered to avoid such battles. Because of Hamburger Hill, and other battles like it, U.S. emphasis was placed on "Vietnamization"--turning the war over to the South Vietnamese forces rather than engage in direct combat operations.

## **MAY 29**

### **1972 United States and USSR issue a joint communique**

In a joint communique issued by the United States and the Soviet Union following the conclusion of summit talks with General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev during President Richard Nixon's visit to Moscow (the first visit ever by an U.S. president), both countries set forth their standard positions on Vietnam. The United States insisted that the future of South Vietnam should be left to the South Vietnamese without interference. The Soviet Union insisted on a withdrawal of U.S. and Allied forces from South Vietnam and an end to the bombing of North Vietnam.

Despite this disagreement over the situation in Southeast Asia, Brezhnev and Nixon had reached a *détente* and Brezhnev did not want the Vietnam War to threaten the thawing of relations with the United States. Nixon, who had also visited China in February 1972, had hoped that the rapprochement with the Chinese and Soviets would scare North Vietnam into making concessions at the Paris peace talks. He was wrong, however, and the North Vietnamese continued to pursue the massive invasion of South Vietnam that they had launched on March 30 and proved intractable in the ongoing negotiations.

The Soviet Union had supported North Vietnam because it served Soviet interests well by keeping the United States fully occupied in an area not of crucial importance to the USSR. After the 1968 Tet Offensive, the Soviets believed for the first time that a total victory was possible, but as the fighting continued, the Soviet leaders became increasingly weary of the war. They came to believe that little more was to be gained from a war that was proving very expensive for the Soviet Union. The Soviets had supplied weapons and equipment that were used in the 1972 spring offensive, but when the Paris peace talks became deadlocked later that year, the Soviets pressured Hanoi to accept a compromise settlement with South Vietnam and the

United States that was finally reached in January 1973.

## **MAY 30**

### **1966 U.S. aircraft carry out new raids**

In the largest raids since air attacks on North Vietnam began in February 1965, U.S. planes destroy five bridges, 17 railroad cars, and 20 buildings in the Thanh Hoa and Vinh areas (100 and 200 miles south of Hanoi, respectively). Other planes hit Highway 12 in four places north of the Mu Gia Pass and inflicted heavy damage on the Yen Bay arsenal and munitions storage area, which was located 75 miles northeast of Hanoi. A U.S. spokesman attributed the unprecedented number of planes taking part in the raids to an improvement in weather conditions.

### **1969 Thieu vows never to agree to a coalition government**

South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, concluding a four-day visit to South Korea, tells reporters at a news conference that he would "never" agree to a coalition government with the National Liberation Front (NLF). Regarding the role of the NLF in possible elections, Thieu said, "If the communists are willing to lay down their weapons, abandon the communist ideology, and abandon atrocities, they could participate in elections."

## **MAY 31**

### **1965 Operation Rolling Thunder continues**

U.S. planes bomb an ammunition depot at Hoi An, west of Hanoi, and try again to drop the Thanh Hoa highway bridge.

These raids were part of Operation Rolling Thunder, which had begun in March 1965. President Lyndon B. Johnson had ordered the sustained bombing of North Vietnam 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 North Vietnamese ammunition dumps and oil storage facilities as targets. 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.

### **1970 Communist soldiers escape South Vietnamese forces**

About 75 communist soldiers who had seized key outposts in the city of Dalat, 145 miles northeast of Saigon, manage to slip past 2,500 South Vietnamese militiamen and soldiers who had surrounded their positions. In earlier fighting, 47 communist soldiers were reported killed; South Vietnamese reported that 16 soldiers were killed and 2 were wounded.