

# Vietnam Day by Day December

## DECEMBER 1

### **1971 Situation in Cambodia worsens**

In Cambodia, communist fighters renew their assaults on government positions, forcing the retreat of Cambodian government forces from Kompong Thmar and nearby Ba Ray, six miles northeast of Phnom Penh.

Premier Lon Nol and his troops had been locked in a desperate battle with the communist Khmer Rouge and their North Vietnamese allies for control of Cambodia since 1970, when Nol had taken over the government from Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The communist forces had just launched a major offensive and the government troops were reeling under the new attacks.

By December 2, the North Vietnamese overran Cambodian forces trying to protect Route 6, one of the key road links between Phnom Penh and the interior. The communists gained control of a 30-mile stretch of Route 6, cutting off thousands of refugees and nearly 10,000 government troops in the northern Kompong Thmar area.

On December 6, Hanoi radio reported that the Cambodian government had lost 12,000 fighting men in the past week's action. The next day, communist gunners renewed their shelling of Phnom Penh, firing three rockets into the capital and eight rockets into the international airport. As the rockets fell, the Communists troops attacked government positions all around the city and by December 11, Lon Nol's forces were in imminent danger of being encircled by the Khmer Rouge, as the communists tried to isolate Phnom Penh from the rest of the country and outside support. With most of the government forces tied down and fighting for their lives, the North Vietnamese were free to use their sanctuaries and resupply routes in Cambodia to begin building up for a major offensive they were planning in South Vietnam for the spring of 1972.

### **1964 Johnson Administration makes plans to bomb North Vietnam**

In two crucial meetings (on this day and two days later) at the White House, President Lyndon B. Johnson and his top-ranking advisers agree, after some debate, to a two-phase bombing plan for North Vietnam.

Phase I would involve air strikes by Air Force and Navy jets against infiltration routes and facilities in the Laotian panhandle. Phase II would extend the air strikes to a larger selection of

targets in North Vietnam. The more "hawkish" advisers--particularly the Joint Chiefs of Staff--preferred a more immediate and intensive series of raids against many targets in North Vietnam, while "dovish" advisers questioned whether bombing was going to have any effect on Hanoi's support of the war. Johnson agreed with the Joint Chiefs on the necessity of bombing, but wanted to take a more gradual and measured approach. When he agreed to the bombing plan, President Johnson made it clear that South Vietnamese leaders would be expected to cooperate and pull their government and people together if they hoped to receive additional aid from the United States. Johnson was concerned that the continuing political instability in Saigon would have a detrimental effect on the South Vietnamese government's ability to pursue the fight against the communist Viet Cong.

## DECEMBER 2

### **1963 South Vietnamese leaders order a temporary halt to the strategic hamlet program**

The military junta, which took control of the South Vietnamese government following the November coup that resulted in the death of President Ngo Dinh Diem, orders a temporary halt to the strategic hamlet program.

This program had been initiated in March 1962 by Diem to gather the peasants residing in areas threatened by guerrilla attack into centralized locations. These locations were to be turned into defensive fortified hamlets. The strategic hamlet program was extremely unpopular because the farmers were forcibly removed from their land and the physical security of the new hamlets was inadequate. In addition, the program was a drain on the assets of the Saigon government.

The junta leaders hoped to win the support of the people by relaxing the rules governing the strategic hamlets. Under the new edict, peasants were not to be coerced into moving into or contributing to the financial upkeep of the hamlets. This tactic did not have any real impact, because the program had already fallen into such disrepair--the senior U.S. representative in Long An Province reported that three-quarters of the strategic hamlets in that area had already been destroyed by the Viet Cong, the peasants, or a combination of both. Ultimately, the South Vietnamese government completely abandoned the program in 1964.

### **1962 Senator Mansfield pronounces American aid to South Vietnam wasted**

Following a trip to Vietnam at President John F. Kennedy's request, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Montana) becomes the first U.S. official to refuse to make an optimistic

public comment on the progress of the war. Originally a supporter of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, Mansfield changed his opinion of the situation after his visit. He claimed that the \$2 billion the United States had poured into Vietnam during the previous seven years had accomplished nothing. He placed blame squarely on the Diem regime for its failure to share power and win support from the South Vietnamese people. He suggested that Americans, despite being motivated by a sincere desire to stop the spread of communism, had simply taken the place formerly occupied by the French colonial power in the minds of many Vietnamese. Mansfield's change of opinion surprised and irritated President Kennedy.

### DECEMBER 3

#### **1962 Report maintains that Viet Cong are prepared for a long war**

Roger Hilsman, director of the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, sends a memorandum to Secretary of State Dean Rusk pointing out that the communist Viet Cong fighters are obviously prepared for a long struggle.

While government control of the countryside had improved slightly, the Viet Cong had expanded considerably in size and influence, both through its own efforts and because of its attraction to "increasingly frustrated non-communist, anti-Diem elements." According to Hilsman, successfully eradicating the Viet Cong would take several years of greater effort by both the United States and the South Vietnamese government of President Ngo Dinh Diem. Real success, he noted, depended upon Diem gaining the support of the South Vietnamese people through social and military measures, which he had so far failed to implement. Hilsman felt that a noncommunist coup against Diem "could occur at any time," and would seriously disrupt or reverse counterinsurgency momentum. As it turned out, Hilsman was eventually proven correct. On November 1, 1963, dissident South Vietnamese generals led a coup resulting in the murder of Diem. His death marked the end of civilian authority and political stability in South Vietnam. The succession of military juntas, coups, and attempted coups in 1964 and early 1965 weakened the government severely and disrupted the momentum of the counterinsurgency effort against the Viet Cong.

#### **1965 Memorandum outlines terms for bombing halt**

In a confidential memorandum to Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton outlines the terms that should precede any permanent bombing halt. He said that North Vietnam must not only cease infiltration efforts, but also take steps to withdraw troops currently

operating in South Vietnam. In addition, the Viet Cong should agree to terminate terror and sabotage activities and allow Saigon to exercise "governmental functions over substantially all of South Vietnam." McNaughton did not believe that these conditions would soon be obtained, however, as they amounted to "capitulation by a communist force that is far from beaten."

## DECEMBER 4

### **1967 Riverine force surrounds Viet Cong battalion**

Elements of the U.S. mobile riverine force and 400 South Vietnamese in armored personnel carriers engage communist forces in the Mekong Delta. During the battle, 235 of the 300-member Viet Cong battalion were killed.

The mobile riverine force was an Army-Navy task force made up of the U.S. 9th Infantry Division (primarily the 2nd Brigade and associated support troops) and the U.S. Navy's Task Force 117. This force was often combined with units from the South Vietnamese 7th and 21st Infantry Divisions and the South Vietnamese Marine Corps. The mobile riverine concept called for Army troops to operate with Navy gunboats and troop carrier boats in the Mekong Delta. This gave the force the capability to travel 150 miles in 24 hours and launch combat operations with its 5,000-man force within 30 minutes after anchoring. The mobile riverine force was activated in June 1967. It conducted operations throughout the Delta until the responsibility for this mission was transferred to the South Vietnamese forces in April 1971, as part of the "Vietnamization" program.

### **1966 Viet Cong attack Tan Son Nhut airport**

A Viet Cong unit penetrates the 13-mile defense perimeter around Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport and shells the field for over four hours. South Vietnamese and U.S. security guards finally drove off the attackers, killing 18 of them in the process. One U.S. RF-101 reconnaissance jet was badly damaged in the attack. The guerrillas returned that same night and resumed the attack, but security guards again repelled them, killing 11 more Viet Cong during the second battle.

## DECEMBER 5

### **1964 Army Captain awarded first Medal of Honor for action in Vietnam**

The first Medal of Honor awarded to a U.S. serviceman for action in Vietnam is presented to Capt. Roger Donlon of Saugerties, New York, for his heroic action earlier in the year.

Captain Donlon and his Special Forces team were manning Camp Nam Dong, a mountain outpost near the borders of Laos and North Vietnam. Just before two o'clock in the morning on

July 6, 1964, hordes of Viet Cong attacked the camp. He was shot in the stomach, but Donlon stuffed a handkerchief into the wound, cinched up his belt, and kept fighting. He was wounded three more times, but he continued fighting--manning a mortar, throwing grenades at the enemy, and refusing medical attention.

The battle ended in early morning; 154 Viet Cong were killed during the battle. Two Americans died and seven were wounded. Over 50 South Vietnamese soldiers and Nung mercenaries were also killed during the action. Once the battle was over, Donlon allowed himself to be evacuated to a hospital in Saigon. He spent over a month there before rejoining the surviving members of his Special Forces team; they completed their six-month tour in Vietnam in November and flew home together. In a White House ceremony, with Donlon's nine surviving team members watching, President Lyndon B. Johnson presented him with the Medal of Honor for "conspicuous gallantry, extraordinary heroism and intrepidity at the risk of his own life above and beyond the call of duty." Donlon, justifiably proud of his team, told the president, "The medal belongs to them, too."

### **1970 North Vietnam announces it will not be intimidated by U.S. bombing**

A North Vietnamese newspaper declares that the country will not be intimidated by U.S. bombing threats. Earlier in the week, U.S. Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird had warned that the U.S. would initiate new bombing raids on North Vietnam if the communists continued to fire on unarmed reconnaissance aircraft flying over their air space. Responding to Laird's threats, North Vietnamese officials declared that any U.S. reconnaissance planes that flew over North Vietnam would be fired upon. This declaration implied that North Vietnam would not be forced into concessions, and was prepared to continue the war regardless of the cost.

## **DECEMBER 6**

### **1961 Operation Farm Gate combat missions authorized**

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff authorize combat missions by Operation Farm Gate pilots. With this order, U.S. Air Force pilots were given the go-ahead to undertake combat missions against the Viet Cong as long as at least one Vietnamese national was carried on board the strike aircraft for training purposes. The program had initially been designed to provide advisory support to assist the South Vietnamese Air Force in increasing its capability. The gradual but dramatic expansion of Operation Farm Gate reflected the increasing involvement of the United States in Vietnam.

President John F. Kennedy originally ordered the Air Force to send a combat detachment to South Vietnam to assist the Saigon government in developing its own counterinsurgency capability. The Air Force formed the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron, which arrived at Bien Hoa Airfield in November 1961. Under Operation Farm Gate, the 4400th used older, propeller-driven aircraft to train South Vietnamese Air Force personnel. With the new order from the Joint Chiefs, the 4400th mission was expanded to include limited combat missions in support of South Vietnamese ground forces.

Farm Gate pilots began flying reconnaissance missions and providing logistical support to U.S. Army Special Forces units. The rules of engagement for combat missions dictated that American pilots only fly missions that the South Vietnamese were unable to undertake. The first Operation Farm Gate mission was flown on December 16, 1961. However, by late 1962, the communist activity and combat intensity had increased so much that President John F. Kennedy ordered a further expansion of Farm Gate. In early 1963, additional aircraft arrived and new detachments were established at Pleiku and Soc Trang.

In early 1964, Farm Gate was upgraded again with the arrival of more modern aircraft. By March 1965, Washington had altogether dropped the requirement that a South Vietnamese national be carried on combat missions. In October 1965, another squadron of A-1E aircraft was established at Bien Hoa. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara approved the replacement of South Vietnamese markings on Farm Gate aircraft with regular U.S. Air Force markings. By this point in the war, the Farm Gate squadrons were flying 80 percent of all missions in support of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). With the buildup of U.S. combat forces in South Vietnam and the increase in U.S. Air Force presence there, the role of the Farm Gate program gradually decreased in significance. The Farm Gate squadrons were moved to Thailand in 1967, where they launched missions against the North Vietnamese forces in Laos.

### **1972 Fighting continues in South Vietnam while negotiators talk in Paris**

Fighting in South Vietnam intensifies as the secret Paris peace talks resume after a 24-hour break. The renewed combat was a result of both sides trying to achieve a positional advantage in the countryside in preparation for the possibility that a cease-fire might be worked out in Paris.

Tan Son Nhut, one of two major airports near Saigon, is hit by the heaviest communist rocket attack in four years. One U.S. rescue helicopter was destroyed and a fuel dump was set

ablaze. In response, U.S. planes bombed suspected Viet Cong positions within 10 miles of the airport. These strikes were followed by South Vietnamese troop attacks against the area from which the rockets were fired. Elsewhere in South Vietnam, fighting continued around Quang Tri, south of the Demilitarized Zone. Quang Tri fell to the North Vietnamese during their spring offensive earlier in the year. South Vietnamese forces reclaimed the city from the communists in September, but fighting continued in the areas around the city.

## **DECEMBER 7**

### **1964 Situation deteriorates in South Vietnam**

The situation worsens in South Vietnam, as the Viet Cong attack and capture the district headquarters at An Lao and much of the surrounding valley 300 miles northeast of Saigon. South Vietnamese troops regained control only after reinforcements were airlifted into the area by U.S. helicopters. During the course of the action, two U.S. advisors were killed. There were over 300 South Vietnamese casualties and as many as 7,000 villagers were temporarily forced to abandon their homes.

In response, Ambassador Maxwell Taylor, who had just returned from Washington, held a series of conferences with Premier Tran Van Huong, General Nguyen Khanh, and other South Vietnamese leaders. Taylor told them that the United States would provide additional financial aid to help stabilize the worsening situation in the countryside. It was agreed that the funds would be used to strengthen South Vietnam's military forces (which South Vietnam agreed to increase by 100,000 men) and to "further economic assistance for a variety of reforms of industrial, urban, and rural development." Nothing was said during these discussions about President Lyndon B. Johnson's plans to commence the bombing of North Vietnam, which had been decided during Taylor's meeting with the president and his advisers when Taylor was in Washington earlier in December.

### **1965 McNamara predicts that more U.S. troops will be needed**

In a memorandum to President Lyndon B. Johnson, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara states that U.S. troop strength must be substantially augmented "if we are to avoid being defeated there." Cautioning that such deployments would not ensure military success, McNamara said the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong "continue to believe that the war will be a long one, that time is their ally and their own staying power is superior to ours."

## **DECEMBER 8**

## **1969 Nixon declares Vietnam War is ending**

At a news conference, President Richard Nixon says that the Vietnam War is coming to a "conclusion as a result of the plan that we have instituted." Nixon had announced at a conference in Midway in June that the United States would be following a new program he termed "Vietnamization."

Under the provisions of this program, South Vietnamese forces would be built up so they could assume more responsibility for the war. As the South Vietnamese forces became more capable, U.S. forces would be withdrawn from combat and returned to the United States. In his speech, Nixon pointed out that he had already ordered the withdrawal of 60,000 U.S. troops. Concurrently, he had issued orders to provide the South Vietnamese with more modern equipment and weapons and increased the advisory effort, all as part of the "Vietnamization" program. As Nixon was holding his press conference, troops from the U.S. 25th Infantry Division (less the Second Brigade) began departing from Vietnam.

Nixon's pronouncements that the war was ending proved premature. In April 1970, he expanded the war by ordering U.S. and South Vietnamese troops to attack communist sanctuaries in Cambodia. The resulting outcry across the United States led to a number of antiwar demonstrations-it was at one of these demonstrations that the National Guard shot four protesters at Kent State.

Although Nixon did continue to decrease American troop strength in South Vietnam, the fighting continued. In 1972, the North Vietnamese launched a massive invasion of South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese forces reeled under the attack, but eventually prevailed with the help of U.S. airpower. After extensive negotiations and the bombing of North Vietnam in December 1972, the Paris Peace Accords were signed in January 1973. Under the provisions of the Accords, U.S. forces were completely withdrawn. Unfortunately, this did not end the war for the Vietnamese and the fighting continued until April 1975 when Saigon fell to the communists.

## **1965 Operation Tiger Hound launched**

In some of the heaviest raids of the war, 150 U.S. Air Force and Navy planes launch Operation Tiger Hound to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the lower portion of the Laotian panhandle, from Route 9 west of the Demilitarized Zone, south to the Cambodian border.

The purpose of this operation, which lasted until 1968, was to reduce North Vietnamese infiltration down the trail into South Vietnam. After 1968, the Tiger Hound missions became part of



a new operation called Commando Hunt.

### **1966 North Vietnam rejects Johnson's prisoner exchange proposal**

The International Red Cross announces in Geneva that North Vietnam has rejected a proposal by President Johnson for a resolution of the prisoner of war situation. He had proposed a joint discussion of fair treatment and possible exchange of war captives held by both sides. The International Red Cross submitted the proposal to North Vietnamese officials in July after Johnson first broached the plan on July 20 at a news conference. No solution was reached on the issue until the Paris Peace Accords were signed in January 1973. By the terms of the accords, all U.S. prisoners were to be released by the following March.

## **DECEMBER 9**

### **1965 Newspaper reports on bombing over North Vietnam**

An article in the *New York Times* asserts that the U.S. bombing campaign has neither destabilized North Vietnam's economy nor appreciably reduced the flow of its forces into South Vietnam.

These observations were strikingly similar to an earlier Defense Intelligence Agency analysis, which concluded that "the idea that destroying, or threatening to destroy, North Vietnam's industry would pressure Hanoi into calling it quits seems, in retrospect, a colossal misjudgement."

The first air strikes against North Vietnam were flown in the fall of 1964, in retaliation for two attacks on American warships in the Gulf of Tonkin (although the second reported attack has never been verified). Additional strikes, carried out under the name Operation Flaming Dart, were ordered in February 1965 in response to Viet Cong attacks on a U.S. Army barracks at Pleiku and a nearby helicopter base, which resulted in the deaths of nine Americans. When the Viet Cong attacked other U.S. facilities in South Vietnam, President Johnson initiated Operation Rolling Thunder in March 1965, an intensified air campaign against North Vietnam. He hoped that this campaign would relieve some of the pressure on South Vietnam, where the situation was rapidly deteriorating. Unfortunately, the bombing campaign did not have the desired results and Johnson had to commit U.S. ground troops to stabilize the situation.

### **1971 Paris Peace talks break down**

For the first time since the Paris peace talks began in May 1968, both sides refuse to set another meeting date for continuation of the negotiations.

The refusal to continue came during the 138th session of the peace talks. U.S. delegate William Porter angered the communist negotiators by asking for a postponement of the next scheduled session of the conference until December 30, to give Hanoi and the Viet Cong an opportunity to develop a "more constructive approach" at the talks.

The U.S. side was displeased with the North Vietnamese, who repeatedly demanded that South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu resign as a prerequisite for any meaningful discussions. Although both sides returned to the official talks in January 1972, the real negotiations were being conducted between Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, the lead North Vietnamese negotiator, in a private villa outside Paris. These secret talks did not result in a peace agreement until January 1973, after the massive 1972 North Vietnamese Easter Offensive had been blunted and Nixon had ordered the "Christmas bombing" of Hanoi and Haiphong to convince North Vietnam to rejoin the peace negotiations.

## **DECEMBER 10**

### **1970 Calley trial defense begins**

The defense opens its case in the murder trial of Lt. William Calley. Charged with six specifications of premeditated murder, Calley was a platoon leader in Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, 11th Infantry Brigade (Light) of the 23rd (Americal) Division. He was tried because of his leadership role in the My Lai massacres. On March 16, 1968, Calley led his troops to murder innocent Vietnamese civilians living in a cluster of hamlets located in Son Tinh District in Quang Ngai Province in the northern coastal lowlands.

Citing "superior's orders," Defense Attorney George Lattimer contended that Capt. Ernest Medina, Calley's company commander, told his men that they were finally going to fight the enemy. He reportedly ordered "every living thing" killed. Lattimer also cited poor training of the platoon, the rage of the men who had seen their buddies killed, and the expectation of fierce resistance as additional factors contributing to the incident. The lawyer also charged that higher commanders on the ground and in the air observed the episode but did nothing.

Despite Lattimer's argument, Calley was found guilty of murdering 22 civilians and sentenced to life imprisonment. His sentence was reduced to 20 years by the Court of Military Appeals and further reduced to 10 years by the Secretary of the Army. Proclaimed a "scapegoat" by much of the public, Calley

was paroled by President Richard Nixon in 1974, after serving about a third of his 10-year sentence.

### **1972 Breakthrough appears near in Paris peace talks**

Technical experts on both sides begin work on the language of a proposed peace accord, giving rise to hope that a final agreement is near. A peace agreement was signed on January 23, 1973.

The peace agreement came out of secret negotiations National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger was conducting with North Vietnamese representatives at a villa outside Paris. Gen. Alexander Haig, who had been briefing President Richard Nixon on the Paris talks, was alerted to fly to Saigon with the document when it was completed, so that Saigon could sign while the United States and Hanoi signed in Paris. Unfortunately, the talks broke down two days later when South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu balked at the proposed agreement because it did not require North Vietnamese troops to leave the south. The North Vietnamese negotiators refused to discuss the withdrawal of their troops and walked out. They returned only after Nixon ordered the bombing of North Vietnam. After 11 days of bombing, Hanoi agreed to send negotiators back to Paris. When the talks resumed in January 1973, the negotiations moved ahead quickly. On January 23, the United States, North Vietnam, the Republic of Vietnam, and the Viet Cong signed a cease-fire agreement that took effect five days later.

## **DECEMBER 11**

### **1969 Paratroopers depart South Vietnam**

Paratroopers from the U.S. Third Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division, depart from Vietnam.

The unit was sent to Vietnam in February 1968 as an emergency measure in response to the Communist 1968 Tet Offensive. Landing at Chu Lai, the unit was attached to the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) and given the mission of protecting the ancient capital of Hue in the region just south of the Demilitarized Zone. In September 1968, the Third Brigade was moved south to counter enemy forces around Saigon. It was assigned to the Capital Military Assistance Command and ordered to secure the western approaches to the city to prevent ground and rocket attacks against the Saigon-Tan Son Nhut airport complex.

When the situation in South Vietnam stabilized, the Third Brigade was withdrawn as part of the second increment of U.S. troop withdrawals called for under President Nixon's Vietnamization program. The brigade returned to Fort Bragg,

North Carolina, where it rejoined the 82nd Airborne Division as part of the United States Army strategic reserve.

### **1961 First U.S. helicopters arrive in South Vietnam**

The ferry carrier, USNS *Core*, arrives in Saigon with the first U.S. helicopter unit. This contingent included 33 Vertol H-21C Shawnee helicopters and 400 air and ground crewmen to operate and maintain them. Their assignment was to airlift South Vietnamese Army troops into combat.

## **DECEMBER 12**

### **1969 Philippine soldiers depart South Vietnam**

The Philippine Civic Action Group, a 1,350-man contingent from the Army of the Philippines, departs South Vietnam.

The 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 Philippine Civic Action Group entered Vietnam in September 1966, setting up operations in a base camp in Tay Ninh Province northwest of Saigon. The force included an engineer construction battalion, medical and rural community development teams, a security battalion, a field artillery battery, and a logistics and headquarters element.

In agreeing to commit troops, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos was partially motivated by the desire for financial aid. In return for the military assistance, the United States not only agreed to pay for the deployment and maintenance of the Philippine force, but also granted Marcos several types of military aid, much of it for use in the Philippines rather than in South Vietnam.

Ultimately, Johnson's Free World Military Forces program failed. The Philippines was one of only five nations that responded to Johnson's repeated plea for military support and troops in South Vietnam.

### **1968 Procedural questions cause difficulty at the peace talks**

The Paris Peace talks, which opened on May 10, continue to be plagued by procedural questions that impeded any meaningful progress. South Vietnamese Premier Nguyen Cao Ky refused to

consent to any permanent seating plan that would 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. Prolonged discussions over the shape of the negotiating table was finally resolved by the placement of two square tables separated by a round table. Chief U.S. negotiator Averell Harriman proposed this arrangement so that NLF representatives could join the North Vietnamese team 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.

## **DECEMBER 13**

### **1972 Peace negotiations in Paris deadlocked**

Peace negotiations are hopelessly deadlocked after a six-hour meeting between North Vietnamese negotiator Le Duc Tho and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger. After the meeting, Kissinger flew to the United States to confer with President Richard Nixon.

The main point of contention was who would have political power in South Vietnam if a cease-fire were announced. The North Vietnamese negotiators demanded the following in the case of a cease-fire: the dissolution of the government of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, the disbanding of the South Vietnamese army, and the installation of a coalition government. The U.S. refused to consider the North Vietnamese demands and steadfastly supported Thieu and his government.

At the same time, the South Vietnamese were making their own demands. Over 100,000 North Vietnamese troops had occupied territory in South Vietnam during the 1972 Easter Offensive. Nguyen Van Thieu demanded that the North Vietnamese recognize Saigon's sovereignty over South Vietnam, which would make the continued presence of the North Vietnamese troops in the south illegal. The North Vietnamese refused Thieu's demands, saying that they would not recognize Thieu's government and would not remove their troops. They walked out of the negotiations.

Nixon issued an ultimatum to Hanoi to send its representatives back to the conference table within 72 hours "or else." When the North Vietnamese rejected Nixon's demand on December 18, the president gave the order to launch Operation Linebacker II, an intensified bombing campaign of North Vietnam that became known as the "Christmas bombing." Over the next 11 days--with the exception of Christmas Day--the bombing continued

unabated, with an estimated 20,000 tons of bombs dropped over North Vietnam. On December 28, North Vietnamese officials agreed to Nixon's conditions for reopening the negotiations; the next day, the president called an end to Linebacker II.

### **1974 North Vietnamese commence attack on Phuoc Long Province**

North Vietnamese General Tran Van Tra orders 7th Division and the newly formed 3rd Division to attack Phuoc Long Province, north of Saigon.

This attack represented an escalation in the "cease-fire war" that started shortly after the Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1973. The North Vietnamese wanted to see how Saigon and Washington reacted to a major attack so close to Saigon. President Richard Nixon and his successor, Gerald Ford, had promised to come to the aid of South Vietnam if the North Vietnamese launched a major attack. With Nixon's resignation and Ford facing an increasingly hostile Congress, Hanoi was essentially conducting a "test" attack to see if the U.S. would honor its commitment to Saigon. The attack was much more successful than the North Vietnamese anticipated: the South Vietnamese soldiers fought poorly and the U.S. did nothing.

The communists overran the last South Vietnamese positions in Phuoc Long on January 6, 1975. Emboldened by their success and by the American passivity, the North Vietnamese leadership decided that it was time to launch a major offensive. The next attack was launched in March, with Ban Me Thuot in the Central Highlands as the initial objective. Once again, the South Vietnamese forces were largely ineffective and the U.S. failed to respond. When the North Vietnamese intensified their efforts, the South Vietnamese, feeling abandoned by the United States, collapsed totally in just 55 days. On April 30, 1975, the North Vietnamese tanks crashed through the gates of the presidential palace and the South Vietnamese surrendered unconditionally.

## **DECEMBER 14**

### **1961 Kennedy announces intent to increase aid to South Vietnam**

In a public exchange of letters with South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, President John F. Kennedy formally announces that the United States will increase aid to South Vietnam, which would include the expansion of the U.S. troop commitment. Kennedy, concerned with the recent advances made by the communist insurgency movement in South Vietnam wrote, "We

shall promptly increase our assistance to your defense effort."

Kennedy's chief military adviser, Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, and Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Walt W. Rostow had just returned from a fact-finding trip to Saigon and urged the president to increase U.S. economic and military advisory support to Diem. The military support was to include intensive training of local self-defense troops by American military advisers. Additionally, Taylor and Rostow advocated a significant increase in airplanes, helicopters, and support personnel. In a secret appendix to their report, Taylor and Rostow recommended the deployment of 8,000 American combat troops, which could be used to support the South Vietnamese forces in combat operations against the insurgents. To overcome Diem's resistance to foreign troops--which he saw as a potential Viet Cong propaganda windfall--Taylor and Rostow suggested that the forces were to be called a "flood control team." Kennedy, who wanted to stop the communists but also wanted to be cautious about the degree of involvement, accepted most of the recommendations, but did not commit U.S. combat troops.

In return for the support, Kennedy requested that Diem liberalize his regime and institute land reform and other measures to win the support of his people. Diem initially refused, but consented when he was threatened with a reduction in the promised aid. In the long run, however, his reforms did not go far enough and the increased American aid proved insufficient in stemming the tide of the insurgency. Diem was murdered during a coup by his own generals in November 1963. Shortly thereafter, Kennedy was assassinated. At the time of his death, there were more than 16,000 U.S. advisers in South Vietnam. Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, rapidly escalated the war, which resulted in the commitment of U.S. ground forces and eventually more than 500,000 American troops in Vietnam.

### **1964 Operation Barrel Roll begins**

In Laos, Operation Barrel Roll, the name given to the first phase of the bombing plan approved by President Lyndon B. Johnson on December 1, begins with U.S. planes attacking "targets of opportunity" in northern Laos.

This operation was initiated in response to a Pathet Lao offensive in the Plaine des Jarres in north central Laos. The Pathet Lao were communist guerrillas who were fighting to overthrow the Royal Lao government. Operation Barrel Roll was designed to provide air support for the Royal Laotian Army and CIA-trained Hmong (mountain people) irregular forces led by Gen. Vang Pao. In addition to these operations, there was also another part of the war in Laos which was conducted in the

eastern part of the country along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which ran out of North Vietnam through Laos and south along the South Vietnamese-Cambodian border. The North Vietnamese used this trail network as the main avenue by which they supplied and reinforced their troops in South Vietnam. Operations Steel Tiger and Tiger Hound were initiated in April and December 1965 respectively to bomb the trail in an intensive and protracted attempt to interdict the massive amounts of men and supplies moving along the corridor. By 1973, when Operations Barrel Roll, Steel Tiger, and Tiger Hound were terminated, Laos had become the most heavily bombed country in the world. During these operations, allied aircraft dropped more than 3 million tons of bombs, three times the amount dropped on North Vietnam. U.S. spending for these bombing campaigns was 10 times that of the Laotian national budget.

## DECEMBER 15

### **1969 Nixon announces additional U.S. troop withdrawals**

President Richard Nixon announces that 50,000 additional U.S. troops will be pulled out of South Vietnam by April 15, 1970. This was the third reduction since the June Midway conference, when Nixon announced his Vietnamization program.

Under the Vietnamization program, the South Vietnamese forces would receive intensified training and new equipment so they could gradually assume overall responsibility for the war. Concurrent with this effort, Nixon announced that he would begin to bring U.S. troops home. This third increment would bring the total reductions to 115,000. By January 1972, there were only around 70,000 U.S. troops left in South Vietnam.

Noting the steady withdrawal of American forces, the North Vietnamese decided to launch a massive invasion of South Vietnam in March 1972. The South Vietnamese forces, supported by American advisers and U.S. airpower, reeled under the onslaught but ultimately prevailed, holding on despite overwhelming odds. After much posturing and many lengthy negotiations (with additional "motivation" contributed by Nixon's bombing of North Vietnam in December 1972), National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and his North Vietnamese counterpart, Le Duc Tho, hammered out a peace agreement. A cease-fire went into effect on January 27, 1973.

The war was over for the United States, but fighting soon resumed between North and South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese held out for nearly two years, but succumbed when the United States cut off all military support. When the North Vietnamese launched a new offensive in March 1975, South Vietnam fell in just 55 days.



## **1965 U.S. bombers strike industrial targets in North Vietnam**

In the first raid on a major North Vietnamese industrial target, U.S. Air Force planes destroy a thermal power plant at Uong Bi, 14 miles north of Haiphong. The plant reportedly supplied about 15 percent of North Vietnam's total electric power production.

## **DECEMBER 16**

### **1972 Kissinger announces that North Vietnamese left negotiations**

Henry Kissinger announces at a news conference in Washington that the North Vietnamese have walked out of the ongoing private negotiations in Paris.

President Richard Nixon turned to private negotiations in August 1969 because of the all but total impasse in the official negotiations that had been in session since May 1968. The fact that these private talks were being conducted was not disclosed until January 25, 1972, when Nixon, in response to criticism that his administration had not made its best efforts to end the war, revealed that Kissinger had been conducting secret negotiations with North Vietnamese representatives in Paris. Although Kissinger had been able to make some progress in the private negotiations, the talks failed to achieve what President Nixon regarded as "just and fair agreement to end the war."

The central disagreement between Kissinger and the North Vietnamese negotiators was over the question of who would rule South Vietnam after any negotiated cease-fire. The North Vietnamese negotiators, headed by Le Duc Tho, demanded that the government of Nguyen Van Thieu be dissolved, that the South Vietnamese army be disbanded, and that a coalition government be installed, which would then negotiate for a truce. At the same time, the South Vietnamese were making their own demands. Over 100,000 North Vietnamese troops had occupied territory in South Vietnam during the 1972 Easter Offensive. Nguyen Van Thieu demanded that the North Vietnamese recognize Saigon's sovereignty over South Vietnam, which would make the continued presence of the North Vietnamese troops in the south illegal. The North Vietnamese refused Thieu's demands, saying that they would not recognize Thieu's government and walked out of the negotiations.

Kissinger charged that Hanoi was to blame for the failure to reach an agreement, and asserted that the U.S. would not be blackmailed or stampeded into an agreement. North Vietnam criticized the U.S. for breaking the agreement to maintain silence on the private negotiations. Nixon issued an ultimatum to Hanoi to send its representatives back to the conference

table within 72 hours "or else." The North Vietnamese rejected Nixon's demand on December 18, and the president gave the order to launch Operation Linebacker II, an intensified bombing campaign of North Vietnam. Over the next 11 days--with the exception of Christmas Day--the "Christmas bombing" continued unabated. In all, roughly tons of bombs over North Vietnam, and Air Force and Navy fighter-bombers added another 5,000 tons. On December 28, the North Vietnamese agreed to Nixon's conditions for re-opening the negotiations and the next day, the president called an end to Linebacker II.

### **1965 Westmoreland asks for more troops**

Gen. William Westmoreland, Commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, sends a request for more troops. With nearly 200,000 U.S. military personnel in South Vietnam already, Westmoreland sent Defense Secretary Robert McNamara a message stating that he would need an additional 243,000 men by the end of 1966. Citing a rapidly deteriorating military situation in which the South Vietnamese were losing the equivalent of an infantry battalion (500 soldiers) a week in battle, Westmoreland predicted that he would need a total of 600,000 men by the end of 1967 to defeat the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. Although the high tide of U.S. troop strength in South Vietnam never reached the 600,000, there were more than 540,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam by 1969.

## **DECEMBER 17**

### **1971 Cambodian forces under heavy pressure**

Cambodian government positions in Prak Ham, 40 miles north of Phnom Penh, and the 4,000-man base at Taing Kauk are the targets of continuous heavy bombardment by communist forces. The communist Khmer Rouge and their North Vietnamese allies were trying to encircle the capital city.

Premier Lon Nol took over the government from Prince Norodom Sihanouk in March 1970, and Lon Nol's troops were locked in a desperate battle with the communists. Despite U.S. air support, the Cambodian government troops were under heavy pressure from the communists. The Prak Ham siege was lifted four days later, but the communists continued to encircle Phnom Penh in the face of weakened Cambodian resistance. Meanwhile, antigovernment demonstrations against the Lon Nol regime broke out inside the capital. The government reacted by banning all such protests, as well as political meetings, and by authorizing police searches of private houses.

Despite the unrest in Phnom Penh and a series of major defeats, Lon Nol managed to retain control of the government. Lon Nol's government troops managed to hold on largely because of U.S. support. However, with the signing of the Paris

Peace Accords in January 1973, American forces were withdrawn from Southeast Asia, and Lon Nol's forces soon found themselves fighting alone against the communists.

The last U.S. airstrikes flown in support of Cambodian forces were in August 1973. Lon Nol and his forces fought on, but with no external support, it was an overwhelming task. On April 17, 1975, Lon Nol's greatly depleted forces surrendered to the Khmer Rouge. During the five years of war, approximately 10 percent of Cambodia's 7 million people died. The victorious Khmer Rouge emptied the cities and forced millions of Cambodians into forced labor camps, murdered hundreds of thousands of real or imagined opponents, and caused hundreds of thousands of deaths from exhaustion, hunger, and disease.

## **DECEMBER 18**

### **1972 Nixon orders the initiation of Operation Linebacker II**

The Nixon administration announces that the bombing and mining of North Vietnam will resume and continue until a "settlement" is reached.

On December 13, North Vietnamese negotiators walked out of secret talks with National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger. President Richard Nixon issued an ultimatum to Hanoi to send its representatives back to the conference table within 72 hours "or else." The North Vietnamese rejected Nixon's demand and the president ordered Operation Linebacker II, a full-scale air campaign against the Hanoi area. White House Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler said that the bombing would end only if all U.S. prisoners of war were released and an internationally recognized cease-fire were in force.

Linebacker II was the most concentrated air offensive of the war, and was conducted by U.S. aircraft, including B-52s, Air Force fighter-bombers flying from bases in Thailand, and Navy and Marine fighter-bombers flying from carriers in the South China Sea. During the 11 days of the attack, 700 B-52 sorties and more than 1,000 fighter-bomber sorties were flown. These planes dropped roughly 20,000 tons of bombs, mostly over the densely populated area between Hanoi and Haiphong.

The North Vietnamese fired more than 1,000 surface-to-air missiles at the attacking aircraft and also used their MiG fighter-interceptor squadrons, eight of which were shot down. In a throwback to past aerial combat, Staff Sgt. Samuel O. Turner, the tail gunner on a Boeing B-52D bomber, downed a trailing MiG-21 with a blast from his .50 calibre machine guns over Hanoi. Six days later, airman, first class Albert E. Moore, also a B-52 gunner, shot down a second MiG-21 after a strike on the Thai Nguyen railyard. These were the only aerial gunner kills of the war. Twenty-six U.S. aircraft were lost, including 15 B-52s. Three aircraft were brought down by MiGs; the rest, including

the B-52s, were downed by surface-to-air missiles.

American antiwar activists dubbed Linebacker II the "Christmas bombing," and charged that it involved "carpet bombing"--deliberately targeting civilian areas with intensive bombing that "carpeted" a city with bombs. The campaign was focused on specific military targets and was not intended to be "carpet bombing," but it did result in the deaths of 1,318 civilians in Hanoi.

The Linebacker II bombing was deemed a success because in its wake, the North Vietnamese returned to the negotiating table, where the Paris Peace Accords were signed less than a month later.

## DECEMBER 19

### 1972 North Vietnam condemns Linebacker raids

Hanoi's foreign ministry, calling the new B-52 raids against Hanoi and Haiphong "extremely barbaric," accuses the United States of premeditated intensification of the war and labels the actions "insane."

On December 13, North Vietnamese negotiators walked out of secret talks in Paris with National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger. President Nixon issued an ultimatum to Hanoi to send its representatives back to the conference table within 72 hours "or else." The North Vietnamese rejected Nixon's demand and the president ordered Operation Linebacker II, a full-scale air campaign against the Hanoi area. During the 11 days of Linebacker II, 700 B-52 sorties and more than 1,000 fighter-bomber sorties were flown. These planes dropped roughly 20,000 tons of bombs, mostly over the densely populated area between Hanoi and Haiphong.

Nixon was severely criticized both by American antiwar activists and in the international community for ordering what became known as the "Christmas bombing." Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, China and the Soviet Union officially condemned the resumption of American bombing above the 20th parallel. The French newspaper *Le Monde* compared the attacks to the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, when German planes from the Condor Legion attacked the Spanish city and caused great devastation and loss of life. In England, the *Manchester Guardian* called the bombing "the action of a man blinded by fury or incapable of seeing the consequences of what he is doing." Pope Paul VI and United Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim expressed concern for world peace.

American antiwar activists charged that Linebacker II involved "carpet bombing"--deliberately targeting civilian areas with intensive bombing designed to "carpet" a city with bombs. Though the bombing was focused on specific military targets, it

did result in the deaths of 1,318 civilians in Hanoi.

The "Christmas bombing" was deemed a success by the U.S., since it caused the North Vietnamese to return to the negotiating table, where the Paris Peace Accords were signed less than a month later.

### **1964 Another bloodless coup topples the government in Saigon**

Another bloodless coup occurs when Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh and a group of generals led by Air Commodore Nguyen Cao Ky and Army Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu arrest three dozen high officers and civilian officials. The coup was part of the continuing political instability that erupted after the November 1963 coup that resulted in the murder of President Ngo Dinh Diem. The period following the overthrow of Diem was marked by a series of coups and "revolving door" governments. The coup on this day was engineered by a faction of younger military officers known as the "Young Turks," who were fed up with what they believed was the ineffective government headed by a group of older generals known as the Military Revolutionary Council. Khanh and the newly formed Armed Forces Council, made up of the generals who had participated in the coup, restored civilian control on January 7, 1965, under Tran Van Huong. Huong proved unable to put together a viable government and the Armed Forces Council ousted him on January 27 and installed Gen. Khanh in power. Khanh was ousted by yet another coup on February 18 led by Ky and Thieu. Khanh then went to the United States and settled in Palm Beach, Florida. A short-lived civilian government under Dr. Phan Huy Quat was installed, but it lasted only until June 12, 1965. At that time, Thieu and Ky formed a new government with Thieu as the chief of state and Ky as the prime minister. Thieu and Ky were elected as president and vice-president in general elections held in 1967

## **DECEMBER 20**

### **1960 National Liberation Front formed**

North Vietnam announces the formation of the National Front for the Liberation of the South at a conference held "somewhere in the South." This organization, more commonly known as the National Liberation Front (NLF), was designed to replicate the success of the Viet Minh, the umbrella nationalist organization that successfully liberated Vietnam from French colonial rule.

The NLF reached out to those parts of South Vietnamese society who were displeased with the government and policies of President Ngo Dinh Diem. One hundred delegates representing more than a dozen political parties and religious groups--both communists and non-communists--were in

attendance at the conference. However, from the beginning, the NLF was dominated by the Lao Dong Party Central Committee (North Vietnamese Communist Party) and served as the North's shadow government in South Vietnam. The Saigon regime dubbed the NLF the "Viet Cong," a pejorative contraction of *Viet Nam Cong San* (Vietnamese Communists).

The NLF's military arm was the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF). In February 1965, the PLAF attacked U.S. Army installations at Pleiku and Qui Nhon, which convinced President Lyndon B. Johnson to send the first U.S. ground troops to South Vietnam a month later. Ultimately, more than 500,000 U.S. troops were sent to Vietnam to fight the PLAF and the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN, or North Vietnamese Army).

The NLF reached the height of its power during the 1968 Tet Offensive, when the communists launched a massive coordinated attack against key urban centers throughout South Vietnam. Although the Viet Cong forces were soundly defeated during the course of the offensive, they achieved a great psychological victory because the attack prompted many long time supporters of the war to question the Johnson administration's optimistic predictions.

### **1967 President Johnson visits Australia, Thailand, and Vietnam**

President Lyndon B. Johnson attends a memorial service for Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt in Melbourne and then visits Vietnam, Thailand, and the Vatican. Arriving in Thailand on December 23, Johnson visited the U.S. air base at Korat, where he told the U.S. pilots there that the United States and its allies were "defeating this aggression." The president then visited U.S. combat troops in Cam Ranh, South Vietnam, and told them that the enemy "knows that he has met his master in the field." Next, Johnson flew to Rome and met with Pope Paul VI for over an hour with only interpreters present. A Vatican statement said the Pope advanced proposals toward attaining peace in Vietnam during the meeting.

## **DECEMBER 21**

### **1969 Thailand announces plans to withdraw troops**

Thailand announces plans to withdraw its 12,000-man contingent from South Vietnam. Thai forces went to Vietnam as 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 first Thai contribution to the South Vietnamese war effort

came in September 1964, when a 16-man Royal Thai Air Force group arrived in Saigon to assist in flying and maintaining some of the cargo aircraft operated by the South Vietnamese Air Force. In 1966, in response to further urging from President Johnson, the Thais agreed to increase their support to South Vietnam. The Royal Thai Military Assistance Group was formed in Saigon in February 1966. Later that year, the Thai government, once again at Johnson's insistence, agreed to send combat troops to aid the South Vietnamese government. In September 1967, the first elements of the Royal Thai Volunteer Regiment, the "Queen's Cobras," arrived in Vietnam and were stationed in Bear Cat (near Bien Hoa, north of Saigon). The Thai regiment began combat operations in October 1967.

In July 1968, the Queen's Cobras were replaced by the Royal Thai Army Expeditionary Division (the "Black Panthers"), which included two brigades of infantry, three battalions of 105-mm field artillery, and an armored cavalry unit. In August 1970, the Black Panther Division was renamed the Royal Thai Army Volunteer Force, a title it retained throughout the rest of its time in South Vietnam.

The decision by the Thai government to begin withdrawing its troops was in line with President Nixon's plan to withdraw U.S. troops from South Vietnam as the war was turned over to the South Vietnamese. The first Thai troops departed South Vietnam in 1971 and all were gone by early 1972.

### **1972 Defense Department reports eight B-52s lost during Linebacker II**

The Defense Department announces that eight B-52 bombers and several fighter-bombers were lost since the commencement of Operation Linebacker II on December 18. These losses included at least 43 flyers captured or killed. President Richard Nixon ordered the operation after the North Vietnamese negotiators walked out of the peace talks in Paris. In response, President Nixon immediately issued an ultimatum that North Vietnam send its representatives back to the conference table within 72 hours "or else." When they rejected Nixon's demand, he ordered a full-scale air campaign against Hanoi and Haiphong to force them back to the negotiating table. On December 28, after 11 days of intensive bombing, the North Vietnamese agreed to return to the talks.

## **DECEMBER 22**

### **1972 Washington announces Linebacker II raids will continue**

Washington announces that the bombing of North Vietnam will continue until Hanoi agrees to negotiate "in a spirit of good will

and in a constructive attitude."

North Vietnamese negotiators walked out of secret talks in Paris on December 13. President Nixon issued an ultimatum to North Vietnam to send its representatives back to the conference table within 72 hours "or else." They rejected Nixon's demand, and in response the president ordered Operation Linebacker II, a full-scale air campaign against the Hanoi area.

During the 11 days of the operation, 700 B-52 sorties and more than 1,000 fighter-bomber sorties dropped an estimated 20,000 tons of bombs, mostly over the densely populated area between Hanoi and Haiphong. In the course of the bombing, the Cuban, Egyptian, and Indian embassies were hit in Hanoi, as were Russian and Chinese freighters in Haiphong. Bach Mai, Hanoi's largest hospital, was also damaged by the attacks. In the United States, 41 American religious leaders issued a letter condemning the bombing.

### **1971 Soviet Union attacks China's policy toward Vietnam**

The Soviet Union accuses China of backing U.S. policies in Vietnam, an accusation that illustrates the growing rift between the two communist superpowers. China, which had previously taken a hard line toward negotiations between Hanoi and Washington, softened its position by endorsing a North Vietnamese peace plan for ending the war. Although the peace proposal was unacceptable to the United States, the fact that China advocated negotiations between Hanoi and Washington was significant. The Soviet Union, whose relations with China were already deteriorating, was highly suspicious of what they rightfully perceived as a "warming" in Sino-American relations. This suspicion only grew stronger in February 1972, when President Richard Nixon visited China.

## **DECEMBER 23**

### **1972 Operation Linebacker II continues**

The East German Embassy and the Hungarian commercial mission in Hanoi are hit in the eighth day of Operation Linebacker II. Although there were reports that a prisoner of war camp holding American soldiers was hit, the rumor was untrue.

President Nixon initiated the full-scale bombing campaign against North Vietnam on December 18, when the North Vietnamese--who walked out of the peace talks in Paris--refused an ultimatum from Nixon to return to the negotiating table. During the 11 days of the operation, 700 B-52 sorties and more than 1,000 fighter-bomber sorties dropped an estimated 20,000 tons of bombs, mostly over the densely populated area between Hanoi and Haiphong. President Nixon was vilified at home and abroad for ordering the "Christmas bombing," but on



December 28, the North Vietnamese did agree to return to the talks in Paris. When the negotiators met again in early January, they quickly arrived at a settlement. The Paris Peace Accords were signed on January 23 and a cease-fire went into effect five days later.

### **1966 Francis Cardinal Spellman visits South Vietnam**

Francis Cardinal Spellman, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York and military vicar of the U.S. armed forces for Roman Catholics, visits U.S. servicemen in South Vietnam. In an address at mass in Saigon, Spellman said that the Vietnamese conflict was "a war for civilization--certainly it is not a war of our seeking. It is a war thrust upon us--we cannot yield to tyranny." Anything "less than victory is inconceivable." On December 26, Spellman told U.S. soldiers that they were in Vietnam for the "defense, protection, and salvation not only of our country, but ...of civilization itself." The next day, Vatican sources expressed displeasure with Spellman's statements in Vietnam. One source said, "The Cardinal did not speak for the Pope or the Church." The Pope had previously called for negotiations and an end to the war in Vietnam.

## **DECEMBER 24**

### **1972 Bob Hope gives his last show in Vietnam**

Comedian Bob Hope gives what he says is his last Christmas show to U.S. servicemen in Saigon. Hope was a comedian and star of stage, radio, television, and over 50 feature films.

Hope was one of many Hollywood stars who followed the tradition of travelling overseas to entertain American troops stationed abroad. The 1972 show marked Hope's ninth consecutive Christmas appearance in Vietnam. Hope endorsed President Nixon's bombing of North Vietnam to force it to accept U.S. peace terms, and received South Vietnam's highest civilian medal for his "anti-communist zeal." Although some antiwar protesters criticized Hope for supporting government policies in Vietnam, the comedian said he believed it was his responsibility to lift spirits by entertaining the troops.

Also on this day: President Nixon suspends Operation Linebacker II for 36 hours to mark the Christmas holiday. The bombing campaign against North Vietnam had been operating since December 18, when Nixon initiated the campaign to force the North Vietnamese back to the Paris peace negotiations. On December 28, the North Vietnamese announced that they would return to Paris if Nixon ended the bombing. The bombing campaign was halted and the negotiators met during the first week of January. They quickly arrived at a settlement--the Paris Peace Accords were signed on January 23, and a cease-fire

went into effect five days later.

### **1964 Viet Cong bomb Brinks Hotel**

Two Viet Cong agents disguised as South Vietnamese soldiers leave a car filled with explosives parked at the Brinks Hotel in Saigon. The hotel was housing U.S. officers. Two Americans were killed in the blast and 65 Americans and Vietnamese were injured.

Ambassador Maxwell Taylor, Gen. William Westmoreland, and other senior U.S. officials tried to persuade President Lyndon B. Johnson to respond with retaliatory raids on North Vietnam, but Johnson refused. In his cable to Taylor explaining his decision, he indicated for the first time that he was considering a commitment of U.S. combat troops.

## **DECEMBER 25**

### **1972 Linebacker II resumes after Christmas pause**

After a 36-hour respite for Christmas, the U.S. resumes Operation Linebacker II. The extensive bombing campaign was resumed because, according to U.S. officials, Hanoi sent no word that it would return to the peace talks.

On December 13, North Vietnamese negotiators walked out of secret talks in Paris with National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger. President Nixon issued an ultimatum that North Vietnam send its representatives back to the conference table within 72 hours "or else." The North Vietnamese rejected Nixon's demand and the president ordered Operation Linebacker II, a full-scale air campaign against the Hanoi area that began on December 18. During the 11 days of Linebacker II, 700 B-52 sorties and more than 1,000 fighter-bomber sorties dropped an estimated 20,000 tons of bombs on North Vietnam--half the total tonnage of bombs dropped on England during World War II.

Also on this day: U.S. headquarters in Saigon announces that American military strength in South Vietnam was reduced by 700 men during the previous week. The reduction brought the total U.S. forces in South Vietnam to 24,000, the lowest in almost eight years.

### **1966 Harrison Salisbury reports on damage caused by U.S. bombing**

Harrison Salisbury, assistant managing editor of the *New York Times*, files a report from Hanoi chronicling the damage to civilian areas in North Vietnam by the U.S. bombing campaign.

Salisbury stated that Nam Dinh, a city about 50 miles southeast of Hanoi, was bombed repeatedly by U.S. planes starting on June 28, 1965. Salisbury's press report caused a stir in Washington where, it was reported, Pentagon officials expressed irritation and contended that he was exaggerating the damage to civilian areas. On December 26, the U.S. Defense Department conceded that American pilots bombed North Vietnamese civilians accidentally during missions against military targets. The spokesman restated administration policy that air raids were confined to military targets but added, "It is sometimes impossible to avoid all damage to civilian areas."

## **DECEMBER 26**

### **1971 U.S. jets strike North Vietnam**

In the sharpest escalation of the war since Operation Rolling Thunder ended in November 1968, U.S. fighter-bombers begin striking at North Vietnamese airfields, missile sites, antiaircraft emplacements, and supply facilities.

These raids continued for five days. They were begun in response to intelligence that predicted a North Vietnamese build up of forces and equipment for a new offensive. At a press conference on December 27, U.S. Defense Secretary Melvin Laird said the increase in bombing was in retaliation for the communist failure to honor agreements made prior to the 1968 bombing halt. As evidence, Laird cited the shelling of Saigon the week before, DMZ violations--including an infiltration route being built through the buffer zone, and attacks on unarmed U.S. reconnaissance planes. Pentagon figures showed that U.S. planes--with as many as 250 aircraft participating in some missions--attacked communist targets over 100 times in 1971, a figure comparable to U.S. air activity in the previous 26 months.

The intensified bombing spurred new antiwar protests in American. In New York, 15 antiwar veterans barricaded themselves inside the Statue of Liberty and flew the U.S. flag upside down from its crown. They ended their occupation of the monument on December 28, obeying a federal court order. At the same time in Washington, over 80 antiwar veterans were arrested after clashing with police on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

### **1967 Laos says communists launched an offensive**

Laotian Premier Souvanna Phouma reports that North Vietnamese troops have started a general offensive against government forces in southern Laos. Phouma reported that at least one battle was being waged near Pha Lane, but said Laotian troops appeared to be in control of the situation. On December 29, North Vietnam denied that its forces began a drive in Laos, but it was supporting the communist Pathet Lao in

their long-time campaign against the Royal Lao government.

## DECEMBER 27

### **1966 U.S. and South Vietnamese troops attack Viet Cong stronghold**

A United States and South Vietnamese joint-service operation takes place against one of the best-fortified Viet Cong strongholds, located in the U Minh Forest in the Mekong Delta, 125 miles southwest of Saigon.

U.S. warplanes dropped bombs and napalm on the forest in preparation for the assault. Then, 6,000 South Vietnamese troops attacked Viet Cong positions in the forest. The U.S. Navy also participated in the operation--on December 29, the U.S. destroyer *Herbert J. Thomas* shelled suspected Viet Cong positions in the same area for seven hours. The operation ended on December 31, with 104 Viet Cong reported killed and 18 captured. The operation was considered a success in weakening the communist strength in the U Minh Forest.

### **1969 U.S. and North Vietnamese forces battle near Loc Ninh**

In the fiercest battle in six weeks, U.S. and North Vietnamese forces clash near Loc Ninh, about 80 miles north of Saigon. Elements of the 1st Infantry Division reported killing 72 of 250 North Vietnamese soldiers in a daylong battle. Loc Ninh, a village of fewer than 10,000 people, was located at the northern limit of national Route 13, only a few miles from the Cambodian border. It was the site of several major battles between U.S. and Communist forces. On April 5, 1972, as part of their Easter Offensive, North Vietnamese forces overtook Loc Ninh during their attempt to capture the An Loc provincial capital to the south.

## DECEMBER 28

### **1972 Hanoi announces return to the Paris peace talks**

After 11 days of round-the-clock bombing (with the exception of a 36-hour break for Christmas), North Vietnamese officials agree to return to the peace negotiations in Paris.

The Linebacker II bombing was initiated on December 18 by President Richard Nixon when the North Vietnamese, who walked out of the peace negotiations in Paris, refused his ultimatum to return to the talks. During the course of the bombing, 700 B-52 sorties and more than 1,000 fighter-bomber sorties dropped an estimated 20,000 tons of bombs, mostly over the densely populated area between Hanoi and Haiphong.

During the ensuing battle, the North Vietnamese launched their entire stock of more than 1,200 surface-to-air missiles against the U.S. planes. Fifteen B-52s and 11 other U.S. aircraft were lost, along with 93 flyers downed, killed, missing or captured. Hanoi claimed heavy damage and destruction of densely populated civilian areas in Hanoi, Haiphong, and their suburbs. The bombing resulted in the deaths of 1,318 in Hanoi. While some news reporters alleged that the U.S. was guilty of "carpet bombing" the area (deliberately targetting civilian areas with intensive bombing to "carpet" a city with bombs), the bombing was intended to focus on specific military targets.

The Linebacker II bombing was effective in bringing the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table. When they returned to Paris, the peace talks moved along quickly. On January 23, 1973, the United States, North Vietnam, the Republic of Vietnam, and the Viet Cong signed a cease-fire agreement that took effect five days later.

### **1964 South Vietnamese win costly battle at Binh Gia**

South Vietnamese troops retake Binh Gia in a costly battle. The Viet Cong launched a major offensive on December 4 and took the village of Binh Gia, 40 miles southeast of Saigon. The South Vietnamese forces recaptured the village, but only after an eight-hour battle and three battalions of reinforcements were brought in on helicopters. The operation continued into the first week of January. Losses included an estimated 200 South Vietnamese and five U.S. advisors killed, plus 300 more South Vietnamese wounded or missing. Battles such this, in which the South Vietnamese suffered such heavy losses at the hands of the Viet Cong, convinced President Lyndon B. Johnson that the South Vietnamese could not defeat the communist without the commitment of U.S. ground troops to the war.

## **DECEMBER 29**

### **1966 Johnson Administration responds to Harrison Salisbury's charges**

Assistant Secretary of Defense Arthur Sylvester admits that the North Vietnamese city of Nam Dinh has been hit by U.S. planes 64 times since mid-1965, and that the air strikes were directed only against military targets: railroad yards, a warehouse, petroleum storage depots, and a thermal power plant. He denounced *New York Times* correspondent Harrison Salisbury's reports on the results of the air raids in North Vietnam as "misstatements of fact."

Salisbury, an assistant managing editor of the *Times*, filed a report on December 25 from Hanoi describing U.S. bombing destruction in several North Vietnamese cities. Salisbury stated that Nam Dinh, about 50 miles southeast of Hanoi, had been

bombed repeatedly by U.S. planes since June 28, 1965. Salisbury's report caused a stir in Washington where, it was reported, Pentagon officials expressed irritation and contended that he was exaggerating the damage to civilian areas.

Also on this day: Student-body presidents from 100 U.S. colleges and universities sign an open letter to President Lyndon B. Johnson expressing anxiety and doubt over U.S. involvement in Vietnam. They warned in the letter that many youths might prefer prison to participation in the war. Johnson did not respond to the letter.

### **1962 Saigon announces success of strategic hamlet program**

Saigon announces that 4,077 strategic hamlets have been completed out of a projected total of 11,182. The figures also stated that 39 percent of the South Vietnamese population was housed in the hamlets. U.S. officials considered these figures questionable.

The strategic hamlet program was started in 1962 and was modeled on a successful British counterinsurgency program used in Malaya from 1948 to 1960. The program aimed to bring the South Vietnamese peasants together in fortified strategic hamlets to provide security from Viet Cong attacks. Although much time and money was put into the program, it had several basic weaknesses. There was much animosity toward the program on the part of the South Vietnamese peasants, who were forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands. Also, the security afforded by the hamlets was inadequate and actually provided lucrative targets for the Viet Cong. Finally, the entire project was poorly managed. After the assassination of the program's sponsor, President Ngo Dinh Diem, in November 1963, the program fell into disfavor and was abandoned.

## **DECEMBER 30**

### **1972 Negotiations to resume in Paris**

Officials in Washington, D.C., announce that the peace talks in Paris between National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger and North Vietnamese negotiator Le Duc Tho will resume on January 2.

On December 28, Hanoi agreed to return to the negotiations, and President Nixon ordered a halt to Linebacker II, the intensive bombing campaign of North Vietnam. Nixon initiated the campaign on December 18 when the North Vietnamese, who walked out of the peace negotiations in Paris, refused his ultimatum to return to the talks. During the course of the bombing, 700 B-52 sorties and more than 1,000 fighter-bombers dropped an estimated 20,000 tons of bombs, mostly

over the densely populated area between Hanoi and Haiphong.

When the communist negotiators returned to Paris, the peace talks moved along quickly. On January 23, 1973, the United States, North Vietnam, the Republic of Vietnam, and the Viet Cong signed a cease-fire agreement that took effect five days later.

### **1970 U.S. Navy transfers some responsibility to South Vietnamese**

The South Vietnamese Navy receives 125 U.S. vessels in a ceremony marking the end of the U.S. Navy's four-year role in inland waterway combat. This brings the total number of vessels turned over to the South Vietnamese Navy to 650. About 17,000 Americans remained with the South Vietnamese Navy in shore positions and as advisers aboard South Vietnamese vessels. The transfer of inland waterway combat responsibility was part of President Nixon's Vietnamization program, in which the war effort was transferred to the South Vietnam so U.S. troops could be withdrawn.

## **DECEMBER 31**

### **1968 Bloodiest year of the war ends**

The bloodiest year of the war comes to an end. At year's end, 536,040 American servicemen were stationed in Vietnam, an increase of over 50,000 from 1967.

Estimates from Headquarters U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam indicated that 181,150 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese were killed during the year. However, Allied losses were also up: 27,915 South Vietnamese, 14,584 Americans (a 56 percent increase over 1967), and 979 South Koreans, Australians, New Zealanders, and Thais were reported killed during 1968. Since January 1961, more than 31,000 U.S. servicemen had been killed in Vietnam and over 200,000 U.S. personnel had been wounded.

Contributing to the high casualty number was the Tet Offensive launched by the communists. Conducted in the early weeks of the year, it was a crushing military defeat for the communists, but the size and scope of the attacks caught the American and South Vietnamese allies completely by surprise. The early reporting of a smashing communist victory went largely uncorrected in the media and this led to a psychological victory for the communists. The heavy U.S. casualties incurred during the offensive coupled with the disillusionment over the earlier overly optimistic reports of progress in the war accelerated the growing disenchantment with President Johnson's conduct of the war. Johnson, frustrated with his inability to reach a solution in Vietnam,

announced on March 31, 1968, that he would neither seek nor accept the Democratic nomination for president. Johnson's announcement did not dampen the wave of antiwar protests that climaxed with the bloody confrontation between protesters and police outside the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August.

### **1971 U.S. annual casualty figures down**

The gradual U.S. withdrawal from the conflict in Southeast Asia is reflected in reduced annual casualty figures. The number of Americans killed in action dropped to 1,386 from the previous year total of 4,204. South Vietnam losses for the year totalled 21,500 men, while the combined Viet Cong and North Vietnamese total was estimated at 97,000 killed in action.

After 10 years of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, a total of 45,627 American soldiers had been killed. The U.S. troop levels, which started the year at 280,000, were down to 159,000. This troop reduction was a direct result of the shifting American goal for the Vietnam War-no longer attempting a military victory, the U.S. was trying to gracefully extricate itself from the situation by transferring responsibility for the war to the South Vietnamese.

### **1972 U.S. and communist negotiators prepare to return to the Paris talks**

With the end of Linebacker II, the most intense U.S. bombing operation of the Vietnam War, U.S. and communist negotiators prepare to return to the secret Paris peace talks scheduled to reconvene on January 2.

In a statement issued in Paris, the Hanoi delegation to the public peace talks asserted that the U.S. bombing did not succeed in "subjugating the Vietnamese people," and called attention to the losses of U.S. planes and the unfavorable world reaction to the raids. Despite the public denial that the Linebacker II raids forced them back, the communists returned to the negotiating table. When the negotiators met in January, the talks moved along quickly and on January 23, 1973, the United States, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), and the Viet Cong signed a cease-fire agreement that took effect five days later.

In 1972, the American troop level in South Vietnam was reduced from 159,000 to only 24,000. Under the terms of the Paris Peace Accords, all of the personnel would be withdrawn



by March 1973.