

Vietnam War by Day July

JULY 1

1965 Ball recommends compromise in Vietnam

Undersecretary of State George Ball submits a memo to President Lyndon B. Johnson titled "A Compromise Solution for South Vietnam." It began bluntly: "The South Vietnamese are losing the war to the Viet Cong. No one can assure you that we can beat the Viet Cong, or even force them to the conference table on our terms, no matter how many hundred thousand white, foreign (U.S.) troops we deploy." Ball advised that the United States not commit any more troops, restrict the combat role of those already in place, and seek to negotiate a way out of the war.

As Ball was submitting his memo, the U.S. air base at Da Nang came under attack by the Viet Cong for the first time. An enemy demolition team infiltrated the airfield and destroyed three planes and damaged three others. One U.S. airman was killed and three U.S. Marines were wounded.

The attack on Da Nang, the increased aggressiveness of the Viet Cong, and the weakness of the Saigon regime convinced Johnson that he had to do something to stop the communists or they would soon take over South Vietnam. While Ball recommended a negotiated settlement, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara urged the president to "expand promptly and substantially" the U.S. military presence in South Vietnam. Johnson, not wanting to lose South Vietnam to the communists, ultimately accepted McNamara's recommendation. On July 22, he authorized a total of 44 U.S. battalions for commitment in South Vietnam, a decision that led to a massive escalation of the war. There were less than ten U.S. Army and Marine battalions in South Vietnam at this time. Eventually there would be more than 540,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam.

1966 Bombing of North Vietnam continues

U.S. Air Force and Navy jets carry out a series of raids on fuel installations in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. The Dong Nam fuel dump, 15 miles northeast of Hanoi, with 9 percent of North Vietnam's storage capacity, was struck on this day. The Do Son petroleum installation, 12 miles southeast of Haiphong, would be attacked on July 3. The raids continued for two more days, as petroleum facilities near Haiphong, Thanh Hoa, and Vinh were bombed, and fuel tanks in the Hanoi area were hit. These raids were part of Operation Rolling Thunder, which had begun in March 1965. The attacks on the North Vietnamese fuel facilities represented a new level of bombing, since these sites had been previously off limits. However, the raids did not have a

lasting impact because China and the Soviet Union replaced the destroyed petroleum assets fairly quickly.

China reacted to these events by calling the bombings "barbarous and wanton acts that have further freed us from any bounds of restrictions in helping North Vietnam." The World Council of Churches in Geneva sent a cable to President Lyndon B. Johnson saying that the latest bombing of North Vietnam was causing a "widespread reaction" of "resentment and alarm" among many Christians. Indian mobs protested the air raids on the Hanoi-Haiphong area with violent anti-American demonstrations in Delhi and several other cities.

JULY 2

1964 Republican Congressional leaders attack Johnson's policy

At a joint news conference, Senate Republican leader Everett Dirksen (Illinois) and House Republican leader Charles Halleck (Indiana) say that the Vietnam War will be a campaign issue because "Johnson's indecision has made it one." President Lyndon B. Johnson had assumed office after the assassination of John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Kennedy had supported Ngo Dinh Diem, the president of South Vietnam, who was assassinated during a coup just before Kennedy was killed. The deaths of both Diem and Kennedy provided an opportunity for the new administration to undertake a reassessment of U.S. policy toward Vietnam, but this was not done. Johnson, who desperately wanted to push a set of social reforms called the Great Society, was instead forced to focus on the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam. Caught in a dilemma, he later wrote: "If I...let the communists take over South Vietnam, then I would be seen as a coward and my nation would be seen as an appeaser and we would both find it impossible to accomplish anything for anybody anywhere in the entire globe." Faced with having to do something about Vietnam, Johnson vacillated as he and his advisers attempted to devise a viable course of action.

The situation changed in August 1964 when North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked U.S. destroyers off the coast of North Vietnam. What became known as the Tonkin Gulf incident led to the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which passed 416 to 0 in the House, and 88 to 2 in the Senate. This resolution, which gave the president approval to "take all necessary measures to repel an armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression," provided the legal basis for President Johnson to initiate a major commitment of U.S. troops to South Vietnam, which ultimately totaled more than 540,000 by 1968.

JULY 3

1968 U.S. command announces new high in casualties

The U.S. command in Saigon releases figures showing that more Americans were killed during the first six months of 1968 than in all of 1967. These casualty figures were a direct result of the heavy fighting that had occurred during, and immediately after, the communist Tet Offensive. The offensive had begun on January 30, when communist forces attacked Saigon, Hue, five of six autonomous cities, 36 of 44 provincial capitals, and 64 of 245 district capitals. The timing and magnitude of the attacks caught the South Vietnamese and American forces completely off guard, but eventually the Allied forces turned the tide. Militarily, the Tet Offensive was a disaster for the communists. By the end of March 1968, they had not achieved any of their objectives and had lost 32,000 soldiers with 5,800 captured. U.S. forces suffered 3,895 dead; South Vietnamese losses were 4,954; non-U.S. allies lost 214. More than 14,300 South Vietnamese civilians died.

Though the offensive was a crushing military defeat for the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese, early reports of a smashing communist victory went largely uncorrected in the U.S. news media. This was a great 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 nomination of his party for re-election.

JULY 4

1963 South Vietnamese officers plot coup

Gen. Tran Van Don informs Lucien Conein of the CIA that certain officers are planning a coup against South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem, who had been supported by the Kennedy administration, had refused to make any meaningful reforms and had oppressed the Buddhist majority. Conein informed Washington that the generals were plotting to overturn the government. President John F. Kennedy, who had come to the conclusion that the Diem government should no longer be in command, sent word that the United States would not interfere with the coup.

In the early afternoon hours of November 1, a group of South Vietnamese generals ordered their troops to seize key military installations and communications systems in Saigon and demanded the resignation of Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. Diem was unable to summon any support, so he and Nhu escaped the palace through an underground passage to a Catholic church in the Chinese sector of the city. From there, Diem began negotiating with the generals by phone. He agreed to surrender and was promised safe conduct, but shortly after

midnight he and his brother were brutally murdered in back of the armored personnel carrier sent to pick them up and return them to the palace.

Kennedy, who had given tacit approval for the coup, was reportedly shocked at the murder of Diem and Nhu. Nevertheless, U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge called the insurgent generals to his office to congratulate them and cabled Kennedy that the prospects for a shorter war had greatly improved with the demise of Diem and Nhu.

1968 Thieu vows to wipe out corruption

At a formal ceremony inaugurating the formation of a new multiparty pro-government political group, the People's Alliance for Social Revolution, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu praises the organization as a "major step toward grassroots political activity." An Alliance manifesto asserted that the group was "determined to wipe out corruption, do away with social inequalities, and rout out the entrenched forces of militarists and reactionaries who have always blocked progress." Thieu's government had long been accused of corruption and, in order to garner political support from the People's Alliance, he vowed to take steps to eradicate the corruption. Unfortunately, neither Thieu nor the People's Alliance could do much about the entrenched corruption in the South Vietnamese government.

JULY 5

1966 Governors express support for U.S. global commitments

State and territorial governors meet in Los Angeles to adopt a resolution expressing "support of our global commitments, including our support of the military defense of South Vietnam against aggression." The vote was 49 to 1, with Governor Mark Hatfield (R-Oregon) casting the dissenting vote against the resolution.

Also on this day: During a White House press conference, President Lyndon B. Johnson expresses his disappointment at the reaction of a "few" U.S. allies. Johnson had been actively seeking international support for the war against the communists in Vietnam. He had hoped to solicit aid for South Vietnam from U.S. allies and non-aligned nations and at the same time build an international consensus for his policies in Southeast Asia. Although more than 40 nations did send humanitarian or economic aid to South Vietnam, the response for military forces had been much less hearty than he expected. He was eventually able to obtain commitments from Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Korea, and the Philippines, who all provided troops to fight in the war.

JULY 6

1955 Diem says South Vietnam not bound by Geneva Agreements

South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem declares in a broadcast that since South Vietnam had not signed the Geneva Agreements, South Vietnam was not bound by them. Although Diem did not reject the "principle of elections," he said that any proposals from the communist Viet Minh were out of the question "if proof is not given us that they put the higher interest of the national community above those of communism."

The Geneva Conference had begun on April 26, 1954, to negotiate an end to the First Indochina War between the French and the Viet Minh forces of Ho Chi Minh. The negotiations resulted in the signing of a truce on July 20. The agreement fixed a provisional demarcation line roughly along the 17th parallel (which would eventually be called the Demilitarized Zone), pending countrywide elections to be held in July 1956. It also allowed the evacuation of French forces north of that line, and Viet Minh forces south of it. Freedom of movement from either zone was allowed for 300 days, and restrictions were imposed on future military alliances. An International Control Commission was formed with representatives from India, Canada, and Poland to supervise implementation of the agreement, including the scheduled elections. The whole package of agreements became known as the Geneva Accords.

The agreement was reached over the objections of South Vietnam, which refused to sign it. Likewise, the United States did not concur with the accords, but pledged that it would refrain from use of force or the threat of force to disturb their provisions. However, United States representatives declared that the U.S. would look upon renewed aggression in violation of the agreement "with grave concern."

The Geneva Accords ended the war between the French and Viet Minh, but set the stage for renewed conflict. When Diem, realizing the strength of Ho Chi Minh's support in South Vietnam, blocked the elections that were called for in the accords, the United States, citing alleged North Vietnamese truce violation, supported him. No longer able to use the elections as a means to reunify Vietnam, the communists turned to force of arms to defeat South Vietnam. This war lasted until 1975, when the North Vietnamese launched their final offensive. South Vietnam, no longer supported by the United States, which had departed in 1973, fell to the communists in 55 days.

1964 Viet Cong attack Special Forces at Nam Dong

At Nam Dong in the northern highlands of South Vietnam, an estimated 500-man Viet Cong battalion attacks an American

Special Forces outpost. During a bitter battle, Capt. Roger C. Donlon, commander of the Special Forces A-Team, rallied his troops, treated the wounded, and directed defenses although he himself was wounded several times. After five hours of fighting, the Viet Cong withdrew. The battle resulted in an estimated 40 Viet Cong killed; two Americans, 1 Australian military adviser, and 57 South Vietnamese defenders also lost their lives. At a White House ceremony in December 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson presented Captain Donlon with the first Medal of Honor of the Vietnam War.

JULY 7

1955 China announces it will provide aid to Hanoi

Officials in China and Hanoi announce that Beijing will extend 800 million yuan (about \$200 million) in economic aid to Hanoi. This announcement followed a trip to Beijing by Ho Chi Minh and his ministers of finance, industry, agriculture, education and health. On July 18, the Soviet Union announced that it would grant Hanoi 400 million rubles (about \$100 million) in economic aid. This aid from fellow communist nations helped sustain North Vietnam in its war against the South Vietnamese and their American allies until 1975, when they defeated the South Vietnamese forces and reunified the country.

1964 New ambassador arrives in Saigon

Gen. Maxwell Taylor, the new ambassador to South Vietnam, arrives in Saigon. As a military man with considerable experience in Vietnam, he was viewed by the South Vietnamese government, the U.S. military establishment, and the Johnson administration as the ideal individual to coordinate and invigorate the war effort. Presumably because of his arrival, a bomb was thrown at the U.S. Embassy and two grenades exploded elsewhere in Saigon; no one was injured and only slight damage was caused.

1969 First U.S. troops withdrawn from South Vietnam

A battalion of the U.S. 9th Infantry Division leaves Saigon in the initial withdrawal of U.S. troops. The 814 soldiers were the first of 25,000 troops that were withdrawn in the first stage of the U.S. disengagement from the war. There would be 14 more increments in the withdrawal, but the last U.S. troops did not leave until after the Paris Peace Accords were signed in January 1973.

JULY 8

1965 Taylor resigns Saigon post

Ambassador Maxwell Taylor resigns from his post in Vietnam. Former Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge replaced Taylor. As ambassador, Taylor had pressed for the return of civilian rule after a military coup had overthrown President Ngo Dinh Diem in November 1963. Although Taylor had initially opposed the employment of U.S. combat troops, he had come to accept this strategy. However, Taylor had an argument with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and General William Westmoreland, U.S. commander in South Vietnam, at a conference in Honolulu in April. He took exception with the shift in strategy from counterinsurgency to large-scale ground operations by U.S. units. According to journalist David Halberstam, this argument marked "the last time that Max Taylor was a major player, his farewell in fact." Upon his return to the United States, Taylor served as a special consultant to President Lyndon B. Johnson and was a member of the Senior Advisory Group--who became known as the "Wise Men"--that convened in March 1968 to advise the president on the course of the war.

Also on this day: President Johnson decrees that a Vietnam Service Medal be awarded to Americans serving in the conflict, even though there had been no official declaration of war. There were 16,300 U.S. troops in South Vietnam at the end of 1964. With Johnson's decision to send U.S. combat units, total U.S. strength in South Vietnam would reach 184,300 by the end of 1965.

1959 First Americans killed in South Vietnam

Maj. Dale R. Ruis and Master Sgt. Chester M. Ovland became the first Americans killed in the American phase of the Vietnam War when guerrillas strike a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) compound in Bien Hoa, 20 miles northeast of Saigon. The group had arrived in South Vietnam on November 1, 1955, to provide military assistance. The organization consisted of U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps personnel who provided advice and assistance to the Ministry of Defense, Joint General Staff, corps and division commanders, training centers, and province and district headquarters.

JULY 9

1971 United States turns over responsibility for the DMZ

Four miles south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), about 500 U.S. troops of the 1st Brigade, 5th Mechanized Division turn over Fire Base Charlie 2 to Saigon troops, completing the transfer of defense responsibilities for the border area. On the previous day, nearby Fire Base Alpha 4 had been turned over to the South Vietnamese. This was part of President Richard Nixon's Vietnamization policy, which had been announced at a

June 1969 conference at Midway Island. Under this program, the United States initiated a comprehensive effort to increase the combat capabilities of the South Vietnamese armed forces. As the South Vietnamese became more capable, responsibility for the fighting was gradually transferred from U.S. forces. Concurrent with this effort, there was a gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces.

1966 Soviets protest U.S. bombing of Haiphong

The Soviet Union sends a note to the U.S. embassy in Moscow charging that the air strikes on the port of Haiphong endangered four Soviet ships that were in the harbor. The United States rejected the Soviet protest on July 23, claiming, "Great care had been taken to assure the safety of shipping in Haiphong." The Soviets sent a second note in August charging that bullets had hit a Russian ship during a raid on August 2, but the claim was rejected by the U.S. embassy on August 5. The Soviets complained on a number of occasions during the war, particularly when the bombing raids threatened to inhibit their ability to resupply the North Vietnamese.

JULY 10

1967 Heavy fighting continues near An Loc and the Central Highlands

Outnumbered South Vietnamese troops repel an attack by two battalions of the 141st North Vietnamese Regiment on a military camp five miles east of An Loc, 60 miles north of Saigon. Communist forces captured a third of the base camp before they were thrown back with the assistance of U.S. and South Vietnamese air and artillery strikes.

Farther to the north, U.S. forces suffered heavy casualties in two separate battles in the Central Highlands. In the first action, about 400 men of the 173rd Airborne Brigade came under heavy fire from North Vietnamese machine guns and mortars during a sweep of the Dak To area near Kontum. Twenty-six Americans were killed and 49 were wounded. In the second area clash, 35 soldiers of the U.S. 4th Infantry Division were killed and 31 were wounded in fighting.

1965 MiGs shot down as bombing of North Vietnam continues

U.S. planes continue heavy raids in South Vietnam and claim to have killed 580 guerrillas. U.S. Phantom jets, escorting fighter-bombers in a raid on the Yen Sen ammunition depot northwest of Hanoi, engaged North Vietnamese MiG-17s. Capt. Thomas S. Roberts with his backseater Capt. Ronald C. Anderson, and

Capt. Kenneth E. Holcombe and his backseater Capt. Arthur C. Clark shot down two MiG-17s with Sidewinder missiles. The action marked the first U.S. Air Force air-to-air victories of the Vietnam War.

JULY 11

1967 Senators debate U.S. policy in Vietnam

In Senate debates about U.S. policy in Southeast Asia, Senator Mike Mansfield (D-Montana) warns against further escalation of the war. Convinced that a military solution to the situation in South Vietnam was impossible, he urged an alternative to expansion of the U.S. effort in Vietnam. His alternative included putting the issue of the confrontation between North and South Vietnam before the United Nations and containing the conflict by building a defensive barrier south of the Demilitarized Zone to separate North Vietnam from South Vietnam. Senator George Aiken (R-Vermont) suggested that the Johnson administration pay more attention to people like Mansfield who were questioning the wisdom of further escalation of the war, rather than relying on "certain military leaders who have far more knowledge of weapons than they have of people." Nevertheless, Senate Republican leader Everett Dirksen (Illinois), asked if he favored an increase in U.S. troops in Vietnam, replied "If General Westmoreland says we need them, yes, sir."

1969 Thieu challenges NLF to participate in free elections

South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, in a televised speech, makes a "comprehensive offer" for a political settlement. He challenged the National Liberation Front to participate in free elections organized by a joint electoral commission and supervised by an international body. Following the speech, South Vietnamese Foreign Minister Tran Chanh Thanh, seeking to clarify the Thieu proposal, said communists could never participate in elections in South Vietnam "as communists" nor have any role in organizing elections--only by the South Vietnamese government could organize the elections.

1966 Public opinion approves bombing of North Vietnam

A Harris survey taken shortly after the bombing raids on the Hanoi-Haiphong area shows that 62 percent of those interviewed favored the raids, 11 percent were opposed, and 27 percent were undecided. Of those polled, 86 percent felt the raids would hasten the end of the war. The raids under discussion were part of the expansion of Operation Rolling Thunder, which had begun in March 1965.

JULY 12

1965 First Marine wins Medal of Honor

Viet Cong ambush Company A of the 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, led by U.S.M.C. Lt. Frank Reasoner of Kellogg, Idaho. The Marines had been on a sweep of a suspected Viet Cong area to deter any enemy activity aimed at the nearby airbase at Da Nang.

Reasoner and the five-man point team he was accompanying were cut off from the main body of the company. He ordered his men to lay down a base of fire and then, repeatedly exposing himself to enemy fire, killed two Viet Cong, single-handedly wiped out an enemy machine gun emplacement, and raced through enemy fire to rescue his injured radio operator. Trying to rally his men, Reasoner was hit by enemy machine gun fire and was killed instantly. For this action, Reasoner was nominated for America's highest award for valor. When Navy Secretary Paul H. Nitze presented the Medal of Honor to Reasoner's widow and son in ceremonies at the Pentagon on January 31, 1967, he spoke of Reasoner's willingness to die for his men: "Lieutenant Reasoner's complete disregard for his own welfare will long serve as an inspiring example to others." Lieutenant Reasoner was the first Marine to receive the Medal of Honor for action in Vietnam.

1966 North Vietnam urged to treat U.S. POWs better

The National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) and American socialist Norman Thomas appeal to North Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh on behalf of captured American pilots. The number of American captives was on the increase due to the intensification of Operation Rolling Thunder, the U.S. bombing campaign against North Vietnam. On July 15, 18 senators opposed to President Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam policy signed a statement calling on North Vietnam to "refrain from any act of vengeance against American airmen." The next day, the United Nations Secretary General also urged North Vietnam to exercise restraint in the treatment of American prisoners of war. On July 19, North Vietnamese ambassadors in Beijing and Prague asserted that the captured Americans would go on trial as war criminals. However, Ho Chi Minh subsequently gave assurances of a humanitarian policy toward the prisoners, in response, he said, to the appeal he received from SANE and Norman Thomas. Despite Ho's assurances, the American POWs were routinely mistreated and tortured. They were released in 1973 as part of the provisions of the Paris Peace Accords that were signed on January 27, 1973.

JULY 13

1968 Rockefeller announces new peace proposal

Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York, a Republican presidential candidate, reveals a four-stage peace plan that, he argues, could end the war in six months if North Vietnam assented to it. The proposal called for a mutual troop pullback and interposition of a neutral peacekeeping force, followed by the withdrawal of all North Vietnamese and most Allied units from South Vietnam; free elections under international supervision; and direct negotiations between North and South Vietnam on reunification.

In his proposal, Rockefeller represented the liberal northeastern wing of the Republican Party. Taking a stance between Rockefeller and the more conservative elements of his party led by Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon won the nomination on the first ballot at the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach. For his running mate, he chose Spiro T. Agnew, the governor of Maryland.

In his speech accepting the nomination, Nixon promised to "bring an honorable end to the war in Vietnam" and to inaugurate "an era of negotiations" with leading communist powers, while restoring "the strength of America so that we shall always negotiate from strength and never from weakness." The party subsequently adopted a platform on the war that called for "progressive de-Americanization" of the war. Indeed, shortly after assuming office, Nixon instituted a program of "Vietnamization," a policy aimed at turning the war over to the South Vietnamese and withdrawing U.S. troops.

1969 Wallace criticizes Nixon's handling of the war

Former Alabama Governor George Wallace criticizes President Richard Nixon for his handling of the war and says he favors an all-out military victory if the Paris talks fail to produce peace soon. Wallace had run unsuccessfully against Nixon as a third party candidate in the 1968 presidential election. In 1972, Wallace ran for the Democratic Party presidential nomination, but was seriously wounded by a would-be assassin. He won several state primaries, but subsequently withdrew from the race. He was not through politically, however, and was twice more elected the governor of Alabama. In 1976, he made another run for the Democratic Party nomination before withdrawing and endorsing Governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia. Wallace retired from politics in 1987.

JULY 14

1964 North Vietnamese regulars are fighting in South Vietnam

U.S. military intelligence publicly charges that North Vietnamese regular army officers command and fight in so-called Viet Cong

forces in the northern provinces, where Viet Cong strength had doubled in the past six months. Only the day before, South Vietnamese Gen. Nguyen Khanh had referred to the "invasion" by North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces.

There would soon be other evidence that North Vietnamese troops were operating in South Vietnam. In August, South Vietnamese officials would claim that two companies from the North Vietnamese army had crossed the Demilitarized Zone in Quang Tri province. A battle ensued, but the North Vietnamese forces were defeated with heavy casualties. It became known later that Hanoi had ordered its forces to begin infiltrating to the South. This marked a major change in the tempo and scope of the war in South Vietnam and resulted in President Lyndon B. Johnson committing U.S. combat troops. North Vietnamese forces and U.S. troops clashed for the first time in November 1965, when units from the newly arrived 1st Cavalry Division engaged several North Vietnamese regiments in the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley in the Central Highlands.

1968 Clifford visits South Vietnam

Defense Secretary Clark Clifford visits South Vietnam to confer with U.S. and South Vietnamese leaders. Upon his arrival in Saigon, Clifford stated that the United States was doing all that it could to improve the fighting capacity of the South Vietnamese armed forces and intended to provide all South Vietnamese army units with M-16 automatic rifles. This effort would increase in 1969 after Richard Nixon became president.

In June 1969, Nixon met with South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu on Midway Island. At the meeting, Nixon announced what became known as his "Vietnamization" policy. Under this policy, Nixon intended U.S. troops to help increase the combat capability of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces so that the South Vietnamese could eventually assume full responsibility of the war. Though Nixon described this as a new policy, its roots could be traced back to Clark Clifford's visit to South Vietnam and groundwork that was laid during the Johnson administration.

JULY 15

1971 Nixon announces a visit to China

In a surprise announcement, President Richard Nixon says that he will visit Beijing, China, before May 1972. The news, issued simultaneously in Beijing and the United States, stunned the world. Nixon reported that he was visiting in order "to seek normalization of relations between the two countries and to exchange views on questions of concern to both sides." Privately, Nixon hoped that achieving a rapprochement with China, North Vietnam's major benefactor, would convince Hanoi

to negotiate a peaceful settlement to the Vietnam War. The announcement was preceded by an April 6 invitation for the U.S. Table Tennis team to visit China, and by Nixon's end to the 20-year U.S. trade embargo against China. On July 22, the North Vietnamese announced that they viewed Nixon's visit to China as a divisive attempt by the United States to drive a wedge between Hanoi and Beijing.

1964 Goldwater nominated for president

Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Arizona) is nominated by the Republican Party to run for president. During the subsequent campaign, Goldwater said that he thought the United States should do whatever was necessary to win in Vietnam. At one point, he talked about the possibility of using low-yield atomic weapons to defoliate enemy infiltration routes, but he never actually advocated the use of nuclear weapons in Southeast Asia. Although Goldwater later clarified his position, the Democrats very effectively portrayed him as a trigger-happy warmonger. This reputation, whether deserved or not, was a key factor in his crushing defeat at the hands of Lyndon B. Johnson, who won 61 percent of the vote to Goldwater's 39 percent.

JULY 15

1971 Nixon announces a visit to China

In a surprise announcement, President Richard Nixon says that he will visit Beijing, China, before May 1972. The news, issued simultaneously in Beijing and the United States, stunned the world. Nixon reported that he was visiting in order "to seek normalization of relations between the two countries and to exchange views on questions of concern to both sides." Privately, Nixon hoped that achieving a rapprochement with China, North Vietnam's major benefactor, would convince Hanoi to negotiate a peaceful settlement to the Vietnam War. The announcement was preceded by an April 6 invitation for the U.S. Table Tennis team to visit China, and by Nixon's end to the 20-year U.S. trade embargo against China. On July 22, the North Vietnamese announced that they viewed Nixon's visit to China as a divisive attempt by the United States to drive a wedge between Hanoi and Beijing.

1964 Goldwater nominated for president

Senator Barry Goldwater (R-Arizona) is nominated by the Republican Party to run for president. During the subsequent campaign, Goldwater said that he thought the United States should do whatever was necessary to win in Vietnam. At one point, he talked about the possibility of using low-yield atomic weapons to defoliate enemy infiltration routes, but he never

actually advocated the use of nuclear weapons in Southeast Asia. Although Goldwater later clarified his position, the Democrats very effectively portrayed him as a trigger-happy warmonger. This reputation, whether deserved or not, was a key factor in his crushing defeat at the hands of Lyndon B. Johnson, who won 61 percent of the vote to Goldwater's 39 percent.

JULY 16

1965 McNamara visits South Vietnam

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara conducts a fact-finding mission in South Vietnam, and Henry Cabot Lodge arrives in Saigon to resume his post as ambassador. Lodge had previously held the ambassadorship, but resigned in 1964 to seek the Republican presidential nomination, which was eventually won by Barry Goldwater of Arizona. Lodge returned to Saigon again as ambassador from 1965 to 1967.

While visiting Saigon, McNamara was informed by secret cable that President Lyndon B. Johnson had decided to give Gen. William Westmoreland the troops he had requested. The American commander had been asking for additional U.S. troops so that he could stabilize the military situation and "carry the war to the communists." McNamara, believing that the United States should commit itself to preventing the fall of South Vietnam to communism, supported Westmoreland's request. McNamara said at a press conference upon leaving Saigon: "There has been deterioration since I was last here, 15 months ago."

1973 Senate begins investigations into secret bombing of Cambodia

The Senate Armed Services Committee begins a probe into allegations that the U.S. Air Force made thousands of secret B-52 raids into Cambodia in 1969 and 1970 at a time when the United States recognized the neutrality of the Prince Norodom Sihanouk regime in Cambodia. The Pentagon acknowledged that President Richard Nixon and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird had authorized the raids against Cambodia, but Sihanouk denied the State Department claim that he had requested or authorized the bombing. Though it was established that the bombing records had been falsified, Laird and Henry Kissinger, Nixon's National Security Advisor, denied any knowledge of the falsification. The Senate hearings eventually exposed the extent of the secrecy involved in the bombing campaign and seriously damaged the credibility of the Nixon administration.

JULY 17

1972 South Vietnamese paratroopers fight for Citadel

South Vietnamese paratroopers fight their way to within 200 yards of the Citadel in Quang Tri City, which was described by reporters who accompanied the troops as a city of rubble and ash. Citizens emerging from neighborhoods retaken by the paratroopers joined the refugees, who had been streaming south toward Hue on Route 1 to get out of the way of continued fighting in Quang Tri.

North Vietnamese troops had captured Quang Tri City on May 1 as part of their Nguyen Hue Offensive (later called the "Easter Offensive"), a massive invasion by North Vietnamese forces that had been launched on March 31. 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 American advisors and airpower. Fighting continued all over South Vietnam into the summer months.

After months of heavy fighting, the South Vietnamese forces finally retook Quang Tri province entirely in September. With the communist invasion blunted, President Nixon declared that the South Vietnamese victory proved the viability of "Vietnamization," a program that he had instituted in 1969 to increase the combat capability of the South Vietnamese armed forces so U.S. troops could be withdrawn.

1969 Wheeler visits South Vietnam

Gen. Earle Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, conducts four days of conferences and inspections with U.S. commanders in South Vietnam. This was an effort to assess the progress of the South Vietnamese armed forces and to discuss future strategy. Upon his return to Washington, Wheeler reported to President Richard Nixon that the situation in South Vietnam was "good" and that the program to improve the South Vietnamese armed forces was on schedule.

JULY 18

1955 Soviet Union agrees to grant Hanoi economic aid

Following a visit from Ho Chi Minh and his ministers, the Soviet

Union announces that it will grant Hanoi 400 million rubles (about \$100 million) in economic aid. On July 7, China had announced that Beijing would extend Hanoi economic aid of 800 million yuan (about \$200 million). The July grants from China and the Soviet Union enabled Hanoi to initiate an ambitious industrialization program. In less than 10 years, the North was producing items not yet made in the South. Continued aid from Hanoi's fellow communist nations would sustain North Vietnam in its war against the South Vietnamese and their American allies until 1975, when they defeated the South Vietnamese forces and reunified the country.

1968 Johnson meets Thieu in Honolulu

President Lyndon B. Johnson meets South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu in Honolulu to discuss relations between Washington and Saigon. Johnson reaffirmed his administration's commitment "to defend South Vietnam." Thieu stated that he had "no apprehensions at all" concerning the U.S. commitment. In a joint communique, Thieu further asserted that his government was determined "to continue to assume all the responsibility that the scale of forces of South Vietnam and their equipment will permit," thus tacitly accepting current U.S. efforts to "Vietnamize" the war. The two presidents also agreed that South Vietnam "should be a full participant playing a leading role in discussions concerning the substance of a final settlement" to the conflict. Johnson's successor, Richard Nixon, made "Vietnamization" one of the pillars of his Vietnam policy. Under the plan, he directed that the combat capability of the South Vietnamese armed forces be improved so that they could ultimately assume full responsibility for the war and U.S. forces could be withdrawn.

JULY 19

1964 President Khanh calls for expanding the war

On what the South Vietnamese call the "Day of Shame"--the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Geneva Accords that partitioned Vietnam--South Vietnamese Premier Nguyen Khanh, at a rally in Saigon, calls for an expansion of the war to North Vietnam. Ambassador Maxwell Taylor and other U.S. officials present declined comment on Khanh's position, but it was known that the United States regarded this as breaking an agreement to consult with Washington before issuing such a call.

1972 Peace talks resume

Washington and Hanoi announce that the private Paris peace talks have resumed. Henry Kissinger and North Vietnamese negotiator Le Duc Tho conferred for over six hours and, by

mutual agreement, neither side revealed details of the meetings. The talks had been suspended when the North Vietnamese had launched their Nguyen Hue Offensive earlier in the year.

Though the peace talks resumed, heavy fighting continued in South Vietnam. A force of 8,000 to 10,000 South Vietnamese troops moved north toward the district capital at Hoi An in the communist-controlled Binh Dinh province. The troop movement marked the beginning of a counteroffensive in the coastal province to retake territory lost to the communists in the early days of the Nguyen Hue Offensive. Saigon's forces succeeded in taking Hoi An two days later, but lost the western half of the city one week after that.

JULY 20

1969 Duck Hook plan completed

A top-secret study, commissioned by presidential assistant Henry Kissinger, is completed by the office of the Chief of Naval Operations. Code-named Duck Hook, the study proposed measures for military escalation against North Vietnam. The military options included a massive bombing of Hanoi, Haiphong, and other key areas of North Vietnam; a ground invasion of North Vietnam; the mining of harbors and rivers; and a bombing campaign designed to sever the main railroad links to China. A total of 29 major targets in North Vietnam were pinpointed for destruction in a series of air attacks planned to last four days and to be renewed until Hanoi capitulated. This plan represented a drastic escalation of the war and was never ordered by President Richard Nixon. However, Nixon did order certain elements of the proposal, such as the intensified bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong and the mining of North Vietnamese harbors, in response to the 1972 North Vietnamese Easter Offensive.

1964 Viet Cong troops overrun town

Viet Cong forces overrun Cai Be, the capital of Dinh Tuong Province, killing 11 South Vietnamese militiamen, 10 women, and 30 children. On July 31, South Vietnam charged that the enemy troops involved in the attack were North Vietnamese Army regulars and that Chinese communist advisors led the attack. This claim was never verified, but it is likely that North Vietnamese regulars participated in the action. This incident and numerous intelligence reports indicated that North Vietnamese regular troops were moving down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in great numbers to join the fighting in South Vietnam. This marked a major change in the tempo and scope of the war in South Vietnam and resulted in President Lyndon B. Johnson committing U.S. combat troops. North Vietnamese forces and U.S. troops clashed for the first time in November 1965, when

units from the newly arrived 1st Cavalry Division engaged several North Vietnamese regiments in the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley in the Central Highlands.

JULY 21

1965 Johnson considers the options

With Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara back from a visit to Vietnam, President Lyndon B. Johnson begins a weeklong series of conferences with his civilian and military advisers on Vietnam. He also met with private citizens that he trusted during this period. Johnson appeared to be considering all the options with an open mind, but it was clear that he was leaning toward providing more combat troops to bolster the faltering South Vietnamese government.

Johnson was faced with a rapidly deteriorating situation in Vietnam. The Viet Cong had increased the level of combat and there were indications that Hanoi was sending troops to fight in South Vietnam. It was apparent that the South Vietnamese were in danger of being overwhelmed. Johnson had sent Marines and paratroopers to protect American installations, but he was becoming convinced that more had to be done to stop the communists or they would soon overwhelm South Vietnam. While some advisers, such as Undersecretary of State George Ball, recommended a negotiated settlement, McNamara urged the president to "expand promptly and substantially" the U.S. military presence in South Vietnam. Johnson, not wanting to "lose" Vietnam to the communists, ultimately accepted McNamara's recommendation. On July 22, he authorized a total of 44 U.S. battalions for commitment in South Vietnam, a decision that led to a massive escalation of the war. There were less than ten U.S. Army and Marine battalions in South Vietnam at this time. Eventually there would be more than 540,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam.

JULY 22

1967 Taylor and Clifford begin tour of the Pacific region

Gen. Maxwell Taylor, former U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam and now a consultant to President Lyndon B. Johnson, and presidential adviser Clark Clifford tour South Vietnam, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea to sound out opinion on the possibility of another summit conference on the situation in Vietnam. Reportedly, they were also seeking additional troops for the war. On their return to Washington, Taylor and Clifford reported no major disagreements on any aspect of the war among the national leaders with whom they had spoken during the trip. Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and Korea eventually sent combat troops to South Vietnam to fight alongside the Americans and South Vietnamese.

1968 North Vietnamese condemn Honolulu Conference

Nguyen Thanh Le, North Vietnamese spokesman at the Paris peace talks, tells reporters that the Honolulu conference reveals that "the position of the United States remains infinitely obstinate." According to the North Vietnamese, the war would continue as long as the United States remained determined to support the "puppet government" in Saigon.

President Lyndon B. Johnson had met with South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu in Honolulu from July 18 to July 20. At the conference, Johnson reaffirmed his administration's commitment "to defend South Vietnam." Thieu stated that he had "no apprehensions at all" concerning the U.S. commitment. In a joint communique, Thieu further asserted that his government was determined "to continue to assume all the responsibility that the scale of forces of South Vietnam and their equipment will permit," thus tacitly accepting current U.S. efforts to "Vietnamize the war." The two presidents also agreed that South Vietnam "should be a full participant playing a leading role in discussions concerning the substance of a final settlement" to the conflict. Johnson's successor, Richard Nixon, made "Vietnamization" one of the pillars of his Vietnam policy, directing that the combat capability of the South Vietnamese armed forces be improved so that they could ultimately assume full responsibility for the war and U.S. forces could be withdrawn.

JULY 23

1964 Taylor and Khanh have "heated" discussions in Saigon

Ambassador Maxwell Taylor meets twice with South Vietnamese Premier General Nguyen Khanh to register U.S. disapproval of the recent calls by Khanh and Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky to extend the war into North Vietnam.

Both meetings were reportedly "heated." It was also said that Khanh stood firmly against Taylor's reprimands, arguing that the war had changed because of the presence of North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam. Khanh offered to resign at the second meeting, but Taylor, who had become convinced that Khanh was partly right about taking the war to the North Vietnamese, not only dissuaded him but also ended up cabling Washington that the United States should undertake covert planning with the South Vietnamese for bombing the North. In a news conference in Washington on July 24, President Lyndon B. Johnson insisted that relations were good between the U.S. and South Vietnam.

1965 Johnson urged to declare a state of national emergency

President Lyndon B. Johnson, in the course of discussions about what to do concerning the deteriorating situation in Vietnam, is told by some that he should give the American public all the facts, ask for an increase in taxes, mobilize the reserves, and declare a state of national emergency in the United States. Johnson rejected this approach, and informed his staff that he wanted any decisions implemented in a "low-key manner" in order to avoid an abrupt challenge to the communists, and to avoid undue concern and excitement in Congress and in domestic public opinion. During these discussions, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara urged the president to "expand promptly and substantially" the U.S. military presence in South Vietnam. Johnson, not wanting to "lose" Vietnam to the communists, ultimately accepted McNamara's recommendation and authorized a total of 44 U.S. battalions in South Vietnam, which led to a massive escalation of the war.

JULY 24

1965 North Vietnam increases air defense capabilities

In the air war, four F-4C Phantom jets escorting a formation of U.S. bombers on a raid over munitions manufacturing facilities at Kang Chi, 55 miles northwest of Hanoi, are fired at from an unknown launching site. It was the first time the enemy had launched antiaircraft missiles at U.S. aircraft.

One plane was destroyed and the other three damaged. The presence of ground-to-air antiaircraft missiles represented a rapidly improving air defense capability for the North Vietnamese. As the war progressed, North Vietnam, supplied by China and the Soviet Union, would fashion a very effective and integrated air defense system that proved to be a formidable challenge to American flyers conducting missions over North Vietnam.

JULY 25

1964 Joint Chiefs propose air strikes

Following a meeting of the National Security Council to discuss the deteriorating situation in Saigon, the Joint Chiefs of Staff draw up a memo proposing air strikes against North Vietnam.

These missions were to be conducted in unmarked planes flown by South Vietnamese and Thai crews. There was no action taken on this recommendation. However, the situation changed in August 1964 when North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked U.S. destroyers off the coast of North Vietnam. What became known as the Tonkin Gulf incident led to the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which passed 416 to 0 in the House and 88 to 2 in the Senate. The resolution gave the president approval to "take all necessary measures to repel an armed

attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." Using the resolution, Johnson ordered the bombing of North Vietnam by U.S. aircraft in retaliation for the Tonkin Gulf incident. In 1965, as the situation continued to deteriorate in South Vietnam, Johnson initiated a major commitment of U.S. troops to South Vietnam, which ultimately totaled more than 540,000 by 1968.

1969 Nixon announces new doctrine

President Richard Nixon, at a briefing in Guam for the news media accompanying him on his trip to Asia, discusses at length the future role the United States should play in Asia and the Pacific region after the conclusion of the Vietnam War. Nixon said that while the United States would continue to have primary responsibility for the defense of its allies against nuclear attack, the noncommunist Asian nations would have to bear the burden of their own defense against conventional attack and assume responsibility for internal security. The president's remarks were nicknamed the "Nixon Doctrine."

JULY 26

1972 South Vietnamese troops raise flag over Quang Tri

Although South Vietnamese paratroopers hoist their flag over Quang Tri Citadel, they prove unable to hold the Citadel for long or to secure Quang Tri City. Fighting outside the city remained intense. Farther to the south, South Vietnamese troops under heavy shelling were forced to abandon Fire Base Bastogne, which protected the southwest approach to Hue.

North Vietnamese troops had captured Quang Tri City on May 1 as part of their Nguyen Hue Offensive (later called the "Easter Offensive"), a massive invasion by North Vietnamese forces that had been launched on March 31. 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. advisors and American airpower. Fighting continued all over South Vietnam into the summer months.

The heavy fighting would continue in the area of Quang Tri and

Hue until September, when the South Vietnamese forces finally succeeded in recapturing Quang Tri. 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.

1968 South Vietnamese opposition leader tried and sentenced

Truong Dinh Dzu, a candidate who ran on a peace platform in the September 1967 presidential elections in South Vietnam, is sentenced to five years of hard labor for urging the formation of a coalition government as a step toward ending the war. This was the first time that a major political figure was tried and convicted under a 1965 decree that ordered the prosecution of persons "who interfere with the government's struggle against communism."

JULY 27

1964 Pentagon announces 5,000 more troops to Vietnam

It is announced that the United States will send an additional 5,000 U.S. troops to Vietnam, bringing the total number of U.S. forces in Vietnam to 21,000. Military spokesmen and Washington officials insisted that this did not represent any change in policy, and that new troops would only intensify existing U.S. efforts. However, the situation changed in August 1964 when North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked U.S. destroyers off the coast of North Vietnam. What became known as the Tonkin Gulf incident led to the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which passed unanimously in the House and 88 to 2 in the Senate. The resolution gave the president approval to "take all necessary measures to repel an armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." Using the resolution, Johnson ordered the bombing of North Vietnam in retaliation for the Tonkin Gulf incident.

In 1965, Johnson was faced with a rapidly deteriorating situation in Vietnam. The Viet Cong had increased the level of combat and there were indications that Hanoi was sending troops to fight in the south. It was apparent that the South Vietnamese were in danger of being overwhelmed. Johnson had sent Marines and paratroopers to protect American installations, but he had become convinced that more had to be done to stop the communists or they would soon overwhelm South Vietnam. While some advisers, such as Undersecretary of State George Ball, recommended a negotiated settlement, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara urged the president to "expand promptly and substantially" the U.S. military presence in South

Vietnam. Johnson, not wanting to "lose" Vietnam to the communists, ultimately accepted McNamara's recommendation. This decision led to a massive escalation of the war.

1965 U.S. jets attack new North Vietnamese air defense sites

Forty-six U.S. F-105 fighter-bombers attack the missile installation that had fired at U.S. planes on July 24. They also attacked another missile installation 40 miles northwest of Hanoi. One missile launcher was destroyed and another was damaged, but five U.S. planes were shot down in the effort.

On July 24, U.S. bombers on a raid over munitions manufacturing facilities at Kang Chi, 55 miles northwest of Hanoi, were fired at from an unknown launching site. It was the first time the enemy had launched antiaircraft missiles at U.S. aircraft. The presence of ground-to-air antiaircraft missiles represented a rapidly improving air defense capability for the North Vietnamese. As the war progressed, North Vietnam, supplied by China and the Soviet Union, would fashion a very effective and integrated air defense system, which became a formidable challenge to American flyers conducting missions over North Vietnam.

JULY 28

1965 Johnson announces more troops to Vietnam

President Lyndon B. Johnson announces that he has ordered an increase in U.S. military forces in Vietnam, from the present 75,000 to 125,000. Johnson also said that he would order additional increases if necessary. He pointed out that to fill the increase in military manpower needs, the monthly draft calls would be raised from 17,000 to 35,000. At the same time, Johnson reaffirmed U.S. readiness to seek a negotiated end to the war, and appealed to the United Nations and any of its member states to help further this goal. There was an immediate reaction throughout the world to this latest escalation, with communist leaders attacking Johnson for his decision to send more troops to Vietnam. Most members of Congress were reported to favor Johnson's decision, while most U.S. state governors, convening for their annual conference, also supported a resolution backing Johnson. This decision to send more troops was regarded as a major turning point, as it effectively guaranteed U.S. military leaders a blank check to pursue the war.

1972 CIA reports minor damage done to North Vietnam's dikes

In response to Soviet accusations that the United States had conducted a two-month bombing campaign intentionally to destroy the dikes and dams of the Tonkin Delta in North Vietnam, a CIA report is made public by the Nixon administration. The report revealed that U.S. bombing at 12 locations had in fact caused accidental minor damage to North Vietnam's dikes, but the damage was unintentional and the dikes were not the intended targets of the bombings. The nearly 2,000 miles of dikes on the Tonkin plain, and more than 2,000 along the sea, made civilized life possible in the Red River Delta. Had the dikes been intentionally targeted, their destruction would have destroyed centuries of patient work and caused the drowning or starvation of hundreds of thousands of peasants. Bombing the dikes had been advocated by some U.S. strategists since the beginning of U.S. involvement in the war, but had been rejected outright by U.S. presidents sitting during the war as an act of terrorism.

JULY 29

1965 101st Airborne Division arrives in Vietnam

The first 4,000 paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division arrive in Vietnam, landing at Cam Ranh Bay. They made a demonstration jump immediately after arriving, observed by Gen. William Westmoreland and outgoing Ambassador (formerly General) Maxwell Taylor. Taylor and Westmoreland were both former commanders of the division, which was known as the "Screaming Eagles." The 101st Airborne Division has a long and storied history, including combat jumps during the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, and the subsequent Market-Garden airborne operation in the Netherlands. Later, the division distinguished itself by its defense of Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge.

The 1st Brigade fought as a separate brigade until 1967, when the remainder of the division arrived in Vietnam. The combat elements of the division consisted of 10 battalions of airmobile infantry, six battalions of artillery, an aerial rocket artillery unit armed with rocket-firing helicopters, and an air reconnaissance unit. Another unique feature of the division was its aviation group, which consisted of three aviation battalions of assault helicopters and gunships.

The majority of the 101st Airborne Division's tactical operations were in the Central Highlands and in the A Shau Valley farther north. Among its major operations was the brutal fight for Ap Bia Mountain, known as the "Hamburger Hill" battle.

The last Army division to leave Vietnam, the remaining elements of the 101st Airborne Division returned to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where today it is the Army's only airmobile division. During the war, troopers from the 101st won

17 Medals of Honor for bravery in combat. The division suffered almost 20,000 soldiers killed or wounded in action in Vietnam, over twice as many as the 9,328 casualties it suffered in World War II.

1967 Fire ravages U.S. carrier off Vietnam

Fire sweeps the U.S. aircraft carrier *Forrestal* off the coast of North Vietnam in the Gulf of Tonkin. It was the worst U.S. naval disaster in a combat zone since World War II. The accident took the lives of 134 crewmen and injured 62 more. Of the carrier's 80 planes, 21 were destroyed and 42 were damaged.

1972 Former U.S. Attorney General visits North Vietnam

Former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark visits North Vietnam as a member of the International Commission of Inquiry into U.S. War Crimes in Indochina. This commission was formed to investigate alleged U.S. bombing of non-military targets in North Vietnam. Clark reported over Hanoi radio that he had seen damage to hospitals, dikes, schools, and civilian areas. His visit stirred intense controversy at home. Nothing ever came of Clark's claims, but he was lauded by antiwar activists for pointing out the damage done by the U.S. bombing attacks. Other Americans condemned Clark as a traitor to the United States.

JULY 30

1964 South Vietnamese boats raid islands in the Tonkin Gulf

At about midnight, six "Swifts," special torpedo boats used by the South Vietnamese for covert raids, attack the islands of Hon Me and Hon Ngu in the Tonkin Gulf. Although unable to land any commandos, the boats fired on island installations. Radar and radio transmissions were monitored by an American destroyer, the USS *Maddox*, which was stationed about 120 miles away.

The South Vietnamese attacks were part of a covert operation called Oplan 34A, which involved raids by South Vietnamese commandos operating under American orders against North Vietnamese coastal and island installations. Although American forces were not directly involved in the actual raids, U.S. Navy ships were on station to conduct electronic surveillance and monitor North Vietnamese defense responses under another program, Operation De Soto. The Oplan 34A attacks played a major role in events that led to what became known as the Gulf of Tonkin Incident. On August 2, North Vietnamese patrol boats

attacked the *Maddox*, which had been conducting a De Soto mission in the area. Two days after the first attack, there was another incident that still remains unclear. The *Maddox*, joined by destroyer USS *C. Turner Joy*, engaged what were thought at the time to be more attacking North Vietnamese patrol boats. Although it was questionable whether the second attack actually happened or not, the incident provided the rationale for retaliatory air attacks against the North Vietnamese and the subsequent Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The resolution became the basis for the initial escalation of the war in Vietnam and ultimately the insertion of U.S. combat troops into the area.

1969 Nixon visits South Vietnam

During his first overseas trip as president--which included stops in Guam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Pakistan, Romania, and Britain--Richard Nixon makes an unscheduled five-and-a-half hour visit to South Vietnam. On the South Vietnam stopover, Nixon met with President Nguyen Van Thieu to discuss U.S. troop withdrawals and later met with senior U.S. military commanders to discuss possible changes in military tactics. Nixon also visited U.S. troops of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division at Di An, 12 miles south of Saigon.

JULY 31

1964 Agreement on conduct of war

In a news conference, Secretary of State Dean Rusk admits there are differences between the United States and South Vietnam on the issue of extending the war into North Vietnam, but agreement on the general conduct of the war. He stated that U.S. warnings to communist China and North Vietnam indicated total U.S. commitment.

Ambassador Maxwell Taylor had met with South Vietnamese head of state Gen. Nguyen Khanh on July 23 to register U.S. disapproval of the recent calls by Khanh and Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky to extend the war into North Vietnam. The meeting was reportedly "heated." It was also said that Khanh stood firmly against Taylor's reprimands, arguing that the war had changed because of the presence of North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam. In a second meeting, Khanh offered to resign, but Taylor, who became convinced that Khanh was at least partly right about taking the war to the North Vietnamese, not only dissuaded him but also ended up cabling Washington that the United States should undertake covert planning with the South Vietnamese for bombing the North.

Despite ongoing disagreements about how best to conduct the war, President Lyndon B. Johnson insisted that relations between the U.S. and South Vietnam were good. Rusk's comments were seen by many to be part of a campaign to

reassure to the South Vietnamese that the United States would continue to stand by them in the struggle.

1972 Hanoi claims that U.S. bombers have struck dikes

Hanoi challenges the Nixon administration on the dike controversy, claiming that since April there had been 173 raids against the dikes in North Vietnam with direct hits in 149 locations. On July 28, in response to claims by the Soviet Union that the United States had conducted an intentional two-month bombing campaign designed to destroy the dikes and dams of the Tonkin Delta in North Vietnam, a CIA report was made public by the Nixon administration. It stated that U.S. bombing at 12 locations had caused accidental minor damage to North Vietnam's dikes, but the damage was unintentional and the dikes were not the intended targets of the bombings.

The nearly 2,000 miles of dikes on the Tonkin plain, and more than 2,000 miles of dikes along the sea, made civilized life possible in the Red River Delta. Had the dikes been intentionally targeted, their destruction would have destroyed centuries of patient work and caused the drowning or starvation of hundreds of thousands of peasants. Bombing the dikes had been advocated by some U.S. strategists since the beginning of U.S. involvement in the war, but had been rejected outright by U.S. presidents sitting during the war as an act of terrorism.