

# Vietnam by day April

## APRIL 1

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

Following three days of the heaviest artillery and rocket bombardment of the war, between 12,000 and 15,000 soldiers of Hanoi's 304th Division--supported by tanks, artillery, and anti-aircraft units equipped with surface-to-air missiles--swept across the Demilitarized Zone. They routed the South Vietnamese 3rd Division and drove them toward their rear bases.

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

North Vietnam had a number of objectives in launching the offensive: impressing the communist world and its own people with its determination; capitalizing on U.S. antiwar sentiment and possibly hurting President Richard Nixon's chances for re-election; proving that "Vietnamization" was a failure; damaging the South Vietnamese forces and government stability; gaining as much territory as possible before a possible truce; and accelerating negotiations on their own terms.

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

## APRIL 2

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

Soldiers of Hanoi's 304th Division, supported by Soviet-made tanks and heavy artillery, take the northern half of the Quang Tri province. This left only Quang Tri City (the combat base on the outskirts of the city) and Dong Ha in South Vietnamese hands. South Vietnam's 3rd Division commander Brig. Gen. Vu Van Giai moved his staff out of the Quang Tri combat base to the citadel at Quang Tri City, the apparent North Vietnamese objective.

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

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

### **1975 South Vietnamese evacuation begins at Qui Nhon.**

As North Vietnamese tanks and infantry continue to push the remnants of South Vietnam's 22nd Division and waves of civilian refugees from the Quang Ngai Province, the South Vietnamese Navy begins to evacuate soldiers and civilians by sea from Qui Nhon. Shortly thereafter, the South Vietnamese abandoned Tuy Hoa and Nha Trang, leaving the North Vietnamese in control of more than half of South Vietnam's territory. During the first week in April, communist forces attacking from the south pushed into Long An Province, just south of Saigon, threatening to cut Highway 4, Saigon's main link with the Mekong Delta, which would have precluded reinforcements from being moved north to assist in the coming

battle for Saigon.

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

### **APRIL 3**

#### **1972 Nixon orders response to North Vietnamese invasion**

The United States prepares hundreds of B-52s and fighter-bombers for possible air strikes to blunt the recently launched North Vietnamese invasion. The aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk* was sent from the Philippines to join the carriers already off the coast of Vietnam and provide additional air support.

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

North Vietnam had a number of reasons for launching the offensive: impressing the communist world and its own people with its determination; capitalizing on U.S. antiwar sentiment and possibly hurting President Richard Nixon's chances for re-election; proving that "Vietnamization" was a failure; damaging the South Vietnamese forces and government stability; gaining as much territory as possible before a possible truce; and accelerating negotiations on their own terms.

Initially, the South Vietnamese defenders were almost overwhelmed, particularly in the northernmost provinces, where they abandoned their positions in Quang Tri and fled south in

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

### **1969 Nixon administration will "Vietnamize" the war**

Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird announces that the United States is moving to "Vietnamize" the war as rapidly as possible. By this, he meant that the responsibility for the fighting would be gradually transferred to the South Vietnamese as they became more combat capable. However, Laird emphasized that it would not serve the United States' purpose to discuss troop withdrawals while the North Vietnamese continued to conduct offensive operations in South Vietnam. Despite Laird's protestations to the contrary, Nixon's "Vietnamization" program, as he would announce it in June, did include a series of scheduled U.S. troop withdrawals, the first of the war.

Also on this date: U.S. military headquarters in Saigon announce that combat deaths for the last week of March have pushed the total number of Americans killed during eight years of U.S. involvement in Vietnam to 33,641. This was 12 more deaths than during the Korean War. By the end of the war, 47,244 Americans had been killed in action in Vietnam. An additional 10,446 died as a result of non-hostile causes like disease and accidents.

## **APRIL 4**

### **1967 Martin Luther King, Jr., speaks out against the war**

The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, says in a speech that there is a common link forming between the civil rights and peace movements. King proposed that the United States stop all bombing of North and South Vietnam; declare a unilateral truce in the hope that it would lead to peace talks; set a date for withdrawal of all troops from Vietnam; and give the National Liberation Front a role in negotiations.

King had been a solid supporter of President Lyndon B. Johnson and his "Great Society," but he became increasingly concerned about U.S. involvement in Vietnam and, as his concerns became more public, his relationship with the Johnson

administration deteriorated. King came to view U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia as little more than imperialism disguised as "fighting the communists". Additionally, he believed that the Vietnam War diverted money and attention from domestic programs created to aid the black poor. King maintained his antiwar stance and supported peace movements until he was assassinated on April 4, 1968.

### **1975 Operation Baby Lift aircraft crashes**

A major U.S. airlift of South Vietnamese orphans begins with disaster when an Air Force cargo jet crashes shortly after departing from Tan Son Nhut airbase in Saigon. More than 138 passengers, mostly children, were killed. Operation Baby Lift was designed to bring 2,000 South Vietnamese orphans to the United States for adoption by American parents. Baby Lift lasted for 10 days and was carried out during the final, desperate phase of the war, as North Vietnamese forces closed in on Saigon. Although this first flight ended in tragedy, all subsequent flights were completed safely, and Baby Lift aircraft brought orphans across the Pacific until the mission's conclusion on April 14, only 16 days before the fall of Saigon and the end of the war.

## **APRIL 5**

### **1972 North Vietnamese launch second front of Nguyen Hue Offensive**

Moving out of eastern Cambodia, North Vietnamese troops open the second front of their offensive with a drive into Binh Long Province, attacking Loc Ninh, a border town 75 miles north of Saigon on Highway 13. At the same time, additional North Vietnamese cut the highway between An Loc, the provincial capital, and Saigon to the south, effectively isolating An Loc from outside support.

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

In Binh Long, the North Vietnamese forces crossed into South Vietnam from Cambodia to strike first at Loc Ninh, then quickly

encircled An Loc, holding it under siege for almost three months while they made repeated attempts to take the city. The defenders suffered heavy casualties, including 2,300 dead or missing, but with the aid of U.S. advisors and American airpower, they managed to hold An Loc against vastly superior odds until the siege was lifted on June 18. Fighting continued all over South Vietnam into the summer months, but eventually the South Vietnamese forces prevailed against the invaders and they retook Quang Tri in September. With the communist invasion blunted, President Nixon declared that the South Vietnamese victory proved the viability of his Vietnamization program, which he had instituted in 1969 to increase the combat capability of the South Vietnamese armed forces.

### **1969 Antiwar demonstrations held across United States**

Approximately 100,000 antiwar demonstrators march in New York City to demand that the United States withdraw from Vietnam. The weekend of antiwar protests ended with demonstrations and parades in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and other cities. The National Mobilization Committee, the Student Mobilization Committee, and the Socialist Workers Party were among the groups that helped organize the demonstrations. At the same time, Quakers held sit-ins at draft boards and committed other acts of civil disobedience in more than 30 cities.

## **APRIL 6**

### **1972 U.S. forces respond to North Vietnamese offensive**

Clear weather for the first time in three days allows U.S. planes and Navy warships to begin the sustained air strikes and naval bombardments ordered by President Nixon in response to the massive North Vietnamese offensive launched on March 30.

The Nguyen Hue Offensive (later known as the "Easter Offensive") was a massive invasion by North Vietnamese forces designed to strike the blow that would win the war for the communists. 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 were Quang Tri in the north, Kontum in the Central Highlands, and An Loc farther to the south.

President Richard Nixon had ordered the Air Force and Navy to provide all available air support to help the South Vietnamese stabilize the situation. In response, U.S. planes flew 225 missions by April 9, hitting North Vietnamese troop concentrations and missile emplacements above and below the Demilitarized Zone. Two U.S. planes were shot down over North Vietnam by missiles, a new element in North Vietnamese

air defenses.

Ultimately, the South Vietnamese forces prevailed against the invaders, but only after six months of desperate fighting that raged across South Vietnam. U.S. airpower proved to be the difference between victory and defeat for the South Vietnamese. With the communist invasion blunted, President Nixon declared that the South Vietnamese victory proved the viability of his "Vietnamization" program, instituted in 1969 to increase the combat capability of the South Vietnamese armed forces.

### **1965 U.S. ground combat troops to take offensive measures**

National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy drafts and signs National Security Action Memorandum 328 on behalf of President Lyndon B. Johnson. This document came out of National Security Council meetings that were held on April 1 and April 2. The memorandum authorized U.S. personnel to take the offensive in South Vietnam to secure "enclaves" and to support South Vietnamese operations. The so-called "enclave strategy" called for the U.S. forces to control the densely-populated coastal areas while the South Vietnamese forces moved inland to fight the communists. This memorandum represented a major mission change for the American soldiers and Marines who had recently arrived in Vietnam. American forces had been limited to strictly defensive operations around the U.S. air bases, but the memorandum authorized them to go on the offensive to secure large areas of terrain, an escalation of U.S. involvement in the war.

## **APRIL 7**

### **1975 North Vietnamese forces begin preparations for final offensive**

North Vietnamese forces prepare to launch the "Ho Chi Minh Campaign," designed to set the conditions for a final communist victory in South Vietnam. By this time, well over two-thirds of South Vietnam was under communist control as South Vietnamese forces had fallen back in panic when the North Vietnamese pressed the attack.

The Ho Chi Minh Campaign offensive was the final phase of the North Vietnamese plan to defeat South Vietnam. Despite the imposition of a cease-fire by the terms of the 1973 Paris Peace Accords, fighting had continued between South Vietnamese forces and the North Vietnamese troops left in South Vietnam at the end of the 1972 Easter Offensive. In December 1974, the North Vietnamese launched a major attack against the lightly defended province of Phuoc Long, located north of Saigon along the Cambodian border. They overran the provincial



capital at Phuoc Binh on January 6, 1975.

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

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

As the North Vietnamese forces closed on the approaches to Saigon, the politburo in Hanoi issued an order to Gen. Van Tien Dung to launch the Ho Chi Minh Campaign, the final assault on Saigon itself. Dung ordered his forces into position for the final battle. The South Vietnamese 18th Division made a valiant final stand at Xuan Loc, 40 miles northeast of Saigon, in which the South Vietnamese soldiers destroyed three of Dung's divisions. After a week, however, the South Vietnamese succumbed to the North Vietnamese. By April 27, the North Vietnamese had completely encircled Saigon and began to maneuver for their final assault. By the morning of April 30, it was all over. When the North Vietnamese tanks broke through the gates of the Presidential Palace in Saigon, the South Vietnamese surrendered. The Vietnam War was over.

## **APRIL 8**

### **1972 North Vietnamese forces open a third front**

North Vietnamese 2nd Division troops drive out of Laos and Cambodia to open a third front of their offensive in the Central Highlands, attacking at Kontum and Pleiku in attempt to cut South Vietnam in two. If successful, this would give North Vietnam control of the northern half of South Vietnam.

The three-front attack was part of the North Vietnamese Nguyen



Hue Offensive (later known as the "Easter Offensive"), which had been launched on March 30. The offensive was a massive invasion by North Vietnamese forces designed to strike the knockout blow that would win the war for the communists. 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.

North Vietnam had a number of objectives in launching the offensive: impressing the communist world and its own people with its determination; capitalizing on U.S. antiwar sentiment and possibly hurting President Richard Nixon's chances for re-election; proving that "Vietnamization" was a failure; damaging the South Vietnamese forces and government stability; gaining as much territory as possible before a possible truce; and accelerating negotiations on their own terms.

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

### **1975 Weyand reports to Congress**

After a weeklong mission to South Vietnam, Gen. Frederick Weyand, U.S. Army Chief of Staff and former Vietnam commander, reports to Congress that South Vietnam cannot survive without additional military aid. Questioned again later by reporters who asked if South Vietnam could survive with additional aid, Weyand replied there was "a chance."

Weyand had been sent to Saigon by President Gerald Ford to assess the South Vietnamese forces and their chances for survival against the attacking North Vietnamese. The South Vietnamese were on the verge of collapse. The most recent assaults had begun in December 1974 when the North Vietnamese launched a major attack against the lightly defended province of Phuoc Long--located north of Saigon along the Cambodian border--and overran the provincial capital at Phuoc Binh on January 6, 1975. Despite previous presidential promises to aid South Vietnam in such a situation,

the United States did nothing. By this time, Nixon had resigned from office and his successor, Gerald Ford, was unable to convince a hostile Congress to make good on Nixon's earlier promises to Saigon.

The situation emboldened the North Vietnamese, who launched a new campaign in March 1975, in which the South Vietnamese forces fell back in total disarray. Once again, the United States did nothing. The South Vietnamese abandoned Pleiku and Kontum in the Highlands with very little fighting. Then Quang Tri, Hue, and Da Nang fell to the communist onslaught. The North Vietnamese continued to attack south along the coast toward Saigon, defeating the South Vietnamese forces at each encounter.

As Weyand reported to Congress, the South Vietnamese were battling three North Vietnamese divisions at Xuan Loc, the last defense line before Saigon. Indeed, it became the last battle in the defense of the Republic of South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese forces managed to hold out against the attackers until they ran out of tactical air support and weapons, finally abandoning Xuan Loc to the communists on April 21. Saigon fell to the communists on April 30.

## **APRIL 9**

### **1969 "Chicago Eight" plead not guilty**

The Chicago Eight, indicted on federal charges of conspiracy to incite a riot at the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago, plead not guilty. The trial for the eight antiwar activists had begun in Chicago on March 20. The defendants included David Dellinger of the National Mobilization Committee (NMC); Rennie Davis and Thomas Hayden of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS); Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, founders of the Youth International Party ("Yippies"); Bobby Seale of the Black Panthers; and two lesser known activists, Lee Weiner and John Froines.

They were charged with conspiracy to cross state lines with intent to incite a riot. Attorneys William Kunstler and Leonard Weinglass represented all but Seale. The trial, presided over by Judge Julius Hoffman, turned into a circus as the defendants and their attorneys used the court as a platform to attack Nixon, the war, racism, and oppression. Their tactics were so disruptive that at one point Judge Hoffman ordered Seale gagged and strapped to his chair. (Seale's disruptive behavior eventually caused the judge to try him separately). When the trial ended in February 1970, Hoffman found the defendants and their attorneys guilty of 175 counts of contempt of court and sentenced them to terms ranging from two to four years. Although declaring the defendants not guilty of conspiracy, the jury found all but Froines and Weiner guilty of intent to riot. The others were each sentenced to five years and fined \$5,000. However, none of the defendants served time because in 1972

a Court of Appeals overturned the criminal convictions and eventually most of the contempt charges were also dropped.

## **APRIL 10**

### **1970 Poll reveals that public approval of Vietnam policy is down**

A Gallup Poll shows that 48 percent of the public approves of President Nixon's policy in Vietnam, while 41 percent disapprove. In January, Nixon had a 65 percent approval rating. The drop reflected the growing dissatisfaction with Nixon's failure to end the war in Vietnam. He had been elected in 1968 largely because he claimed to have a plan to end the war, but after three months in office, there was still no announcement about when the plan would be enacted. His approval rating further plummeted later in April, when he announced that U.S. and South Vietnamese forces had crossed the border into Cambodia. This announcement set off a wave of antiwar demonstrations, including one at Kent State University that resulted in the killing of four students by Army National Guard troops. The "Cambodian incursion," as it came to be called, angered many in Congress, who felt that Nixon was illegally widening the war; this resulted in a series of congressional resolutions and legislative initiatives to severely limit the executive power of the president.

### **1972 B-52s begin bombing North Vietnam**

Although the U.S. command refuses to confirm publicly the location of targets, U.S. B-52 bombers reportedly begin bombing North Vietnam for the first time since November 1967. The bombers struck in the vicinity of Vinh, 145 miles north of the Demilitarized Zone. It was later acknowledged publicly that target priority during these attacks had been given to SAM-2 missile sites, which had made raids over North Vietnam increasingly hazardous. U.S. officials called Hanoi's SAM-2 defenses "the most sophisticated air defenses in the history of air warfare." These defenses consisted of advanced radar and lethally accurate air defense missiles.

## **APRIL 11**

### **1972 B-52s strike North Vietnamese positions**

On this day, B-52 strikes against communist forces attacking South Vietnamese positions in the Central Highlands near Kontum remove any immediate threat to that city. Air strikes against North Vietnam continued, but were hampered by poor weather. Also on this day, the Pentagon ordered two more squadrons of B-52s to Thailand.

These actions were part of the U.S. response to the ongoing North Vietnamese Nguyen Hue Offensive, which had begun on

March 30. This offensive, later more commonly known as the "Easter Offensive," was a massive invasion by North Vietnamese forces designed to strike the blow that would win the war for the communists. 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. The fighting, which continued into the fall, was some of the most desperate of the war. The South Vietnamese prevailed against the invaders with the help of U.S. advisors and massive American airpower.

### **1963 Troops from Hawaii sent to South Vietnam**

One hundred U.S. troops of the Hawaiian-based 25th Infantry Division are ordered to temporary duty with military units in South Vietnam to serve as machine gunners aboard Army H-21 helicopters. This was the first commitment of American combat troops to the war and represented a quiet escalation of the U.S. commitment to the war in Vietnam.

## **APRIL 12**

### **1975 U.S. Embassy in Cambodia evacuated**

In Cambodia, the U.S. ambassador and his staff leave Phnom Penh when the U.S. Navy conducts its evacuation effort, Operation Eagle. On April 3, 1975, as the communist Khmer Rouge forces closed in for the final assault on the capital city, U.S. forces were put on alert for the impending embassy evacuation. An 11-man Marine element flew into the city to prepare for the arrival of the U.S. evacuation helicopters. On April 10, U.S. Ambassador Gunther Dean asked Washington that the evacuation begin no later than April 12.

At 8:50 a.m. on April 12, an Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service HH-53 landed a four-man Air Force combat control team to coordinate the operation. Three minutes later, it guided in a Marine Corps helicopter with the first element of the Marine security force. Marine and Air Force helicopters then carried 276 evacuees--including 82 Americans, 159 Cambodians, and 35 foreign nationals--to the safety of U.S. Navy assault carriers in the Gulf of Thailand. By 10 a.m., the Marine contingency force, the advance 11-man element, and the combat control team had been evacuated without any casualties.

On April 16, the Lon Nol government surrendered to the Khmer Rouge, ending five years of war. With the surrender, the victorious Khmer Rouge evacuated Phnom Penh and set about to reorder Cambodian society, which resulted in a killing spree and the notorious "killing fields." Eventually, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians were murdered or died from

exhaustion, hunger, and disease.

### **1961 Rostow recommends escalation of effort**

Walt W. Rostow, senior White House specialist on Southeast Asia and a principal architect of U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, delivers a memorandum to President John F. Kennedy asserting that the time has come for "gearing up the whole Vietnam operation." Rostow's proposals, almost all of which eventually became policy, included: a visit to Vietnam by the vice president; increasing the number of American Special Forces; increasing funds for South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem; and "persuading Diem to move more rapidly to broaden the base of his government, as well as to decrease its centralization and improve its efficiency."

## **APRIL 13**

### **1972 North Vietnamese launch major attack on An Loc**

Three North Vietnamese divisions attack An Loc with infantry, tanks, heavy artillery and rockets, taking half the city after a day of close combat. An Loc, the capital of Binh Long Province, was located 65 miles northwest of Saigon.

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

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

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

### **1966 SCLC passes resolution about South Vietnam**

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) adopts a resolution urging that the United States "desist from aiding the military junta against the Buddhists, Catholics, and students, whose efforts to democratize their government are more in consonance with our traditions than the policy of the military oligarchy." This resolution, which had little real impact on administration policies, indicated the growing dissatisfaction among many segments of the American population with President Lyndon B. Johnson's handling of the war in Vietnam.

Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., had helped establish the SCLC in 1957 to coordinate civil rights protests in the South. King began to speak out against the American involvement in Vietnam in July 1965, and he became increasingly identified with the antiwar movement. He argued that the war diverted money and attention from domestic programs created to aid the black poor. The SCLC resolution was one of the first public pronouncements by King and his followers against U.S. policy in Vietnam, but successive protests by King rapidly alienated President Johnson.

## **APRIL 14**

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

The Joint Chiefs of Staff order the deployment of the 173rd Airborne Brigade from Okinawa to South Vietnam. The 173rd arrived in Vietnam in May 1965 and was the first major U.S. Army ground combat unit committed to the war.

Headquartered at Bien Hoa Air Base near Saigon from May 1965 to October 1967, the brigade conducted combat operations in the region surrounding Saigon. In November 1967, the brigade fought a major battle with North Vietnamese Army forces at Dak To in the Central Highlands, winning the Presidential Union Citation for bravery in action. After more than six years in South Vietnam, the 173rd was withdrawn from Vietnam in August 1971 as part of President Richard Nixon's troop withdrawal program.

During combat service in Vietnam, 12 troopers of the 173rd Airborne Brigade won the Medal of Honor for conspicuous bravery; 1,606 were killed in action; and 8,435 were wounded in action.

### **1975 Operation "Baby Lift" concludes**

The American airlift of Vietnamese orphans to the United States ends after 2,600 children are transported to America. The operation began disastrously on April 4 when an Air Force cargo jet crashed shortly after take-off from Tan Son Nhut airbase in Saigon. More than 138 of the passengers, mostly children, were killed. Operation Baby Lift was initiated to bring South Vietnamese orphans to the United States for adoption by American parents. Baby Lift lasted 10 days and was carried out during the final, desperate phase of the war, as North Vietnamese forces were closing in on Saigon. Although the first flight ended in tragedy, all other flights took place without incident, and Baby Lift aircraft ferried orphans across the Pacific until the mission concluded on April 14, only 16 days before the fall of Saigon and the end of the war.

## **APRIL 15**

### **1970 U.S. 1st Infantry Division withdraws from Vietnam**

As part of the third phase of U.S. troop withdrawals announced by President Nixon, the 1st Infantry Division departs Vietnam. One of the most distinguished units in the U.S. Army, the 1st Infantry Division was organized in May 1917 and served with distinction in both World War I and II. It was deployed to the area north of Saigon in October 1965, one of the first Army infantry divisions to arrive in Vietnam. The division consisted of seven battalions of light infantry and two battalions of mechanized infantry. Other combat elements included an armored reconnaissance unit and four battalions of artillery.

The approaches to Saigon and the border regions between Vietnam and Cambodia were the major battlefields for the 1st Infantry Division. It took part in large-scale operations such as Operation Junction City (February-May 1967) and the Tet Offensive of 1968. The division also conducted major operations in conjunction with South Vietnamese forces in the region. It returned to Fort Riley, Kansas, upon its departure from South Vietnam.

The 1st Infantry Division was awarded the Vietnamese Civil Action Medal and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm. Among other individual awards, its soldiers won 11 Medals of Honor, 67 Distinguished Service Crosses, and 905 Silver Stars for bravery. The division suffered 20,770 soldiers killed or wounded in action, slightly more than the 20,659 casualties the division suffered in World War II.

### **1967 Antiwar protests held in New York and San Francisco**

Massive parades to protest Vietnam policy are held in New York and San Francisco. In New York, police estimated that 100,000 to 125,000 people listened to speeches by Martin Luther King,



Jr., Floyd McKissick, Stokely Carmichael and Dr. Benjamin Spock. Prior to the march, nearly 200 draft cards were burned by youths in Central Park. In San Francisco, black nationalists led a march, but most of the 20,000 marchers were white.

## **APRIL 16**

### **1972 United States resumes bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong**

In an effort to help blunt the ongoing North Vietnamese Nguyen Hue Offensive, the United States resumes bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong after a four-year lull.

In the first use of B-52s against both Hanoi and Haiphong, and the first attacks against both cities since November 1968, 18 B-52s and about 100 U.S. Navy and Air Force fighter-bombers struck supply dumps near Haiphong's harbor. Sixty fighter-bombers hit petroleum storage facilities near Hanoi, with another wave of planes striking later in the afternoon. White House spokesmen announced that the United States would bomb military targets anywhere in Vietnam in order to help the South Vietnamese defend against the communist onslaught.

These actions were part of the U.S. response to the North Vietnamese offensive, which had begun on March 30. The North Vietnamese had launched a massive invasion designed to strike the knockout blow that would win the war for the communists. The attack was called the Nguyen Hue Offensive by the North Vietnamese, but was also more commonly known to Americans as the "Easter Offensive." The attacking force of North Vietnamese 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. The fighting, which continued into the fall, was some of the most desperate of the war as the South Vietnamese fought for their very survival. They prevailed against the invaders with the help of U.S. advisors and massive American airpower.

### **1968 Johnson arrives in Honolulu**

At a series of meetings in Honolulu, President Johnson discusses recent Allied and enemy troop deployments with U.S. military leaders. He also conferred with South Korean President Park Chung Hee to reaffirm U.S. military commitments to Seoul and assure Park that his country's interests would not be compromised by any Vietnamese peace agreement.

## **APRIL 17**

### **1975 Cambodia falls to the Khmer Rouge**

The Khmer Rouge troops capture Phnom Penh and government forces surrender. The war between government troops and the communist insurgents had been raging since March 1970, when Lt. Gen. Lon Nol had ousted Prince Norodom Sihanouk in a bloodless coup and proclaimed the establishment of the Khmer Republic.

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

### **1972 First antiwar protest of the year is conducted**

The first major antiwar protest of 1972 is held. The demonstration, held at the University of Maryland, was organized to protest the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC). Hundreds of students were arrested and 800 National Guardsmen were ordered onto the campus. Significant protests continued across the country in reaction to the increased bombing of North Vietnam, which had been initiated in response to the new communist offensive in South Vietnam.

## **APRIL 18**

### **1969 Nixon says prospects for peace in Vietnam are better**

At a news conference, President Nixon says he feels the prospects for peace have "significantly improved" since he took office. He cited the greater political stability of the Saigon government and the improvement in the South Vietnamese armed forces as proof.

With these remarks, Nixon was trying to set the stage for a major announcement he would make at the Midway conference in June. While conferring with South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, Nixon announced that the United States would be pursuing a three-pronged strategy to end the war. Efforts would be increased to improve the combat capability of the South Vietnamese armed forces so that they could assume responsibility for the war against the North Vietnamese--Nixon described this effort as "Vietnamization." As the South

Vietnamese became more capable, U.S. forces would be withdrawn from South Vietnam. At the same time, U.S. negotiators would continue to try to reach a negotiated settlement to the war with the communists at the Paris peace talks.

This announcement represented a significant change in the nature of the U.S. commitment to the war, as the United States would be withdrawing troops from the war for the first time. The first U.S. soldiers were withdrawn in the fall of 1969 and the withdrawals continued periodically through 1972. At the same time, the United States increased the advisory effort and provided massive amounts of new equipment and weapons to the South Vietnamese as well. When the North Vietnamese launched a massive invasion in the spring of 1972, the South Vietnamese wavered, but eventually rallied with U.S. support and prevailed over the North Vietnamese. Nixon proclaimed that the South Vietnamese victory validated his strategy. In fact, a peace agreement was finalized in January 1973, but the fighting continued anyway. The U.S. did not deliver the aid it had promised in the case of continued attacks-the South Vietnamese held out for two years but they succumbed to the North Vietnamese in April 1975.

## **APRIL 19**

### **1971 Vietnam Veterans Against the War demonstrate**

As a prelude to a massive antiwar protest, Vietnam Veterans Against the War begin a five-day demonstration in Washington, D.C. The generally peaceful protest, called Dewey Canyon III in honor of the operation of the same name conducted in Laos, ended on April 23 with about 1,000 veterans throwing their combat ribbons, helmets, and uniforms on the Capitol steps, along with toy weapons. Earlier, they had lobbied with their congressmen, laid wreaths in Arlington National Cemetery, and staged mock "search and destroy" missions.

On April 24, a massive rally of about 200,000 took place on the Mall in Washington, D.C. A simultaneous protest was held by 156,000 demonstrators in San Francisco, but that rally, described as the largest such protest to date on the West Coast, ended prematurely when militants took over the stage and protest coordinators were forced to cancel the last few speeches. The comparatively orderly demonstrations in Washington, D.C., ended on April 26 when the demonstrators changed their tactics to aggressive "people lobbying," with the avowed purpose of "shutting down the government." Five thousand police officers, backed by 12,000 troops, outmaneuvered the demonstrators and prevented them from blocking access to government buildings.

### **1967 Air Force pilot cited for bravery**

Over North Vietnam, Air Force Maj. Leo K. Thorsness, from the 357th Tactical Fighter Squadron, and his electronic warfare officer, Capt. Harold E. Johnson, destroy two enemy surface-to-air missile sites, and then shoot down a MiG-17 before escorting search-and-rescue helicopters to a downed aircrew. Although his F-105 fighter-bomber was very low on fuel, Major Thorsness attacked four more MiG-17s in an effort to draw the enemy aircraft away from the downed aircrew. Awarded the Medal of Honor for his courageous action this day, Major Thorsness did not receive his medal until 1973--on April 30, 1967, he was shot down over North Vietnam and spent the next six years as a prisoner of war.

## **APRIL 20**

### **1971 "Fragging" on the rise in U.S. units**

The Pentagon releases figures confirming that fragging incidents are on the rise. In 1970, 209 such incidents caused the deaths of 34 men; in 1969, 96 such incidents cost 34 men their lives. Fragging was a slang term used to describe U.S. military personnel tossing of fragmentation hand grenades (hence the term "fragging") usually into sleeping areas to murder fellow soldiers. It was usually directed primarily against unit leaders, officers, and noncommissioned officers.

Fragging was rare in the early days of U.S. involvement in ground combat, but it became increasingly common as the rapid turnover caused by the one-year rotation policy weakened unit cohesion. With leadership and morale already declining in the face of repetitive Vietnam tours, the withdrawal of public support led to soldiers questioning their purpose on the battlefield. The situation worsened with the gradual U.S. troop withdrawal that began in 1969. As some troops were withdrawn, discipline and motivation declined as many remaining soldiers began to question why they had to continue fighting.

Fragging incidents in combat were usually attempts to remove leaders perceived to be incompetent and a threat to survival. Most fragging incidents, however, occurred in rear-echelon units and were committed by soldiers on drugs or because unit leaders were enforcing anti-drug policies. Unit leaders who were perceived to be too stringent in the enforcement of discipline or regulations sometimes received warnings via a fragmentation grenade, with the safety pin left on, but with their name painted on it left on their bunk, or a smoke grenade discharged under their bunk. Most understood the message, and intimidation through threat of fragging far exceeded actual incidents.

### **1970 Nixon announces more troop withdrawals**

In a televised speech, President Nixon pledges to withdraw

150,000 more U.S. troops over the next year "based entirely on the progress" of the Vietnamization program. His program, which had first been announced in June 1969, included three parts. First, the United States would step up its effort to improve the combat capability of the South Vietnamese armed forces so that they could assume responsibility for the war against the North Vietnamese. As the South Vietnamese became more capable, U.S. forces would be withdrawn from South Vietnam. At the same time, U.S. negotiators would continue to try to reach a negotiated settlement to the war with the communists at the Paris peace talks. Nixon's new strategy and the continuing U.S. troop withdrawals represented a significant change in the nature of the American commitment to the war, as the primary responsibility for the fighting was transferred to the South Vietnamese armed forces. The first U.S. soldiers were withdrawn in the fall of 1969 and the withdrawals continued periodically through 1972. The remaining U.S. troops were withdrawn from South Vietnam in March 1973 as part of the provisions of the Paris Peace Accords.

## **APRIL 21**

### **1975 Thieu flees Saigon as Xuan Loc falls**

Xuan Loc, the last South Vietnamese outpost blocking a direct North Vietnamese assault on Saigon, falls to the communists.

The North Vietnamese had launched a major offensive in March to capture the provincial capital of Ban Me Thuot in the Central Highlands. The South Vietnamese defenders fought very poorly and were quickly overwhelmed by the North Vietnamese attackers. Despite previous promises to provide support to the South Vietnamese if the communists violated the provisions of the cease-fire, the United States did nothing.

In an attempt to reposition his forces for a better defense, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu ordered his forces in the Highlands to withdraw to more defensible positions to the south. What started out as a reasonably orderly withdrawal soon degenerated into a panic that spread throughout the South Vietnamese armed forces. They abandoned Pleiku and Kontum in the Highlands with very little fighting and the North Vietnamese pressed the attack from the west and north. In quick succession, Quang Tri, Hue, and Da Nang in the north fell to the communist onslaught. The North Vietnamese continued to attack south along the coast, defeating the South Vietnamese forces at each encounter.

As the North Vietnamese forces closed on the approaches to Saigon, the politburo in Hanoi issued an order to Gen. Van Tien Dung to launch the "Ho Chi Minh Campaign," the final assault on Saigon itself. Dung began to move his forces into position for the final battle.

The South Vietnamese 18th Division made a valiant final stand

at Xuan Loc, 40 miles northeast of Saigon, and the South Vietnamese soldiers destroyed three of Dung's divisions. However, the South Vietnamese succumbed to the superior North Vietnamese numbers. With the fall of Xuan Loc, President Nguyen Van Thieu resigned and transferred authority to Vice-President Tran Van Huong. Thieu then fled Saigon, flying to Taiwan on April 25 and eventually on to Great Britain, where he now resides.

By April 27, the North Vietnamese had completely encircled Saigon and began to maneuver for their final assault. By the morning of April 30, the war was over. When the North Vietnamese tanks broke through the gates of the Presidential Palace in Saigon, the South Vietnamese surrendered and the Vietnam War came to an end.

### **1965 Intelligence reveals North Vietnamese units in South Vietnam**

The Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency report a "most ominous" development: a regiment of the People's Army of Vietnam--the regular army of North Vietnam--division is now operating with the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. Prior to this, it was believed that South Vietnam was dealing with an internal insurgency by the Viet Cong; the report detailed that, in fact, the Viet Cong forces were being joined in the war against the Saigon government by North Vietnamese army units. In short, the report revealed that South Vietnam was now involved in a much larger war than originally believed. The situation far outstripped the combat capability of the South Vietnamese forces. In order to stabilize the situation, President Lyndon B. Johnson would have to commit U.S. ground combat units, leading to a much greater American involvement in the war. Indeed, eventually over 500,000 U.S. troops were stationed in South Vietnam.

## **APRIL 22**

### **1968 South Vietnamese have increased combat capabilities**

In a news conference, Defense Secretary Clark Clifford declares that the South Vietnamese have "acquired the capacity to begin to insure their own security [and] they are going to take over more and more of the fighting."

Clifford, who had succeeded Robert McNamara, had taken office with more than a little skepticism about the way the United States was conducting the war in Vietnam. This skepticism increased after the communists launched their massive offensive during the Tet (Chinese New Year) holiday earlier in 1968. Clifford set up a Vietnam task force to reassess the situation. He learned that U.S. military leaders could offer no plan for victory or assurance of success. Accordingly, he told

President Lyndon B. Johnson that victory was probably impossible and recommended that the president initiate a bombing halt of North Vietnam and try to negotiate an end to the war. Clifford's comments about the combat capabilities of the South Vietnamese were part of his effort to set the stage for U.S. disengagement from the war. Johnson would follow Clifford's advice on the bombing halt in October 1968 when he called an end to Operation Rolling Thunder, the bombing campaign against North Vietnam that had been ongoing since March 1965. Clifford left office in 1969 with the rest of the Johnson administration. The next president, Richard M. Nixon, instituted a new policy that echoed many of the things that Clifford had recommended. In June 1969, Nixon announced his "Vietnamization" policy, a strategy built around two main objectives: increasing South Vietnamese combat capability and withdrawing U.S. troops.

### **1972 Antiwar demonstrations held**

Antiwar demonstrations prompted by the accelerated U.S. bombing in Southeast Asia drew somewhere between 30,000 to 60,000 marchers in New York; 30,000 to 40,000 in San Francisco; 10,000 to 12,000 in Los Angeles; and smaller gatherings in Chicago and other cities throughout the country. The new bombing campaign was in response to the North Vietnam's massive invasion of South Vietnam in March. As the demonstrations were happening, bitter fighting continued all over South Vietnam. In the Mekong Delta, for example, the fighting was the heaviest it had been in 18 months.

## **APRIL 23**

### **1975 Ford says that war is finished for America**

At a speech at Tulane University, President Gerald Ford says the Vietnam War is finished as far as America is concerned. "Today, Americans can regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam. But it cannot be achieved by re-fighting a war." This was devastating news to the South Vietnamese, who were desperately pleading for U.S. support as the North Vietnamese surrounded Saigon for the final assault on the capital city.

The North Vietnamese had launched a major offensive in March to capture the provincial capital of Ban Me Thuot (Darlac province) in the Central Highlands. The South Vietnamese defenders there fought very poorly and were quickly overwhelmed by the North Vietnamese attackers. Despite previous promises by both Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford to provide support, the United States did nothing. In an attempt to reposition his forces for a better defense, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu ordered his forces in the Highlands to withdraw to more defensible positions to the south. What started out as a reasonably orderly withdrawal



soon degenerated into a panic that spread throughout the South Vietnamese armed forces. The South Vietnamese abandoned Pleiku and Kontum in the Highlands with very little fighting and the North Vietnamese pressed the attack from the west and north. In quick succession, Quang Tri, Hue, and Da Nang in the north fell to the communist onslaught. The North Vietnamese continued to attack south along the coast, defeating the South Vietnamese forces at each encounter.

As the North Vietnamese forces closed on the approaches to Saigon, the politburo in Hanoi issued an order to Gen. Van Tien Dung to launch the "Ho Chi Minh Campaign," the final assault on Saigon itself. Dung ordered his forces into position for the final battle.

The South Vietnamese 18th Division made a valiant final stand at Xuan Loc, 40 miles northeast of Saigon, in which the South Vietnamese soldiers destroyed three of Dung's divisions. However, the South Vietnamese finally succumbed to the superior North Vietnamese numbers. With the fall of Xuan Loc on April 21 and Ford's statement at Tulane, it was apparent that the North Vietnamese would be victorious. President Thieu resigned and transferred authority to Vice President Tran Van Huong before fleeing Saigon on April 25.

By April 27, the North Vietnamese had completely encircled Saigon and began to maneuver for their final assault. By the morning of April 30, it was all over. When the North Vietnamese tanks crashed through the gates of the Presidential Palace in Saigon, the South Vietnamese surrendered and the Vietnam War was officially over.

## **APRIL 24**

### **1967 Westmoreland makes controversial remarks**

At a news conference in Washington, Gen. William Westmoreland, senior U.S. commander in South Vietnam, causes controversy by saying that the enemy had "gained support in the United States that gives him hope that he can win politically that which he cannot win militarily." Though he said that, "Ninety-five percent of the people were behind the United States effort in Vietnam," he asserted that the American soldiers in Vietnam were "dismayed, and so am I, by recent unpatriotic acts at home." This criticism of the antiwar movement was not received well by many in and out of the antiwar movement, who believed it was both their right and responsibility to speak out against the war.

### **1971 North Vietnamese attack South Vietnamese installations**

North Vietnamese troops hit Allied installations throughout

South Vietnam. In the most devastating attack, the ammunition depot at Qui Nhon was blown up. On April 27, the aviation fuel tanks at Da Nang air base were attacked by communist gunners, resulting in explosions and a fire that destroyed a large proportion of the fuel stored there. In the following three days, 54 South Vietnamese soldiers and civilians were reported killed, and 185 wounded. The United States reported seven dead and 60 wounded.

## **APRIL 25**

### **1964 Johnson announces appointment of Westmoreland**

President Lyndon B. Johnson announces that Gen. William Westmoreland will replace Gen. Paul Harkins as head of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) as of June 20. The assignment would put Westmoreland in charge of all American military forces in Vietnam. One of the war's most controversial figures, General Westmoreland was given many honors when the fighting was going well, but when the war turned sour, many Americans saw him as a cause of U.S. problems in Vietnam. Negative feeling about Westmoreland grew particularly strong following the Tet Offensive of 1968, when he had requested a large number of additional troops for deployment to Vietnam. On March 22, 1968, President Johnson announced that Westmoreland would depart South Vietnam to take on the post of Army Chief of Staff; Gen. Creighton Abrams replaced him as the senior U.S. commander in South Vietnam.

### **1972 North Vietnamese Army close to cutting South Vietnam in two**

Hanoi's 320th Division drives 5,000 South Vietnamese troops into retreat and traps about 2,500 others in a border outpost northwest of Kontum in the Central Highlands. This was part of the ongoing North Vietnamese Nguyen Hue Offensive, also known as the "Easter Offensive," which included an invasion by 120,000 North Vietnamese troops. The offensive was based on three objectives: Quang Tri in the north, Kontum in the Central Highlands, and An Loc in the south--just 65 miles north of Saigon. If successful, the attack at Kontum would effectively cut South Vietnam in two across the Central Highlands, giving North Vietnam control of the northern half of South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese defenders were able to hold out and prevent this from happening.

## **APRIL 26**

### **1971 U.S. troop strength in South Vietnam at five-year low**

The U.S. command in Saigon announces that the U.S. force level in Vietnam is 281,400 men, the lowest since July 1966.

These figures were a direct result of President Richard Nixon's

new "Vietnamization" strategy, which he had announced at the Midway Conference in June 1969. This strategy was a three-pronged program to disengage the United States from the war in Vietnam. The program required that efforts be increased to improve the combat capability of the South Vietnamese armed forces so that they could assume responsibility for the war against the North Vietnamese. Then, as the South Vietnamese became more capable, U.S. forces would be withdrawn from South Vietnam. At the same time, U.S. negotiators would continue to try to reach a negotiated settlement to the war with the communists at the Paris peace talks. The announcement represented a significant change in the nature of the U.S. commitment to the war.

The first U.S. soldiers were withdrawn in the fall of 1969 and the withdrawals continued periodically through 1972. Simultaneously, the U.S. increased the advisory effort and provided massive amounts of new equipment and weapons to the South Vietnamese. When the North Vietnamese launched the massive "Easter Offensive" invasion in spring 1972, the South Vietnamese wavered, but eventually rallied with U.S. support and prevailed over the North Vietnamese. Nixon proclaimed that the South Vietnamese victory validated his strategy.

### **1972 Nixon announces additional troop withdrawals**

President Nixon, despite the ongoing communist offensive, announces that another 20,000 U.S. troops will be withdrawn from Vietnam in May and June, reducing authorized troop strength to 49,000. Nixon emphasized that while U.S. ground troops were being withdrawn, sea and air support for the South Vietnamese would continue. In fact, the U.S. Navy doubled the number of its fighting ships off Vietnam.

## **APRIL 27**

### **1972 North Vietnamese attack outskirts of Quang Tri**

North Vietnamese troops shatter defenses north of Quang Tri and move to within 2.5 miles of the city. Using Russian-built tanks, they took Dong Ha, 7 miles north of Quang Tri, the next day and continued to tighten their ring around Quang Tri, shelling it heavily. South Vietnamese troops suffered their highest casualties for any week in the war in the bitter fighting.

This was the northern-most front of the North Vietnamese Nguyen Hue Offensive, launched on March 30 when more than 120,000 North Vietnamese troops invaded South Vietnam. The attacks on Quang Tri were followed by attacks on Binh Long province, just 75 miles north of Saigon, and Kontum in the Central Highlands.

Hanoi's 304th Division, supported by tanks, artillery, and anti-aircraft units, swept across the Demilitarized Zone and routed the South Vietnamese division that had been guarding outlying positions on the approach to Quang Tri. The attackers quickly overwhelmed the South Vietnamese troops, who fell back toward the city of Quang Tri.

The North Vietnamese encircled the city and continued to pound it with artillery and rockets. On May 1, the North Vietnamese captured the city as the South Vietnamese 3rd Division collapsed as a fighting force. This was the first provincial capital to fall during the North Vietnamese offensive and ultimately the North Vietnamese controlled the entire province. Hanoi claimed 10,000 South Vietnamese and Allied casualties were captured during the battle for Quang Tri.

### **1968 Humphrey announces his candidacy**

Vice President Hubert Humphrey announces his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination. In an interview, he said he supported the current U.S. policy of sending troops "where required by our own national security."

On March 31, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson, frustrated with his inability to reach a solution in Vietnam, announced that he would neither seek nor accept the nomination of his party for re-election. This set up a contest for the Democratic nomination. Humphrey's main competition was Senator Eugene McCarthy (D-Minnesota), who had come within a few hundred votes of beating Lyndon Johnson in the New Hampshire primary. Robert Kennedy had entered the race and won most of the Democratic primaries until he was assassinated in June. When the Democratic National Convention opened in Chicago in August, a conflict immediately erupted over the party's Vietnam platform. While demonstrations against the war took place in the streets outside the convention hall, Humphrey won the party nomination. He was ultimately defeated in the general election by Republican Richard Nixon, who criticized the Johnson's handling of the war and ran on a platform of achieving "peace with honor" in Vietnam.

## **APRIL 28**

### **1970 Nixon approves Cambodian incursion**

President Richard Nixon gives his formal authorization to commit U.S. combat troops, in cooperation with South Vietnamese units, against communist troop sanctuaries in Cambodia.

Secretary of State William Rogers and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, who had continually argued for a downsizing of the U.S. effort in Vietnam, were excluded from the decision to use

U.S. troops in Cambodia. Gen. Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, cabled Gen. Creighton Abrams, senior U.S. commander in Saigon, informing him of the decision that a "higher authority has authorized certain military actions to protect U.S. forces operating in South Vietnam." Nixon believed that the operation was necessary as a pre-emptive strike to forestall North Vietnamese attacks from Cambodia into South Vietnam as the U.S. forces withdrew and the South Vietnamese assumed more responsibility for the fighting. Nevertheless, three National Security Council staff members and key aides to presidential assistant Henry Kissinger resigned in protest over what amounted to an invasion of Cambodia.

When Nixon publicly announced the Cambodian incursion on April 30, it set off a wave of antiwar demonstrations. A protest at Kent State University resulted in the killing of four students by Army National Guard troops. Another student rally at Jackson State College in Mississippi resulted in the death of two students and 12 wounded when police opened fire on a women's dormitory. The incursion angered many in Congress, who felt that Nixon was illegally widening the war; this resulted in a series of congressional resolutions and legislative initiatives that would severely limit the executive power of the president.

### **1972 North Vietnamese press South Vietnamese at Hue and Kontum**

The North Vietnamese offensive continues as Fire Base Bastogne, 20 miles west of Hue, falls to the communists. Fire Base Birmingham, 4 miles to the east, was also under heavy attack. As fighting intensified all across the northern province of South Vietnam, much of Hue's civilian population tried to escape south to Da Nang. Farther south in the Central Highlands, 20,000 North Vietnamese troops converged on Kontum, encircling it and cutting it off. Only 65 miles north of Saigon, An Loc lay under siege and continued to take a pummeling from North Vietnamese artillery, rockets, and ground attacks. To the American command in Saigon, it appeared that South Vietnam was on the verge of total defeat by the North Vietnamese, but the South Vietnamese were able to hold out.

## **APRIL 29**

### **1970 U.S.-South Vietnamese forces launch Cambodian "incursion"**

U.S. and South Vietnamese forces launch a limited "incursion" into Cambodia. The campaign included 13 major ground operations to clear North Vietnamese sanctuaries 20 miles inside the Cambodian border. Some 50,000 South Vietnamese soldiers and 30,000 U.S. troops were involved, making it the largest operation of the war since Operation

Junction City in 1967.

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

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

Many intelligence analysts at the time believed that the Cambodian incursion dealt a stunning blow to the communists, driving main force units away from the border and damaging their morale, and in the process buying as much as a year for South Vietnam's survival. However, the incursion gave the antiwar movement in the United States a new rallying point. News of the incursion set off a wave of antiwar demonstrations, including one at Kent State University that resulted in the killing of four students by Army National Guard troops and another at Jackson State in Mississippi that resulted in the shooting of two students when police opened fire on a women's dormitory. The incursion also angered many in Congress, who felt that Nixon was illegally widening the scope of the war; this resulted in a series of congressional resolutions and legislative initiatives that would severely limit the executive power of the president.

### **1975 Operation Frequent Wind begins**

Operation Frequent Wind, the largest helicopter evacuation on record, begins removing the last Americans from Saigon.

The North Vietnamese had launched their final offensive in March 1975 and the South Vietnamese forces had fallen back before their rapid advance, losing Quang Tri, Hue, Da Nang,

Qui Nhon, Tuy Hoa, Nha Trang, and Xuan Loc in quick succession. With the North Vietnamese attacking the outskirts of Saigon, U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin ordered the commencement of Frequent Wind.

In 19 hours, 81 helicopters carried more than 1,000 Americans and almost 6,000 Vietnamese to aircraft carriers offshore. Cpl. Charles McMahon, Jr. and Lance Cpl. Darwin Judge, USMC, were the last U.S. military personnel killed in action in Vietnam, when shrapnel from a North Vietnamese rocket struck them as they were guarding Tan Son Nhut Airbase during the evacuation. At 7:53 a.m. on April 30, the last helicopter lifted off the roof of the embassy and headed out to sea. Later that morning, North Vietnamese tanks crashed through the gates of the Presidential Palace. North Vietnamese Col. Bui Tin accepted the surrender from Gen. Duong Van Minh, who had taken over from Tran Van Huong (who only spent one day in power after President Nguyen Van Thieu fled). The Vietnam War was over.

#### **1971 New casualty figures released.**

U.S. casualty figures for April 18 to April 24 are released. The 45 killed during that time brought total U.S. losses for the Vietnam War to 45,019 since 1961. These figures made Southeast Asia fourth in total losses sustained by the U.S. during a war, topped only by the number of losses incurred during the Civil War, World War I, and World War II.

### **APRIL 30**

#### **1975 South Vietnam surrenders**

By dawn, communist forces move into Saigon, where they meet only sporadic resistance. The South Vietnamese forces had collapsed under the rapid advancement of the North Vietnamese. The most recent fighting had begun in December 1974, when the North Vietnamese had launched a major attack against the lightly defended province of Phuoc Long, located due north of Saigon along the Cambodian border, overrunning the provincial capital at Phuoc Binh on January 6, 1975. Despite previous presidential promises to provide aid in such a scenario, the United States did nothing. By this time, Nixon had resigned from office and his successor, Gerald Ford, was unable to convince a hostile Congress to make good on Nixon's earlier promises to rescue Saigon from communist takeover.

This situation emboldened the North Vietnamese, who launched a new campaign in March 1975. The South Vietnamese forces fell back in total disarray, and once again, the United States did nothing. The South Vietnamese abandoned Pleiku and Kontum in the Highlands with very little fighting. Then Quang Tri, Hue, and Da Nang fell to the communist onslaught. The North



Vietnamese continued to attack south along the coast toward Saigon, defeating the South Vietnamese forces at each encounter.

The South Vietnamese 18th Division had fought a valiant battle at Xuan Loc, just to the east of Saigon, destroying three North Vietnamese divisions in the process. However, it proved to be the last battle in the defense of the Republic of South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese forces held out against the attackers until they ran out of tactical air support and weapons, finally abandoning Xuan Loc to the communists on April 21.

Having crushed the last major organized opposition before Saigon, the North Vietnamese got into position for the final assault. In Saigon, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu resigned and transferred authority to Vice President Tran Van Huong before fleeing the city on April 25. By April 27, the North Vietnamese had completely encircled Saigon and began to maneuver for a complete takeover.

When they attacked at dawn on April 30, they met little resistance. North Vietnamese tanks crashed through the gates of the Presidential Palace and the war came to an end. North Vietnamese Col. Bui Tin accepted the surrender from Gen. Duong Van Minh, who had taken over after Tran Van Huong spent only one day in power. Tin explained to Minh, "You have nothing to fear. Between Vietnamese there are no victors and no vanquished. Only the Americans have been beaten. If you are patriots, consider this a moment of joy. The war for our country is over."

## **APRIL 30**

### **1975 South Vietnam surrenders**

By dawn, communist forces move into Saigon, where they meet only sporadic resistance. The South Vietnamese forces had collapsed under the rapid advancement of the North Vietnamese. The most recent fighting had begun in December 1974, when the North Vietnamese had launched a major attack against the lightly defended province of Phuoc Long, located due north of Saigon along the Cambodian border, overrunning the provincial capital at Phuoc Binh on January 6, 1975. Despite previous presidential promises to provide aid in such a scenario, the United States did nothing. By this time, Nixon had resigned from office and his successor, Gerald Ford, was unable to convince a hostile Congress to make good on Nixon's earlier promises to rescue Saigon from communist takeover.

This situation emboldened the North Vietnamese, who launched a new campaign in March 1975. The South Vietnamese forces fell back in total disarray, and once again, the United States did nothing. The South Vietnamese abandoned Pleiku and Kontum in the Highlands with very little fighting. Then Quang Tri, Hue,

and Da Nang fell to the communist onslaught. The North Vietnamese continued to attack south along the coast toward Saigon, defeating the South Vietnamese forces at each encounter.

The South Vietnamese 18th Division had fought a valiant battle at Xuan Loc, just to the east of Saigon, destroying three North Vietnamese divisions in the process. However, it proved to be the last battle in the defense of the Republic of South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese forces held out against the attackers until they ran out of tactical air support and weapons, finally abandoning Xuan Loc to the communists on April 21.

Having crushed the last major organized opposition before Saigon, the North Vietnamese got into position for the final assault. In Saigon, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu resigned and transferred authority to Vice President Tran Van Huong before fleeing the city on April 25. By April 27, the North Vietnamese had completely encircled Saigon and began to maneuver for a complete takeover.

When they attacked at dawn on April 30, they met little resistance. North Vietnamese tanks crashed through the gates of the Presidential Palace and the war came to an end. North Vietnamese Col. Bui Tin accepted the surrender from Gen. Duong Van Minh, who had taken over after Tran Van Huong spent only one day in power. Tin explained to Minh, "You have nothing to fear. Between Vietnamese there are no victors and no vanquished. Only the Americans have been beaten. If you are patriots, consider this a moment of joy. The war for our country is over."