

The Vietnam Debacle

If the stalemate in Korea humiliated the United States and seriously undermined American prestige in the world, the more recent debacle in Vietnam only served to further erode American prestige and influence in an already unstable world.

In the Korean conflict, America began the war (aided by a rather feeble U.N. participation) with the full intention of *winning*. But during the course of that war, America's win strategy was changed to a no-win policy.

General Douglas A. MacArthur was quite incensed by the U.S. shift to a no-win policy in Korea. He believed victory was the real object in war:

"Once war is forced upon us," said MacArthur, "there is no other alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end. War's very object is victory — not prolonged indecision. In war, indeed, there can be no substitute for victory." But, alas, it was General MacArthur's all-out victory approach to the Korean War which caused him to be relieved of his command in the Pacific.

No Clear Military Goal

Both the Korean and the Vietnam wars were *undeclared* wars. The United States never declared war on its "enemies" during either of those conflicts. From the very start there was never any firm determination on the part of the United States to actually win the Vietnam War. During the struggle American officials defined "winning" as merely preserving South Vietnamese independence. If one accepts this definition of "winning" then it is clear that America was actually defeated in that twelve-year war!

How did the United States become so deeply involved in the Vietnam war? Why did America think it necessary to involve herself in such a titanic struggle, many thousands of miles from the U.S.? Many believe the United States had no valid reason for sacrificing over 50,000 lives while spending over \$150 billion in the Vietnam conflict.

The Vietnam Background

France had ruled over French Indochina since the last half of the 19th century. When Japanese forces occupied Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) in 1940, Vietnamese resistance was organized and led by Ho Chi Minh. Ho had U.S. support against the Japanese occupying forces all during World War II.

But following the surrender of the Japanese in 1945, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed Vietnam's independence. After World War II, the French returned to Indochina, seeking to reassert their colonial rule. France signed an agreement with Ho Chi Minh in which the French recognized Vietnam as a "free state within the French Union," but it meant little. France's attempt to re-impose colonial rule was met by determined Viet Minh resistance. Ho Chi Minh, a devoted Communist, soon became the leader of the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Viet Minh) in northern Vietnam.

A clash between French colonial interests and the Communists, led by Ho Chi Minh, was inevitable. Serious disagreements finally culminated in hostilities between French and Communists forces on December 19, 1946. The French-Indo-Chinese war continued for the next eight years, culminating in the humiliating defeat of the French by the Communists in May 1954, at Dien Bien Phu. The Communist forces were led by General Vo Nguyen Giap.

A Divided Vietnam

Shortly after this crushing French defeat, a nine-nation peace conference was arranged in Geneva, Switzerland. At that historic conference, the war in Cambodia and Laos was ended, and Vietnam was divided at the 17th parallel. The Communists were given control over Vietnam north of the 17th parallel. Ho Chi Minh headed that government, called the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The Vietnamese territory south of the 17th parallel became known as the Republic of Vietnam after Emperor Bao Dai was deposed in 1955. At that time Ngo Dinh Diem, who had strong U.S. backing, became Premier, and later President. Neither the United States nor South Vietnam signed the Geneva agreements of 1954, but both agreed to abide by those accords.

The Geneva agreements stipulated that Vietnam must be *reunited* in 1956 through free elections which were to be supervised by an international commission. But when 1956 arrived, President Diem of South Vietnam refused to hold the agreed-upon elections. He contended that free elections were utterly impossible, because North Vietnam would not permit pre-election campaigning north of the 17th parallel. Diem feared

that the popular Ho Chi Minh and his Communist followers would therefore receive most of the votes in the north, thereby gaining Communist control of a united Vietnam.

Diem's refusal to hold agreed-upon elections infuriated Ho Chi Minh and the Communists, who were sure that they would benefit from such elections to be held in both North and South Vietnam. From the time of Diem's refusal to hold elections, the Communists vowed to seize control of South Vietnam. They immediately set about organizing a revolutionary movement in the South. These insurgents became known as the Viet Cong or VC. Viet Cong is but a shortened form of the words *Viet Congsan*, meaning Vietnam Communists.

The following year (1957), Viet Cong forces, supported by Communist North Vietnam, began attacking the government and officials of South Vietnam. For the next few years, these attacking forces consisted of guerrillas and terrorists (Viet Cong). Most of the Viet Cong's officers had been trained in North Vietnam and were later sent secretly back into South Vietnam.

The South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) opposed the Viet Cong. The ARVN began receiving military and economic aid from America — and were assisted by U.S. "advisers."

Initial U.S. Involvement

Initial American involvement began in the early 1950s. Even before Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the U.S. had sent military supplies and advisers to assist the French in Indochina.

After the 1954 Geneva accords, President Dwight D. Eisenhower pledged U.S. support for South Vietnam. And American aid did much to rehabilitate that war-torn country.

President Diem of South Vietnam stayed in power because he had American aid and support. But as corruption, nepotism and government inefficiency became increasingly evident, he and his corrupt regime became more and more unpopular. From October to June 1963, seven Buddhist monks burned themselves to death in protest against Diem's Catholic-dominated government. Growing dissatisfaction with the corruption and ineffectiveness of the Diem regime culminated in a military coup in November 1963.

When the Communist-backed Viet Cong guerrilla attacks began in early 1957, the insurgents didn't have much popular support in South Vietnam. The Viet Cong began attacking farm villages, particularly in the Mekong Delta. Some of the most battle-hardened Viet Cong had been fighting for nearly twenty years, first against the Japanese, then against the French, and finally against the Republic of South Vietnam backed by the United States.

The Viet Cong could only muster about 20,000 men in 1960, and were outnumbered by the South Vietnamese Army by ten to one. Even so, they were strong enough to attack forts and army units in the South. They became masters at guerrilla tactics, striking suddenly at many different locations in South Vietnam. South Vietnamese troops tried in vain to protect their country from these Viet Cong attacks.

Then, in December 1960, the National Liberation Front (NLF), was organized in Hanoi. It was founded for the express purpose of giving political support to the Viet Cong. Not long afterward, the NLF set up local councils to govern areas of South Vietnam which had come under the control of the Viet Cong. They also built munitions factories, and supplied ammunition, money and medical supplies to the Viet Cong. Before long, a flood of supplies and troops flowed into South Vietnam from the North — chiefly over the network of trails and roads known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The Viet Cong had become so well organized and so successful in the South by 1961, that the U.S. felt it had to choose between allowing the collapse of the South Vietnamese government or increasing American support. At the time, America had only about 750 military “advisers” in South Vietnam. The total number of American advisers in Vietnam rose from around 2,000 in December 1961, to over 15,000 by the end of 1963. President Kennedy ordered a step-up in military aid to South Vietnam, including a substantial increase in American advisers, technicians, pilots and planes. When Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963, there were about 16,300 U.S. military men in South Vietnam.

On November 1, 1963, President Diem’s government was overthrown by dissatisfied South Vietnamese generals. They reportedly received encouragement from the U.S. in their plot to overthrow Diem’s corrupt government. President Diem and his brother Nhu were executed the following day. From then until June 1965, ten successive, short-lived regimes governed South Vietnam. In June 1965, a military junta headed by Air Force Commander Nguyen Cao Ky assumed power in South Vietnam.

Gulf of Tonkin Incident

Direct U.S. military action against North Vietnam didn’t occur until 1964. On August 2, 1964, two U.S. destroyers were patrolling north of the 17th parallel when they were attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. America quickly retaliated by sinking two of the PT boats. Then American planes bombed the PT boat bases. This incident caused the U.S. to become directly involved in military action against the aggressive Communist North Vietnamese.

After the attack upon America's destroyers *Maddox* and *C. Turner Joy* in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 2, 1964, America decided to strike directly at North Vietnam. President Lyndon B. Johnson asked Congress for powers "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression."

Congress granted President Johnson those powers by an overwhelming vote. Later, however, some Congressmen stated that they had misunderstood the full implications of this action. But this vote of Congress gave President Johnson a legal basis for U.S. military support of South Vietnam in the war. Six years later, after the U.S. had become deeply involved in the Vietnam morass, Congress repealed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. By then Congress was determined to put the bit into the mouth of the President so that he would be unable to commit further American troops and resources without their direct consent.

President Johnson ordered continuous bombing raids over North Vietnam below the 20th parallel in February 1965. And on June 8th, U.S. commanders were authorized to commit 23,000 advisers to combat. By the end of that year, U.S. army, navy, air and marine forces in Vietnam reached 184,300 men.

The U.S. began making bombing strikes against Hanoi and Haiphong on June 29, 1966. By December, U.S. forces in Vietnam had reached 385,300 men — not including 33,000 troops stationed in Thailand and some 60,000 men in the U.S. fleet. America was becoming progressively more deeply involved in the Vietnam quagmire.

The war in Vietnam was different from any war ever fought in history. Russia, China and other Communist nations continued giving military aid and moral support to the North Vietnamese and to the Viet Cong fighting in the South while America continued giving massive support (both in men and in war matériel) to the government of South Vietnam.

New ground warfare tactics had to be devised to combat the unconventional format of the Vietnam operation. America soon devised the "search and destroy" missions as a means of countering the hit-and-run tactics of the Communists. Also, "free-fire zones" for artillery were established. Armed U.S. helicopters were used quite extensively because of their great mobility.

In the meantime, American casualties began to mount. The "no-win" conflict was costing dearly. It soon became apparent that the U.S. was being bled white in the futile effort to destroy the elusive Communist aggressors and engraft "democracy" onto South Vietnam. The average Vietnamese couldn't even tell the difference between Communism and Democracy. Frankly, they didn't care all that much which type of government governed them — just so long as they could live in peace, had enough rice, sufficient clothes and other necessities of life.

As the war continued to escalate, more American and Vietnamese casualties were added to the grim tolls. And as U.S. casualties increased, large-scale *protests* against the war erupted all across the U.S. On October 21st and 22nd, 1967, thousands of protestors marched on Washington D.C., and hundreds were arrested when they attempted to storm the Pentagon.

In spite of widespread dissatisfaction with the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, American troop strength climbed to 474,300 by December 1967 — 1,500 more than peak U.S. strength during the Korean conflict.

Escalation Continues

At least one North Vietnamese battalion had fought through into South Vietnam by the latter part of 1964. By mid-spring, 1965, large numbers of North Vietnamese troops began arriving in the South. South Vietnamese morale had sunk extremely low by late 1964. America began seriously considering the possibility of bombing the North as a way of ending the war.

Savage Communist attacks on two U.S. camps at Pleiku in early 1965 finally decided the issue. America decided to use her air power to help bring the Communists to heel. U.S. and South Vietnamese pilots began bombing the infiltration routes and the military installations in North Vietnam, and they also bombed Communist-controlled areas in the South in an attempt to stop the flow of men and supplies.

In the meanwhile, American troop strength was still being increased until it reached the *half million* mark by 1969! The North also continued to receive armaments and technical assistance from the Soviet Union, China and other Communist countries.









In spite of massive U.S. military aid, growing U.S. troop commitments and heavy bombing, the U.S. and the South Vietnamese were unable to inflict permanent setbacks on the Viet Cong and their North Vietnamese allies.

The Tet Offensive of 1968

As the American involvement increased, South Vietnamese and American optimism over winning the war grew. Confidence was flowing. Shattering the hollow optimism, on January 30, 1968, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese attacked 30 provincial capitals in South Vietnam. These large-scale attacks by the Communists were launched against urban centers and military bases in the South. Called the "Tet offensive," the surprise attacks caused heavy damage and the loss of many lives in the cities of Hue and Saigon. The U.S. Embassy in Saigon was even occupied for a few hours, and the Communists, in one of the longest

C H I N A

THE VIETNAM CONFLICT

-  U.S. ALLIES
-  COMMUNIST
-  NEUTRAL
-  MAJOR CONFLICTS
-  GUERRILLA ACTIONS
-  AIR STRIKE TARGETS
-  SOVIET MISSILE SITES
-  MAJOR U.S. BASES

BURMA

NORTH

Dien Bien Phu

Hanoi

Haiphong

COMMUNIST PATHET LAO
CONTROLS EASTERN LAOS

LAOS

Plain of Jars

VIETNAM

GULF OF
TONKIN
INCIDENT

Vinh

Vientiane

Udon Thani

Nakhon Phanom

Mu Gia Pass

DMZ

17th PARALLEL

THAILAND

QUANG TRI PROVINCE

Hue

SOUTH
CHINA
SEA

U.S. LANDINGS

Ubon
Ratchathani

Chu Lai

DAK TO

Qui Nhon

HO CHI MINH TRAIL
INFILTRATION AND SUPPLY ROUTE
FOR VIETCONG IN S. VIETNAM

IA DRANG VALLEY

SOUTH

CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh

ZONE C

VIETNAM

Saigon

Nha Trang

Cam Ranh Bay

Phan Rang

MAYAGUEZ
INCIDENT

GULF OF SIAM

Mekong
Delta

MILES

0 50 100 150

battles of the war, attacked the U.S. marine base of Khe Sanh. The North Vietnamese withdrew after a 77-day siege, and U.S. marines then abandoned the base in mid-1968.

It was in March 1968, that the infamous *My Lai massacre* of an estimated 347 Vietnamese civilians occurred.

President Johnson announced a bombing halt over ninety percent of North Vietnam on March 31st, and also asked Hanoi for a peaceful response. Even as the fighting continued, preliminary peace talks between the U.S. and North Vietnam opened in Paris on May 10th.

Shortly afterward, Chicago police and National Guardsmen clashed with ten to fifteen thousand anti-war demonstrators during the Democratic National Convention (August 26-29, 1968).

In the meantime, many hoped and worked for peace. On January 18, 1969, expanded peace talks (including representatives from the Viet Cong as well as the South Vietnamese) opened in Paris.

By April 1969, American forces in South Vietnam had reached a final peak of 543,400. U.S. battle deaths totaled 33,641 by April 3rd — surpassing by twelve those killed in the entire Korean conflict!

Disenchantment at Home

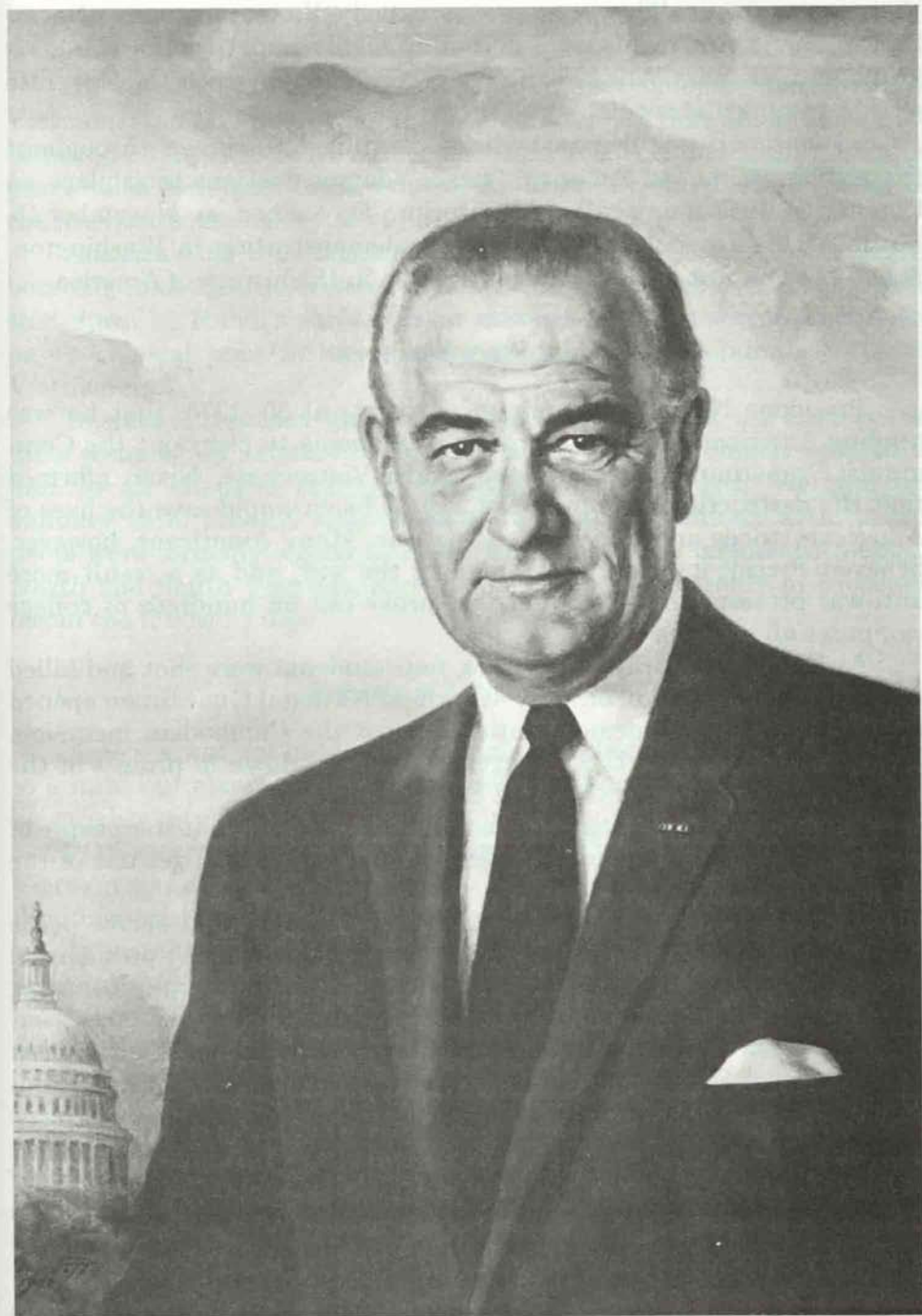
Back home, more Americans were becoming disenchanted and even bitter over America's continued involvement in the seemingly endless Vietnam war. The ranks of those sick of the war grew. The anti-Vietnam faction in America (known as "doves") began exerting greater pressure at various levels of government. These war protests and his failure to decisively end the war are credited with having forced President Johnson out of the U.S. presidential race in 1968.

After Richard M. Nixon's inauguration in January 1969, he began altering U.S. tactics — combining intensified bombing and the invasion of Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia in 1970 with the withdrawal of U.S. troops. But in spite of the withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam, many in America became increasingly more vocal over the costly, bloody war.

America was still enmeshed in her longest war. U.S. casualties continued to mount and the war crimes such as the massacre at My Lai caused many to turn against the war. Furthermore, the war in Vietnam was costing U.S. taxpayers dearly.

Politically, the anti-Vietnam war effort was led by Senators William Fulbright, Eugene McCarthy, Robert F. Kennedy and George S. McGovern. Their influence began to be felt.

In June 1969, President Richard M. Nixon announced the first of several withdrawals of U.S. forces from Vietnam. President Nixon told Americans that their fighting men would soon be replaced by South



Lyndon B. Johnson (36th President) tried to build the "Great Society" in America, but the Vietnam debacle and civil unrest at home dogged his steps — until the weary President chose not to seek re-election.
— *White House Collection*

Vietnamese forces. This process was called "Vietnamization." Nevertheless, many Americans were becoming highly impatient for the long-drawn-out Vietnam War to end. They were unhappy with the slow rate of U.S. troop withdrawals.

Violent anti-war demonstrations continued to spread throughout the nation. All across America, "peace" demonstrations took place on October 15, 1969, a day called Moratorium Day. Then, on November 15, about 300,000 persons held an anti-war demonstration in Washington, D.C. — the biggest anti-war demonstration in the history of America.

Kent State Shootings

President Nixon then announced on April 30, 1970, that he was sending American combat troops into Cambodia to clear out the Communist "sanctuaries" used by the North Vietnamese. Nixon affirmed that the destruction of Communist supply bases would save the lives of American troops and also shorten the war. Many Americans, however, believed President Nixon was widening the war, and as a result more anti-war protests and student strikes broke out on hundreds of college campuses all over the U.S.

At Kent State University, Ohio, four students were shot and killed and nine were wounded, on May 4th, when National Guardsmen opened fire during a student demonstration against the Cambodian incursion. Shortly afterward, 100 U.S. colleges were closed down in protest of the Cambodian invasion and the Kent State killings.

It was becoming quite clear to America's leaders that the people of the United States were fed up. They wanted America to get out of the war as quickly as possible.

On January 25, 1972, President Nixon revealed that secret peace negotiations had been conducted since the previous June by presidential adviser, Henry A. Kissinger. Many in America began foolishly believing that peace in Vietnam was just around the corner.

But when Communist forces on March 30 launched their biggest attack against South Vietnam since the Tet offensive of 1968, all illusions regarding an immediate peaceful solution to the Vietnam struggle evaporated.

Nixon quickly retaliated by ordering the resumption of bombing of North Vietnam on April 15 — the first intensive bombing of the North since 1968. On May 1, the important city of Quang Tri, capital city of South Vietnam's northernmost province, fell to Hanoi troops. To demonstrate America's resolution, President Nixon ordered the immediate mining of Haiphong and other North Vietnamese ports on May 8, even though many nations trading with North Vietnam vehemently objected. After initial setbacks, South Vietnamese troops brought the Communist invasion to a halt.

Last U.S. Troops Depart

On August 11, 1972, the last U.S. combat troops departed from Vietnam. And on October 26th, Hanoi announced that secret talks had achieved a tentative peace agreement. But by December 18th, the Paris peace talks had again broken down. An angry President Nixon ordered the heaviest bombing of the war against North Vietnam.

America's big B-52 bombers were used in those massive saturation bombing raids against targets in Hanoi, and 15 of those U.S. planes were shot down by Hanoi's surface-to-air missiles. America was beginning to pay a colossal price in her attempt to punish the Communist North Vietnamese.

In spite of repeated snags to the peace negotiations, the Paris peace talks resumed on January 8, 1973. President Nixon promptly ordered a halt to all offensive military operations against North Vietnam on January 15th. Finally, after years of fighting, on January 27th, peace pacts were formally signed in Paris. The signatories included America, North and South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong. A ceasefire in Vietnam began the following day.

Release of U.S. Prisoners

America was not only concerned about bringing the war in Vietnam to a halt, but about getting assurances that her prisoners of war would be speedily returned. Between February 12 and April 1, 1973, 596 American POWs were released by North Vietnam. The U.S. military pullout of Vietnam was completed on August 15th, when all U.S. warplanes ceased their bombing missions throughout Indochina.

It was now clear to the South Vietnamese that they had been deserted. Abandoned. All American military forces had now left Vietnam. The South Vietnamese were now on their own. True, they still received military matériel and economic assistance — but now they must learn to swim by themselves — or sink!

The governing officials of South Vietnam didn't agree with the Paris peace settlement. They believed they were being betrayed. President Thieu denounced the tentative accords as unacceptable to South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese knew there was every likelihood that it would be just a matter of time until the war resumed. They knew full well that the North Vietnamese had no intention of honoring their "peace" agreements.

The South Vietnamese began bracing themselves for the final onslaught which they knew was not far away.

The Paris peace agreements of January 27, 1973 had hardly been signed when the Communists began violating them. The Communists

continued their infiltration, subversion, and their massive buildup for the final *coup de grace* against South Vietnam.

An estimated 200,000 North Vietnamese soldiers were in South Vietnam by the end of 1974 — building infiltration routes and supply lines — getting ready for the final stroke.

The final tragic chapter in the long Vietnam War began on January 9, 1975, with the fall of Phuoc Binh — the first major Communist victory since the January 1973 Paris peace agreement.

When Ban Me Thuot fell to the Communists on March 13, the Saigon government was persuaded that it ought to withdraw its forces from most of the Central Highlands. But their “withdrawal” turned into a total rout. Communist forces overran the towns of Kontum and Pleiku on March 18. The Communist onslaught struck panic into many of the South Vietnamese and led to a disorganized mass movement of refugees who by now were streaming to the coastal areas.

Government forces began to withdraw from the northern part of the country on March 20, 1975. The Saigon government planned this to be an orderly retreat to more defensible positions, but this retreat soon became a disorderly debacle — as both civilians and soldiers raced south — hoping to escape the wrath of fast-approaching Communist armies.

The cultural capital of South Vietnam, Hue, was abandoned on March 24th, and Danang (the second largest city) was in imminent danger. On March 27th, the U.S. began a hastily organized airlift of refugees from Danang. By the 29th, Danang was plunged into chaos as thousands of panicky soldiers literally fought off civilians to get aboard the planes which were trying to evacuate the refugees.

President Gerald R. Ford ordered U.S. Navy ships to evacuate helpless refugees from the coastal cities to safety in the South. Communist forces finally entered Danang on March 30.

Fears of a Communist attack on Saigon mounted. The U.S. immediately began an airlift of military and medical supplies to Saigon as the country's third largest city, Qui Nhon, was also abandoned.

It was now clear that the coastal area was falling to the Communists without much opposition. Before long, Cam Ranh, Tuy Hoa and Nha Trang were abandoned. And the Communists intensified their attacks in the Mekong Delta.

Then the Communists launched an attack on Xuan Loc, 35 miles northeast of Saigon, on April 11. South Vietnam was now being squeezed to death by the deadly anaconda-like Communist forces closing in on all sides. The agony would soon be over.

On April 20th, Communist gunners had reached the important air base at Bien Hoa, only 15 miles from Saigon, and had rendered it virtually useless.

President Thieu Resigns

By now it was clear that all hope was lost. On April 21st, President Nyugen Van Thieu resigned. Communist forces now held more than two thirds of South Vietnam, and were menacing the very lifeline of Saigon. All of Saigon's approaches were about to be sealed off by the Communists.

In Thieu's national farewell address, he defended the accomplishments of his ten years in office, and bitterly accused the United States of violating its promises to help uphold the anti-Communist government of South Vietnam.

It was becoming clear by now that the Communists might be willing to negotiate peace with the Saigon government — but only if General Duong Van Minh ("Big Minh") was the head of the Saigon government. Big Minh had been a longtime proponent of neutrality and cooperation with the Communists. Big Minh was installed as President on April 28, while Communist forces were within one mile of Saigon city limits.

The Tragic End

President Gerald Ford ordered a total evacuation of all Americans from Vietnam on April 29th — saying the move "closes a chapter in the American experience." The U.S. President's decision had been inspired by the Communist assault on Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport, where two U.S. marine guards had died.

The final evacuation on April 30th of all the remaining 395 U.S. personnel in Saigon was carried out by 81 helicopters. This massive helicopter airlift also spirited away 4,475 Vietnamese to U.S. ships which were waiting offshore.

It was only after the complete American withdrawal on April 30th that the Viet Cong accepted Big Minh's unconditional surrender. Vietnam had finally arrived at the tragic end of its long-drawn-out war.

The final bloody chapter of Vietnam's tragic history had been written. Indochina had been convulsed in war ever since the Japanese took over that part of Southeast Asia in 1940. A third of a century later, Vietnam was once again at peace. But a massive reconstruction and rehabilitation program would have to be carried out before the wretched people of the war-torn country would be able to restore the necessities of life.

The Cost Was High!

The Vietnamese War was one of the bloodiest, most destructive in the history of mankind. It was also one of the most costly. According to

the U.S. Defense Department, America spent \$101 billion between 1966 and 1972 in Indochina. Russia and China spent \$4.1 billion in aid to Indochina during that same period.

An estimated two million died in that sanguinary war. Over 56,000 of that number were Americans. Overall, the U.S. spent over \$150 billion in Vietnam in direct military spending.

During the period from January 1, 1961 to January 27, 1973, America sustained a total of 210,048 casualties. These casualties don't include another 150,332 wounded which didn't require hospitalization. Of the total 210,048 casualties, 46,397 were actual battle deaths. Another 10,346 died from causes other than battle.

The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong dead are estimated at over 900,000, and the South Vietnamese lost over 400,000 dead.

In Saigon and other cities, graft and corruption, prostitution and crime ran rampant. One thing which the Communists did when they gained control of South Vietnam in 1975 was to bring organized prostitution to an end. Their program of rehabilitating the "ladies of the evening" has helped make many of them into useful citizens.

Many Americans continue to blush at the thought of some of the napalm bombings, defoliation programs and massacres committed by the U.S. forces during that bitter war.

My Lai Massacre

The worst of all U.S. atrocities during the Vietnam War was the My Lai massacre of 1968.

The My Lai massacre occurred only weeks after the great slaughter during the January Tet offensive. Many thousands suffered and died in that bloody conflict before the Communist thrusts were brought to a halt. As the Communist attacks erupted throughout much of South Vietnam, it was sometimes very difficult for Americans to know who were their friends and who were their enemies — for the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese looked exactly like the South Vietnamese.

Not knowing who really was the enemy may explain why some Americans became trigger-happy and filled with hatred toward the unidentifiable yet omnipresent enemy. Many American soldiers saw their comrades blown to bits by land mines, or shot before their eyes. Undoubtedly, some American troops became so filled with revenge that they were carried away in the heat of passion and committed atrocities. My Lai was undoubtedly only one of a number of these atrocities committed during that period of hate and confusion.

On March 16, 1968 a unit of the U.S. army division under the command of Lt. William L. Calley, invaded the South Vietnamese hamlet of My Lai. This village was allegedly a Viet Cong stronghold.

What happened was sickening, both to battle-hardened soldiers and to shocked Americans who later heard of the incident.

During the course of the operations to clear the Viet Cong out of My Lai, unarmed civilians including both women and children were shot to death — some at point blank range. The U.S. Army finally estimated that 347 were killed during that tragic event.

The My Lai massacre remained unknown to the American public until the autumn of 1969, when a former soldier sent a series of letters to government officials, forcing the U.S. Army to take action. During the ensuing proceedings, several soldiers and veterans were charged with murder, and numerous officers were accused of dereliction of duty for their part in covering up that gruesome episode.

Special painstaking investigations by the House of Representatives and by the U.S. Army concluded that a massacre had in fact taken place at My Lai. Though many soldiers were originally charged, only five were court-martialled, and only one, Lieutenant Calley, was convicted. Lt. Calley was found guilty of the premeditated murder of at least twenty-two Vietnamese civilians and sentenced to life imprisonment on March 29, 1971. But a Federal district court overturned the conviction in September 1974. The U.S. Army subsequently released Calley.

The My Lai massacre aroused widespread controversy at the time, and contributed to growing disillusionment with the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

Like Whipped Dogs

When U.S. forces withdrew from Vietnam with their tails between their legs, like whipped dogs, America experienced the greatest “loss of face” in the eyes of the Orientals that she had ever suffered.

As South Vietnam fell into the iron grip of the Communists in 1975, President Thieu of South Vietnam bitterly accused America of deserting the South Vietnamese.

How did the world look upon the American-South Vietnamese defeat of 1975? Acerbic comments from the world press revealed that America had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Communists. After the fall of Saigon in early 1975, the London *Daily Telegraph* described South Vietnam’s surrender as “world communism’s biggest victory, the free world’s biggest defeat.”

Many began asking if the “domino theory” might have some validity after all. Now that the Vietnam domino had fallen, and the Laos domino had also toppled before the Communists, would the South Korean domino soon fall before the onslaught of world Communism? And would the other “dominoes” of Southeast Asia all fall before Communism in the not-too-distant future?

But the counsels of fear and timidity prevailed in Washington even before America entered the Vietnam War. As early as 1959, Joseph E. Johnson, Chief of the Policy Planning Division of the U.S. State Department, declared: "From now on, every decision facing the U.S. in this field must be taken in the light of the fact that a good part of this country could be destroyed. . . . We must be prepared to fight limited wars; limited as to weapons and as to goals, to stabilize the situation temporarily, tide things over. But victory is no longer possible."

During the war in Vietnam, General Maxwell D. Taylor, President Johnson's special consultant on Vietnam, told a group of Americans that he opposed unlimited bombing of Communist North Vietnam because, said he, "it would destroy the Hanoi Government."

And President Johnson himself declared: "We're not asking any unconditional surrender on the part of the adversary. We're just saying to 'em, 'Come into the room and let us reason together. Let's talk out our difficulties.' "

America's Secretary of Defense during much of the Vietnam War was Robert S. McNamara. He once said that the United States had "a very limited objective in Southeast Asia — very, very limited. We are not seeking to destroy the Government of North Vietnam."

With such statements, is there any wonder that the North Vietnamese felt relatively secure? They could continue to send scores of thousands of North Vietnamese soldiers streaming across into South Vietnam — and could be assured that the mighty American giant would do little or nothing.

The U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Arthur Goldberg stated in February 1967: "We are not engaged in a 'holy war' against Communism." And in March that same year he added: "We're ready for unconditional negotiations!"

"Timid Military Tactics"

Many in the United States feared the prospect of America getting more deeply involved in a titanic struggle in Southeast Asia. They wanted to see America *cut her losses* and get out as quickly as possible!

General Curtis LeMay further said:

The popular philosophy that we can, by *cautious* and *timid* military tactics, keep the war from escalating into a larger conflict is the *ultimate in military blindness*. The only way to win a war is to escalate it in one way or another above what the enemy can take. If we feel that we can't win without unacceptable risk, we have *no business fighting in the first place* Thus, whenever we commit our young men to mortal combat, we should be equally prepared to commit our leaders, our cities, our families and civilians — our own or the enemy's. Modern war is that serious, and we should not forget it.

But it was the council of fear and timidity which ultimately carried the day in Washington — and America lost its most humiliating war to a tenth-rate nation.

If one studies the “Rules of Engagement” imposed on U.S. servicemen fighting in Vietnam, three points become crystal clear: First, no other armed force (at least in modern history) was ever asked to fight under such severe and unheard-of restrictions — restrictions which clearly aided the foe. Secondly, U.S. clear superiority in firepower (both air and artillery) was deliberately not exploited in the tragic war in Vietnam. Thirdly, in the air war against the North Vietnamese, American airmen were hamstrung by orders that “targets, munitions and strike tactics will be selected to minimize risk of collateral damage to civilian population.”

But, with American forces fighting with one hand tied behind their backs, is there any wonder that the U.S. would eventually have to crawl out of that tragic struggle — leaving the enfeebled South Vietnamese at the mercy of the Communists? And make no mistake about it — when the American forces left, it was clearly understood around the world that it would only be a matter of time until the North Vietnamese dealt the final *coup de grace* to the battered and bleeding nation of South Vietnam. The so-called “Paris peace accord” arranged by Secretary Kissinger and Le Duc Tho in 1973 was merely a peace *farce* — not a genuine “peace accord” as was widely hailed at the time. These two men of “peace” were given the Nobel Peace Prize the same year — but for what?

The Mayaguez Incident

After the Communists had gained control of Laos and had seized both Cambodia and Vietnam in 1975, they were not content with their vaunted victories. They wished to do everything possible to humiliate the United States. One final slap at the U.S. giant might, they thought, be a fitting way to further humiliate America.

On May 12, 1975, the Communist Cambodians seized the U.S. container ship, *Mayaguez* and its 39-man crew. What their intentions were wasn't perfectly clear. But America had had enough. It wasn't willing to be slapped around by a tenth-rate little Communist nation.

On May 12, 1975, the White House announced that a Cambodian naval vessel had fired on the unarmed *Mayaguez*, boarded it, and forced the container ship into the port of Sihanoukville. President Ford called this seizure “an act of piracy” by the Communists of Cambodia.

The President then instructed the State Department to “demand immediate release of the ship” because, said the State Department,

“failure to do so would have the most serious consequences.” America appealed to Communist China in vain to help the U.S. recover the ship and its crew.

The Rescue Operation

All diplomatic initiatives produced no results. President Ford, therefore, ordered the rescue operation. Despite strong protest from the Thai government, 1,100 marines were flown to U Taphao air base in Thailand for possible use in the rescue operation.

The actual operation began in the early hours of May 14, when U.S. planes sank three Cambodian gunboats which were attempting to transport the crew of the *Mayaguez* to the Cambodian mainland.

The major confrontation during this dangerous rescue mission occurred late in the afternoon on Tang Island in the Gulf of Siam. Two hundred marines battled the Khmer Rouge for over twelve hours. The U.S. marines had been landed on the island by helicopter in the mistaken belief that the *Mayaguez* crew were being held as hostages there.

After U.S. assault forces hit Tang Island, Phnom Penh radio broadcast an announcement in which it stated that it was freeing the ship and its crew.

Not long afterward, tough U.S. marines boarded the *Mayaguez* but found the crew weren't on board the ship. About two hours later, the U.S. destroyer *Wilson* retrieved the crew from a small boat which was flying a white flag. At about this same time, U.S. carrier planes began making punitive air strikes on Ream, apparently to prevent possible air attacks by Cambodian planes.

The successful operation was concluded on May 14 when some 300 marines were airlifted from Tang Island. Then a second air attack, this time on an oil depot near Sihanoukville, was also made by U.S. carrier planes.

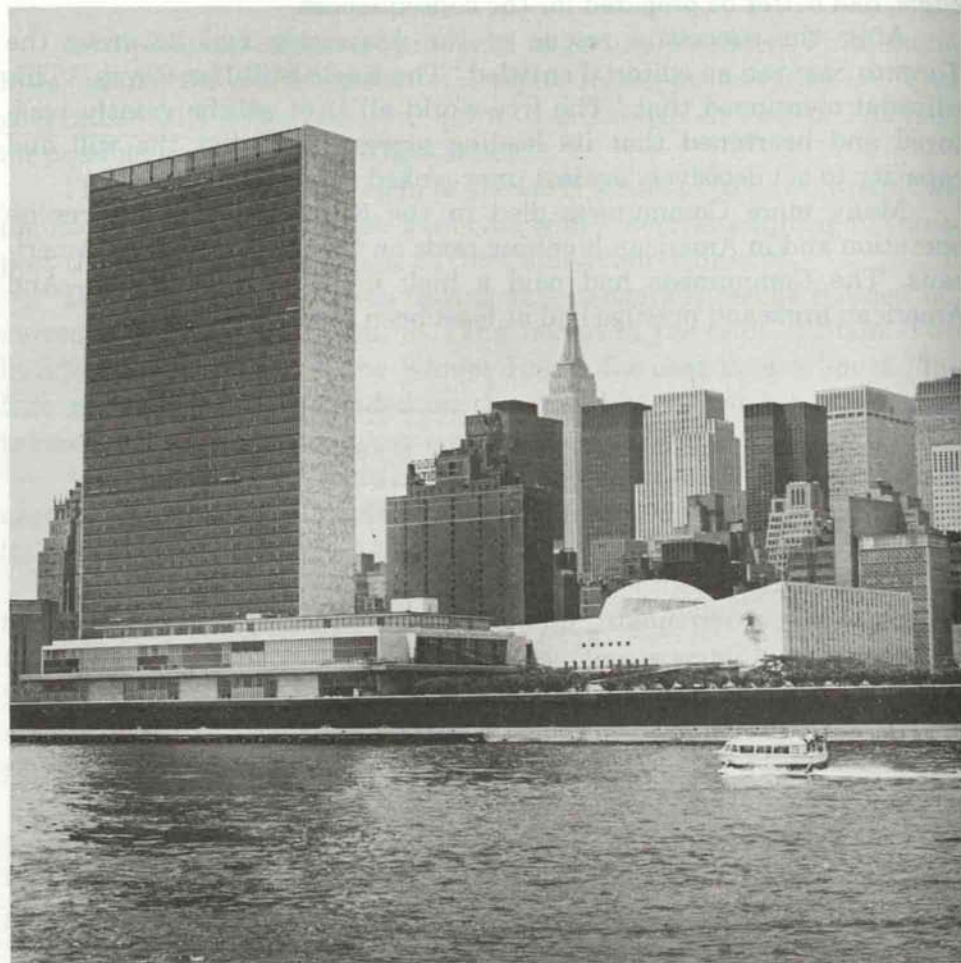
The Cambodian Minister of Information, Hu Him, broadcast from Phnom Penh on May 4th stating that Cambodia had decided to release the ship because “our weak country cannot have a confrontation with the U.S.” the U.S. Secretary of State, Henry A. Kissinger, on May 16th, said that the rescue operation showed that “there are limits beyond which the United States cannot be pushed.”

How many lives did this rescue operation cost America? The Defense Department reported on May 20, 1975 that fifteen American servicemen were killed, fifty wounded, and three missing. Then the following day, twenty-three more servicemen were reported to have died in a helicopter crash related to the rescue mission. All told, the lives of thirty-eight were lost in that daring, yet dangerous, rescue mission.

What did that rescue operation accomplish? America secured the recovery of the *Mayaguez* and its thirty-nine man crew. But more importantly, America's swift action in the rescue mission sought to demonstrate to the whole world that she still had some fight in her, and that anyone who pulls the feathers on the tail of the mighty *American eagle*, had better be prepared for the consequences.

After the successful rescue of the *Mayaguez* and its crew, the *Toronto Star* ran an editorial entitled "The Eagle Still Has Claws." This editorial mentioned that "The free-world alliance will be greatly reassured and heartened that its leading power...still has the will and capacity to act decisively against unprovoked aggression."

Many more Communists died in the fighting during the rescue operation and in American bombing raids on Cambodia than did Americans. The Communists had paid a high price for their lesson. And American pride and prestige had at least been somewhat restored.



United Nations building in New York. The U.N. became man's hope of future peace following W.W.II, but, like the League of Nations before it, the U.N. is too weak to guarantee world peace. — *United Nations Photo*