

Vietnam War January key dates

January 1950 - The People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union recognize Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

China then begins sending military advisors and modern weapons to the Viet Minh including automatic weapons, mortars, howitzers, and trucks. Much of the equipment is American-made and had belonged to the Chinese Nationalists before their defeat by Mao. With the influx of new equipment and Chinese advisors, General Giap transforms his guerrilla fighters into conventional army units including five light infantry divisions and one heavy division.

January 13, 1951 - 20,000 Viet Minh under Gen. Giap begin a series of attacks on fortified French positions in the Red River Delta (extending from Hanoi to the Gulf of Tonkin). The open areas of the Delta, in contrast to the jungle, allow French troops under the new command of Gen. Jean de Lattre to strike back with devastating results from the 'De Lattre Line' which encircles the region. 6000 Viet Minh die while assaulting the town of Vinh Yen near Hanoi in the first attack, causing Giap to withdraw.

January 12, 1952 - French supply lines to Hoa Binh along the Black River are cut. The road along Route Coloniale 6 is also cut.

January 20, 1953 - Dwight D. Eisenhower, former five-star Army general and Allied commander in Europe during World War II, is inaugurated as the 34th U.S. President.

During his term, Eisenhower will greatly increase U.S. military aid to the French in Vietnam to prevent a Communist victory. U.S. military advisors will continue to accompany American supplies sent to Vietnam. To justify America's financial commitment, Eisenhower will cite a 'Domino Theory' in which a Communist victory in Vietnam would result in surrounding countries falling one after another like a "falling row of dominoes." The Domino

Theory will be used by a succession of Presidents and their advisors to justify ever-deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

January 1955 - The first direct shipment of U.S. military aid to Saigon arrives. The U.S. also offers to train the fledgling South Vietnam Army.

January 1956 - Diem launches a brutal crackdown against Viet Minh suspects in the countryside. Those arrested are denied counsel and hauled before "security committees" with many suspects tortured or executed under the guise of 'shot while attempting escape.'

January 1957 - The Soviet Union proposes permanent division of Vietnam into North and South, with the two nations admitted separately to the United Nations. The U.S. rejects the proposal, unwilling to recognize Communist North Vietnam.

January 1961 - Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev pledges support for "wars of national liberation" throughout the world. His statement greatly encourages Communists in North Vietnam to escalate their armed struggle to unify Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh.

January 20, 1961 - John Fitzgerald Kennedy is inaugurated as the 35th U.S. President and declares "...we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to insure the survival and the success of liberty." Privately, outgoing President Eisenhower tells him "I think you're going to have to send troops..." to Southeast Asia.

The youthful Kennedy administration is inexperienced in matters regarding Southeast Asia. Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, 44-year-old Robert McNamara, along with civilian planners recruited from the academic community, will play a crucial role in deciding White House strategy for Vietnam over the next several years. Under their leadership, the United States will wage a limited war to force a political settlement.

However, the U.S. will be opposed by an enemy dedicated to total military victory "...whatever the sacrifices, however long the struggle...until Vietnam is fully independent and reunified," as stated by Ho Chi Minh.

January 11, 1962 - During his State of the Union address, President Kennedy states, "Few generations in all of history have been granted the role of being the great defender of freedom in its maximum hour of danger. This is our good fortune..."

January 15, 1962 - During a press conference, President Kennedy is asked if any Americans in Vietnam are engaged in the fighting. "No," the President responds without further comment.

January 3, 1963 - A Viet Cong victory in the Battle of Ap Bac makes front page news in America as 350 Viet Cong fighters defeat a large force of American-equipped South Vietnamese troops attempting to seize a radio transmitter. Three American helicopter crew members are killed.

The South Vietnamese Army is run by officers personally chosen by President Diem, not for their competence, but for their loyalty to him. Diem has instructed his officers to avoid casualties. Their primary mission, he has told them, is to protect him from any coups in Saigon.

January 30, 1964 - General Minh is ousted from power in a bloodless coup led by General Nguyen Khanh who becomes the new leader of South Vietnam.

January 20, 1965 - Lyndon B. Johnson takes the oath as president and [declares](#), "We can never again stand aside, prideful in isolation. Terrific dangers and troubles that we once called "foreign" now constantly live among us..."

January 27, 1965 - General Khanh seizes full control of South Vietnam's government.

January 27, 1965 - Johnson aides, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, send a memo to the President stating that America's limited military involvement in Vietnam is not succeeding, and that the U.S. has reached a 'fork in the road' in Vietnam and must either soon escalate or withdraw.

January 1965 - Operation Game Warden begins U.S. Navy river patrols on South Vietnam's 3000 nautical miles of inland waterways.

January 12, 1966 - During his State of the Union address before Congress, President Johnson comments that the war in Vietnam is unlike America's previous wars, "Yet, finally, war is always the same. It is young men dying in the fullness of their promise. It is trying to kill a man that you do not even know well enough to hate...therefore, to know war is to know that there is still madness in this world."

January 28-March 6 - Operation Masher marks the beginning of large-scale U.S. search-and-destroy operations against Viet Cong and NVA troop encampments. However, President Johnson orders the name changed to the less aggressive sounding 'White Wing' over concern for U.S. public opinion. During the 42 day operation in South Vietnam's Bon Son Plain near the coast, troopers of the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) once again fly by helicopters directly into battle zones and engage in heavy fighting. 228 Americans are killed and 788 wounded. NVA losses are put at 1342.

The term 'search-and-destroy' is used by the media to describe everything from large scale Airmobile troop movements to small patrols rooting out Viet Cong in tiny hamlets. The term eventually becomes associated with negative images of Americans burning villages.

January 31, 1966 - Citing Hanoi's failure to respond to his peace overtures during the 37 day bombing pause, President Johnson announces bombing of North Vietnam will resume.

January 31, 1966 - Senator Robert F. Kennedy criticizes President Johnson's decision to resume the bombing, stating that the U.S. may be headed "on a road from which there is no turning back, a road that leads to catastrophe for all mankind." His comments infuriate the President.

January 2, 1967 - Operation Bolo occurs as 28 U.S. Air Force F-4 Phantom jets lure North Vietnamese MiG-21 interceptors into a dogfight over Hanoi and shoot down seven of them. This leaves only nine MiG-21s operational for the North Vietnamese. American pilots, however, are prohibited by Washington from attacking MiG air bases in North Vietnam.

January 8-26 - Operation Cedar Falls occurs. It is the largest combined offensive to date and involves 16,000 American and 14,000 South Vietnamese soldiers clearing out Viet Cong from the 'Iron Triangle' area 25 miles northwest of Saigon. The Viet Cong choose not to fight and instead melt away into the jungle. Americans then uncover an extensive network of tunnels and for the first time use 'tunnel rats,' the nickname given to specially trained volunteers who explore the maze of tunnels. After the American and South Vietnamese troops leave the area, Viet Cong return and rebuild their sanctuary. This pattern is repeated throughout the war as Americans utilize 'in-and-out' tactics in which troops arrive by helicopters, secure an area, then depart by helicopters.

January 10, 1967 - U.N. Secretary-General U Thant expresses doubts that Vietnam is essential to the security of the West. On this same day, during his State of the Union address before Congress, President Johnson once again declares "We will stand firm in Vietnam."

January 23, 1967 - Senator J. William Fulbright publishes *The Arrogance of Power* a book critical of American war policy in Vietnam advocating direct peace talks between the South Vietnamese government and the Viet Cong. By this time, Fulbright and President Johnson are no longer on speaking terms. Instead, the President uses the news media to deride Fulbright, Robert Kennedy, and a growing number of critics in Congress as "nervous Nellies" and "sunshine patriots."

January 5, 1968 - Operation Niagara I to map NVA positions around Khe Sanh begins.

January 21, 1968 - 20,000 NVA troops under the command of Gen. Giap attack the American air base at Khe Sanh. A 77 day siege begins as 5000 U.S. Marines in the isolated outpost are encircled. The siege attracts enormous media attention back in America, with many comparisons made to the 1954 Battle of Dien Bien Phu in which the French were surrounded then defeated.

"I don't want any damn Dinbinfoo," an anxious President Johnson tells Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Earle Wheeler. As Johnson personally sends off Marine reinforcements, he states "...the eyes of the nation and the eyes of the entire world, the eyes of all of history itself, are on that little brave band of defenders who hold the pass at Khe Sanh..." Johnson issues presidential orders to the Marines to hold the base and demands a guarantee "signed in blood" from the Joint Chiefs of Staff that they will succeed.

Operation Niagara II then begins a massive aerial supply effort to the besieged Marines along with heavy B-52 bombardment of NVA troop positions. At the peak of the battle, NVA soldiers are hit round-the-clock every 90 minutes by groups of three B-52s which drop over 110,000 tons of bombs during the siege, the heaviest bombardment of a small area in the history of warfare.

January 31, 1968 - The turning point of the war occurs as 84,000 Viet Cong guerrillas aided by NVA troops launch the Tet

Offensive attacking a hundred cities and towns throughout South Vietnam.

The surprise offensive is closely observed by American TV news crews in Vietnam which film the U.S. embassy in Saigon being attacked by 17 Viet Cong commandos, along with bloody scenes from battle areas showing American soldiers under fire, dead and wounded. The graphic color film footage is then quickly relayed back to the states for broadcast on nightly news programs. Americans at home thus have a front row seat in their living rooms to the Viet Cong/NVA assaults against their fathers, sons, and brothers, ten thousand miles away. "The whole thing stinks, really," says a Marine under fire at Hue after more than 100 Marines are killed.

January 31-March 7 - In the Battle for Saigon during Tet, 35 NVA and Viet Cong battalions are defeated by 50 battalions of American and Allied troops that had been positioned to protect the city on a hunch by Lt. Gen. Fred C. Weyand, a veteran of World War II in the Pacific. Nicknamed the "savior of Saigon," Weyand had sensed the coming attack, prepared his troops, and on February 1 launched a decisive counterattack against the Viet Cong at Tan Son Nhut airport thus protecting nearby MACV and South Vietnamese military headquarters from possible capture.

January 31-March 2 - In the Battle for Hue during Tet, 12,000 NVA and Viet Cong troops storm the lightly defended historical city, then begin systematic executions of over 3000 "enemies of the people" including South Vietnamese government officials, captured South Vietnamese officers, and Catholic priests. South Vietnamese troops and three U.S. Marine battalions' counterattack and engage in the heaviest fighting of the entire Tet Offensive. They retake the old imperial city, house by house, street by street, aided by American air and artillery strikes. On February 24, U.S. Marines occupy the Imperial Palace in the heart of the citadel and the battle soon ends with a North Vietnamese defeat. American losses are 142 Marines killed and 857 wounded,

74 U.S. Army killed and 507 wounded. South Vietnamese suffer 384 killed and 1830 wounded. NVA killed are put at over 5000.

January 1, 1969 - Henry Cabot Lodge, former American ambassador to South Vietnam, is nominated by President-elect Nixon to be the senior U.S negotiator at the Paris peace talks.

January 20, 1969 - Richard M. Nixon is inaugurated as the 37th U.S. President and declares "...the greatest honor history can bestow is the title of peacemaker. This honor now beckons America..." He is the fifth President coping with Vietnam and had successfully campaigned on a pledge of "peace with honor."

January 22, 1969 - Operation Dewey Canyon, the last major operation by U.S. Marines begins in the Da Krong valley.

January 25, 1969 - Paris peace talks open with the U.S., South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and the Viet Cong all in attendance.

January 4, 1971 - President Nixon announces, "the end is in sight."

January 19, 1971 - U.S. fighter-bombers launch heavy air strikes against NVA supply camps in Laos and Cambodia.

January 30-April 6 - Operation Lam Son 719, an all-South Vietnamese ground offensive, occurs as 17,000 South Vietnamese soldiers attack 22,000 NVA inside Laos in an attempt to sever the Ho Chi Minh trail. Aided by heavy U.S. artillery and air strikes, along with American helicopter lifts, South Vietnamese troops advance to their first objective but then stall thus allowing the NVA time to bring in massive troop reinforcements. By battle's end, 40,000 NVA pursue 8000 South Vietnamese survivors back across the border. The South Vietnamese suffer 7682 casualties, nearly half the original force. The U.S. suffers 215 killed, over 100 helicopters lost, and over 600 damaged while supporting the offensive. NVA losses are estimated up to 20,000 as a result of the intense American bombardment. Also, among

those killed was *Life* magazine photographer Larry Burrows who had been working in Vietnam for ten years.

Although an upbeat President Nixon declares after the battle that "Vietnamization has succeeded," the failed offensive indicates true Vietnamization of the war may be difficult to achieve.

January 25, 1972 - President Nixon announces a proposed eight point peace plan for Vietnam and also reveals that Kissinger has been secretly negotiating with the North Vietnamese. However, Hanoi rejects Nixon's peace overture.

January 8, 1973 - Kissinger and Le Duc Tho resume negotiations in Paris.

January 9, 1973 - All remaining differences are resolved between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho.

President Thieu, once again threatened by Nixon with a total cut-off of American aid to South Vietnam, now unwillingly accepts the peace agreement, which still allows North Vietnamese troops to remain in South Vietnam. Thieu labels the terms "tantamount to surrender" for South Vietnam.

January 23, 1973 - President Nixon announces that an agreement has been reached which will "end the war and bring peace with honor."

January 27, 1973 - The Paris Peace Accords are signed by the U.S., North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong. Under the terms, the U.S. agrees to immediately halt all military activities and withdraw all remaining military personnel within 60 days. The North Vietnamese agree to an immediate cease-fire and the release of all American POWs within 60 days. An estimated 150,000 North Vietnamese soldiers presently in South Vietnam are allowed to remain. Vietnam is still divided. South Vietnam is considered to be one country with two governments, one led by President Thieu, the other led by Viet Cong, pending future reconciliation.

January 27, 1973 - Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird announces the draft is ended in favor of voluntary enlistment.

January 27, 1973 - The last American soldier to die in combat in Vietnam, Lt. Col. William B. Nolde, is killed.

January 8, 1975 - NVA general staff plan for the invasion of South Vietnam by 20 divisions is approved by North Vietnam's Politburo. By now, the Soviet-supplied North Vietnamese Army is the fifth largest in the world. It anticipates a two year struggle for victory. But in reality, South Vietnam's forces will collapse in only 55 days.

January 14, 1975 - Testifying before Congress, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger states that the U.S. is not living up to its earlier promise to South Vietnam's President Thieu of "severe retaliatory action" in the event North Vietnam violated the Paris peace treaty.

January 21, 1975 - During a press conference, President Ford states the U.S. is unwilling to re-enter the war.

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