

The Vietnam War



The Jungle War 1965 - 1968

1965

January 20, 1965 - Lyndon B. Johnson takes the oath as president and , "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.

February 4, 1965 - National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy visits South Vietnam for the first time. In North Vietnam, Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin coincidentally arrives in Hanoi.

February 6, 1965 - Viet Cong guerrillas attack the U.S. military compound at Pleiku in the Central Highlands, killing eight Americans, wounding 126 and destroying ten aircraft.

February 7-8 - "I've had enough of this," President Johnson tells his National Security advisors. He then approves Operation Flaming Dart, the bombing of a North Vietnamese army camp near Dong Hoi by U.S. Navy jets from the carrier *Ranger*.

Johnson makes no speeches or public statements concerning his decision. Opinion polls taken in the U.S. shortly after the bombing indicate a 70 percent approval rating for the President and an 80 percent approval of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. Johnson now agrees to a long-

standing recommendation from his advisors for a sustained bombing campaign against North Vietnam.

In Hanoi, Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin is pressured by the North Vietnamese to provide unlimited military aid to counter the American "aggression." Kosygin gives in to their demands. As a result, sophisticated Soviet surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) begin arriving in Hanoi within weeks.

February 18, 1965 - Another military coup in Saigon results in General Khanh finally ousted from power and a new military/civilian government installed, led by Dr. Phan Huy Quat.

February 22, 1965 - General Westmoreland requests two battalions of U.S. Marines to protect the American air base at Da Nang from 6000 Viet Cong massed in the vicinity. The President approves his request, despite the "grave reservations" of Ambassador Taylor in Vietnam who warns that America may be about to repeat the same mistakes made by the French in sending ever-increasing numbers of soldiers into the Asian forests and jungles of a "hostile foreign country" where friend and foe are indistinguishable.

March 2, 1965 - Operation Rolling Thunder begins as over 100 American fighter-bombers attack targets in North Vietnam. Scheduled to last eight weeks, Rolling Thunder will instead go on for three years.

The first U.S. air strikes also occur against the Ho Chi Minh trail. Throughout the war, the trail is heavily bombed by American jets with little actual success in halting the tremendous flow of soldiers and supplies from the North. 500 American jets will be lost attacking the trail. After each attack, bomb damage along the trail is repaired by female construction crews.

During the entire war, the U.S. will fly 3 million sorties and drop nearly 8 million tons of bombs, four times the tonnage dropped during all of World War II, in the largest display of firepower in the history of warfare.

The majority of bombs are dropped in South Vietnam against Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army positions, resulting in 3 million civilian refugees due to the destruction of numerous villages. In North Vietnam, military targets include fuel depots and factories. The North Vietnamese react to the air strikes by decentralizing their factories and supply bases, thus minimizing their vulnerability to bomb damage.

March 8, 1965 - The first U.S. combat troops arrive in Vietnam as 3500 Marines land at China Beach to defend the American air base at Da Nang. They join 23,000 American military advisors already in Vietnam.

March 9, 1965 - President Johnson authorizes the use of Napalm, a petroleum based anti-personnel bomb that showers hundreds of explosive pellets upon impact.

March 11, 1965 - Operation Market Time, a joint effort between the U.S. Navy and South Vietnamese Navy, commences to disrupt North Vietnamese sea routes used to funnel supplies

into the South. The operation is highly successful in cutting off coastal supply lines and results in the North Vietnamese shifting to the more difficult land route along the Ho Chi Minh trail.

March 29, 1965 - Viet Cong terrorists bomb the U.S. embassy in Saigon.

April 1, 1965 - At the White House, President Johnson authorizes sending two more Marine battalions and up to 20,000 logistical personnel to Vietnam. The President also authorizes American combat troops to conduct patrols to root out Viet Cong in the countryside. His decision to allow offensive operations is kept secret from the American press and public for two months.

April 7, 1965 - President Johnson delivers his "Peace Without Conquest" Speech at Johns Hopkins University offering Hanoi "unconditional discussions" to stop the war in return for massive economic assistance in modernizing Vietnam. "Old Ho can't turn that down," Johnson privately tells his aides. But Johnson's peace overture is quickly rejected.

April 15, 1965 - A thousand tons of bombs are dropped on Viet Cong positions by U.S. and South Vietnamese fighter-bombers.

April 17, 1965 - In Washington, 15,000 students gather to protest the U.S. bombing campaign.

Student demonstrators will often refer to President Johnson, his advisors, the Pentagon, Washington bureaucrats, and weapons manufacturers, simply as "the Establishment."

April 20, 1965 - In Honolulu, Johnson's top aides, including McNamara, Gen. Westmoreland, Gen. Wheeler, William Bundy, and Ambassador Taylor, meet and agree to recommend to the President sending another 40,000 combat soldiers to Vietnam.

April 24, 1965 - President Johnson announces Americans in Vietnam are eligible for combat pay.

May 3, 1965 - The first U.S. Army combat troops, 3500 men of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, arrive in Vietnam.

May 11, 1965 - Viet Cong over-run South Vietnamese troops in Phuoc Long Province north of Saigon and also attack in central South Vietnam.

May 13, 1965 - The first bombing pause is announced by the U.S. in the hope that Hanoi will now negotiate. There will be six more pauses during the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign, all with same intention. However, each time, the North Vietnamese ignore the peace overtures and instead use the pause to repair air defenses and send more troops and supplies into the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail.

May 13, 1965 - Viet Cong attack the U.S. special forces camp in Phuoc Long. During the fighting, 2nd Lt. Charles Williams, earns the Congressional Medal of Honor by knocking out a Viet Cong machine-gun then guiding rescue helicopters, while wounded four times.

May 19, 1965 - U.S. bombing of North Vietnam resumes.

June 18, 1965 - Nguyen Cao Ky takes power in South Vietnam as the new prime minister with Nguyen Van Thieu functioning as official chief of state. They lead the 10th government in 20 months.

July 1, 1965 - Viet Cong stage a mortar attack against Da Nang air base and destroy three aircraft.

July 8, 1965 - Henry Cabot Lodge is reappointed as U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam.

July 21-28 - President Johnson meets with top aides to decide the future course of action in Vietnam.

July 28, 1965 - During a noontime press conference, President Johnson announces he will send 44 combat battalions to Vietnam increasing the U.S. military presence to 125,000 men. Monthly draft calls are doubled to 35,000. "I have asked the commanding general, General Westmoreland, what more he needs to meet this mounting aggression. He has told me. And we will meet his needs. We cannot be defeated by force of arms. We will stand in Vietnam."

"...I do not find it easy to send the flower of our youth, our finest young men, into battle. I have spoken to you today of the divisions and the forces and the battalions and the units, but I know them all, every one. I have seen them in a thousand streets, of a hundred towns, in every state in this union?working and laughing and building, and filled with hope and life. I think I know, too, how their mothers weep and how their families sorrow."

August 1965 - Combined Action Platoons are formed by U.S. Marines utilizing South Vietnamese militia units to protect villages and conduct patrols to root out Viet Cong guerrillas.

August 3, 1965 - The destruction of suspected Viet Cong villages near Da Nang by a U.S. Marine rifle company is shown on CBS TV and generates controversy in America. Earlier, seven Marines had been killed nearby while searching for Viet Cong following a mortar attack against the air base at Da Nang.

August 4, 1965 - President Johnson asks Congress for an additional \$1.7 billion for the war.

August 5, 1965 - Viet Cong destroy two million gallons of fuel in storage tanks near Da Nang.

August 8, 1965 - The U.S. conducts major air strikes against the Viet Cong.

August 18-24, 1965 - Operation Starlite begins the first major U.S. ground operation in Vietnam as U.S. Marines wage a preemptive strike against 1500 Viet Cong planning to assault the American airfield at Chu Lai. The Marines arrive by helicopter and by sea following heavy artillery and air bombardment of Viet Cong positions. 45 Marines are killed and 120 wounded. Viet Cong suffer 614 dead and 9 taken prisoner. This decisive first victory gives a big boost to U.S. troop morale.

August 31, 1965 - President Johnson signs a law criminalizing draft card burning. Although it may result in a five year prison sentence and \$1000 fine, the burnings become common during anti-war rallies and often attract the attention of news media.

October 16, 1965 - Anti-war rallies occur in 40 American cities and in international cities including London and Rome.

October 19, 1965 - North Vietnamese Army troops attack the U.S. Special Forces camp at Plei Me in a prelude to the Battle of Ia Drang Valley in South Vietnam's Central Highlands.

October 30, 1965 - 25,000 march in Washington in support of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The marchers are led by five Medal of Honor recipients.

November 14-16 - The Battle of Ia Drang Valley marks the first major battle between U.S. troops and North Vietnamese Army regulars (NVA) inside South Vietnam. American Army troops of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) respond to the NVA threat by using helicopters to fly directly into the battle zone. Upon landing, the troops quickly disembark then engage in fierce fire fights, supported by heavy artillery and B-52 air strikes, marking the first use of B-52s to assist combat troops. The two-day battle ends with NVA retreating into the jungle. 79 Americans are killed and 121 wounded. NVA losses are estimated at 2000.

November 17, 1965 - The American success at Ia Drang is marred by a deadly ambush against 400 soldiers of the U.S. 7th Cavalry sent on foot to occupy nearby Landing Zone 'Albany.' NVA troops that had been held in reserve during Ia Drang, along with troops that had retreated, kill 155 Americans and wound 124.

November 27, 1965 - In Washington, 35,000 anti-war protesters circle the White House then march on to the Washington Monument for a rally.

November 30, 1965 - After visiting Vietnam, Defense Secretary McNamara privately warns that American casualty rates of up to 1000 dead per month could be expected.

December 4, 1965 - In Saigon, Viet Cong terrorists bomb a hotel used by U.S. military personnel, killing eight and wounding 137.

December 7, 1965 - Defense Secretary McNamara tells President Johnson that the North Vietnamese apparently "believe that the war will be a long one, that time is their ally, and that their staying power is superior to ours."

December 9, 1965 - The *New York Times* reveals the U.S. is unable to stop the flow of North Vietnamese soldiers and supplies into the South despite extensive bombing.

December 18-20 - President Johnson and top aides meet to decide the future course of action.

December 25, 1965 - The second pause in the bombing of North Vietnam occurs. This will last for 37 days while the U.S. attempts to pressure North Vietnam into a negotiated peace. However,

the North Vietnamese denounce the bombing halt as a "trick" and continue Viet Cong terrorist activities in the South.

By year's end U.S. troop levels in Vietnam reached 184,300. An estimated 90,000 South Vietnamese soldiers deserted in 1965, while an estimated 35,000 soldiers from North Vietnam infiltrated the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail. Up to 50 percent of the countryside in South Vietnam is now under some degree of Viet Cong control.

Time Magazine chooses General William Westmoreland as 1965's 'Man of the Year.'

1966

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.

February 1966 - The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by Sen. J. William Fulbright, holds televised hearings examining America's policy in Vietnam. Appearing before the committee, Defense Secretary McNamara states that U.S. objectives in Vietnam are "not to destroy or overthrow the Communist government of North Vietnam. They are limited to the destruction of the insurrection and aggression directed by North Vietnamese against the political institutions of South Vietnam."

February 3, 1966 - Influential newspaper columnist Walter Lippmann lambastes President Johnson's strategy in Vietnam, stating, "Gestures, propaganda, public relations and bombing and

more bombing will not work." Lippmann predicts Vietnam will divide America as combat casualties mount.

February 6-9 - President Johnson and South Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky meet in Honolulu.

March 1, 1966 - An attempt to repeal the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution fails in the U.S. Senate by a vote of 92 to 5. The attempt was led by Sen. Wayne Morse.

March 9, 1966 - The U.S. reveals that 20,000 acres of food crops have been destroyed in suspected Viet Cong villages. The admission generates harsh criticism from the American academic community.

March 10, 1966 - South Vietnamese Buddhists begin a violent campaign to oust Prime Minister Ky following his dismissal of a top Buddhist general. This marks the beginning of a period of extreme unrest in several cities in South Vietnam including Saigon, Da Nang and Hue as political squabbling spills out into the streets and interferes with U.S. military operations.

March 26, 1966 - Anti-war protests are held in New York, Washington, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston and San Francisco.

April 12, 1966 - B-52 bombers are used for the first time against North Vietnam. Each B-52 carries up to 100 bombs, dropped from an altitude of about six miles. Target selections are closely supervised by the White House. There are six main target categories; power facilities, war support facilities, transportation lines, military complexes, fuel storage, and air defense installations.

April 13, 1966 - Viet Cong attack Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon causing 140 casualties while destroying 12 U.S. helicopters and nine aircraft.

May 2, 1966 - Secretary of Defense McNamara privately reports the North Vietnamese are infiltrating 4500 men per month into the South.

May 14, 1966 - Political unrest intensifies as South Vietnamese troops loyal to Prime Minister Ky over-run renegade South Vietnamese Buddhist troops in Da Nang. Ky's troops then move on to Hue to oust renegades there. Ky's actions result in a new series of immolations by Buddhist monks and nuns as an act of protest against his Saigon regime and its American backers. Buddhist leader Tri Quang blames President Johnson personally for the situation. Johnson responds by labeling the immolations as "tragic and unnecessary."

June 4, 1966 - A three-page anti-war advertisement appears in the *New York Times* signed by 6400 teachers and professors.

June 25, 1966 - Political unrest in South Vietnam abates following the crackdown on Buddhist rebels by Prime Minister Ky, including the arrest of Buddhist leader Tri Quang. Ky now appeals for calm.

June 29, 1966 - Citing increased infiltration of Communist guerrillas from North Vietnam into the South, the U.S. bombs oil depots around Hanoi and Haiphong, ending a self-imposed moratorium.

The U.S. is very cautious about targeting the city of Hanoi itself over concerns for the reactions of North Vietnam's military allies, China and the Soviet Union. This concern also prevents any U.S. ground invasion of North Vietnam, despite such recommendations by a few military planners in Washington.

July 6, 1966 - Hanoi Radio reports that captured American pilots have been paraded through the streets of Hanoi through jeering crowds.

July 11, 1966 - The U.S. intensifies bombing raids against portions of the Ho Chi Minh trail winding through Laos.

July 15, 1966 - Operation Hastings is launched by U.S. Marines and South Vietnamese troops against 10,000 NVA in Quang Tri Province. This is the largest combined military operation to date in the war.

July 30, 1966 - For the first time, the U.S. bombs NVA troops in the Demilitarized Zone, the buffer area separating North and South Vietnam.

August 9, 1966 - U.S. jets attack two South Vietnamese villages by mistake, killing 63 civilians and wounding over 100.

August 30, 1966 - Hanoi announces China will provide economic and technical assistance.

September 1, 1966 - During a visit to neighboring Cambodia, French President Charles de Gaulle calls for U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.

September 12, 1966 - The heaviest air raid of the war to date occurs as 500 U.S. jets attack NVA supply lines and coastal targets.

September 14-November 24 - Operation Attleboro occurs involving 20,000 U.S. and South Vietnamese soldiers in a successful search-and-destroy mission 50 miles north of Saigon near the Cambodian border. During the fighting, an enormous weapons cache is uncovered in a hidden base camp in the jungle. 155 Americans are killed and 494 wounded. North Vietnamese losses are 1106.

September 23, 1966 - The U.S. reveals jungles near the Demilitarized Zone are being defoliated by sprayed chemicals.

October 2-24, 1966 - The U.S. 1st Air Cavalry Division conducts Operation Irving to clear NVA from mountainous areas near Qui Nhon.

October 3, 1966 - The Soviet Union announces it will provide military and economic assistance to North Vietnam.

October 25, 1966 - President Johnson conducts a conference in Manila with America's Vietnam Allies; Australia, Philippines, Thailand, New Zealand, South Korea and South Vietnam. The Allies pledge to withdraw from Vietnam within six months if North Vietnam will withdraw completely from the South.

October 26, 1966 - President Johnson visits U.S. troops at Cam Ranh Bay. This is the first of two visits to Vietnam made during his presidency.

November 7, 1966 - Defense Secretary McNamara is confronted by student protesters during a visit to Harvard University.

November 12, 1966 - The *New York Times* reports that 40 percent of U.S. economic aid sent to Saigon is stolen or winds up on the black market.

December 8-9 - North Vietnam rejects a proposal by President Johnson for discussions concerning treatment of POWs and a possible exchange.

December 13-14 - The village of Caudat near Hanoi is leveled by U.S. bombers resulting in harsh criticism from the international community.

December 26, 1966 - Facing increased scrutiny from journalists over mounting civilian casualties in North Vietnam, the U.S. Defense Department now admits civilians may have been bombed accidentally.

December 27, 1966 - The U.S. mounts a large-scale air assault against suspected Viet Cong positions in the Mekong Delta using Napalm and hundreds of tons of bombs.

By year's end, U.S. troop levels reach 389,000 with 5008 combat deaths and 30,093 wounded. Over half of the American casualties are caused by snipers and small-arms fire during Viet Cong ambushes, along with handmade booby traps and mines planted everywhere in the countryside by Viet Cong. American Allies fighting in Vietnam include 45,000 soldiers from South Korea and 7000 Australians. An estimated 89,000 soldiers from North Vietnam infiltrated the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail in 1966.

1967

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."

February 2, 1967 - President Johnson states there are no "serious indications that the other side is ready to stop the war."

February 8-10 - American religious groups stage a nationwide "Fast for Peace."

February 8-12 - A truce occurs during Tet, the lunar New Year, a traditional Vietnamese holiday.

February 13, 1967 - Following the failure of diplomatic peace efforts, President Johnson announces the U.S. will resume full-scale bombing of North Vietnam.

February 22-May 14 - The largest U.S. military offensive of the war occurs. Operation Junction City involves 22 U.S. and four South Vietnamese battalions attempting to destroy the NVA's Central Office headquarters in South Vietnam. The offensive includes the only parachute assault by U.S. troops during the entire war. During the fighting at Ap Gu, U.S. 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry is commanded by Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Haig who will later become an influential White House aide. Junction City ends with 2728 Viet Cong killed and 34 captured. American losses are 282 killed and 1576 wounded. NVA relocate their Central Office headquarters inside Cambodia, thus avoiding capture.

March 8, 1967 - Congress authorizes \$4.5 billion for the war.

March 19-21 - President Johnson meets in Guam with South Vietnam's Prime Minister Ky and pressures Ky to hold national elections.

April 6, 1967 - Quang Tri City is attacked by 2500 Viet Cong and NVA.

April 14, 1967 - Richard M. Nixon visits Saigon and states that anti-war protests back in the U.S. are "prolonging the war."

April 15, 1967 - Anti-war demonstrations occur in New York and San Francisco involving nearly 200,000. Rev. Martin Luther King declares that the war is undermining President Johnson's Great Society social reform programs, "...the pursuit of this widened war has narrowed the promised dimensions of the domestic welfare programs, making the poor white and Negro bear the heaviest burdens both at the front and at home."

April 20, 1967 - U.S. bombers target Haiphong harbor in North Vietnam for the first time.

April 24-May 11 - Hill fights rage at Khe Sanh between U.S. 3rd Marines and the North Vietnamese Army resulting in 940 NVA killed. American losses are 155 killed and 425 wounded. The isolated air base is located in mountainous terrain less than 10 miles from North Vietnam near the border of Laos.

April 24, 1967 - General Westmoreland condemns anti-war demonstrators saying they give the North Vietnamese soldier "hope that he can win politically that which he cannot accomplish militarily." Privately, he has already warned President Johnson "the war could go on indefinitely."

May 1, 1967 - Ellsworth Bunker replaces Henry Cabot Lodge as U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam.

May 2, 1967 - The U.S. is condemned during a mock war crimes tribunal held in Stockholm, organized by British philosopher Bertrand Russell.

May 9, 1967 - Robert W. Komer, a former CIA analyst, is appointed by President Johnson as deputy commander of MACV to form a new agency called Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) to pacify the population of South Vietnam. Nearly 60 percent of rural villages in South Vietnam are now under Viet Cong control. \$850 million in food, medical supplies, machinery, and numerous other household items, will be distributed through CORDS to the population in order to regain their loyalty in the struggle for the "hearts and minds" of common villagers. CORDS also trains local militias to protect their villages from the Viet Cong.

May 13, 1967 - In New York City, 70,000 march in support of the war, led by a New York City fire captain.

May 18-26 - U.S. and South Vietnamese troops enter the Demilitarized Zone for the first time and engage in a series of fire fights with NVA. Both sides suffer heavy losses.

May 22, 1967 - President Johnson publicly urges North Vietnam to accept a peace compromise.

June 1967 - The Mobile Riverine Force becomes operational utilizing U.S. Navy 'Swift' boats combined with Army troop support to halt Viet Cong usage of inland waterways in the Mekong Delta.

July 1967 - General Westmoreland requests an additional 200,000 reinforcements on top of the 475,000 soldiers already scheduled to be sent to Vietnam, which would bring the U.S. total in Vietnam to 675,000. President Johnson agrees only to an extra 45,000.

July 7, 1967 - North Vietnam's Politburo makes the decision to launch a widespread offensive against South Vietnam. Conceived in three phases, the first phase involves attacks against remote border areas in an effort to lure American troops away from South Vietnam's cities. The second phase (Tet Offensive) will be an attack against the cities themselves by Viet Cong forces aided by NVA troops, in the hope of igniting a "general uprising" to overthrow the government of South Vietnam. The third phase involves the actual invasion of South Vietnam by NVA troops coming from North Vietnam.

July 29, 1967 - A fire resulting from a punctured fuel tank kills 134 U.S. crewmen aboard the *USS Forrestal* in the Gulf of Tonkin, in the worst naval accident since World War II.

August 9, 1967 - The Senate Armed Services Committee begins closed-door hearings concerning the influence of civilian advisors on military planning. During the hearings, Defense Secretary McNamara testifies that the extensive and costly U.S. bombing campaign in Vietnam is failing to impact North Vietnam's war making ability in South Vietnam and that nothing short of "the virtual annihilation of North Vietnam and its people" through bombing would ever succeed.

August 18, 1967 - California Governor Ronald Reagan says the U.S. should get out of Vietnam citing the difficulties of winning a war when "too many qualified targets have been put off limits to bombing."

August 21, 1967 - The Chinese shoot down two U.S. fighter-bombers that accidentally crossed their border during air raids in North Vietnam along the Chinese border.

September 1, 1967 - North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong publicly states Hanoi will "continue to fight."

September 3, 1967 - National elections are held in South Vietnam. With 80 percent of eligible voters participating, Nguyen Van Thieu is elected president with Nguyen Cao Ky as his vice-president, the pair winning just 35 percent of the vote.

September 11-October 31 - U.S. Marines are besieged by NVA at Con Thien located two miles south of the Demilitarized Zone. A massive long-range artillery duel then erupts between NVA and U.S. guns during the siege as NVA fire 42,000 rounds at the Marines while the U.S. responds with 281,000 rounds and B-52 air strikes to lift the siege. NVA losses are estimated at over 2000.

October 1967 - A public opinion poll indicates 46 percent of Americans now believe U.S. military involvement in Vietnam to be a "mistake." However, most Americans also believe that the U.S. should "win or get out" of Vietnam. Also in October, *Life* magazine renounces its earlier support of President Johnson's war policies.

October 5, 1967 - Hanoi accuses the U.S. of hitting a school in North Vietnam with anti-personnel bombs.

October 21-23 - 'March on the Pentagon' draws 55,000 protesters. In London, protesters try to storm the U.S. embassy.

October 31, 1967 - President Johnson reaffirms his commitment to maintain U.S. involvement in South Vietnam.

November 3-December 1 - The Battle of Dak To occurs in the mountainous terrain along the border of Cambodia and Laos as the U.S. 4th Infantry Division heads off a planned NVA attack against the Special Forces camp located there. During the fighting, the 4th Battalion, 503rd Airborne Infantry earns a Presidential Unit Citation for bravery. Massive air strikes combined with U.S. and South Vietnamese ground attacks result in an NVA withdrawal into Laos and Cambodia. NVA losses are put at 1644. U.S. troops suffer 289 killed. "Along with the gallantry and tenacity of our soldiers, our tremendously successful air logistic operation was the key to the victory," states General Westmoreland.

November 11, 1967 - President Johnson makes another peace overture, but it is soon rejected by Hanoi.

November 17, 1967 - Following an optimistic briefing in the White House by General Westmoreland, Ambassador Bunker, and Robert Komer, President Johnson tells the American public on TV, "We are inflicting greater losses than we're taking...We are making progress."

In a *Time* magazine interview, General Westmoreland taunts the Viet Cong, saying "I hope they try something because we are looking for a fight."

November 29, 1967 - An emotional Robert McNamara announces his resignation as Defense Secretary during a press briefing, stating, "Mr. President...I cannot find words to express what lies in my heart today..." Behind closed doors, he had begun regularly expressing doubts over Johnson's war strategy, angering the President. McNamara joins a growing list of Johnson's top aides who resigned over the war including Bill Moyers, McGeorge Bundy and George Ball.

November 30, 1967 - Anti-war Democrat Eugene McCarthy announces he will be a candidate for President opposing Lyndon Johnson, stating, "...we are involved in a very deep crisis of leadership, a crisis of direction and a crisis of national purpose...the entire history of this war in Vietnam, no matter what we call it, has been one of continued error and misjudgment."

December 4, 1967 - Four days of anti-war protests begin in New York. Among the 585 protesters arrested is renowned 'baby doctor' Dr. Benjamin Spock.

December 6, 1967 - The U.S. reports Viet Cong murdered 252 civilians in the hamlet of Dak Son.

December 23, 1967 - Upon arrival at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam, President Johnson declares "...all the challenges have been met. The enemy is not beaten, but he knows that he has met his master in the field." This is the President's second and final trip to Vietnam during his presidency.

By year's end, U.S. troop levels reach 463,000 with 16,000 combat deaths to date. By this time, over a million American soldiers have rotated through Vietnam, with length of service for draftees being one year, and most Americans serving in support units. An estimated 90,000 soldiers from North Vietnam infiltrated into the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail in 1967. Overall Viet Cong/NVA troop strength throughout South Vietnam is now estimated up to 300,000 men.

1968

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 counter-attack 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 counter-attack 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.

February 1, 1968 - In Saigon during Tet, a suspected Viet Cong guerrilla is shot in the head by South Vietnam's police chief Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan, in full view of an NBC news cameraman and an Associated Press still photographer. The haunting AP photo taken by Eddie Adams appears on the front page of most American newspapers the next morning. Americans also observe the filmed execution on NBC TV.

Another controversy during Tet, and one of the most controversial statements of the entire war, is made by an American officer who states, 'We had to destroy it, in order to save it,' referring to a small city near Saigon leveled by American bombs. His statement is later used by many as a metaphor for the American experience in Vietnam.

February 2, 1968 - President Johnson labels the Tet Offensive "a complete failure."

For the North Vietnamese, the Tet Offensive is both a military and political failure in Vietnam. The "general uprising" they had hoped to ignite among South Vietnamese peasants against the Saigon government never materialized. Viet Cong had also come out of hiding to do most of the actual fighting, suffered devastating losses, and never regained their former strength. As a result, most of the fighting will be taken over by North Vietnamese regulars fighting a conventional war. Tet's only success, and an unexpected one, was in eroding grassroots support among Americans and in Congress for continuing the war indefinitely.

February 8, 1968 - 21 U.S. Marines are killed by NVA at Khe Sanh.

February 27, 1968 - Influential CBS TV news anchorman Walter Cronkite, who just returned from Saigon, tells Americans during his CBS Evening News broadcast that he is certain "the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate."

February 28, 1968 - Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Wheeler, at the behest of Gen. Westmoreland, asks President Johnson for an additional 206,000 soldiers and mobilization of reserve units in the U.S.

March 1, 1968 - Clark Clifford, renowned Washington lawyer and an old friend of the President, becomes the new U.S. Secretary of Defense. For the next few days, Clifford conducts an intensive study of the entire situation in Vietnam, discovers there is no concept or overall plan anywhere in Washington for achieving victory in Vietnam, then reports to President Johnson that the United States should not escalate the war. "The time has come to decide where we go from here," he tells Johnson.

March 2, 1968 - 48 U.S. Army soldiers are killed during an ambush at Tan Son Nhut airport in Saigon.

March 10, 1968 - The *New York Times* breaks the news of Westmoreland's 206,000 troop request. The *Times* story is denied by the White House. Secretary of State Dean Rusk is then called before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and grilled for two days on live TV about the troop request and the overall effectiveness of Johnson's war strategy.

March 11, 1968 - Operation Quyet Thang begins a 28 day offensive by 33 U.S. and South Vietnamese battalions in the Saigon region.

March 12, 1968 - By a very slim margin of just 300 votes, President Johnson defeats anti-war Democrat Eugene McCarthy in the New Hampshire Democratic primary election. This indicates that political support for Johnson is seriously eroding.

Public opinion polls taken after the Tet Offensive revealed Johnson's overall approval rating has slipped to 36 percent, while approval of his Vietnam war policy slipped to 26 percent.

March 14, 1968 - Senator Robert F. Kennedy offers President Johnson a confidential political proposition. Kennedy will agree to stay out of the presidential race if Johnson will renounce his earlier Vietnam strategy and appoint a committee, including Kennedy, to chart a new course in Vietnam. Johnson spurns the offer.

March 16, 1968 - Robert F. Kennedy announces his candidacy for the presidency. Polls indicate Kennedy is now more popular than the President.

During his campaign, Kennedy addresses the issue of his participation in forming President John F. Kennedy's Vietnam policy by stating, "past error is no excuse for its own perpetuation."

March 16, 1968 - Over 300 Vietnamese civilians are slaughtered in My Lai hamlet by members of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry U.S. Army, while participating in an airborne assault against suspected Viet Cong encampments in Quang Ngai Province. Upon entering My Lai and finding no Viet Cong, the Americans begin killing every civilian in sight, interrupted only by helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson who lands and begins evacuating civilians after realizing what is happening.

March 28, 1968 - The initial report by participants at My Lai states that 69 Viet Cong soldiers were killed and makes no mention of civilian casualties.

The My Lai massacre is successfully concealed for a year, until a series of letters from Vietnam veteran Ronald Ridenhour spark an official Army investigation that results in Charlie Company Commander, Capt. Ernest L. Medina, First Platoon Leader, Lt. William Calley, and 14 others being brought to trial by the Army. A news photos of the carnage, showing a mass of dead children, women and old men, remains one of the most enduring images of America's involvement in Vietnam.

March 23, 1968 - During a secret meeting in the Philippines, Gen Wheeler informs Gen. Westmoreland that President Johnson will approve only 13,500 additional soldiers out of the original 206,000 requested. Gen. Wheeler also instructs Westmoreland to urge the South Vietnamese to expand their own war effort.

March 25, 1968 - Clark Clifford convenes the "Wise Men," a dozen distinguished elder statesmen and soldiers, including former Secretary of State Dean Acheson and World War II General Omar Bradley at the State Department for dinner. They are given a blunt assessment of the situation in Vietnam, including the widespread corruption of the Saigon government and the unlikely prospect for military victory "under the present circumstances."

March 26, 1968 - The "Wise Men" gather at the White House for lunch with the President. They now advocate U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, with only four of those present dissenting from that opinion.

March 31, 1968 - President Johnson stuns the world by his surprise decision not to seek re-election. He also announces a partial bombing halt and urges Hanoi to begin peace talks. "We are prepared to move immediately toward peace through negotiations." As a result, peace talks soon begin. The bombing halt only affects targets north of the 20th parallel, including Hanoi.

April 1, 1968 - The U.S. 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) begins Operation Pegasus to reopen Route 9, the relief route to the besieged Marines at Khe Sanh.

April 4, 1968 - Civil rights leader Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King is assassinated in Memphis. Racial unrest then erupts in over 100 American cities.

April 8, 1968 - The siege of Khe Sanh ends with the withdrawal of NVA troops from the area as a result of intensive American bombing and the reopening of Route 9. NVA losses during the siege are estimated up to 15,000. U.S. Marines suffered 199 killed and 830 wounded. 1st Cavalry suffered 92 killed and 629 wounded reopening Route 9. The U.S. command then secretly shuts down the Khe Sanh air base and withdraws the Marines. Commenting on the heroism of U.S. troops that defended Khe Sanh, President Johnson states "...they vividly demonstrated to the enemy the utter futility of his attempts to win a military victory in the South." A North Vietnamese official labels the closing of Khe Sanh air base as America's "gravest defeat" so far.

April 11, 1968 - Defense Secretary Clifford announces Gen. Westmoreland's request for 206,000 additional soldiers will not be granted.

April 23, 1968 - Anti-war activists at Columbia University seize five buildings.

April 27, 1968 - In New York, 200,000 students refuse to attend classes as a protest.

April 30-May 3 - The Battle of Dai Do occurs along the Demilitarized Zone as NVA troops seek to open an invasion corridor into South Vietnam. They are halted by a battalion of U.S. Marines nicknamed "the Magnificent Bastards" under the command of Lt. Col. William Weise. Aided by heavy artillery and air strikes, NVA suffer 1568 killed. 81 Marines are killed and 297 wounded. 29 U.S. Army are killed supporting the Marines and 130 wounded.

For the time being, this defeat ends North Vietnam's hope of successfully invading the South. They will wait four years, until 1972, before trying again, after most of the Americans have gone. It will actually take seven years, until 1975, for them to succeed.

May 5, 1968 - Viet Cong launch "Mini Tet," a series of rocket and mortar attacks against Saigon and 119 cities and military installations throughout South Vietnam. The U.S. responds with air strikes using Napalm and high explosives.

May 10, 1968 - An NVA battalion attacks the Special Forces camp at Kham Duc along the border of Laos. The isolated camp had been established in 1963 to monitor North Vietnamese infiltration. Now encircled by NVA, the decision is made to evacuate via C-130 transport planes. At the conclusion of the successful airlift, it is discovered that three U.S. Air Force controllers have accidentally been left behind. Although the camp is now over-run by NVA and two C-130s have already been shot down, Lt. Col. Joe M. Jackson pilots a C-123 Provider, lands on the air strip under intense fire, gathers all three controllers, then takes off. For this, Jackson is awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

May 10, 1968 - Peace talks begin in Paris but soon stall as the U.S. insists that North Vietnamese troops withdraw from the South, while the North Vietnamese insist on Viet Cong participation in a coalition government in South Vietnam. This marks the beginning of five years of on-again off-again official talks between the U.S. and North Vietnam in Paris.

June 5, 1968 - Robert F. Kennedy is shot and mortally wounded in Los Angeles just after winning the California Democratic presidential primary election.

July 1968 - Congress passes a ten percent income tax surcharge to defray the ballooning costs of the war.

July 1, 1968 - General Westmoreland is replaced as U.S. commander in Vietnam by General Creighton W. Abrams.

July 1, 1968 - The Phoenix program is established to crush the secret Viet Cong infrastructure (VCI) in South Vietnam. The VCI, estimated at up to 70,000 Communist guerrillas, has been

responsible for a long-standing campaign of terror against Americans, South Vietnamese government officials, village leaders and innocent civilians.

However, the Phoenix program, which is controlled through CORDS under the direction of Robert Komer, generates huge controversy in America concerning numerous alleged assassinations of suspected Viet Cong operatives by South Vietnamese trained by the U.S. The controversy, generated in part through North Vietnamese propaganda, eventually results in Congressional hearings. Testifying in 1971 before Congress, Komer's successor William E. Colby states, "The Phoenix program was not a program of assassination. The Phoenix program was a part of the overall pacification program." Colby admits that 20,587 Viet Cong had been killed "mostly in combat situations...by regular or paramilitary forces."

July 3, 1968 - Three American prisoners of war are released by Hanoi.

July 19, 1968 - President Johnson and South Vietnam's President Thieu meet in Hawaii.

August 8, 1968 - Richard M. Nixon is chosen as the Republican presidential candidate and promises "an honorable end to the war in Vietnam."

August 28, 1968 - During the Democratic national convention in Chicago, 10,000 anti-war protesters gather on downtown streets and are then confronted by 26,000 police and national guardsmen. The brutal crackdown is covered live on network TV. 800 demonstrators are injured.

The United States is now experiencing a level of social unrest unseen since the American Civil War era, a hundred years earlier. There have been 221 student protests at 101 colleges and universities thus far in 1968.

September 30, 1968 - The 900th U.S. aircraft is shot down over North Vietnam.

October 1968 - Operation Sealord begins the largest combined naval operation of the entire war as over 1200 U.S. Navy and South Vietnamese Navy gunboats and warships target NVA supply lines extending from Cambodia into the Mekong Delta. NVA supply camps in the Delta and along other waterways are also successfully disrupted during the two-year operation.

October 21, 1968 - The U.S. releases 14 North Vietnamese POWs.

October 27, 1968 - In London, 50,000 protest the war.

October 31, 1968 - Operation Rolling Thunder ends as President Johnson announces a complete halt of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam in the hope of restarting the peace talks.

Throughout the three and a half year bombing campaign, the U.S. dropped a million tons of bombs on North Vietnam, the equivalent of 800 tons per day, with little actual success in halting the flow of soldiers and supplies into the South or in damaging North Vietnamese morale. In fact, the opposite has occurred as the North Vietnamese have patriotically rallied around their

Communist leaders as a result of the onslaught. By now, many towns south of Hanoi have been leveled with a U.S. estimate of 52,000 civilian deaths.

During Rolling Thunder, North Vietnam's sophisticated, Soviet-supplied air defense system managed to shoot down 922 U.S. aircraft during 2380 sorties flown by B-52 bombers and over 300,000 sorties by U.S. Navy and Air Force fighter-bombers.

November 1968 - William E. Colby replaces Robert Komer as head of CORDS.

November 5, 1968 - Republican Richard M. Nixon narrowly defeats Democrat Hubert Humphrey in the U.S. presidential election.

November 27, 1968 - President-elect Nixon asks Harvard professor Henry Kissinger to be his National Security Advisor. Kissinger accepts.

By year's end, U.S. troop levels reached 495,000 with 30,000 American deaths to date. In 1968, over a thousand a month were killed. An estimated 150,000 soldiers from North Vietnam infiltrated the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail in 1968. Although the U.S. conducted 200 air strikes each day against the trail in late 1968, up to 10,000 NVA supply trucks are en route at any given time.