

## The War Lost

In the spring of 1971, I began to appreciate a new factor in the war - the anti-war movement in the United States. It had already erupted earlier, of course, over the Cambodian incursion in 1970, for example, but this seemed only a faraway and misguided protest against what on the ground was a clearly justified effort to clean out the Communist base areas along the frontier with South Vietnam which the Communists used for logistics depots, command centers, refuges from the pressures of the pacification campaign which had made their target areas inhospitable and launch pads for units to slip into Vietnam on attack missions. Surely a nation which had cleaned out the lairs of the Barbary Coast pirates could understand the need to do the same when its troops and its allies were continually assaulted and <sup>by their enemies</sup> rocketed from ~~Cambodia~~ Cambodia. Certainly there was no harm to Cambodians, as the regions involved in the operations were essentially unoccupied jungle until the North Vietnamese built their bases. In fact, the Cambodian government privately welcomed the actions ~~which~~ which cleared their territory of unwelcome occupants, as Prince Sihanouk has since stated. His overthrow was directly related to this problem but not in the sense of encouragement from the Americans or the Vietnamese. He had travelled to Peking and Moscow in an attempt to induce these capitals to pressure the North Vietnamese, ~~who~~ the receiver of their military assistance, to leave his country, and had failed, whereupon his generals decided that they would remove him and take on the job themselves. By doing so, of course, they stimulated the Communists to attack them, which they had not done ~~in any~~ ~~degree~~ while they benefitted from a permissive government in Phnom Penh, ~~and~~ The Cambodian content of that attack was the so-called Khmer Rouge, whose <sup>later</sup> brutish method of revolutionizing the social structure of Cambodia <sup>to</sup> ~~was~~ eliminate its French trained elite was to murder or starve approximately two million of Cambodia's seven million population. The Communists in North Vietnam in

1954 and 1955 killed some 50,000 such elite (~~the~~ "landlords") in mob trials ~~and~~ ~~and~~ ~~and~~ (most of the old elite escaping to South Vietnam). <sup>Communist</sup> China had similarly held "people's courts" <sup>after its 1949 victory over the Nationalists there.</sup> and eliminated perhaps a million. But the scale of the Khmer Rouge atrocity was a shock to the world when it finally leaked out of the borders of the unhappy land. In ~~the~~ the early 1970's, however, this prospect was unperceived by the anti-war activists who saw only American and South Vietnamese<sup>s</sup> fault<sup>s</sup> in Indochina.

I experienced a bit of the intensity when I was asked to ~~me~~ return to Washington to testify about ~~the~~ our assistance to refugees before <sup>on Refug</sup> Senator Edward Kennedy's Subcommittee. ~~A~~ group of anti-war veterans in beards and camouflage uniforms in the back of the hearing room ~~the~~ hooted denunciations of me as lying or supporting an American policy of genocide. <sup>This</sup> ~~A~~ did not particularly bother me, especially as Kennedy made it clear that he insisted on order at his hearing. What was unnerving was the surreal atmosphere of discussing American and Vietnamese actions as though there were no enemy at all. Our preoccupation Vietnam with the care and resettlement of refugees was almost ignored as we discussed the small scope of Vietnam's <sup>civilian</sup> social welfare program, which we had been able to step up in the past year but which could hardly match Massachusetts'. We got into a theological discussion of whether ~~the~~ populations should ever be relocated into secure areas so they would not be involved in our battles with North Vietnamese forces. isolated settlements When I tried to stress President Thieu's policy of moving security to the people rather than the people to security wherever possible and his requirement that relocation only be conducted with high level approval and with proper preparation, a few ~~cases~~ ~~cases~~ inadequate handling were thrown up at me. ~~and~~ <sup>my</sup> reference to the fact that many nations <sup>e.g.,</sup> had relocated population in wartime situations (the Japanese-Americans from California <sup>the action.</sup> <sup>an</sup> Chinese was set aside as not justifying ~~the~~ <sup>an</sup> 82 mm/mortar mortar fin I had picked up in one refugee camp in the highlands, but I decided that displaying it would just be contentious ~~and~~ not have any effect on the overall atmosphere, and decrease rather than increase the impression I was trying to project that the situation was by no means perfect but that the Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam were working on it

and fully understood its moral dimensions. ~~My approach~~ My approach seemed to pay off ~~in~~ to a degree, when Kennedy summed up saying that I had done an excellent job in defending an indefensible policy. But the gulf between the reality of making progress in meeting the myriad ~~problems~~ problems in Vietnam and the American insistence on immediate perfection still <sup>pers</sup>isted, and everything bad was blamed on American and South Vietnamese actions. ~~INSERT~~

INSERT

At the end of June 1971 I returned from Vietnam to Washington for the last time. My daughter Catherine, to whom this book is dedicated, was extremely sick psychiatrically and my place was clearly here to help with her. ~~Some critics have alleged~~ and ~~her~~ later death in 1973 that her sickness was a protest against my work in Vietnam and particularly my direction of the Phoenix program. I know this to be untrue, as she was invariably supportive of my efforts on behalf of Vietnam, where she was perhaps happiest during her childhood. The letter to the Washington Post I quote in my dedication reveals her understanding of Vietnamese life and her rejection of those Americans who did not respect the Vietnamese. After my return she had a series of good and bad periods but her epilepsy and her depression gradually slipped into anorexia which finally took her <sup>life in 1973,</sup> despite the efforts of the medical experts in Washington and at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. <sup>1 of</sup> My return in 1971 <sup>fully</sup> opened my eyes to the ~~intensity~~ intensity and even virulence of the antiwar movement. In July the House of Representatives Committee on Government Operations decided to hold hearings on our assistance program in Vietnam and I took the full impact of the new atmosphere. Two Members had staked out the Phoenix program for major <sup>attack</sup> ~~attack~~, although the Committee began on the somewhat mundane subject of accountings for the budgets devoted to the CORDS effort. A General Accounting Office team had recently visited Vietnam to survey the subject and had been startled at my statement that I did not know in dollar terms what my program cost. Being an intelligent team they soon understood that I did know about funds we actually managed in the field <sup>as</sup> ~~the~~ the cost of the programs ~~of~~ of the agencies which supported our efforts in the countryside frequently included the costs of weapons written off when shipped from the United States and delivered to the Vietnamese

On 13 June more fuel was added to the fire against our efforts in Vietnam by the beginning of the publication of the so-called Pentagon Papers, and then their full release by the Supreme Court over the Nixon Government's objections. I had no real problem with their accuracy but ~~was~~<sup>did</sup> with their scope, as their coverage ended in May 1968 just when CORDS had begun its work. They thus focussed on the Diem period and his overthrow, and the revolving door governments which followed him, the major American ~~military~~ military build up, and the dramatic Communist Tet offensive. While their description of the formation of CORDS ended on a hopeful note that <sup>"at last</sup> the Mission was better run and better organized than it ever had been before, and this fact may in time lead to a more efficient and successful effort", their main effect on the public was once again to call attention to the confused and ineffective conduct of the war <sup>the</sup> prior to period of success which followed 1968, and reinforce the feelings of futility which had become fixed about Vietnam.

Government for distribution to the territorial forces in the field <sup>as well as</sup> ~~and~~ assistance programs ~~of our government~~ <sup>were</sup> which ~~was~~ <sup>an</sup> handled by ~~that~~ <sup>the United</sup> agency in ~~Vietnam~~ <sup>States and</sup> at the national level and by CORDS <sup>Field</sup> at the rural level. They even accepted my statement that we had been putting our efforts into fighting the war rather than accounting, but extracted my concession that things were going well enough that it was appropriate for us to put some attention ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> better accounting and financial controls. <sup>FF</sup> The Committee then huffed and puffed a bit about this problem and/repeated much of Senator Kennedy's concern over refugees and the civilian victims of the war. The two Congressmen bored ~~in~~ <sup>how</sup> on Phoenix. One, Paul McCloskey of California, had been to Vietnam and was escorted around by one of the best of the CORDS officers, Frank Scotton of the Information Agency on detail ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> CORDS, who spoke Vietnamese fluently and who operated under my instruction to him to let the Congressman see anything he wanted to, to tell him the truth even if ~~hurt~~ <sup>hurt</sup> but to ~~try~~ <sup>try</sup> to give him some sense of ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> proportion and the reality in which the war existed. He was having little of that, however, and focussed on nuggets he could use to denounce the program. The other, Ogden Reid of New York, concentrated on whether Phoenix met the standards <sup>d</sup> of American constitutional due process, with right to counsel, court procedures, etc. Since my constitutional law studies were at least as good as his (we both graduated from Columbia University Law School), I frankly said that they did not, but that we were doing all we could to improve the procedures under which this necessary program of the war ~~was~~ would be carried out, and were improving the treatment of detainees over what ~~was~~ had been the practices of the past. I arranged a legal opinion from the Legal Counsel's office of the Department of State that the program did not transgress the requirements of the Geneva Conventions, which they did not, and in fact exceeded in terms of decency, while I said that they did not meet my, or ~~the~~ American constitutional standards of what we would expect to be applied to American citizens. The fact that the detention procedures, with the exception of right to counsel (not a normality in a former colonial nation with 200-odd lawyers), were almost the same as those contained in United States law (the McCarran Act of 1950) for application in an

"internal security emergency" and with those applied in such other nations as Northern Ireland, India and even by Abraham Lincoln cut little ice with ~~some~~ Congressman Reid. ~~Congressman Reid asked me to make a statement to the committee on the Phoenix program. I did so.~~

~~But the most significant aspect of the~~ But the most significant aspect of the ~~my 1970 testimony~~ <sup>on</sup> my 1970 testimony took some time to mature. In my presentation I had updated the numbers of members of the Communist apparatus who had been captured, taken ~~amnesty~~ or been killed and ~~explained~~ explained that the last group were primarily killed in military actions. Again I ~~did~~ <sup>did</sup> not deny that some wrongful deaths had occurred, but contended that the purpose, <sup>y</sup> and effect, of the Phoenix program had been to bring better order into an activity which had certainly been wild in the mid-1960's but was a necessary part of the war effort against an enemy which operated secretly to impress its control over the population. The ~~hardest~~ aspect of the hearing was to try to bring my questioners around to the fundamental fact that a war was going on in South Vietnam, as every fact or statistic I cited was used against me and the government of South Vietnam to prove that a repressive regime was brutalizing its citizens. ~~My~~ My testimony was followed a day or so later by an account by a former military officer who drew the most sensational and bloody picture of the Phoenix program from his experience with military intelligence in the heavily militarized area of DaNang, although it was clear from his description of his assignment and the dates of his service that he had not been a Phoenix advisor nor ~~in Vietnam beyond November 1969~~ in Vietnam beyond November 1969 when it really began to work. The overall result of the hearing was to write in concrete one of the more repulsive, but flatly wrong, pictures of the Vietnam war, that the Phoenix program had assassinated some 20,000 ~~Vietnamese~~ Vietnamese, <sup>This was</sup> despite my attempts, ~~and the Congress~~ <sup>to clarify</sup> ~~that the deaths involved were mostly during military actions and~~ <sup>had</sup> identified on the battlefield ~~as~~ after the fight as known members of the Communist apparatus. My problem was that I could not say that no wrongful death had ever occurred so that the sensational item for the press was my admission that these ~~had~~ happened. ~~The~~ The fact that the program was reducing them was lost in the impression of wrongful

death. The fact that the figures were <sup>only</sup> supplemental to those I had reported during my testimony to Senator Fulbright in early 1970, and not different in proportion, was more a mark of the different atmosphere which had grown around the question of Vietnam than of the figures themselves. I was moved to consider the words of the moralist that if one is not concerned with the death of <sup>each</sup> a single individual one is not concerned with the death of any, but rather with the political capital which can be made of it. The really big day followed, however, when two former soldiers testified in ~~test~~ graphic detail on abuses of prisoners, ~~and~~ threats to throw inter<sup>state</sup>fergees from helicopters and ~~and~~ <sup>(nonsense)</sup>. ~~that~~ that no <sup>t</sup>interogee had survived his questioning. This was all ~~inter~~ related to the Phoenix program and became the basis for ~~later~~ later denunciations and charges about it. The fact was, however, that neither of the <sup>witnesses</sup> was in the Phoenix program. They were members of American military intelligence units working with the American forces, not the Vietnamese Phoenix program nor its American advisory team. ~~One~~ One was in Vietnam from December 1968 to May 1969, the other ~~from~~ <sup>to</sup> September 1967 to December 196<sup>8</sup>. As we saw above, the program was essentially launched in July 1968 and had hardly taken form prior to the Accelerated Pacification Program of November 1968 through January 1969. The ~~men~~ Congressmen did not pick up these key facts about their witness which any attorney would have caught as affecting their credibility, but wallowed in the accounts of bloody misdeeds, as the ~~press~~ media recorded it all. ~~Many~~ <sup>H</sup> Over a year after this dramatic testimony, the Committee submitted its report on it, which was more significant for what it did not say than for what it did, so it received practically no media coverage. The sole recommendation dealing with the Phoenix testimony was that the Secretary of Defense should investigate the allegations of the second witness of crimes committed by U.S. military personnel against civilians. The committee also recorded its concern over the problems of the Phoenix program about which I had testified and ~~about~~ which our advisory teams were working to overcome. But no recommendation issued from the committee that the program or its American support should be stopped. ~~The~~ The committee and its staff apparently concluded on a conscientious review of the

that full record ~~the~~ sensational allegations of the two witnesses did not really stand up/ as an indictment of the ~~whole~~ program, although some of the incidents may have happened and should be prosecuted. But this is a rather subtle conclusion to be drawn from the report, and certainly attracted no attention from the media or the anti-war movement, which were content to continue to repeat the sweeping ~~allegation~~ charges of the two soldier witnesses/ and apply them to Phoenix as a whole. My main conclusion from the exercise was a full appreciation of how antagonistic to America's involvement in Vietnam, and even to ~~the~~ South Vietnam ~~the~~ generally the anti-war movement had become, and how this was affecting the ~~human~~ political atmosphere in Washington and the nation as a whole.

In this account of the Vietnam war, I have omitted any discussion of the various diplomatic efforts which were made to settle it. This was not from inadvertence nor ~~from~~ the fact that <sup>the subject</sup> ~~it~~ never really fell within my responsibilities either in Vietnam or in Washington. It rather reflects my belief then and now that it was largely irrelevant to the struggle in the countryside. I was convinced that the North Vietnamese Communist leadership was determined to conquer South Vietnam and would accept nothing less than victory in any negotiations which might take place. They had certainly given full evidence of their determination to prosecute the war, whatever the casualties on the battlefield; I was certain that they would not be turned from their objectives by diplomatic persuasion. At one stage the political leaders of the United States and the diplomats thought that approached to the Soviet Union could produce pressures on the North Vietnamese to get them to accept some compromise solution. My own view was that this not only did not give sufficient weight to North Vietnamese determination, it missed the most interesting of the balancing acts which occurred during the Vietnam conflict : the exquisite skill of the Vietnamese <sup>in</sup> ~~to~~ manipulate <sup>ing</sup> their Soviet and Chinese sources of supply to extract the maximum from each by challenging each to demonstrate their credentials as fellow Communists in hard terms against the other, locked as they were in rivalry for leadership of the Communist cause world wide between Mao's

~~Cultural~~ Cultural Revolution and Moscow's revisionism. There were those in CIA who considered this ideological dispute a charade to confuse the West and advance the cause of Communism, but I accepted it at face value as reflective of a theological dispute and the national antagonisms which had characterized Russian and Chinese relations for centuries. The North Vietnamese saw in the dispute a chance to play each <sup>supporter</sup> off against the other and derived a rich reward in military hardware therefrom. The one thing that seemed obvious to me was that <sup>in this situation</sup> the Soviets did not have the influence over the North Vietnamese to halt their operations against South Vietnam. With the frustrations Americans suffered trying to make the South Vietnamese conform to ~~their~~ <sup>American</sup> ideas of what was good for them, I saw little chance that the Soviets could control their far more <sup>tough-minded</sup> ~~ambitious~~ and determined cousins in the North. Thus I paid slight attention to the various secret probes and intermediaries, or the direct approaches to Moscow, which diverted high level concentration <sup>from</sup> ~~of~~ the war in the South during the <sup>mid-</sup>1960's. Even when formal ~~direct~~ negotiations began in Paris in 1968, ~~and were intended to include the both sides of the South Vietnamese situation~~, it was plain that no compromise solution was possible through ~~any~~ diplomatic channels. The North Vietnamese attitude was perhaps best expressed by their suggestion <sup>at one point</sup> ~~that~~ the principal obstacle to a "solution" to the impasse which persisted between the parties could be removed by a simple act of <sup>their</sup> assassinating President Thieu, perhaps a fair comment in view of the history of how the American government had treated his predecessor, President Diem, when he failed to follow American direction.

But there was an unseen seat at the negotiating table which the North Vietnamese depended upon to split the American delegation from its South Vietnamese negotiating partner. This seat was occupied by the American anti-war movement, which the North Vietnamese assiduously courted in contacts in Europe, visits to Hanoi and appeals to liberal sympathy with anti-colonialism. This was immensely assisted by the American media's full access to South Vietnam and its essential ~~absence~~ <sup>from</sup> inability to ~~penetrate~~ <sup>penetrate</sup> North Vietnam's tight security screen, ~~which thus provided~~ thus providing the American public a

rich diet of stories of the failures and imperfections of the South Vietnamese regime and little or nothing <sup>about</sup> its opponents beyond the image they wished others to see. The North counted on the pressures the anti-war movement would put on the American government to separate it from its South Vietnamese ally and seek a separate arrangement to bring American participation in their war to an end, in the same way the French government in 19<sup>54</sup> had withdrawn from Vietnam and left the South to its ~~own~~ fate. And while public interest in Vietnam declined with the withdrawal of American troops and the reduction of American casualties, ~~the~~ prevailing liberal and anti-war opinion shifted from an emphasis on halting American military action to ~~halting any American military support for the United States government of South Vietnam~~ settling the Vietnam conflict by recognition of the Communist claims for participation in South Vietnam's government in order to achieve "peace". ~~The negotiating process with the North began in 1968 and in 1972~~

These pressures rested especially on President Richard Nixon and his National Security Assistant Henry Kissinger. Nixon faced the election campaign in 1972 opposed by George McGovern's flat call for and end to all American involvement <sup>in</sup> and ~~their~~ support of ~~the~~ South Vietnam. Kissinger realized that the only possible answer to that challenge was to bring about a peace agreement, and he searched insistently for a formula which would satisfy the North Vietnamese and yet allow ~~the~~ President Nixon to assert that he had achieved an honorable settlement. The North Vietnamese had an additional card to play in the persons of the American military captives held in North Vietnam. Their captors ~~deliberately~~ cynically exploited them at the same time they abused them, parading them before anti-war activists like Jane Fonda in order <sup>spectacular</sup> to add this public pressure on President Nixon to yield to their demands. <sup>Their own</sup> courage and discipline under pressure were hardly recognized by a nation which had decided that what they had done in the service of their country was <sup>and that</sup> the <sup>show</sup> flawed presence in <sup>as a</sup> <sup>not pr</sup> ~~the~~ South Vietnam which they had lost to ~~the~~ Thieu's pacification campaigns, and in the neighboring border regions of Laos and Cambodia. Thieu saw this as an impossible outcome, as he fully realized that a peace agreement would only mean one thing - that the United States would end its involvement and support of South Vietnam while the North Vietnamese

would return to the attack as soon as the situation seemed propitious. North Vietnam's assistance from its Soviet and Chinese allies would certainly continue, but America's to South Vietnam would as certainly dry up. Thieu thus resolutely refused to accept a continued North Vietnamese presence in the South. Kissinger's accomplishment in the negotiations of <sup>finally</sup> obtaining North Vietnam's acceptance of the authority of the Thieu government as an equal ~~partner~~ to the Communist provisional government in South Vietnam was of no value to Thieu, who knew that the war would resume as soon as the Americans had been removed from the scene, and that the balance of forces without the Americans would certainly favor the Communists and their allies. ~~Thieu's differences with the Communists~~ Kissinger was seeking the best possible compromise with the Communists, trading their acceptance of a continued role for the Thieu government for permitting them to remain in South Vietnam, <sup>albeit with a promise they would stop further infiltration.</sup> He asserts in his White House Years that he assumed that the South Vietnamese Army with American support could handle minor violations of the agreement and that the United States would return to ~~their aid~~ their aid against major ones in the way it had done in the spring of 1972.

Kissinger recounts the full story of the final negotiations in great detail. He first had to overcome Thieu's resistance to allowing the North Vietnamese to remain in the South, which he had conceded, <sup>by</sup> ~~in return for the North Vietnamese acceptance of the continued authority of the Thieu regime~~ <sup>to be arranged in theory by the</sup> asserting that later elections <sup>could gauge</sup> the balance between the two rival authorities. Vietnamese parties Kissinger's problem was that the conditions he had obtained in his secret bargaining with the North Vietnamese were better from the viewpoint of the South than <sup>the</sup> ones Thieu had previously authorized him to offer, so that Kissinger knew that his political opponents in the United States would repudiate him if he now did not secure Thieu's agreement to the settlement. Thieu's problem was that he had indeed given Kissinger such assurances, but had done it when the prospect of a favorable outcome of the negotiations through Hanoi's acceptance of ~~him~~ a future for Thieu's government seemed remote. <sup>because of the concessions Kissinger had extracted from the North</sup> Now that it appeared imminent ~~however~~, it was as it was to the North clear to Thieu that any agreement which left the North in the South would only mean a

resumption of the war without American support, with defeat almost a certainty. He thus dug in his heels and used every ~~maneuver~~ stratagem possible to avoid agreement with Kissinger's program. While President Nixon was clear that Kissinger's negotiations should not be affected by the forthcoming presidential elections, both of them were in fact pressed by the clear evaporation of American public and Congressional support for Vietnam and were anxious to extract a peace agreement to forestall a unilateral suspension of American assistance. The North Vietnamese were equally anxious for an agreement to fix American withdrawal, and made a series of concessions such as agreeing to withdraw from Laos and Cambodia to obtain it. Thus the two actual negotiators had come to agreement, but were unable to complete it because Thieu was resisting. Even the promise of a pre-truce massive infusion of military supplies to South Vietnam which could then under the agreement be replaced on a one for one basis, did not overcome Thieu's resistance. He judged that the key question was continued American will and involvement, which he correctly judged would melt away, rather than the ~~substance~~ words on the paper of the agreement. Thus he reacted with a combination of hysterical rudeness to the American envoys, tears, accusations that the United States was planning a coup to overthrow him and intransigent rejection of the carefully constructed agreement, despite President Nixon's strongly worded expressions that American support would be forthcoming if the agreement was violated, <sup>but</sup> ~~and~~ that he would be unable to maintain American support if the agreement were not signed. The impasse with Thieu became obvious to the North Vietnamese, who then decided that they would hold up the agreement <sup>to</sup> get better terms than they had already agreed to. ~~The~~ <sup>It</sup> situation was only opened ~~by~~ <sup>to</sup> by a forceful thrust against both Vietnamese parties. The North Vietnamese were subjected to a powerful bombing campaign at President Nixon's express order to make it clear to them that this was ~~a~~ different ~~sort of~~ than the delicately applied bombing campaigns which had characterized the 1960's. Despite its force, however, and in contrast to the hysterical opposition it aroused among the anti-war factions in the United States, it was both precise and effective. The North Vietnamese massively publicized the destruction

of a hospital in Hanoi, but omitted to report that it was across the street from the railway yards. They made a mistake in announcing the death toll ~~number~~ as 1300 to 1600, which to anyone familiar with World War II casualties indicated clearly that the ~~operation~~ <sup>attack</sup> had been no "carpet bombing". And it worked. The North Vietnamese quickly requested a resumption of the negotiations they had stalled, with a view to coming to a final peace treaty along the lines of the concessions they had made. <sup>7</sup> President Nixon's forcefulness was equally effective with President Thieu and the South Vietnamese. To convince him that the Christmas bombing did not reflect any change in ~~the~~ <sup>the U.S.</sup> determination to make an agreement with the North Vietnamese along the lines that had been negotiated Nixon advised Thieu that "you must decide now whether you desire to continue our alliance or whether you want me to seek a settlement with the enemy which serves U.S. interests alone". Thieu gave a response which withdrew some of his objections but said that he could not "accept" the continued presence of North Vietnamese troops in the South, a ~~which~~ formulation which did not stop the Americans from the negotiations but kept Thieu's conscience clear that he had not acquiesced in what he accurately predicted would be the provision which ~~assured~~ would lead to the defeat of his country. Nixon then supplemented his forceful letter to Thieu with another that offered his "assurance of continued assistance in the post-~~war~~/settlement period and that we (the U.S.) will respond with full force should the settlement be violated by North Vietnam". But when the final agreement had been <sup>settled</sup> ~~submitted~~ in Paris and was taken to Saigon for Thieu's agreement, it was accompanied by a Nixon letter which said that he would sign the agreement, "if necessary, alone. In that case I shall have to explain publicly that your Government obstructs peace. The result will be an inevitable and immediate termination of U.S. economic and military assistance". <sup>Despite</sup> ~~in~~ a flurry of last minute attempts to salvage something for his country, Thieu accepted the American decision and the die was cast for "peace" in Vietnam.

During this period, I had little connection with the ~~questions of the~~ negotiation. My job was that of Executive Director of CIA, responsible under Director Richard Helms

and Deputy Director General ~~William~~ Vernon Walters for management problems in the Agency, but essentially cut out of the substantive questions it dealt with. But my long involvement with Vietnam did not allow me to turn it off entirely, and I followed the intelligence reports on what was happening there and ~~to~~ in Paris with particular attention. What I saw did not alter my basic belief that South Vietnam would have to fight for its continued existence, and that United States support was a critical factor in whether it would be able to sustain itself. Certainly, South Vietnam had proved that it could sustain itself with American logistic and strategic support, but it was plain that it was still vulnerable if the Americans abandoned it to its own devices. And it was clear that the political contest had been won - the Communists offered no attraction whatsoever to the Vietnamese people and the Thieu government had designed a program of economic and political improvement which meant a better life for the Vietnamese people, despite foreign and American complaints that authoritarianism and corruption still made its system far from ideal - or even what Americans insisted should be the ~~perfect~~ norm.

The euphoria which greeted the return of the brave men who had endured Hanoi's imprisonment seized the national consciousness, and the Vietnamese sank into oblivion. In Vietnam the Northerners set up a liaison mission in Saigon which the South Vietnamese in effect sealed off. The North Vietnamese commenced the construction of a network of roads through the Annamite mountain chain around the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Vietnam down to the area just north of Saigon which had been ~~the~~ one of the principal points of attack during the 1972 Spring Offensive. A four power international commission was established to monitor compliance with the peace treaty, and soon fell into the same paralysis which had marked its predecessor after the 1954 Geneva settlement on it. Poland and Hungary, as the Communist nations/could never see any violations by the North Vietnamese and the Northerners ignored the requirements for reporting to the Commission. Both North and South made last minute efforts to extend their areas of control as the peace treaty went into effect, an exercise in which the South Vietnamese Army acquitted itself well

essentially confining the Northerners to the remote and isolated mountain and border areas without population of any substantial numbers and on their side regaining control over the Northernmost city and province of Quang Tri which had been taken by the North Vietnamese in the 1972 Spring Offensive.

The one aspect of the Peace Treaty which was complied with was the American commitment. Within the prescribed sixty days the last American military left Vietnam, leaving only a Defense Attache's office and a few Marine guards at the American Embassy in Saigon. These were supplemented by some 8500 American civilians, but most of these were ~~humanitarian~~ logistics and ~~engineering~~ and technical personnel retained to maintain the technology of the South Vietnamese military and civil structures. The United States did continue bombing support of Cambodia against the continued assaults of Pol Pot's Communist forces which had not been included in the Peace Treaty and which the North Vietnamese had indicated that they could not control. In the last days ~~before~~<sup>e</sup> before the treaty came into effect, the Americans ~~had~~ surged to place in Vietnam large quantities of military equipment to give the South Vietnamese a stock for the future and a basis for replacements item by item in the future as authorized in the treaty. But <sup>implementation of this program</sup> ~~this~~ of course depended upon continued American will to do so, in the form of Congressional appropriations funding the future equipment.

~~This~~ This of course proved to be wanting. The ~~Nixon~~ administration bravely tried to continue a healthy level of aid to South Vietnam within the limits allowed by the treaty, only to face rising resistance to continued American involvement in Indochina. The Senate and the House of Representatives in June 1973 passed bills to bar any funds <sup>activities</sup> for U.S. military ~~involvement~~ in Indochina and were only persuaded to delay the cutoff date until 15 August by Administration urgings that American support to Cambodia continue to allow pressure for a cease fire and negotiations there. In October 1973, the Congress passed the War Powers Resolution and in November overrode President Nixon's veto of it, limiting to sixty days the ~~Nixon~~ President's power to commit American force abroad without specific Congressional approval, a clear limitation on President Nixon's

power to carry out his pledge to President Thieu to "respond with full force" to North Vietnamese violations of the peace treaty. The rate of decline of American support in South Vietnam almost symbiotically matched the increase of North Vietnam's build up with weaponry provided by the Soviet Union in South Vietnam and in its adjacent Cambodian and Laotian border areas. By October 1973, the North Vietnamese had increased their forces through infiltration by some 70,000 men and hundreds of tanks, artillery and anti-aircraft weaponry, plus building an all weather road to the region near Saigon. They also were well on their way to producing an oil pipeline on the same route to provide the fuel for the modernized military forces they were assembling in South Vietnam. To those of us in CIA's headquarters in Langley who followed these intelligence reports and photographs from the sky, their intentions were crystal clear, to resume the assault on South Vietnam at whatever time they deemed auspicious, but this time by an overpowering military attack rather than the laborious peoples' war tactics which the South had so clearly defeated. By this time in mid 1973 it was my duty as the new Director of Central Intelligence, to brief the Congress and to keep the executive branch up to date on developments in Vietnam despite the competing attention of the other trouble spots in the world such as the Yom Kippur war in the Middle East. I felt the responsibility about Vietnam particularly keenly, however, as I had the feeling that President Nixon had selected me for the Director's post because of what he and Alexander Haig had heard of what I had done in Vietnam in the pacification program. But my briefings fell on very deaf ears, as the Congress was far more interested in reducing American involvement abroad. The proof of the pudding lay in the eating, as American assistance to Vietnam declined over the years 1973, 1974 and for 1975. The \$2.8 billion military aid to South Vietnam for 1973 which included the last minute surge of supplies before the peace treaty was cut by Congress to \$700 million for 1974 and to \$300 million for 1975. A mark of the nation's attitude in 1973 was that

President Nixon in April 1973 could only invite ~~the~~ President Thieu, our ally in the long Vietnam War, ~~who~~ to visit him in San Clemente, ~~and the nation's capital in~~ <sup>in a normal state</sup> ~~Washington~~ because of the political hostility he would have aroused ~~there~~ vis.

The South Vietnamese were fully aware of this erosion of American support for their continued struggle against the growing force from the North, and it had ~~the~~ clear effects on their morale and hopes for the future. Commanders were frank in their statements to old American friends and visitors that they had real doubts whether their troops could be relied upon to fight off another invasion after the obvious departure of the Americans. President Thieu ~~gradually~~ arrested the gradual growth of democratic institutions when he suspended elections at the hamlet ~~and village~~ levels ~~and~~ replaced them with appointees, justified by the continuing Communist threat. He also established a Democracy Party and effectively erased others, providing the forms but not the reality of political life. The government bureaucracy filled the key positions of the new party, excluding new blood from the rural and lower classes, in a reprise of Ngo Dinh Diem's National Revolutionary Movement, to present a facade of political participation without its reality. Faced with declining American support, the Army began husbanding its supplies, reducing its allocations of ammunition ~~and~~ and fuel for offensive operations against ~~the~~ Communist units in the mountain and jungle areas and limiting ~~itself~~ to static defensive tactics. The territorial ~~forces~~ and the self-defense forces saw their firepower reduced and the general sense of initiative on behalf of extending local security replaced by a wary ~~and cautious~~ <sup>daily</sup> limitation of risk. Various indicators such as the allocation of artillery/rates of fire/ <sup>or helicopter and air sorties</sup> reflected this increasingly cautious approach. The Vietnamese Army, trained in American weaponry and tactics, was adjusting to ~~the gradual~~ being deprived of the American logistics which were essential to the lessons it had been taught. <sup>H</sup> ~~The~~ The political initiative which had characterized the period of Vietnamization and pacification with full American support and encouragement was ~~replaced~~ replaced by a reversion to a military dominated stress on mere administration. Thieu believed that the clear rise in Communist <sup>conventional</sup> military strength

left him no choice but to rely increasingly on his military chain of command ~~foundation~~ to meet the ~~The military, facing~~ obviously coming onslaught. ~~It, rather than the immediate~~ fight a last ditch battle, increasingly believed that it had been abandoned by ~~the American~~ <sup>the American</sup> mentor and supporter to wage a hopeless fight, and began to think of the survival of the ~~families~~ <sup>the</sup> families rather than a glorious sacrifice. But despite the decline in effectiveness of the security forces in the countryside, there was ~~somehow~~ <sup>no</sup> no concomitant rise in Communist presence or strength there. The rural population showed little or no inclination toward joining the Communist led "revolutionary" effort, and the Communists seemed to have put the peoples war strategy aside while they built up their conventional forces for frontal attack when the time was right.

An additional development ~~was a major~~ <sup>was to have a major</sup> impact on the American response to North Vietnamese violations of the peace treaty, <sup>ex CIA employee</sup> including Howard Hunt's scheme to discredit President Kennedy by rewriting his role in Watergate. As this tawdry tale unfolded, and included bits of the Vietnam story, it had its primary effect in further weakening the authority of President Nixon, and even of his successor Gerald Ford, to utilize ~~or~~ <sup>or</sup> American force or to mobilize ~~or~~ <sup>or</sup> other American support of South Vietnam. President Nixon's forced resignation <sup>in August 1974</sup> was the high water mark of Congressional power over the executive, and ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> the public's distrust of Presidential leadership over the years of the Vietnam War. It also revealed the fragility of President Nixon's <sup>personal</sup> pledge to react "with full force" to any major violation of the peace treaty by Hanoi.

By December 1974, it was clear that North Vietnam had massed an overpowering force on the borders of South Vietnam. The question was what it would do with it. This was discussed intensely in Hanoi and in Washington among intelligence analysts. ~~It~~ <sup>Curious</sup> Curious ~~that~~ both discussions came roughly to the same conclusion, that Hanoi would ~~make~~ <sup>make</sup> its main attack on South Vietnam ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup> 1976 to benefit from the pressure which would stem from the American presidential elections. In the meantime, however, it would launch preliminary attacks during the spring of 1975, to maintain the pressure on South Vietnam and ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> American public opinion. Of course, if a target of opportunity opened, Hanoi

would certainly exploit it and press as far as it could. To meet the new pressures, the Ford administration prepared a request for a supplemental Congressional appropriation of \$300 million ~~military~~ <sup>military</sup> assistance for South Vietnam, which was received by the Congress with undisguised hostility. ~~My~~ <sup>My</sup> briefings in support of it, pointing out the increase<sup>s</sup> in North Vietnamese force<sup>s</sup> in and around South Vietnam, ~~met~~ <sup>met</sup> little of no interest. I certainly could not put my full effort on Vietnam, however, as I found myself from Christmas 1974 almost totally engaged in defending the CIA from a massive assault by the Congress on it, based on various<sup>z</sup> instances over its 25 year history in which it had overstepped its proper bounds, but which were exaggerated and sensationalized to put its continued existence in jeopardy.

In January, the North Vietnamese strategy was initiated by a strong attack on the province of Phuoc Long some 75 miles North of Saigon. "Province" is something of an exaggeration to describe the area, as in truth it consisted of essentially empty jungled hills with a few isolated communities connected by thin dirt roads. President Diem had made it a province in order to force the government administration to pay some attention to it, and had resettled some North Vietnamese refugee communities there in order to build a defense against the expected North Vietnamese exploitation of this access to the Saigon area. But the Northerners selected it for their first attacks in 1975 to determine what the South Vietnamese - and American - reaction would be to this move as a harbinger of ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> reopening of formal hostilities/ despite the peace treaty. It was also conveniently <sup>ic<sup>n</sup></sup> adjacent to the supply depots and rest areas the Communists had built up at the end of their all-weather roads and pipeline from the North. ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> their test was successful. President Thieu decided that he could not risk or devote the necessary helicopter lift to react forcefully to the Communist attack, and it was apparent that the Americans would take no action. President Ford's request for supplemental assistance for South Vietnam attracted no greater Congressional attention or support than his report that the North had 289,000 troops in South Vietnam together with hundreds of tanks, heavy artillery and anti-aircraft weapons. The North

had attacked in 1972.

could escalate its attack with confidence that the Americans would not intervene and that Thieu would be forced to fight a "poor man's war" in the North Vietnamese phrase rather than the one the Americans had trained the Vietnamese Army for. Thus the leadership of North Vietnam prepared a large scale attack to take advantage of their new appreciation of the situation - that the South would not be supported by the American allies, would have major morale problems among its own troops and would be outgunned and overpowered by the heavy forces the North would deploy against them. But the North did not consider the coming encounter a piece of cake, as it realized that the South Vietnamese forces were still substantial and that ~~they~~ the North were essentially outsiders seeking to overwhelm a still resilient South Vietnam into which its efforts to penetrate with a subversive and guerrilla force had essentially failed. The way to victory would be by conventional military assault, not the hope of undermining the South through the peoples war strategy.

~~They~~ They launched the attack at approximately the same points on the border areas <sup>the border areas</sup>. This worked better than they could have dreamed. Tactical failures and mistakes caused local defeats for the South Vietnamese forces. The regional commander of the highlands gave totally inadequate orders to withdraw his forces from the exposed highlands pursuant to President Thieu's strategic instructions, and then left his subordinates without control to launch the forces - and their families - on a totally inadequate road system to handle them, so that they were completely bogged down and chopped up by the enemy forces. In the North, President Thieu countermanded his own order to use his <sup>airborne</sup> best troops first to resist the enemy onslaught, then to withdraw to meet the main attack in the South and then to defend the ancient capital of Hue. The result was a total collapse of the military resistance to the oncoming North Vietnamese forces in the North and the Central part of South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese followed their basic strategic plan to exploit the weaknesses which opened before them and the South Vietnamese forces melted before their attack into individuals seeking their own and their families' salvation. In Washington we in the National Security Council could only watch helplessly ~~as~~ as the intelligence assessments, which I presented, showed the steady advance of the North Vietnamese regular forces down the peninsula and indicated that

the disintegration of the South Vietnamese defenses was both imminent and certain. It reminded me forcefully of the collapse of France before the blitzkrieg of the Nazi divisions in 1940, when the inadequacy of the defensive forces not only foreordained their defeat but their ~~disintegration~~ fragmentation into individuals seeking ~~their~~ salvation, ~~South Vietnamese offering final resistance.~~ Nonetheless, to give them credit, there were individual commanders and whole units which offered a desperate last minute resistance to the superior enemy forces, such as the 18th Division at Xuan Loc just north of Saigon, whose identities in any long history of Vietnam should be accorded ~~the~~ recognition of the heroism they displayed against hopeless odds. ~~But~~ the comparison with France in had another referent point, the neutrality of the United States as it watched the ~~disintegration~~ final outcome of its involvement in Vietnam. ~~The~~ President Ford and his government were powerless to influence the outcome of the contest, despite its repudiation of the efforts and the investments the United States had made in supporting a free Vietnam, because of the rejection of the experience by the Congress and the people of the nation.

~~The last days of the South Vietnamese government were marked by the frantic efforts to salvage something from the imminent wreckage of a nation. Our CIA chief of station, Th~~

Polgar, who had been chosen for the job by reason of an exceptionally effective performance in several other stations (including an incident in which he had climbed aboard a hijacked plane and convinced the hijackers to surrender), came from a Hungarian family, and had struck up an acquaintance with the head of the local Hungarian delegation on the international commission which was supposed to monitor compliance with the peace treaty. This generated a flood of cables to and from Washington about whether the Hungarians could intervene with the North Vietnamese to cause them to accept a cease fire, ~~and~~ some non-violent way of ending the conflict. My own view, expressed in the

endless meetings which occupied Washington, was that there was little or no hope that these probes would be any more successful than the many efforts we had made to get the Soviet Union to reason the North Vietnamese into a settlement, especially as the balance of forces on the ground so clearly indicated that they would soon achieve the total victory they had sought so long and for which they had sacrificed so many of the people. I did intervene with a strong negative, however, at one suggestion that a settlement might be obtained if the United States would support a coup against President Thieu to replace him with someone more amenable to the Communists. I sent an immediate reply that we would have nothing to do with any such move. If South Vietnam was to fail so be it, but not with the ultimate indignity of a push from its American ally. We did not need to add a second Vietnamese president overthrown with American complicity.

There has been an intense debate over the evacuation of Vietnam, amid charges that many individuals who should have been helped to depart were abandoned, and that sensitive material was left behind to compromise those who had worked with the CIA and other American agencies. Certainly, many who should have been helped to depart did not but many others did. The collapse of a nation does not permit careful and meticulous planning for evacuation. The true test is how many escaped, either through their own efforts or as assisted by their allies. The numbers are impressive, some 130,000 Vietnamese and all the Americans escaped Hanoi's rule, ~~a considerably larger number than left France in its fall~~. As for documents, the Embassy and the CIA station spent considerable of their energies in the last days destroying documents which would have identified our sources among the enemy ranks, and we have not been treated to the show trials which would have shamed us for the plight of our secret friends. Great numbers of South Vietnamese were <sup>later</sup> sent to "reeducation" camps, but these were open members of the nationalist cause, <sup>or</sup> ~~not~~ sources betrayed by documents left behind in various Vietnamese offices, not American files, or CIA files. ~~Some of these evacuations evaded official orders, conducted either by individuals, some of whom returned in a voluntary manner.~~ The evacuation was supplemented by a number of private efforts by some officers and former officers who returned to Vietnam

on their own to help as much as they could, including several former CORDS officers such as Gage MacAfee, rounding up former Vietnamese colleagues and ensuring that they ~~were~~ were included in the airlift. One former CIA officer was not so lucky, Tucker Gougleman, who came by sea to the South coast only to be captured and later die in prison.

Finally, however, the end was clear, and near - the occupation of Saigon by the North Vietnamese forces. President Ford cut through any last minute hopes which Ambassador Graham Martin might have had to order the complete evacuation of the Embassy by 3:45 am on April 30th. Shortly before it, the CIA station chief sent me a message that he would soon terminate all communication so that the codes and equipment could be destroyed. He then added:

It has been a long and hard fight and we have lost. This experience unique in the history of the United States does not signal necessarily the demise of the United States as a world power. The severity of the defeat and the circumstances of it, however, would seem to call for a reassessment of the policies of niggardly half measures which have characterized much of our participation here despite the commitment of manpower and resources which were certainly generous. Those who fail to learn from history are forced to repeat it. Let us hope that we will not have another Vietnam experience and that we have learned our lesson. Saigon signing off.

In Washington I was aware that ~~these~~ communications with Saigon would soon end, and I thought it only appropriate to record an appropriate recognition of the CIA's effort there ~~over the years~~ over the years. So I sent a message with crossed the incoming one:

As we approach end of communication with Saigon, I would like to record the Agency's pride and satisfaction with the job its representatives did there, and no time during its twenty-odd-year history is this ~~more~~ more true than during these past few weeks. The courage, integrity, dedication and high competence the Agency displayed in a variety of situations over these years has been fully

matched and even surpassed by your performance during this difficult final phase. Thousands of Vietnamese owe their lives and future hopes to your efforts, your Government has profited immensely from the accuracy and breadth of your reporting and your country will one day learn with admiration of the way you represented its best instincts and ideals. Good luck and many thanks

~~Why?~~ This book has recounted the story. Now it is time to answer the key question: Why?

Soon afterwards the North Vietnamese entered Saigon and occupied its principal offices. But an NBC television crew caught one of the most significant pictures of the event. It filmed a huge North Vietnamese tank with its <sup>obscenely</sup> monstrous cannon as it broke open the main gate to the Presidential Palace. The people's war was over, ~~not~~ not by the work of a barefoot guerrilla but by the most conventional of military forces. The ultimate irony was that the people's war launched in 1959 had been defeated but the soldiers war, which the United States had insisted on fighting during the 1960's with massive military forces, was finally won by the enemy.