

Turning Point: The Vietnam War Blog Notes Part 1: America Goes to War (in Vietnam, referred to as the American War). The John Birch Society launched a recorded phone campaign (Scott Camil) towards defeating the "Communist world control conspiracy." The messages were sent via telephone to citizens all over the United States.

The decline in the "imperial presidency." For the first time, Americans clearly saw irrefutable evidence that their nation's leaders had repeatedly lied to them. The documentary creators consider the war in Vietnam as a major influence on the way our country is currently divided.

The early American perspective: everyone had to choose...totalitarianism vs. democracy.

President Kennedy believed in the threat of the Communist State, specifically, the USSR and the Republic of China. The Berlin Wall in 1961. Castro in Cuba...the Bay of Pigs. Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon recorded conversations extensively. The documentary filmmakers appealed to recorded covert conversations for comparison with what the public was officially told via news releases and press conferences. North Vietnam (The Democratic Republic of Vietnam?) had become a communist state supported by USSR/China and led by Ho Chi Minh. South Vietnam was led by Ngo Dinh Diem, a Catholic and dedicated anti-communist.

The North Vietnamese were already pursuing a war campaign, an insurrection in South Vietnam escalating in 1960-61. "Domino theory" in the West suggested that if South Vietnam fell, all of Southeast Asia would become communist, and San Francisco would be under threat in no time. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was considered an architect of the Vietnam War.

Project "Beef-Up" increased the number of military advisors in South Vietnam from 700 in 1961 to 16,000 by 1963. Forcing South Vietnamese troops into fire fights for training was not working. "Viet Cong" is derogatory, and so North Vietnam's military forces will be referred to as The Liberation Front.

When directly asked by the press, President Kennedy omitted information about aircraft and weapons being sent to Vietnam, and American military advisors leading tactical offensives. The American press in South Vietnam were heavily censored; all news stories had to go out through the mail, where censors would have access and control. So journalists got close to military action to get the story about what was really going on the ground, significantly beginning with Ap Bac. Casualties and five helicopters destroyed; advisors were obviously involved in combat--in direct contradiction to what American citizens were told. Military brass blatantly fabricated reports with a positive spin on them. Reporters like Peter Arnett published more accurate stories revealing the deception of politics in this process.

The United States heavily supported Diem, whose older brother was a Catholic archbishop. The South Vietnamese leader was discriminating against a prominent Buddhist presence in that country. Tran Le Xuan (Madame Nhu) became a spokesperson for Diem. Opposing Diem was not permitted; opponents were labeled "enemies of the state." Buddhists did not want a Catholic president. South Vietnamese leadership launched a campaign blatantly disrespecting Buddhist temples; then Buddhist leaders were killed, monks buried alive. Many Buddhists joined the Liberation Front. 1963 saw all-out war between Catholic leadership and the Buddhist majority. The protest in Hue: Security used grenades, and eight Buddhist protestors were killed. Anger and hunger strikes ensued. Within days, protests reached Saigon in the South. An elderly Buddhist monk named Thich Quang Duc infamously set himself on fire in the middle of the street during the protest. More "immolations by fire" continued. Madame Nhu irreverently referred to them as "barbecues" in an empathy-free statement of political contempt. South Vietnam began

raiding pagodas, waging war on its own people. American leadership watched from a distance in horror, soon denouncing the "crackdown." November 1, 1963, during a newscast preempting soap opera *The Guiding Light*, Mike Wallace reported the apparent overthrow of the South Vietnamese government during a revolt led by Major General Duong Van Minh and other high-ranking officials. Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu escaped the presidential palace but were soon stabbed and shot by a single dissident. Duong Van Minh and Nguyen Ngoc Tho assumed leadership. Interviewees in the documentary pointed to President Kennedy's giving the green light to this coup without arranging protection for the leaders to be overthrown. That qualifies as having blood on one's hands. A series of coups ensued in South Vietnam, into 1966. But just days after the first coup in South Vietnam, the United States experienced one of the most tragic days in its history. November 22, 1963 was the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. In a retrospective interview for the documentary, former CBS journalist Dan Rather referred to the Kennedy assassination as a "shock to the American psyche."

Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, was characterized as "in command" regarding domestic policy, but insecure and a bit naive on Vietnam, and admitted as much. The biased slant of strong-headed Robert McNamara was continuously in Johnson's ear. American leadership was searching for a pretext to get aggressive in Vietnam in 1964. On August 4 of that year, a second consecutive day's incident provided that pretext--torpedoes were not really present; crew members of the USS Maddox and USS Turner Joy misinterpreted sonar and other instrument readings (as an official report, kept classified for over forty years, concluded). (Pilot Everett Alvarez Jr. was captured--the first.) McNamara misrepresented the incident to Congress and the press. Operation Rolling Thunder ensued--a strategic bombing campaign against North Vietnam. Alvarez and the other POWs were forced into the dehumanizing, persecutory Hanoi March--repeatedly assaulted by the frenzied North Vietnamese crowd. American citizens were privy to propagandized footage of this event.

Turning Point: The Vietnam War Blog Notes Part 2: Civil War. Vo Thi Trong was a female national who joined the National Liberation Front (NLF). American soldiers entered villages, "beat people for no reason," murdered people, and burned down houses. She joined the revolution to stop those inhumanities. The first time she saw she had killed an American soldier, she felt thrilled. Soon thereafter, Trong destroyed a tank, killing 15 American soldiers. She eventually acquired the name "Tank Killer Hero." All she really wanted was a tranquil life, but felt she and the others had an obligation to fight.

Author Viet Thanh Nguyen framed the Vietnam War as having tremendous impact on twentieth century history. To Americans the word "Vietnam" came to mean "war"; for those in many other countries, it meant "revolution" and "freedom." This was echoed by South Vietnamese Congressman Nguyen Trong Nho: "The history of Vietnam is a history of revolution against foreign occupiers." As early as 1858 there had been a history of Vietnamese resistance to French Colonization. The French had violently enslaved and exploited locals as young as age ten on rubber plantations. There was torture and executions for not meeting expectations. The appearance of Ho Chi Minh introduced revolution. Working in the United States and Europe (eventually Paris), he met other anti-colonial Vietnamese hoping to overthrow occupiers. This was Ho Chi Minh's political awakening as a Communist. He is still known endearingly as "Uncle

Ho" in his homeland. A nationalist organization asserted independence at the end of World War II, led by Ho Chi Minh.

The French Indochina war ensued, from 1946 to 1954. Ho Chi Minh actually believed the United States, being anti-colonial themselves, would support his efforts. The French played up the Cold War dimension of this situation to the U.S.--this was a "fight for democracy," they framed. Ho Chi Minh understood that by fighting on their own terrain, they would outlast the French. The battle of Dien Bien Phu led to the defeat of the French in Vietnam. The Geneva Convention led to agreements of a ceasefire at the 17th parallel, and regrouping with the French remaining below that line, with the Vietnamese military confined above that boundary. North and South Vietnam were born. A reunification election was to take place. The United States opposed this settlement, viewing it as a defeat, also upset with the French for failing to win. Present Eisenhower took over the French effort to prevent the reestablishment of Communism in Vietnam.

Ho Chi Minh gained support from China. A pro-communist campaign against property owners ensued, inciting the poorest farmers to rise up against the landlords. The "people's court" led to the execution of landowners all over the country, usually by beheading. Land reform spared no one who owned land, as attested by Nguyen Trong Nho, the grand nephew of one land owner who gladly gave all he had to the government at their campaign request, and was mob-ridiculed, sentenced, and shot to death anyway. Anywhere from 20,000 to 50,000 land owners were executed in this communist campaign. Even though North Vietnamese Ho Chi Minh, and South Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem were to be on the ballot, the 1956 election agreed upon in the Geneva Accords never came to pass. Diem had no interest in an election that only presented risk to his current power. Seeing there would be no democratic reunification, North Vietnam initiated civil war. By 1965, the American presence in Vietnam was really building up. The Vietnamese were under occupation once more.

The North framed their effort as a fight against a "foreign invader" in the South. It was asserted in the documentary that General Secretary Le Duan was the de facto leader of North Vietnam, not Ho Chi Minh. Le Duan saw no path to reunification rather than war. To supply the North in South Vietnam required the expansion of the Ho Chi Minh trail outside the country's borders, running through Laos and Cambodia. Prior to the trail expansion, human beings had to trek goods by bicycle or pack on grueling, narrow muddy paths. Most of the fighting occurred in the jungles of the Central Highlands. Soon the North was controlling the economy in the South via human power and the rice crops. Common people in the South did not really know what to make of the American presence, or what Communism was about. Many of them joined the insurgency as guerrillas fighting for the NLF (official title for the "Viet Cong"--considered derogatory). The American military had difficulty differentiating opponents from allies. The set out to create "hamlets" or fortified villages where allied peasants would be protected behind barricades from the insurgency. The "New Life Hamlets" isolated peasants who had been pried from their own land and all their resources, their huts set ablaze. They were now refugees in their own country. Sequestered without the ability to provide for themselves, they began to starve. Many just went back to their provincial lands.

General William Westmoreland was chosen by President Johnson to take command in Vietnam in 1964. The South military were losing over a hundred soldiers a week. Westmoreland requested and received a steady increase in troops to Vietnam. New recruits landed in Panang

under immediate attack. Soldiers originally had a friendly rapport with local villages, handing out candy to children. But after sustaining growing casualties, the attitude of American troops toward the Vietnamese changed. Sniper fire and booby traps from guerilla warfare was everywhere. Westmoreland's "search and destroy" missions ensued. The military would announce to villagers to evacuate a designated "free fire zone," and the troops believed that thereafter they would only encounter enemy insurgents, which was not at all the case. Many innocent civilians stayed and were killed by accident--or intentionally and willfully with the knowledge of the soldiers firing on them. This pestilence only fueled the influx of South Vietnamese villagers into the enemy NLF. The North Vietnamese relied on female soldiers--as many as 70 percent of volunteers and 1.5 million total. One soldier, Tran Thi Yen Ngoc, said everyone in the NLF felt like a unified family, the atmosphere was spirited and hot-blooded, and being female was not going to become an obstacle: she would not let her "emotions" get in the way of her engagement against the American enemy.

Official U.S. government reports and daily press briefings were so propagandic, they became referred to as the "five o'clock follies." Journalists experienced serious pressure to be "team players," even from General Westmoreland himself. The most vital and reliable reports came from journalists on the ground near the fighting, including Morley Safer, who reported the Cam Ne Village campaign which burned 150 houses and killed some women and children. Safer's transparent report of the macabre realities of this war were themselves inflammatory. President Johnson reached out to CBS executive Frank Stanton demanding that Safer be fired. Stanton refused. The honest journalism continued with the arrival of Dan Rather, who put himself under fire in locations like Cu Che. He saw the inability of American forces to prevail in one firefight after another, reading aloud the figures of casualties by the day or by the battle. The "credibility gap"--the lack of believability in American leadership by the American public--was widening, and for valid reasons.

The American strategy (Robert McNamara, U.S. Secretary of Defense) was to kill enough sheer numbers of the enemy that they would not be able to replenish their forces and would have to give up. This strategy turned out to be utterly ineffective. The NLF removed their dead quickly so it would be difficult to ascertain accurate statistics on how many had been killed. One third of the body count officially reported are estimated by historians to have been innocent civilians, not enemy insurgents. Ground artillery and air strikes on villages were followed by walk-throughs. According to former U.S. Marine and Vietnam veteran Mike Nakayama, those walk-throughs revealed large numbers of dead bodies of children, babies and the elderly. Body parts were strewn "all over the place...those are the kinds of memories that stay with me." For this documentary, Dan Rather concluded, "there is no such thing as a clean war." For all the innocent people killed by the American military, the NLF killed even more, even stringing up village leaders by the neck as they moved through, Rather said.

In 1964, about 112,000 Americans were inducted into the armed forces. By 1966, that number was 380,000 for that year alone. Increases in the draft were key to the war effort in Vietnam. People with connections, it was discovered, were figuring out ways to abuse deferments to avoid having to serve. A disproportionate number of black men were being drafted. As many as twenty-five percent of any unit in Vietnam were African-American. The irony in the face of systemic racism back home--race and class inequality and the failures of American capitalism--was stark. In April of 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King gave a speech in opposition to the

Vietnam War. Muhammed Ali refused to be drafted, famously saying, "...shoot them for what? They never called me n\*\*\*\*\*." There was more personally significant conflict for citizens of color right in their communities back home. The anti-war movement escalated with fervor and much domestic unrest.

Westmoreland was called back to the United States in 1967 for President Johnson's "salesmanship campaign." Recorded conversations behind closed doors differed wildly from what was being told to the public. More firepower was being visited upon Vietnam than on any location in the American history of wars, and Vietnam was still a stalemate. This was primarily because enemy ranks never diminished; the NLF was persisting. Robert McNamara secretly had a growing sense that the United States needed to find a way out of Vietnam. Johnson was counting the cost of such a change in direction, and maneuvered McNamara out of the Pentagon. On January 17, 1968, Johnson delivered an address amounting to an outright quantitative and qualitative lie. American forces were winning battle after battle, as though total victory was near. What ensued was the Tet Offensive.

Turning Point: The Vietnam War Blog Notes Part 3 "Life is Cheap": Keith Kay (correspondent) stated that a lot of people called the War in Vietnam "television's war." Free journalism focused on "kids in the field," young soldiers bound by a vow to carry out orders. Interviews with them reflected frustration and futility. One group of soldiers would sit on a bunker "Where have all the flowers gone,"--not exactly a military morale march. Their sentiment in interviews sounded anti-war even as they were dressed to fight. Keith Kay emphasized a branch of journalism trying to show what war does to young and other innocent humans.

Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Thieu was a presidential candidate in the 1967 South Vietnam election. Eighty three percent of registered voters turned out under threats of a NLF attack. Thieu won president, with former Premier Ky as vice president. Thieu was poor like other military personnel, having a history of service starting under French Colonialism. Huang duc Na was Chief of Staff. President Johnson knew public support of the war was declining; his own approval rating was 37%. General Westmoreland stepped up to the microphone for more lies about the war going favorably for the United States.

A mutual ceasefire was declared for the 1968 Tet Holiday. The North Vietnamese did not honor the truce. Nine targets in Saigon were attacked, including the U.S. Embassy; infiltrators used fake IDs. Journalist Peter Arnett was there as the explosions began; the NLF were attacking the city--urban centers and centers of government. Numerous major cities were part of the onslaught. The NLF spy raiders initiating the offensive all were killed. But Arnett was baffled at Westmoreland's spin on the event as he addressed the press. The Tet offensive actually continued into March of 1968. American troops were sent into the city of Hue unaware of how ten thousand North Vietnamese would be prepared to respond. C.J. Ellis, a platoon sergeant, first experienced his men being killed in combat, and could not recover the dead. Civilians kidnapped by the North Vietnamese upon their invasion of the South Vietnamese city were never heard from again. Communist forces had to leave the city but killed all witnesses on the way out. A year after this battle, mass graves were discovered in Hue. The horrifying scene revealed 1300 bodies. Hands tied behind backs in school uniforms belied the NLF story that those civilians were killed by bombs from the South. Both sides were lying, and both sides were killing innocent citizens in this war in Vietnam.

The Tet Offensive rallied South Vietnam, who saw a spike in military recruitment. But it also supplanted the American leadership lie that they were winning the war. Dan Rather spoke to the role of journalists to reveal what's really happening somewhere (as in war) as opposed to what political leadership say what is happening. CBS anchor Walter Cronkite joined Dan Rather by going to Vietnam to cover the war. Cronkite was allowed by CBS to do an editorial story--previously forbidden by the higher-ups at that network. His editorial asserted the war was a standoff; Johnson knew he'd lost "middle America" with Cronkite's declaration. With their eyes newly opened, mothers of young soldiers all over the country began to oppose the war. That did not keep Westmoreland from asking for 206,000 more troops. War protests spread to countries all over the world. While 1968 saw record numbers of soldiers killed in the war.

Photographer Ronald Haeberle was assigned to the 11th infantry brigade with Charlie company in Quang Ngai province; Captain Medina, first platoon Lieutenant William Calley, led troops into My Lai in Son My Village. Haeberle arrived and moved toward the village with a lot of gunfire. The American troops had killed everyone in their path on the way into the village, then had captured and rounded up groups of villagers and were firing into those groups of those captured. Haeberle noted the procedurally extreme actions being taken, and soldiers who looked like zombies. They had killed livestock and set fire to houses and barns. Surviving eye witnesses to the massacre were interviewed for the documentary, corroborating Haeberle's vocal story and his pictorial record. It was said that this massacre at My Lai ended because U.S. Army helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson took people aboard his chopper declaring that he would fire on any American personnel who shot at the villagers and others he was trying to rescue, then flew back to his base and demanded the killing stop. In this senseless attack, five hundred people were killed in two hours, all of them presumed innocent and having presented no resistance to the American troops who slayed them.

Haeberle had to submit black and white photographs to military brass to put a positive spin on how the war was going. He knew he'd have a responsibility to report what he saw at My Lai; however, no one in the military even asked. Others had written letters to the president and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with no response. When the Army learned of it, they began to take action, charging those who led this massacre. A journalist named Seymour Hersh chose to investigate the incident, and it was discovered that gang rapes took place with victims as young as age ten. Haeberle got an editor at a paper called the Plain Dealer to publish the photographs he had taken with his personal camera. Captain Medina was acquitted. Only Lieutenant Calley was convicted, spending very little time in the brig and some time on house arrest. Military historian Colonel Gregory A. Daddis addressed the necessity of dehumanization in war. Empathy is pushed away and aggression is embraced in order to accomplish the tasks of war. Vietnam vet Scott Camil stated his opinion that Lt. Calley hadn't proceeded very differently than what everyone had been ordered to do over and over in Vietnam.

Westmoreland was moved to a paper-pushing job in Washington D.C., replaced by Creighton Abrams. Johnson had lost credibility with the public as he entered a presidential re-election campaign. As he fell behind in the 1968 primary to Bobby Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson stepped aside during a speech in which he emphasized the need to focus on Vietnam. He would not seek re-election. On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot and killed in Memphis, Tennessee. The civil rights leader who had spoken in support of so many young black military

men was dead. His assassination was credited with catalyzing a shift in the climate of anti-war protest within U.S. borders. Protests were taking on a more militant feel.

On June 5, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy was also shot and killed. Activist Chic Canfora, who was thirteen when she witnessed the assassination of John F. Kennedy, commented: "it was a tough pill to swallow that anyone who was effective at speaking out against war...effective at change, was killed." There were deep divisions in the party evident during the Democratic Convention in Chicago--the one where Dan Rather was roughly handled by security outside the convention. Chicago Police clashed with demonstrators at nearby Lincoln Park. To call the brutality an excessive use of force would be a colossal understatement. War researcher Ken Hughes brought to light the manner in which Richard Nixon reassured the public that if elected, he would bring an honorable end to the war in Vietnam--while behind close doors he was throwing a "wrench" into any potential peace process.

Turning Point: The Vietnam War Blog Notes Part 4 Why Are We Even Here? Chic Canfora's early view of war was similar to that of most Americans, it would seem--war was a John Wayne movie, and America was always in the right. Her brothers in combat sheltered her from the reality they shared with the other males in the family about the war in Vietnam--which was worse than any horror movie. When Canfora's eyes were opened to the atrocities in Vietnam, she chose to stand in protest. Viet Than Nguyen noted that the U.S. dropped more bombs over Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam than they had over Europe during all of World War II. Johnson announced he'd not seek re-election, ceased bombing of North Vietnam, and negotiated for a halt to the bombing. Americans were encouraged by the peace talks as the 1968 presidential election approached. Candidates were Richard Nixon and Vice President Hubert Humphrey. Nixon effectively sold his pledge to honorably end the war in Vietnam.

The Paris Peace talks were credited with narrowing his fifteen-point lead in the polls. Johnson's recorded conversations suggested that Richard Nixon was secretly negotiating to sabotage peace talks; intelligence supported that suspicion. Republican backer Anna Chennault was implicated in trying to sway leadership in South Vietnam to wait. Johnson's own recorded words doubted Nixon's direct involvement but a certainty that people like Chennault were doing so on Nixon's behalf. South Vietnam ultimately did not send a delegate to the Paris peace talks. President Thieu's announcement of this took the wind out of Hubert Humphrey's sails, and Nixon triumphed to become the 37th President of the United States. Nixon, with the help U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, escalated the war with in hopes of "winning" it. Tim Weiner referred to them as "incurably covert...manipulators." All American leadership--Nixon, Kissinger, the Pentagon, etc.--agreed South Vietnam would not succeed without American Troops. But what Nixon said to the public was that the role of the United States was to train and prepare the South to fight North Vietnam on their own.

The South Vietnamese military were falsely reputed to be inept and cowardly, even though many of their forces fought with skilled fearless motivation--like those who were locally known by the moniker the "Kingbees." Politically, South Vietnam realized it was in serious danger of being left without support.

By 1969, protests on American soil reached record numbers--hundreds of thousands taking to the streets, with a never-before seen fervor. They had the support of celebrities like John Lennon, Yoko Ono, and Country Joe and the Fish who sang anti-war mantras. Weary of the ineffectiveness of previous passive measures, protestors became increasingly violent. A group

called The Weathermen detonated bombs, committed to "emulation of the Black Panther Party." Polls showed strong opposition to the anti-war protestors, however. They objected to the criminal civil disobedience. Nixon saw an opening and took it, ordering American intelligence to find the Communist conspiracy driving the anti-war movement. They violated the civil rights of hundreds of thousands of citizens looking for a conspiracy that did not exist, according to the documentary makers.

Nixon also changed the draft system to a lottery, understanding that the military draft was very unpopular. People were now drafted by birthdates randomly drawn in this lottery. People defied their draft orders en masse. Draftees even began to protest. (C. Jack Ellis, U.S. Army. Peter Osnos (Washington Post) noted that heroism was no longer part of the aspiration to serve..."it was a slog." Journalist Jack Laurence referenced the new divide between "the lifers and the grunts." There was dissension in the ranks. Fragging (assaulting or killing one's superior officer) became increasingly common. Soldiers would sometimes even throw money into a pool of cash to carry out a fragging gesture. GI's were also openly self-medicating with drugs, as original journalistic media footage demonstrated. Many soldiers became addicted to opium and heroin. A government investigation found that as many as fifteen percent were using heroin.

As for the Paris Peace Talks, the North Vietnamese found ways to drag out the process--there was a ten-week argument about the shape of the table at which delegates would sit. The United States had private side conversations with North Vietnam alone, to negotiate the end of American involvement in the war. Talks were contentious; North Vietnam wanted the U.S. to withdraw unilaterally while also overthrowing the South Vietnamese government on the way out. Kissinger countered with the display of his "madman" theory: if you suggested you could be annoyed enough to suddenly go "apeshit" with aggression, it could talk the opponent down from their position.

The leader of Cambodia, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, had tried to keep his country out of the war by allowing the NLF to expand the Ho Chi Minh Trail on Cambodian turf, and had looked the other way when South Vietnam chased the Communists into Cambodia. The North Vietnamese had hospitals, supplies, weapons stores, and training facilities across the border in Cambodia, retreating to these safe bases between attacks. Nixon ordered the secret bombing of Cambodia for months, with the United States dropping hundreds of thousands of bombs on that country. The war was spreading and the American public and American Congress were unaware. This actually drove the NLF farther into Cambodia, initiating clashes with Cambodian forces, leading to the overthrow of Sihanouk, who was replaced by a pro-American leader. Record demonstrations against Nixon exploded in the United States. A Kent State ROTC building scheduled for demolition was set ablaze by students and burned down. The National Guard was sent to Kent State. Students defied a reading of the riot act, and began throwing rocks and returning tear gas canisters at the National Guard. One guardsman took aim, and many others followed suit. Troop G huddled, turned in unison and opened fire. Chic Canfora's brother Alan was among the surviving students hit by fire; four students, however, were killed in the incident. Nixon's speeches were promulgating the dehumanization of protesters, promoting violence to quell dissent. Dissent is seminal to the health of any democracy, and Nixon's fascism was prohibiting this key step to healthy democracy. Vietnam veteran Scott Camil felt betrayed, led astray by everyone who had filled his young mind with pro-war dogma. He arrived home to receive the contempt of the American public, as did countless other GI's. They were verbally



assaulted and spit on. Graphic original film footage shows disabled soldiers who came home alive but missing limbs (not to mention invisibly wounded with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Major Depression), only to be rejected by an American public who had praised and pedestaled the war heroes of Korea and World War II. Veteran Eldson McGhee described the way his mother sat with him and suffered alongside him as he fought his posttraumatic symptoms. Medical Unit veteran Shad Meshad was assigned to a "resocialization committee" and went all over his city looking for combat veterans in need of outreach. This process led to his awareness of the condition known as PTSD.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War was formed by ex-military protestors of the war. The Winter Soldier Investigations ensued. The atrocities revealed were graphic almost beyond description. Scott Camil became the subject of a Graham Nash song--Oh Camil (the Winter Soldier).

Vietnam Veterans of the War marched on Washington on April 23, 1971. The New York Times released a detailed story in June, which led to the release of the Pentagon Papers--confirming the government had been lying to the American public the entire time. The Supreme Court, however, soon ruled that newspapers could not publish information from this report. Daniel Ellsberg, the man who released the Pentagon Papers to the public, turned himself in. Chief of Staff Bob Halderman encouraged Nixon's installation of a voice-activated wall-to-wall recording system in the Oval Office. But Nixon's paranoia had considerable overreach; he had people burglarize Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office to find info with which to blackmail Ellsberg. These "White House Plumbers"--seven Nixon aides--were caught breaking in and trying to bug the Democratic National Committee Office, and the Watergate scandal was born. Nixon's empire immediately crumbled.

Turning Point: The Vietnam War Blog Notes Part 5 The End of the Road: The documentary's final episode begins with the governmental question: How do we crawl out of a country standing up? Henry Kissinger had advised President Richard Nixon to abandon thoughts about ending participation in the war in 1971, so as not to lose the war in an election year and hurt Nixon political. Secret negotiations with the Communists regarding "the Decent Interval" began. In C. Jack Ellis' terms, soldiers' lives were used as a collective bargaining chip to protect Nixon's political career.

The United States aggressively attacked the North Vietnamese directly across the demilitarized zone; the NLF was on its heels momentarily. Le Duan kept two demands in Paris: America pulls out, and NLF Troops remain in South Vietnam. South Vietnamese President Thieu was livid. Nixon and Kissinger were known in South Vietnam as having betrayed the country. In October 1972, Kissinger gave a speech announcing that "peace is at hand." This helped Nixon win re-election to the presidency. In December, Nixon launched the "Christmas bombing" in Hanoi. It was the South that felt forced to sign the agreement to end the war, the 1973 Paris Peace Accords, so as not to lose all support from the United States. The bombings brought the North back to the table for the signing of this agreement. American troops were to withdraw, the North Vietnamese troops were to remain in South Vietnam, and prisoners of war were to be released on both sides.

Prisoner of War Everett Alvarez, Jr., had been in captivity over eight years. The Peace Accords arranged for his release along with the release of others. He described how the cabin erupted in cheers as the plane lifted off the ground bound for the U.S. loaded with POWs. The anti-war attitude toward the military was now gone, and the POWs were received with much acceptance

and to great fanfare. Military historian Gregory Daddis pointed out that the war did not end with the Paris Peace Accords; war never ends when wars are declared over. There was no ceasefire, and thousands of South Vietnamese POWs were still being held. Hanoi was not abiding by the main provisions of the Paris Peace Accords. Human suffering from atrocious rights violations continued.

Nixon was facing the music of the Watergate scandal; Chic Canfora referred to Nixon as "evil incarnate when it comes to government corruption." On August 8, 1974, Richard Nixon resigned his office. Gerald Ford was sworn in with his hands tied; Congress had cut back involvement and the U.S. was basically out of the war. American forces would no longer be sent to South Vietnam. Graham Martin became the last U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam; the death of his adopted son in the war cemented Graham's hatred of the Communists. And though he could not provide support to the South, neither could he bring himself to square with them on the truth. The North began a campaign to test any American response; their attacks were not met with any reaction from the U.S. The dominoes began to fall, beginning with Hue, then Danang. Hordes of citizens scrambled to evacuate in mass pandemonium. The Pentagon told Martin to send the "surplus people home." Martin would not, and also kept up appearances to the press. Further, Martin suggested a "baby lift" to rescue young children of South Vietnam. These "children of the dust" were babies born to American soldiers and South Vietnamese nationals. The mothers would not be coming along on the rescue trip. Someone had forgotten to latch a canopy lock on the plane, and the plane instantly decompress as it came free from the craft. Documentary details were graphic and grotesque about what happened to the children in the plane and civilians on the ground as the C-5 crash landed outside Saigon. Evacuation in emergency circumstances without proper planning carries such risk with it.

President Ford requested about a billion dollars of aid in the midst of this Communist offensive; Congress shot it down. The People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN--the North Vietnamese Army) progressed steadily toward Saigon, consuming the territory on all sides. The South Vietnamese military fled with the others, with large numbers of people being killed trying to leave. The North acquired classified documents identifying people who had worked for the American government. Graham Martin continued to downplay the seriousness of the situation and was not moving with any urgency. He may have held hope in some agreement with the North which would never materialize. The U.S. embassy underscored Martin's denial. South Vietnamese President Thieu publicly denounced America's betrayal.

General Duong Van Minh assumed leadership after Thieu left. At that time, Kissinger finally ordered major evacuation to begin, forcing Martin to act. The North attacked and damaged the airport to be used for evacuations, with ships not being a viable option. Visual footage in the documentary depicted the tragic level of panic amidst an emergency demanding immediate evacuation which was simply not plausible, due to the sheer numbers of people needing to leave and the scarce resources available to rescue them. The images and interviewee testimonials are heartbreaking and nauseating. The USS Midway found itself accepting evacuees from American helicopters as well as small private Vietnamese helicopters, required to push several of the landed aircraft into the ocean one by one, to make room for the landing of the next. As some pilots abandoned their helicopters, one after another crashed into the sea. The Midway expected to take 7000 evacuees, but eventually took on 147,000. Refugees stampeded to the U.S. Embassy, surrounding the walls of the building, screaming to be let in.

U.S. Marines shoved them back as they tried scaling the fenced walls. Embassy workers were feverishly shredding classified documents, an act Martin forbid back when it should have been done. Five million dollars in leftover U.S. cash funds were reportedly burned. Ambassador Martin and his team were among the last to be airlifted out. Scores of South Vietnamese crowded onto the roof. A journalist recorded a conversation with some of the desperate people left on the roof.

On April 30, 1975, The North Vietnamese military arrived at the Independence Palace in Saigon. Surviving members of the NLF and the PAVN were interviewed for the documentary, chronicling their sense of triumph and relief, but also profound loss at the "liberation of the South" with the fall of Saigon. Author Viet Thanh Nguyen recalled being held at a refugee camp in Pennsylvania. None could leave without an American sponsor, and no one would take his family, so he was separated from his parents. Over 130,000 South Vietnamese refugees had arrived in the U.S. Those tens of thousands who could not leave or did not leave were labeled "enemies of the people" and worked in forced labor camps, called "re-education camps" where those in control attempted to brainwash the detainees. Chung Tu Buu was held in a labor camp in Vietnam for thirteen years. In the twenty ensuing years, nearly a million more refugees arrived on U.S. shores a few at a time, in small boats. Their perilous ocean journey alone is unimaginable.

In Vietnam alone, three million people were killed during the war; another 1.7 died in the genocide in Cambodia during that period. Civil war ensued, and a quarter of the remaining population were killed after 1975. Political repression continues in that country. Relations between the U.S. and Vietnam were "normalized" officially in 1995. One thousand Americans remain missing from the war in Vietnam; the number of Vietnamese missing are estimated at 200,000-300,000. The documentary characterizes McNamara and President Johnson as inept. They underscored the enormous toll on human life taken in the name of furthering Richard Nixon's political career. The documentary briefly depicted history repeating itself during the war in Iraq. Dan Rather emphasized that a genuinely free press is the "red beating heart of democracy." The Vietnam War undercut confidence in American leadership, a condition from which the country has never recovered. C. Jack Ellis became the mayor of Macon, Georgia. During his term, he took the opportunity to meet the mayor of Hue, Vietnam, a gentlemen who had fought against him back in 1968. Honored with the closing comment of the documentary, Ellis said, "some of us carry the burden of that war to this day."