



**INDOCHINA
IN THE YEAR OF
THE TIGER- 1974**



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Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn¹

When the modern Western states were created, the following principle was proclaimed: governments are meant to serve man, and man lives to be free and to pursue happiness....

The individual's independence from many types of state pressure has been guaranteed; the majority of people have been granted well-being to an extent their fathers and grandfathers could not even dream about; it has become possible to raise young people according to these ideals, leading them to physical splendor, happiness, possession of material goods, money and leisure, to an almost unlimited freedom of enjoyment. So who should now renounce all this, why and for what should one risk one's precious life in defense of common values, and particularly in such nebulous cases when the security of one's nation must be defended in a distant country?...

People in the West have acquired considerable skill in using, interpreting and manipulating law.... If one is right from a legal point of view, nothing more is required, nobody may mention that one could still not be entirely right, and urge self-restraint. ... One almost never sees voluntary self-restraint. Everybody operates at the extreme limit of those legal frames. An oil company is legally blameless when it purchases an invention of a new type of energy in order to prevent its use. A food product manufacturer is legally blameless when he poisons his produce to make it last longer; after all, people are free not to buy it.

I have spent all my life under a Communist regime and I will tell you that a society without any objective legal scale is a terrible one indeed. But a society with no other scale but the legal one is not quite worthy of man either....

The defense of individual rights has reached such extremes as to make society as a whole defenseless against certain individuals. It is time in the West to defend not so much human rights as human obligations.

Destructive and irresponsible freedom has been granted boundless space. Society appears to have little defense against the abyss of human decadence, such as, for example, misuse of liberty for moral violence against young people, motion pictures full of pornography, crime and

¹ Excerpts from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's commencement address at Harvard cited in *The New York Times* June 13, 1978 headlined *The Editorial Notebook - The Decline of the West*

horror... Life organized legalistically has thus shown its inability to defend itself against the corrosion of evil....

The press, too, of course, enjoys the widest freedom.... Thus we may see terrorists heroized or secret matters, pertaining to one's nation's defense, publicly revealed, or we may witness shameless intrusion on the privacy of well-known people under the slogan: "Everyone is entitled to know everything."

But this is a false slogan, characteristic of a false era; people also have the right not to know, and it is a much more valuable one. The right not to have their divine souls stuffed with gossip, nonsense, vain talk....

Enormous freedom exists for the press, but not for the readership, because newspapers mostly give enough stress and emphasis to those opinions which do not too openly contradict their own and the general trend.

Without any censorship, in the West fashionable trends of thought and ideas are carefully separated from those which are not fashionable; nothing is forbidden, but what is not fashionable will hardly ever find its way into periodicals or books or be heard in colleges. ..

The most cruel mistake occurred with the failure to understand the Vietnam War.... Members of the U.S. antiwar movement wound up being involved in the betrayal of Far Eastern nations, in a genocide and in the suffering today imposed on 30 million people there. Do those convinced pacifists hear the moans coming from there? Do they understand their responsibility today? Or do they prefer not to hear?...

No weapons, no matter how powerful, can help the West until it overcomes its loss of will power.... To defend oneself, one must also be ready to die; there is little such readiness in a society raised in the cult of material well-being....

We are now experiencing the consequences of mistakes which had not been noticed at the beginning of the journey. We have placed too much hope in political and social reforms; only to find out that we were being deprived of our most precious possession: our spiritual life.

Dedicated to Major Bruce Davies MBE (1943 – 2020)

Bruce Davies enlisted in the Australian Army in 1961 and was in the first contingent of Australian infantry sent to Vietnam in 1965. Attached to the US 173rd Airborne Brigade, he completed his first deployment in June 1966 and then returned as an adviser with the Australian Army Training Team in 1967. As a warrant officer, he saw action with the ARVN in I Corps and led a Montagnard ‘Mike Force’ platoon during his assignment with US Special Forces in Pleiku. (In later life, he maintained this US-Australia connection as a leading member of the Australian ‘Chapter 86’ of the US Special Forces Association.) Receiving a Bronze Star for valour, he was Mentioned in Dispatches for his initiative and courage in the rescue of South Vietnamese soldiers during a river-crossing under heavy fire in 1969. Having served in Vietnam in every year since 1965, Bruce Davies completed his third and final tour in August 1970 and retired from the Australian Army with the rank of Major in 1985. As a historian, Major Davies materially assisted Vietnam Veterans for Factual History with a chronicle of the ANZAC military contribution condensed from his co-authored book, *Vietnam: the Complete Story of the Australian War*. Whether it was in a river-crossing under fire or the historical defence of South Vietnam’s right to exist, Bruce Davies will be remembered as an exemplary Australian soldier and a forthright friend and ally in the cause of freedom.



CONTENTS - 1974

Dedication: to Major Bruce Davies MBE (1943-2020)	3	
Introduction: Indochina in the Year of the Tiger	5	
The Situation in 1974		
Defense Attache's . . . Assessment 2 nd Quarter FY75.....	7	
Daniel Ellsberg: The Man Who Lost the Vietnam War		
<i>by Stephen Sherman</i>	9	
Remembering Ha Thuc Can		
<i>by Frank Scotton</i>	15	
Strategic Raids		
<i>by Michael A. Eggleston</i>	26	
1974: An Insider's Reflections on Congress' Betrayal of the Republic of Vietnam <i>by Dr. Robert Turner</i>		42
Hanoi's War After The War: Vietnamese Communist Strategic Thinking, 1973-74 <i>by Pierre Asselin</i>		56
DAO		
<i>by Joe A. De Santos, Jr.</i>	65	
The Vietnam Peace Movement in 1974		
<i>by Dr. Roger B. Canfield</i>	81	
Writers of the Republic of Vietnam		
<i>by Nhã Ca</i>	121	
China and Laos: A Kaleidoscopic Relationship, Part 2 -- (1968-1979) <i>by Frederic C. Benson</i>		133
Paracel Islands		
<i>by Nghia Vo</i>	212	
Vietnamese Voices		
<i>various</i>	217	
Our Wrap Up: The Big Picture 1974		
<i>by James D. McLeroy</i>	228	
References	231	

Introduction

1974 nobly and ignobly signaled the end of Indochina's struggle against a blood and treasure squandering North Vietnam lavishly aided by communist nations, principally Russia and China. Meanwhile America's peace movement and the US Congress beat a hasty and ignoble defeat.

Joe A. DeSantos summarizes the 1974 reports of Major General Murray of Defense Attaché Office, Saigon identifying niggardly US aid, but ARVN courageous performance against the NVA. Less the costs of transportation and inflation, \$700 million was "less than \$1 per day per man to fund all of the RVNAF." During 1974 south performed admirably against multiple NVA raids.

DAO's Major General H. D. SMITH reported South's heavy casualties in a valiant stand against the NVA in Phuoc Long Province on December 31. Yet with US aid, the South's prospects were positive. Tran Ngoc Chau notes President Ford saying on January 21, 1975, "the U.S is unwilling to reenter the war" giving a clear Green Light for Hanoi to proceed to final victory.

Pierre Asselin reveals Hanoi's strategic thinking since Paris, a policy of "resolutely counterattack" testing Washington's resolve and building up its forces. Resolve absent, Hanoi's forces took "aggressive measures as they saw fit." The USA would not respond "even if you offer them candy."

Mike Eggleston details NVA's strategic 1974 raids softening up South Vietnam everywhere except the Delta. Southern forces devoid of US air support either prevailed or gave the enemy endless losses of blood and treasure. The NVA had unchallenged sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos.

Nghia M. Vo's Battle of the Paracel Islands tells the story of China's conquest of the Paracel Islands which, along with other Chinese militarized islands in the South China Sea, still also threatens the sea lanes and sovereignty of Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, and Philippines. Dang Nhan Khang reveals neither Saigon or Washington helped in the January 1974 battle for the Paracels.

Frederic C. Benson details China's seldom told massive roadbuilding and antiaircraft assets in northwest Laos aiding communist NVA and Pathet Lao and threatening Thailand security. Souvanna Phouma said the roads "not meant for Lao tourism." Washington refused modest military help against China unless tiny Laos condemned China and North Vietnam. Kissinger said Chinese forces could be withdrawn in a day. Multiple Air America craft were shot down during talks with China.

The Situation in 1974

DEFENSE ATTACHE'S . . . ASSESSMENT¹

During the past quarter, RVNAF continued to defend their nation while operating under the constraints made mandatory by reduced FY 75 funding. The JGS issued several directives which addressed, among other subjects, ammunition conservation, POL conservation and recovery of end items. Reaction to those directives varied by Military Region but by late October/early November it was apparent that a massive conservation program was in progress.

Concurrently, the NVA stepped up their input of materiel into the South, providing more evidence of increased action in the near future. Documents captured in early November spelled out in detail how the NVA proposed to escalate an already high level of activity and outlined the objectives of the impending escalation. In December, the NVA opened up with great intensity in the Delta, surpassing by far any previously recorded activity since the so-called cease-fire.

RVNAF reacted magnificently. While RVNAF is not yet facing a countrywide offensive, the NVA is clearly determined to make substantial gains in all areas within SVN. While it did not occur during the quarter to which this assessment is devoted, the fall of Phuoc Long Province after a concerted combined arms effort on the part of the NVA - an effort which pulled no punches and spared no resources - certainly presaged the future. RVNAF's reaction with greatly increased air support and the reaction of the relatively small number of ARVN ground personnel caused the NVA to pay a heavy toll for their gain.

When the MR-3 Commander called for additional materiel resources, they were provided. VNAF flew sorties out of MR's 2 and 4, as well as MR-3.

This pattern will continue, since it must. But when you examine resource expenditures, you will note that once again they have not been exorbitant nor do they match in any manner the resource expenditures which might have been expected some few months back. This, in my judgment, is a plus for RVNAF and for the JGS.

Where the constraint continues to be felt is in initiatives and counter-offensives which RVNAF would have executed in the days of less constrained resources. While it is clearly evident that RVNAF is not

¹ From the Defense Attache Saigon, RVNAF Quarterly Assessment, FY75/2 1 Oct 74 - 31 Dec 74.