



**INDOCHINA**

**IN THE YEAR OF  
THE RAT - 1972**



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Ken Burns is fond of quoting Mark Twain saying that “history does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme.” It is quite simple to draw parallels in history because our imaginations want to see them there. In preparing to write about 1972, the Editor had the occasion to review Theodore White’s classic *The Making of the President 1972*. White takes quotes from Nixon’s acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in that year: “. . . the choice in this election is not between radical change and no change. The choice . . . is between change that works and change that won’t work. . . . It has become fashionable in recent years to point up what is wrong with our . . . American system. The critics contend that it is so unfair, so corrupt, so unjust that we should tear it down and substitute something in its place. I totally disagree. I believe in the American system. . . .

“Theirs is the politics of paternalism, where master planners in Washington make decisions for the people. Ours is the politics of people—where people make decisions for themselves . . . when you add up the cost of all the programs our opponents have proposed, you reach only one conclusion, they would destroy the system which has made America number one in the world. . . .”

White says that Nixon was talking to the people “Out There” rather than to the delegates or the Press. Nixon’s “chief adversary was not George McGovern nor McGovern’s Democratic Party, but the news media of America – and the culture they spoke for, which so contradicted the culture for which he spoke, and on which he was to found his victory.”

But his election victory only fueled the hostility. The media, Nixon’s own well-deserved paranoia, and a partisan Congress, ended a productive executive administration, rejected “peace with honor” and demonstrated the deep divide that has permeated our society to this day. It would be hoped that a proper study of history and civics would be the salve to heal the nation, but that study has been left to an unchecked opposition. Burns’ contribution, despite recognizing the problem, has been negative.

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# CONTENTS - 1972

<b>Introduction: Indochina in the Year of the Rat</b> .....	3
<b>The Situation in 1972</b>	
<i>MACV Command History 1972</i> .....	4
<b>Richard Nixon</b>	
<i>By Matthew Henry</i> .....	15
<b>Viet Nam 1972: The Year We Snatched Defeat from the Jaws of Victory</b>	
<i>Dr. William Stearman</i> .....	33
<b>Easter Offensive</b>	
<i>Bob Baker</i> .....	50
<b>An Loc</b>	
<i>Nghia Vo and Van Nguyen Duong</i> .....	102
<b>Air War – Linebacker I &amp; II</b>	
<i>Stephen Kirby</i> .....	117
<b>Demise of Pyswar Against North Viet Nam (Addendum)</b>	
<i>Mervyn Edwin Roberts III</i> .....	128
<b>The Viet Nam Peace Movement in 1972: The End is Near?</b>	
<i>Dr. Roger B. Canfield</i> .....	131
<b>Recovery Operations 1967–1975 (Recovery–Revival–Relapse)</b>	
<i>Frank Scotton</i> .....	222
<b>Jane Fonda and her Friendly North Vietnamese Intelligence Officer</b>	
<i>Merle Pribbenow</i> .....	234
<b>Vietnamese Voices</b>	
<i>Various</i> .....	239
<b>China and Laos: A Kaleidoscopic Relationship Part I – (1945-1960)</b>	
<i>Frederic C. Benson</i> .....	249
<b>Christian Appy</b>	
<i>Bill Laurie</i> .....	289
<b>Our Wrap Up: A Viet Nam Vet’s Memorial Day Message</b>	
<i>Phillip Jennings</i> .....	306
<b>References</b> .....	308

## **Introduction: Indochina in the Year of the Rat**

Indochina's 1972 was dramatic: massive U.S. withdrawal; heroic ARVN and US air power defeated a massive Hanoi invasion; Nixon's landslide victory over George McGovern; and "Christmas" bombings. The table was set for victory.

During the US drawdown, the Republic of Viet Nam relied on its citizens and soldiers to pacify and defend the country. On the battlefield and in pacification, Saigon proved itself. GVN gave lands to 800,000 tenant tillers and controlled 90% of the population in the south.

Due to South Vietnamese courage and U.S. air power, Hanoi's massive Easter offensive of 1972 was an abject, bloody, failure. This was most evident in the hard, months long battle for An Loc and Route 13. President Thiệu said, "An Lộc's victory was ... a victory of the free world's democracy over communist totalitarianism." Le Ba Binh, Vietnamese Marine Battalion commander and his advisor, Capt John Ripley acted heroically in the battle of Dong Ha Bridge in the north.

President Richard Nixon succeeded as Commander in Chief with his policies of withdrawal, Vietnamization and bombing. Bombing invading NVA troops, previously off limits sites and the "Christmas bombing" brought Hanoi to sign a treaty. Nixon's 49-state victory over peace candidate George McGovern proved as did polls that the American public stood with its President despite a noisy antiwar movement.

Shortcomings of the year were also apparent. Voice of America broadcasts and 600 million leaflets, seeking to demoralize the enemy came up short; Hanoi's propaganda operations among the peace movement were far more successful in influencing Congress in Hanoi's favor. While over the top, Jane Fonda's 20 broadcasts and the media's hysterical and false coverage of the "Christmas Bombings" had their affects. Jane Fonda's contacts with a Hanoi intelligence officer, "Ho Nam" knowingly allowed her fame to be exploited for both covert intelligence and propaganda. Anti-war movement and pressures in Congress limited Nixon. Hoi B. Tran, says "Naïve Americans were recklessly and unjustly anxious to blame their own country and its ally South Viet Nam for perpetuating the war."

Kissinger's could not negotiate the removal of NVA forces from South Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia. This would ultimately bring defeat from the jaws of victory of our South Vietnamese allies. Americans troops won their war and left South Viet Nam free. The dishonor goes to the cut and run Congress abandoning Saigon and the historians who still have it wrong.