



**INDOCHINA**

**IN THE YEAR OF THE**

**WATER BUFFALO - 1973**



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**FOREWORD TO DAO REPORT Dated 1 August 1974**

This is my last assessment.

I'm aware that the modern history of Vietnam is strewn with the bones of mistaken prophets.

I am also aware that hope hallucinates victory. And that past prophets were infatuated with a tunnel light that I, for the life of me, can't see.

It would be prudent to remain silent. But it's hard to resist going out on the limb before going out on the limbo of retirement.

I don't read tea leaves, don't have a crystal ball, and my name isn't Nostradamus. But if I was Jimmy the Greek, in Las Vegas, and laying the odds, I'd put them in favor of our side.

Why?

Because the RVNAF take the big ones.

True they lost Dak Pek. After 400 days siege, Tong Le Chan. And they lost the outposts of Chi Linh, Rach Bap, Base 82, Bach Ma Mountain, Plei d'Jereng, Bu Prang, Bu Bong and Dak Pek. All told, the net loss was 144 outposts. But – contradictory as it may sound these were largely gainful losses.

This is only relearning what the French learned the hard way two decades ago. As Bernard Fall points out, "at that time, everyone had agreed that sealed off 'hedgehogs' were hardly worth the use of maintaining them".<sup>1</sup>

Holding all these small places takes too much in life and effort. The big ones count. And each Corps since the Cease-Fire has seen the big ones taken by the RVNAF. The first big fight in I Corps was over the Port of Sa Huynh. The Division size battles at Quang Duc in II Corps, at Tri Phap in IV Corps, and the Iron Triangle in III Corps. All enemy defeats. With only the Iron Triangle less than total.

But if – and this a prodigious pivotal if – if we don't support them with the dollar wherewithal, then the end is the opposite. The end, is their end.

I am apprehensive over the GVN future as the enemy builds up and our support of the RVNAF lessens. Their hope as we scrimp the support, is in their Generalship, their basic leadership and courage.

As we take a lesson from the History of War at Dien Bien Phu of two

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Fall, *Hell In A Very Small Place (The Siege of Dien Bien Phu)*, Vintage Books, 1968, pg. 18.

decades ago, we can also take a lesson from the same source and Waterloo, 16 decades ago; where Marshal Ney "the Bravest of the Brave" made a final desperate charge, and ended up – in frenzied despair – beating a cannon with a broken sword.

Valor is not enough....

What I'm saying is, they'll win. If we support them as we promised. They won't, if we don't.



JOHN E. MURRAY  
Major General, USA  
Defense Attaché

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**Introduction: Indochina in the Year of the Water Buffalo**

By the end of 1972, Saigon's Regional and Popular Forces (RF/PF) controlled 90% of the countryside and the Land to Tiller program had given land titles for 800,000 hectares to happy tenant farmers. Things were going well. After the "Christmas" bombing of 1972, in early 1973, all parties signed the Paris Peace Accords. Hanoi troops were allowed to stay inside the south. John Negroponte said, "We bombed them into accepting our concessions." Watergate and antiwar movement's political influence on Congress, explained this military surrender. Democrat caucuses in the House and Senate indicated their ultimate intent. They resolved to cut off U.S. funds for the war in Vietnam.

Vigorously objecting to large NVA forces remaining in place, an abandoned President Thieu signed based on Nixon's "irrevocable" promises to respond with "full force" if Hanoi violated the agreement. In January 1973, Hanoi's troops also stayed behind in Laos, 70,000 and Cambodia, 30,000.

Meanwhile, both Saigon and Hanoi engaged in last minute "land grabs" and flag wars, before and after the ceasefire. Saigon won beating back most of hundreds of attacks in territories totaling 680,000 people. Viet Cong flag stayed in only 3% of hamlets in the South. Yet ARVN abandoned remote outposts too costly in life and treasure to defend, e.g. A Chau valley, but still vital to Hanoi war plans. The South suffered from corruption of its officials and communist terrorism. Moreover, only 200,000 of the South's 1.1 million were in combat units, the rest in bureaucratic support, an American legacy.

With MACV disbanded, planning to resume air and naval combat operations in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam if required, moved to USASAG, in Thailand. In Saigon a residual diplomatic corps, the Defense Attaché Office (DAO), sought to implement the treaty. Both eventually failed. The NVA violated the treaty and congress killed all military options. On March 29, the last American troops withdrew.

February to April, American POWs returned in Operation Homecoming. Hanoi dribbled out POWs on its their own schedule and agenda. Up to the last minute of the last day, Hanoi milked propaganda out of POWs. CBS John Hart used Hanoi's coerced quotes from POWs—treatment, communists and antiwar good. At home POWs revealed the truth. Tom Hayden and Jane Fonda called the POWs, "liars, hypocrites and pawns." The VFW held a parade. Nixon and Perot held parties.

April-May 1973, the Khmer Rouge's barbaric offensive captured most of three provinces along Cambodia's border with South Vietnam. Ken