THE VIETNAM WAR

APRIL 30th 1975

AMERICA's Bitter END

Please Click on your mouse to advance the slides...
BAO DAI, Vietnam's last emperor, ascended to the throne in 1932 and cooperated with the Japanese occupying Vietnam during World War II.

After the war, he briefly joined ranks with Vietnamese communist leader Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh, only to flee into exile in Hong Kong and France from 1949-1955.

He returned to Vietnam to rule under French control until he was ousted by South Vietnamese leader Ngo Dinh Diem in an election in 1954.

One day after his 42nd birthday, Bao Dai found himself overwhelmingly repudiated by the people he had sometimes meant to serve.
Diem is proud of his Vietnamese heritage: "We are a country of principles, an old country, a country built village by village."

... but: "Sometimes I think we Asians are too reserved, talk too much by nuance. We ought to learn to be rude in our talk like the Americans, and get things done."

Apr. 04, 1955

After refusing Ho Chi Minh’s invitation to join the Communist movement, Ngo Dinh Diem 54-year-old bachelor, proclaimed South Viet Nam a Republic and himself its first President.

President Diem led the South Vietnam from 1954 to 1963, when he was killed by his generals in a coup.
In his eight months as Premier, South Viet Nam's Nguyen Cao Ky had best been known as an atavistic aviator.

Ky showed himself eloquent and honest, astute and independent, and above all a man who cared passionately about the defense and the welfare of his nation.

Feb. 18, 1966

But under the spotlight of Lyndon Johnson's U.S.-Vietnamese summit in Honolulu, the highflying aviator finally came down to earth.

Ky showed himself eloquent and honest, astute and independent, and above all a man who cared passionately about the defense and the welfare of his nation.
Nguyen Van Thieu served as the South Vietnamese chief of state under Nguyen Cao Ky from 1965-67.

In 1967, he ran successfully for president of South Vietnam and held that position until the Fall of Saigon.

The people of South Viet Nam chose a President, Nguyen Van Thieu, a Vice President, Nguyen Cao Ky, and 60 Senators in a free election.

As President, Thieu now gives every sign that this time he intends to be No. 1 in fact as well as in title.

Thieu forced Ky to stand aside.

Sep. 15, 1967
Joint statement by Presidents Nguyen Van Thieu and Nixon at Midway Island. June 8, 1969

PRESIDENT NIXON, April 1973….

Mr. President, we have been allies in a long and difficult war. And now you can be sure that we stand with you as we continue to work together to build a lasting peace.

Nixon also renewed a secret pledge to Thieu: he would "respond with full force" if the Communists broke the cease-fire.

Thieu expected American air power to save him. But Nixon’s own power was under attack in Washington.
President Richard M. Nixon promised the Saigon government in 1972 and 1973 that the United States would "take swift and severe retaliatory action" and would "respond with full force" if North Vietnam violated the Paris cease-fire accord.

These agreements, said Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr., former chief of naval operations, were never communicated to the Congress.

"Kissinger and Nixon did not level with the Congress as to the commitments that were made," said the retired four-star-admiral Zumwalt.
President Ford formally refused to give Congress copies of the Nixon - Thieu correspondence on the ground of diplomatic confidentiality.

These agreements, said Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr. former chief of naval operations, were never communicated to the Congress.

"We prevailed upon Vietnamese President Thieu to accept a very bad truce. This truce permitted the enemy to remain in South Vietnam in exchange for something that was good for the United States and that was the total removal of our forces...." said the retired four-star-admiral Zumwalt.
The U.S. was clearly looking harder than ever before for an honorable end to the war, and Saigon finally realized that the American commitment was not open-ended, which hastened South Viet Nam's plans for going on its own.

Thieu, still believing that America would not abandon him, again pleaded for help.

On April 2nd 1975, he met with Ambassador Martin and President Ford's special envoy. But by now, the Americans were losing faith in Thieu.

Just prior to the Fall of Saigon, Thieu emigrated to Taiwan before taking up residence in England.

Mar. 28, 1969
In Beijing on June 22, 1972, Kissinger told Zhou Enlai that the United States might accept a Communist takeover of South Vietnam if it occurred after a withdrawal of American troops.

“...If we can live with a communist government in China we ought to be able to accept it in Indochina...”

He told Zhou Enlai that, for credibility reasons, the United States could not meet Hanoi’s demand for the "overthrow" of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu.

But, once US forces had left Indochina, Kissinger declared, the White House would accept the results of historical change.
After concluding most of a deal with the North Vietnamese 1972, Kissinger finally flew to Saigon "to present what he had done," which was, after all, to sketch a pact that would permit communist soldiers to remain on the soil of free Vietnam.

Thieu realized that Mr. Kissinger was coming to Saigon to demand his approval of a done deal.

"Suddenly, I realized that things were being negotiated for us behind my back and without my approval," Mr. Isaacson quotes Mr. Thieu as recalling.

Mr. Walter Isaacson's biography of Mr. Kissinger says, Thieu was actually thinking "I wanted to punch Kissinger in the mouth."
President Thieu made a crucial decision. He ordered his forces to abandon the northern and central provinces and form a new line of defense further south.

At four o'clock on the afternoon of March 9, 1975, Banmethuot fell, but the government said nothing, and the withdrawal from Pleiku was only learned about from rumors. People stopped believing in the government.
On foot and on anything with wheels, refugees evacuated ahead of Communist forces, fleeing in general panic.

The official silence panicked the population. Within days, thousands of civilians were streaming toward the coastal city of Danang, desperately seeking safety.
CIVILIAN REFUGEES TRAVELLED FROM CENTRAL AND QUANG TRI PROVINCE ALONG THE HORROR HIGHWAY 1.

Anarchy was beginning to break out everywhere…
During the withdrawal, the air force, obviously, was using their airplanes to get out any way they could. Mixed in with all of this was the panic-stricken flight of tens of thousands of civilians and dependents.

As the rumors flew, fear spread. Nobody knew what to believe and nobody wanted to be left behind.
A World Airways jet with company president Ed Daley aboard made a perilous landing at Danang. He wanted to save women and children first, but desperate soldiers jammed into the airplane. They scrambled into the baggage compartment and clung to the stairway as the plane took off. It was the last American flight out of Danang.
BETRAYED & ABANDONED CIVILIAN REFUGEES DIED ALONG THE DEATH HIGHWAYS UNDER VIET CONG UNDISCRIMINATED ARTILLERY RAIN.
To avoid being captured by communists, abandoned ARVN soldiers shredded off their uniforms and scattered them all over on the streets.
Among the ribbons of refugees heading away from the fighting were the embittered abandoned ARVN soldiers.
The Abandoned ARVN Soldiers: To avoid being captured by Communists, the ARVN soldiers shedded off their uniforms which were scattered all over on the street.
Two wounded ARVN soldiers while defending Newport bridge in Saigon on April 28, 1975
The morning of April 29, 1975.
Tan Son Nhut airport was under fire,
preventing passenger planes from taking off.
The icon image of US evacuation (April 30, 1975)
On April 30th 1975, a long line of people climbing on helicopters on the rooftop of the U.S. embassy to get out of the doomed country.
More than 600 US military flights airlifted evacuees from Saigon to ships offshore.
At the airport, the U.S. embassy, and elsewhere in the capital, all Americans and Vietnamese at risk were taken out by helicopter to U.S. aircraft carriers.
By March 21, 1975, 100,000 refugees, many of them, troops and their families, had crowded into Danang.

Some soldiers put their wives and children aboard ships headed for safer areas in the South. Offshore, refugees were packed aboard rescue ships. Thousands drowned trying to flee, or were suffocated in the crush.
At the airport, the U.S. embassy, and elsewhere in the capital, all Americans and Vietnamese at risk were taken out by helicopter to U.S. aircraft carriers.
During the last two days, more than 600 US military flights airlifted evacuees from Saigon to ships offshore. Air America also joined the effort.

Above, civilians head for a helicopter at Tan Son Nhut.
At the airport, the U.S. embassy, and elsewhere in the capital, all Americans and Vietnamese at risk were taken out by helicopter to U.S. aircraft carriers.
Man!!! What the Hell are they doing, don’t they know I am here to get my reward as the fastest escapee?
Anyone Home? I mean: Lyndon, Richard, or Gerald?
Newsmen Interviewing Graham Martin
Original caption: Aboard USS Blue Ridge: U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam Graham Martin, answers newsmen's questions during his brief visit of the temporary press center aboard the Blue Ridge in the South China Sea. The 61 year old diplomat in a news conference said that, "If we had done as a nation the things I think we said we should do -- if we had kept our commitments -- we wouldn't have had to evacuate." Martin was the one of the last to evacuate from the embassy in Saigon.
By late afternoon April 29th 1975, most Americans and thousands of Vietnamese had reached the U.S. carriers offshore. Thousands more Vietnamese were waiting in Saigon.
Inside the palace, Duong Van Minh, president for 44 hours, was waiting. Colonel Bui Tin took the surrender.

COL. LEGRO: I felt that the United States had betrayed a trust that the United States had given South Vietnam. I also felt that I was personally betrayed; I had also made, implied promises, that the United States would honor the agreements we had made at the time of the cease-fire and then when things got really tough we really just cut and run.

COL. BUI TIN: When I saw fear on the faces of Minh and the others present, I said: "The war has ended today, and all Vietnamese are victors. Only the American imperialists are the vanquished. If you still have any feelings for the nation and the people, consider today a happy day."
COL. BUI TIN (Army of North Vietnam): After reaching the other side of the bridge, we went straight to the Independence Palace.

They had planned a two-year campaign to capture the capital. It took 55 days.
NGUYEN CONG THANH (Army of North Vietnam): We entered the city from six different directions. None of us knew how to get to the Independence Palace.
BETRAYED & ABANDONED
The fall of Saigon drove many people to commit suicide on and after April 30, 1975, estimated at several hundreds. Some famous cases were fully recorded.

**ARVN Colonel HO NGOC CAN (1940-1975)**
He fell into the hands of the Communist force after he failed an attempt to kill himself. He told the enemy that he wouldn't surrender, and asked them to let him salute the ARVN colors with his uniform on before the execution. Colonel Can was publicly executed by the Communist firing squad after a quick summary trial at a Communist kangaroo court.

**ARVN Brigadier General LE VAN HUNG (1933-1975)**
Said farewell to his men, his wife and children before he killed himself by a .45 pistol. It was 8:45 PM, 30 April 1975.

**ARVN General PHAM VAN PHU (1927-1975)**
His troops suffered heavy losses during the withdraw to the coastal areas in April 1975. General Phu committed suicide on 30 April 1975 in Saigon.

**ARVN Major General NGUYEN KHOA NAM (1927-1975)**
At 11:30 PM, 30 April 1975, General Nam killed himself after saying farewell to his staff and talking by phone with General Le Van Hung, who later ended his life.

**ARVN Brigadier General TRAN VAN HAI (1927-1975)**
At midnight, 30 April 1975, he committed suicide at the Division Headquarters, Dong Tam Army Base.

**ARVN Brigadier General LE NGUYEN VY (1933-1975),**
General Vy commander of the 5th Infantry Division at Lai Khe. Committed suicide by a pistol at 11:00 AM, 30 April 1975 at the division headquarters in Lai Khe.
Lieutenant Colonel Nguyen Van Long, shot himself in front of the Congress Hall and below the Statute of ARVN Soldier on April 30th, 1975.

"Why don't these people die fast"

*Henri Kissinger* (referring to South Vietnam's struggle against Hanoi military attack after Da Nang retreat)
April 30th 1975
The End