



## Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam, 1973-75

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The defeat of South Vietnam was arguably America's worst foreign policy disaster of the 20th Century. Yet a complete understanding of the endgame—from the 27 January 1973 signing of the Paris Peace Accords to South Vietnam's surrender on 30 April 1975—has eluded us.

*Black April* addresses that deficit. A culmination of exhaustive research in three distinct areas: primary source documents from American archives, North Vietnamese publications containing primary and secondary source material, and dozens of articles and numerous interviews with key South Vietnamese participants, this book represents one of the largest Vietnamese translation projects ever accomplished, including almost one hundred rarely or never seen before North Vietnamese unit histories, battle studies, and memoirs. Most important, to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of South Vietnam's conquest, the leaders in Hanoi released several compendiums of formerly highly classified cables and memorandum between the Politburo and its military commanders in the south. This treasure trove of primary source materials provides the most complete insight into North Vietnamese decision-making ever complied. While South Vietnamese deliberations remain less clear, enough material exists to provide a decent overview.

Ultimately, whatever errors occurred on the American and South Vietnamese side, the simple fact remains that the country was conquered by a North Vietnamese military invasion despite written pledges by Hanoi's leadership against such action. Hanoi's momentous choice to destroy the Paris Peace Accords and militarily end the war sent a generation of South Vietnamese into exile, and exacerbated a societal trauma in America over our long Vietnam involvement that reverberates to this day. How that transpired deserves deeper scrutiny.

## Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam, 1973-75 Details

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## From Reader Review Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam, 1973-75 for online ebook

### Rob Schmertz says

Too detailed - to the point of obscuring the author's main points and insights. And even in some cases apparently contradicting them (US cutting off aid hamstrung ARVN but can't recall any examples of this in practice in the details of the battles). Author seemed content to skip over the big points to focus instead of exactly who hit what tank with what weapon at what point in a 2 hour fire fight for a minor village.

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### Joshua says

I find this book to be a difficult book to review because it is not exactly my "cup of tea." Nevertheless, to rate it based on personal interest would not only be foolish but would also be somewhat unfair. When I bought this book I was hoping to gain a stronger look into the political aspects surrounding Black April. Having recently finished "An American Amnesia: How the U.S. Congress Forced the Surrender of North Vietnam and Cambodia" I was hoping to gain further information from a historian. While the book mentioned above is a quality book, it is blatantly biased and does not always contain quality sources; not to mention that the author of that book is not himself a historian. This is not to imply that only a historian can write quality history, but simply means that a historian is often trained to attempt an unbiased, clinical assessment of a situation as it occurs historically; and a historian is taught to cite his sources as meticulously as possible. While this book is clinical and well-documented it was not exactly what I hoped to find and to be blatantly honest, there were parts of this book that I found to be cumbersome and uninteresting. However, that has little to do with the book and more to do with the fact that I have never been terribly interested in studying battles, tactics, and military strategy. For the kind of book that it is, this book will likely become something of a standard on the military strategies that led to the downfall of South Vietnam.

While the book focused a great deal on the tactical aspects of the major battles surrounding the fall of South Vietnam it did contain some of the information that I hoped to find. The beginning of the book was lively and quite engaging. He starts out the introduction with a very clear set of objectives and a defined list of reasons for the fall of the South Vietnamese government. Although, the book generally looks at the war almost solely through eyes of Vietnamese; he does take time to discuss the role that was played by the American government. Like most historians he tends to paint Nixon as a strong leader in terms of dealing with the North Vietnamese and as I read it the question in my mind was whether or not Black April would have occurred if "Watergate" had not forced the resignation of President Nixon. It is easily to assume that because the North won that the south Vietnamese people were in agreement with the "politburo" or the Communist leadership during the war. However, according to Veith the south Vietnamese people were very much in opposition to Communist rule and it was a smaller, determined, well-organized, well-funded group of communists who imposed their own will on the whole of Vietnam. The million plus who exited Vietnam during or shortly after Black April is a testament to the sentiments of the average citizen of the People's Republic of Vietnam. The people wanted a Republic but 1.) the weak nature of Ford's presidency 2.) the anti-war sentiments of Americans and Congress 3.) the painting of Thieu as a despot all played a significant role in the ultimate downfall of the republic.

Money was really the crucial issue that determined who was able to secure victory in this engagement. However, it was not simply money but there were a number of bad decisions made by those in key military

leadership positions in Saigon. While it is true that the north had more weapons, the south was actually better trained and prepared than their northern counterparts. However, the lack of resources due to drastic reduction in U.S. aid gave the communists an edge. Many of the generals in the "politburo" were very bright men and credit should be given wherever it is due; but if the U.S. had aided their ally sufficiently it is doubtful that south Vietnam would have been taken over. In fact, in many cases the south Vietnamese fought gallantly and only needed to be better equipped and funded. The communists were very shrewd about attacking south Vietnam usually striking at just the right times and places. South Vietnam did everything under their power to garner the assistance of the Americans and although Ford failed he did at least attempt to get as much funding as he could to aid the south. However, the Americans were dead set against any more involvement and the movements of the communist forces were predicated on their accurate assessment of U.S. sentiment. Vietnam desperately needed money after the war as it was in an economic crunch. It was vital that the U.S. keep its word to aid them in the event of a communist uprising but the American government did not follow through with our commitments.

As the book moved forward Veith was drawn into a strong description of the battles that occurred and this section began to bring about a wane in interest. The chapters in this part of the book are very long making it hard to partition the book off into more bite-size chunks. As the book goes on there were times I found it near intolerable. This does not reflect on the author but rather on me as a reader. I tend to struggle visualizing the events described in battle scenes. There were several things that made this difficult as far as this book is concerned. First of all, the names of the generals are all very different from American names and I found it difficult from time to time to keep them straight. The photos in the book were helpful but they did not necessarily solve the issue. Second of all, while the maps were helpful my general unfamiliarity with Vietnam as a nation made it difficult to follow along from location to location. This book is accessible to everyone but to be honest there is a necessity to already have a working knowledge of the geographic locations that are discussed. Lastly, the details of each encounter were painstakingly detailed and for someone like me who does not have a strong background this became cumbersome and tedious. Part of the way through the book it became necessary to read rather lightly looking mostly at areas where something of interest came into play. However, if I were a military historian then Veith's details would be an invaluable source.

At the end of the work Veith gave a good assessment and allowed the reader to see his perspective which was honest and refreshing. It seems clear that he is a conservative writer which explains the sympathetic tone in reference to Nixon. He criticized the liberal media for their involvement in turning public sentiment. He felt that Americans did the right thing going into Vietnam and we did wrong when we turned away from our ally in the time of need. He also expressed that Thieu is misunderstood and actually was not as despotic as he is thought to be. He does not gloss over the fact that in some cases Thieu was a dictator; but compared to what they ended up with Thieu was very democratic. Veith does not turn a deaf ear to the fact that many government policies in America were impure, but still believes that the basic reason that we were there in Vietnam was good and right. I have to agree and I think that the aftermath of Black April certainly demonstrate this perspective on the war. As we look at the war in Afghanistan and much of what has happened in Iraq then perhaps the situation in Vietnam can offer us guidance. Whether or not it can or not I don't know, but I do know that this is a quality book that is well-done and if you are interested in getting down to the "nitty-gritty" of Black April then this book is for you. If you are not already familiar with the geography, or culture then it may be best to first make sure that you know this before going into the book. It is not my "cup of tea" but it still a valuable book on the Vietnam era.

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### **David Bales says**

Extensively detailed military history about the collapse of South Vietnam after the U.S. troop withdrawal in 1973; Veith points out that while the general perception of the ARVN, (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) is sort of true, (that is, that they were poorly-led, corrupt and reluctant to fight) but not completely true, and that they often showed high degrees of courage and competence, especially after 1972, with American assistance. Still, the magnitude of South Vietnam's failure after 1973 is hard to hide. Veith blames several factors, especially the U.S. stoppage of military aid in 1975 and President Nixon's resignation. Nixon had pledged to defend South Vietnam, but by the spring of 1975, post-Watergate America was in no mood for a return of the B-52s to save South Vietnam's government. The spark that led to the end was the North Vietnamese capture of Da Nang in March, 1975, which set off a complete and irreversible panic among the South Vietnamese military. The photo section of the book is annoyingly small, and deals mostly with South Vietnamese military officials. Staid, to the point and rather emotionless, Veith does little to capture the overwhelming human tragedy that the Vietnam War created: the refugees, the panic, the lines of wounded and dying civilians, et al. After billions of dollars and several million lives, the U.S. more or less abandoned the South Vietnamese to their fate. An important moral lesson to those that advocate bugging out of Afghanistan.

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### **Stuart Bobb says**

The book was interesting in that it has now been long enough to get information from all sides and a more complete history is available.

It was engaging in that while I was a tween when Saigon fell, I still knew so little about the end of the war. Certainly one doesn't come away from this book with a very positive view of how the US chose to "end" this war. Clearly, the leadership of the North Vietnamese did an excellent job of predicting American behavior and South Vietnamese morale. As with most debacles, plenty of smart people described quite clearly what was likely to happen and what could/should be done about it, but they were not able to get the changes needed.

The book is frustrating in that it is very detailed about this or that combat unit and this or that little town and this or that river or air force base, etc. I didn't find that level of detail engaging in this book, though I can see why historians would care.

As is often the case with Kindle books, the map pages weren't very readable and that didn't help me follow all the details of location.

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### **Dave Beeman says**

So you think the South Vietnamese rolled over and gave up in the Spring of 1975. Not so says the author. He goes into great detail explaining the strategic decisions made by both North and South Vietnam; the political decisions made and in great detail takes you through the many battles fought before and up to the fall of Saigon. Well researched.

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## **Mike says**

A serious book for serious students of military history, and the first thorough study of the events from after the US left South Vietnam in 1973 to its fall in 1975. As many who were shouted down at the time knew, the South finally carried its own weight and performed well against the Northern invaders until the US abandoned them financially. Quite simply, Russia and China supported their client longer than the US supported ours. The outcome was not inevitable, but it is hard to fight a well equipped and lavishly supplied enemy without supplies. The US Congress made a conscious decision to lose South Vietnam.

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## **James Murphy says**

The Paris Peace Accords of 1973 ended the many years of fighting in Vietnam. It provided for a ceasefire in place and the withdrawal of all non-Vietnamese forces. And it expressed a desire that both Vietnams be united by peaceful means. Within 4 months of that signing, the North Vietnamese leadership had decided to continue military operations aimed at the overthrow of the government of South Vietnam and a unification under the communist government of the North. Within those areas of the South the PAVN still occupied as permitted by the Accord, they built an enormous military presence backed by Chinese and Soviet aid. A limited offensive was conducted in 1974. In March of 1975 they began the general offensive designed to overthrow the South in a year.

South Vietnam proved to be a house of cards. Crippled by Congressional aid restraints, the non-involvement of American airpower, and by strategic blunders committed by President Nguyen Van Thieu, South Vietnam collapsed within 60 days. Veith's telling is comprehensive and told from both sides. Though it's a big story he doesn't skip the portraits and analyses of the many men who controlled those momentous events, whether they saw them finally as joyous justification after years of conflict or as unmitigated tragedy. The portraits of these men are precise; the desperation on both sides is seen as acute. The story of those 2 months is richly told. In this detailed history of the 1973-75 period, Veith has made extensive use of the available North Vietnamese archives and accounts written by the leadership which explain the decision-making processes as well as the debates within the Politburo and the military command structure. For now this is the definitive account of the fall of South Vietnam.

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## **Anthony Nelson says**

A very thorough look at the final campaign of South Vietnam. It's a scholarly, purely military focused look, so you may find yourself referring to the notes many times for various acronyms, but gives an excellent overview of the details of the various battles.

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## **Lucas says**

I had previously assumed that the people of South Vietnam were simply unwilling to fight for their freedom, and my view of American involvement in Vietnam was sketched in large part out of reflections on this conclusion. This work is simply magisterial, and blew away many of the cobwebs in my mind on this issue. I am still reeling from all the new information offered in this volume. I now feel that the abandonment of

South Vietnam was a more sordid affair than our years of support.

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### **Diogo Sena says**

Black April is a tremendous work of research, a tremendous accounting of Military History. In fact the chessboard upon which the North and South face each other is painted with military precision and methodology. As a reader I enjoyed a mental visualization of the battleground, making sense of the battle fought in Vietnam. The author isn't given to any traits of romance language, nor was this book the place for such. Again it is a tremendous work of research, it is really worth highlighting that. Then presented with military clearness.

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### **Mark Peebler says**

This is an excellent book, though it tells the story of a tremendous tragedy. From President Nixon's private promises made to South Vietnamese President Thieu (promises that the Watergate Scandal would not allow him to keep), to the unparalleled abandonment of an Ally by the 93rd and 94th U.S. Congress, this book reads like a series of falling dominoes setting off calamitous events one after the other; constantly snowballing towards the epic collapse of the Republic of Vietnam. It is a volume that reminds the reader of how the South Vietnamese were taught to model their military after the highly mobile U.S. armed forces in a way that relied heavily upon air power, and massive consumption of fuel and ammunition to defend themselves; only to have the money required for such a military abruptly cut off at the worst possible time. The lack of supplies for Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) troops would be juxtaposed against a communist North Vietnam fully supplied by the communist governments of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Communist North Vietnam would completely violate the 1973 Paris Peace Accords, while the United States would sit on the sideline and do nothing. To be sure, impossibly hard decisions made by President Thieu exacerbated the situation in the II Corps Area at the opening of the 1975 communist offensive. Add to the mix a multitude of civilians fleeing the communist juggernaut and completely clogging the roads in I Corps and II Corps; roads that were ARVN's only remaining means of egress since the diminution of helicopter fuel. Cohesion was lost among the troops and many Regional Forces and ARVN Units were jumbled with civilians, becoming easy prey for communist tanks and artillery. Numerous units lost morale and quickly ceased to exist. These ARVN failures are duly noted in Vieth's book, but so is the valiant last stand made by General Le Minh Dao and his famed 18th Infantry Division at the week-long battle of Xuan Loc. ARVN forces, with supplies and American air power, had made the communists pay dearly for their four month long failure in the Spring of 1972; without supplies or any appreciable air power in 1975 ARVN forces only held out a mere 55 days. Saigon was no more.

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