



THE TRUTH ABOUT THE VIETNAM WAR

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Decades back, in late 1972, South Vietnam and the United States were winning the Vietnam War decisively by every conceivable measure. That's not just my view. That was the view of our enemy, the North Vietnamese government officials. Victory was apparent when President Nixon ordered the U.S. Air Force to bomb industrial and military targets in Hanoi, North Vietnam's capital city, and in Haiphong, its major port city, and we would stop the bombing if the North Vietnamese would attend the Paris Peace Talks that they had left earlier. The North Vietnamese did go back to the Paris Peace talks, and we did stop the bombing as promised.

On January the 23rd, 1973, President Nixon gave a speech to the nation on primetime television announcing that the Paris Peace Accords had been initialed by the United States, South Vietnam, North Vietnam, the Viet Cong, and the Accords would be signed on the 27th. What the United States and South Vietnam received in those accords was victory. At the White House, it was called "VV Day," "Victory in Vietnam Day."

The U.S. backed up that victory with a simple pledge within the Paris Peace Accords saying: should the South require any military hardware to defend itself against any North Vietnam aggression we would provide replacement aid to the South on a piece-by-piece, one-to-one replacement, meaning a bullet for a bullet; a helicopter for a helicopter, for all things lost -- replacement. The advance of communist tyranny had been halted by those accords.

Then it all came apart. And it happened this way: In August of the following year, 1974, President Nixon resigned his office as a result of what became known as "Watergate." Three months after his resignation came the November congressional elections and within them the Democrats won a landslide victory for the new Congress and many of the members used their new majority to de-fund the military aid the U.S. had promised, piece for piece, breaking the commitment that we made to the South Vietnamese in Paris to provide whatever military hardware the South Vietnamese needed in case of aggression from the North. Put simply and accurately, a majority of Democrats of the 94th Congress did not keep the word of the United States.

On April the 10th of 1975, President Gerald Ford appealed directly to those members of the congress in an evening Joint Session, televised to the nation. In that speech he literally begged the Congress to keep the word of the United States. But as President Ford delivered his speech, many of the members of the Congress walked out of the chamber. Many of them had an investment in America's failure in Vietnam. They had participated in demonstrations against the war for many years. They wouldn't give the aid.

On April the 30th South Vietnam surrendered and Re-education Camps were constructed,

and the phenomenon of the Boat People began. If the South Vietnamese had received the arms that the United States promised them would the result have been different? It already had been different. The North Vietnamese leaders admitted that they were testing the new President, Gerald Ford, and they took one village after another, then cities, then provinces and our only response was to go back on our word. The U.S. did not re-supply the South Vietnamese as we had promised. It was then that the North Vietnamese knew they were on the road to South Vietnam's capital city, Saigon, that would soon be renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

Former Arkansas Senator William Fulbright, who had been the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee made a public statement about the surrender of South Vietnam. He said this, "I am no more distressed than I would be about Arkansas losing a football game to Texas." The U.S. knew that North Vietnam would violate the accords and so we planned for it. What we did not know was that our own Congress would violate the accords. And violate them, of all things, on behalf of the North Vietnamese. That's what happened.

I'm Bruce Herschensohn.