

Due date: Sunday, 27 May 2012, 11:55 PM

Last edited: Sunday, 27 May 2012, 08:17 PM (983 words)

History of Vietnam Assignment Two

Jason McKay

A turning point in the Vietnam War happened on April 20, 1970 when Anthony Lake, special assistant to National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger resigned from his post, in protest to the planned invasion of Cambodia. The election of Richard Nixon as the 37th President of the United States resulted in a new phase of the Vietnam War, as Nixon, along with Kissinger planned to end the war 'honorably'. Instead, Nixon escalated the war with secret incursions into Cambodia, ordered specific individuals to be secretly wiretapped (including those who worked for him), and created a larger, louder anti-war movement.

Anthony Lake's testimony in *Patriots* (pgs. 380-382) delves into his mixed feeling of resigning from his position as an assistant to Kissinger. He no longer could work for an administration which would no longer heed the advice of so-called 'doves', or 'bleeding hearts' as Kissinger personally described his dissenting staff (Appy, page 381). Lake felt there was possibly something more that could be done from the inside, working with the White House, rather than leaving. He explains it himself, in reference to others assuming he was proud of the bold move: "The reason I felt guilty was that I knew I had more of an opportunity to argue about the conduct of war and how to end it by being in the White House than I did by becoming a citizen again. I still believe that". (Appy, page 381)

Anthony Lake's resignation, along with another Kissinger staffer Roger Morris, is a turning point in the Vietnam War because it is a moment in history when many within the White House staff felt compelled to quit due to a growing unpopularity with President Nixon's policies. The incursion into Cambodia which caused such a large rift between the 'doves and hawks' within the White House, resulted not just in individuals leaving, but also created an escalation in the anti-war movement throughout the United States, causing mass demonstration and hundreds of schools to close (*America's Longest War*, page 293). The

anger over Cambodia also caused growing dissent throughout the Congress, including those who were formally sympathetic to Nixon. As the numbers swelled of those who disagreed with the policies of Richard Nixon, his growing paranoia and stress caused him to make irrational personal decisions, such as secretly wiretapping individuals, including Anthony Lake upon his resignation. These factors created a turning point, which would eventually help lead to both the end of the Vietnam War and the presidency of Richard Nixon. Ironically, after leaving the Nixon administration in shame, over two decades later, Anthony Lake would become the National Security Advisor to President Clinton.

A testimonial from *Patriot's* which could be observed as a catalyst to the Vietnam War is that of Daniel Ellsberg, "the most dangerous man in America" as described by Henry Kissinger (Appy, pg. 432). Ellsberg is chiefly known as the Department of Defense employee who released the mammoth secret government documents (7,000 pages), the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times. In his own words in *Patriots*, Ellsberg not only describes his motivation, but proclaims that his contribution not only brought every dirty little secret regarding the Vietnam War (or at least everything from the beginning of America's involvement through 1967) to the public, but it's release directly caused the Watergate scandal, which would lead to Nixon's resignation.

Much of America was 'fed up' with the war by the time the Pentagon Papers were released, but they did give validation to many of the doves that were presently or formally members of the White House, as well as the anti-war movement. The Pentagon Papers gave a shocking revelation of White House lies that led to every escalation of the Vietnam War, including the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 which gave the Johnson administration congressional approval for war.

Ellsberg insinuates that the Pentagon Papers may have directly helped end the Vietnam War and if not, definitely ended Nixon's presidency. He states, "And without Watergate I think Nixon might have been able to keep up the bombing of Vietnam indefinitely. I think Watergate shortened the war by at least a couple of years and possibly much longer. Apart from its connection to Watergate, the Pentagon Papers definitely contributed to a delegitimation of the war, an impatience with its continuation, and a sense of that it was

wrong. They made people understand that presidents lie all the time, not just occasionally, but all the time.” (Appy, pg. 436)

Reflecting back, it is hard to say what could have happened ... or not, if Nixon would have stayed in the White House, would he tried to continue the war? We do recognize the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam in 1975, when President Ford declares an end to the Vietnam War in a televised speech on April 25th. On the other hand, despite the public reaction to the Pentagon Papers, Richard Nixon did go on to win the 1972 presidential election by one of the largest landslides in American history (about 60% of the popular vote). The 1973 Case-Church Amendment which prohibited continued military involvement in Vietnam could be observed as the official ending of the war.

1971 was a year of ‘war weariness’, with 71% of the general population agreeing that the United States made a mistake going into Vietnam and another 58% believing the war was ‘immoral’ (Herring, pg. 300). Daniel Ellsberg was one of the individuals who believed both those points, and released the Pentagon Papers with the intention of seeing an ‘end’ to the Vietnam War.

Close this window

 [Moodle Docs for this page](#)