

Tet Offensive of Marks 50th Anniversary of this Vietnam War Milestone on January 31

The Tet Offensive of 1968, in which 2,000 American, 5,000 South Vietnamese and 40,000 North Vietnamese combatants died, along with an uncounted number of civilians marks its 50th year on January 31, and spelled the beginning of the end of American involvement in Vietnam.

January 30, 2018 (FPRC) -- The Tet Offensive, a countrywide assault by the North Vietnamese communists that began on January 31, 1968, in an attempt to turn the tide of war in their favor, marks its 50th anniversary this year.

"Although it was a military disaster for the North, Tet proved to be a strategic and political defeat for the U.S., and it marked a turning point that ultimately led to the withdrawal of all American forces from the war," observes Michael Morris, a Vietnam veteran fought during the Tet Offensive. His recollection of the days during and immediately following Tet are still vivid.

"On the 50th anniversary of that bloody debacle—in which more than 2,000 American, 5,000 South Vietnamese and 40,000 North Vietnamese combatants died, along with an uncounted number of civilians—it is not surprising that this milestone is again in the news," adds Morris.

The Vietnam War continues to resonate as a key historic event for many Americans. The conflict divided the nation, tainted the administrations of four presidents, killed more than 58,000 U.S. servicemen and caused untold pain for the families of the fallen and its surviving veterans, Morris reflects.

Morris and Dick Pirozzolo, a fellow Vietnam veteran coauthored "Escape from Saigon – a Novel" recently released by Skyhorse Publishing, New York. The novel depicts the final chapter of the war and is told through the lives of journalists and ordinary people who were trapped in Saigon during April 1975 and their quest to escape.

"As in previous years," he recalls, "we and the North Vietnamese had agreed to a ceasefire during Tet, the Buddhist Lunar New Year," says Morris adding, "The holiday ran from Jan. 31 to Feb. 5 in 1968. Meanwhile, the North was infiltrating thousands of fresh troops into South Vietnam, especially in the region below the demilitarized zone, but our commanders saw this as part of a general buildup for an offensive that would follow Tet. My infantry unit was moved into the mountains just west of Da Nang, one of the big coastal cities, to serve as a blocking force to protect the city and the thousands of troops, aircraft and supplies we had stationed there."

He continues, "We thought we'd get a few days of relative rest during the ceasefire. We had no idea that the North Vietnamese were planning a massive assault to coincide with Tet. It turned out to be pretty horrific. By that point I had been in combat almost an entire year and I had never seen anything as bad. We killed a lot of their men but we took plenty of casualties ourselves and spent the next few weeks in constant battles, sometimes just trying to stay alive."

According to Morris, "After the fighting intensity died down, we were shocked to learn that American

newspapers and TV news outlets were calling Tet a big victory for the communists, saying they were able to mount a major offensive throughout the country when our leaders—President Johnson and General William Westmoreland, who headed Military Assistance Command in Vietnam—were telling us just the opposite. A month before, Westmoreland actually said the end of the war ‘was coming into view.’”

Observes Morris, “After Tet, you could see things starting to change. No one believed the war was winnable. It was like the tide was going out. I returned to the States shortly after and it was even more noticeable at home. The anti-war protests got bigger and louder. President Johnson said he wouldn’t run for re-election. The war wasn’t over by a long shot but you could see the writing on the wall. Tet was the watershed, the battle that literally ended the war/” Morris now lives with his family in Savannah, Georgia after an illustrious career as a journalist in New York.

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