

# How Envoy Hoped To Save the Day

By George McArthur  
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## Aboard USS Blue Bridge

U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin is a canny professional diplomat who desperately hoped to save South Vietnam from Communist occupation.

In the aftermath of America's final, convulsive evacuation, Martin is being blamed by some for all the mistakes of the past two years.

Obviously worn by illness and strain, the white-haired ambassador worked restlessly in his cabin aboard the evacuation ship Blue Ridge — a Navy amphibious command ship, — and professed faith in the final judgment of history.

His severest critics charge that Martin's conduct of the embassy over the last two years contributed largely to the outcome. And his orders concerning the evacuation itself are surrounded in controversy.

Certainly, Martin was violently opposed to the cries for evacuation which sounded loudly after the fall of Da Nang on March 29. Although many old Vietnam hands within the embassy were reporting exactly the opposite of him, his solution for the moment was a show of American confidence plus a big new injection of American military equipment and money.

### Analysis and Opinion

At any rate, Martin suppressed all talk of evacuation in early April and put on a personal show of confidence.

One official with direct knowledge contends that last Tuesday morning, barely hours before he was forced to flash the evacuation recommendation to President Ford, Martin still had hopes that the Communists would stop outside the city to permit some kind of negotiated end.

An economic report, prepared at Martin's direction at a time when so many clearly saw the South going down the drain, was focused on future investment prospects in South Vietnam and its long-term future.

The report stressed that the Communist advances at that time, covering almost two-thirds of the country, had occupied mainly an "economic deficit area" of mountains and jungles. Technically, this was correct. However unreal, it reflected the political and military situation.

In the same vein, Martin kept other embassy officials occupied with similar forward-looking projects which would furnish support for further arguments with

Washington. In the political field, he hoped for negotiations. In the military field, he hoped for South Vietnam's reorganization to be completed in time.

Much of Martin's toughness at the end can probably be traced to the difficult initial days. He arrived in Saigon in midsummer of 1973 to find that somehow Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had failed to chart any policy at all for South Vietnam after the Paris ceasefire talks.

Despite eight years of American involvement, 55,000 American lives lost and mountains of treasure, neither Kissinger nor then President Nixon displayed any real interest in formulating a policy for South Vietnam after the Paris agreements.

Sources of the highest rank in the State Department confirm that from mid-1973, when Martin arrived, policy ideas concerning Vietnam came from the bottom,

meaning Martin, and not from the top, meaning Kissinger.

Kissinger showed little interest and that state department body known as the Vietnam Working Group became something similar to an extra appendix.

Martin, a well-known cold warrior who formerly held the posts as ambassador to Thailand and Italy, was hardly the man to permit such a situation to exist long. If no policy existed and nobody was making one, he would do so—as Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Nixon must have known of such a strong-willed man.

Martin drew up a political, military and economic package that at least read credibly on paper, though it made some economists shudder. The point was, however, that executive Washington bought the package—largely because Kissinger and company had not devoted the time to producing another.

The fact that Martin's

package would have the roughest kind of sledding in Congress was largely ignored by a very busy Kissinger and a very preoccupied Mr. Nixon. If President Ford had second thoughts he hardly had time to collect them.

And so the seeds for disaster were there in 1973 — a strong-willed ambassador who badly needed guidance and help from Washington for his own good. He never got it.

Now, the time for spreading the blame has come. There is plenty to go around.



GRAHAM MARTIN  
Aboard the Blue Ridge