

Viet Cong "Contraction of the term Viet Nam Cong San (Vietnamese communists), the name applied by the governments of the United States and South Vietnam to the communist insurgents in rebellion against the latter government, beginning around 1957. The Vietnamese communists never used the term themselves, but referred to their movement as the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (also known as the National Liberation Front), formally inaugurated in Dec 1960." (Country Study, Vietnam, p. 368.)



People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) "The military forces of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (until 1976) and, after reunification, of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. During the Second Indochina War, PAVN bore the brunt of the fighting against the United States military forces in Vietnam, but was consistently able to recoup its losses and infiltrate units by means of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Failing to topple the Saigon government during the Tet Offensive of 1968, PAVN undertook its first conventional invasion of South Vietnam in the Easter Offensive of 1972. This attempt ended in defeat, but PAVN's next effort, the Spring Offensive of 1975, quickly overran the ineffectual ARVN resistance and toppled the Saigon government, thereby bringing to a close the Second Indochina War." (Country Study, Vietnam, p. 367.)

Ho Chi Minh Trail



"An intricate network of jungle trails, paths, and roads leading from the panhandle of northern Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia into the border provinces of southern Vietnam. At the height of the Second Indochina War, it was a major resupply artery for Hanoi's armed forces operating in South Vietnam." (Country Study, Vietnam, pp. 365, 366.)

1963 Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) defeated at Ap Bac. Buddhists stage demonstrations. Diem assassinated.

Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) *"The military ground forces of the South Vietnamese government (Republic of Vietnam) until its collapse in April 1975. ARVN originated in the Vietnamese military units raised by French authorities to defend the Associated State of Vietnam in the early 1950s. During the Second Indochina War, it grew to over 1 million men and women organized into eleven army divisions (plus specialized units, such as Rangers and Special Forces) deployed in four Corps Tactical Zones (redesignated as Military Regions in 1971.)"* (Country Studies, Vietnam, p. 363.)

1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident and resolution. Vietcong attack Bien Hoa air base. 5th Special Forces Group deploys to Vietnam. General Westmoreland becomes MACV commander.

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution *"The Johnson administration remained hesitant to raise the American commitment to Vietnam. However, in August 1964, following the reputed shelling of United States warships in the Gulf of Tonkin off the North Vietnamese coast, [President] Johnson approved air strikes against North Vietnamese naval bases.*



At President Johnson's urgent request, the United States Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which gave the president the power 'to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.'" (Country Study, Vietnam, pp. 64, 65.)

1965 Vietcong attack U.S. installations. U.S. Air Force begins Rolling Thunder against North Vietnam. U.S. military units deploy to Vietnam in strength. U.S. Army Vietnam (USARV) headquarters created. Protests against U.S. involvement erupt in the United States.



Ia Drang (EE-ah drang) "Less than a month later the newly arrived airmobile division received its own baptism of combat. The North Vietnamese Army attacked a Special Forces camp at Plei Me (play mee); when it was repulsed, Westmoreland directed the division to launch an offensive to locate and destroy enemy regiments that had been identified in the vicinity of the camp. The result was the battle of the Ia Drang valley, named for a small river that flowed through the area of operations. For thirty-five days the division pursued and fought the 32d, 33d, and 66th North Vietnamese Regiments, until the enemy, suffering heavy casualties, returned to his bases in Cambodia...

Landing zone X-Ray was one of several U.S. positions vulnerable to attack by the enemy forces that occupied the surrounding high ground. Here on 14 November began fighting that pitted three battalions against elements of two NVA regiments.

Withstanding repeated mortar attacks and infantry assaults, the Americans used every means of firepower available to them—the division's own gunships, massive artillery bombardment, hundreds of strafing and bombing attacks by tactical aircraft, and earth-shaking bombs dropped by B-52 bombers from Guam—to turn back a determined enemy. The Communists lost 600 dead, the Americans 79.

Although badly hurt, the enemy did not leave the Ia Drang valley. Elements of the 66th North Vietnamese Regiment moving east toward Plei Me encountered an American battalion on 17 November, a few miles north of X-Ray.

The fight that resulted was a gory reminder of the North Vietnamese mastery of the ambush. The Communists quickly snared three U.S. companies in their net. As the trapped units struggled for survival, nearly all semblance of organized combat disappeared in the confusion and mayhem. Neither reinforcements nor effective firepower could be brought in. At times combat was reduced to valiant efforts by individuals and small units to avert annihilation. When the fighting ended that night, 60 percent of the Americans were casualties, and almost one of every three soldiers in the battalion had been killed.

Lauded as the first major American triumph of the Vietnam War, the battle of the Ia Drang Valley was in truth a costly and problematic victory." (The U.S. Army in Vietnam, p. 657.)

1966 United States resumes Rolling Thunder after 37-day halt. Air Force, Army, and Marine units deploy to Vietnam. Army units conduct large-scale operations. B-52 strikes directed against North Vietnam.



1967 Nguyen Van Thieu elected president and Nguyen Cao Ky elected vice president of South Vietnam. Large antiwar protests in the United States.

Dak To (dock tou) *"Despite daily air and artillery bombardments of their positions, the North Vietnamese launched two attacks against Dak To on 15 November, destroying two C-130 aircraft and causing severe damage to the camp's surrounding hills, but the North Vietnamese held fast in fortified positions.*

The center of enemy resistance was Hill 875; here, two battalions of the 173d Airborne Brigade made a slow and painful ascent against determined resistance and under grueling physical conditions, fighting for every foot of ground. Enemy fire was so intense and accurate that at times the Americans were unable to bring in reinforcements by helicopter or to provide fire support. In fighting that resembled the hill battles of the final stage of the Korean War, the confusion at Dak To pitted soldier against soldier in classic infantry battle. In desperation, beleaguered U.S. commanders on Hill 875 called in artillery and even B-52 air strikes at perilously close range to their own positions. On 17 November American forces at last gained control of Hill 875.



The battle of Dak To was the longest and most violent in the highlands since the battle of the Ia Drang two years before. Enemy casualties numbered in the thousands, with an estimated 1400 killed. Americans had suffered too. Approximately one-fifth of the 173d Airborne Brigade had become casualties, with 174 killed, 642 wounded, and 17 missing in action.

If the battle of the Ia Drang exemplified airmobility in all its versatility, the battle of Dak To, with the arduous ascent of Hill 875, epitomized infantry combat at its most basic and crushing effect of supporting air power." (The U.S. Army in Vietnam, p. 669.)

1968 Siege of Khe Sanh (khay sang). Tet Offensive. U.S. military leaders request 206,000 additional troops for Vietnam and other parts of the world. My Lai massacre. Peace talks begin in Paris. General Abrams replaces Westmoreland as MACV commander. President Johnson announces he will not seek reelection.

My Lai (mee li) "...Except during spasms of intense combat, as in the summer of 1969 when the Americal Division confronted the 1st North Vietnamese Regiment, most U.S. casualties were caused by snipers, mines, and booby traps.

Villages populated by old men, women, and children were as dangerous as the elusive enemy main force units. Operating in such conditions day after day induced a climate of fear and hate among the Americans. The already thin line between civilian and combatant was easily blurred and violated. In the hamlet of My Lai, elements of the Americal Division killed about two hundred civilians in the spring of 1968. Although only one member of the division was tried and found guilty of war crimes, the repercussions of the atrocity were felt throughout the Army. However rare, such acts undid the benefit of countless hours of civic action by Army units and individual soldiers and raised unsettling questions about the conduct of the war.



What happened at My Lai could have occurred in any Army unit in Vietnam in the late 1960's and early 1970's. War crimes were born of a sense of frustration that also contributed to a host of morale and discipline problems, among enlisted men and officers alike. As American forces were withdrawn by a government eager to escape the war, the lack of a clear military objective contributed to a weakened sense of mission and a slackening of discipline.

The short-timer syndrome, the reluctance to take risks in combat toward the end of a soldier's one-year tour, was compounded by the 'last-casualty' syndrome. Knowing that all U.S. troops would soon leave Vietnam, no soldier wanted to be the last to die.

Meanwhile, in the United States harsh criticism of the war, the military, and traditional military values had become widespread. Heightened individualism, growing permissiveness, and a weakening of traditional bonds of authority pervaded American society and affected the Army's rank and file. The Army grappled with problems of drug abuse, racial tensions, weakened discipline, and lapses of leadership.

While outright refusals to fight were few in number, incidents of 'fragging'—murderous attacks on officers and noncoms—occurred frequently enough to compel commands to institute a host of new security measures within their cantonments. All these problems were symptoms of larger social and political forces and underlined a growing disenchantment with the war among soldiers in the field." (The U.S. Army in Vietnam, p. 681.)



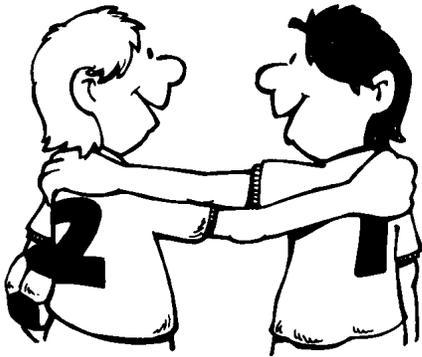
1969 President Nixon sworn in. Secret bombing of Cambodia. "Vietnamization" program announced. United States begins withdrawing from Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh dies. My Lai massacre revealed.

Hamburger Hill

"On 11 May 1969, a battalion of the 101st Airborne Division climbing Hill 937 found the 29th North Vietnamese Regiment waiting for it. The struggle for "Hamburger Hill" raged for ten days and became one of the war's fiercest and most controversial battles. Entrenched in tiers of fortified bunkers with well-prepared fields of fire, the enemy forces withstood repeated attempts to dislodge them. Supported by intense artillery and air strikes, Americans made a slow, tortuous climb, fighting hand to hand. By the time Hill 937 was taken, three Army battalions and an ARVN regiment had been committed to the battle.

Victory, however, was ambiguous as well as costly; the hill itself had no strategic or tactical importance and was abandoned soon after its capture. Critics charged that the battle wasted American lives and exemplified the irrelevance of U.S. tactics in Vietnam. Defending the operation, the commander of the 101st acknowledged that the hill's only significance was that the enemy occupied it. 'My mission,' he said, 'was to destroy enemy forces and installations. We found the enemy on Hill 937, and that is where we fought them.' (The U.S. Army in Vietnam, p. 680.)

Vietnamization



"The last phase of American involvement in South Vietnam was carried out under a broad policy called Vietnamization. Its main goal was to create strong, largely self-reliant South Vietnamese forces, an objective consistent with that espoused by U.S. advisers as early as the 1950's. But Vietnamization also meant the withdrawal of a half-million American soldiers.

Past efforts to strengthen and modernize South Vietnam's Army had proceeded at a measured pace, without the pressure of diminishing American support, large-scale combat, or the presence of formidable North Vietnamese forces in the South.

Vietnamization entailed three overlapping phases: redeployment of American forces and the assumption of their combat role by the South Vietnamese; improvement of ARVN's combat and support capabilities, especially firepower and mobility; and replacement of the Military Assistance Command by an American advisory group.

Vietnamization had the added dimension of fostering political, social, and economic reforms to create a vibrant South Vietnamese state based on popular participation in national political life. Such reforms, however, depended on progress in the pacification program which never had a clearly fixed timetable.

The task of carrying out the military aspects of Vietnamization fell to General Creighton W. Abrams, who succeeded General Westmoreland as MACV commander in mid-1968..." (The U.S. Army in Vietnam, p. 675.)

1970 Kissinger begins secret peace talks in Paris. Prince Norodom Sihanouk (nor-ah-DOM SEE-ah-NOOK) of Cambodia overthrown by General Lon Nol. U.S. operations in Cambodia. U.S. raid on Son Tay prison camp in North Vietnam. Congress prohibits U.S. combat forces in Cambodia or Laos. U.S. troop withdrawals continue.



National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger's Perspective "I cannot yet write about Vietnam except with pain and sadness..." writes then National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger.



Dr. Kissinger saw American involvement in Vietnam as the result of an optimistic idealism inherent within the American view of the world. Cynical, criminal conspiracy, "ugly American" theories played little role. (See The White House Years, by Henry Kissinger, pp. 226, 230.)

1971 ARVN conduct operations in Laos. U.S. troop withdrawals continue. Pentagon Papers published.

Pentagon Papers "Publication of classified Pentagon papers on the U.S. involvement in Vietnam was begun June 13 by the New York Times. In a 6-3 vote, the U.S. Supreme Court June 30 upheld the right of the Times and the Washington Post to publish the documents under the

protection of the first amendment." (The World Almanac, 1996, p. 506.)

1972 North Vietnamese launch Eastertide offensive. United States resumes bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong after four-year lull. Paris peace talks deadlock. Operation Linebacker II (Christmas bombing).



1973 Peace pact signed in Paris by the United States, South Vietnam, Vietcong, and North Vietnamese. Congress passes War Powers Act. Withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Vietnam and release of American POWs.

Missing-in-action (MIA)

"United States military term for servicemen who remained unaccounted for at the end of the Second Indochina War. In the 1980s, rumors persisted that some MIAs were still alive and had been detained involuntarily in Vietnam after the war." (Country Study, Vietnam, p. 366.)

1974 President Nixon resigns. Congress reduces aid to South Vietnam. North Vietnam attacks South Vietnamese across border.

1975 North Vietnamese continue major attacks. Saigon falls.

Boat People *"Refugees who fled Vietnam by sea after 1975. Many fell victim to pirate attacks in the Gulf of Thailand, drowned, or endured starvation and dehydration as a result of their escape in ill-equipped and undersized vessels. Those who reached safety in neighboring Southeast Asian countries were accorded temporary asylum in refugee camps while awaiting permanent resettlement in*

industrialized Western nations willing to accept them."
(Country Study, Vietnam, p. 363.)

Khmer Rouge (kmer roozh) *"The name given to the Cambodian communists by Prince Norodom Sihanouk in the 1960s...Between 1975 and 1978, it denoted the Democratic Kampuchean (or Khmer) Communist Party. After being driven from Phnom Penh by the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in Dec 1978, the Khmer Rouge went back to guerrilla warfare and joined forces with two noncommunist insurgent movements to form the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea."*
(Country Study, Vietnam, p. 366.)

III. Lessons of Vietnam--Selected Insights of Importance to Military Linguists

1. Importance of Culture on Operations

a. Culture/social impact

"...The rediscovery of the Vietnam War suggests that its most important legacy may be the lesson that unique historical, political, cultural, and social factors always impinge on the military."



Strategic and tactical success rests not only on military progress but on correctly analyzing the nature of the particular conflict, understanding the enemy's strategy, and realistically assessing the strengths and weaknesses of allies. A new humility and a new sophistication may form the best parts of the complex heritage left the Army by the long, bitter war in Vietnam." (The U.S. Army in Vietnam, p. 693.)

b. Negotiation styles

Dr. Kissinger describes the negotiation styles of the North Vietnamese as being "superbly skillful," not like representatives from an underdeveloped country. Their style was an indirect one, aiming to overcome by exhaustion rather than clear clarification of issues. (See The White House Years, pp. 1030, 1032, 1368.)

2. Attitudes Toward Populace

General Abrams, Commander of U.S. Forces in Vietnam, saw the importance of cultural awareness. He "was one of the few commanders out there who had studied the Vietnamese character enough to respect the Vietnamese." (Thunderbolt, p. 266.)

His sense of respect applied not only to the South Vietnamese, but to enemy forces as well.



3. Holiday and Observance Importance

The timing of some combined operations (American--South Vietnamese) such as the attacks of Fishhook and Parrot's Beak required input from counterparts of both Armies. The first suggested dates were impossible to Vietnamese forces. A senior Vietnamese General said...

"He had been to see his astrologer, and that was the worst day that could have been picked. He wanted to go... when the signs were more favorable." (Thunderbolt, p. 286)

4. Perspectives Toward the Enemy

Then Captain James McDonough, a platoon leader in Vietnam, led battle hardened soldiers in jungle conditions. After one lieutenant addressed North Vietnamese prisoners as "gooks," CPT McDonough countered...

'They aren't gooks,' I said quietly. 'They're soldiers, just like you and me.' (Platoon Leader, p. 160.)

