

5. Overall Lessons

"The most important point to make about the U.S. in this respect probably is that we first committed ourselves to the war and then began to think about it comprehensively.



The highest level leadership did not initially sit down and address in detailed and extended fashion its strategic position, did not discuss and analyze enemy strengths, weaknesses, and probable strategies, did not wrangle and argue and finally hammer out a fully articulated strategy.

There was in this behavior a sense of enormous self-confidence, indeed a kind of unconscious arrogance on the part of the Americans. It was abundantly evident in Vietnam during the early period of the arriving American ground troops—particularly those American civilians who had been present in Vietnam in earlier years.

It was manifested mainly toward ARVN, a syndrome of superior professionalism: step aside and let the big boys do it.

The second most important point to make in this respect is that we entered the war without fully appreciating the enemy's strategy. Worse, we never made a serious effort to correct this shortcoming. The highest leadership never devoted itself to systematically learning about Hanoi's strategic thinking and doctrine. Indeed there is not even today clear knowledge in the U.S. government as to what exactly was the strategy employed by the Communist military forces in Vietnam...

No one, in or out of government, ever produced a history of PAVN, a PAVN guide, or any other full-scale study of PAVN and PLAF.



No significant biographical studies of enemy leaders were done. We had 470,000 Americans in Vietnam at the height of the war, and one sociologist in the villages doing research on social organization. The number of analysts working on the Viet Cong (National Liberation Front, NLF) could be numbered on the fingers of one hand, and they started years after the organization was formed.

One can search the voluminous Pentagon Papers in vain for extended discussion of the other side, any discussion at all. Unlike earlier wars in which research and analysis were both extensive and esoteric...in Vietnam we allocated hardly any resources. Much tactical intelligence was generated that could have been exploited, but wasn't.

Work on order of battle generally was good; politics of the Politburo was hardly touched."

(*"Conduct of the Vietnam War: Strategic Factors, 1965-1968,"* by Douglas Pike, *The Evolution of Modern Warfare*, C620, pp. 370, 371.)



"Confront your fears."

Vocabulary List: Vietnam

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 11 army divisions.

Bao Dai (bow di, 1913-1997) Born Nguyen Vinh Thuy, ruled Vietnam as the last emperor of the Nguyen Dynasty from 1926-45. In a final attempt to control the Viet Minh (Ho Chi Minh's political party), Bao Dai allowed the French to reclaim hold on Vietnam by naming the country as a French protectorate.

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.

Cao Dai (kow-DI) A self-styled, Vietnamese reformed Buddhist sect, founded and initially propagated by Ngo Van Chieu, a minor official who, in 1919, claimed to have had a series of revelations. An amalgam of different beliefs derived from Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity, and Western nineteenth-century romanticism, it claimed 1 million to 2 million adherents.

Dak To (dock tou) Site of especially hard fighting in 1967. 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.

Dien Bien Phu French garrison, thought impregnable by the French, which fell after a siege, in 1954. This victory demonstrated the tenacity of the Viet Minh forces.

Doan Ngu (dwan new) Vietnamese celebration marking the Summer Solstice. Offerings made to spirits, ghosts and God of Death to protect against epidemics. Burnings of human figures provide souls to staff the army of the God of Death.

Giap, Vo Nguyen (ZAP vo new-win, 1911-) Organized the Viet Minh as commander in chief. Master of guerrilla warfare who fought the Japanese during WW II, ended French colonization in Vietnam, and defeated United States forces to unify his nation at the end of the Vietnam War in 1976. Giap served as deputy prime minister and minister of defense until his retirement in 1982.

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution Declaration by congress giving the president power to deter aggression when hostile actions were committed against U.S. forces. Established after purported North Vietnamese attacks on U.S. Navy personnel in the Gulf of Tonkin.

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 10 days and became one of the war's fiercest and most controversial battles.

Ho Chi Minh (HOH CHEE MIHN, 1969) "Father of his country," founding the Communist Party in Vietnam after co-founding the same in France twenty years prior.

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.

Hoa (WHA) Han Chinese, the single largest ethnic group in Vietnam.

Hoia Hao [WHA HOW], A reformed Vietnamese Theravada Buddhist sect which preserved a distinctive Buddhist coloration. Based mostly in the southernmost areas of the delta, it stressed individual prayer, simplicity, and social justice over icon veneration or elaborate ceremonies.

Hungry Ghost Festival Remembrance of souls of dead through grave visitation. Known as Yue Lan, Vu Lan Day, Day of the Dead, Trung Nguyen (chung new-when). Second most important festival after Tet.

Ia Drang (EE-ah drang) Site of the first major U.S. forces airmobile operation in South Vietnam. Took place in 1965 in the Ia Drang Valley.

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.

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.

Montagnards (mon-tahn-YAHRD) Minorities that live in the mountainous regions of Vietnam. The Vietnamese also disparagingly call them "moi," meaning savage.

My Lai (mee li) 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.

Ngo Dinh Diem (NOH DEEN DYEM, 1901-1963) In 1954, Diem staged an election which forced Emperor Bao Dai to abdicate with himself becoming first president of South Vietnam. Anticommunist, anti-French, and against unification with North Vietnam. Formed a loose alliance with the United States to contain the Communist north. Severely abused power by placing family members in high ranking positions, and actively promoting Catholicism.

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.

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.

Struggle Dual sided tactic employed by General Giap of the North Vietnamese forces. Struggle involved both political (politics with guns) and military (violence and action) means.

Tet Vietnamese New Year, an abbreviation for Tet Nguyen Dan, "first day." Start of new year with family reunions, respect given departed ancestors, payment of debts.

Thanh-Minh (tang ming) Similar to U.S. Memorial Day, Thanh-Minh day honors the dead. Flowers, food, incense and other offerings brought by family members to the graves of departed relatives.

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.

Viet Minh (VEE-et MIHN) Common name given to the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi (Vietnamese Independence League) founded by the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in 1941 under Ho Chi Minh. The Viet Minh was determined to free Vietnam of all foreigners and later reunite the split nation.

Vietnamization Process of handing over the defense of South Vietnam to the Vietnamese themselves. It 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.

Review Quiz: Vietnam



Part 1--Multiple Choice Place the letter of the most correct response in the blank provided.

1. _____ Most ethnic Vietnamese identify themselves with
 - a. Theravada Buddhism.
 - b. Mahayana Buddhism.
 - c. Zen.

2. _____ Current Vietnamese government policy toward religious practice encourages tolerance as long as adherents
 - a. only practice their faith in their homes.
 - b. stick close to official guidelines and registration practices.
 - c. identify freely with world-side religious groups.

3. _____ Where are Protestants most likely to be found in Vietnam?
 - a. In the delta region near Ho Chi Minh City
 - b. In the southern highlands among the Montagnard peoples
 - c. There are no Protestants in Vietnam

4. _____ Ethnic Vietnamese live primarily in the delta regions and
 - a. coastal plains.
 - b. central highlands and mountains.
 - c. jungle forests.

5. _____ The Hoa (Wha), the largest minority people of Vietnam, are of what background?
 - a. Han Chinese
 - b. Khmer Cambodian
 - c. Thai

6. _____ The current Vietnamese government works with non-government agencies (NGOs) to combat
- religious proselytism.
 - prostitution.
 - child labor laws.
7. _____ A complex dispute between Vietnam, China, Malaysia, Philippines and Taiwan concerns the oil rich region of the
- Spratley Islands.
 - Brunei Straits.
 - Mekong Delta.
8. _____ The second most important Vietnamese festival after Tet is
- Doan Ngu (summer solstice).
 - Hungry Ghost Festival.
 - Thanh-Minh (honor given dead).
9. _____ According to Culturgrams, some analysts see current Vietnamese as looking forward to
- punishing Americans for land mines laid during the Vietnam conflict.
 - doing business with Americans and setting aside feelings raised by the Vietnam conflict.
 - seek reparations from the American government for the Vietnam conflict.
10. _____ In current Vietnam, reverence for _____ is mandatory by law.
- Gautama Buddha
 - Ho Chi Minh
 - Vo Nguyen Giap
11. _____ Current economic policy in Vietnam is
- rigid Marxian Communist.
 - tolerant of some free market activity.
 - so bureaucratic little development occurs.

12. _____ Which north Vietnamese leader was a master of tactical and strategic warfare, influential in his country's eventual victory?

- a. Vo Nguyen Giap
- b. Ho Chi Minh
- c. Ngo Dinh Diem

13. _____ What Communist group defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu?

- a. PAVN
- b. Viet Minh
- c. Viet Cong

14. _____ A primary strategy of General Giap was the doctrine of political and military _____.

- a. surprise
- b. struggle
- c. victory

15. _____ The Ho Chi Minh trail usually operated just _____ the Cambodian border.

- a. alongside
- b. inside
- c. outside

16. _____ The _____ gave the President power to repel armed attack against the U.S. and prevent further aggression.

- a. War Powers Act of 1942
- b. Gulf of Tonkin Resolution
- c. Tet offensive

17. _____ The first major American airmobile offensive, taking place in 1965, occurred

- a. in the Ia Drang Valley.
- b. at Hill 875.
- c. near Khe Sanh.

18. _____ The former National Security Advisor, instrumental in bringing an end to U.S. involvement in Vietnam, was

- a. Casper Weinberger.
- b. Henry Kissinger.
- c. Robert McNamara.

19. _____ Classified documents pertaining to the Vietnam War, published in 1971 by the New York Times and Washington Post, were called

- a. the Khmer Rouge.
- b. the Pentagon Papers.
- c. Indo-China Journal.

20. _____ The French fortified camp at _____, seemingly impenetrable, fell to Viet Minh soldiers in 1954.

- a. Dien Bien Phu
- b. Khe Sanh
- c. Dak To

Part 2--True or False Place a T or F in the blank provided.



1. _____ The Catholic faith and practice is most prominent in the _____ former northern area of Vietnam.
2. _____ Cao Dai practice draws primarily upon Buddhist thought and understanding.
3. _____ Folk religion continues to display an impact on Vietnamese personal and social behavior.
4. _____ Astrology has little place in folk belief and practice of the Vietnamese people.
5. _____ Non-Chinese minorities in Vietnam currently live relatively independent lives in the highlands.

6. _____ Current Vietnamese government practice rigorously enforces constitutional provision of equal pay for women.
7. _____ When in Vietnam, expect Vietnamese people to pass items primarily with their right hand.
8. _____ Current Vietnamese government policy allows Buddhist and Catholic clergy great freedom in their organization and connections with world-wide groups.
9. _____ Vietnamese Muslims desiring to go on Hajj can do so with little government interference.
10. _____ Astrological prediction affected the timing of at least one South Vietnamese attack during the Vietnam conflict.



Part 3--Matching

Place the correct letter in the blank provided.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. _____ Giap, Vo Nguyen Ho | A. Communist warriors founded by Chi Minh, dedicated to free Vietnam of foreigners and reunite the nation. |
| 2. _____ Ngo Dinh Diem | |
| 3. _____ Ho Chi Minh | B. Military forces of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (N. Vietnam), who bore the brunt |
| 4. _____ Viet Minh | of fighting against U.S. forces. |
| 5. _____ Dien Bien Phu | C. Program designed to create self-reliant S. Vietnamese forces, allowing for withdrawal of U.S. personnel. |
| 6. _____ Viet Cong | |
| 7. _____ PAVN | D. "Father of his country." |
| 8. _____ ARVN | |
| 9. _____ My Lai | |

10. _____ Vietnamization

Minh,

during the

were
which were
U.S. forces.

E. Military forces of the South
Vietnamese government.
F. Commander in Chief of Viet
a brilliant tactical and
strategic leader
Vietnam conflict.

G. Village where 200 civilians
killed, repercussions
felt throughout the

H. French garrison of 15,000 which
suffered a Viet Minh siege and
surrendered 7 May 1954.

assassinated in a

I. Anticommunist, often corrupt
South Vietnamese leader
eventually
1963 coup.

J. Term given around 1957, by U.S.
and South Vietnamese, to
insurgents against South
Vietnam.



“I will support and defend...’ Accordingly, we will have:
courage to meet the demands of our profession and the mission
when it is hazardous, demanding, or otherwise difficult; Make
decisions in the best interest of the navy and the nation,
without regard to personal consequences; Meet these challenges
while adhering to a higher standard of personal conduct and
decency; Be loyal to our nation, ensuring the resources
entrusted to us are used in an honest, careful, and efficient

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way. Courage is the value that gives us the moral and mental strength to do what is right, even in the face of personal or professional adversity."

A Core Value of the United States Navy