

# **The Vietnam War As Seen By A Veteran**



**The War Is Over  
But The Memories Linger**  
*Dennis Cavitt*

## Vietnam War History

---



The Vietnam war was a long, costly armed conflict that pitted the Communist regime of North Vietnam and its southern allies, known as the Viet Cong, against South Vietnam and its principle allies the United States and Australia. The war began in 1954 (though conflict in the region stretched back to the mid-1940's), after the rise to power of Ho Chi Minh and his Viet Minh party in North Vietnam, and continued against the backdrop of an intense Cold War between two global superpowers: The United States and The Soviet Union. More than 3 million people (including over 58,000 Americans and 520 Australians) were killed in the Vietnam War; more than half were Vietnamese civilians. By 1969, at the peak of US involvement in the War, more than 500,000 US military personnel were involved in the Vietnam Conflict. Growing opposition to the war in the United States led to bitter divisions amount the Americans, both before and after President Richard Nixon ordered the withdrawal of US forces in 1973. In 1975, Communist forces seized control of Saigon, ending the Vietnam War, and the country was unified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam the following year.

### Roots of the Vietnam War:

During World War II, the Japan invaded and occupied Vietnam, a nation on the eastern edge of the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia that had been under French administration since the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Inspired by Chinese and Soviet Communism, Ho Chi Minh formed the Viet Minh, or the League for the Independence of Vietnam, to fight both Japan and the French colonial administration. Japan withdrew its forces in 1945, leaving the French-educated Emperor Bao Dai in control of an independent Vietnam. Ho's Viet Minh forces rose up immediately, seizing the northern city of Hanoi and declaring a Democratic Republic of Vietnam with Ho as president.

Seeking to regain control of the region, French backed Bao set up the State of Vietnam (South Vietnam) in July 1949, with Saigon as its Capital. Armed conflict continued until a decisive battle at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 ended

in French defeat by Viet Minh forces. The subsequent treaty negotiations at Geneva split Vietnam along the latitude known as the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel with Ho controlling the north and Bao controlling the south and called for nationwide elections for reunification to be held in 1956. In 1955, however, the strongly anti-communist Ngo Dinh Diem pushed Bao aside to become president of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam.

US intervention begins:

With the Cold War intensifying, the United States hardened its policies against any allies of the Soviet Union, and by 1955 President Dwight David Eisenhower had pledged his firm support to Diem and South Vietnam. With training and equipment from American military and police, Diem's security forces cracked down on Viet Minh sympathizers in the south, whom he derisively called Viet Cong (or Vietnamese Communist), arresting some 100,000 people, many of whom were tortured and executed. By 1957, the Viet Cong and other opponents of Diem's repressive regime began fighting back with attacks on government officials and other targets, and by 1959 they had begun engaging South Vietnamese Army forces in firefights.

In December 1960, Diem's opponents within South Vietnam (both communist and non-communist) formed the National Liberation Front to organize resistance to the regime. Though the NLF claimed to be autonomous and that most of its members were non-communist, many in Washington assumed it was a puppet to Hanoi. A team sent by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 to report on conditions in South Vietnam advised a build-up of American military, economic and technical aid in order to help confront the Viet Cong threat. Working under the "domino theory," which held that if one Southeast Asian country fell to communism, many would follow, Kennedy increased US aid, though he stopped short of committing to a large-scale military intervention. By 1962, the U.S. military presence in South Vietnam had reached some 9,000 troops, compared with fewer than 800 during the 1950s.



## Viet Nam war escalates:

A coup by some of his own generals succeeded in toppling and killing Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, in November 1963, three weeks before Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. The ensuing political instability in South Vietnam persuaded Lyndon B. Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara to further increase US military and economic support. The following August, after DRV torpedo boats attacked two US destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin, Johnson ordered the retaliatory bombing of military targets in North Vietnam. Congress soon passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which gave Johnson broad war-making powers, and U.S. planes began regular bombing raids, codenamed Operation Rolling Thunder the following February.

In March 1965, Johnson made the decision (with the support of the American public) to send U.S. combat forces into battle in Vietnam. By June, 82,000 combat troops were stationed in Vietnam, and General William Westmoreland was calling for 175,000 by the end of 1965 to shore up the struggling South Vietnamese army. Despite the concerns of some of his advisers about this escalation, and about the entire war effort as well as a growing anti-war movement in the U.S., Johnson authorizes the immediate dispatch of 100,000 troops at the end of July 1965 and another 100,000 in 1966. In addition to the US, South Korea, Thailand, Australia, and New Zealand also committed troops to fight in South Vietnam (albeit on a much smaller scale).

## Strategy of attrition in Vietnam:

In contrast to the air attacks on North Vietnam, the U.S.- South Vietnamese war effort in the south was fought on the ground, largely under the command of General Westmoreland in coordination with the government of General Nguyen Van Thieu in Saigon. In general, US military forces in the region pursued a policy of attrition, aiming to kill as many enemy troops as possible rather than trying to secure territory. By 1966 large areas of South Vietnam

had been designated as free-fire zones from which all innocent civilians were supposed to be evacuated and only enemy remained. Heavy bombing by B-52 aircraft or shelling made these zones uninhabitable, as refugees poured into camps in designated safe areas near Saigon and other cities. Even as the body count (at times exaggerated by U.S. and South Vietnamese authorities) mounted steadily, DRV and Viet Cong troops refused to stop fighting, encouraged by the fact that they could easily reoccupy lost territory. Meanwhile, supported by aid from China and the Soviet Union, North Vietnam strengthened its air defenses.

By November 1967, the number of American troops in Vietnam was approaching 500,000, and U.S. casualties had reached 15,058 killed and 109,527 wounded. As the war stretched on, some soldiers came to mistrust their government's reasons for keeping them there, as well as Washington's claims that the war was being won. The later years of the war saw increased physical and psychological deterioration among American soldiers including drug use, mutinies and attacks by soldiers against officers and noncommissioned officers.

Bombarded by horrific images of the war on their televisions, Americans on the home front turned against the war as well. In October 1967, some 35,000 demonstrators staged a mass antiwar protest outside the Pentagon. Opponents of the war argued that civilians, not the enemy combatants, were the primary victims and that the United States was supporting a corrupt dictatorship in Saigon.

#### Impact of the Tet offensive on the Vietnam War:

By the end of 1967, Hanoi's communist leadership was growing impatient as well, and sought to strike a decisive blow aimed at forcing the better supplied US to give up hopes of success. On January 31, 1968, some 70,000 DRV forces under General Vo Nguyen Giap launched the Tet offensive (named for



the lunar New Year), a coordinated series of fierce attacks on more than 100 cities and towns in South Vietnam. Though taken by surprise U.S. and South Vietnamese forces managed to strike back quickly and the communists were unable to hold any of the targets for more than a day or two. Reports of the attacks stunned the U.S. public especially after the news broke that Westmoreland had requested an additional 200,000 troops. With all his approval ratings dropping in an election year, Johnson called a halt to bombing in much of North Vietnam in March (though bombing continued in the south) and promised to dedicate the rest of his term to seeking peace rather than his reelection.

Johnson's new track, laid out in a March 1968 speech, met with a positive response from Hanoi, and peace talks between the U.S. and North Vietnam opened in Paris that May. Despite the later inclusion of the South Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front (the political arm of the Viet Cong) the dialogue soon reached an impasse, and after an election campaign marred by violence, Republican Richard M. Nixon defeated Hubert Humphrey to win the White House.

Vietnam War ends: From Vietnamization to withdrawal:

Nixon sought to deflate the antiwar movement by appealing to a "silent majority" of Americans who he believed supported the war effort. In an attempt to limit the volume of American casualties, he announced a program of withdrawing troops, increasing aerial and artillery bombardment and giving South Vietnamese control over ground operations. In addition to this policy, which he called "Vietnamization", Nixon continued public peace talks in Paris, adding high level secret talks conducted by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger beginning in the spring of 1968. The North Vietnamese continued to insist on the complete U.S. withdrawal as a condition of peace, however, the next few years would bring even more carnage, including the horrifying revelation that U.S. soldiers had massacred more than 400 unarmed civilians

in the village of My Lai in March 1968. Nothing was ever said about the atrocities the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were raging against the civilians in South Vietnamese (the burning of villages, stealing of crops, kidnapping of young men and women to force them to fight for the communist, the rape of women and the killing of men, women and children in the villages that refused to hide the raiders).

Anti-war protests continued to build as the conflict wore on. In 1968 and 1969, there were hundreds of anti-war marches and gatherings throughout the country. On November 15, 1969, the largest anti-war protest in American history took place in Washington D.C., as over 250,000 Americans gathered peacefully, calling for the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. The anti-war movement, which was particularly strong on college campuses, divided Americans bitterly. For some young people, the war symbolized a form of unchecked authority they had come to resent. For other Americans, opposing the government was considered unpatriotic and treasonous.

As the first U. S. troops were withdrawn, those who remained became increasingly angry and frustrated, exacerbating problems with moral and leadership. Tens of thousands of soldiers received dishonorable discharges for desertion, and about 500,000 American men from 1965-1973 became "draft dodgers," with many fleeing to Canada to evade conscription. Nixon ended draft calls in 1972, and instituted an all-volunteer service system the following year.

In 1970, a joint U.S.-South Vietnamese operation invaded Cambodia, hoping to wipe out DRV supply bases there. The South Vietnamese then led their own invasion of Laos, which was pushed back by North Vietnam. The invasion of these countries, in violation of international law, sparked a new wave of protests on college campuses across America, including two at Kent State in Ohio and Jackson Mississippi during which National Guardsmen and police killed a total of six student protesters. By the end of June 1972,



however, after another failed offensive into South Vietnam, Hanoi was finally willing to compromise. Kissinger and North Vietnam representatives drafted a peace agreement by early fall, but leaders in Saigon rejected it, and in December Nixon authorized a number of bombing raids against targets in Hanoi and Haiphong. Known as the Christmas Bombings, the raids drew international condemnation.

### Legacy of the Vietnam War:

In January 1973, the United States and North Korea concluded a final peace agreement, ending open hostilities between the two nations. War between North and South Vietnam continued, however, until April 30, 1975, when DRV forces captured Saigon, renaming it Ho Chi Minh City. The long conflict had affected an immense majority of the country's population. From 1945 to 1975 warfare had claimed 2 million Vietnamese deaths and 3 million wounded and another 12 million became refugees. War had decimated the country's infrastructure and economy, and reconstruction proceeded slowly. In 1976, Vietnam was unified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, though sporadic violence continued over the next 15 years, including conflicts with neighboring China and Cambodia. Under a broad free market policy put in place in 1986, the economy began to improve, boosted by oil export revenues and the influx of foreign capital. Trade and diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the U. S. resumed in the 1990s.

In the United States, the effects of the Vietnam War would linger, even after the last troops returned home in 1973, for our veterans throughout our lifetime and will never be put to rest until the last survivor has been laid to rest. The nation spent more than \$120 billion on the conflict in Vietnam from 1965-73: this massive spending led to widespread inflation, exacerbated by a worldwide oil crisis in 1973 and skyrocketing fuel prices. Psychologically, the effects ran even deeper. The war had pierced the myth of American invincibility, and had bitterly divided the nation. Many returning veterans

faced negative reactions from both opponents of the war (who viewed them as having killed innocent civilians) and its supporters (who saw them as having lost the war), along with physical damage including the effects of exposure to the harmful chemical herbicide Agent Orange, millions of gallons of which had been dumped by U.S. Planes on the dense forests of Vietnam. In 1982, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was unveiled in Washington D. C. On it are inscribed the names of over 58,200 American armed forces killed or missing during the war.

There were 5 U.S. Presidents during the involvement in the Vietnam War.

Dwight Eisenhower (1953-1961)

After the Geneva Accords were signed between the French and Communist Viet Minh leading to a partition of Vietnam, Eisenhower decided to create the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) with the purpose of stopping communist influence in South East Asia. SEATO was used as a cover for Eisenhower to build a new nation in the South fighting against the Communist in the North. In 1955, the Republic of Vietnam was born with Ngo Dinh Diem as its President.

John F. Kennedy (1961-1963)

Kennedy pledged extra aid to Diem regime when he was in office in 1961. More advisers and machinery but not troops were sent to South Vietnam. In 1963 Kennedy tacitly approved a coup to



overthrow Diem just 3 weeks before his assassination.

#### Lyndon Johnson (1963-1969)

In 1964, the Gulf of Tonkin incident occurred and its resolution gave Johnson more powers to wage war in Vietnam. He was the President who ordered the bombing campaign called Operation Rolling Thunder and sent the first combat troops to South Vietnam in March of 1965 after an attack of Viet Cong on the air base at Pleiku. The draft was instituted soon after that and caused many anti-war protests nationwide especially inside college campuses.

#### Richard Nixon (1969-1974)

Nixon started the so called Vietnamization policy in 1969. During his years in office, he escalated the war into Laos and Cambodia in an attempt to destroy communist food, weapons, and manpower supply through the Ho Chi Minh Trail to South Vietnam. Nixon ordered the Christmas Bombing in 1972 to keep North Vietnam at the negotiating table as well as to convince South Vietnam to sign the peace treaty. In January 1973, the Paris Peace Accords were signed ending the American direct involvement in Vietnam, which subsequently led to the end of the war.

#### Gerald Ford (1974-1977)

Aid funds for South Vietnam were significantly cut off during the Ford years. Although it had been promised by the Nixon

administration, Congress forbid further U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia even when North Vietnamese forces blatantly violated the settlement in 1975. On April 23, 1975 Ford declared the Vietnam War ended, as far as America was concerned. Seven days later, Saigon was captured and South Vietnam fell to the North Communists.

All That Is War Is  
Not Just Dodging Bullets

Compiled By

Dennis Cavitt

*Dennis Cavitt*



## All That Is War Is Not Just Dodging Bullets

As a combat veteran of the Vietnam War, I learned that there are many hazards that a soldier faces in the time of war that are not the result of being shot at. Being caught in a firefight does have the top priority in the danger category. One never knew where the enemy was going to come from, the whole country was a war zone. It was very hard to pick out the enemy. He was given several names by the American troops; Charlie, VC, and Viet Cong. Then there was the seasoned troops from North Vietnam called the North Vietnamese Regulars. "Charlie" would take on the appearance of the friendly farmer or villager by day and change into a ruthless killer in the blink of an eye.

There were many ways the enemy became effective in the taking of the American soldier out of commission. Many forms of booby traps were used along the trails to kill, maim, or slow up the progress of the troops mission. They learned that it took 2 to 3 men to take care of one wounded or dead soldier. One kind of booby trap used was called the toe popper. It was a small explosive device placed in the trails that when kicked or stepped on would cause injury to the foot and lower leg. Trip wires attached to all kinds of explosive devices were stretched across the trails which would take out several men at one time. Charlie would use discarded "c" ration cans, bamboo, artillery canisters, hand grenades, and anything else that would hold an explosive for these kinds of traps. Large pits were dug in the trails and sharpen bamboo spikes were set in the bottom and covered with human feces. When they punctured the skin, infection would set in. Infection in the high temperature high humidity jungles was a killer.

Spikes were tied to limbs and pulled back under tension with wire and would swing across the trail when tripped. Large logs with spikes drove into them were pulled up in the trees so they would swing into the path of the patrol column. The point man (first man in the patrol) in the column would have to be rotated from time to time to prevent burnout from having to be on constant alert for the trip wires and booby traps set by the enemy.

The order of the G. I. Column as they worked their way through their missions was as follows: point man, cover man, squad leader, radio man, machine gunner, ammo carrier, four riflemen, and trail gunner. When Charlie, on his ambush, learned the order of the file he would wait for the first two men to pass then open fire on the line to wipe out the leadership and the communication. In my squad that would be me. I took the leadership role for the safety and well being of my men very serious. The squad leader had to always know the co-ordinance of the location of his squad. This was very important in the case of contact with the enemy, so if needed he could call for back up be it by gunship, jet fighter support or an artillery barrage. He might have to call for dust-off choppers for the wounded or if the mission was over call for pick up to be moved to a new mission location.

Cleanliness was a major problem to the troops in the field in Vietnam. Being out on missions for long periods of time meant that proper bathing and changing was not done very often. We would take baths in the jungle rivers and streams if the opportunity presented itself. A couple of men at a time would bathe while the others kept guard. Clean cloths were a rarity and a luxury; only available in the stand down areas (base camps or forward fire bases). Our missions could last from 2 days to a month. In the hot humid weather it would get quite smelly. We did keep dry socks with us at all times to prevent jungle rot to our feet.

Food preparation presented to be difficult at best. While on missions we carried "c" rations and/or lurps (meals in a bag that had to have water added). Most of the time these meals were eaten cold because on the missions fire was a no-no. Even a lit cigarette can be seen for a distance of over a mile. Ever try to eat cold spaghetti from a can? When at all possible we could pinch off a small portion of c-4 (a plastic explosive that came in brick form or in our claymore mines) and light it to warm our food. The claymore mines were anti-personal explosives we could take apart and use some of the c-4 inside them.

We mainly left the greasy meals behind and took the canned meats, canned fruits, beans n weenies, and chocolates. We could not eat food from the villages or open markets because of the unsanitary nature of these foods as they were often covered with flies and maggots. The smell of rotten chicken and duck carcasses along with the fish heads and guts filled the air. Hard to tell the difference in the rice and maggots, that's why there is no rice for this soldier still today. When the jungle villages the squad leader (me) would often be invited to dine with the village chief. Yuck! They liked to serve eggs boiled in duck stomach with fish heads fish guts and rice. What ever happened to the Army promise of three hots and a cot every day; although we did get a steak and potato when in on stand down.

Our backpacks were heavy (60 to 70 pounds) with supplies, food, and ammo cans filled with extra machine gun ammo, bandoleers of personal ammo 2 thousand rounds, extra radio batteries, 6 hand grenades, and 4 smoke grenades. Everyone in the squad carried at least 2 thousand rounds each. Often the missions took us on long helicopter rides at the end of which the choppers could not land in the landing zones because of incoming fire from the enemy and we would have to jump from up to 10 feet under fire with the weight taking you hard to the ground upon



impact. If in the rice patties you had to struggle to get up in the water. When we called for resupply in the field, we would have to be very careful not to give up the whereabouts of our positions until the moment of the supply drop. If in the thick jungle the supplies had to be dropped through the thick foliage and the water bags would often be ripped and the water lost. When this happened we would have to get water from any source available and dose it with iodine tablets to kill the bacteria and germs.

Defoliants were often sprayed from aircraft in the areas where the foliage was thick and could hide the enemy. These chemicals killed the trees, brush, and grasses and made the area look like a desert. The most popular defoliant used was the notorious AGENT ORANGE. This agent caused many problems to the soldiers then and still causes problems today. It was dropped on the troops and the wind often carried the mist to their location, making them sick on the spot. Even walking through the areas already sprayed was dangerous because it would get on your clothes and boots. But the most common results of the chemical caused birth defects on many of the veterans offspring and cancers in the vets. with problems to most all the internal organs years later.

Napalm is a jelled gas that could be loaded in bombs and rockets. It was the most dangerous and deadly ammo in our arsenal. It was used in close combat. There was no way to put out the flames and if it hit you there was little hope for survival. When I called for a napalm strike I always tried to call the Navy to deliver the strike because they could put it in your back pocked (so to speak) with out hurting you. They would come in on tree top approaches and look for your smoke then drop their payload. Your smoke meant that you had to mark the ends of your formation by throwing smoke grenades and having the pilot identify the

color of your smoke. The enemy could also throw smoke grenades of a color so you had to conform the right color with the pilot of the jet.

Sickness was another concern of the combat soldier. Although we received many inoculations and took a regiment of pills there was a constant awareness that one could get sick at anytime. Malaria, dysentery, and hepatitis were the most common illnesses. Malaria was caused by misquotes. Dysentery was caused by the unclean environment we had to operate in (the rice patties filled with buffalo feces and other rotting fertilizers used, and unclean native foods, and water not properly treated). Hepatitis was caused by bad food and having to handle wounded soldiers both friendly and enemy.

Beside the constant buzzing of the mosquito there were other insects that caused soldiers much grief. The leeches were thicker than ants on a Sunday picnic. They are not like our American leeches that only live in water, they infested the thick balmy under growth of the jungle floor. Attracted to body heat these leeches (often up to six or seven inches long) would crawl along the vegetation in search of a host from which to suck blood. We would tie the bottom of our fatigue pants as tight to our boots as possible but these blood sucker vampires could always find a way to get a meal. Each evening when we were ready to set up our ambushes or just to camp for the night we used the buddy system to check each others arms, legs, back, stomach, and head for the pesky little critters. In the mornings the search would have to be done again because at night while we were laying on the jungle floor the leeches got into the eyes, inside the ears, up your nose, inside your mouth, in the groin area, and even in the anal cavity. Leeches could not be pulled off because of the attachment devices in their heads. They could be removed with a lit cigarette, open flame, a hot bayonet, or by squirting the Government issue bug killer (in the small green plastic bottles

everyone carried). Poisonous spiders of many different shapes and sizes were all over the country. Hiding in every imaginable space just waiting for its next victim. Their poison was much stronger than that of our Black Widow or Brown Recluse. The symptoms of a bite were much the same but more severe. Huge red wasps the size of our hornets would build nests on the under side of the broad leaf plants such as banana, palm, and rubber. When disturbed they would swarm the unsuspecting victim with a vicious and unrelenting attack, and it did hurt.

Some animals native to the country were often our worst enemy. The monitor lizards roamed the country side looking for dead carcasses on which to feed. They would also attack the soldiers walking through the tall elephant grasses. A bite to the leg caused infection or a swipe of the tail could cause a broken leg. These lizards grew as big as our American Alligators. Other small lizards would give out distress or warning calls from the tree tops when they saw things they were not accustomed to seeing, mainly the American soldier. Their calls could alert the Vietnamese of an intending ambush or the approximate location of a squad recon. No matter where we went in country there was the constant threat of snakes. The Bamboo Viper was a green snake that could hide in the bamboo and remain invisible waiting for the proper time to strike. It was often referred to as the green two-stepper because of the deadly fast acting poison. The Krait is a highly venomous snake found in Vietnam. They are nocturnal in nature. They can be identified by their alternating black and yellow color bands and have hexagon scales on their back. Because their fangs are short they have to inject poison by chewing on the victim. The Krait grows from 6 to 8 feet in length. The Malayan Pit Viper commonly called the finger rotters because when bitten the flesh quickly rots and dies. A very temperamental snake grows to about 3 to 4 feet. Cobras range widely in the country. The most common cobras were the King and Asian. There are 140 species of snakes in Vietnam and 30 are poisonous. The Vietnamese would use these in trap pits and in tunnels.



Other animals there were Asian Tigers, water buffalo, apes, and elephants. The tigers were mostly nocturnal and shy slipping away into the jungle with the slightest noise. Water buffalo however were very dangerous. Their size and temperament made them hard to deal with. If something did not suit them they would break and charge running over, goring or trampling you. We were given orders not to shoot a buffalo because under Geneva Conventions rules of warfare a First World Country could not destroy the lively hood of the third world country wherein the conflict of war was located. The U.S. would have to pay the farmer for the buffalo, the number of offspring that animal could produce in its lifetime and the rice crops that would be lost. Elephants had much the same temperament as the water buffalo and caused the same type of injury. Elephants were used as beast of burden and in the logging industry. The Vietnamese used them to haul supplies where they could not get trucks to go. Monkeys and apes were used by the Vietnamese as warning devices to alert them when the soldiers were getting close. The rock apes sometimes would attack if agitated biting and scratching. Rats were as big as our young opossums and would get into your supplies and sometimes try to eat you when sleeping on the jungle floor. I shot one with my M-16 in a bunker while at Fire support Base Charlie 1 on the DMZ.

The weather varied from the Northern parts to the Southern parts of South Vietnam. The temperature in the Delta area was warm and balmy (from 73°F to 83°F). In the triple canopy of the rainforest the temperature often reached the triple digits with high humidities. During the monsoon season which lasts about 20 to 30 days in November and December it rains every day all day and dumps up to 70 inches of water. One on patrol or ambush had to sleep sitting up or with head propped up high to avoid drowning. Wading in water all day caused the feet to swell and burst open leading to jungle rot. There was always extra room in the

back pack for extra pairs of socks to try to keep the feet dry. In the high lands the temperature can drop to 40°F at night which meant one could be in the rainforest with 100°F and in a short period of time be in the mountains with 40°F temperature. In the Delta region one stayed wet all the time. For this reason special boots were made for the soldiers with the canvas mesh tops and air vents in the arches.

The terrain (which I have touched on briefly above) from mission to mission often changed drastically. In the south or the Delta Region the land was flat and often swampy with many rice patties. The only dry places were the dikes which were nearly always booby trapped or infested with snakes. Elephant grasses grew seven to eight feet tall. It was hard to maneuver through. The blades of the grass were very sharp and would cut the bare skin and even cut your clothes. The main source of travel on the rivers was the gun boats. North of the Delta was the low high lands. Here the farmers dammed the hillsides with long dikes to form rice patties. Banana tree plantations and rubber tree plantations dotted the landscape. Bamboo thickets were a big problem in this area. They were tall, big in diameter and had small sprouts on them which grabbed your cloths and tore them and your skin. The only way to get through these thickets was to use machetes and cut through them. The barbs on the bamboo would even get hooked in the pull rings of the smoke grenades and the baseball grenades so you had to always make sure your pull pins were secure and mounted on your web belt and suspenders with the pins on the inside toward your body. The viper snakes inhabited these thickets. The thick triple canopy rain forest jungles were also in this area. Up in the high lands the mountains were high, often rugged and steep full of tunnels made large enough to house companies of Vietnamese troops and even hospitals. Bunker complexes were numerous and well fortified. Then there was the DMZ (demilitarized zone). This section between North and South Vietnam

was a bombed out desolate area with only scrubby vegetation. On the South Side of the zone the Americans had built large concrete machine gun bunkers and fortified culvert bunkers with artillery and tank positions between them. This area was marked by the Geneva Convention Rules of Warfare as a safe buffer zone between two countries where no fighting could take place. This rule only applied to the major World Powers who signed the peace accord at the end of World War II. North Vietnam was not a major power and did not have to follow the rule, so they could fire upon our soldiers but we could not fire back.

Our own Government as well as the Convention Rule handicapped us in our efforts to fight the enemy in this so called war. Everyone had to follow certain rules because of the constant presence of the newsmen and their cameras. The Vietnam War was the first war that had instant viewing in the living rooms of the world. Everything there was under the scrutiny of the peace demonstrators who were in their homelands and completely out of any danger and fear of death on foreign soil. Even the higher Military Leaders would not take responsibility for the actions of their troops if there was a question of so called immoral action. The infantryman was completely on his own. Only some of America was at war. The people back home were always being lied to about the war by the military and political leaders of the Nation. Everyday there was the reports that we were winning the war when we were actually getting our butts kicked and loosing good men both wounded and killed. It was all about the body counts of the dead enemy soldiers. Erroneous numbers were always turned in. No one was going to go around after a battle counting the dead. We were told to turn in an inflated, estimated count.

Drugs played a major part in the war. The enemy would get very high on any number of hallucinogenic drugs and believe themselves to be

invincible to death. A soldier could not just wound them because wounds would not slow them down. They would just keep coming at you until you killed them. The most common drugs used by the V.C. Were heroin, hashish, and opium. The women often chewed beetle nut which stained their teeth black.

The war was so unpopular at home that it effected our ability to carry out our missions without thinking in the back of our minds what people at home thought of us. But we did our job to the best we could, saving our own lives and the lives of our fellow soldiers was the main priority of our existence at that time. People at home were burning their draft cards and even leaving the country going to Canada to avoid the draft. They were later pardoned by the President of the United States for committing treason. Jane Fonda (Hanoi Jane) even went to North Vietnam to protest the war. This war was looked upon by the soldiers as a poor mans war. If you went to college, had money, or had important parents such as political leaders you were exempt from the draft. Our Government has betrayed us, no way to deactivate our training or deal with the way we were treated by the world we were thrust back into. We were just supposed to forget that we had been in a war, maimed physically and mentally, seen our comrades wounded and killed, and too deal with the horrors on our own. All our politicians can do is vote themselves pay raises and cut veteran benefits.



Heroes do not wear capes they wear dog tags!

Did not we answer the call of our Country?

Did we not serve as gallantly as all those in previous wars?

Did not my wounds hurt as badly as those of other wars?

Was not the blood shed in my war not as red as in other wars?

Why didn't we get a slap on the back or a hand shake for doing all we could?

Why didn't we get a welcome home?

We just want to be accepted with military honors!

We payed our dues!

Thank a Vet!

For those who had to fight for it, freedom has a flavor the protected shall never know.

A Vet can only be as strong as those who support, acknowledge, and remember the things he has accomplished and the country he fought for.

Combat Vets are a very special breed who have faced many hardships, had to leave loved ones, friends and home to go to hostile lands and fight for the freedom of others. I FOUGHT FOR YOU.



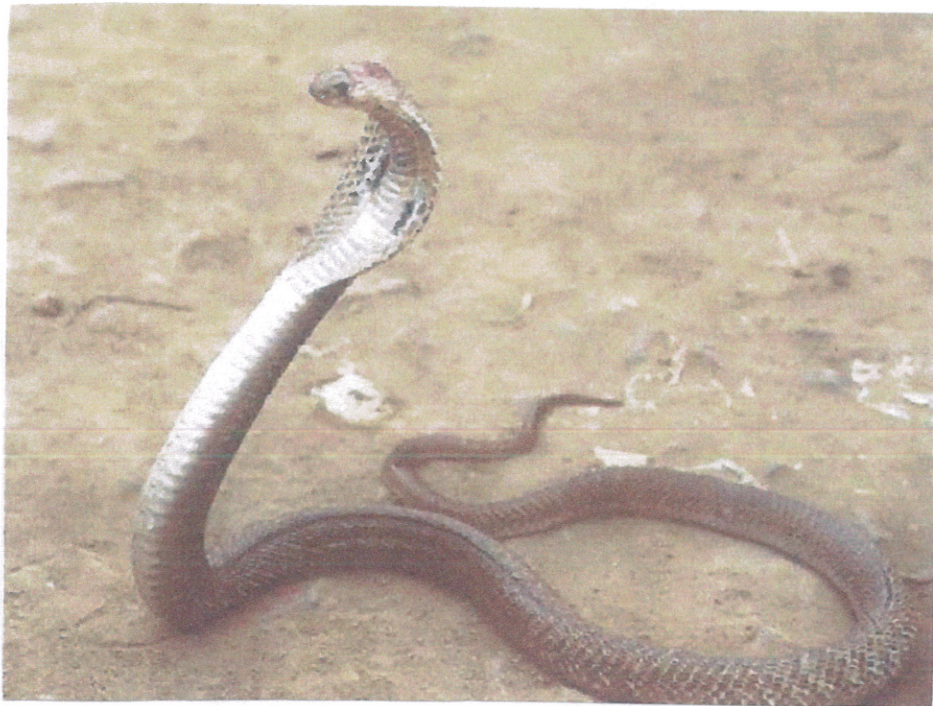


Above: Krait one of the world's most Deadly Snakes  
Also Known as the One Stepper

Below: Bamboo Viper (many varieties in the species)  
Also Known as two stepper







Above: Cobra, there are many varieties of this  
Snake

Below: monitor or Komodo Dragon





Right:  
Rock Ape



Below:  
Asian Elephant

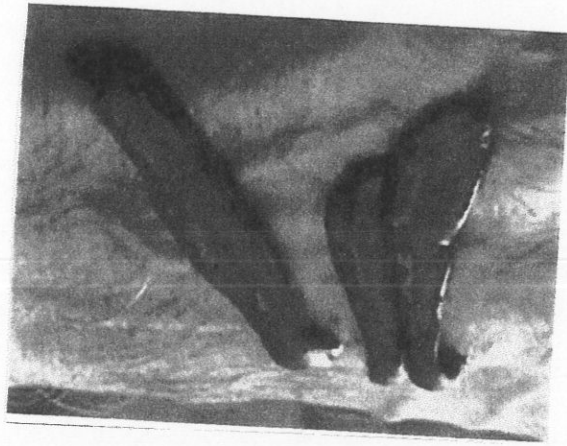




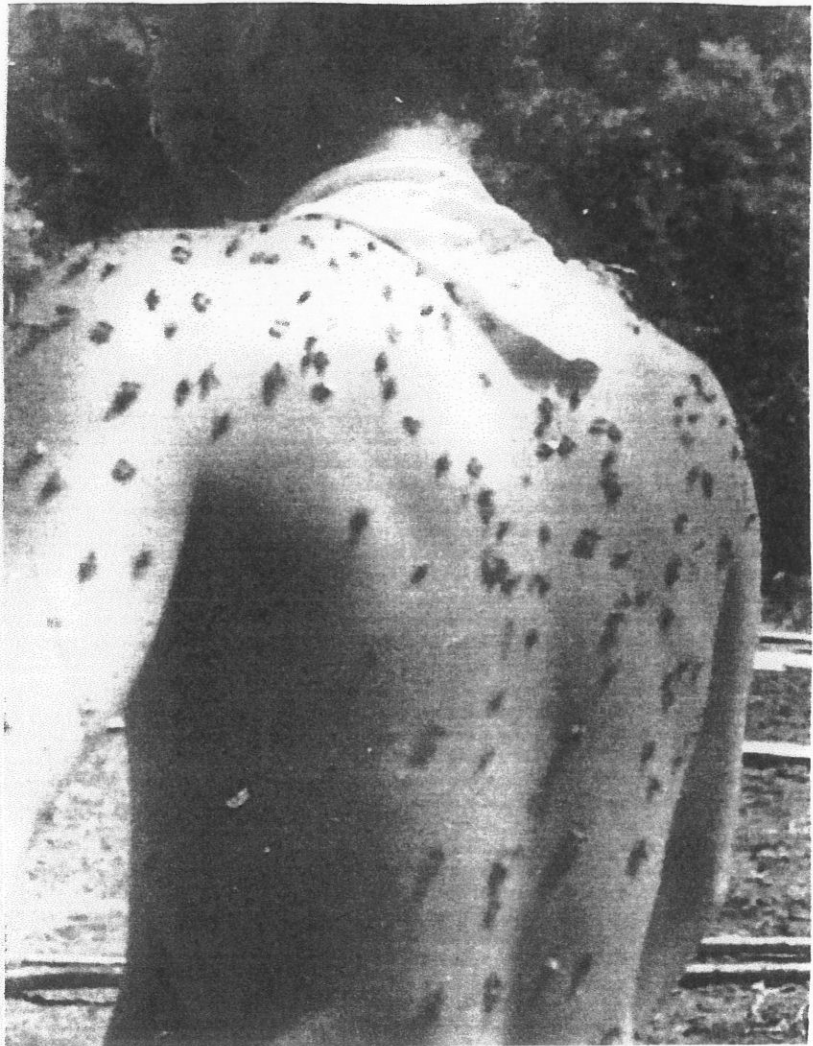


Above: Asian Tiger  
Below: Water Baffalo





Leeches





Below: Rats as  
Large as o'possums



Below: Ants



Below: Wasp





OPEN  
Market

Right  
Chickens &  
Ducks



Below: Dogs skinned & ready



Below: Roasted Rats



Right:  
Stuffed Cat  
On the Spit





Vietnam War was fought in many terrains

Central  
High Lands



Trenches around  
Fire Bases



Rice Paddies





## Vietnam War in the Delta



## Fighting during Monsoon Season



Vietnam War  
in  
Banana  
Plantations



War in  
the Open  
farmlands



War in the  
Jungle





War in  
the  
Mountains



War in  
Bamboo  
Forest







It often Took four Soldiers to take Care of one wounded



On Patrol

A Soldiers  
Best Friend  
A Machine  
Gun & lots  
of Ammo





When Calling Air Strikes & Artillery Strikes the  
Squad leader better know his units exact location

Navy Jet  
Napom  
Strike  
Danger close



Artillery  
barrage







Hot LZ (Landing Zone)  
Get close and Jump.







Forward Fire Base Los Banos





THE WAR IS OVER  
BUT THE MEMORIES REMAIN

BY DENNIS CAVITT

*Dennis Cavitt*

They called it a conflict, but to those of us who were there it was nothing short of WAR. For me it was long ago but the memories are like yesterday. A 20 year old country boy called by his country to do his duty as an American citizen to defend the rights and freedoms of people on the other side of the World. I am a proud veteran and wear that pride openly for all to see. I did not burn my draft card or desert my country by running off to Canada to avoid the draft.

This is a book of many of the memories and reflections of my participation in the Vietnam Conflict (War).

I would like to pay tribute to those men who served with me in Nam both in the 199<sup>th</sup> and the 101<sup>st</sup>. I thank them for the privilege of serving as their squad leader and the trust they placed in me as that leader. We went through a lot of close calls and lost some men in the process. I gained the respect of my men and they trusted my decisions and followed me without any hesitation and we made a good squad.



Let us start at the beginning. On August 21, 1948, a son was born to Charles and Eldred English Cavitt in their apartment in the small town of Benton Kentucky. He was the second of five children and was named Dennis. That would be me. At my young age we moved to St Louis, Missouri, for Dad to find work. We stayed there for a few years and moved to Palma in Marshall Co. Kentucky. Mom and Dad then bought a small farm in Scale. After several years they bought a house in Benton, Kentucky. That brings me to the year 1966. My draft status with the Selective Service System was the old familiar 1-A, which meant I was of age and fit for duty in the United States Military.

After High School I attended Freed-Hardamen College in Henderson, Tennessee for two years then one semester at Murray State University. In May of 1969, a letter came to me and the envelope said it was from our Uncle Sam. He had pointed his finger at me and said, "I WANT YOU", I had been called.

I was to report to the induction center in Nashville, Tennessee. From there I was sent for Basic Training to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Upon Graduation from there I was to report for AIT (Advanced Infantry Training) in Fort Polk, Louisiana. Everyone knew that if you received orders to Fort Polk you were destined for Vietnam. I then received orders to report to Fort Benning, Georgia to attend NCO School (Non Commissioned Officers School). The death rate in Vietnam for leadership personnel was very high. I was graduated with the rank of Sargent E-5 and assigned the MOS (Military Occupations Specialists) of 11C-40, which meant I was to be squad-leader in a mortar unit. I was now a trained government killer, ready to go off to war.

Then came the big day; it was off to Vietnam. I left on a commercial airlines from Nashville, Tennessee headed for Fort Ord, California. There

was traveling with me a soldier named Freddy Buchanan from Bruce, Mississippi. We had been together through all our training since the first day at Fort Campbell. From Fort Orr we flew to Alaska, then Guam and on to Bien Hoa Airbase near Long Binh, Vietnam. After a few days of acclimating to the heat Freddy and I were sent to different Army Units. I became a member of Company D 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry 199<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade better known as the Red Catchers. The 199<sup>th</sup> was deployed to Southeast Asia in 1966. Its area of operations covered the areas North and East of Saigon, South Vietnam. In 1970 the unit covered the Iron Triangle and made incursions into Cambodia and Laos.

Upon reaching my unit my Mos was changed from 11C-40 to 11B-40 (bush beaters or often referred to as grunts) because of the need for squad-leaders in the Infantry unit. I was flown by helicopter to where my unit was on patrol and waiting on the chopper for resupply. After meeting with the other men in the squad we set out for our night time ambush on a Viet Cong trail. We traveled several clicks (a click being about .6 mile) and located a heavily used V C trail and set out flare trip wires and claymore mines. The wires were stretched across the trail so that when tripped the flares would illuminate the trail so we could see what had set them off. If it was the enemy we could set off the mines and open fire. Two men at a time stayed awake and pulled guard. The night swallowed up the landscape and total darkness set in. There were many sounds that filled the night: frogs, lizards, monkeys, birds, tigers, elephants and other creatures I had no knowledge of. That night the trail was not used.

Daybreak finally comes and it is time to get a quick C-ration meal, a cold one at that because there could be no fire or smoke that could alert the enemy of your position. "Ok men load up," was the command of the squad leader. Our back packs were heavy with supplies and a few personal items. Each man carried 20 magazines of m-16 ammo, two 100 round belts over their shoulders and a full ammo can on the bottom of their pack



of machine gun ammo, four hand grenades, two smoke grenades, two claymore mines, bandages, water, food, extra bricks of C-4 (plastic explosive), explosive charges, and a flack vest.

We moved out on patrol looking for the enemy. It was about noon and we had entered into a banana plantation, there was a crack of an AK-47 (a distinctive sound one can never forget). All of a sudden the hold plantation was filled with gun fire. We had walked into a hot spot for the Viet Cong. Bullets were hitting all around my head. I was so scared I tried to crawl under my helmet but my butt just would not fit. I heard someone call my name and I said to myself, "Cavitt you must return fire if you plan to go home". I did and from that time on I was a seasoned soldier ready to fight. That day I earned my Combat Infantry Badge (for being shot at) to go along with my American Defense Medal, my Vietnam Service Medal, and my Vietnam Campaign Medal. When the scrummage was over the wounded were attended to and we moved to a landing zone to be picked up by choppers and dropped in a different area.

When we went into a new landing zone, artillery was often called in to soften and clear the area so the choppers could get in and out easier. If we were going into a hot LZ, one where we were going in under enemy fire the choppers would not land but would get to within ten to twelve feet of the ground and you had to jump with your 60 pound back pack and if you landed wrong it sure did hurt.

Many days were spent hiking around the country looking for Charlie (Viet Cong). So much for 3 hot meals and a cot that the army advertised in all its commercials back home. All we got was an extended camping trip. Nights of sleeping on the ground or sometimes in a hammock made from our ponchos. The food was C-rations left over from WW11. The Beans and franks were good cold as were the fruit, canned ham and beef, but no one wanted the spaghetti because there was a layer of grease atop the can. If we

were in a place where we could cook we could take a small piece of C-4 explosive light it and heat our meals. The C-4 could be lit or stomped but not both at the same time. If the drinking water ran out we could get water from many sources but iodine tablets had to be added. I have swiped scum from bomb craters just to get a drink. Cigarettes also came in the ration packs but very few were smoked because a single flame from a lighter can be seen with the naked eye for ten miles and makes a good target for a sniper.

Traveling through the thick triple canopy jungle often caused much concern to the whole squad. The point man had to be rotated because he had to many times use a machete to chop a path through the thick vines and bamboo. Not knowing where the enemy could be hiding or when you could happen upon a heavily used trail. While working in these conditions it happened to us. The point man had tripped a booby trap which set off an explosion and the jungle became alive with gun fire. We were in the middle of bunker complex with a platoon of NVA (North Vietnamese Army) regulars. The fighting became fierce and a call had to be made for artillery fire support from a local forward fire support base named Fire Base Trap. The location of our position was given and the 155 howitzer shells came zipping in. Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! The ground shook, dirt and debris fell from the sky like rain. The artillery strike was right where we needed it. Danger close or in the grunts language in your back pocket. The squad-leader had been wounded and had to be dusted off by a medivac chopper. Being the only other E-5 Sergeant in the squad, I was now the squad-leader. After regrouping the men we were given new orders and were off to our next mission.

There were many more small encounters with the enemy throughout the upcoming days and weeks. We found ourselves in the rice patties. No where to take cover except the patty dooms. Wading in water all day was slow and hazardous but we could not walk on the dooms because they were often



booby trapped by the enemy. There were many different kinds of traps the enemy set. The main ones used on the dikes were toe poppers and trip wires. It was on one of these missions in the rice patties where my squad had to have contact with the villagers. The Village Chief had asked me to dine with him. Part of our training as squad-leaders was if requested by the local authorities to eat as their quest, we were obligated to do so to strengthen relations with the locals. On the menu that afternoon was duck eggs boiled in duck internals on a bed of rice. Yum! Yum! I never ate rice again even to this day.

The war was everywhere. No place was safe. When we went into a forward fire support base for some rest time, there was always the threat of rocket and mortar attack. The grunts had to pull guard duty on the perimeter bunkers because we knew how to fight. The higher ups were always trying to mess with us. Get a hair cut, get a shave, get cleaned up, do this do that. My men trusted me and looked up to me as their squad-leader and I took care of them and their needs in the camps. I told the higher ups to leave my men alone and it was up to the men if they wanted a hair cut or to shave (we were a rough and rebel bunch and we survived). After all what were they going to do to us, send us to Vietnam. One time at fire base Lowlander the base commander was giving us much grief. I had my men go out in front of our bunkers and set up claymore mines for night time coverage and tie trip wires from the trip flairs to their claymore clacker (electrical devices used to set off blasting caps) wires and wait for my command. I would take the midnight watch and when I broke squelch on the radio three times they were to pull on the clacker wires setting off the trip flairs and then blow the claymore mines. I hollowed gooks in the wire and opened up with machine gun and rifle fire. That woke up everyone in the command bunker. The next morning we were given orders to return to the jungles.

I received the co-ordinance to the top of a mountain where there was reported to be a lot of enemy activity. So off we went. After two days of

maneuvers we were close to the target. Caution was the word. Before I knew it we had walked right into the middle of a bunker complex. Lucky for us there was no one home at the time. Easing back out I called for an air strike. The Navy had no jets in the area but an Air Force B-52 Bomber Jet pilot answered my call and said he had a full pay load and was looking for a place to drop. I gave our location and he said he was 15 minutes away and to get off the mountain. You talk about a scramble we were in a dead run down the trail we had just come in on. He was so high we never heard the jet coming all we heard was the explosions of the bombs. It was like an earthquake the ground rumbled and shook. Upon returning to the top of the mountain to make a report of the condition of the bunker complex we found not much left. There had been someone at home after all. The ground was strewn with dead bodies They were all underground. It was a hidden hospital with many supplied. On this mission I was awarded my first Army Commendation Award Medal.

Leaving the top of the mountain we returned to the jungle floor to the banks of a local river. There were not many opportunities afforded us to take a good bath so when we happened upon a river we set up camp and took turns pulling guard and using the local spa. How refreshing but had to put back on the same old dirty stinking fatigues. We did not mind being in the monsoon season cause we could shower every day. WOW.

Back to the war. The orders came to move into the lower highlands and look for a unit of Viet Cong operating in that area and destroying the local villages that were not sympathetic to their cause. We got into a large area of elephant grass and got bogged down. The blades of these grasses are very sharp and will cut the skin and cloths like razors. This was a platoon mission so a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant was leading the party. When we cleared the grass lands and had covered a few clicks (1000 meters is one click) the Lt. decided he would change the orders and not go to the destination and co-ordinance our mission was supposed to take us. As we were setting up our



night time defenses, there in the distance we could hear an eight inch cannon fire. It seemed to be from an ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) Fire Base about ten miles away. Soon there was a whistle of an artillery shell and a loud boom with the shell hitting about 100 meters from our position. Then there was another round fired from the cannon. This round hit half the distance between us and the last explosion. The Lt. was on the radio calling for a cease fire and check fire. But there was a third round fired and it hit right in the middle of our position. A Viet Cong commander had seen us set up and had called in our position to the ARVN camp for a fire mission on us. The ARVNs thought they were firing on a company of NVA. A hot searing pain had hit me in the back, my hair stood on its end, it was like a thousand bees hitting me in the same place. Hot shrapnel had penetrated my flack vest and was burning its way into my back. Moaning and groaning was coming from all directions. The medic was earning his pay. Dust off choppers filled the sky. I was bandaged and stayed with my squad. Never did get a purple heart.

After several days of searching and setting up ambushes in the grasslands our unit was choppered into Fire Base Big Windy. There was intelligence information of a built up of enemy troops around the base. We were moved in to provide extra support on the bunker line. The next day the perimeter was hit. First shelling of mortar rounds then the assault began. The enemy threw wooden ladders across the apron wire and started pouring in. A barrage of fire from the bunkers met them. The 105 howitzers barrels were lowered to point blank range and fired flechette (beehive) rounds over the bunkers. It looked like porcupine quills stuck in the sandbags and devastated the on coming enemy charge. Dead VC lay scattered on the wire.

All the companies of the 199<sup>th</sup> were called in from their missions and had to be choppered to the main headquarters in Bien Hoa. The unit was being retired from active duty in Vietnam. It was a big ceremony. The colors (Unit Flags and Banners) were taken down from the flag poles and stored. All the

company records and equipment were loaded up on cargo planes and flown back to the U.S. Only the top officers were allowed to go home all the rest of the troops were assigned to new units. My new home was Company E, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 506<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, Airmobile. From that day forward my mission changed. This was a search and destroy unit whose field of operations was the entire country of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The 199<sup>th</sup> was a small unit and had to rely on other units for fire support, and choppers. The 101<sup>st</sup> had everything a unit needed and was self-sufficient. Our main objective became to hunt the enemy make contact and call for support to annihilate them.

I found myself once again in the squad-leader position. During one of our missions in the triple canopy jungle I was stricken with malaria and had to be air lifted to Cameron Bay to a field hospital for care. There was no landing zone near to us so I had to be hauled up through the canopy on a tripod seat attached to a cable from a dust off chopper. Talk about a rough ride, first I was almost beaten to death by the trees on my ride up then the chopper floor was covered with my puke. Boy was I sick. After a week I was returned to my unit and gladly so. In the hospital I had to do PT (Physical Training) to stay in shape. One week later I had a relapse of malaria but refused dust off and stayed with my men.

Contact after contact with Charlie, fire fight after fire fight, calling in cobra gun ships with their cannons blasting. Calling in for artillery support 105 and 155 howitzer shells exploding all around. Calling for the Navy F-14 and F-16 to shoot rockets and drop napalm canisters in danger close and try not to call it in on your own men. Nerves getting short, jitters, men reacting to the slightest noise, will we ever make it home. Seeing your brothers in arms fall. Bodies covered with blood, the sight of body bag some full some containing only pieces of your comrades. What a waste. Somehow you hide



your emotions and fight on. I was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for bravery and meritorious service and a second Army Commendation Medal.

While operating out of Forward Fire Base Los Banos in the central part of the country a mission called my unit to set up close to Highway 1, a major supply route for supplies from North Vietnam to the south. Having set up an ambush and waiting for contact with a supply convoy, I was in desperate need to relieve myself so I stepped outside of the defense line and told my machine gunner to keep an eye out for me. Well I had just got my pants down and started my constitution when I heard the chatter of soldiers. I hollered at Gary Hall and he hollered get down. He opened fire cutting down trees and gooks. I had chosen a well traveled trail to do my business by. I did not mess my pants but I had fallen in my mess and had it all over my pants leg. I used my canteen water to clean. So much for that ambush.

We spent two weeks on the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) at Outpost Charlie One. By name this was to be a buffer zone between North and South Vietnam where no military action was to be taken. As a First World Country the U.S. had to abide by the Geneva Convention of rules of warfare. Vietnam being a Third World Country did not. Our position would get shelled by mortar and artillery day and night but we could return no fire. Across the DMZ flew large North Vietnamese Flag that could be seen for a distance of 5 miles. It was a large swath of land that was barren of vegetation from previous bombing and agent orange aerial spraying.

Many of our operations were on the notorious Highway 1. Trying to cut off this supply route proved to be a difficult task. The NVA traveled this road at night using low light sources with thousands of workers to repair any US disruptive bombing. We set up ambushes all along the highway made contact called in airstrikes and artillery but for everyone killed they had two to replace them. The floods of troops and supplies to the south increased daily.

No ground troops were supposed to cross the borders into Laos and Cambodia. It was to be bombing and air strikes only. Secret missions were conducted and the 101<sup>st</sup> was the main unit involved. My squad was directed to enter Laos on several occasions to cut off supply lines coming into South Vietnam. All our identification was taken and even our dog tags were removed and left behind at the base camp. We were told if captured the US Government knew nothing about us and we were on our own. Special codes and signals were used to keep these missions a secret and away from the news media. There was a French deserter who had joined the North Vietnamese cause and was leading a band of gorilla fighters in raids on the common villagers. If he was captured he was to be returned to Saigon immediately. We spent many days searching for the enemy in their backyard, making brief contact only to have them disappear into the country side, hiding in tunnels and the thick underbrush to avoid being found.

Back on the East side of the Mekong River it was time to build a new fire base camp. Our platoon was to be dropped into a new area to clear a landing pad. There were about 15 choppers and cobra gun ships for escort. The choppers swooped in and everyone bailed out to take up defensive positions. Then the work began. C-4 and explosive cord was used to cut down trees so the bulldozers could be dropped in by Chinooks. Bunkers had to be built Canon pits had to be dug apron and Constantine wire had to be laid. Then it was time for the 105 or 155 artillery canons to be set in place. Thus a fire base was born from which to fan out and go on new offensives.

Now it is the first of June and the Tet Offensive for 1970 is in full swing. There is a major build up of supplies and troops on the move down the Ho Chi Minh trail. The 101<sup>st</sup> operated a fire base named Ripcord on a mountain top over looking the A Shau Valley through which ran the Ho Chi Minh trail. Intelligence reports said one of the main objectives of the new year



was to overrun this out post and drive out the inhabitants so there would be no one to slow down their advances. My unit was pulled in to set up ambushes and surveillance in the valley. Our landing zone was not secure and we started taking fire from the tree lines. A failed attempt to make a landing was the result. Cobra gunships strafed the area and we again tried a landing with every man in the choppers laying down fire power. My squad was the first to hit the ground. I took control of the landing zone by distributing my men and maintaining ground fire power so the other choppers could unload. No chopper landed they got to within 10 to 12 feet of the ground and everyone had to bail out. For this action I was awarded the Air Combat Medal. We were pinned down in the landing zone and had to call for artillery and air support. The Cobras came in firing their cannons and rockets into the tree line but we were still taking fire. A call was made for the jets to come and drop napalm. We marked our possessions with smoke grenades and called for danger close drops. The sky was red with the fire balls created by the napalm. A resupply of ammo had to be called for immediately cause we had spent so much ammo. The next few days was a constant battle making contact with the enemy daily. There seemed to be no end. The NVA kept pouring in. On July 1, 1970, Ripcord started taking enemy fire. The following is an official record (housed in Texas Tech University, Vietnam Archives) of the daily incidents during the Battle for Fire Base Ripcord.

1 July 1970

The shelling of Ripcord begins at 0708. By days end, a Chinook Helicopter has been shot down and there are 15 WIA in B/2-319<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery.

2 July 1970

From 0346-0420, C/2-506<sup>th</sup> is attached atop Hill 902, South of Ripcord. Enemy sappers get inside the NDP, and NVA infantrymen attack from outside. There are 7 KIA (including the CO Hewitt) 1 MIA (this GI was apparently blown to bits by an RPG), and 6 WIA. Despite heavy losses C

Co. holds (15 enemy bodies were found at daybreak, plus numerous blood trails) and is replaced in the morning by B/2-506.

At 1030 another Chinook is shot down on Ripcord. Meanwhile, the 2-501<sup>st</sup> establishes its TOC (Tactical Operations Command) with the 2-506th TOC on Ripcord. The 2-501 was rushed in to reinforce 2-506<sup>th</sup>.

3 July 1970

B/2-506<sup>th</sup> takes 1 KIA during patrol off Hill 902.

4 July 1970

C/2-506<sup>th</sup> hits a daisy-chain booby trap made of 5 82 mm mortar rounds placed along a trail, resulting in 5 KIA (including the platoon leader) and 5 WIA.

5 July 1970

Between 0010-0605, the C/2-501<sup>st</sup> NDP (Night Defensive Position) is attacked. 1 KIA, 17 WIA, and 5 NVA KIA.

6 July 1970

On Ripcord the continued shelling results in 5 WIA.

The recon Platoon E/2-506 takes 5 WIA when it engages an NVA mortar position on Hill 1000, due west of Ripcord. The company on the bunker line, D/2-506<sup>th</sup>, moves out to support Recon and is replaced by B/2-506<sup>th</sup>, which will secure Ripcord for the rest of the battle.

7 July 1970

On Ripcord the shelling continues and 5 more WIA.

D/2-506<sup>th</sup> makes an unsuccessful attack on Hill 1000: pinned down, the company breaks contact after a chopper comes in low taking numerous hits and drops ammo and grenades to the troops. D Co has 1 KIA, 2 MIA (these men were wounded and apparently died during the firefight, but their bodies were never found), plus 19 WIA. Six NVA were known to have been



killed, With other blood trails everywhere.

Meanwhile, C/2-506 on the north side of hill 1000, runs into an enemy force, and suffers 1 KIA and 15 WIA.

8 July 1970

C/2-506 and D/2-506 launch another attack on Hill 1000. C co takes 2 KIA and 5 WIA. C Co. refuses to make a second attack on the grounds that it is now at platoon strength.

10 July 1970

No major action this day.

11 July 1970

The 2-506<sup>th</sup> is pulled out of the Ripcord AO (Area of Operations) and lifted to Camp Evans to organize a Counter Attack behind Hill 1000 back in the Ripcord AO.

12 July 1970

The 2-501<sup>st</sup> combat assaults behind Hill 1000.

A/2-506<sup>th</sup> and D/2-501<sup>st</sup> takes Hill 805. D CO. digs in on top and at 2222 repels an enemy attack, 26 WIA. As usual, enemy casualties were considerable given the fire A CO poured into the rear of the attack force, go uncounted.

13 July 1970

No major action this day.

14 July 1970

At 0203, D/2-501<sup>st</sup> at Hill 805 is hit hard. 6 KIA, 9 WIA, & 5 NVA KIA.

The 2-501<sup>st</sup> assaults up the back slope of Hill 1000. The attack was repulsed with 1 KIA and 20 WIA (four of whom were hit by errant Cobra fire).

At 1705 DTs (Defensive Targets) are fired upon to prevent a massive attack

during the night. There is no attack.

At 2253, however, the NVA again hit D/2-501<sup>st</sup> on Hill 805. 1 KIA and 7 WIA.

15 July 1970

Starting at 1845, the NVA shell and probe D/2-501 on Hill 805. 2 NVA KIA.

16 July 1970

NVA again attack Hill 805.

17 July 1970

At 0737, two 120mm mortar shells slam onto Ripcord, marking the first use of this heavy fire power. The shelling continues all day and results in 15 WIA. A planed extraction of 2-501 is delayed because of high winds. Meanwhile D/2-501<sup>st</sup> is ordered to march on Hill 805 to an extraction LZ. On the way a booby trap wounds 9 GIs and 2 KIA. D/2-501<sup>st</sup> is not replaced and the NVA quickly take possession of Hill 805.

18 July 1970

The 2-501 and Co. D is extracted from the Ripcord AO. On Ripcord the shelling continues 2 KIA and 5 WIA. A 120mm round takes out the command bunker 2 KIA 4 WIA. A Chinook carrying a sling load of 105mm ammo is shot down and crashes into the B/2-319<sup>th</sup> area, setting of a major fire that destroys all 6 howitzers and all the battery's ammunition. 5 helicopter crewman are injured and the flight engineer is killed in the fire. To provide Ripcord with 105 artillery support the 1-501 opens up FSB Gladiator, almost eight clicks northeast of Ripcord B/2-320 (105mm) is lifted in.

19 July 1970

Continued shelling of Ripcord. 12 WIA. Two enemy soldiers walk right into



A/2-506<sup>th</sup> Command Possession. They are killed ( one of them was a NVA recon sergeant and the other a Chinese.

20 July 1970

More shells hit Ripcord. 2 KIA and 1 WIA.

D/1-506<sup>th</sup> is combat assaulted three clicks east of Ripcord on a mission whose objectivity was unclear. They ran into a hornets nest 4 KIA 5 WIA 3 NVA KIA.

Meanwhile A/2-506<sup>th</sup> discovers an enemy high-speed trail southeast of Ripcord, along which is stretched communication wire. Tapping into it the company Kit Carson (Vietnamese) Scout eavesdrops for 5 hours on conversations between an NVA regiment and division headquarters. Numerous NVA troops are killed by A Co. as they come to check on the wire or to fill their canteens at a nearby stream.

Thanks to the wire tap it is learned that 4 regiments surround Ripcord for the purpose of seizing the fire base. Plans were made for additional US troops were then called in to destroy the regiments.

21 July 1970

D/1-506<sup>th</sup> is mortared in its NDP; pulling downhill to its LZ from the day before it is then assaulted by overwhelming numbers of NVA. 5 KIA and 35 WIA. 1 MIA was reported when he fell from a medivac chopper and never found.

D/2-506<sup>th</sup> create a new LZ to extract D/1-506<sup>th</sup> .

On Ripcord the shelling continues 2 KIA, 4 WIA. B/ 2-506 has 3 KIA and 7 WIA. A/2-11<sup>th</sup> artillery has 1 KIA.

22 July 1970

The decision is made to evacuate Ripcord.

Meanwhile the shelling continues 1 KIA and 3 WIA. A Huey is hit on the landing pad 4 crewmen WIA.

A/2-506<sup>th</sup> runs into a NVA battalion while moving to an extraction LZ. 12 KIA, 51 WIA, and 61 NVA KIA.

23 July 1970

From 0632-1214 FSB Ripcord is evacuated. The Chinooks took out the Artillery and heavy equipment first. Eight Chinooks are hit by fire to include mortar and 51 caliber from atop Hill 805, and AK-47 fire from NVA in the debris of the base. Two Chinooks are shot down. During the extraction of the infantry two Cobras and twelve Hueys are hit. There are a total of 22 Chinook and 100 Huey sorties (flights) made in the extraction. Ripcord falls into the hands of the NVA.

For the 23 days that Ripcord was under siege my unit E/3-506 is on search and destroy missions on the A Shau Valley floor. 5 KIA, 10 WIA hundreds of NVA and Viet Cong KIA and WIA.

After Ripcord Company E/3-506 was air lifted further south to Fire Base Eagle for fear that it would also be over run. My platoon was lifted to LZ Anaconda. Upon approach to the LZ we started taking fire from the tree line. The choppers swooped in and unloaded without landing (ten feet from the ground and jump). After seeking cover a call was made to Base Eagle for fire support. First came a barrage of artillery rounds and then the cobra gunships came for closer protection the fight lasted for about an hour then the enemy disappeared back into the jungle. On recon we found a complex tunnel system and called for canine and handler teams to be inserted to our local. This proved to be a major tunnel system with large caches of supplies and ammo. The unit pulled back several clicks and the area was carpet bombed with 250 pound bombs with delayed fuses for ground penetration. We went back into the area after the bombing stopped. All the tunnels and bunkers were destroyed and only large holes were left from the delayed fuse bombs.



The next mission took us back to the Mekong River. We were lifted into another hot LZ taking fire from the Viet Cong. The fighting became intense and we needed help fast. An AC-130 (Puff the Magic Dragon) was dispatched from Cam Ranh Bay to our local. This gunship with its cannons, machine guns and mini guns could put a round in every square foot of a football field in one pass. We had to mark our possessions with smoke grenades as the aircraft approached. Man was it a beautiful sight.

There were many other contacts made with the enemy most of which in gorilla type warfare (hit and run). It is hard to remember all the small battles and contacts made. These have been the most notable and memorable encounters with the enemy.

Time for me became short and my Deros date (date estimated return from overseas duty) was fast approaching (only five days left). A Chopper was sent to extract me from the jungle location and my replacement was on board. I was lifted to a check point on a bridge along Highway One just North of Saigon. On the fifth day a jeep arrived and I was taken to the Tan Son Nhut Air Base for my trip back to the US. On the way to Vietnam I had lost a whole day of my life because of crossing the International Date Line. On the way back to California I lived the same day twice by arriving at the airport hours before I left Vietnam. At the airport, still in my jungle fatigues and wearing boots covered with caked on Vietnamese mud a young lady walked up to me, spat on me and called me a baby killer. If she had only known the real truth about the fighting in Vietnam. How young children carried weapons and shot at us the same as adults. How children walked up to GI's and asked for chocolate then handed them a grenade with the detonation pin pulled. Because I was still in uniform I represented my Country as an American Soldier and could not retaliate against that person even though I wanted to.

I only had one month left on my two year obligation to the Army. I was

awarded the Good Conduct Medal for my service and was Discharged at that point. My stint in the Army was over. Like most Vietnam Vets, I was very disappointed in the way Americans viewed the soldiers of a war we were forced to serve in and a Government who had deserted us and turned their backs on our needs as we returned. Today we are still finding it hard to get the proper treatment for our ailments (Agent Orange, loneliness, homelessness, alcoholism, drug use, and anti-social behavior). I am proud that I was able to escape all these problems. I do not smoke, drink alcohol, never participated in drug use. I do not even drink coffee. I can after many years of silence talk about my experiences in Nam though I do still get choked up about many of those experiences. The nightmares have calmed down some but upon some occasions do still haunt me. I can not get enough of seeing how the movies portray the war and those who fought there. Not many of them are even close.

Most of the time there were only eleven of us (squad) (point man, cover man, squad leader, radio man, machine gunner, ammo barrier, three riflemen, trail cover man, and a trail gunner) against overwhelming odds but we beat them.



The Vietnam War  
As Seen By A  
Veteran

*Dennis Cavitt*

Dennis Cavitt

The Vietnam War was the longest and most expensive war in American History. The toll we paid wasn't just financial, it cost the people involved greatly, physically and mentally. This war caused great distress and sadness as well as national confusion. Everyone had that one burning question being; why? Why were we even there? The other question being; why did America withdraw from Vietnam?

The Truman Document was to stop the spread of communism and was to be used to stop the south part of Vietnam becoming communist like the north. So America sent in money and all the help they could to stop Vietnam from becoming a communist country. Vietnam was part of French Empire until World War II when the Japanese captured it and took over. The Vietnamese communist movement, Vietminh was formed to fight the Japanese. France tried to repossess Vietnam at the end of WWII but the Vietminh fought back. With the United States lending its financial support to France, when the Japanese defeated France, the United States sent money and military consultants to the non-communist government of South Vietnam. Other advisers however doubted that such an action could reverse the disastrous course of the war and warned the president that it could lead to inevitable to deeper involvement in an Asian land war the United States couldn't win.

By 1960 the American troops were sent in to fight a war that cost; in excess of 150 billion dollars over fifty-eight thousand American lives. The losses to the Vietnamese people were appalling. During the 15 years of military involvement, over 2 million Americans served in Vietnam with 500,000 seeing actual combat. Over 47,244 were killed in action, including 8000 airmen. There were 10,446 non-combat deaths. 153,329 were seriously wounded, including 10,000 amputees. One out of every 10 Americans who served in Vietnam was a casualty. Although the percentage who died is similar to other wars, amputations or crippling wounds were 300% higher



than in WWII. There were over 2400 American POW/MIAs. The average age of the American soldiers killed in the war was 23 years of age. The average infantryman in the South Pacific during WWII saw about 40 days of combat in 4 years: the average infantryman in Vietnam saw 240 days of combat in one year due to the mobility of the helicopter. The numbers of North Vietnamese killed was over 600,000.

No War is easy for those fighting it. The training for those who were determined to go to Vietnam was very intense. I can only speak for the training of the Army troops. The physical training and conditioning was super tough and aimed at surviving a war that was in a tropical region of the world. The main topic of the training was kill, kill, kill. We were more or less trained to be government killers. During all maneuvers the word kill comes into play; rifle, mortar, bayonet, hand grenade, and hand-to-hand combat. Kill zones, no wounding, no prisoners, you have to destroy the enemy. Escape and evade, killing in the silence of the moment, rear strangle hold take down, a bayonet under the rib cage with an upward thrust or a cut to the throat from ear to ear so no sound can be uttered. Rifle training, one shot one kill. Awards given for high scores in training. Most all the Army training took place in Fort Polk Louisiana in the swamps and terrains similar to that of Vietnam.

The Vietnam War soldier faced many challenges, some insurmountable and some impossible. They faced physical challenges posed by the climate, terrain, and wildlife of the country, along with the tactical problems thrown up by what was an inherently complex situation. On top of that Vietnam was a war with few conventional objectives like territory held, no front lines, not even a well-defined theater of war. The Vietnam conflict was a shiftless, dynamic and fluid struggle, where people moved freely and their political loyalties could not be easily identified. It was a 360-degree war – attacks, ambushes, and booby-traps might be encountered at any place, at any time, launched by an unseen enemy.

Who was the enemy? How can you distinguish between the civilians and the non-civilians? The same people who came to work in the army bases at daytime, they just want to shoot and kill you in the nighttime. So how can you distinguish between the two? The good or the bad? All of them look the same! The only thing the Vietnamese liked about the American presence in their country was the jobs created and the money the soldiers (the ones that did not have combat rolls) spent in the cities.

The troops of North Vietnam and the Vietcong were under-resourced and poorly equipped, at least in comparison to those of the US. They did have some considerable advantages, not least of which was a close knowledge of the local people, language and terrain. The NVA and Vietcong also benefited from the eight-year war with the French ( 1946-54) which gave them valuable experience in fighting a major Western power. Their leadership adopted guerrilla methods to inflict American casualties, while avoiding major battles. Hanoi's goal was to prolong the war and inflict as many casualties on the US troops as they could. It knew that America's involvement would be costly; that its political and military leaders were impatient; that the American public would soon withdraw their support and grow tired of that involvement if the war lasted a long time and went poorly.

During the Vietnam War, life for the soldiers changed an extreme amount. Not only did their lives change, but life became a significant amount more difficult. American soldiers thought they were serving their country but had no ideal what this war was really about or what they were fighting against. The Vietnam terrain was that of jungles and rice patties, filled with booby traps and thick under growth. There was constant heat, humidity, and torrents of rain, and many different kinds of dangerous animals. The soldiers ended up becoming ill and injured due to the environment before the actual violence of the war even got to them.

In addition to this the soldiers had no idea what sort of enemy they were fighting, as the American Government had underestimated the Vietnamese determination to dis-lodge the invaders from their country. The Vietcong had a complex network of underground tunnels to hide themselves and large caches of supplies. They even had large hospitals underground. This caused even just finding the enemy to be difficult for US forces.

The biggest tunnel systems were in the Iron Triangle and the Cu Chi District only 20 miles from Saigon. The base area at Cu Chi was a vast network, with nearly 200 miles of tunnels. Hidden trapdoors led below, past guarded chambers, to long chambers, to long passages. At regular intervals, branches led back to the surface and other secret entrances. Some openings were even concealed beneath the waters or streams and canals. At the deepest levels, there were chambers carved out for arms factories and a well for the base's water supply. There were rooms for weapons and rice. Base kitchens were always near the surface with long carved-out chimneys designed to diffuse cooking smoke and release it some distance away. Near the kitchen were the guerilla's sleeping quarters. Everywhere on the top level were hundreds of hidden firing posts for defense of the base.

In the villages, it was hard to determine who were the enemies, because even women and children could help build traps, or house and feed the Vietcong. Vietnamese mothers would often hand off their babies to an American soldier, or a small child would walk up to a soldier, and a grenade the child was carrying would explode. For reasons like this, Americans were forced to kill civilians even if they had no proof that they were for sure the enemy, because there was no definite way to tell. This did not set well with the news reporters or the people back home in the US. Incidents such as this caused a great riff between the soldier trying to do his job and survive by not becoming a casualty of war. The so called bad things were all over the news



broadcasts. Nothing was said about the life of a buddy the soldier saved by having to kill a supposedly “unarmed civilian”. If you were not there you can not properly judge the actions of a combat soldier. I believe Lieutenant Calley was improperly judged because of the reporting of a newsman who did not know or understand the circumstances that surrounded the destruction of that village and the killing of enemy and their sympathizer in that village. There was known Vietcong activity there. It would have been no different if he had called for an airstrike on that village. Because of incidences like these the US soldiers were often yelled at as being “baby killers”.

The Vietnamese Communist, or Vietcong, were the military branch of the National Liberation Front (NLF), and were commanded by the Central Office for South Vietnam, which was located near the Cambodian border. For arms, ammunition and special equipment, the Vietcong depended on the Ho Chi Minh trail. Other needs such as food, shelter, medical supplies, and cover (from detection) were met inside South Vietnam. Main force Vietcong units were uniformed, full-time soldiers, and were used to launch large scale offensives over a wide area. Regional forces were also full-time but operated only in their own districts. When necessary small regional forces would unit for large scale attacks. If enemy pressure became to great, they would break down into small units and scatter into the terrain. Unlike the main troops, who saw themselves as professional soldiers, local Vietcong groups tended to be far less confident. For the most part, recruits were young teenagers, and while many were motivated by idealism, others had been pressured or shamed into joining. They also harbored real doubts about their ability to fight heavily armed and well-trained American soldiers.

Initially, local guerrillas were given only a basic minimum of infantry training, but if they were recruited to a main force unit, they could receive up to a month of advanced instruction. Additionally there were dozens of hidden centers all over South Vietnam for squad and platoon leader , weapons and

radio training. To ensure that the guerrillas understood why they were fighting, all training courses included political instruction.

Most main force Vietcong troops were armed with Chinese versions of the Russian AK-47 sub-machine guns. They also used a range of effective Soviet and Chinese light and medium machines, and infrequently, heavy machine guns. In particular, heavy machine guns were valued for defense against American helicopters. For destroying armored vehicles or bunkers, the Vietcong had highly effective rocket propelled grenades and recoilless rifles. Mortars were also available in large numbers and had the advantage of being very easy to transport. Many weapons, including booby traps and mines were homemade in villages. The materials ranged from scavenged tin cans to discarded wire, but the most important ingredients were provided by the US Air Force and Navy. In a year dud American bombs could have more than 20,000 tons of explosives scattered around the Vietnamese countryside. After air-raids, volunteers retrieved the duds and the dangerous business of creating new weapons began. Local forces also designed primitive weapons, some designed to frighten intruders, but others were extremely dangerous. Punji traps (sharpened spikes hidden in pits) could easily disable an enemy soldier. Punjis were often deliberately contaminated with feces to increase the risk of infection.

This was the real world. There was nothing to do in the bush but eat, sleep, and fight. War is about surviving and keeping your sanity. Young men thrust into a war with only their buddies to rely upon; all the conveniences of home gone for 365 days of hell. Contact with the enemy could last for seconds or days. One had to always be on the alert, finger on the trigger ready to squeeze off a volley fire at the slightest strange movement or sound. This was a 360 degree war with the enemy coming at you from any direction, no front lines no where to retreat for safety, no place to sit and think about things and loved ones back home. No one to discuss the happenings of the day with. Just your

memories and your thoughts, pressure, pressure. To kill or be killed. It's not a question you had to ponder on. You become callused and do not think about who is at the receiving end of the bullet you just set off or the frag you just tossed, after all you are a government trained killer. Doing what you perceive to be is in the best interest of your Country.

The orders come down from the war commanders in the base camps, there is a mission. The infantryman (grunt) saddles up his gear and supplies and boards a huey helicopter and is airlifted to a predetermined landing zone somewhere in Vietnam. At the LZ (landing zone) it could be peaceful or as in most cases when your chopper approaches the air is zinging with enemy fire power and you have now hit a Hot LZ. You can hear the bullets hitting the metal sides of your chopper. DING! DING! DING! DING! DING! The bullets that hit the rotor of the chopper. ZING! ZING! ZING! ZING! There is a cry of pain from someone being shot, in your mind with the adrenalin flowing you think was that me that was just winching in pain or one of your fellow comrades. No blood on me so I must be o-kay for now. Jump and hit the ground running away from the chopper so that it is not shot down on top of you. As a squad leader you must take command and check your men to see who is left unscaved and able to fight, check the wounded, call for a medic, get the wounded back on the choppers for dust off, all the time you are trying to return fire and keep from getting yourself killed in the process. More gunfire comes from the perimeter and now there is rocket and mortar fire also. BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! And that never unforgettable sound of AK-47 gunfire: YAK! YAK! YAK! YAK! YAK! More moaning and crying for help from those whose lives you were intrusted with. A call has to be made for more fire power to aid you. Alpha, Charlie. Tango fire mission you give your concordance and after an adjustment round from a 155 or a 105 artillery cannon, you give the command for a 10 round sweeping fire for effect at 50 meter intervals. After the smoke has cleared, the enemy has disappeared, and you and your squad, the ones that are able,



are left to care for the wounded, putting pressure on stubs where arms or legs used to be attached. Sucking chest wounds where the lungs are exposed and collapsed. Holding in ones internals in place or putting them back in the gaping hole they had spilled out of. Trying to stop the bleeding from so many bullet holes. Trying to comfort those who do not know just how badly they are hurt. They look up to you because you are their leader and think you can solve everything. Placing bodies into body bags, sometimes not knowing if all the parts go together in the same bag. This always was the most difficult part of any mission and happened many times. Arms. Legs, and other body parts scattered all over the battle field. Blood from your fellow comrades spilled on the ground and all over you. No place or time to wash the blood off, you just have to wear it until it wears off. You have to hold your emotions inside, just to be relived at a later day in the future. You have to be strong, for you are the squad leader and have others to care for. The main goal you have set for yourself is to get as many of your troops and yourself through this war and back to the States. Re-supply, replace the wounded and dead with new troops, and on to the next encounter with the enemy. Sometimes more fighting on the same day or maybe the next day it doesn't matter to the Brass in the base camps to them the grunts are just expendable machines used to make their command look better or for the advancement of their careers. It is the closeness of the men in the squad that draws them together as a band of brothers. Brothers in arms forever.

Most of the enemy forces brave enough to attack a landing zone are NVA. The other enemy forces known as "Charlie" or the "Vietcong" or "Gooks" are usually encountered around the villages. Leaving the landing zone site orders are to patrol looking for an enemy you rarely see until they want you to see them, usually in the form of an ambush. Humping through the jungle following narrow trails, or making your own chopping a path with a machete, the point man has to be extremely cautious looking for booby traps or trip wires Charlie has placed to alert him of your presence. Following the trail,

suddenly the point man stops but it was to late. He has hit a trip wire and two to three seconds later; BOOM! Brush and dirt hit you in the face. Luckily no one is seriously hurt and after the medic is summonsed over from the other squad working along side, the wounds are attended to and the mission continues. A new point man is appointed and the squads move on; but now on heightened alert because Charlie now knows we are in the area. Always on edge, always scanning the area looking for a sign that the enemy is near. The muscles in your body fill with adrenaline and you actually get all pumped up for a fire fight and then it happens. YAK! YAK! YAK! You are in the middle of an ambush. Return fire your brain tells you. And the action is on. YAK, YAK, POW, POW, their AK's and your M-16's, the sounds are intermingled and coming from all directions. Splat, splat, splat, thud, thud, thud the sounds of soldiers on both sides being hit with bullets. Screams, moans, and groans, grown men crying for help, not wanting to die alone. Pinned down by enemy fire you can not help right away; all you can do is return fire and burn up as much ammo as is possible. A call for air support and the F-16 Navy jet swoops in at tree top level. You scramble to throw out smoke grenades to show your location so the pilot does not mistake you for the enemy. Another pass from the jet and its napalm canisters are cut loose from the craft and the area explodes in a fireball of liquid flames from the napalm gel. Then the cobra gunships come in shooting rockets at the retreating enemy. The noise of all the gunfire, the rockets, and the canisters exploding leaves your head throbbing. The smell of the gel gas of napalm burns your nostrils. Now the wounded and the dead have to be attended to. A call on the radio comes in from headquarters and all they want to know is the enemy body count. Its always about the body count. They always want a body count. It doesn't matter about your men lost or injured, all they want is the "ENEMY BODY COUNT." It is the only way for the Political Justification of the Vietnam War. So the infantryman now has to go and find dead enemy soldiers so the rear command can have their "BODY COUNT". Day after day of this activity makes one hard and calloused.

On patrol humping the countryside in the highlands we came across a village in the Montagnard region. These people are primitive natives who keep to themselves and dislike the Vietnamese on both sides of the war. They were raided by the gooks and people were killed on both sides. The chief of the village showed us the remains of the enemy. In the heat of the jungle the order of rotting bodies was pungent. In fact their main diet of sardines and rice had formed gasses that made the bodies swell and burst open. A body count was called in and we moved on.

While attached to the 199<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade (before moving to the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Airmobile) I was a squad leader. On several occasions, while in close combat, I had two persons that would hide and not help in the combat roll. After the firefights were over I would have to dispatch men to look for these persons, endangering my squad by looking for them and that I did not have the full capacity and capability of the full fire power of the squad. So on our first stand down, I went to the Company Commander and requested that these two individuals be removed from my squad and deemed not suitable for combat. I told the CC that if he did not remove and replace them that next time I would not look for them but report them as MIAs and leave them. My demands were met and I had good fighting men from that time forward.

There are no holidays for the infantryman, only the troops in the base camps get to observe the special days and the USO shows that are shown on TV to make the citizens in the States think their GI's are having one big party. For the grunt it is humping, looking for "Charlie" and getting shot at in fire fights. Every day on guard for their lives. Civilians have never learned that this war was different from all other wars the US has ever been involved in. Not even in the wars of 1980's through the present. No relax time or sleep. Very few hot meals, no showers, no clean clothes, no parties, no calls to home, no clean drinking water, no beds, just camping (rough style) and survival



24/7/365. Days of humping the terrain with everything you own and need in a backpack making some sort of contact with the enemy, fighting like mad men and setting up ambushes at night.

Fighting in the rice patties was like a different war altogether. No clearing of landing zones (nothing to clear). The choppers had to drop in fast and unload the squads in seconds. It was like a duck or goose shoot for the enemy. Upon approach the enemy opened fire on the choppers. The troops had to sit on the floor of the chopper with his feet on the skids ready to jump at 10 to 12 feet above the water. DING! DING! DING! The choppers take hits from the bullets. WOOSCH! WOOSCH! WOOSCH! WOOSCH! The bullets zip by your head. The door gunners return fire with their machine guns blazing. You hit the water and sink in the mud. Trying to get your feet moving and not get your profile too high in the water is a task in itself. You wind up kind of crawling in the water with the enemy bullets skipping across the water. SPLAT! SPLAT! SPLAT! CHOO! CHOO! CHOO! Getting to the paddy dike for cover is the goal. Finally able to return fire and gather up the men. Having to go back into the open water to aid the wounded. Keep their heads above water so they do not drown. SPLAT! SPLAT! SPLAT! Bullets hitting all around you as you try to save your own life and that of your comrade. The wounded are left on the dikes and dust off choppers are called. Pushing on chasing the enemy from the rice patties and into the countryside. Still making contact we find ourselves fighting in a local village. When someone shoots at you, you shoot back. Women and children are often the ones firing at you from the villages. They have to be killed too, because the bullets that come from their weapons kill the same as those of their men counterparts. Combat is close and you can see the faces of those you kill. The fear, the pain, the agony in their eyes as you see their bodies jerk as your bullets tear through their bodies. THUD! THUD! THUD! The sound of your bullets as they strike the target. This is a Vietcong village so every thing has to be destroyed. The hooches are set on fire, the farm animals shot, all the rice rendered

uneatable, and all other supplies busted and made unusable. Nothing can be left for the enemy to use. Body counts recorded and a resupply of ammo and new troops to replace the dead and wounded join the squads. The squad walks from the village in search of another encounter with the enemy. THIS IS VIETNAM.

The days seem to run together, as do the clashes with “Charlie”. Finally we get to take a trip to the main base camp for a 3 day stand down. Hot meals, showers, clean cloths. and a cot. Three whole days out of the bush but not out of danger. Rocket attacks every day. However, with all the top brass there and all the pomp and circumstance makes everyone want to go back to the bush. No true rest as we are only grunts and infantrymen and considered low on the totem pole, so we get guard duty on the bunker line and all the details the base soldiers do not really want to do.

Moving out of the base camp we go to a forward fire support base to do recon missions around them because of enemy troop build up in the area. By day we go on clover leaf recons around the perimeter of the fire base to look for any signs of enemy activity. There are signs of new trails and bunkers being built. A call is made to the fire base and defensive targets are set up by the artillery. We return to the fire base and the DT's are started. Round after round of shells are fired from the cannons to the targets all around the base. BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! For hours this goes on. The air around the camp is filled with sulfur smelling smoke. The fire base is placed on heightened alert. The bunker line is our domain for the night. All is quiet until about mid-night, then things get wild. THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! Every infantry man knows that it is the sound of mortars being dropped down the tube. BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! The fire base has been hit. Then YAK! YAK! YAK! YAK! “Gooks in the wire” is the cry from the bunker line. The bunker line is fully engaged in rifle and machine gun fire. Screaming and crying as the bullets find the intended targets. SPLAT!

SPLAT! SPLAT! Are the sounds as the enemy rounds hit the sandbags of the bunkers. Flares are fired by the artillery to light up the area. M-16, AK-47, Cannons, mortars going off all at one time sounds like the grand finale at a 4th of July fireworks show but with no end. There is a large BOOM!!!! with several smaller ones, a sapper has made his way to the ammo dump with a satchel charge. The fighting goes on for hours and by daybreak it is over. There are hundreds of dead gooks in the wire and the area between the wire and the bunkers. A few even lay on the bunkers. A recon of the area showed blood trails and more dead bodies along the trails. And the government wants that ever important BODY COUNT for paper work to show that the US is winning the war and to justify the monetary cost of the war and explain why American lives can be lost for the cause. The fire base was all but destroyed and had to be abandoned.

Many of the missions designed for the infantry were top secret. Such were the first ground missions into Laos and Cambodia. President Johnson promised the American people there would be no troops on the ground in either country that phase of the war would be air-raids and bombing only. The enemy troops were pouring into Vietnam through these two countries. President Nixon operated more secretly. Our company received orders to enter into Laos and try to cut off some of the supplies and man power routes leading to Vietnam. All our personal letters and any like of identification, including dog tags were collected and removed from our being. We were told that if captured the Army knew nothing of our existence. We were loaded on choppers and taken to the Laos-Vietnam border just Southwest of Hue and crossed the Song Xan River into Laos. Not really wanting to make contact with the enemy because we had no support elements in the case of a major encounter with the enemy. To avoid contact the company split into platoon grids and clover leafed its designated areas. Our platoon split into squad recons to further hide our existence. Every step made took us farther into uncharted jungles. We made visual contact with the NVA on several occas-



ions but did not engage. Evading the enemy had become our priority. We could also be masters of disguise. After three days of maneuvers and recording the numbers of enemy troop buildup in the area, we reunited with the company at the river crossing and returned to Vietnam. This had been the first crossing into Laos but would not be the last. The next time it was to be in full combat, via orders of President Nixon.

Operating out of FSB Trap in the south on a platoon size mission we had humped outside the base four clicks and set up a ambush on a major supply trail in the Mekong Delta region. I took my machine gunner, two riflemen, and my radio operator and to make a clover leaf recon around 1/3 of our night perimeter. Having been gone about 15 minutes we made contact with some gooks in an encampment. YAK! YAK! YAK! We had been spotted and now were cut off from the rest of our men. With limited ammo in our presence, we could be in real trouble. POW! POW! POW! POW! We were returning fire. After expending around 200 rounds, silence prevailed. The gooks had slipped off into the jungle and escaped. That was close. After being reunited with the rest of the platoon the ambush circle was completed. There was an uneasiness that we would be hit that night because of the brief encounter with the NVA soldiers. We called the FSB and set up predetermined artillery strike sites and stand byes for White Phosphorus (Willie-Peter) illumination rounds. It was on the second watch 10pm-midnight that movement was detected around our perimeter. Everyone along the lines was alerted. A call was made for WP three rounds at three minute intervals. POW! POW! POW! The whole area was lit brighter than day. Then it started. From every direction there were AK-47s, M-16s, and machine guns firing. The tracer rounds (every 7<sup>th</sup> round in a magazine or in a machine gun belt) was a tracer and made red streaks through the night. Another call was made to the fire base and the artillery rounds started coming in. They fell good and tight to our positions. Three cannons were firing and a ten round fire for effect volley was requested, which meant 30 artillery rounds hit the advancing NVA

soldiers. All throughout the night there were sporadic periods of gun fire between the enemy lines. As daybreak came none of our soldiers were KIA, but we had 5 WIA. Recon showed that we had fought off a company of NVA. At least 14 enemy KIA and numerous WIA that had been helped off by the enemy soldiers. Some of the dead were women and children, but they were trained soldiers.

There was a heavy built up of activity around many of the fire bases. One of our fire bases occupied by and in support of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division was Fire Support Base Ripcord. Located on a mountain top in the Nam Hoa District of the Thau Thien Province over looking the A Shau Valley. The mission was to locate and harass the 324B Division of the NVA. This mission was dubbed Operation Texas Star. The 2<sup>nd</sup> /506<sup>th</sup> got the mountain top, Ripcord and we 3<sup>rd</sup> /506<sup>th</sup> got to scout out the area around the mountain. Our mission was to engage the enemy establish contact and call in the artillery, gun ships, and bombing raids. We did not realize that a major offensive was being launches by the North Vietnamese. The 324B Division was joined by the 304B Division, 4 Artillery Divisions, 4 102mm mortar companies, 1 anti-aircraft battalions, and 1 sapper battalion. The enemy was planning to overrun the fire bases in the area and capture the villages in the Provence. We were out numbered 100 to 1. Contact was make every day. We were now using the gorilla tactics the enemy had been using the whole war. Hit and run calling in artillery and airstrikes as we retreated. Meanwhile, Ripcord was being hit by enemy fire everyday (The Siege of Ripcord). Because of the massive tunnel complexes our mission was a complete failure. The enemy would disappear underground during the bombing raids and reappear in another area. Unable to cut off the supply lines of the NVA, Operation Texas Star was scrapped and Ripcord was abandoned. The news directed by the US Government called this operation a huge success for the American troops.

With the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Airmobile we had the mobility to be anywhere in

Vietnam in a matter of hours. We found our unit back in the Mekong Delta along the Cambodian border Province of Tay Minh. Working with a Kit Carson Scout (converted North Vietnamese soldier) and two platoons of South Vietnamese Regulars (ARVNS). This mission was to aid the ARVNS in search and destroy operations against the NVA coming into the country through Cambodia. After having helped the ARVNS set up defensive positions, our platoon took the central command in the center of the defense perimeter to control the activities of the operation. The ARVNS performed recons in the area and reported little to no activity in the area. It turned out that they did not do their job. As soon as night fell the NVA hit the perimeter defenses. Mortar rounds whistled in BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Then there was AK-47 gunfire YAK! YAK! YAK! The ARVNS started running like scared rabbits. THUD! THUD! THUD! THUD! Were the sounds of the bullets striking the bodies of the fleeing soldiers. Crying and screaming asking for help as more bullets were fired into the positions. Quickly our platoon leader took control set up firing lines and held off the enemy until a call for artillery was made to fire base Julie. The battle lasted through the night and into the next day. We had expended thousands of rounds and the artillery had fired hundreds of 155mm rounds. The ARVNS had deserted their posts and ran from the enemy. Many of them were killed. We left their bodies where they fell. Our unit was shot up but none of our men died. We did not give an accurate body count (only an estimated one) because we were getting tired of the political aspect of a war we were losing.

The war could not be fought as it should because of all the political ramifications we faced as soldiers. The news-media painted a picture of the American Soldier as ruthless drug using killers of civilian women and children. We are fighting for our lives in the name of our country and all we get in return is name calling. No help from our government and no help from home. Toward the middle of 1970 we had entered into a new phase of the war. President Nixon was trying to turn more of the fighting over to the South



Vietnamese and reduce the combat roll of the American soldiers. No major combat encounters could be made without Presidential approval. In other words if there was to be a major battle we had to turn tail and run. This led to descension in the ranks. How could these trained government killers, hump all over a foreign country they had been a fighting war in, all of a sudden when encountering the enemy turn tail and run and not defend itself. It was not to happen. We were still at war until removed from harms way.

As television news became more and more popular throughout the turbulent years of the Vietnam War era, Americans increasingly relied on visuals of the news to inform them of the situation in Vietnam. Television coverage brought images of the war home to the American public, yet these images were rarely a true reflection of the war itself. War is a complex, bloody, and brutal event that cannot accurately be condensed into a thirty minute news event. It is clear that after the Tet Offensives, the news media deemed the war to be a complete failure. Vietnam veterans, whose experiences made them more qualified to interpret the news coverage of the war, than the media scholar or journalist. We believe the coverage to be very negative. Specifically, body counts and the lack of attention to the NVA and VC committed atrocities vilified the war and the US soldiers. A majority of veterans partially blame television coverage for the rise in the anti-war movement and others blame the coverage for the Vietnam Veteran's image. Veterans also feel that the television coverage contributed to the American lack of resolve, which ultimately cost the US the war. There were many reasons behind the negativity but the media contributed to the crazy, baby-killer, war-monger stereo- type of the Vietnam Veteran. We were fighting to stop a tyrant from taking over another country just like our predecessors in Korea, WWII, and WWI.

The language of the Vietnam war soldiers: a partial list of the terms and acronyms used.

Airburst, explosion of a munition in the air.

Air Cav, air Calvary , referring to helicopter-borne infantry.

AIT, advanced infantry training following basic training specialized training given each soldier based on his MOS (military occupational specialty).

Alpha-Alpha, automatic ambush, a combination of claymore mines configured to detonate simultaneously when triggered by a trip-wire/battery mechanism.

ARC Light Operation, code name for the devastating aerial raids of B-52 Stratofortresses against enemy positions in Southeast Asia.

ARCOM, Army Commendation Medals.

Article-15, Summary disciplinary judgment of a soldier by his commander, could result in fines or confinement to the stockade.

Arty, artillery.

ARVN, Army of the Republic of Vietnam (Army of South Vietnam).

Bac Si, Vietnamese term for medical corpsman (doctor).

Banana Clip, curved shaped magazine, standard on the AK-47 assault rifle.

Base Camp, semi-permanent field head quarters and center for a given unit usually within that unit's tactical areas responsibility. A unit could operate in or away from its base camp. Base camps usually contained all or part of a given units support elements.

Battalion, organizational institution in the army. Commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel.

Beehive, a direct fire artillery round which incorporated steel darts (fleshettes) used as a primary base defense munition against ground attack.

Bird, any air craft, usually helicopters.

Blueleg, infantryman aka grunt.

Bouncing Betty, explosive that propels upward, after hitting the ground , about 4 feet into the air and then detonates.

Brigade, three brigades form a division.

Bring Smoke, to direct intense artillery fire on an enemy position.

C & C, command and control.

Charlie, Charles, Chuck, short for VC (Victor Charlie).

Cherry, a new troop replacement.

Chicken Plate, chest protector (body armor) worn by helicopter door-gunners.

Church key, bottle opener.

Clacker, firing device used to detonate a claymore mine.

Claymore, popular fan-shaped anti-personal land mine.



Comic Book (funny books), military maps.

Company, two or more platoons.

Cracker Box, field ambulance.

C's, C-rations, canned meals.

Dap, stylized manner of hand shaking started by African-American troops.

Dapsone, small pill takes periodically to prevent malaria and leprosy.

DMZ, demilitarized zone.

Donut Dolly, a female American Red Cross volunteer.

Dope, a term for adjusting weapon sights.

Doubtfuls, Vietnamese individuals who could not be categorized as either Vietcong or civilian.

Dustoff, medical evacuation helicopter.

DT, defensive target fired by artillery.

E&E, escape and evade.

ECM, electronic countermeasures such as jamming, deception, and detection.

Elephant grass, razor sharp edged grass found in the highlands.

EM, enlisted man.

Fighting hole, foxhole with sandbags protection and sometimes an elevated roof of sheet metal reinforced with sand bags. Sized for one or two men, fighting holes might be dispersed around a company or battery area for defensive use in a ground attack.

Firecracker, artillery round incorporating many small bomblets which eject over a target area and explode almost simultaneously making a firecracker sound.

Firefight, exchange of small area fire between opposing sides.

Frag, common term for grenade.

Fragging, the assassination of an officer by his own troops with a grenade.

Freedom bird, any aircraft carrying troops back to the "world" (USA).

Friendlys, US troops, allies, or anyone not on the other side.

Friendly fire, air, artillery, or small arms fire directed at one's own troops.

Green-eye starlight scope, light amplifying telescope used to see at night.

Grunt, popular nickname for infantryman derived from the sound he made while trying to lift his rucksack.

Hanoi Hilton, nickname for Hoa Lo Prison in Hanoi.

Hootch, house, living quarters, or native hut.

Hump, to move through the countryside on foot.

In Country, Vietnam.

Irregulars, armed individuals and groups not members of the regular armed forces.

KIA, killed in action.

Klick, K, short for kilometer (0.62 miles).

Lay chilly, lie motionless.

Leatherneck, Marine.

Lifer, career soldier.

Light up, to fire on the enemy.

LZ, landing zone.

Mad minute, concentrated fire of all weapons for a brief period of time at maximum speed.

MIA, missing in action.

Newbie, any person with less time in country than the speaker.



Number one, good.

Number ten, bad.

Number ten thousand, very bad.

Out-country, Southeast Asia conflict outside South Vietnam (Cambodia, Laos, North Vietnam, China or Thailand).

Platoon, unit made up of two squads.

POW, prisoner of war.

PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder.

Pucker factor, assessment of the fear factor, the difficulty or risk in an upcoming mission.

Recon, reconnaissance.

Red (hot) LZ, landing zone under hostile fire.

Rock-n-roll, to put the M-16 A-1 rifle on fully automatic.

R&R, rest-n-recreation vacation.

RVN, Republic of Vietnam.

Sapper, North Vietnamese Army or Vietcong demolition commando.

SAR, search and rescue.

Search-n-clear, offensive military operations to sweep through an area to locate and attack the enemy.

Search-n-destroy, offensive operations designed to find and destroy enemy forces rather than establish permanent government control, Also called “zippo” missions.

Shake-n-bake, officer straight out of Officers Candidate School with no combat experience.

Short, Short time, Short timer, individuals with little time left in Vietnam.

Skate, goof off.

Sleeper, an undercover agent or mole.

Sortie, one aircraft making one takeoff and landing to conduct the mission of which it was scheduled.

Stand-down, period of rest and refitting in which all operational activity, except for security, is stopped.

VC, Cong, Vietcong.

Vietcong, communist forces fighting the South Vietnamese government.

Vietminh, Viet Nam Doc Lap Minh Hoi, the Vietnamese Independence League.

White Mice, South Vietnamese police.

WIA, wounded in action.

The World, United States.

Zippo, flamethrower.

Zippo Mission, search-n-destroy mission.

Zulu, casualty report, also the letter "Z".

Machinery used by and in support of the Infantry Units:

Bell UH-1 Helicopter, popularly known as the Huey was the workhorse aircraft of the armed forces. Well adapted for jungle warfare. The Huey could fly at low altitudes and various speeds, land in small clearings, maneuver to dodge enemy fire, and carry a large array of powerful armaments. Among other duties, the versatile chopper transported troops, equipment, supplies, and support personnel into the field, provide fire power to troops engaged on the ground, and evacuate the wounded and dead.

B-52 Stratofortress, a high altitude bomber used in carpet bombing sorties.

F-4 Phantom Fighter jet, armed with 20mm cannons and air to air missiles, the fast, maneuverable Phantom also served as a bomber, delivering conventional or radar-guided payloads to enemy targets and were often loaded with napalm canisters. They could deliver munitions close and tight (danger close) to friendly troops.

Artillery, various forms of artillery, (105mm and 155mm howitzers, and



4.2mm mortars) both base-stationed and carried into the field, supported troops on the ground by breaking up enemy troop concentrations, illuminating hostile positions, and knocking out opposing forces' artillery, support lines, and supply lines.

M-113 Armed Personnel Carrier, served valuable transportation, reconnaissance, and fire support functions in a variety of terrains Protected by heavy armor sides and .50 caliber Browning machine gun and two 60mm machine guns it could carry a squad.

M-60 general purpose machine gun, was light enough to be carried on patrol and deadly in a fire fight. It could fire up to 550 rounds a minute.

M-19 60mm mortar, one of the most common field support weapons. This portable mortar fired as many as 30 high-explosive, smoke, or illumination rounds per minute.

M-72 (Law), was a hand held anti-tank weapon which when extended looked and performed like the WW11 bazooka.

M-79 grenade launcher is a single shot, shoulder fired, break action weapon that fires a 40mm grenade. Because of its distinctive sound, it was called the "Thumper", "Thump Gun", "Bloop Tube", or "Bloop". It could fire a number of different rounds: high explosive, anti-personnel, smoke, buckshot, flechette, and illumination.

Remington 870, 12- gauge shotgun with the plug removed and loaded with double ought buckshot.

Home coming stories of Vietnam Veterans reveal how bitterly divided the country was. Still today the vets often will not talk to non-vets about the war

because they just do not understand what we went through. Our country sent us into battle in a country where the majority of the common people did not want us. The people in our own country did not want a war and took it out on the Vets. We were only doing our job. Our government hindered us from fighting the war and put us in grave danger by not giving us the support we truly needed to win the war. The civilians on the home-front were protesting the war on a daily basis. Burning their draft cards and deserting to Canada to avoid military service. Our government slapped the Vietnam Vet in the face by giving them a full pardon for their actions. Jane Fonda even committed treason by going to North Vietnam and siding with the enemy and even had her picture taken sitting on an anti-aircraft gun which was used to shoot down our pilots. She was pardoned and allowed back into the US. She is hated among the ranks of the Vets. Upon return to the States many soldiers were accosted and spit upon by protesters.

By nature of this war the soldiers were sent to Vietnam and brought back to the World as individuals not as a unit. We flew in and out of civilian airports, leaving us vulnerable to be heckled and abused verbally and physically. We were still in jungle fatigues and it was obvious to all that we were Vietnam returnees. Still in uniform and members of the military we were not allowed to approach the hecklers or touch them in fear of military charges. I remember walking through the airport in Oakland California with my medals pinned to my chest feeling proud to be an American and to have served my country, when asked, and then meeting up with protesters, calling me all kinds of names and trying to get me to retaliate in some manner. I would not lower myself to their level and was applauded by some of the other people in the airport, which made me show my pride and thanks to them.

On the home front. The people of America were very unsupportive of the Vietnam War. The nation had just begun to calm down from the after-math of the Second World War and Korea and life was just beginning to return to

normal. Citizens did not support the draft, and they believed that it was morally and politically wrong for the United States to be involved in Vietnamese affairs. The oppositions caused an outbreak of riots, anti-war organizations, and tension between citizens themselves. The draft was a new concept of the American military. Prior to the draft, a soldier was a volunteer opportunity. However, the draft, or selective service, provided a way for the government to require citizens to serve. This at first seemed like an effective way to go about things. However, many people began to dodge the draft, primarily the rich and educated. These draft dodgers caused the normal American to be furious, as the once just selective service was now bias and unbalanced.

The majority of Americans believed that the conflict in Vietnam was a war that did not need to be fought. The Vietnam War was the first war to be portrayed on television, and citizens were unaccustomed to the brutalities of war, such as children dying, mass displays of dead bodies, and the immense loss of American soldiers. These were things that only soldiers had seen in the past wars. United States intervention of Vietnam was seen as unnecessary and unjustified. Many felt that it was a civil war meant to be fought within that country, and America had no rights to intervene.

Due to the extreme lack of support for the war, life on the home front was much different than before the war. Polarization was great between supporters and anti-war believers. Many anti-war organizations such as the Committee for Non-Violent Action and the Committee for Sane Nuclear Policy were formed in order to begin an anti-war movement. A majority of college students were pacifists and believed that the war was immoral.. The anti-war movement caused a large number of riots to begin. Rebellions caused violent protests and revolts, and many American citizens were injured and even killed in these outbreaks.



In conclusion the Vietnam War, whether it was ours to fight or not, was a war that we lost and a lot of brave men and women lost their lives. The rest came back home to an America divided with those who welcomed them back with open arms and those who were angry with them. The very nature of the war also brewed confusion and self-doubt in the minds of US soldiers. Though trained to follow orders and disregard external factors, most American GIs were actually aware of the tremendous difficulties of their job. Their mission to secure South Vietnam, gain the trust and loyalty of the people and eradicate the Vietcong often seemed impossible. Many combat operations had no discernible outcomes other than "body counts", which were often no more than estimates. An area could be cleared of Vietcong one day but be back in their hands immediately after US troops left. The villagers were sometimes welcoming, sometimes treacherous, but largely indifferent to the Americans. Language barriers often added to mistrust.

War, no matter how brief, can have a tremendous impact on a person's life. To the veteran the war never really ends. The war, with all the blood, tragedy and loss, will still continue to be fought over and over again in the minds of the many, whose sacrifice changed their lives forever. Over four decades have passed since "our war". We old Vietnam Vets greet each other with a knowing and bold "Welcome home brother". To us it is our own private welcome home and acknowledgment of each others service. Citizens can identify the veteran by our caps and t-shirts and hat pins.

Veterans today have more recognition and rights afforded them and better health care then ever before because of the vocalizations of the Vietnam Vet. We did not just lay down and disappear because of the hatred shown to us by many of our fellow Americans. We stood up for our rights and the rights for the rights of all veterans.

In veterans' eyes, we are ordinary people, thrust into positions of terror and

impossible circumstances with the possibility of facing death. We were forced to rise to the occasion by putting our lives on the line for family, friends, and country to ensure our freedom. Freedom commands a terrible price signing its name in blood wherever troops have risen to its defense. It left its signature in such places as Lexington and Fort Henry. It bled at the Battle of Lake Erie and King's Mountain, and saturated the soils during the battles of Vera Cruz, Antietam, Shiloh, and San Juan Hill. Freedom sank into the waters of Pearl Harbor. It stamped across Tripoli, and soaked into Flanders Field, where it now slumbers under a sea of blood-red poppies. Freedom is buried in the grounds of Inchon, Kum Duc, Chu Lai, Hamburger Hill, and Ripcord. Freedom splattered its signature over Baghdad, Fallujah and currently remains wet on the sands of Afghanistan. Veterans are the ones who paid freedoms' terrible price. Some came home and some never did. All gave some but some gave all. Veterans of all ages are America's treasures. They do not want much; just a recognition of their service and a thank you for the freedoms you enjoy. FREEDOM ISN'T FREE!

There is also the misconception, by the public that all military personnel who were involved in a foreign war are taken care of emotionally and physically with all their bills paid for by the government. This is far from the truth. I as many of my fellow veterans have to pay for all our medical and prescriptions costs. We do get a discount but still have to pay a large part of the bills. All they ask you is if you are filling suicidal. The phrase "ALL GAVE SOME BUT SOME GAVE ALL" is true, but part of the all gave some are still giving even though the war ended in 1975.

