

Warrior

OSPREY
PUBLISHING

US Army Infantryman in Vietnam 1965–73



Gordon L Rottman • Illustrated by Kevin Lyles



GORDON L. ROTTMAN entered the US Army in 1967, volunteered for Special Forces and completed training as a weapons specialist. He served in the 5th Special Forces Group in Vietnam in 1969–70 and subsequently in airborne infantry, long-range patrol and intelligence assignments until retiring after 26 years. He was a special operations forces scenario writer at the Joint Readiness Training Center for 12 years and is now a freelance writer.

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Warrior • 98

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Abbreviations

AIT	Advanced Individual Training
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam (pronounced "Are-van")
BCT	Basic Combat Training
C4	plastic explosive
CO	Commanding Officer
DEROS	Date Estimated Return from Overseas (pronounced "Dee-roes")
EM	enlisted men
ETS	Estimated Time of Separation
FNG	"funny" new guy
FSB	fire support base
IOBC	Infantry Officer's Basic Course
KIA	killed in action
LZ	landing zone (helicopter)
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (pronounced "Mac-vee")
MIA	missing in action
MOS	Military Occupation Specialty
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
OCS	Officer Candidate Course
PFC	Private First Class
PX	post exchange
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps
RPG	rocket-propelled grenade (RPG-2, RPG-7 – aka B40, B41)
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
US	United States
USARV	US Army, Vietnam (pronounced "use-are-vee")
VC	Viet Cong
WIA	wounded in action
WP	white phosphorus
XO	Executive Officer (second-in-command)

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
CHRONOLOGY	5
CONSCRIPTION AND ENLISTMENT	6
TRAINING	11
Basic Combat Training • Military rank and pay • After graduation	
APPEARANCE	21
Grubby in the bush	
WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT	27
Gear in 'Nam • Weapons in 'Nam	
WELCOME TO VIETNAM ... FNG	41
BELIEF AND BELONGING	44
Drug culture • Rest and recreation • Relations in the ranks • Maintaining the esprit de corps	
THE BOONIES: ON CAMPAIGN	49
FIREFIGHT: EXPERIENCE IN BATTLE	52
THE REAL WORLD: AFTERMATH OF BATTLE	55
COLLECTIONS, MUSEUMS, AND REENACTMENT	57
WEBSITES	58
BIBLIOGRAPHY	59
COLOR PLATE COMMENTARY	60
INDEX	64

US ARMY INFANTRYMAN IN VIETNAM 1965-73

INTRODUCTION

The image of the infantryman busting through the brush, startlingly young, gaunt, sunburned and often looking oddly clean as grime was sweated off, is what most often comes to mind when Vietnam is mentioned. Of the hundreds of thousands of troops deployed in Vietnam, it was the light infantryman, the 11B¹, who bore the heaviest burdens of a distant, controversial war. Commonly called an “11 Bravo,” “11 Bush,” “11 Bang,” “11 Bullet-stopper,” “ground-pounder”, or “crunchy” (for crunching through the brush), the infantryman was more often simply called a “grunt” – from the the sound a soldier makes when hoisting a rucksack on to his back or rising to his feet, helped by a buddy.

Vietnam was truly an infantryman’s war, in which he fought an elusive, dedicated, and crafty enemy in a wide range of environments, from forested mountains, open plains, rolling triple-canopy jungles, to vast delta swamps. Eighty-one infantry battalions of all types fought in a harsh environment with frequently changing weather conditions. While it was mostly hot and humid, infantrymen could also be inundated with endless rains or even chilly nights.

Not all infantrymen “busted brush” through the jungle, at least not all the time. Many rode in, or, more accurately, on, armored personnel carriers, and all rode in helicopters – some more than others. Others were transported by heavily armed river assault craft; still others were paratroopers. But these were merely the delivery means – all infantrymen spent time with “boots on the ground.” Their experiences differed depending on the type of unit they were assigned to, where they served, and when. It was a long, evolving war, and the life of the infantryman in Vietnam was extremely harsh, brutal, and mind numbing. Endless days in the “boondocks” (rough or isolated country)



Reception Station, US Army Training Center, Infantry, Ft Polk, LA. Recruits would see signs bearing the shoulder-sleeve insignia of units in Vietnam all over the training center as a means of instilling esprit de corps.

¹ 11B is the military occupation specialty code for light infantryman. The first “1” means combat arms, the second “1” infantry, and the “B” light infantryman, a rifleman. Prior to 1965 the MOS code was 11100.

in what they called the “lost year,” a year out of their lives away from home and family, was a year lost to a cause few understood and many questioned.

The Vietnam infantryman was a product of his society, as are all soldiers, but the political atmosphere, the sudden and sweeping changes in American culture, and the complex and confusing nature of the war made the American infantryman a very different kind of soldier than found in other American wars.

Although the US was militarily involved in Vietnam to an increasing degree from the early 1950s, infantry units were not deployed until 1965 and then rapidly increased. Units began to withdraw in 1969, and most combat units were gone by late 1971, with the last to leave a year later.

It has recently become popular in some political circles, even those that in the past shunned or even despised them, to be supportive of veterans of the Vietnam War. This is one reason why this book is so important at this point in time – to provide a means of understanding what the grunt endured and what his life was like, which transcends one’s view of the war or political affiliation.



Inspections were conducted on Saturday mornings. While most were in the barracks, an occasional “full field layout inspection” was conducted. The “pup tent” was assembled by buttoning two shelter halves together, one carried by each soldier, along with a three-section tent pole and five tent stakes. These were seldom used in Vietnam, as soldiers had to make do with ponchos.

CHRONOLOGY 1954-75

July 21, 1954	Vietnam divided at the 17th Parallel as the French withdraw.
March 1955	First US military advisors arrive in Vietnam.
January 1959	North Vietnam issues resolution that changes its “political struggle” in South Vietnam to an “armed struggle.”
May 1959	North Vietnam begins major improvements on the Ho Chi Minh Trail to supply its struggle in the south.
December 1960	National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) formed.
February 6, 1962	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) formed to control all US armed forces in RVN (Republic of South Vietnam).
November 22, 1963	President John F. Kennedy is assassinated. Lyndon B. Johnson becomes president.
June 20, 1964	Gen William Westmoreland assumes command of MACV.
August 2-4, 1964	Destroyers USS <i>Maddox</i> and <i>C. Turner Joy</i> allegedly attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin.
August 7, 1964	US Congress passes Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to counter North Vietnamese aggression.
November 3, 1964	Johnson elected president.
February 7, 1965	VC attacks US installations in Pleiku. Johnson authorizes air attacks on North Vietnam, which commence on February 24.
March 8, 1965	First US Marine ground combat troops arrive in RVN.
April 6, 1965	US ground troops authorized to conduct offensive operations.
May 7, 1965	First US Army conventional ground combat troops arrive in RVN: 173d Airborne Brigade.
July 30, 1965	US Army, Vietnam (USARV) is formed to control Army forces.
September 11, 1965	1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) arrives in RVN.
October 2, 1965	1st Infantry Division arrives in RVN.
March 28, 1966	25th Infantry Division arrives in RVN.
September 25, 1966	4th Infantry Division arrives in RVN.
December 16, 1966	9th Infantry Division arrives in RVN.
September 25, 1967	AMERICAL ² Division activated in RVN.

² The AMERICAL Division was formed in World War II; its name was derived from ‘Americans in New Caledonia’

November 19, 1967	101st Airborne Division arrives in RVN.
December 1967	Anti-war protests increase in the US.
January 30, 1968	VC and NVA initiate Tet Offensive, which ends on February 26.
March 16, 1968	My Lai massacre.
March 31, 1968	US government announces de-escalation of its war effort and halts bombing of North Vietnam.
May 12, 1968	Peace talks begin in Paris.
July 1, 1968	Gen Creighton Abrams assumes command of MACV and Gen Westmoreland becomes Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.
November 6, 1968	Richard M. Nixon is elected president.
June 8, 1969	US initiates Vietnamization Program to completely turn the war effort over to RVN forces.
November 16, 1969	My Lai massacre is publicly revealed.
April 29, 1970	Offensive operations into Cambodia to neutralize NVA/VC sanctuaries.
November 7, 1970	Nixon is re-elected.
January 15, 1973	US announces halt of all offensive ground actions.
January 27, 1973	Ceasefire agreement is signed in Paris and US conscription ceases.
March 29, 1973	Final US troops are withdrawn from RVN, and MACV is disbanded.
August 9, 1974	Nixon resigns and is replaced by Gerald Ford.
April 29, 1975	US Embassy in Saigon is evacuated.
April 30, 1975	Saigon falls to NVA forces.

CONSCRIPTION AND ENLISTMENT

The draft, or, officially, Universal Military Service, had been a fact of American life since before World War II. How the possibility of involuntary military service sat with young men varied greatly. Some strongly opposed it; others viewed it as something necessary, if unpleasant; most thought little about it until being surprised when called to the colors.

It was a period that saw perhaps the most sweeping changes ever to American society and culture, a disjointed revolution of sorts: civil rights for minorities, women's rights and the feminist movement, the drug subculture, the so-called sexual revolution, the Hippie subculture (not as widespread as imagined), and the growing anti-war movement. Motion pictures, television, and popular music "spread the word" of new ideas as never before. It was a period of youthful defiance. It became popular to disdain patriotism, distrust the government, and question authority. Race and anti-war protests, as well as protests against just about everything else in society, were widespread, ranging from peaceful demonstrations to boycotts to sit-ins to vicious riots requiring National Guard and even active Army suppression. These actually involved only a small percentage of Americans.

The Selective Service Act required all males to register for conscription on reaching 18, making them eligible for the draft until 27. At the beginning of US ground combat in 1965 less than one-third of the Army was composed of conscripts. Of the 9,087,000 men and women of all armed services serving during the Vietnam War (1964-73), 2,594,000 were actually deployed in Vietnam. Only 1,766,910 of those serving throughout the world were drafted, with most going into the Army and fewer than 42,700 into the Marine Corps; the Navy and Air Force did not accept draftees. The numbers of draftees serving in



A C-ration lunch was standard fare when training in the field. In Vietnam infantrymen would live on Cs for weeks on end. Here cartons of milk were issued with the Cs, or "meal, combat, individual." These trainees wear the old black-on-OD US Army and black-on-white nametapes. By 1967 black-on-OD versions of both were being worn in Vietnam and Stateside.

combat units varied over time. In 1965, after the first ground combat units were introduced, it was about 20 percent. At the time the withdrawal began it was almost 70 percent.

Upon turning 18, individuals reported to their local draft board, filled out a classification questionnaire, and underwent a pre-induction physical to determine their status and eligibility for deferments or exemption. The over 4,000 draft boards were assigned monthly quotas. There was a complex system of deferments and exemptions based on physical qualifications, education, essential employment situations, family hardships, and religious beliefs. Some played the system, but most made little or no effort to do so, not knowing what to do or simply leaving things to fate. Essential employment included law enforcement officers, firemen, medical professionals, teachers, ministers and divinity students, and certain categories of scientists and engineers. Married men with or without children, post-graduate students, men caring for elderly parents, and other hardship situations, were usually given a lower priority I-A status, but by 1966 when the draft was increased to 30,000 a month such individuals began to be called. The peak year for induction was 1966 when new divisions, brigades, and support units were raised and existing units brought up to strength for Vietnam deployment: 382,000 were drafted. After that it was well over 200,000 per year until dropping off in 1970.

A Class I-A classification meant eligibility for induction. I-C, D, O, S, W, and Y were deferments for police, ROTC, conscientious objectors, high-school students, conscientious objectors performing civil work, and those qualified only in time of declared war, respectively. II-A, B, and S were deferments for critical occupations, agricultural workers, and students. III-A was a deferment for extreme hardships or children. IV-A, B, C, D, and F were individuals with prior military service or a sole surviving son, government officials, resident aliens not liable for service, ministers or divinity students, and physically or mentally unqualified. Registrants received a Registration Certificate: the infamous "Draft Card."

If grades seriously dropped, a student could lose his deferment, and once a deferment was rescinded it could not be reapplied for. Upon graduation, college students lost their education deferment and were

just as eligible for the draft as an 18-year-old unemployed Black from Georgia. In fact, prior to 1967 they were even more likely to be drafted because draft boards selected the oldest first from their list of eligible 18–25-year-olds. This practice was reversed in June 1967 and 18-year-olds headed the list. This, it was felt, was less disruptive to the lives of younger men recently out of high school, who had not yet begun college, or had become established in jobs and careers, or had started families.

In 1970, in an effort to improve fairness, a World War II-type lottery system was established. The first lottery was drawn on December 1, 1969 for 1970, when 366 capsules were drawn in random order and the dates announced in newspapers. Each date was assigned a number from 1 to 366 in the order drawn. I-As born between 1944 and 1950 were called in the order their birth date was drawn. This was repeated each year, with the age bracket moved up until the draft was cancelled in 1973.

The issues of minorities and the poor are often broached when discussing combat service in Vietnam. It is true that the poor or lower middle class would more likely be assigned to the infantry, and a large percentage of minorities fell into that category. However, studies have shown that the numbers of minorities serving in combat units and killed in action were almost identical to the national population percentage. In fact it was the service support units that typically possessed a higher percentage of Blacks. It was true, however, that the better educated one was, the less chance there was of going to Vietnam or being assigned to a combat unit. Only about 40 percent of college graduates went. Over 60 percent of high-school graduates went and fewer than 70 percent of the dropouts.

Some volunteered for the draft. They had little better chance of receiving a non-combat assignment than other inductees, but they could time their induction, get their inevitable service out of the way, and get on with their lives. This was beneficial to those planning for college, pursuing a career, or starting a family.

Conscription was for two years, followed by four years in the Standby Reserve after “separation” from active duty. Technically Standby Reservists were liable for call-up in the event of war or national emergency, but they were simply a manpower pool, were not assigned to Reserve units, and never mobilized. Once their six-year-military obligation had been fulfilled, they were “discharged” from the Army.

Throughout the war, large numbers volunteered for the Regular Army and three years’ active duty. Numbers dwindled as the war dragged on. Obviously it was the route chosen by those seeking a military career.

Volunteering for the Regular Army also had benefits over waiting to be



The confidence course was yet another form of physical fitness, but also built self-confidence and agility. Both it and obstacle courses were run without combat equipment to allow the necessary freedom of movement.

drafted. Volunteers could pick their MOS in a specialty skill, many of which were closed to two-year draftees, and were almost guaranteed exemption from combat if that was their desire. Almost 90 percent of the Army was assigned to non-combat positions. Volunteers not remaining in the Army after their three years' active duty were assigned to the Standby Reserve, the same as draftees. A man could enlist at 17 with both parents' permission, but the normal age was 18. Seventeen-year-olds could not be deployed to Vietnam.

Over 1 million served in the National Guard and Organized Reserves during the war. As draft quotas sank after 1970, the numbers enlisting in the Guard and Reserves fell. This was another way to beat the draft, with waiting lists to join units. Joining the Army National Guard or Army Reserve meant six years assigned to a drilling unit. They undertook up to six months' active duty training alongside Active Army trainees and returned home to carry on jobs or schooling. A Guard infantryman undertook roughly four months' active training. He then attended one weekend drill a month and a two-week summer camp as well as occasional specialty or NCO schools. A Guardsman or Reservist missing three weekend drills could technically be assigned to active duty, though this was rare. Only a very small number of Guard and Reserve units were mobilized for active duty and fewer were deployed to Vietnam. Guardsmen and Reservists are often criticized for avoiding Vietnam or active duty, but such criticism is unjustified. Units in Europe, Korea, and elsewhere were often under-strength, and the US needed backup forces to discourage threats in other regions.

Men volunteering for three years in the Regular Army enlisted through local Army Recruiting Stations. They could pick their MOS (military occupation specialty) based on their Armed Forces Classification Test (AFCT) scores. Test scores evaluated one's aptitude in such areas as Clerical, Electronics, General Maintenance, Mechanical Maintenance, and Skilled Technical. The most important was the General Technical (GT) score, similar to an IQ score. An infantryman was required to achieve at least a 70 GT score, Special Forces 100, and Officer Candidate School 110.



The tear gas chamber served to familiarize trainees with the effects of tear gas, or CS, but also taught them the value of the M17 protective mask's proper use and demonstrated that it actually worked. The first step had the trainees enter the chamber wearing a mask, removing it, and reciting their name, rank, service number, and date of birth before being allowed to flee the building. CS was used extensively in Vietnam and it was essential that soldiers be familiar with its effects.

Many Blacks and Hispanics volunteered for the airborne, either because it was an opportunity to prove themselves or simply because it enabled them to send extra money home to their families. The GI Bill, paying for a college education once active service was completed, was a major motivator for many, regardless of ethnic group or social status. In the long run the GI Bill³ provided the country with a large number of more mature and educated citizens, many of whom would not have been able to obtain a degree without it.

Volunteers could enlist via the Delayed Entrance Program, even while a high-school senior, and delay their entry up to six months. Delay time did not count toward their service obligation, but did count toward time in grade for promotion. They would take a physical prior to enlisting and then another when they reported for duty to ensure that they still met requirements. There was also a Buddy Program where two or more friends could enlist and be guaranteed to attend at least BCT (Basic Combat Training) together and perhaps AIT (advanced individual training) if they drew the same MOS.

Draftees received an Order to Report for Armed Forces Physical Examination to assess their fitness as well as take the AFCT and other tests. The in-depth physical examination tested agility, sight, hearing, teeth, blood, chest, urine, etc. For a recruit to be assigned to a combat arms branch (infantry, armor, combat engineers – artillerymen were allowed a 2 for hearing) he was required to possess a physical profile 111111 meaning no physical limitations: a “picket fence profile.” The PULHES profile consisted of: P – Physical capacity or stamina, U – Upper extremities, L – Lower extremities, H – Hearing and ears, E – Eyes, and S – Psychiatric.

When selected, inductees received an Order to Report for Induction, usually about a month before their reporting date. It began with, “GREETING: You are hereby ordered for induction into the Armed Forces of the United States, and to report at ...” followed by the address of an Armed Forces Induction Station usually located in the Federal Building or main Post Office of a nearby large city. They would receive another physical, more tests, complete more forms, and wait. They were sworn in en masse – draftees, volunteers, Guardsmen, Reservists from all armed services – by an officer not necessarily from their assigned service. With right hand raised they pledged to defend America from all enemies, foreign and domestic, and to obey all lawful orders of those appointed over them. “Congratulations, you are a member of the Armed Forces of the United States.” For anyone thinking this would not happen to him, he had now entered reality.

They had been told to bring three days’ clothes, toilet articles, \$20, and their Social Security card (or to apply for one if they did not have it). Either that same day or the next they were on a chartered bus for one of seven infantry training centers – Ft Benning, GA; Ft Dix, NJ; Ft Gordon, GA; Ft Jackson, SC; Ft Ord, CA; Ft Polk, LA; Ft Riley, KS. Most had said their farewells to family and friends at home prior to reporting. They left the bus station without fanfare, a small suitcase or gym bag – what they learned to call an “AWOL bag” – in hand, full of apprehension.

3 The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the “GI Bill of Rights,” was instituted by President Franklin Roosevelt to assist veterans’ education and job training assistance; home, farm or business loans; unemployment pay, job-finding assistance, and other post-discharge assistance.



Training was of course the focus during Basic and AIT, but work details were a necessary part of Army life. A company mess hall required six or so KPs a day to clean the dining room and kitchen, wash dishes and cooking utensils, clean garbage cans, and help man the serving line. Only cooks could serve meat to prevent serving-line KPs from slipping extra to their buddies.

winner. An unknown Marine wrote, "The worst of ours are going north, and the best of theirs are coming south."

TRAINING

Charles Legg had volunteered for the Army out of high school, signing up for the Delayed Entrance and Buddy Programs with a friend, William Peters. They delayed their entry until school began in the fall and enjoyed their summer. They had gone through high school together, becoming fast friends in the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC). That had been a bit of a challenge, as ROTC was far from popular in the late 1960s. They were generally excluded from the usual cliques of want-to-be "hippies," "goat-ropers" or "cowboys," "surfers," "rockers," "jocks," and the "popular." ROTC, however, taught them much of what they would learn in Basic Combat Training and had prepared them well. While the strange new world the recruits were about to enter would confuse and perplex them, Legg and Peters would take it in their stride.

They were middle-class 18-year-olds from blue-collar families, hard working, patriotic, and religious, with solid values. Their fellow recruits on the bus reflected a cross-section of American society from all economic levels, ethnic groups, religions, and employment, from major urban, suburban, or rural areas, and small towns. For many it would be the first time they had mixed with such a diversified group of young men of their own age. Schools had only recently desegregated, and many had had little close exposure to Blacks, and vice versa.

The bus was quiet and the recruits wide-eyed, staring at everything as the Greyhound rolled into the United States Army Training Center, Infantry, Ft Polk, Louisiana, late at night. They passed rows of darkened barracks on empty, well-lit streets. The bus pulled into an asphalt parking lot before a group of two-story barracks. A sign proclaimed, "US Army Reception Station: Welcome Soldier to the United States Army – Stand Proud!"

The bus door hissed open and a shadowy figure stepped aboard: "Get off my bus!" There was a mad scramble. They lined up on a yellow stripe and were informed by a sergeant wearing a black helmet liner that

And what of those who actively avoided the draft – the draft dodgers? Some simply failed to register, chancing the risk of being caught and prosecuted. Others took extensive measures to change their identity or openly defied authorities and burned their Draft Cards. Others left the country, with an estimated 50,000–125,000 running to Canada, which included deserters as well. Estimates of the numbers of Canadians drafted or volunteering for the US armed forces vary just as much, but at least 2,500–5,000 served in Vietnam, including a Medal of Honor

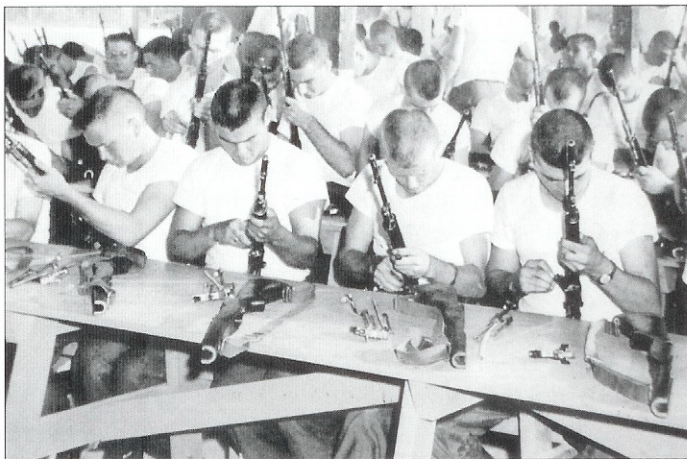
they would be here for several days for administrative processing, to receive a hair cut, more testing, inoculations, and uniforms. This was "Zero Week" and did not count toward Basic. They lined up and marched past an amnesty barrel in which they were to drop prohibited items without fear of repercussion: drugs, firearms, ammunition, alcoholic beverages, knives with a blade exceeding 2.5 inches, and straight razors. Their adaptation to military life began immediately as they learned how to fall into formation, wait in lines, pay attention to instructions, make it quick, make their bunk beds, roll their socks and underwear for locker display, and how to behave in the mess hall. There was no real harassment and they were not expected to march or even appear soldierly. They were rushed and chewed out for being late, too slow, or not paying attention. They learned to hurry up and wait, that they had to do everything "ASAP" (as soon as possible – "a-sap"), and discovered Army chow was not too bad. A \$25 advance, the "flying 25," was made to their first month's pay to buy toothpaste, razor blades, cigarettes, boot polish, etc.

Wearing new uniforms and toting heavy duffel bags, the recruits, about to become trainees, assembled on the parking lot. Their drill sergeants were en route to pick them up. Names were called off and they formed into groups of 120. Soon a column of olive-drab school buses rolled into the parking lot. Wearing starched fatigues and "Smokey Bear hats," Drill Sergeants stepped off the buses and appeared inexplicably angry – actually a display to cower the recruits and not a genuine annoyance. They marched to the different groups with clipboards in hand and again called off names. Rushed on to the buses, they were driven to their new home for the next two months. There were rows and rows of World War II wooden barracks surrounded by mowed lawns. In the company area were three cream-colored barracks, perched low to the ground on piers, with high green-shingled peaked roofs and a 3-foot-wide wooden awning over the first-floor windows. In one side near the end was a door with another in the far end. Beside that door a fixed ladder led to a tiny porch before a second-floor door. The company admin building was one-story. In the front end was the orderly room, domain of the first sergeant and the company clerk, and small offices for the CO, XO, training officer, etc. The larger portion of the rear was the

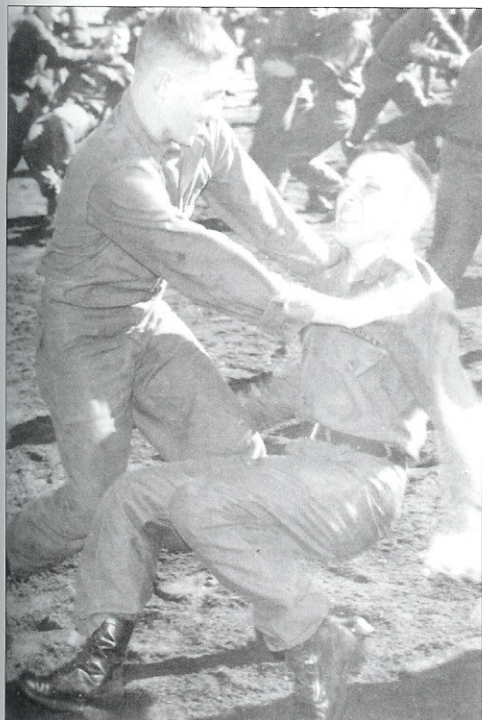
supply room with the arms cage. The mess hall was next door. A large dining room with a stainless-steel serving line dominated the building, with a kitchen outfitted with all the appliances and facilities found in a moderate-sized restaurant. Scattered about the small company area were various physical training apparatus.

The drill sergeants had been curt but civil on the short ride from the reception station to the company area. "Get off my bus!" They scrambled off to find more drill sergeants and black-helmeted soldiers waiting for them. Screaming at the stumbling trainees,

Much time was spent on the disassembly, assembly, and maintenance of the M14 rifle. It was stressed that the rifle was the most important piece of equipment in the hands of an infantryman.



Eight hours of hand-to-hand combat, consisting mostly of defensive moves, was taught in Basic. It was yet another means of achieving physical fitness, agility, aggressiveness, and self-confidence – just enough to give one the confidence to start a bar fight and get his butt kicked, as the drill sergeants cautioned against.



they herded them into a low-crawl pit filled with sawdust and sand and told to crawl back and forth “until I’m tired of watchin’ ya!” With their new uniforms now filled with the pit’s contents, the trainees were broken down into three platoons by alphabetical order. Platoons lined up in four equal ranks by height. “If you’re taller than the man in front of you, move up.” They then faced to the right and repeated the procedure. The men who had been in ROTC were moved to the head of each rank to be squad leaders. Legg found himself at the head of a squad and was later given an armband with two chevrons. Willie Peters, simply because he was the tallest of the ROTCers, was made platoon guide, an acting platoon sergeant with three chevrons. The rest of the day was spent being told what life would be like and what they could and could not do. Bunks were then assigned. They were restricted to the company area. Squad leaders received a mimeographed sheet with diagrams of how wall and footlockers were to be arranged. Men were picked for kitchen police (KP) and they were told about fireguard. The cooks (“spoons”) were sometimes tougher on KPs than the drill sergeants. Each night a squad was assigned fireguard, with the squad leader assigning men to walk the floor for an hour and then waking their reliefs. The almost 30-year-old wooden barracks would burn down in minutes if a fire started.

Two squads were housed on each floor with one squad to a side. Bunk beds were double-stacked. On the first floor were two small cadre rooms at one end and the latrine at the other with a larger cadre room above the latrine. One or two drill corporals or other company cadre might use these. The latrine was simply a large room with toilets on one wall without stalls, and sinks on the other plus a few urinals. A large shower room with three walls sprouting showerheads occupied one end of the latrine. Squads

cleaned their own areas and alternated cleaning the central aisle daily. A water fountain sat at the latrine end of the aisle and fire extinguishers and butt cans hung on support posts. Butt cans were red-painted 1-gallon cans with an inch of water in the bottom for cigarettes. Latrine clean-up was rotated between all squads.

The drill sergeants, usually sergeants and staff sergeants, were not called Drill Instructors (DI); that was a Marine Corps term. They were specially selected NCOs who attended a six-week Drill Sergeant School. With shortages of drill sergeants, “drill corporals” and even PFCs were employed. Tactical NCOs (“TACs”) were newly graduated sergeants of the NCO Candidate Course assisting drills to gain troop experience. Others were Vietnam veterans with a few months remaining in their enlistment, for whom it was not worth assigning to a troop unit for such a short time. None had attended Drill Sergeant School, and they wore black helmet liners rather than the distinctive “Smokey Bear hats,” being known as “hardhats.” It was a tough job, requiring longer hours than that put in by the trainees.

The first days were a nightmarish blur of unceasing harassment and adaptation to the new life. Much of the harassment was sophomoric, and, so long as one

Name (Last, F., M.I.) Rottman, Gordon		Service No. RA15845309		Platoon No. E	
Organization D-4-2		Test C		Squad No. 5	
STA		SUBJECT		POSSIBLE SCORE	
1	Military Courtesy and General Subj		11	16	18
2	Military Justice and Code of Conduct		10	14	18
3	Drill and Ceremonies		14	14	18
4	First Aid, Indiv Protective Measures		8	6	8
5	Guard Duty and Reporting		5	4	8
6	Hand-to-hand Combat		5	6	8
7	Report		5	4	8
8	Individual Tactical Training		9	7	8
TOTAL		(PHASE I)	59	62	80
PHYSICAL COMBAT PROF TEST		(PHASE II)	14	12	15
WEAPONS QUALIFICATION		(PHASE I)	17	16	18
TOTAL SCORE (PHASES I, II, III)			100	99	113
COMMANDER'S EVALUATION		(PHASE IV)	100	100	100
GRAND TOTAL (PHASES I, II, III, IV)			200	199	213
ADJECTIVE RATING: ☒ SUP ☐ DP ☐ SAT ☐ UNSAT					

FP FORM 939 (Revised)
18 Aug 65

SCORE SHEET (ATT 21-2)-UNIT COPY (SEE FILE)

Basic Combat Training G-3 Testing Score-card.

except when deserved, rather than mindlessly directed at the platoon. The reason for harassment and group punishment was to help trainees understand that they had to respond immediately to orders, pay attention to detail, anticipate what needed to be done, and work as a team. It was not about individuals, as the trainees learned: it was for the good of the group.

Young American men are mostly competitive, sports-minded, and individualistic. Platoons competed against each other in everything from having the cleanest barracks to running a mile in the fastest time. In the first confused days individuals were always asking where they were going, what they would be doing, as they loaded in buses, or trucks, or marched down a road. Such questions dwindled after the first couple of weeks. They learned that wherever they were going might not always be fun, but it would be interesting and that everything was organized.

Basic Combat Training

The Basic Combat Training program of instruction called for 352 hours, 44 hours a week, but it was actually many more hours, with additional reinforcement training provided by the ever-present drill sergeants into the evenings and on the weekend "off" days. What little "free time" was allotted was mostly spent cleaning the barracks, washing clothes, polishing boots, and working in the yard. After the third week trainees were allowed to leave the company area after duty hours, and after the fifth they were given off-post 24-hour passes. Days began at 0500 hours with a rushed visit to the latrine, dressing, readying equipment as relayed from the drill sergeants through the squad leaders, a hasty breakfast, and formation at 0700 hours to depart for training. Besides marching to the tune of Joddie calls (often raunchy in these pre-PC days), 18-wheeler tractor-trailers were employed. Flatbed trailers fitted with sidewalls and bench seats could haul a platoon. Known as "cattle trucks," they were also called "watermelon trucks," as only the tops of the seated passengers' green helmets could be seen above the sides.

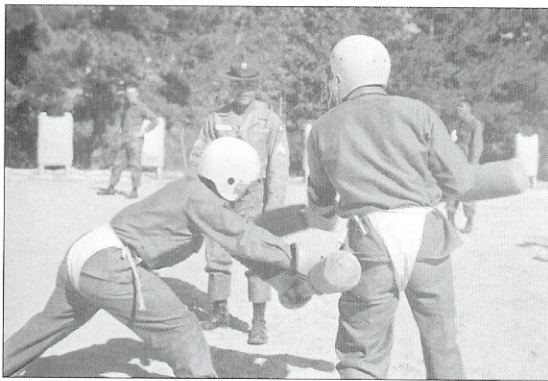
Basic Combat Training⁴ was just that. Virtually everyone entering the Army undertook Basic to learn the bare skills necessary to become a

understood that it was seldom personally directed and just part of the game, it was not unendurable. Of course individuals who were screw-ups or had an attitude were singled out for special treatment. If errant trainees failed to change their ways they might receive a late-night "blanket party" from their squad, in which the victim was pinned down by a blanket and subjected to a barrage of punches. One also did not want to be tagged as a "ghost," i.e. one who disappeared when work was to be done. Harassment was directed mostly at the platoon or the company as a whole. There was a great deal of shouting, push-ups, and runs. Drill sergeants were prohibited from striking a trainee and were supposed to keep their language clean, which most of them found impossible. It was difficult for most trainees in the first couple of weeks, but they adapted, and the harassment gradually declined,

4 "Basic" was sometimes called "Boot Camp," but this is a Marine Corps and Navy term.

soldier. "Combat" was included in the syllabus title, as all soldiers, regardless of their duties and their type of unit, were expected to be able to defend themselves. It served as an orientation to Army and military life in general, got them into physical shape, conditioned them to accept orders and authority, and taught them how to work as a group and how to shoot. Commander's time was devoted to orientation, safety briefings, make-up and reinforcement training, and pay call. They learned about the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the legal system they were now under; the Code of Conduct, guiding their conduct in combat and as a prisoner; and the General Orders, dictating the requirements of guard duty. Drill and ceremonies taught them how to march in formation. First-aid training was sufficient to help keep a wounded man alive until evacuated. Only 30 hours were allotted to physical training (PT), but this was actually a continuous process, with all the intense activity, marching to training areas, and so forth. Push-ups were frequently dealt out by the drill sergeants, unit runs were common occurrences as were the "Army Daily Dozen" – a series of exercises – and pull-ups on the horizontal ladder were practiced as the men stood in line outside the mess hall. The 26 hours of physical contact confidence training included obstacle and confidence courses, pugil-stick exercises in which head and groin protection was donned before battering one another with padded poles using bayonet techniques, plus several hours of bayonet instruction. Considered impractical in modern warfare, bayonet training provided an additional means of PT, thereby learning agility, and instilling aggressiveness. Also included was eight hours of hand-to-hand combat instruction. The focus of the chemical, biological and radiological warfare training was the entering of a tear gas-filled room, removing the protective mask, and experiencing the effects personally. Another exercise saw trainees entering a chlorine-gas-filled room (non-lethal levels), removing their masks, and then re-donning and clearing them to provide confidence. Individual tactical training included day and night movement techniques, camouflage, and concealment.

Besides push-ups, no more than 10 at a time although this was often exceeded, other punishments might be dealt out by the drill sergeants. The front-leaning rest, the up position of push-ups with a straight back, was held for lengthy periods as was holding up a barracks. This was a position in which one's legs were outspread four feet from the wall, leaning forward at a steep angle, and arms widespread. Hugging a tree required one to wrap one's arms and legs around a coarse-barked pine tree and hang on tightly. Failure to shave could result in a "dry-shave," literally shaving without shaving cream or water. In order to pass the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) at the end of Basic, trainees were tested almost weekly. Those failing in different areas were assigned to the dreaded



Pugil-stick training encouraged achieving physical fitness, agility, aggressiveness, and self-confidence. It was also supposed to reinforce bayonet-fighting techniques, but it usually turned into a battering match, allowing trainees to vent some pent-up stress.

Basic Combat Training Subjects

Subject	Hours
Administrative processing	24
Commander's time	23
Proficiency test	4
Achievements & traditions of the Army	2
Military courtesy & customs	3
Character guidance	4
Code of conduct	1
Geneva Convention	1
Basic map reading	6
Military justice	3
Command information	1
Dismounted drill & ceremonies	34
Personal hygiene	1
First aid	8
Chemical, biological & radiological warfare	4
Guard duty	4
Inspections	28
Physical training	30
Orientation in counter-insurgency operations	1
Physical contact-confidence training	26
Hand grenades	4
Basic M14 rifle marksmanship course	83
Close-combat course	4
Infiltration course	3
Individual tactical training	14
Marches & bivouacs	30
Combat firing	4
Driver education	2

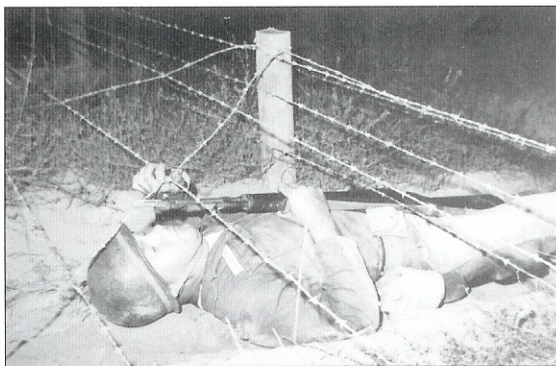
Motivation or Duffel Bag Platoon. They would receive additional PT in their problem areas after duty hours.

Lunch was at noon. If in the field or on a range it was "Mermited" out in insulated food containers and served on mess-hall trays, which were returned and then cleaned in the mess hall. Mess kits were not used, as these were difficult to clean in the field. Training was completed by 1700 and dinner was in the mess hall. If night training was undertaken, the troops either returned to the field or again the chow was Mermited out. Much of the 30 training hours allotted to marches and bivouacs was consumed marching to ranges and training areas. Only a night or two were spent on overnight bivouacs, where the men learned field sanitation and how to pitch pup tents. Lights out (no talking) was usually at 2130 or 2200 hours, providing about seven hours of sleep.

Two full weeks were dedicated to M14 rifle training, assembly/disassembly, care and cleaning, zeroing, known-distance range firing, and combat firing. The latter was known as Trainfire I and consisted of the firer engaging targets from standing, kneeling, squatting, prone, and foxhole positions. The targets were green waist-up, man-sized silhouettes. The downrange firing lane was rough ground covered by brush and trees, as would be encountered in combat. Targets would pop-up in irregular sequences from 50- to 300-meter ranges, requiring the shooter to first detect the target and engage it before it dropped to "safety" after a few seconds' exposure. This would also be the method used for rifle-qualification firing. Another eight hours was dedicated to conducting combat firing as a squad, and a close-combat assault course run by two trainees covering each other with live ammunition. They were taught how to identify hand grenades, and every trainee threw at least one live grenade. Trainees were taught the "Quick-Kill" technique from 1967, with one man tossing half-dollar-size aluminum discs into the air and his partner shooting at them with a BB (pellet) gun without sights. Many could actually hit a coin in flight with an M14.

The infiltration course offered a high degree of realism, stress, and confidence building. At night, the trainees entered a trench running perpendicular to several machine guns' lines of fire. Crawling out of the trench they advanced toward the machine guns, which fired bursts of live tracers over their heads as they low-crawled through barbed-wire obstacles and detonated demolition pits. Periodically pole-mounted floodlights would flash on, simulating flares, and the crawling trainees would freeze and wait for them to be extinguished before continuing.

The infiltration course, with live machine-gun fire zipping overhead, required trainees to low-crawl through obstacles and exploding demolition pits, and was a tremendous confidence builder. Trainees were told to hug the ground or risk being hit. While the tracers streaking overhead appear inches away, the machine guns were firing 8 feet above the ground.



Military rank and pay

Aside from all the physical training, one of the most difficult things to adjust to was the perplexity of military ranks. Officer ranks were quickly understood, though it was at first confusing that the silver bar and oak leaf of 1st lieutenants and lieutenants colonel were senior to the gold bar and oak leaf of the more junior 2nd lieutenants and majors. Trainees soon learned that 2nd and 1st

lieutenants were both addressed as “lieutenant,” and that lieutenant colonels and “full” or “bird” colonels were collectively called “colonels.” Not that it made much difference; they were all called “Sir” and seldom seen. To simplify things, they learned to informally refer to officers by their pay grade rather than rank titles: O-1 for 2nd lieutenants and O-6 for colonels, pronounced “Oh-Six.” The “O” meant officer.

Enlisted ranks were more complex. Enlisted pay grades ran from E-1 to E-9. There were two private grades, E-1 and E-2, or PV1 and PV2. Prior to 1968 both grades lacked insignia, and were thus known as “slick sleeves.” Private first class (PFC) E-3 wore a single point-up chevron until mid-1968 when this insignia was given to PV2s and PFCs added a rocker to their chevron. The next rank was specialist 4 (SP4) E-4 or “spec 4.” His insignia was an odd-shaped backing with an indented downward point and an arched top. A spread-winged eagle, as on the cap badge, was centered. Specialists were just that and filled technical positions, though spec 4s in the infantry were generally grenadiers, machine gunners, mortar gunners, etc. Specialists did not have supervisory responsibilities and they fell below the NCO rank of the same pay grade in authority. Corporals ((CPL) E-4), two chevrons, were rare. The only corporal positions in a division were senior pathfinders and artillery assistant gunners. Sergeants reduced in grade to E-4 were usually made corporals, resulting in more legitimate corporals being asked why they had been busted.

Next up was specialist 5 ((SP5) E-5), identified by a spec 4’s insignia with an arched bar across the top. In an infantry battalion spec 5s were first cooks, senior radar operators, senior vehicle mechanics, and senior medical aidmen. Sergeants ((SGT) E-5, three chevrons), were commonly called “buck sergeants” to differentiate them from other sergeant ranks. They were fire team and mortar squad leaders. Specialist 6s ((SP6) E-6) had two arches over the eagle. The only spec 6s in an infantry battalion were medical assistants. Three chevrons with a rocker across the bottom identified staff sergeants ((SSG) E-6) leading rifle and weapons squads. Specialist 7s ((SP7) E-7) were only found in higher echelon support units and had three arches over their eagle. The two NCO E-7 ranks, sergeant first class (SFC) and platoon sergeant (PSG), were identified by three chevrons and two rockers. SFCs were in battalion and higher staffs and support units.

There were two E-8 ranks: master sergeant (MSG) with three chevrons and three rockers, and 1st sergeant (1SG) with the same chevrons but with a diamond in the center. Master sergeants were on battalion and brigade staffs, while the “first shirt” was the senior company NCO.

Likewise there were two E-9 ranks: sergeant major (SGM) and command sergeant major (CSM), identified by the master sergeant’s chevron with a star in the center; the CSM, however, had a smaller wreathed star. Sergeant majors were on division and higher staffs while the CSM was the senior NCO and advisor on enlisted affairs to the commander of battalion and larger units. Within enlisted ranks their word was “God’s.”

Collectively, sergeants were called “sergeants” – “hard-strippers” as opposed to specialists, regardless of

Enlisted Rank

Rank	Abbreviation	Pay Grade
Private 1	PV1	E-1
Private 2	PV2	E-2
Private first class	PFC	E-3
Specialist 4	SP4	E-4
Corporal	CPL	E-4
Specialist 5	SP5	E-5
Sergeant	SGT	E-5
Specialist 6	SP6	E-6
Staff sergeant	SSG	E-6
Specialist 7	SP7	E-7
Sergeant first class	SFC	E-7
Platoon sergeant	PSG	E-7
Master sergeant	MSG	E-8
1st sergeant	1SG	E-8
Sergeant major	SGM	E-9
Command sergeant major	CSM	E-9



Trainfire I rifle qualification firing was conducted in the sixth week. During the many hours of practice, range-firing pairs of trainees would fire while the other coached. During qualification firing they scored for each other. Here the coach wears a yellow steel helmet so that the safety NCOs can maintain better control. Safety measures on range were extreme.

rank, with the exception of 1st sergeants and sergeant majors, who were addressed as such. NCOs more often though were simply referred to by their pay grade, E-5 through E-9, while specialists were spec 4 through spec 7. Hard-strippers were promoted to the next NCO rank and specialists to a higher specialist rank, but they could be "promoted" to the parallel NCO rank within the same pay grade or promoted to the next pay grade's NCO rank if they assumed supervisory responsibilities.

As Legg and his buddies low-crawled and marched their way through Basic they gradually changed. Their stomachs flattened out and those needing some weight gained it while others with less need lost it. It was no longer all so strange. The drill sergeants began complimenting them on their accomplishments; they were not hopeless losers after all. All still looked forward to the end of Basic, but it had not actually been the ordeal many feared. It was demanding to be sure, but they were gaining confidence, taking things in their stride, and developing teamwork. There were three tests they had to complete to graduate. The APFT required a one-mile run, push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, horizontal ladder, dummy hand grenade throw, low-crawl, and the completion of a run, dodge and jump course, all timed or requiring a minimum number of repetitions. This was taken in the last week, as was G-3 Testing – proficiency tests where trainees demonstrated skills and knowledge before a committee. The other was rifle qualification requiring a Marksman rating of at least 26 hits out of 40 on the Trainfire I range. Sharpshooter required a score of 33 and Expert 38. If one failed to qualify, he "bolloed," and would be re-cycled to another training company to re-qualify.

Graduation day was held on the post parade ground with the companies uniformed in khakis or greens depending on the season. They marched past

G-3 proficiency testing was conducted in the final week of Basic. Trainees demonstrated their skills and ability to perform tasks under pressure. Here a trainee applies a field dressing to a dummy to show his knowledge of treating a gunshot wound and to halt bleeding. A group number is chalked on his helmet liner.



the post commander, with a band playing, listened to a short speech about duty and what they had accomplished, and found out that their drill sergeants thought they had done well after all. They had found out their future assignments during the previous week; Legg and others destined for infantry training at Tigerland felt sobered. Occasionally those realizing that infantry might mean Vietnam went AWOL. For the majority, there were heart-felt goodbyes and sincere handshakes with the drill sergeants. Legg was stunned to realize that he had actually come to like some of them. It was sad too when it was realized that he would never again see most of his fellow trainees. Up until 1967, Basic graduates received two weeks' leave, but in the rush to produce troops, leave was not granted until after AIT. The one exception was that trainees in Basic and AIT received a two-week Christmas leave if their cycle fell at the year's end. Soldiers were authorized 30 days' paid leave per year.

After graduation

The graduates went in all directions. Some stayed at Ft Polk to be trained by the 4th Combat Support Training Brigade as truck drivers, wiremen, cooks, and clerks. Others were dispersed throughout the Army school system to be trained in one of the over 350 MOSs. Of the seven infantry training centers, six were Vietnam-oriented, with Ft Dix, NJ, being the sole exception. There infantrymen bound for Germany, Korea, Alaska, and Panama, as well as many destined for OCS and Special Forces, would later receive Vietnam-oriented training. Not enough infantrymen could be pushed through the training system to feed units in Vietnam. Peters and a small number of graduates who had demonstrated leadership ability attended the two-week Leadership Preparation Course prior to AIT, and Legg and his friend parted company. They would serve as platoon guides and squad leaders in AIT and often go on to the NCO Candidate Course.

Two of Ft Polk's BCT brigades and the CST (Combat Support Training) brigade were located on South Fort, but the 3d Infantry AIT and 5th BCT Brigade were at North Fort. BCT graduates were assembled from different companies and bused a few miles to Tigerland, as North Fort was known. While Tigerland had the reputation of being one of the toughest AIT brigades, it was not all that much different from the others, and certainly nothing like that depicted in the motion picture bearing the same name.

There was the usual harassment to let the infantry trainees know they were still trainees and who was in charge. More of the drill sergeants were Vietnam veterans than in Basic. Overall though it was milder, but the training was intense, fast-paced, and more technical. Training companies had four platoons, one of which was filled with either indirect fire crewmen (mortarmen – MOS 11C) or direct fire crewmen (recoilless rifle

Military Pay

Pay call was on the last Friday of the month. The company commander, with a loaded .45-caliber pistol, paid Legg and his fellows in cash. Before income tax, Social Security, and optional Savings Bond deductions, the Base Pay for soldiers with less than two years' service (1968 scale) was:

\$102.30	E-1 less than 4 months
\$109.50	E-1 over 4 months
\$113.40	E-2
\$137.70	E-3
\$190.20	E-4

Married soldiers without children received \$55.20 Basic Allowance for Quarters, and another \$30 Family Separation Allowance when deployed overseas. When overseas, including Vietnam, they additionally received \$16 Overseas Allowance and in Vietnam \$65 Hostile Fire Pay ("Combat Pay"). Paratroopers received \$55 Hazardous Duty Pay ("Jump Pay"). Paratroopers were required to jump once every three months to receive Jump Pay, but they continued to receive it in Vietnam, as aircraft and parachutes were unavailable for parachute proficiency jumping. In Vietnam there were no income tax deductions, but Social Security deductions were still withheld.

gunners – MOS 11H). They conducted common-skill training with the three rifle platoons (light weapons infantrymen – MOS 11B), but much of their training was conducted separately.

The main focus was on weapons. Three weeks of rifle marksmanship in Basic prepared them well, along with the many hours of combat firing. They fired the 40mm M79 grenade launcher, the 3.5-inch M20A1B1 bazooka, the M72 LAW, and the .50-caliber M2 machine gun for familiarization. A great deal of instruction was spent on the 7.62mm M14A1 automatic rifle, which Legg found was difficult to qualify on even as Marksman; Expert was seldom achieved because the weapon was so inaccurate. The 7.62mm M60 machine gun was a different matter and an entire week was spent on this weapon. They also fired the .45-caliber M1911A1 pistol for qualification.

Tactical training consisted of 56 hours of squad techniques of fire and tactics, 32 hours of patrolling, 15 hours of individual combat skills, and 15 hours of map and compass work. It was realistic, and Vietnam veterans from specialized training committees conducted most of the training. Survival, evasion, and escape training included a night escape and evasion (E&E) course, as squads attempted to exfiltrate through “enemy” patrols. They learned how to operate squad and platoon radios, became familiar with radio procedures, and learned the phonetic alphabet (words substituted for letters to prevent misunderstandings through static). In land-mine warfare they learned how to emplace, arm, disarm, and recover anti-personnel and anti-tank mines as well as make and deal with booby traps.

Infantry AIT was 352 hours, but Vietnam-oriented AIT entailed an extra week of patrolling, land navigation, countering booby traps, field sanitation, enemy tactics, and the cordon and search of a simulated village.

AIT did not make the same impression on Legg as Basic. Basic was that first memorable taste of military life, what seemed like impossible challenges overcome, and an episode often remembered with a certain degree of fondness. In the final week of AIT they learned their destination. Most were headed for Vietnam, but small numbers found they were assigned to other overseas units and some even in the States, though they might be levied for Vietnam themselves within six months, leaving draftees with sufficient time to serve their year in Vietnam. Three-year volunteers not bound immediately for Vietnam had a year and a half to sweat out a levee. Those bound for Vietnam received a 30-day leave, most others two weeks. Many graduating AIT were promoted to PV2.

During AIT, trainees had the opportunity to volunteer for the Basic Airborne Course (“Jump School”) at Ft Benning, GA. They had to first pass the Airborne Physical Fitness Test. This was a three-week course



The Viet Cong village at Peason Ridge, north of Ft Polk, LA, provided a fairly realistic setting for exposing infantry trainees to Vietnam. It did not replicate a typical Vietnamese village, but rather a fortified VC village.

more physically demanding and intense than the eight weeks of Basic, requiring five parachute jumps. These men would go on to the many airborne units in Vietnam, the States, Germany, Panama, and Alaska.

E-1s through E-4s attending the NCO Candidate Course (NCOCC) had to have proven leadership skills, at least a 100 GT score, and at least 13 months' service remaining after graduation. Willie Peters took this route. There were such serious shortages of NCOs that a means of providing additional junior leaders was necessary. The shortage was due to NCO casualties, retirements, and the requirement that unless a soldier volunteered he could not be redeployed to Vietnam for 25 months. The NCOCC was conducted in two phases, the first being 13 weeks of leadership instruction, combat skills, weapons employment, and squad and platoon tactics. NCO candidates were made corporals, but could not wear the rank. Graduates were promoted to sergeant and a few honors graduates to staff sergeant. They were assigned to a troop or training unit for 9–10 weeks as leader "understudies" or as TAC NCOs to gain practical experience. The program was begun in late 1967 and ran through early 1972, producing 20,000 infantry NCOs (other combat arms also ran NCOCC). (To give an idea of the chance of an infantryman being killed in Vietnam, 1,002 of the graduates were KIA.) Graduates were eligible for OCS, but most declined.

There was resentment of the "Instant NCO Course" in some circles. Dubbed as "Shake n' Bakes," "Instant NCOs," and "Whip n' Chills," senior NCOs resented the fact that soldiers could receive the stripes in a year that it took them 4–6 years to earn. E-4s and below with several months in Vietnam were resentful of a newly assigned sergeant who had been in the Army for less time than they taking over their squad. The program did not prevent other enlisted men from progressing in rank though. It was true that the new NCOs lacked the years of practical experience gained by traditional NCOs, but most did well, especially if first broken in when assigned to a squad rather than taking over directly.

APPEARANCE

In an era when the Beatles-style haircut was in vogue, the idea of having one's head nearly shaved bare was almost unbearable. Marched to the barber shop and begrudgingly plopping down into the chair, PV1 Legg was asked, "Ya wanta keep those sideburns, trainee?" There



grunt v. 1. To utter a deep guttural sound, as does a hog.
2. To utter a similar sound, as in disgust, annoyance, indifference, strain, or effort.
3. An infantryman.

Light Infantry Advanced Individual Training Subjects

Subject	Hours
Administrative processing	10
Commander's time	27
Character guidance	2
Command information	4
Physical training	24
Drill and ceremonies	12
Inspections	14
Land navigation	18
First aid	4
Graduation	1
Bayonet	2
Field fortifications	3
M1911A1 pistol	8
M79 grenade launcher	4
3.5-inch rocket launcher	6
.50-caliber machine gun	8
Land mine warfare	8
Survival, evasion & escape	9
Individual combat actions	15
Introduction to armored personnel carrier	1
Technique of fire & tactics, rifle squad	56
Proficiency test	4
Weapons demonstration	2
Communications	10
M14A1 automatic rifle	28
M60 machine gun	40
Patrolling	32

Vietnam's terrain varied widely, with the variations often extreme. This photograph demonstrates this with an open rice paddy, edged by dense jungle, beyond which are steep forested hills, all within a few hundred meters.



appeared to be hope after all. "Yes, sir!" "Then hold out ya hand." To add insult to injury, the recruits had to pay 50 cents for the haircut. Less than a quarter of an inch remained on top, and around the ears and nape of the neck it was "white sidewalls." Regardless of the reasons given – sanitation in a hot, dusty environment with no time to spend on grooming – the real reason was simply uniformity. Everyone was different, but nobody was special, and no one needed to stand out. Shaving was mandatory every day whether one had a beard or not.

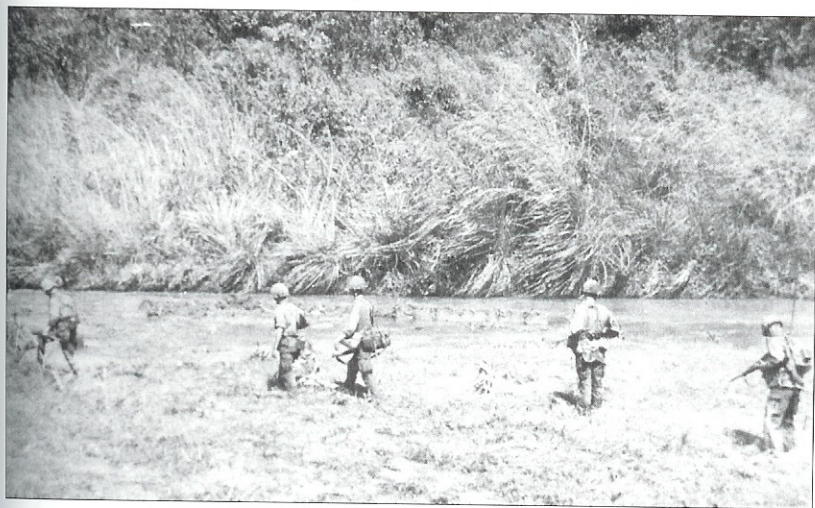
The first thing that struck PV1 Legg when the day came to be issued uniforms was a sign over the entrance to the warehouse-like quartermaster building: "Through these doors pass the world's best-dressed soldiers." Aside from snide remarks by some, Legg reasoned that this was possibly true – the uniforms looked sharp. They stripped down to underwear and placed their "civvies" in sacks to be mailed home. They did not realize that it would be months before they donned civvies again. Civilians quickly and efficiently measured, fitted, and issued the men's uniforms in a whirlwind, assembly-line process.

The second surprise was the quantity of uniforms that filled Legg's arms: four sets of fatigues, two of short-sleeve khakis, a set each of summer- and winter-weight Army green "Class A" uniforms, three tan shirts to wear with the greens, two field caps, two envelope-like Army green garrison caps, and a visored Army green service cap, referred to respectively as "baseball," "overseas" or "c**t," and "bus driver" or "flying-saucer" caps; five pairs of white boxer shorts, undershirts, and handkerchiefs; five pairs of black cushion-sole socks, three pairs of black dress socks, black leather glove shells with two pairs of olive-drab wool inserts, two black web belts, an M1951 or M1965 field jacket, an Army green overcoat, and a leaky taupe raincoat – a grayish brown that turned lilac when wet. Two pairs of black leather combat boots were issued with much discussion on how best to break them in. A can of white paint was provided and a little square painted at the top edge of the back reinforcing strap on one pair. The drill sergeants directed that boots would be alternated each day. Another white rectangle was painted inside and marked with name and serial number. Plain black low-top

dress shoes were to be worn with khakis and greens, known simply as "low-quarters."

It was a massive armload of clothing and accessories, and when stacked beside Legg's duffel bag it appeared impossible for it all to fit. The NCOs said it had better. He packed a layer in and slammed the bag on to the floor a few times to compact it before shoving in more. It did all fit, barely. Gold-on-black US ARMY tapes were already sewn on the fatigue shirts, but black-on-OD nametapes had to be sewn on by a battery of speedy women behind sewing machines. Recruits wore no other insignia. A passing sergeant asked a group waiting in line what the US Army meant. Reluctant to take the bait, no one admitted knowing. Pointing to each letter on his own chest he said, "Uncle Sam Ain't Released Me Yet." It was their first hint that sergeants were human too.

After arrival at their training company, recruits were issued two additional items for which they had filled out forms at the reception center. One was a black plastic nameplate with their last name etched in white. This was worn on the flap of the right breast pocket on khakis and greens. The other was the personal identity tag, or "dog tag." One of the stainless steel rectangles with rounded ends was attached to a beaded neck chain and the other to a shorter chain attached to the longer. A religious medal could be attached to the chain, but no other form of jewelry. The drill sergeants taught that if a man was killed, the tag on the long chain remained with the body and the other was detached and turned in with the casualty report. They dispelled the lingering myth that one of the tags was jammed between a dead man's teeth. Dog tags were part of the uniform and were to be worn at all times. Stamped on the tag was: LEGG, CHARLES (NMI). "NMI" meant No Middle Initial. Beneath this were his serial number, blood type and group, and religious preference. At the PX he bought a pair of "dog tag silencers," stretch-plastic frames that fitted around the tags' edges to keep them from clinking. The silencer set included a length of clear plastic tubing through which the long chain was threaded. Some soldiers simply taped the tags together. Most soldiers can still recite their seven-digit serial number preceded by two letters: RA – Regular Army (three-year volunteers), US – United States (conscripts), ER – Enlisted



A patrol parallels a stream (described as a "blue line" in radio conversation), moving in the open rather than attempting to move through the dense elephant grass and brush on the far side. Elephant grass can grow up to 9 feet high (3m), but most is from three to six feet (1-2m).

Reserve, or NG – National Guard. If an enlisted man was commissioned through OCS he received a new serial number preceded by an “O.” From January 1968 Social Security numbers replaced serial numbers and the letter prefixes were dropped.

The olive green utility uniform, more commonly known as “fatigues,” was the daily duty wear. The loose-fitting uniform was worn with the shirt (officially a jacket) tucked into the trousers, sleeves down, and the trouser cuffs bloused (tucked) into the boots. Many used blousing garters or “blousing rubbers” rather than tucking them into the boot tops. The garters, purchased at the PX or Quartermaster Clothing Sales, consisted of a twisted elastic cord with a small hook at both ends. They were fastened around the ankles over the top of the socks and the trousers cuff rolled up under it. Large rubber bands were sometimes used, but were not as durable. The term “blousing rubbers” came from World War II when a couple of condoms were tied together end-to-end and used for the same purpose. Some drill sergeants would not allow their trainees to blouse their trousers in this manner, requiring them to be tucked into the boots instead.

Trainees simply washed their fatigues at a self-service Laundromat equipped with washers and dryers and wore them un-pressed and un-starched. Drill sergeants and permanent party (cooks, clerks, etc) had their fatigues starched and pressed and would daily “break starch,” that is, force their legs and arms into the trousers and shirtsleeves to peel the heavily starched fabric apart. Later, as soldiers purchased additional sets of fatigues, they learned that wearing an older faded shirt with new darker trousers or vice versa was called a “golf suit” because of the mismatched shades, and was frowned upon.

The helmet – “steel pot,” “piss pot,” or “brain dome” – was worn with its helmet liner. Basic trainees did not wear camouflage covers, just the bare olive-drab helmet. Trainees in AIT wore the reversible cover. A complete helmet assembly weighed almost 3.5 pounds, but the men found that within a week they became used to it. The unpopular hot-weather field cap, or “baseball cap,” was worn in the company area and off-duty. Headgear was removed indoors, and the cap’s visor was folded into the crown and the cap stuck into the back of the trousers.

Khaki uniforms were 100 percent cotton and required heavy starch and military creases: three creases down the back, centerline and parallel on either side aligned with the shoulder blades, chest creases aligned down the center of the chest pockets, sharply creased trousers. It was a sharp-looking uniform until worn for a few hours and then it looked like one had slept in it. Later some purchased tan tropical worsted wool uniforms (“TWs”), authorized in lieu of cotton khaki, and these were distinctively presentable uniforms. The well-tailored Army Green uniform, especially the 100 percent wool winter weight, was also a presentable uniform.

Once training was completed, hair could be grown out somewhat, but it was still “high-and-tight.” Mustaches were out in most cases. Few first sergeants

Streams were common in many areas and crossing them a frequent occurrence. Here infantrymen ford a stream for a short local security patrol on the far side. They have stripped down to the bare minimum, as it is of only short duration. They carry only a bandolier with seven M16A1 rifle magazines.



allowed them, often saying, "You can have a mustache if you're wearing one in your ID card photo," which of course was an impossibility, a "Catch 22." Sideburns were not to extend below the level of the ear opening, a restriction frequently tested.

The PX sold such items as higher-quality-than-issue branch-of-service collar insignia, rank insignia, award and decoration ribbons, unit patches and crests. Brass-like branch-of-service insignia and belt buckles could be purchased that did not require polishing. The Quartermaster Clothing Sales Store sold "Army-issue" versions of the same items at a lower cost as well as all uniform and individual equipment items, which could be purchased as replacements for lost or worn-out items.

Grubby in the bush

Legg's appearance was to alter drastically in Vietnam. It was an altogether different army and environment. The uniforms and equipment infantrymen donned there would thus be different from those worn elsewhere.

He reported to the overseas replacement station wearing travel-crumpled khakis and a couple of sets of fatigues; everything else was left at home. One of the first activities was the issue of tropical uniforms. He received three sets of tropical combat uniforms, two pairs of tropical combat boots, five sets of olive-green undershirts and shorts, and two olive-green towels. He was told that he had to have a baseball cap and to buy one at Quartermaster Sales if he had reported in without.

The loose-fitting, many-pocketed "jungle fatigues" or "fatikees" were probably one of the most popular uniforms worn by the US Army. Comfortable, lightweight, and fast-drying, they proved a practical design. The lightweight canvas-topped "jungle boots" with punji stake protection in the soles, drainage eyelets protecting from leeches, and cleated soles also proved popular. The men rushed to on-post dry cleaners to have their name and US Army tapes, and any special skill badges, sewn on. Unit patches would wait until they found out their assignment in Vietnam. They might have sewn on sleeve rank insignia, but from 1968 small black pin-on collar rank insignia were authorized. In 1968 subdued unit shoulder patches and special skill badges were also authorized. During the transition period through 1970, both full-color and black or OD subdued insignia could be worn mixed on the uniform depending on what was available.

In Vietnam, dress and appearance standards were somewhat relaxed owing to the limited laundry facilities, the climate, and the overall primitive conditions. Undershirts and shorts were usually dispensed with as they trapped moisture and caused rashes, immodestly called "crotch rot" or referred to as a disease: "rot-ya-crotch-off." Jungle fatigue shirtsleeves were usually rolled up above the elbows, but Legg learned that when busting dense brush, bamboo, thorn thickets, and elephant grass it was best to keep them rolled down. This helped keep out ants and leeches as did tie-tapes on trousers cuffs. An olive-green towel or triangular bandage was often worn around the neck to sop up sweat: a "drive-on rag." While Legg and his buddies generally went shirtless in firebases or wore undershirts, at nightfall they were required to don shirts with sleeves rolled down to deter malaria-bearing mosquitoes.

Once assigned to a unit the shoulder patch would be sewn on in a local Vietnamese tailor shop, one of the many "mamasan" shops outside

larger bases. Often it was a wasted effort to sew on nametapes, badges, and so forth. In the field, filthy uniforms were direct exchanged (DXed) for new uniforms devoid of insignia or for laundered uniforms with someone else's nametape.

Little was carried in pockets because any item with bulk and weight would bounce when the soldier ran. Seldom were the shirt's skirt pockets used because they were inaccessible when wearing web gear. Leaders carried plastic-wrapped maps in a trousers cargo pocket and a compass in a chest pocket, dummy-corded to a shirt buttonhole. Wallets were placed in a small plastic bag secured by a rubber band. Typical contents were:

- Armed Force Identification Card ("Military ID Card")
- Geneva Conventions Identification Card
- MACV Ration Card
- US Government Motor Vehicle Operator's Identification Card ("Military Driver's License;" few infantrymen possessed this)
- Home-state driver's license (did not have to be renewed while in the service)
- Personal photos (family, wife, children, girlfriend)
- Military Payment Certificates

The steel pot was habitual wear in the field and became an equipment carrier and billboard. The camouflage cover was worn green-side-out in most areas and it was seldom reversed if the vegetation changed – too much trouble. Personal names and nicknames, home towns and states, slogans, and unit mottoes were commonly written on the cover with grease pencils or felt markers. Various symbols too were crudely marked, ranging from rank, unit patches or crests, state outlines or flags, peace symbols, or short-timer calendars. The elastic camouflage band was seldom used to attach foliage, but instead to stow small personal items making them easily accessible and out of reach of water when wading streams: cigarette pack, matchbook, C-ration spoon, insect repellent bottle, P38 can opener, and field dressings are examples.

The full-brimmed tropical hat was issued, and locally made versions were often bought from mamasan shops. It was seldom worn in the field, even on reconnaissance patrols. However, soldiers were often sentimentally attached to their "boonie hat," to the point where the replacement depots allowed them to retain Army-issue ones rather than try to collect them up when departing.

OD 550-pound parachute suspension line ("550 cord") often replaced bootlaces. Rather than wearing the dog tags around the neck, men often threaded them through the bottom end of their boot laces, one on each boot. The theory was that both tags would not be separated from the body, as would be the case

Stream crossing often required the aid of a buddy because of the irregular bottom, deep mud, and sometimes swift current. The infantryman in the foreground wears the nylon rucksack with aluminum frame. The frame precluded wearing any equipment on the belt other than on the front. Large water leeches and smaller land leeches were more a nuisance than a hazard.





Besides jungles, swamps, and hills, the infantryman also sometimes fought in built-up or urbanized areas. Most of the urban construction was reinforced concrete to endure the harsh tropical climate.

their appearance. Some sported longer hair, especially long sideburns, and mustaches sprouted. The extent of such practices varied from unit to unit, and the degree to which it was tolerated depended on the unit leader.

with decapitation – a rare occurrence. It was more frequently done to be different rather than for practical reasons. Those wearing dog tags in the normal manner invariably had a P38 can opener attached.

With time there were efforts by some to assert their individuality, protest their plight (real or perceived), or make some statement. Such efforts increased as the war wore on, small-unit leadership deteriorated, and as the war became increasing unpopular at home. More anti-war and peace symbols⁵ and slogans appeared, some sported headbands, beads or necklaces with peace symbols, and braided or bead bracelets made

WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

The day after their assignment to the training company the recruits were fallen in in front of the supply room. Each man picked up a footlocker filled with an assortment of bags, pouches, straps, and belts. Each item was called off as trainees held it up for confirmation. Drill sergeants walked through the formation coaching them on what unfamiliar items were. They signed an individual clothing and equipment record. Back in their barracks a drill sergeant explained that the bewildering tangled pile of OD canvas and webbing was called “TA-50,” after Table of Allowance 50, specifying how many of what items were issued. They were talked through assembling and adjusting the M1956 load-bearing equipment (LBE) or load-carrying equipment (LCE) or “web gear.”

The heavy-duty pistol belt had a pair of universal ammunition pouches (“ammo pouches”) on the front, a first-aid pouch with a field dressing, a plastic canteen in a carrier on one hip, and a small combat pack (“butt or ass pack”) attached to the back of the belt. A pair of heavy-duty suspenders took the weight of the gear off the hips. Its front straps were attached to the belt and the back strap to tabs on the butt pack. If the butt pack was not worn, the back straps were extended and fastened to the belt. Two 20-round M14 rifle magazines were carried in each pouch and there were small straps on the sides for hand grenades. Another strap on the pouch clipped to a ring on the front of the suspenders to support the weight. Magazines were only issued on the rifle range. Trainees soon learned that the drill sergeants would check

⁵ The peace symbol began life as an icon for the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in 1958. It represents the semaphore flag signs for “N” (inverted “V”) and “D” (vertical line). Its original meaning subverted, it soon appeared in US civil rights marches and later in anti-war demonstrations. It also happened to be the 1940 insignia of the German 3d Panzer Division.



The enemy, here an NVA sapper, reconnaissance-commando, armed with the 7.62mm AK-47 assault rifle. He is a defector, a Chieu Hoi (pronounced "choo hoy"), who demonstrates sapper techniques to American troops. The Local Force VC appeared to be local peasants wearing black "pajamas." Main Force VC and NVA regulars mostly wore green uniforms and were well equipped for the most part.

pouches to ensure that cigarettes and "poggy bait" (candy and snacks) were not carried. A canteen cup with a folding handle nested on to the bottom of the one-quart canteen. Legg would find this to be a valuable item for heating coffee and cocoa, cooking C-rations, for washing and shaving, and even for bathing. A folding entrenching tool was carried on the left hip when necessary. A man in Legg's squad made the mistake of calling it a "little shovel," immediately setting off an outraged drill corporal, who told him it was an "e-tool," not a shovel, and that if he heard such a blatant unauthorized nomenclature being used for an e-tool he might be going to the stockade for murdering a trainee. A bayonet could be fastened to the e-tool's carrier, but these were issued only during bayonet training. On a daily basis nothing was carried in the butt pack other than a rolled up poncho and a pair of socks.

Legg soon learned to rattle off the description of what was officially designated the US rifle, caliber 7.62mm, M14: a "lightweight, air-cooled, gas-operated, magazine-fed, shoulder-fired weapon." Having handled only .22 rifles and bolt-action deer rifles he was surprised by its 11.25 pounds loaded with a full magazine. Regardless of the fact that large numbers of Americans owned firearms, only a comparatively small number had more than just minimal experience with them, many none at all. None had experienced semi-automatic assault-type weapons, as they were not yet widely available on the commercial market. They quickly learned that it was called a "rifle" or "weapon," never a "gun," which is an artillery piece. Rifles were issued after breakfast from the arms room cage and turned in at day's end. Legg was given yet another number to remember: his rifle's serial number.

Gear in 'Nam

When PV2 Legg arrived at the 1st Cavalry Division's FIRST TEAM Academy, he was issued with a full set of LBE. His platoon sergeant or squad members told him what was essential and what was unnecessary; the bare minimum was carried. Tramping over the rugged terrain and the enervating climate made this necessary. The ability to conduct frequent resupply by helicopter helped keep loads light with only a few days' rations carried and no need for spare clothing. Occasionally a new platoon leader or company commander would have some idealistic desire to make soldiers carry everything specified "by the book," much of which was unnecessary, such as shelter-halves and mess kits. Most leaders were more practical and allowed troops to carry what they felt was needed and dispense with the "nice to have" items. Experience and observation of how other platoon members carried their gear led to Legg making refinements during his tour.

M1956 gear provided the basis for LBE in Vietnam. Even when more durable rot-proof nylon gear began to be fielded in 1967, it was similar in design to the earlier cotton web gear. There were three areas in which the earlier gear, designed for temperate environments and supported by traditional supply lines stretching from a secure rear area, differed from Vietnam:

1. Soldiers had to carry rations for several days rather than receive the next meal when consuming the last.

2. According to manuals the basic load of ammunition for an M14 rifle was five 20-round magazines, and nine 20-round magazines for an M16A1 (30-round magazines used today were not available). This was completely insufficient for close-range firefights that might turn into prolonged battles. Helicopter resupply of ammunition was erratic and not always timely because of weather and enemy fire. Two or three times as much ammunition might be carried.

3. Water was another concern. In a conventional environment soldiers carried a single one-quart canteen. Four to six quarts was typical in Vietnam.

The official temperate climate fighting load was 65 pounds and only a single C-ration meal was carried. Much of the extraneous items were eliminated in Vietnam (13-pound sleeping bag, gas mask, mess kit, bayonet, and other items), but made up for by additional rations, water, ammo, and other munitions. Efforts were made to reduce individual loads by sharing a single item between two men. Soldiers would buddy-up, with one carrying an air mattress ("rubber bitch") and the other a poncho liner and mosquito net. One carried an e-tool and both a poncho.

The small butt pack was totally inadequate for carrying necessary loads. Either the lightweight rucksack with an aluminum frame or the later tropical rucksack was used. "Rucks" accommodated the minimum three days' rations, a gallon or more of water in one- and two-quart canteens, and the additional munitions distributed through squads. Four M16 ammunition pouches might be carried, and extra magazines were sometimes carried in one-quart canteen carriers or Claymore bags. Many soldiers carried up to two-dozen magazines. Besides the short ammo pouches made for M16 magazines, sometimes only deeper M14 pouches were available. Both carried four M16 magazines. To raise the shorter M16 magazines up to the M14 pouch's top opening, a field dressing was placed in the bottom. M16 ammunition was issued in seven-pocket cloth bandoliers with two 10-round stripper clips per pocket. A loaded 20-round magazine was often carried in each pocket. Two magazine-filled bandoliers were often the only means used by some to carry ammo, and allowed the elimination of the pistol belt and other belt-carried gear, with canteens being attached to the ruck.

Toilet articles (razor, razorblades – disposable razors had not yet appeared – bar of soap in a plastic box, toothbrush, toothpaste), a few pairs of socks in a plastic bag (dry socks were heaven), letter-writing materials in a plastic bag or a grenade packing tube, and not much else, were carried. At least two field dressings were carried, as a gunshot typically resulted in entry and exit wounds, and mortars, grenades, RPGs, and booby traps often caused multiple fragmentation wounds.

Besides two to four frag grenades, soldiers carried a significant amount of munitions for the platoon. This was divvied up and included machine-gun belts, 40mm rounds, Claymore mines, LAWs (light anti-tank weapons), colored smoke grenades, trip flares, "pop-up" signal flares, 1.25-pound C4 demolition blocks (different individuals carried detonators and safety fuse), radio batteries, and special-purpose grenades such as WP, concussion, and thermite.



Scout-dog teams search a "hooch" of typical construction. When ordered to burn a village that had been supporting the VC, most soldiers felt that it was no great loss to the Vietnamese as the houses could be quickly and easily replaced. A cheap, simply built hut it might be, but to the Vietnamese it was home, and such acts often did more harm than good.

Weapons in 'Nam

Up until late 1969 Legg and other trainees used the M14 rifle. It was not until then that M16A1s were provided to training units. Most Army units in Vietnam received the 5.56mm M16A1 in 1966 and it officially replaced the M14 in February 1967, but it remained in use by most of the Army outside of Vietnam for sometime. Airborne and airmobile units had received the still experimental XM16E1s prior to deploying to Vietnam in 1964 as a lightweight more compact weapon.

Vilified by some, praised by others, the M16 was arguably the most controversial weapon to enter US service. Its advantages over the M14 were its lighter weight (7.6 pounds compared to 9.3 pounds unloaded), compactness, and more room for ammo to be carried. There were problems with early M16s: the bolt would sometimes not fully close after excessive firing, it had poor extraction, and the open prong flash suppressor often caught on vegetation, thus fouling the weapon. Many of these problems were rectified in the M16A1, providing an improved bolt and recoil spring, a forward assist plunger on the receiver's side to ensure that the bolt fully locked, a chrome-plated chamber to improve extraction, and a closed-type "birdcage" suppressor. It still required meticulous cleaning, but this was somewhat offset by a less fouling propellant.

Other problems were experienced with M16s because of their extremely high-velocity lightweight bullet. It achieved very poor penetration through brush, bamboo, sandbags, foxhole parapets, etc. It was easily deflected by vegetation and there were frequent reports of it inflicting light wounds that should really have been kills. There were equally numerous reports of horrendous wounds and fatal 5.56mm hits that would have been less severe if a 7.62mm M60 machine gun had been used. Such disparity in effects was caused by the light bullet's erratic behavior. One might make a

The VC and NVA often left propaganda signs and scattered leaflets in abandoned camps, urging surrender when they heard free-world units approaching. American soldiers treated these rather simplistic efforts with disdain.



clean passage through a target and the next would tumble after impact. However, the bullet did not tumble in flight, as so often reported, unless it had been deflected by vegetation.

Because of the M16's poor penetration, the platoon's 7.62mm M60 machine guns played an important role. The M60 was heavy, 23 pounds, but able to put out a high rate of fire that could chop through dense vegetation. Up to 1,200 rounds would be carried for each M60, with the 100-round assault bags distributed through the platoon. While the M60 had a quick-change barrel for overheating, spare barrels were seldom carried by the two-man crew.

The M14 saw initial use in Vietnam along with the M14(M) and M14A1 (M14E2 1963–66) automatic rifles. While heavy, the M14 offered good penetration and man-stopping capabilities. The basic rifle, while capable of full-automatic firing, was fitted with a selector lock to allow only semi-automatic firing. The M14(M) (Modified) was fitted with an M2 bipod and the selector lock removed. It was too light, resulting in it being extremely inaccurate. An effort was made to improve its accuracy in the form of the M14A1 by providing a straight-line stock, rear and forward pistol grips, and a muzzle compensator. It was still notoriously inaccurate and quickly overheated.

The 40mm M79 grenade launcher – “blooper” or “thumper” – was an extremely effective and versatile weapon. A good grenadier could easily put a high explosive fragmentation round on a small target at 150 or more meters and area targets up to 350. It could also launch various colored signal smoke and pyrotechnic (“pyro”) signals and illumination flares. The M79 was light, 6.2 pounds, but grenadiers carried up to 30–40 rounds. These might be carried in an 18-pocket vest or in a combination of M14 ammunition pouches, Claymore bags, one-quart canteen carriers, or the six-round bandolier the cartridges were issued in.

Squads had two M79s, and one problem was that each M79 meant one less rifle. Grenadiers carried a .45-caliber M1911A1 Colt pistol, but that was strictly a self-defense weapon and contributed nothing to platoon firepower; a few grenadiers carried an M16 though. Development began on a 40mm grenade launcher that could be attached beneath an M16's handguard. The first attempt was the XM148, which saw limited field testing in 1966. It was plagued with mechanical problems and the project was dropped. The XM203 was field tested in 1968 and standardized the following year, although the M79 continued in use.

Certain precautions were necessary with the M79. Early HE (high explosive) rounds armed within 8–12 meters, and if the round struck vegetation or the launcher was accidentally fired with the round impacting among nearby troops, friendly casualties resulted. The causality radius was 5 meters, although casualties occurred within 15 meters. New rounds armed within 14–28 meters, making them safer to friendly troops.



The US Army employed thousands of helicopters in Vietnam. They were essential for transportation, resupply, medical evacuation, command and control, reconnaissance, and fire support. The French operated only 54 helicopters in the whole of Indochina. Here Hueys extract a company after completing a search-and-clear mission.



A rifleman prepares to leap off the skid of a Huey. His aluminum-frame rucksack demonstrates the sometimes haphazard collection of gear infantrymen carried. In most units it was very much left up to the individual how he arranged his gear.

provide a more even all-around fragmentation pattern. These were the M33, M59, M67, and M68. The M57, M61, M67, and M68 were identical to the M26A2, M26A1, M33, and M59, respectively, with the addition of a safety clip. This wire clip was rotated to allow the arming lever to fly off once the arming pin was pulled and the grenade thrown. It helped prevent accidents if the grenade was dropped at the wrong time. Of course there were instances in the excitement of combat when rotating the clip would be forgotten. The M26A2, M57, M59, and M68 were impact-detonating frags. They too had a 4–5-second delay, but if they struck the ground before that time they detonated on impact. They proved very dangerous if accidentally dropped once armed, and worse, would detonate if striking intervening vegetation, something impossible to avoid. Many troops simply refused to use impact grenades. They were identified by a squatter fuse and marked IMPACT on the lever and

body. Other grenades are depicted in Plates D and G.

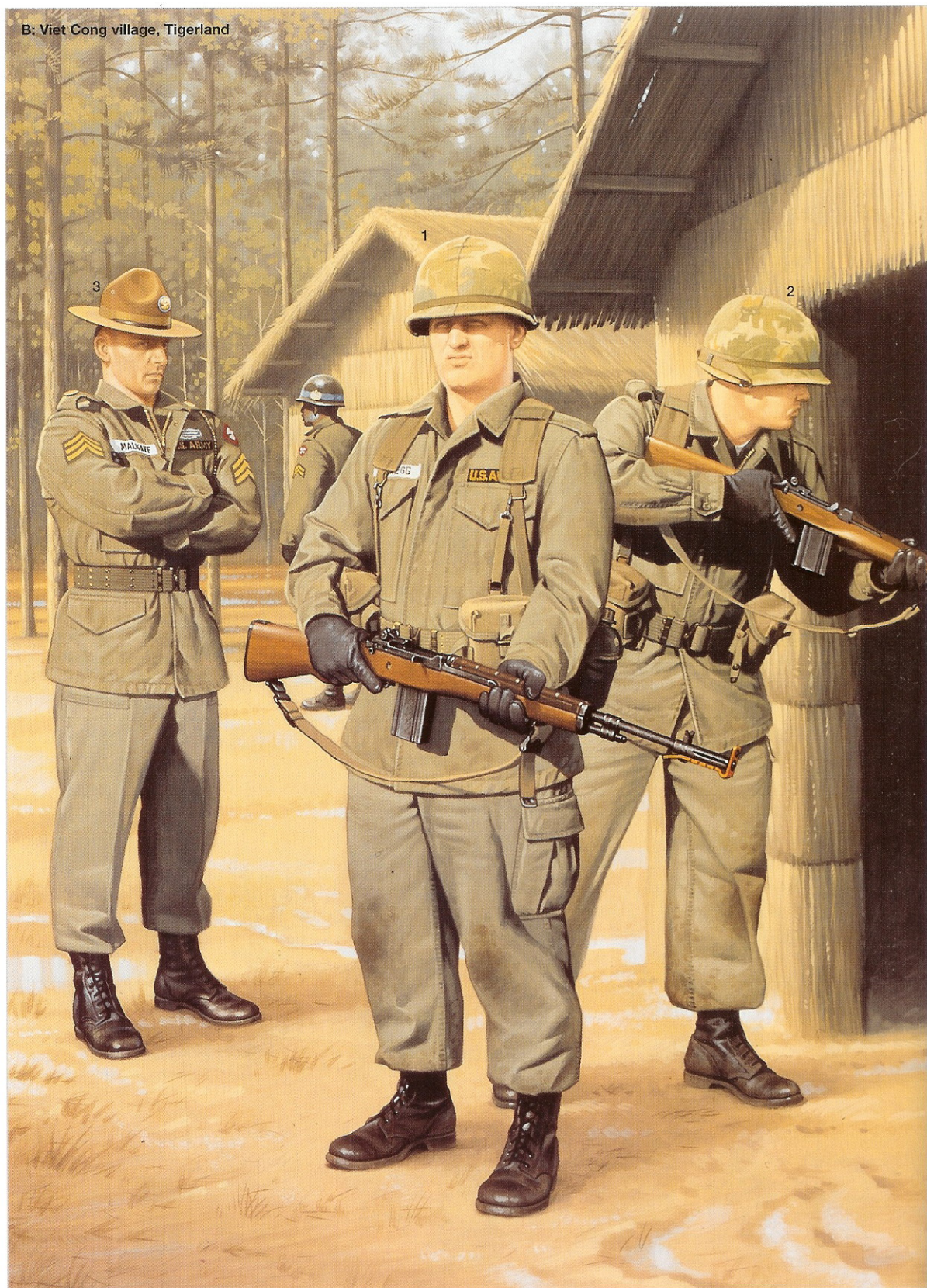
M18A1 Claymore anti-personnel mines were used extensively in Vietnam, some 80,000 per month. It was a 3.5-pound directional mine in a rectangular, slightly curved fiberglass box with 1.5 pounds of C4 plastic explosive backing an epoxy matrix in which were embedded 704 7/32-inch (6mm) diameter ball bearings. It was either electrically detonated by command or rigged with a tripwire to be activated by an intruder. When detonated the ball bearings were blasted out in a 60-degree fan with an optimum range of 50 meters, but dangerous up to 250. Blast and secondary fragmentation were

Infantry Battalion Weapons, 1965–73

- .45-caliber M1911A1 pistol
- 7.62mm M14 rifle
- 7.62mm M14(M) and M14A1 automatic rifles
- 7.62mm M21 sniper rifle
- 5.56mm M16 and M16A1 rifles
- 5.56mm XM177E1 and XM177E2 submachine guns ("CAR-15")
- 7.62mm M60 machine gun
- .50-caliber M2 machine gun
- 40mm M79, XM148, and M203 grenade launchers
- 66mm M72 and M72A1 light anti-tank weapons (LAW)
- 3.5-inch M20A1B1 rocket launcher ("bazooka")
- 90mm M67 recoilless rifle
- 106mm M40A1 recoilless rifle
- 81mm M29 and M29A1 mortars
- 4.2-inch M30 mortar



B: Viet Cong village, Tigerland

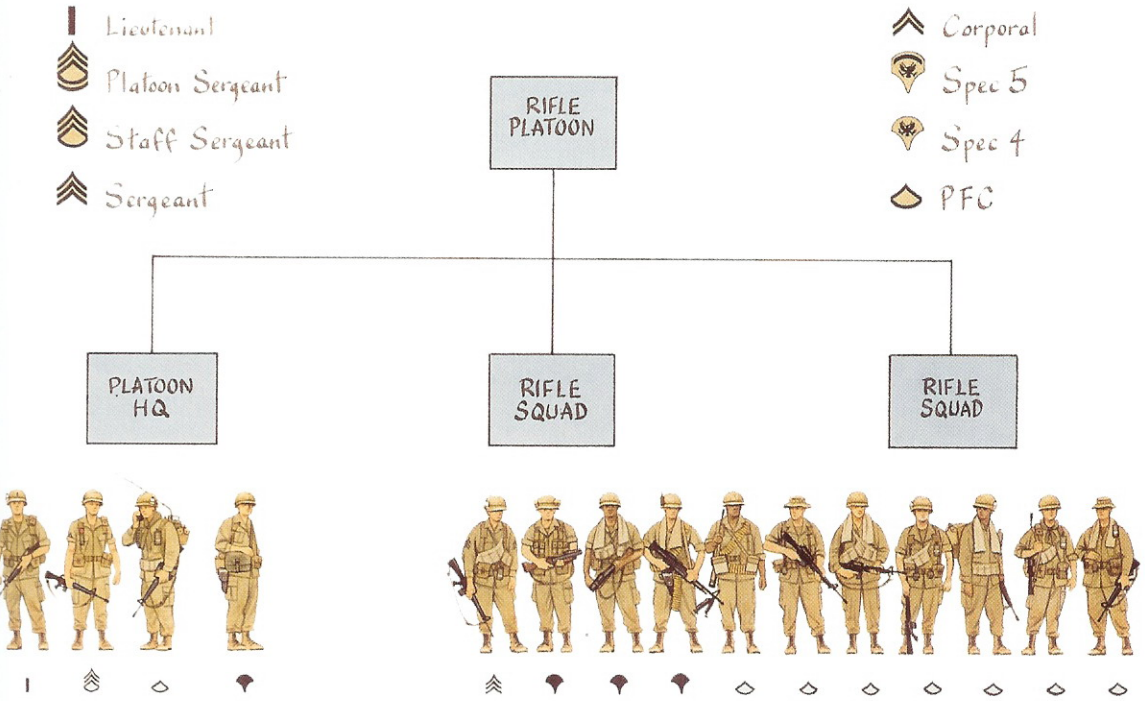
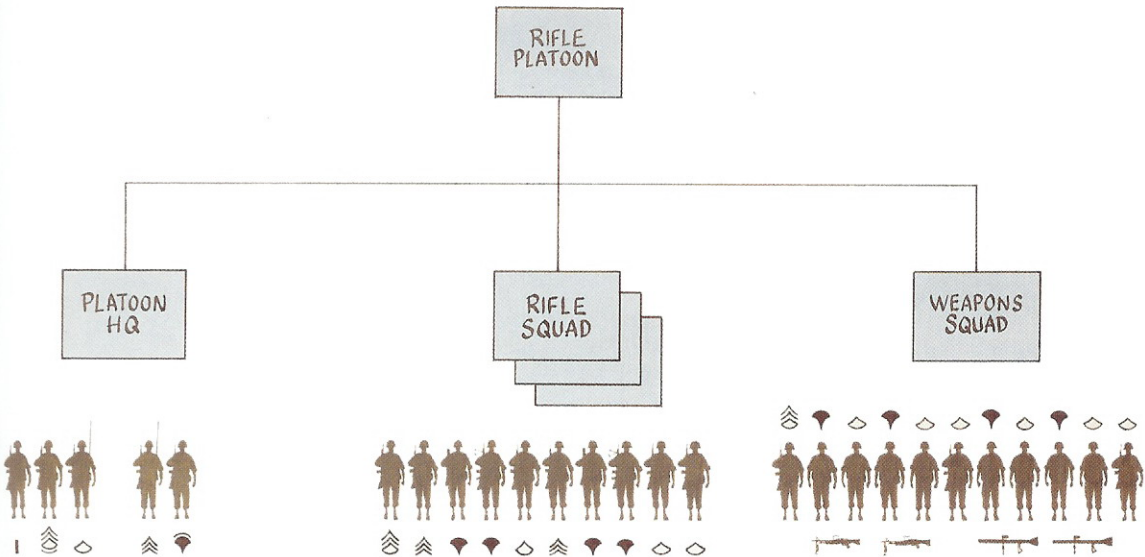




D: Individual equipment and platoon weapons



E: The rifle platoon, the grunt's family

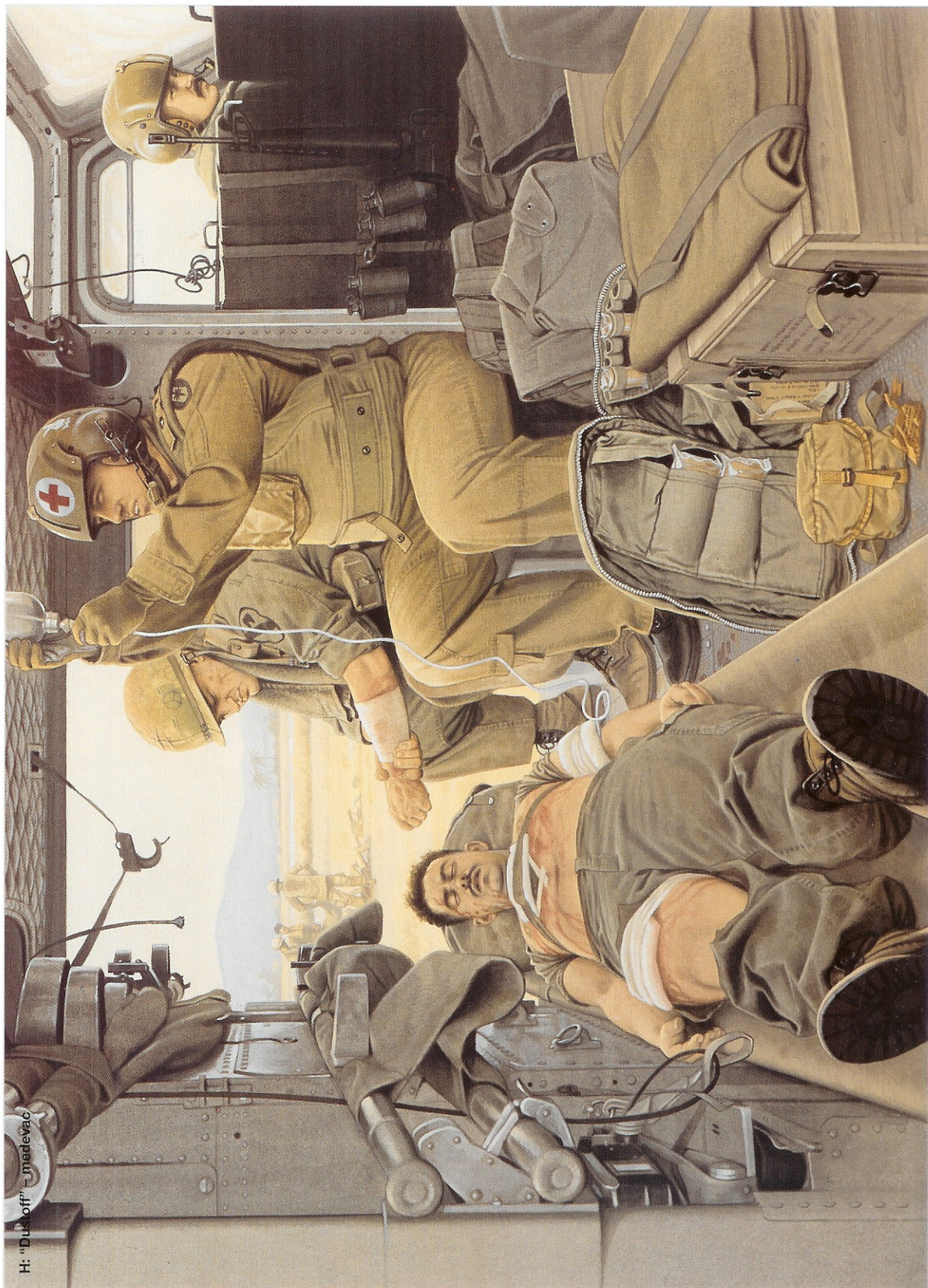


F: Firefight - the "seven-minute war"



G: Individual and platoon equipment





H: "Dust off" - medevac

dangerous within 100 meters in all directions, and they were devastating to assault troops and those caught in an ambush kill zone.

The M49A1 trip flare was 1.5 inches in diameter, almost 5 inches long, and weighed 15 ounces. They were attached to barbed-wire pickets, stakes, trees by a mounting bracket, or simply wired to a stake without the bracket, several inches above the ground within wire entanglements or on likely enemy approaches to a unit's night position, and rigged to be activated by an up to 40-foot tripwire. When activated the magnesium flare immediately ignited, burning for 55–70 seconds at 50,000 candlepower at 4,200°F and illuminated up to a 300-meter radius area. They could also be thrown by hand by removing the arming pin, gripping the grenade-like arming lever, and throwing it. It ignited immediately upon release of the lever, but cleared the hand by several feet. This was useful for illuminating a close-in area that the enemy was suspected of infiltrating, or to ignite fires.

WELCOME TO VIETNAM ... FNG

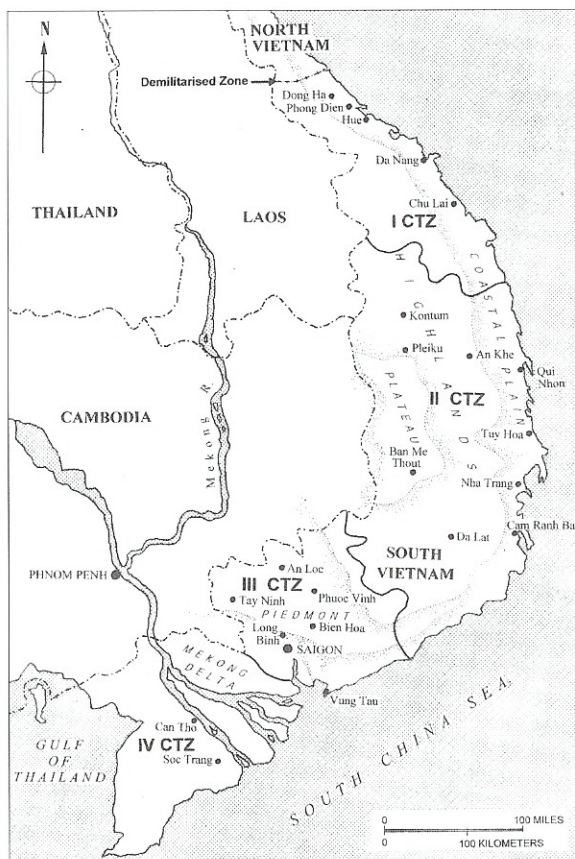
The Boeing 707, chartered from a commercial airline and bearing stewardesses and the usual amenities, rolled down the Cam Ranh Bay runway. After processing at Ft Lewis, WA, the recruits' airliner had departed McChord Air Force Base, refueling in Alaska and Japan. The day they took off marked the beginning of their 365-day tour in 'Nam, and the countdown to DEROS (Date Eligible for Return from Over Seas – “de-ros”) had begun. Others would fly over after processing at Oakland Army Base (Oakland Army Terminal before July 1966), CA, from Travis Air Force Base to arrive at Saigon's Ton Son Nhut Airport and at the 90th Replacement Battalion at Long Binh Army Base outside of the city. Of the almost 2,600,000 who served in Vietnam, only some 7,000 failed to report for deployment.

Worn out from the whirlwind processing, 18–20 hours' flying and jetlag, the first thing that struck Legg was the absence of the half-expected rocket attack, followed by the realization of just how hot and humid it was. There were Vietnamese civilians everywhere, workers on the base, and not a single one suddenly threw a grenade. Columns of gray smoke rose over the base, indicating that they had just missed a rocket attack. The 160 troops off-loading the plane felt vulnerable being unarmed, especially when the steel mesh-covered windows on the buses were noted. They were driven to the 22d Replacement Battalion and along the way saw the three most common sights in Vietnam: barbed wire, sandbags, and motorbikes, sometimes with an entire Vietnamese family clinging on.

Housed in simple two-story barracks similar to their Stateside counterparts, the replacements were rushed through a week of processing and filling out more forms, including a next of kin (NOK) notification. They could check a box saying “not to notify

A Pathfinder ground-guides a Huey as it off-loads infantrymen. Choppers preferred not to actually land on the ground, as rocks or stumps hidden in the grass and brush could damage the underside. All infantry units became equally proficient at airmobile operations, whether they were airmobile, airborne, light, or standard “straight-leg” infantry.





The diversity of Vietnam's terrain is demonstrated by this map of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). The ARVN divided Vietnam into four corps tactical zones (CTZ) for command and control purposes. US command arrangements were overlaid on this. When a veteran is asked where he served in Vietnam he will say Eye Corps, Two Corps, Three Corps, or Four Corps and others will know the approximate area.

as a surprise, all E-2s were promoted to PFC upon arrival.

The men learned that letters could be sent home postage free by simply writing "FREE" on the envelope. If mailed to a friend in another unit they wrote "IN COUNTRY." It was popular to use the tops of C-ration cartons as postcards. Full postage had to be paid on packages. They had to brush their teeth with special one-time-use fluoridated toothpaste and sternly told to take their daily and weekly malaria pills. In some cases individuals were charged with an Article 15 (a small fine or reduction in rank) for failure to follow orders if they contracted malaria, as they had obviously failed to take the pills. Venereal disease was a major problem in Vietnam, and replacements were warned not to partake of local offerings. They were told about incurable "black syphilis," and that if they contracted it they would be sent to an island off Vietnam to spend the rest of their lives and their families notified that they were KIA. Few believed this myth.

They finally found out to what division or separate brigade they were assigned; Legg drew the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). It was a bit unsettling to be told, "Only the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam - "Ar-vin") have been in 'Nam longer than the CAV." Loaded on a C-130 transport, 40 replacements were flown southwest to Phong Dien in the extreme north of Vietnam. The sprawling base was the CAV's home and included an airfield with some of the Division's 400 helicopters, vehicle and aircraft maintenance facilities, communications sites, artillery positions, motor pools, unpainted barracks and mess halls, and

NOK" if they were lightly wounded, but if seriously wounded, killed, or missing their NOK would be notified. They found that if KIA (killed in action), MIA (missing in action), WIA (wounded in action), or taken prisoner, an officer and chaplain would notify their NOK in person. Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance paid the beneficiary \$10,000 plus burial expenses.

They were issued Geneva Conventions and MACV Ration Cards (limiting purchases of electrical appliances, cameras, liquor, and cigarettes, for black market control). American dollars were exchanged for Military Payment Certificates (MPC - "monopoly" or "funny money") and they were informed that the possession and use of US dollars was illegal. MPCs could not be spent on the local economy either; they were required to be converted to piasters, "pees," at military pay offices and banks (US\$1.00 = 115\$VN in 1969). MPCs could only be spent in PXs, military clubs, Army post offices, and Vietnamese concessionaires on bases (barbers, laundries, etc.). Most men had much of their pay deposited in the First National City or Chase Manhattan Banks in check or savings accounts. Legg drew \$50 a month in MPCs and banked the rest. Money could also be sent home by postal money order through Army post offices. Coming

everywhere bunkers in which to take cover from the occasional rocket attack. They had electrical power, clubs, PXs, a post office, troop clinics for sick call, outdoor movies. It was not unlike a Stateside base, just more austere. Steam baths ("steam and cream") and low-cost prostitutes (500 pees for "short-time," 2,000 for "longtime" – all night) were readily available in the off-base "vil." The large division and brigade base camps were relatively secure. They might be rocketed and mortared, but seldom was a ground attack attempted.

They were surprised that Vietnamese civilians pulled most KP and served as hooch maids, cleaning barracks, polishing boots, washing uniforms (strictly hands-off, though that did not prevent some girls from earning extra piasters). Legg had soon found that columns of gray smoke were common on all bases and were not the result of "incoming" – rockets or mortars. Latrines were wooden outhouses with toilet seats over a compartment containing a cut-down 55-gallon drum. The shit-burning detail involved pulling the drums out of a door in the back, stirring in diesel fuel, and burning it. Not a pleasant detail, but the pungent odor was masked by the diesel. Urinals were pipes or plastic mortar round tubes inserted at an angle in a gravel bed sprinkled with DDT powder to keep down flies.

Since 1966, divisions and separate brigades were required to conduct a week or two orientation and acclimatization course. At the FIRST TEAM Academy, replacements were given a bit of the CAV's history, acclimatized through marches and runs, refresher first aid, "helicopter" rappelling from a tower, and land navigation. They also received instruction on booby traps, Claymore mines, ambushes, and patrolling; they familiarization-fired the M79 and M60, were issued gear, and received training on and zeroed their M16A1s. Sometimes they ran a patrol and set up a night ambush outside the base. It was disconcerting to be told, "Forget everything you learned in the States." This was an exaggeration, but their previous training was mostly oriented to a conventional environment, and 'Nam required different tactics and techniques.

There were several types of infantry battalion in Vietnam: "standard" infantry and light infantry, the latter structured for Vietnam, but the former similarly modified – "straight-leg" – infantry. Mechanized battalions were equipped with M113A1 armored personnel carriers (APCs or "tracks"), one per squad, which they rode on top of, rather than inside, for fear of mines and rocket-propelled grenades. Airborne infantry battalions were of course parachute-qualified, but there was such a shortage of parachutists that many units were designated "airborne" only on paper and sometimes converted to airmobile. Airmobile divisions (1st Cav, 101st Airborne from 1969, AMERICAL Divisions – though not so designated) possessed enough "organic" helicopters (ones permanently assigned to the unit) to lift one-third of the division at once, giving them unprecedented tactical mobility. All other infantry battalions were just as proficient in air assaults using abundant non-divisional aviation battalions. There were even



While UH-1D/H Hueys were used for combat assaults and many other missions, when troops were transported into a secured area or firebase the CH-47 Chinook, or "Shithook," was used. They could carry up to 33 troops, although in Vietnam it was fewer because of high temperatures, the infantrymen's loads and extra armament, and armor. Troops took a deep breath before loading or off-loading a Chinook, as the exhaust blasting from the engine housings above the tailgate scorched the air like a blast furnace.



Ten cent Military Payment Certificate (MPC) or "funny money." Also issued in five, 25 and 50 cent as well as one, five, ten, and 20 dollar denominations.



A CH-53 Tarhe, or "Skyhook," heavy-lift helicopter delivers a 155mm M114A1 howitzer to a ridge-top firebase. A firebase such as this was often in place only for a few days to support an operation and was then relocated to another hilltop. Defenses were hasty and sometimes not even concertina wire was strung.

A rifle-platoon leader and his radio-telephone operator (RTO). Lieutenants selected their RTO with care from the sharpest men and they performed as a team. Many platoon leaders did all the talking on the radio. Others relayed to the RTO and he did the talking. The soldiers wear body armor vests, "flak vests," which were not too commonly worn by Army troops.



riverine battalions transported in armored troop transports – armed and armored landing craft in the Mekong Delta. 11Bs were not specifically trained for the different types of battalions, other than paratroopers; they learned their duties on the job.

Meals on the large bases were mainly B-rations: canned, dehydrated, and preserved foods, mostly in #10 (1-gallon) cans. Some A-rations – fresh and frozen foods (mostly steaks, pork chops, chicken, fish) – were served, and bread was baked in base bakeries. Iced tea, fruit juice, and coffee were also served. Even milk was available. Filled milk – powdered milk

reconstituted with water and fat – came from a plant at Long Binh. Eggs were mostly powdered. Some fresh vegetables and canned fruits were available. Similar fare was served on fire support bases, but no A-rations because of lack of refrigeration.

On graduation day the men were told which battalion they were assigned to. Legg and four others were loaded in a Huey, their first chopper ride, and flown to a firebase. This was their first chance to view the terrain they would be working in – horizon to horizon of vivid green jungle. From their seat it looked beautiful, but then they would see kilometers-long swathes of shattered trees and craters from B-52 Arc Light strikes and burned-out villages.

The firebase was a sad sight, a ragged muddy or dusty scar of a clearing gouged into the jungle. There were one or two coils of meandering concertina wire around an irregular-shaped bulldozed earthen berm, green sandbag bunkers – no two alike – donut-like artillery positions, dozens of radio antennas, columns of gray smoke from shit-burning and endlessly howling generators, helicopters constantly arriving and departing among blowing dust. All this promoted the response: "It hits home, we're really in it now." The troops lived in rat- and roach-infested, wet and overly hot sandbag bunkers or slept beneath culvert pipe sections covered with a couple of layers of sandbags.

Soldiers on the firebase were lean and gaunt-looking, their uniforms, boots, web gear, hair, and skin tinted pale maroon from the deep red soil. Some stared at the new guys, but most ignored them. They'd seen plenty before of what the *Army Digest* called "funny new guys."

BELIEF AND BELONGING

The men were met by an NCO and led through the base's labyrinth of bunkers and trenches to the battalion command post (CP). The sergeant major welcomed them, told them what he expected and to listen to their NCOs. They were in the CAV now and he expected them to give their best. Another NCO led them to a grubby sandbagged company CP. Here another "lifer," the first sergeant, laid down the law and welcomed them to "the best company in the battalion." They filled out



An M60 machine gunner festooned with 7.62mm ammunition belts. Note that the belts are arranged with the bullets pointing outwards to prevent the tips from digging into the neck.

paperwork and stacked their duffel bags and rucks outside. They met the company CO, the "Old Man" or the "Six" (derived from the radio code for a CO). The "Top" showed them around the company area and then turned them over to their platoon sergeants, who may or may not have been lifer-types, most being 20-something staff sergeants. He too read the riot act and then assigned Legg to a squad.

The eight men of 1st Squad, 2d Platoon, Charlie Company, were stripped to the waist and filling sandbags, a seemingly unending task in a firebase. They were a mixed lot – Whites from across the country, one a college dropout – from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. Two were Blacks and one a Hispanic. They had been "in-country" from three to 10 months. The buck sergeant squad leader had been in the Army over two years and in-country eight months, having served a tour in Alaska. They regarded Legg with little apparent interest, shook hands as the squad leader rattled off nicknames and last names, the names he would remember them by; for most he never knew their full names or even where they were from. Legg would get to know them closely on one level, but in many ways he would know little about most of them.

Most soldiers immediately began counting off their 365 days. Some waited until later. The six-month point was sobering to many realizing they had just as much time left as they had already spent. If not sooner, most started a "short-timer calendar" at 30 days.⁶

Few young Americans knew anything about Vietnam or the war. Few watched television news or read the papers, at least not about the war. Rare was the 18-year-old who could even show you where Vietnam was on a map, much less understand what the war was about. Some thought it was a civil war ... it wasn't. The author had a couple of high-school students ask him about the war when he returned and they thought we were fighting the Japanese.

⁶ This was usually in the form of a woman's body or an outline of Vietnam divided into 30 or even 365 numbered segments to be penciled in.



The rifle platoon's two M60 machine guns, or "pigs," were a key part of the platoon's firepower. Prior to the introduction of small pin-on and sew-on collar rank insignia, subdued rank insignia were worn on the sleeves, here Spec 4.

The rifle squad's two 40mm M79 grenade launchers provided a third of the squad's firepower. On occasion all or part of a platoon's M79s were concentrated in a group for concentrated fire on enemy positions or snipers. This grenadier has hand grenade arming rings and pins inserted in his boonie hat's camouflage band. These were handy for neutralizing VC booby traps, which often utilized hand grenades. US grenade pins could be inserted in Chicom and Soviet grenades as well.



While not educated politically to any degree nor barraged with government propaganda even approaching what any communist government inflicted on its people, the average middle-American values of conservatism, God-given rights, and anti-communism were strong. Many soldiers who served in Vietnam had fathers and uncles who had fought for those same values just 20-odd years earlier in World War II.

While the war was increasingly unpopular or thought of as un-winnable or unmerited or just plain wrong, a large percentage of the population did not believe that the US should cut and run. Many did feel that it was attempting to halt the spread of

communism, that the South Vietnamese people had the right to defend themselves, and that it was just that we aid them. It was at the higher military and political levels that the war was poorly conceived and managed. It was the politicians who lacked the wherewithal and not the soldiers.

Drug culture

Drugs were an increasing problem throughout the war. As opposition to the war rose at home, leadership deteriorated, and as numbers of draftees increased, drug usage grew. The use of draftees as a whole was not the cause, but it did increase the numbers of less than motivated soldiers who resented enforced military service, and felt that their lives had been disrupted, and that they would spend a "wasted" year in a war they wanted nothing of. Drugs could be purchased at low cost from Vietnamese, though a few soldiers set themselves up as dealers. Marijuana was the most common, but cocaine and heroin came into increasing use. Drugs, especially marijuana, were used on combat operations by some troops, but more often it was not tolerated by most of them, at least in the bush. It was not as widespread in infantry units as assumed, but much more prevalent in support units. Use varied from unit to unit. Up to nine soldiers supported every infantryman "beating the bush." Employed in often boring and mundane jobs, drug use, alcoholism, racism, and dissent was more common in the rear among the REMFs – "rear echelon motherf**kers," as they were known to the "grunts."

Rest and recreation

Troops need time off. A five- or six-day Rest and Recreation (R&R), non-chargeable to annual leave with free airfare, was authorized after in-country for four months, plus a three-day in-country R&R at Vung Tau or China Beach.⁷ Sydney was extremely popular, and many married men met their wives in Hawaii. Though not encouraged, they could take a seven-day leave to R&R Centers or other places accessible by military hop, such as Okinawa. When a death occurred in the immediate family, individuals were flown home and granted 30 days' compassionate leave. If a soldier extended six months in Vietnam, he received a 30-day leave home and another R&R.

⁷ R&R Centers were located at Bangkok, Thailand; Honolulu, Hawaii; Manila, Philippines; Sydney, Australia; Hong Kong; Singapore; Tokyo; Taipei, Taiwan; and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Relations in the ranks

Legg met his platoon leader later in the day, a 2nd lieutenant in his mid-20s. His source of commission was college ROTC, which he had taken for four years in a state university to pay for part of his tuition and then owed six years' active duty. He attended the 12-week Infantry Officer Basic Course (OBC) at "Ft Benning School for Boys" after commissioning. Others had a college degree without having taken ROTC. Upon joining the Army they could volunteer for the 23-week Infantry Officer Candidate School (OCS) at Ft Benning, GA, with no requirement for IOBC. Most officers had served at least a year in troop or training units prior to deployment. Second lieutenants were automatically promoted to 1st after 12 months and to captain after another 12.

In most instances relations were cordial enough, but officers did have to maintain a certain distance. How well this was perceived by the troops and handled by the officers was very much personality driven and also depended on company and battalion leadership. Known simply as the "LT," in the field, the lieutenant endured the same ordeals as his platoon. In the FSB he was often quartered separately and frequently burdened with extra company administrative duties. The running of the platoon was left to the platoon sergeant, who essentially became a foreman for endless work details. Some lieutenants tried to become their men's "buddy," others remained aloof and even condescending. It was difficult under such conditions to strike an even balance – know your men, but don't become too familiar.

It was rare that relations were hostile, but it occurred. Frustration with the war and with their lot in life, constant danger, harsh conditions, drugs, and increasing racial issues contributed to the stress. Most enlisted men were destined to serve out their year in a platoon. Most lieutenants did six to seven months as a platoon leader and then went on to become a company XO or CO or drew a "softer" headquarters company assignment. This could lead to officers being viewed as a privileged class and to further resentment, but this again depended on personalities. Lax discipline was just as much a cause of problems as overly strict and unfair authority.

"Fragging," the use of grenades to murder or harass disliked leaders or other individuals, did occur, but not nearly on the scale depicted in novels and motion pictures. Fragging was usually conducted as a graduated sequence of warnings: first a smoke grenade, then a tear gas grenade, then a frag grenade without pin pulled, and finally a frag with pin pulled – the targeted individual usually got the message before the process ran its full course. There were 199 homicides from all causes within the Army in Southeast Asia (including Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos) from 1961 to 1976. One source cites 500 fragging incidents from 1968 to 1972, and another source claims 363 from 1970 to 1972. Not all resulted in death or injury. Some 62 percent were directed against officers, mostly lower ranking. Most of the remainder were aimed at staff sergeants and above.

Racial tensions increased throughout the war. It was not so much of an issue in combat units because of the shared adversity, close living conditions, and reliance on everyone within a small group. It was much more of

Troops of a rifle company's mortar platoon in the field. A mortar platoon had three 81mm mortars. Usually only one or two were carried to the field. They more often stayed in the firebase, as the mortars and ammunition were too heavy and only a limited number of rounds could be carried. Companies operated under the umbrella of artillery, gunships, and close-air support.





The 81mm M29A1 mortars normally remained in firebases for close-in defense and to support local security patrols. Besides HE and WP ammunition, they also fired parachute illumination flares, one of their most valuable uses.

The AN/PRC-25 radio, or "prick-25," was the standard platoon and company-level radio. Weighing 20 pounds, it was a substantial load coupled with rifle, web gear, smoke grenades, heavy spare batteries, and accessories, carried here in a canvas bag on the left side. RTOs were sniper targets and the radio was sometimes carried inside a rucksack or covered with a sandbag.



a problem in support units. It was occasionally seen in combat units though, and the longer a unit remained in a base the stronger the tendency for individuals to migrate toward others of their own social background, which was divided along racial lines. Whites too splintered into sub-groups, much like those found in high schools.

Maintaining the esprit de corps

Diversions in a base were few: card-playing, occasional movies, reading, the rare United Service Organization (USO) show, writing letters, and reading the much-anticipated letters from home. In 1965 the new cassette

tapes were coming into use and for the first time an electronic means of sending mail was available. Cassette tapes also provided music (rock, folk, country and western, rhythm and blues). The Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) provided programming, mostly re-runs of popular Stateside television shows, but also local weather bulletins and public service announcements warning soldiers of the dangers of drugs and spending US dollars on the local economy. The military-run *Stars and Stripes* newspaper, *Army Digest* magazine, and divisional newspapers provided information. There were few opportunities for organized sports.

Life in a firebase consisted of endless work details: building and rebuilding bunkers and quarters, filling sandbags, stringing and repairing barbed wire, digging drainage ditches, burning out latrines, KP, unloading supplies and ammunition from helicopters, trash details, perimeter guard, radio watch, local security patrols, manning observation (day) and listening (night) posts, and more.

The Army made a major effort to provide meaningful meals during Thanksgiving and Christmas. Firebase meals were served on paper plates and cups and with plastic-wear to eliminate the health hazard of mess-kit washing. Breakfast and dinner were usually B-rations and lunch Cs. The Fourth of July was usually celebrated in the form of a more intense and colorful evening "mad minute." Religious services were available in firebases. Mail too was important to the Army, and every effort was used to get it to the troops in remote locations and while on operations.

The outlook of individuals ranged from a strong sense of patriotic duty to extreme anger at the disruption to their lives and a loathing of what they were to face. Most men called to the colors made the best of it and did their duty. Among those volunteering, and there were a great many of them, even late in the war, their reasons were varied: patriotism, sense of duty, adventure, a challenge, to gain experience, learn a technical skill, gain self-respect, or the opportunity for an education. Many wished to prove themselves to themselves or others, or had no employment prospects, who saw the opportunity for a better life than they had

living in poverty or a poor relationship or a bad family situation at home, or because a judge gave them the option of the military or jail time. Many admitted they were seeking discipline and direction. Others felt the war was just, and while many could have gotten deferments, they felt strongly that if they backed the war they should prove it and not just let others fight it. Others fell for the packaged image presented by recruiters, or the picture painted by the few pro-war novels and non-fiction books. Their experiences were mixed. Some came out of the war disillusioned, feeling that they had been sold a bill of goods; others felt they had benefited and realized their expectations. For many the war would be a defining event in their lives, an experience that changed their lives and their entire view of life for good or bad. How often has one heard, "You know, he's different since he came back from Vietnam?" No kidding, what a surprise.

THE BOONIES: ON CAMPAIGN

The "Boondocks," the "boonies," the "bush," "Indian Territory"; this is where infantrymen spent most of their time. Combat operations could be of a few days' duration, or up to five or six weeks without seeing a firebase. To the grunt it was a company-size operation. It made no difference to him if his company was operating as part of a battalion, brigade, or division-level operation. He saw little of other companies. He might hear their fire, overhear radio transmissions, see dozens of helicopters flashing over, and jets "bring smoke" (bomb runs or artillery strikes), but down in the bush he had a very limited view of the world. In the forested and brush-covered northern mountains, the southern double- and triple-canopy jungles, in densely vegetated swamps, even on the elephant grass-covered plains of the central highlands, he could see little, often just a few men around him.

The climate is typically in the high 90-degree Fahrenheit range with equally high humidity. In the northern highlands it can become chilly at night, and it experiences a "wetter dry season." There are two seasons: the November to April dry season or northeast monsoon, and the June to October wet season or southwest monsoon. Soldiers claimed that there were three seasons: wet, dry, and dusty, occurring at hourly intervals. Mosquitoes, dry land and water leeches, red and black ants, scorpions, centipedes, snakes, and flies were a bother. Malaria, dengue fever, dysentery, diarrhea ("Hershey squirts," the topic of many discussions), "undiagnosed fevers," heat exhaustion, and dehydration were common ailments. Everything stung, bit, or jabbed you.

PFC Legg was assigned to Mojo, a wiry black kid from up north and a veteran of seven months. Mojo did not much care for the "buddy team" assignment, but told Legg, "Do what I say and you might make it through this crap. Play stupid, you end up wrapped up in a poncho and stuffed in a body-bag." Mojo had his "cherry" (slang for a first timer) dump out his ruck and threw out and added to its contents, and more canteens were drawn from supply.

A rifle squad cautiously advances up a trail after receiving sniper fire. Note that the rear men keep an eye on the flank. Their rucksacks have been left in the nearby patrol base.



Charlie Company was alerted that it would airmobile into an area and conduct a search-and-destroy mission⁸. As usual no duration was specified. Mojo gave Legg a 100-round M60 belt, a Claymore bag, two pop-up flares, and three colored smokes. He learned that over the radio they were not called red, yellow, green, or violet, but cherry, lemon, lime, and grape or other shades. It might fool the enemy monitoring their radios, as they would try to confuse aircraft by throwing the same color smoke. Red was only thrown when contact was made or to warn helicopters of enemy fire.

Mojo showed him how to strip down C-rats. They would receive a minor resupply every three days and a major every sixth. The minor brought Cs, water, and ammo, a quick in and out. Three days meant nine 1-pound meals, but most only ate two Cs a day. Unwanted items were discarded along with the cartons and the cans packed in spare socks to reduce rattling.

The UH-1H Huey helicopters arrived early in the morning. The company was divided into sticks of six men. In theory a Huey could carry 11 troops, but with the addition of door guns, ammunition, two gunners, and the high temperatures affecting lift capability, only six or seven could be carried. Before loading, Legg's squad leader admonished him: "Stay on your toes and pay attention to Mojo."

Piling out of the chopper the stick "chogied" (moved rapidly) through elephant grass across the landing zone (LZ) to the tree line. No enemy fire: a "hot" LZ was rare. Three lifts were required to insert the company. Once assembled they moved out in a single file, the "long green line." Movement formations and tactics were kept simple to ease control and because of inexperienced leadership. Operations entailed a lot of walking in rough terrain, slow, often boring, yet dangerous. Many assume that paths were hacked with machetes through the brush and bamboo, but this was seldom done – it was too noisy. The long green line pushed and crawled "busting brush." Short breaks were frequent. The company's position was reported hourly to "higher."

The first night in a "remain overnight" (RON) position was tough on Legg. Worn out from his first day in the bush, he took his turn maintaining the 50 percent alert: two hours on, two off, rotating with Mojo. They shared the single air mattress and poncho liner they carried. If the enemy did not appear too active, only one squad member stood guard, with each man pulling one hour. They ate a C-rat in the evening and one in the morning, maybe just C-rat "John Wayne crackers" or cookies for lunch. Water was collected from streams or from rain running off ponchos, but chlorine-tasting water was brought in by helicopter too. Water purification tablets were essential for stream water. Pre-sweetened Kool-Aid sent from home cut lukewarm turbid water. C-rats and coffee might be heated with a little burning ball of C4 or heating tablets ("heat tabs"), but more often they were eaten cold. Cs were filling, not all that bad tasting, but when cold, sometimes greasy, and



Infantrymen enter a Vietnamese village through a drainage ditch beneath a barbed-wire fence. Many villages had such barriers as a mostly ineffective deterrent to visiting VC. The VC would often make nocturnal visits to spread propaganda, collect food, extort "war tax" money, and ask villagers about American movements.

⁸ Such missions were later termed offensive sweeps or reconnaissance-in-force because of the adverse connotations implied by the media.

they became monotonous. Tabasco sauce was a favorite condiment for spicing up the flavor. "Care packages" sent from home with foods and snacks were valued and shared with one's squad. The major resupply day was often a rest day. The unit secured an LZ and might receive two lifts. If possible, hot chow was flown in in Mermit containers to be picked up by the second flight. Mail was delivered and picked up; radio batteries, fresh socks, and replacements for damaged uniforms were issued.

Units seldom moved at night: it was too slow and loud. American units were not generally known for their noise discipline and a RON was not always silent. Moving in daylight they were sometimes noisy, and radios were even fitted with speakers allowing transmissions to be heard. Americans were also notoriously lax with litter discipline. The VC scrounged up expended smoke grenades, safety levers and pins, LAW tubes, Claymore components, ammunition boxes and containers, grenade and projectile packing tubes, propellant containers, sandbags, bandoliers, loading clips, machine gun links, C-rat cans (some unopened), and expended batteries. They made munitions from them, and a "dead" battery had enough juice to detonate a mine. The VC even recycled field dressings, IV bottles, and morphine syringes. There were of course exceptions to laxness, but it was more common than the exception.

The average soldier respected the enemy, especially NVA regulars. VC Main Force were good too, but were mostly filled with North Vietnamese, even before the 1968 Tet Offensive decimated the VC. These forces were conventional light infantry. They were not guerrillas, though they employed many guerrilla techniques. From 1965 Vietnam was a low-intensity conventional conflict. The enemy may not have employed armor, artillery, or aircraft, but operations on both sides were divisional or multiple-division actions. Local VC guerrillas supported them, and guerrilla tactics were still an aspect of the war, but for the most part American soldiers were fighting light conventional forces. Local Force VC were more a nuisance, being typically described as "Three gooks carrying an AK, a magazine, and a grenade." The VC and NVA were commonly referred to simply as the "Cong" or "Charlie," derived from the phonetic alphabet "Victor Charlie" or "Chuck," the nickname for Charles.

The attitude of soldiers toward the Vietnamese is often discussed and was a major dynamic. Regardless of the line pitched by the US government and Army, the average grunt thought very little of the people they were fighting to protect from communism and instill democracy in. To many soldiers they were unmotivated, indifferent, lazy, unclean, selfish, uneducated, and would do anything for a piaster. There was widespread corruption within the Vietnamese government and ARVN. They thought even less of the ARVN, who often appeared unmotivated and unreliable (though there were many well-led, effective units). There was a degree of



A rifle squad advances across a clearing. This is a 1965 photograph with the troops wearing Stateside fatigues and cotton M1956 web gear. They would soon receive jungle fatigues and later nylon LBE.

Most villagers were pro-government and welcomed Americans. Most of the infantrymen here wear towels around their necks to mop up sweat, "drive-on rags." This machine gunner has taped his baggy trouser legs to help prevent them from snagging on vegetation.



C-rations

"Meal, combat, individual" (MCI) or "C-rats" were issued in cases of 12 different meals providing 1,200 calories each. A 3 x 5 x 6-inch carton held three cans (large *, small #), white plastic spoon, and a foil accessory packet with a book of matches, small roll of toilet paper, salt, sugar, instant coffee, non-dairy creamer packets, two Chiclets (gum), and a pack of four cigarettes (Camel, Chesterfield, Kent, Kool, Lucky Strike, Marlboro, Pall Mall, Salem, Winston).

B-1 Unit:

Meat unit# – chicken or turkey loaf, beefsteak, chopped ham and eggs, or sliced fried ham.

Fruit unit* – applesauce, fruit cocktail, peaches, or pears.

B unit# – 7 crackers, peanut butter, candy disc (solid chocolate, chocolate cream, chocolate coconut).

B-2 Unit:

Meat unit* – spaghetti and meatballs with tomato sauce or beef slices and potatoes with gravy, ham and lima beans, beans in frankfurter chunks with tomato sauce, or meatballs with beans in tomato sauce.

B unit# – 4 crackers, caraway or pimento processed cheese spread.

Dessert unit# – fruitcake, pecan roll, or pound cake.

B-3 Unit:

Meat unit# – boned chicken or meat loaf, chicken and noodles, or spiced beef.

B unit* – 4 cookies, cocoa beverage powder; apple, grape, berry/mixed fruit, or strawberry jam.

White bread#

racial prejudice among Americans too, and the soldiers' common names for Vietnamese were "gooks," "slopes," "dinks," and "zipperheads." Another factor was the type of Vietnamese most often encountered by soldiers. One does not develop a kindly outlook toward a people when exposed mainly to prostitutes, pimps, bargirls, and drug and pornography dealers. The population suffered from almost 30 years of war weariness and changes in corrupt governments. The attitude had evolved to make the best of it for oneself. Rural villagers did not care who ran the country; they just wanted to be left alone to continue their simple lives.

There is a tendency among critics of the war to claim incorrectly that it was common for American soldiers to carry out atrocities such as these: "personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blew up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks, and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam." Yes, atrocities

occurred, but they were extremely rare. It was not policy, it was not tolerated, and it was not acceptable to most American soldiers. There are far more examples of selfless sacrifice and efforts to help the people of Vietnam than are usually recounted.

FIREFIGHT: EXPERIENCE IN BATTLE

After a week in the bush Legg was getting used to his new life. He was always tired owing to the heat, humidity, stress, irregular sleep, poor chow, and endless "humping" up and down hills, wading through streams, "bustin' brush." Because he was a "cherry" he was thankful that he did not have to "walk point," the lead man looking for booby traps, enemy movement, with his M16 set on "rock and roll" – full-auto. He soon found that booby traps were not scattered at random through the jungle, but were found around firebases to catch patrols, on approaches to enemy base camps, and on trails around VC-controlled villages. Regardless, mines⁹ and booby traps accounted for 32 percent of US casualties.

A LOH (pronounced "loach") light observation helicopter reported several men in green uniforms running into the jungle from a nearby "Ap" (village) as the battalion's Alpha Company approached from the west. Charlie Company, moving in from the east, halted while

A Huey drops off infantrymen as their company secures an artillery-blasted hilltop as a firebase. The second man carries a case of C-rats.



9 A mine often depicted in movies shows a soldier stepping on it, hearing a click, shouting "Mine!" and told that if he moves it will detonate. Such mines exist only in Hollywood.

the platoon leaders conferred with the CO. 3d Platoon and the company HQ continued east toward the village following a ridge. 1st Platoon moved down the ridge's north side to follow a stream toward the "vil," it being suspected that the fleeing enemy might use the densely vegetated ravine as an escape route. 2d Platoon would protect 1st Platoon's north flank by conducting a "cloverleaf" – a series of sweeps that would circle back to their point of origin – into the narrow belt of woods past the stream in event the enemy chose that route. They would also swing out into the broad elephant-grass field beyond the woods and check for possible escape trails. 1st Platoon moved down to the stream, establishing a blocking position, while 2d Platoon splashed through and began its looping search through the belt of trees. While the underbrush was less dense than in the wide ravine, visibility was limited and the going was slow. 1st Platoon continued down the stream toward the "vil." It was a seldom-seen situation in which the platoons spread out widely without being coiled together. The risk was acceptable, as it was only what was believed to be a small NVA foraging patrol that was being hunted. 2d Platoon followed a circuitous route through the trees to patrol out into the field and then circle back through the woods toward the ravine.

Reaching the wood line, the platoon paused to scan the broad expanse of elephant grass swaying in the breeze. It was impossible to tell if anyone was hidden amongst the dense, head-high grass. The platoon moved out, 26 men in single-file, silent, with Legg's squad in the lead. The platoon leader followed the lead squad and the platoon sergeant brought up the platoon's rear with the "tail-end Charlie" or "tail gunner." Shortly after entering the field the ground became soggy and wet, then the water deepened. They were in a long-abandoned rice paddy. With the point man pushing through grass, the column moved at a snail's pace. The "point" was rotated frequently relieving the exhausting effort. The squad leader followed behind the point with compass in hand and tried to maintain a pace count to estimate the distance traveled. Legg found himself behind the squad leader as the point rotated. He turned to Legg, "Take the point Cherry. Just stay cool, take it slow." Legg moved up, switching his selector to full-auto, a round already in the chamber. He pushed through the grass in calf-deep water unable to see anything around him and stumbled up a low grass-covered dyke. Some distance beyond the dyke he discovered a narrow open stream of muddied water, an irrigation ditch. He waved the squad leader up. Looking around, he muttered, "The water's muddy. Someone's been through here." He dropped back, motioning one of the grenadiers to take position beside him.

The platoon leader was moving up the line for a look-see. A ripping sound tore across the field, close. More rips and a grenade detonated as the platoon opened fire blindly into the grass on both sides of the column. With movement on both sides of him, Legg heard men splashing into the shallow ditch seeking what cover it offered. Legg slid over the low berm edging the ditch and heard bullets snapping over his head. Most of the troops were firing semi-auto, but straying rapid shots into the screening grass. The two M60s were hammering



VC Repatriation (surrender)
leaflet aimed at US servicemen.
Such propaganda attempts had
virtually no effect.

A patrol returns to a firebase
after a local security patrol. To
protect firebases from surprise
attacks, security patrols
reconnoitered throughout the
immediate area and observation
posts were established. At night
closer-in listening posts were
manned and ambushes
established on likely approach
routes.





A firebase hacked out of the jungle was in a constant state of construction. Sandbags, empty ammunition boxes, and pallets were the basic construction materials for fighting positions, bunkers, and living quarters, called "hooches" regardless of the form they took. Here a battery of 105mm M102 howitzers is being emplaced.

short bursts punctuated by an occasional M79 thump and bangs as rounds detonated. Repeated AK-47 bursts ripped from both sides. On the far side of the ditch he heard movement and fired in that direction, surprising himself with a full-auto burst. The grenadier, who had his pistol out and had not fired the M79 yet, glared sharply at him, "Take it easy, man!" Legg switched to semi and triggered more rounds in the direction of the sound. His helmet was knocked over his eyes as Mojo slapped the back of his head while pushing past. "What ya doin, man? Keep cool!" Legg could hear a muted radio conversation behind him in the grass. Someone said, "Light fire team inbound." "Come on, Cherry!" Mojo motioned for Legg to join him down the ditch.

Legg crawled awkwardly through the water on his knees, one hand holding his rifle out of the water.

The firing mostly died out with no visible targets. Yellow smoke coiled up out to the grass behind them and the faint beat of choppers could be heard. Legg could see an AH-1 Hueycobra gunship and an OH-6 LOH barreling in high over the field. Firing broke out with AKs ripping rounds through the grass, and M16s and M60s answered. It quickly increased to a steady roar, and it became impossible to distinguish individual shots and bursts. Legg sensed the NVA were making an effort to break for it before the helicopters arrived. Someone yelled "Beehive, beehive!" and a cluster of five red pop-up flare balls arched into the sky. Mojo grabbed Legg's left arm holding him out of the water and yanked on it, sending him face down into the mud. Puffs of smoke appeared behind the Cobra and long white streaks slanted toward the ground. The white trails terminated in gray puffs followed by a buzzing noise. Making a hard turn the Cobra ran back in from the opposite direction. More rockets leapt out followed by dull booms, dirty white smoke, and showering mud. Another hard turn and its mini-gun was buzzing out 4,000 rounds a minute, like ripping paper, with zipping noises scything through the grass. Small-arms fire died away. Most of the platoon was in the ditch, though some were securing the rear. The frontline was the direction in which one faced. Legg heard the radio crackle and the LT replied, "Thanks much, Blue Max. Out here."

Legg saw the platoon leader wave his arm, and the men were up, weapons at their hips. "Follow me," muttered Mojo cynically, repeating the Infantry motto, "Let's see what we got." Grenades sailed though the air and weapons rattled in short full-auto bursts as they pushed into the grass on line. A surprisingly short distance into the grass they came upon a large ragged, flattened and torn area. Three contorted bodies were lying in the muddy water. Legg's squad leader had him search one. The uniform was wet dark green and riddled with tiny holes, flechette darts poking from some. He gingerly pulled off the Chicom web gear and a small rucksack; it too was punctured by darts. He kept thinking, "I could end up like this." Others troopers snaked through the area and reported two more KIAs. Back on the dyke the medic, "Doc," was treating two wounded as the RTO reported "Dustoff," a medical evacuation (medevac) chopper, was inbound. Word was passed who the WIAs were and that they had minor wounds. Legg was squatting in the water and was surprised to learn that he had emptied four magazines; he did not remember changing them. They

had just “zapped,” “wasted,” “hosed,” “whacked” five young men, the enemy. Legg heard the squad leader say that the 2d Squad had found a blood trail of a wounded VC, “pink and foamy,” indicating the man would not go far; he was bleeding out. No one suggested going in pursuit.

Legg suddenly felt a burning pain as he walked and discovered two small holes in his cargo pocket. Dropping his trousers he found a bullet graze across his thigh, on which Doc smeared betadine and taped on a gauze pad, cautioning him, “Keep it clean and watch for infection.” Mojo slapped him on the arm as they shared a cigarette burning off leeches, “You done good Cherry. You got yaself a friggin’ Purple Heart and CIB¹⁰ on your first time bustin’ brush and runnin’ point.” That was the last time Mojo or anyone called him “cherry”.

THE REAL WORLD: AFTERMATH OF BATTLE

It was a long year for Legg. He did not know how many days he had spent in the boonies, or how many firefights and ambushes he had participated in. One day he was made responsible for a Cherry. The kid did OK; most did. A new LT took over and a month later the new platoon sergeant from another company replaced theirs after being wounded. Legg’s squad leader ended up in the battalion HQ because they needed an assistant ops sergeant, and he could type. The new platoon leader instituted fire teams; Legg was selected as the Alpha Team leader, and eventually promoted to SP4. The new squad leader was a “Shake n’ Bake” who did well, after following the platoon sergeant around for a couple of weeks before being given the squad. Mojo, still a PFC, reluctantly ran the squad until the Shake n’ Bake took over, which was highly resented by Mojo. They once helped ARVN troops forcefully remove civilians from a village to be relocated to a New Life Hamlet and burned their abandoned homes. His squad shoved a scared NVA prisoner around after their machine gunner lost a leg to a grenade, but Legg never saw an atrocity. Mojo rotated home, leaving without saying a word to anyone. In his seventh month Legg went on R&R to Australia. He missed his opportunity for a three-day in-country R&R. Two months later he came down with dengue fever, also called “break-bone fever”: aching joints accompanied by severe headaches and vomiting. Weak, he went back to his platoon after two weeks, but did light duty in the firebase for a week before going back to the bush. Old hands left and new faces arrived, constant turnover owing to the one-year rotation. Years later Legg could not remember many of them. Some he would never forget.

SP4 Legg sweated in the heat and humidity, shivered in the rain, choked in the dust, at times thought he would never be dry again, wanted for chow and water, suffered minor illnesses and diarrhea, endured all sorts of pests and boredom, stared into the jungle listening and waiting ... on



A 105mm M102 howitzer is being prepared to be moved out by sling-loading it under a Chinook helicopter. This base is being abandoned and most of the positions and structures have been bulldozed down. VC scroungers would descend on the base to recover anything useful. The Americans might leave behind booby traps, saturate the area with tear gas powder, ambushes, and fire artillery randomly on the base.

A rifle platoon turns away from the blasting dust, gravel, and twigs thrown up by a landing Chinook that will transport them to their new area of operations (AO). An entire under-strength platoon could be transported in a Chinook.



¹⁰ The Combat Infantryman Badge was a coveted award eligible only to soldiers with an infantry MOS, assigned to infantry units below brigade-level, personally present and under fire and engaged in active ground combat for a period of at least 30 consecutive days in the combat zone.

countless nights, was scared spitless at times, laughed at pranks pulled by buddies, got drunk one night with the LT when they shared jokes about old girlfriends, thought endlessly about family and friends, was reamed out by the Top for something he did not remember doing, saw men die and others suffer horrendous wounds, wondered why a handsome NVA soldier died instead of himself, cried as he gave his remaining Cs to refugee kids on a muddy road, cursed other Vietnamese for not caring about the war, filled a million sandbags and burned a ton of shit, wondered what would happen next, and alternated between questioning and believing in why he was there.

Legg was pulled out of the field a month before his DEROS. He was assigned to a provisional security platoon and spent his final days pulling perimeter guard, filling sandbags, and other work details. While not a formal policy, many units felt a "short-timer" was less than effective in his final weeks, being preoccupied with thoughts of home and thus overly cautious. He was best employed elsewhere. A week, "six days and a wake-up," before his 365th day in country, Legg said what goodbyes he could; his old platoon was in the bush, already filling up with new faces. With a trophy SKS carbine¹¹ in hand, he flew to Phuoc Vinh, the CAV's new base 40 miles north of Saigon, on a work chopper where he turned in his rifle and battered LBE. A C-123 lifted him and other returnees to Bien Hoa Air Base and then a bus to the 90th Replacement Battalion at Long Binh Army Base outside of Saigon, a city few soldiers saw. He turned in most of his jungle fatigues, keeping one set, his boonie hat and boots. MPs searched his duffel bag for drugs and weapons. The returnees were bused to Ton Son Nhut Airport and boarded the "Freedom Bird" for home, the "real world." Once the airliner was airborne the captain announced to the cheering troops that they had left Vietnam airspace.

The next day they arrived in Oakland, CA (or Ft Lewis, WA), for out-processing at the US Army Personnel Center. Customs officers inspected duffel bags and the troops were issued a Public Health Service card, which they were asked to retain for two weeks, notifying doctors that the individual may have been exposed to plague, cholera, and other communicable diseases. Returning troops were kept segregated from those deploying to Vietnam. They were treated to a steak dinner with all the trimmings. Those declining the meal signed a form stating that it had been offered. Soldiers with less than five months remaining to their estimated time of separation (ETS) date were processed for discharge. A physical was given, paperwork for separation completed, a briefing given on veterans' benefits – the most important being the



A heavily loaded rifleman is assisted by two buddies up the side of a stream back. It was exhausting work, day after day, seemingly never ending.

A rifleman takes precautionary aim at an area that might conceal a lurking enemy. Note the bullet hole in the plastic forearm behind the foresight. The infantryman had a love-hate relationship with the M16A1 rifle, what he called the "black rifle" or the "plastic rifle." It had its flaws and benefits.



¹¹ Soldiers could bring a single captured weapon home after approval by the unit intelligence officer. Only bolt-action or semi-automatic shoulder weapons or handguns were approved – no automatic or high explosive-firing weapons, no US or Allied weapons, no munitions.

GI Bill, which provided for a college education and low-interest home loans – and also a briefing on their remaining time on their six-year military obligation. They were happy to hear that they were in the Standby Reserve and not required to join a drilling Reserve or National Guard unit. Out-processing and discharge was accomplished in less than 24 hours. They were paid up to that day, to include any unused leave time. A new Army Green Class A uniform was issued and all necessary insignia provided for the trip home. The Army paid the airfare and booked the flight.

Some disgruntled soldiers immediately purchased civilian clothes and shed their uniforms. Most simply went home quietly. There was no fanfare, no parades, little in the way of a welcome home except from immediate family and friends. There are stories of soldiers being spit on and declared “baby killers.” Such incidents occurred, but were extremely rare. Some Vietnam veterans proud of their service discovered that local veterans’ groups did not always welcome them. Most friends did not want to hear about the war. Veterans tended to keep it to themselves. Many of the wounded required post-service treatment for wounds or illnesses at Veterans Administration hospitals and had less than pleasant experiences. Many of the VA’s deficiencies were eventually corrected. Controversies have lingered regarding soldiers contaminated with Agent Orange defoliant and resulting illnesses.¹² Much has been made of psychological problems suffered by some Vietnam veterans. While veterans have suffered from various difficulties, it is by no means widespread. Most veterans lead perfectly normal and productive lives and remain proud of their service.

COLLECTIONS, MUSEUMS, AND REENACTMENT

Numerous US Army museums display Vietnam War collections. These include the museums of the remaining active-duty divisions that served in Vietnam: 1st Infantry (Ft Riley, KS), 4th Infantry (Ft Hood, TX), 25th Infantry (Schofield Barracks, HI), 82d Airborne (Ft Bragg, NC), 101st Airborne (Ft Campbell, KY), 1st Cavalry Division (Ft Hood). The 5th, 9th,

Typical Decorations

A veteran infantryman, performing no particular acts of valor, though simply being an infantryman could be termed valorous, typically wore a number of decorations over his left breast pocket. From the wearer’s right to left, top to bottom in order of precedence:

Purple Heart – For wounds caused by enemy action.

Army Commendation Medal – Awarded for overall service.

Officers usually received the Bronze Star Medal*.

National Defense Service Medal – For service in the US Armed Forces between 1 January 1961 and 14 August 1974.

Vietnam Service Medal – For service in Vietnam between 3 July 1965 and 28 March 1973. Bronze service stars were worn for participation in designated campaigns.

Vietnam Campaign Medal – Awarded to US armed forces by the government of Vietnam.

The ribbons were topped by the Combat Infantryman Badge. Any special skill badges such as the Parachutist or Pathfinder Badge would be worn below the ribbons on the pocket flap. Gold-framed unit awards such as the Presidential Unit Citation, Valorous Unit Award, Meritorious Unit Commendation, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, and Vietnamese Civil Action Award might be worn above the right breast pocket.

* The ACM and BS were also awarded for valor and identified by a bronze “V” device.

Results of a contact. Infantrymen load a wounded comrade into a medevac chopper. Dustoff chopper crews had a reputation for going into hot pick-up zones to medevac the wounded that regular assault helicopter crew would turn away from. They were far from being considered faint of heart.



¹² It was officially designated “Herbicide Orange,” identified by an orange band on drums. It is reported that the media coined the more sinister “Agent Orange” term. Other color-coded herbicides (purple, pink, blue, green, white) were also employed.

and AMERICAL Infantry Divisions are gone. Most Army posts have a Vietnam display in their museum or historical holding area. Posts with branch museums all have significant Vietnam displays. The National Infantry Museum at Ft Benning, GA, and the US Military Academy Museum at West Point, NY, possess excellent Vietnam collections. The National Vietnam War Museum site in Mineral Wells, TX (near Dallas), was dedicated in 2004, but will not open for some years yet.

While many Vietnam veterans have no desire to see the country again, many do return with the cooperation of the Vietnamese government. They find a few propaganda-filled museums and shops selling reproduction items. Virtually nothing remains of American bases and installations. There are few signs of the war.

The collecting of Vietnam memorabilia, ranging from mementos, uniforms, equipment, and insignia, is a major field. Collectors are strongly urged to use caution and question the authenticity of any item presented as authentic Vietnam-era. This applies to items sold at militaria and gun shows, by private collectors, and especially on e-Bay, where fakes are frequently auctioned as authentic. Fakes are also produced in Vietnam and sold within and outside the country as authentic "Vietnam-made" items, but are post-war reproductions. Collectors are finding that actual Vietnam War items are becoming scarcer and more costly.

Vietnam reenactment groups flourish and are extremely popular in the United States, Britain, France, Japan, and elsewhere. There are even a few VC/NVA reenactment groups. Replica Vietnam War uniforms, equipment, and even rations are available to reenactors.

Vietnam is frequently portrayed in the movies, but it must be understood that these are the products of Hollywood. While many provide some glimpses of an infantryman's reality, for the most part they are misleading and inaccurate. The movies recommended by the author for their degree of accuracy are: *Go Tell the Spartans* (1978), *Hamburger Hill* (1987), *84 Charlie Mopic* (1989), and *We Were Soldiers* (2002).

WEBSITES

Vietnam War and Veteran Resources:

<http://www.vietsandiego.com/docs/vnwar.html>

Vietnam Reproductions and Fakes: <http://www.insigne.org/Fakes-I-Vn.htm>

The Vietnam Data Base: <http://www.thevietnam-database.co.uk/Index.htm>

Korea/Vietnam Reenactments:

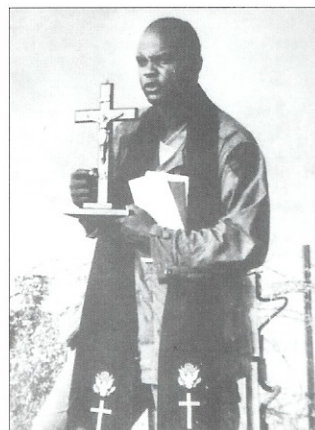
http://www.reenactor.net/main_htmls/korea_nam.html

Vietnam Veterans' Terminology and Slang:

Vietnam Campaign Participation Dates

Campaign	Inclusive Dates
Advisory	March 15, 1962–March 7, 1965
Defense	March 8, 1965–December 24, 1965
Counteroffensive	December 25, 1965–June 30, 1966
Counteroffensive, Phase II	July 1, 1966–May 31, 1967
Counteroffensive, Phase III	June 1, 1967–January 29, 1968
Tet Counteroffensive	January 30, 1968–April 1, 1968
Counteroffensive, Phase IV	April 2, 1968–June 30, 1968
Counteroffensive, Phase V	July 1, 1968–November 1, 1968
Counteroffensive, Phase VI	November 2, 1968–February 22, 1969
Summer–Fall 1969	June 9, 1969–October 31, 1969
Winter–Spring 1970	November 1, 1969–April 30, 1970
Sanctuary Counteroffensive	May 1, 1970–June 30, 1970
Counteroffensive, Phase VII	July 1, 1970–June 30, 1971
Consolidation I	July 1, 1971–November 30, 1971
Consolidation II	December 1, 1971–March 29, 1972
Cease-fire	March 30, 1972–January 28, 1973

A chaplain, what soldiers call a "sky pilot," conducts services in the field. Chaplains were a steady influence, boosted morale, and helped instill confidence. The field ecclesiastical scarf is black with gold-embroidered US coat of arms and cross.



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COLOR PLATE COMMENTARY

A: RECRUIT, FT POLK, LOUISIANA

PV1 Legg may have initially felt uncomfortable in his new uniform, but it was functional and practical: olive green (OG) shade 107 cotton sateen utility uniform, or simply "fatigues" (1 and 2). Fatigues were the routine hot and temperate uniform worn the world over, even in Vietnam, until jungle fatigues were introduced in 1963. The gold-on-black 'US ARMY' tape was worn until a black-on-OG tape was approved in 1968. The black-on-OG nametape had replaced the black-on-white version in 1966. The acting squad leader brassard consisted of a gold-yellow-on navy blue corporal chevron on a black armband.

PVT Legg also wears the M1 steel helmet. Ear protectors are carried in a plastic container by its chain through a jacket buttonhole. The back view displays the unpopular OG shade 106 field cap, or "baseball cap." He is armed with the 7.62mm M14 rifle. The M1956 load bearing equipment (LCE) consists of the utility belt, universal ammunition pouch, first aid case, canteen and carrier, and an M1961 combat pack, or "butt pack."

3.a. M1 steel helmet ("steel pot"). Basic trainees did not wear camouflage covers.

3.b. Laminated nylon helmet liner.

3.c. Helmet liner showing web suspension system.

4.a. Entrenching tool carrier with M6 bayonet-knife and M8A1 sheath.

4.b. M6 bayonet-knife (6.75-in. blade, 11.5-in. overall). The M16A1's M8 bayonet was almost identical.

4.c. Combination entrenching tool with pick.

5.a. Protective mask carrier carried on the left hip and strapped on beneath other web gear.

5.b. The M17 protective mask, or "gas mask."

6. The M1956 universal small arms ammunition pouch held two 20-round M14 magazines, four 20-round M16 magazines, four M2 carbine 30-round magazines, eight M1

rifle 8-round clips, three 40mm M79 grenades, 24 12-gauge shotgun shells, or two hand grenades plus grenade straps on the sides.

7. M1956 first aid case with old-type field dressing.

8. M1956 canteen carrier with 1-quart plastic canteen and canteen cup.

9. M1910 mess kit and utensils.

10. Poncho roll. In garrison training, when the butt pack was unnecessary, the poncho was carried on the back of the belt between the suspender straps.

B: VIET CONG VILLAGE, TIGERLAND

The simulated fortified VC villages of infantry training centers strove to orient infantrymen to the basics of surviving in Vietnam. Realism was compromised by Americans role-playing Vietnamese peasants and VC, the lack of women and children, smaller than real villages, pine trees, and below-freezing winter temperatures.

PV1 Legg (1) stands guard as his buddy (2) cautiously enters a hooch. A drill sergeant (3) looks on, wearing his characteristic Smoky Bear hat, Drill Sergeant Badge, Army Training Center crests, and the Fourth Army patch. The "hat, drill sergeant, male, enlisted," was influenced by its long use by Marine Corps' drill instructors. Drill corporals normally wore a glossy olive green helmet liner with a colored band indicating the training brigade, rank insignia on the front, and army training center and parent army decals on the sides. The Ft Polk village boasted a modest tunnel complex, but because of the high water table and rain it was often flooded. Lined with steel culvert pipe, compasses could not be used to practice mapping the system. It did provide a means of detecting tunnel entrances and air-vents and demonstrated the enemy's ability to pop-up behind soldiers. The villages were booby-trapped with simulated devices to instill a degree of caution.

Mild southern winters called for M1951 OG shade 107 field jackets with liners and sometimes heavier M1951 field trousers over fatigue trousers. Troops attending infantry AIT could be differentiated from basic trainees by camouflage helmet covers. Here M12 blank adapters are fitted to the M14 rifles.

C: BARRACKS LIFE, TIGERLAND

The half day's training on Saturdays was often dedicated to inspections. Trainees were provided mimeographed diagrams of the manner in which clothing was hung and equipment stowed in wall lockers, in footlockers, and laid out on the bunk or on a spread poncho before an erected pup tent for a "full field layout inspection." There was a good deal of harassment in the first inspections with drill sergeants flinging footlocker trays down the aisle, racking gear and even the mattress off the bunk with a sweep of the arm, and throwing neatly hung uniforms out of lockers whether the items were displayed correctly or not. This reinforced the need for attention to detail. By the fifth week of BCT things settled down, and trainees realized the real purpose of inspections was to ensure the serviceability and cleanliness of



Up and away. Units of the 1st Cavalry Division were frequently relocated, not just tactically by helicopter, but operationally to other parts of Vietnam by C-130 transports. The division's lightweight equipment and airmobility mindset made it a useful fire brigade to be deployed rapidly where needed. The troops grabbed their rucks, duffel bags, and unit signs and went wherever necessary.



Arriving at their new base of operations, troops move off the runway to establish their new brigade base and would soon commence operations.

uniform items, equipment, and quarters. Inspections became more routine during AIT. That fifth week inspection was important for another reason: pass or failure determined whether or not one received his first off-post pass. Seldom-seen company officers conducted the later inspections, with a drill sergeant noting transgressions.

PV2 Legg (1) now wears infantry crossed rifles on his collar, since he is undertaking infantry AIT. He displays an Expert Badge with rifle and machine gun qualification bars, and a Marksman Badge with automatic rifle and pistol bars. The drill sergeant (3) also wears infantry distinctions in the form of robin's-egg-blue plastic discs behind his collar and hat insignia. Beneath the coveted Combat Infantryman's Badge are the typical ribbons of a soldier with over three years' service and a Vietnam tour (viewer's left-to-right): Army Commendation Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, and Vietnam Campaign Medal. On the right of his chest are the Presidential Unit Citation and Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm – unit awards. A company training officer (2) wears the service cap, more commonly known as the "bus driver" or "flying saucer" cap. The 2LT wears the Sharpshooter Badge for rifle and Marksman Badge for pistol.

D: INDIVIDUAL EQUIPMENT AND PLATOON WEAPONS

It was common for both subdued and full-color insignia to be worn on the same jungle fatigues. Armed with the XM16E1 rifle, troops soon found the nine 20-round magazines prescribed in the basic load insufficient. The lightweight rucksack, although developed for tropical (and arctic) use, was unpopular and soon fell from general use. The frame's wide lower portion meant that items could only be worn on the front of the pistol belt (1 and 2).

3. 40mm M79 grenade launcher.

4.a. 40mm ammunition was issued in six-round bandoliers.

4.b. A variety of 40mm ammunition was available (left-to-right): M406 HE, XM576E1 multiple projectile (27 x 33-cal 00 buckshot), and M583A1 white star parachute for illumination. A number of colored smoke signal cartridges similar in appearance to the white star parachute were used.

5. A few 66mm M72 light anti-tank weapons (LAW) were carried by platoons for use against snipers and bunkers. It is pictured in the extended firing mode. D2 depicts it in the closed carrying mode.

6. M49A1 trip flares were attached to barbed-wire pickets or stakes by a mounting bracket, or simply wired to a tree and rigged for activation by a tripwire. The magnesium flare ignited immediately, burning for 55–70 seconds at 50,000 candlepower, and illuminated up to a 300m radius.

7. Handheld ground signals, or "pop-ups," consisted of an aluminum launch-tube (7.a.) containing a rocket-propelled signal carrier (7.b.). They were carried removed from the steel packing tube (7.c.), the muzzle cap removed and slipped on to the opposite end, held at arm's length vertically, and the cap slapped with the palm of the other hand to fire a variety of colored flares and smoke signals to 600–700 feet:

M125 green, M158 red, and M159 white star cluster (five freefalling stars).

M195 green, M126 red, and M127 white star parachute (parachute-suspended flare).

M128 green, M129 red, and M194 yellow smoke parachute (parachute-suspended smoke).

8. Chemical burning-type grenades:

8.a. M7A2 tear gas to flush out tunnels and bunkers.

8.b. AN-M8 white smoke for screening.

8.c. AN-M14 incendiary for destroying equipment.

8.d. M18 colored smoke in green, red, yellow, and violet for air-to-ground signaling and marking positions.

9. The meal, combat, individual, or C-rations, was the most widely used field ration.

10. The lensatic compass, usually carried in a first aid pouch, was issued to platoon and squad leaders and platoon sergeants.

11. The plastic MX-911/U flashlight's screw-off bottom compartment contained an extra bulb and filters to reduce its light for night use.

12. M16-armed automatic riflemen were issued a cloth pin-type bipod in either a simple early-issue case or the XM3 case, which carried cleaning gear.

VC suspects are led to a helicopter for pick-up. The lack of a Vietnam national identity card was grounds for apprehension.



E: THE RIFLE PLATOON, THE GRUNT'S FAMILY

Whether standard, light, airborne, airmobile or mechanized, the rifle platoon was organized in essentially the same manner. Its 44 men were organized into a platoon headquarters with a platoon leader (LT), platoon sergeant (his position and rank), and an AN/PRC-25-equipped radio-telephone operator, all with M14s or M16A1s. An aidman and mortar forward observer were attached. The three 10-man rifle squads had a squad leader (staff sergeant) and two fire teams, each with a team leader (sergeant), grenadier, automatic rifleman, and one or two riflemen. Mechanized rifle squads also had a driver. All were armed with M14s or M16A1s, except grenadiers, who had M79 grenade launchers and M1911A1 pistols, and automatic riflemen, who had either M14E2 automatic rifles or M16A1s with bipod and were "authorized" to fire full-automatic. The 11-man weapons squad had a squad leader (staff sergeant) and two each machine gunners, assistant machine gunners, recoilless rifle gunners, assistant recoilless rifle gunners, and ammunition bearers. Squad armament was two M60 machine guns and two 90mm M67 recoilless rifles. Grenadiers, automatic riflemen, and gunners were SP4s while all others were PFCs.

The realities of Vietnam saw a different platoon organization. Manpower shortages, detached personnel, and a scarcity of NCOs typically saw platoons with 20-30 men organized into two or three squads and fire teams often abandoned. The weapons squad seldom existed since there was no need for antitank weapons: they and their ammunition were simply too heavy to carry. The two machine guns were either assigned to rifle squads or the platoon headquarters. Rifle squads were seven or eight men. Squad leaders were often sergeants or SP4s, while fire team leaders, if employed, were SP4s or PFCs. It was not uncommon for only two squads to be organized in order to

provide a higher strength with 9-12 men, as depicted here. A two-man machine-gun crew is organic to both. There were usually two grenadiers per squad. Often when two squads were employed, and because of the inexperience of some squad leaders, the platoon leader and platoon sergeant would personally take charge of a squad when engaged. Medics became a platoon fixture, but mortar forward observers disappeared as artillery and attack helicopters became the primary fire support weapons.

F: FIREFIGHT - THE "SEVEN-MINUTE WAR"

The firefight was the most frequent type of engagement in Vietnam and typically brief - sometimes characterized as the "seven-minute war." Often they were chance contacts - meeting engagements. They might involve only a few sudden bursts of fire as two elements ran into one another and quickly broke contact, but they could become vicious close-range fights and escalate into major battles as both sides committed reinforcements.

This plate depicts two common aspects of a firefight: isolation and uncertainty. There was an extreme sense of individual isolation. The enemy was almost impossible to detect and it was sometimes difficult to determine from which direction fire was coming. Even in the comparatively open Mekong Delta with its sword-grass-covered plains, to soldiers hugging the mud, visibility was limited to a few meters. All that could be seen was the soldier on either side. Extreme uncertainty was encountered regardless of the initiative of leaders. Questions running through soldiers' minds might be, is it a quick and dirty fight with the enemy immediately breaking contact, have we walked into an ambush, are they maneuvering to surround us, are reinforcements rushing toward us this moment?

This patrol has marked its position with a yellow smoke grenade, extremely conspicuous against the sword grass, as a light fire team comprised of an AH-1G Hueycobra gunship and an OH-6A Cayuse light observation helicopter (LOH - pronounced "loach") dash in for support. Such teams were on standby to support patrols with 7.62mm minigun, 40mm automatic grenade launcher, and 2.75-in. rocket fire.

G: INDIVIDUAL AND PLATOON EQUIPMENT

Many soldiers stripped down to bare necessities to lighten their load, dispensing with LBE and attaching gear to rucksacks instead. SP4 Legg (1) carries a new nylon tropical rucksack designed for Vietnam. Canteens, grenades, and other gear, including a "pop-up" flare, are carried on the "ruck." M16A1 magazines are carried in seven-pocket bandoliers in which 5.56mm ammunition was issued with two 10-round stripper clips per pocket. He wears a towel around his neck, a "drive-on rag." A spring steel X-frame (2), which sometimes bowed in the wrong direction to dig into the soldier's back, supported the rucksack. A nylon poncho liner was an essential item, and, with an air mattress, served as bedding. The AN/PRC-25 radio and accessory bag (3) were carried by the platoon radio-telephone operator. The platoon and squad leaders and platoon sergeants may have used the "helmet radio," AN/PRR-9 receiver mounted on the helmet (4) and the handheld AN/PRT-4 transmitter for platoon communications. A new version of the 2-qt. canteen



What were they thinking then? What will they most likely recall today?

(5) was easier to fill from a stream. The lightweight LRP ("lurp") ration (6) consisted of a dehydrated main course, dessert, and an accessory packet. Many platoon members carried an M18A1 Claymore mine (7) with 100ft of firing wire, an M57 firing device ("clacker"), and an M40 circuit test set (one with every six mines) in an M9 bandolier. Casualty-producing hand grenades (8) included:

8.a. M26A1 fragmentation remained in use through the war.

8.b. M57 fragmentation impact saw little use as it detonated if dropped or struck vegetation.

8.c. M67 fragmentation provided more effective casualty radius than the M26-series.

8.d. Mk 3A2 demolition or concussion grenade was effective for clearing bunkers.

8.e. M34 white phosphorus was a bursting-type grenade that rained WP particles down on troops in open positions.

The M9 protective mask (9) offered protection only from tear gas, but was lighter than the M17. The 7.62mm M60 machine gun (10) served as the platoon's primary heavy weapon. Ammunition was issued in 100-round assault bags, two bags per ammo can. A C-ration B unit long can was sometimes clipped in the ammunition box bracket to aid belt feed. The combination tool was necessary to clean the gas piston.

H: "DUSTOFF" – MEDEVAC

Casualties in Vietnam had a higher chance of surviving when compared to their World War II and Korean War counterparts. Besides advances in combat medicine, rapid

evacuation by medical evacuation (medevac) helicopter helped greatly. Medevac chopper crews were renowned for their boldness, often flying into hot landing zones (LZ) under heavy fire that regular crews avoided. UH-1D medevac helicopters were unarmed, and the red cross markings seldom prevented the enemy from firing on them. Likewise medics seldom wore Geneva Convention armbands. "Dustoffs," the Army-wide call-sign of medevacs, transported some 120,000 casualties.

This 44th Medical Brigade Spec 5 medic wears standard aviator's clothing: SPH-4 flying helmet, K2B fire-resistant flight suit, air crewman body armor with add-on torso armor plate ("chicken plate"), and leather combat boots, as they were more fire-resistant than jungle boots.

A Dustoff Huey could carry three litters and two sitting wounded. The backpack-type M5 medical bag carried field dressings, bandages, tape, splints, blood-volume expander, saline solution, and IV kits. The smaller No. 3 medical instrument and supply set ("aid bag") was carried by medics with field dressings, airway, morphine, antiseptics, aspirin, and emergency instrument set with scalpels, forceps, clamps, bullet probe, and sutures. The standard 4 x 7-in. field dressing protects leg and chest wounds, the latter a sucking chest wound (punctured lung) made airtight by placing a split-open outer plastic dressing package beneath the dressing pad.

Highland Defense. An exhausted machine gunner rests beside his M60 as his squad covers approaches a hastily established defensive position on the edge of a bomb-blasted area. Print by Frank M. Thomas, 1984.



INDEX

Figures in **bold** refer to illustrations

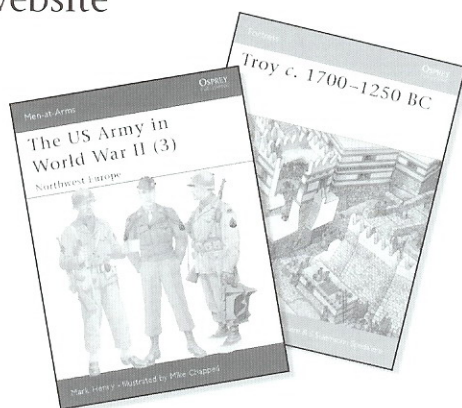
- Agent Orange 57
- ailments 42, 49, 55
- ammunition 27, 29, 61, **D**
- ammunition belts 45, 61, 62, **D, G**
- appearance 21-7
- Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) 48
- Army Reserve 9
- artillery
 - howitzers 44, 54, 55
 - mortars 47, 48
- ARVN 51
- atrocities 52, 55
- barrack inspections 60-1, **C**
- bases
 - Stateside 4, 11-13, 19-20, 20, 60-1, **B, C**
 - Vietnam 42-3, 44
 - see also* firebases
- booby traps 46, 52
- butt packs 27-8, 29, 60, **A**
- Canada, and Vietnam War 11
- canteens 62-3, **G**
- casualties 21
 - notifying next of kin 41-2
- chaplains 58
- Combat Infantry Badge 55, 57, 61, **C**
- communications 44, 48
- compasses 61, **D**
- conscription and enlistment 6-11
 - Buddy Program 10
 - classifications 7, 9, 10
 - deferments 7-8
 - lottery system 8
 - minority and poor conscripts 8
 - numbers conscripted 6-7
 - volunteers 8-10
- CS gas *see* tear gas
- daily life 4-5, 44, 48, 55-6
 - battle experiences 52-5
 - on ops 50-2
- death benefits and notification 42
- decorations 55, 57, 61, **C**
- dengue fever 55
- discharge 56-7
- dog tags 23, 26-7
- dogs: scout-dog teams 30
- draft *see* conscription and enlistment
- draft dodgers 11
- drill sergeants 12, 13, 14, 19, 60, **B**
- drug use 46
- elephant grass 23
- enlistment *see* conscription and enlistment
- entertainment 46, 48
- equipment 27-9, 32, 60, 61, 62-3, **A, D, G**
- medics 63
- firebases 44, 44, 54
 - abandoning 55
 - life in 48
 - security 53
- firefigths 52-5, 62, **F**
- first aid 29
- flares 41, 50, 61, **D**
- flashlights 61, **D**
- food
 - while training 11, 16
- in Vietnam 7, 28, 29, 44, 48, 50-1, 52, 63, **G**
- Fort Polk 4, 11-13, 19
- Tigerland 19-20, 20, 60-1, **B, C**
- fragging 47
- General Technical (GT) scores 9
- GI Bill 10, 57
- graduation 18-19
- haircuts 21-2, 24-5, 27
- headwear 24, 25, 26, 60, 61, **A, B, C**
- helicopters
 - Cayuses 62, **F**
 - Chinooks 43, 55
 - Hueys 31, 32, 41, 50, 52, 62, **F**
 - medevac 63, **H**
 - quantities 43
 - Skyhooks 44
- holidays, national 48
- homicides 47
- identification papers 26
 - see also* dog tags
- induction 10-14
- infantry battalions: types 43-4
- insignia 4, 25, 46
- Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) 11
- latrines and urinals 43
- laundry 24
- leave 19, 46
- leisure 46, 48
- letters *see* mail
- litter 51
- mail 42, 48
- malaria 42, 49
- masks, protective 9, 63, **G**
- medical care and medevac 29, 57, 63, **H**
- mess hall work details 11
- money 42, 43
 - see also* pay
- military ranks 16-18
- mortar platoons 47
- nametapes 7, 23, 60, **A**
- National Guard 9
- NCOs 21
 - see also* drill sergeants
- nicknames 4
- NVA 28, 51, 54
- propaganda 30
- officers 47
- organization 62
- outprocessing 56-7
- paratroopers 19, 20-1
- pay 19, 42
- Peason Ridge replica VC village 20, 60, **B**
- Phong Dien 42-3
- pistol belts 27
- point men 52, 53
- prostitutes 43
- pugil sticks 15
- punishments 15-16
- racism 46, 47-8, 51-2
- radios 44, 48, 62, **G**
- rations *see* food
- religious services 48
- rest and recreation 46
- rifle platoons 62, **E**
- rifle squads 49, 51, 62
- rucksacks 26, 29, 32, 62, **G**
- serial numbers 23-4
- Standby Reserve 8, 9
- streams 23, 24, 26, 56
- tear gas
 - protective masks 9, 63, **G**
 - training 9
- tents, pup 5
- Tigerland 19-20, 20, 60-1, **B, C**
- training 11-21
 - Advanced Individual Training (AIT) 19-21, 60, **B**
 - airborne 20-1
 - Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) 18
 - Basic Combat Training (BCT) 14-19
 - confidence course 8, 15
 - G-3 Testing 18, 18
 - hand-to-hand combat 13
 - infiltration course 16, 16
 - living quarters during 12-13
 - NCOs 21
 - pugil-stick 15, 15
 - score cards 14
 - tear gas 9, 15
 - Vietnam acclimatization 20, 43, 60, **B**
 - weapons 12, 16, 18, 18, 19-20
- uniforms and clothing 22-7, 60, **A**
 - aviators 63, **H**
 - flak vests 44
 - in Vietnam 25-7, 51
- US Army: 1st Cav. Div. (Airborne) 42, 60
- venereal disease 42
- veterans 57
- Viet Cong 28, 50, 51, 61
 - propaganda 30, 53
- Vietnam
 - arrival in 41-2, 61
 - climate 4, 49
 - corps deployment 42
 - leaving 56
 - replica VC village 20, 60, **B**
 - streams 23, 24, 26, 56
 - terrain 4, 22, 44
 - urban environments 27
 - villagers 51
 - villages 30, 50
- Vietnam War: campaigns 58
- Vietnamese, relations with 51-2
- water, drinking 29, 50
- weapons 30-41, 61, **D**
 - grenade arming rings and pins 46
 - grenade launchers 31, 46, 61, **D**
 - grenades 32, 61, 63, **D, G**
 - machine guns 31, 45, 46, 63, 63, **G**
 - mines 32-41, 52, 63, **G**
 - munitions carried 29
 - pistols 31
 - rifles 12, 18, 20, 28, 28, 30-1, 56, 60, **A**
 - rocket launchers (LAWs) 32, 61, **D**
 - training 12, 16, 18, 18, 19-20
 - trip flares 41, 61, **D**
- web gear 27, 28, 51

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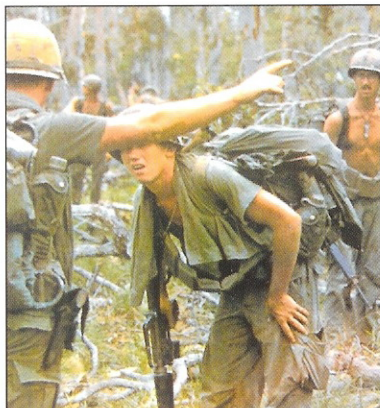
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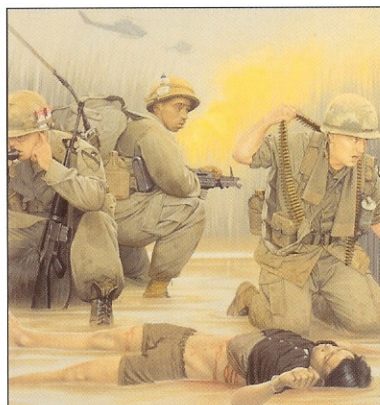
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