

Religious Studies 155
The Impact of the Vietnam War

Winter Quarter, 1994
University of California, Santa Barbara
Professor Walter Capps, Presiding

Glossary of Terms Emanating From or Referring to the Vietnam War

Disclaimer: This document has been created solely by John Muir, and as such, contains his personal bias and viewpoints. I have tried to maintain as much balance as possible, however, the Vietnam war is an immense subject, full of historical and personal contradictions and is viewed by everyone who lived through it in a different way. I will try to be as objective as I can in the compilation of this glossary, however I would urge the reader the consult other sources as well.

Casualty Figures from America's Wars in the 20th Century:

| | | |
|---------------|--------------------|------------|
| WW I: | Participants; | 4,744,000 |
| | Killed in Action: | 116,000 |
| | Missing in Action: | 3,350 |
| WW II: | Participants; | 16,535,000 |
| | Killed in Action: | 406,000 |
| | Missing in Action: | 78,773 |
| Korea: | Participants; | 6,807,000 |
| | Killed in Action: | 55,000 |
| | Missing in Action: | 8,177 |
| Vietnam: | Participants; | 9,200,00 |
| | Killed in Action: | 58,131 |
| | Missing in Action: | 2,440 |
| Persian Gulf: | Participants; | 539,350 |
| | Killed in Action: | 312 |
| | Missing in Action: | 22 |

6 by 6 (Duece and a Half): open bed truck, the primary mode of transportation for both men and material.

60mm (60 millimeter) Mortar: basic infantry light support weapon. 60 millimeter refers to the size of the projectile; mortar refers to the type (See mortar)

81mm (81 millimeter) Mortar: Crew served support weapon, not carried along with the infantry but in a close support role.

AFN (Armed Forces Network): The radio, and later television, network that was the primary source of entertainment and news for U.S. forces in South East Asia. This is the group made famous by Robin Williams in "Good-morning, Vietnam."

Agent Orange (White, Purple): Chemical defoliants used extensively throughout South East Asia. Agent Orange was the most widely used and is the most known of the defoliants used but there were others, i.e. Agent White, Agent Purple. The color designations referred to the bands of markings around the containers. To begin with these agents were used primarily to denude the areas around American compounds in order to open up fields of fire and reduce the amount of cover afforded the enemy. Later they were sometimes used to destroy crop production in order to damage the enemy's ability to feed itself (this unfortunately also caused the local population to go hungry as well).

AK-47: A Russian designed, Czech or Chinese made assault rifle. One of the most common firearms in the world, even today.

AmTrac (Amphibious Tractor): An armored assault vehicle that can "swim" ashore on beach landing or across rivers. I will hold approximately 15 armed troops.

APC (Armored Personnel Carrier): A somewhat lighter version of the AmTrac without the ability to swim. A fairly fast, lightly armored transport vehicle.

Arty: Slang for Artillery.

ARVN: Army of the Republic of Vietnam - South Vietnamese Army - our allies.

Bank of America: In this context this refers to the Bank of America branch in Isla Vista which was burned to the ground in a zealous attempt to prevent them from financing the war in Southeast Asia. This prompted a massive retaliation by the law enforcement community, including reinforcements from as far away as Los Angeles. One protester was killed, ostensibly by accident, and many more arrested. The war continued and the Bank of America is still in business.

Battalion: One of the various groupings of infantry forces collectively known as the chain of command. These are from the smallest to the largest: Fire Team, Squad, Platoon, Company, Battalion, Regiment, Division. The Battalion is roughly 1300 to 1500 men.

Bouncing Betty: the affectionate name given to a common land mine, invented in and principally manufactured by the U.S. This weapon consists of a 60mm mortar round, placed in a spring loaded tube which is most commonly buried (although I have seen them placed in trees, aimed downwards as well) so that when tripped the mortar round springs roughly 3 feet into the air and explodes in a flat disk pattern. The idea being to go off at the level of one's testicles, thus employing a certain psychological effect as well as simply blowing your nuts off.

Bug out: to retreat with alacrity. A common tactic of guerilla fighters is the "hit and run" technique of opening fire, inflicting as much damage as possible in a short period of time and then "bugging out."

C-Rations: the precursor to Meal, Ready to Eat (MRE's). Field rations used to feed troops in the field and on the run. These were generally of World War Two vintage, thus were usually older than we were.

Call Signs/Code names: Every unit of Battalion size or larger (or for smaller units on detached or special duty), and all operations were given call signs or code names. The code names for operations were for organizational use in order to determine which units or individuals were where, when. The call signs were for radio or field telephone use to short-cut some of the numbers which could cause some confusion. For instance, a representative example of some of the operations that I was a part of would include: Harvest Moon, New York, Prairie, Hastings. Some of the Call signs I used would include: Pennant Winner, Sacred Delta, Cossack, Fertilizer. For example in "E" (or Echo) Company, 2nd Battalion 1st Marines, my call sign was Pennant Winner Echo.

ChiCom: Short for Chinese Communist. Usually referred to weapons of ammunition of Chinese origin.

Claymore: A type of wire detonated mine. This is a shaped charge which has several hundred ball bearings imbedded in the charge so that they will be hurled outward in the direction desired. It was used extensively in defensive position and to set off ambushes.

CO/CG: Commanding Officer or Commanding General

Company: Another of the organizational divisions in the Chain of Command (See Battalion). An infantry Company should have roughly 210 men, they typically had from 140 to 185.

Division: Another of the organizational divisions in the Chain of Command (See Battalion). An infantry Division should have roughly 10,000 to 12,000 men.

Door Gunner: One who manned a machine gun in the doorway of a helicopter. The number of gunners and the type of machine varied with the type of aircraft. Most had two, one on each side, roughly analogous to the waist gunners of the Bombers of WW II. They usually did double duty as crew chiefs and/or mechanics as well.

Dove: One who could be considered generally against the war, the opposite of Hawk. Someone who favored a peaceful settlement to the conflict. Depending upon the position of the user, this term could be either pejorative or complimentary. (See Hawk)

F-4B Phantom II: An all-weather, all purpose fighter bomber used by Air Force, Navy and Marine air units. This was perhaps the most widely used model of the fighter jet in the U.S. arsenal. From my experience, it was the aircraft that the Marines used most frequently in conducting close air support operations with infantry.

FAC: Forward Air Controller. Most frequently a small spotter aircraft used to call in and then control the various forms of air support for infantry.

FDF (Final Defensive Fires): The last ditch effort. This is where everybody who can hold a rifle, shoots as much as they can for a long as they can. Used when all else fails (see Bug out).

Fire for effect: An artillery term, it means that the guns have been adjusted to the target and that they should continue to fire on those coordinates until told to cease.

Fire Team: The smallest unit of the Chain of Command. Generally a team of four or five, consisting of a team leader, an automatic rifleman, an assistant automatic rifleman and either one or two riflemen.

Flare: A portable illumination source. These come in a number of sizes from hand held, either pop-up or illumination grenades, to mortar, artillery, Naval Gunfire, or air dropped. They are a burning light which hangs from a small parachute and casts an amber light, much like modern street lamps, which can penetrate fog, rain, and other visual impediments.

FO: Forward Observer. Plays the same role for the artillery as the Forward Air Controller does for air support. Calls in strikes and adjusts fire. Unlike the FAC the FO is generally on the ground along with the troops he is assisting.

Frag: Short for fragmentation grenade. When used as a verb, i.e. to frag, meant to use a grenade to rid oneself of a problem, usually purported to be a troublesome officer. My belief is that the fear of this activity far outweighed its reality.

French Indochina: The obsolete name for the general region comprising Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia .

Gook: perjorative term for anyone Asian. Often used to denigrate all Asians, it was also frequently used to refer to the VC only. Often used to dehumanize the enemy to make the participation in killing them less onerous.

Grab your hat: to flee, retreat with alacrity (See Bug Out).

Grunt: a catch-all name for the infantry. Usually referring to the rifleman, it could also be construed to include the various support personnel who travelled in their circles, i.e. Machine Gunners, Radiomen, Grenadiers, et al. Originated with the "pack-animal" type activities frequently required of them.

H and I Fire: Harassment and Interdiction Fire. Artillery fire placed during the night in such a manner as to harass and/or interdict the enemy's activities. Usually managed to punch holes of various sizes in completely

meaningless or even friendly territory. Generally managed to only harass the local civilian population or us.

Hawk: One who could be considered generally in favor the war, the opposite of Dove. Someone who favored a forceful settlement to the conflict. Depending upon the position of the user, this term could be either pejorative of complimentary. (See Dove)

Hippy: A member of a loose association of young people during the '60's who professed counter-culture ideals of freedom and unconventionality. Their dress was very casual, their attitudes were as well. They often espoused free love and mind expanding drugs. They were the fledgling beginnings of the Green movement. They were doomed as a movement when they became fashionable.

Ho Chi Minh: The leader of the North Vietnamese and those in the South who advocated the overthrow of the Government. Long time Communist and Nationalist he had fought against successive regimes of French, Chinese, other Nationalists, the Emperor, the Japanese and finally the Americans. Often called "Uncle" Ho, a mildly derisive term when used by Americans, but a serious term of respect and endearment to Vietnamese. Most Vietnamese had great admiration and esteem for him. It would be worth your while to read further about this remarkable man.

Hooch: living quarters of a grunt. Usually referring to a hole in the ground with sandbag walls and a poncho (rubberized rain protection) for a roof. It came to mean any rude hovel used for a domicile. I believe that this term came from Okinawa originally.

Howitzer: a field artillery piece that is transportable. Has a short barrel that utilizes a high angle of fire, but not so high as the mortar. Generally came in two sizes, 105mm and 155mm.

Huey: Nickname for the HU1 series of helicopters. Name is derived from the way HU1 looks, thus it became Huey. The workhorse aircraft of the war.

Immersion Foot: A form of "Trench Foot" similar to what soldiers suffered in World War One. It is a general decaying of the tissue of the feet caused by extended periods where the feet are at a substantially lower temperature than the rest of the body, i.e. wading or standing with your feet in water for extended periods of time, as in rice paddies. Commonly called "jungle rot".

Jolly Green Giant: CH-56 Helicopter, the largest helicopter in the U.S. inventory. Used extensively in rescue operations to recover downed airmen.

Kent State: The University in central Ohio where on May 4th, 1970, National Guard troops, called in to quell anti-war demonstrations shot and killed four students.

KIA: Killed in Action. Statistical term used to designate those killed by enemy action as opposed to those killed by other activities (i.e. car crashes, industrial accidents, injuries that result in death from causes other than enemy action).

LAAW: Light Anti-Tank Weapon. An easily carried, disposable anti-tank or anti-bunker rocket, similar to the RPG. (See RPG)

Linebacker I, II: Series of air operations directed against the North late in the war, designed to induce the North Vietnamese to the bargaining table.

M-14: the primary infantry weapon early in the war. 7.62mm round was compatible with all the infantry weapons of the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) countries. Gas operated, magazine fed, air-cooled, semi-automatic shoulder weapon. At 9.5 pounds it was purported to be too heavy, and it was replaced by the M-16. (See next)

M-16: smaller lighter, and more complicated infantry weapon. It replaced the M-14 in late 1966 and early 1967 as the primary infantry weapon. Prone to jamming and difficult to keep clean under field conditions. It was put into the hands of many units with little or no thought to training in use or maintenance and as such caused many needless deaths.

M-60: Primary field machine gun. Still in use today. Also using the 7.62mm NATO ammunition which was compatible with the M-14, when the M-16 came along it necessitated the use of separate kinds of ammunition for the rifle and for the Machine Gun.

M-79: 40mm grenade launcher, similar to a large breech loading shotgun. This was a very useful, handy weapon to lay down close support in the field.

Make your bird: Grab your hat: to flee, retreat with alacrity (See Bug Out).

Med-evac: Verbal short hand for Medical Evacuation. Generally accomplished by helicopter, this is the reason that many more of the wounded from Vietnam survived than those of previous wars.

MIA: Missing in Action. Those who, for one reason or another, were not able to be physically identified as having died. The range of reasons could be far flung, such as blown to smithereens, lost in the bush, augured an airplane into the ground in such a way as to leave no recognizable pieces of people or airplane.

Mortar: A small artillery piece, usually used in close support, that threw its shell in an extremely high arc in order to fire over intervening obstacles. (See 60mm and 81mm)

Napalm: Jellied gasoline. Napalm had the ability to cling to whatever it splattered on while burning furiously. This meant that if the object that it clung to was flammable, it would ignite it, if it was incombustible, it would heat it to a degree that would cause all the oxygen to be used up.

Navel Gunfire: Artillery fire that came from ships. Often Destroyers or Cruisers that would come in close to the shore in dangerous shoal infested waters. It was highly accurate and extremely powerful.

NLF: National Liberation Front. The political arm of the Viet Cong. The South Vietnamese insurgents.

NVA: North Vietnamese Army. The regular army of the North Vietnamese, as opposed to the irregular insurgents in the South known as the Viet Cong. (See V.C.)

O Dark Thirty: A parody of the military's 24 hour clock of the early morning hours (i.e. 0300, oh three hundred is 3:00 a.m., 0430, oh four thirty is 4:30 a.m.) a generic term for awful early in the morning. Before dawn.

Ontos: A Greek word meaning "thing" the Ontos was a light tracked vehicle used by the Marines that had six 106mm recoilless rifles mounted on it. They were called recoilless rifles because they had an open ended breech mechanism that allowed the exploding gas propellant to release out the back, much like a bazooka (rocket launcher). It was called Ontos (thing) because it was ugly.

Peace-nik: Avid anti-war activist. Often a member of the counter-culture, (See Hippie) they were generally young early, but as the war ground on they crossed generational and cultural boundaries.

Platoon: Another of the organizational divisions in the Chain of Command (See Battalion). An infantry Platoon was the main divisor of the Company (See Company) it was composed of four squads of from 10 to 12 each and so should have roughly 40 to 50 men, they typically had from 25 to 30.

Pogey Bait: (strictly a Marine term) Candy, sweets, junk food.

Pogue: (strictly a Marine term) one who was stationed in a nice, safe, comfortable rear area, doing an easy (or at least tolerable) job. One who had access to pogey bait. (See Pogey Bait)

PRC - 6, 10, 25: Korean war vintage field radios. They had a range of only slightly farther than one could holler, and a battery life measured in moments.

PTSD - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: A widespread psychological condition that results from exposure to one or more traumatic events that fall beyond the scope of the individual's capacity to cope. Its onset is often delayed for a number of years following the initial exposure. Some, but certainly not all, of its symptoms include: Sleep disorders (i.e. nightmares, sweats, speaking or crying out while asleep, extreme wakefulness), Intrusive thoughts (memories of the event or surrounding events intrude into everyday thinking), Hyper-sensitive Startle Reaction ("Fight or Flight" reactions), Lack of concentration and general malaise. Like any psychological condition PTSD is a complex and complicated malady that will vary in degree from one individual to the next and should never be thought of in stereotypical ways.

Puff: Originally a C-47 (WW II vintage aircraft) with three high speed electric gatling guns (firing rates of thousands of rounds per second), it later evolved into a larger C-130 transport aircraft with enormous firepower. Used for close air support of ground troops.

Pungi Trap: A hole large enough to step into with steel or bamboo stakes at the bottom or on the side, often smeared with excrement to hasten infection, that would pierce the foot or leg causing debilitating injury.

Purple Heart: America's oldest medal. An award given to those who have sustained a wound or injury inflicted by an enemy.

PX: the Post Exchange, the military version of a 7-11. An all-purpose convenience store.

Ranch-hand: the code name for the operation that was primarily responsible for spraying Agent Orange. (See Call Signs/Code Names)

Regiment: Another level of the Chain of Command. Three Battalions make up a Regiment, three Regiments make up a Division, etc.

Rolling Thunder: The original series of air operations against industrial and military targets in North Vietnam.

Round-eye: An Occidental, usually in reference to women.

RPG: Rocket Propelled Grenade. A disposable anti-tank or anti-bunker rocket similar to our LAAW. (See LAAW)

RVN: Republic of Vietnam - South Vietnam, our allies.

Sappers: Military Engineers who specialize in detonation of explosives. They are most often armed with satchel charges which are packages of explosives that can be either fused or wire detonated with great force. Similar to the charges used in commercial demolition to knock down buildings.

Slope: Another derogatory term for Asians, only marginally less offensive than Gook. (See Gook)

Sniper: A rifleman who's job was long range, individualized killing. Target selection was most often opportunistic, however in certain instances selective assassination might be employed.

Squad: The next to the bottom rung of the Chain of Command ladder. Generally composed of three Fire Teams, a Grenadier and a Squad Leader. They would often be customized to fulfill a specific role, they would a Corpsman (or Medic in the Army) or a Machine Gun Section as well as a Radioman and become a completely independent tactical operational unit.

Thunder Thud: A Republic F-105. Officially known as the Thunder Chief, they were affectionately called Thud. They were the U.S. Air Force's primary Light Attack Bomber in the North.

Tonkin Gulf Resolution: A Congressional resolution passed in 1964 that urged President Johnson to employ any means he deemed necessary to counter armed aggression by the forces of North Vietnam. Generally considered today to have been an abrogation of Congressional responsibility,