

MILITARY TERMS AND SLANG

USED IN THE THINGS THEY CARRIED

Definitions from "**Glossary of Military Terms & Slang from the Vietnam War** "

http://lists.village.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Glossary/Sixties_Term_Gloss_A_C.html

This text, made available by the Sixties Project, is copyright (c)1996 by Viet Nam Generation, Inc., or the author, all rights reserved. This text may be used, printed, and archived in accordance with the Fair Use provisions of U.S. Copyright law. This text may not be archived, printed, or redistributed in any form for a fee, without the consent of the copyright holder. This notice must accompany any redistribution of the text. The Sixties Project, sponsored by Viet Nam Generation Inc. and the Institute of Advanced Technology in the Humanities at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, is a collective of humanities scholars working together on the Internet to use electronic resources to provide routes of collaboration and make available primary and secondary sources for researchers, students, teachers, writers and librarians interested in the 1960s.

To use this glossary efficiently use the **find** feature and type in the name of the term you want to find, so that it will take you to the term and definition.

[Return to Guide](#)

A

AK-47 Soviet-manufactured Kalashnikov semi-automatic and fully automatic combat assault rifle, 7.62-mm; the basic weapon of the Communist forces.

AO area of operations

AR Army regulation

ARVN Army of the Republic of Vietnam; the South Vietnamese Regular Army

AWOL absent without leave; leaving a post or position without official permission

B

body bag plastic bag used to transport dead bodies from the field

boonierat a combat infantryman

boonies infantry term for the field; jungles or swampy areas far from the comforts of civilization

bouncing Betty antipersonnel mine with two charges: the first propels the explosive charge upward, and the other is set to explode at about waist level.

C

CC Company commander

CHARLIE Viet Cong; the enemy; Charlie-Charlie; C&C Chuck

CIB combat infantry badge. An Army award for being under enemy fire in a combat zone

claymore an antipersonnel mine carried by the infantry which, when detonated, propelled small steel cubes in a 60-degree fan-shaped pattern to a maximum distance of 100 meters

company a military unit usually consisting of a headquarters and two or more platoons

compound a fortified military installation

concertina wire coiled barbed wire used as an obstacle

C-rations combat rations. Canned meals for use in the field. Each usually consisted of a can of some basic course, a can of fruit, a packet of some type of dessert, a packet of powdered cocoa, a small pack of cigarettes, and two pieces of chewing gum.

crispy critters burn victims

D

didi mau slang Vietnamese for "go quickly"

dink derogatory term for an Asian

DMZ demilitarized zone. The dividing line between North and South Vietnam established in 1954 at the Geneva Convention.

dust-off medical evacuation by helicopter

F

fatigues standard combat uniform, green in color

firefight a battle, or exchange of small arms fire with the enemy

flack jacket heavy fiberglass-filled vest worn for protection from shrapnel

foo gas a mixture of explosives and napalm, usually set in a fifty-gallon drum

frag fragmentation grenade; verb form of "fragging"

fragging the assassination of an officer by his own troops, usually by a grenade

Freedom Bird the plane that took soldiers from Vietnam back to the World

fuck along with fucked and fuckin', the most commonly used word in the GI vocabulary other than the article 'a'

G

gook derogatory term for an Asian

Green Berets U.S. Special Forces

grunt infantryman. Originally slang for a Marine fighting in Vietnam but later applied to any soldier fighting there; a boonierat.

GSW gunshot wound

H

heat tabs flammable tablet used to heat C-rations. Always in short supply.

hooch a hut or simple dwelling, either military or civilian. Also spelled hootch.

hot area under fire

HQ headquarters

hump march or hike carrying a rucksack; to perform any arduous task

I - J - K

in-country Vietnam

john wayne can opener. Also a verb to describe the actions of someone who exposes himself to danger.

jungle boots footwear that looks like a combination of combat boot and canvas sneaker used by the U.S.

military in a tropical climate, where leather rots because of the dampness.

KIA killed in action

klick kilometer

L

leg slightly contemptuous term used by airborne-qualified troops when talking about regular infantry

LP listening post. A position set up at night outside the perimeter away from the main body of troopers, which acted as an early warning system against attack.

LT lieutenant

LZ landing zone. Usually a small clearing secured temporarily for the landing of resupply helicopters. Some become more permanent and eventually become base camps.

M

M-16 the standard U.S. military rifle used in Vietnam from 1966 on.

M-60 the standard lightweight machine gun used by U.S. forces in Vietnam

M-79 a U.S. military hand-held grenade launcher

mama san pidgin used by American servicemen for any older Vietnamese woman

MIA missing in action

Mr. Charles the Viet Cong; the enemy

Montagnard a Vietnamese term for several tribes of mountain people inhabiting the hills and mountains of central and northern Vietnam.

MOS military occupational specialty

MP military police

N

Nam Vietnam

napalm a jellied petroleum substance which burns fiercely, and is used against personnel.

NDP night defensive position

NPD night perimeter defense

number one the best

number ten the worst

NVA North Vietnamese Army

P

papa san pidgin used by U.S. servicemen for any older Vietnamese man

perimeter outer limits of a military position. The area beyond the perimeter belongs to the enemy.

PF Popular Forces. South Vietnamese National Guard-type local military units

PFC private first class

platoon a subdivision of a company-sized military unit, normally consisting of two or more squads or sections

***post-traumatic stress disorder

development of characteristic symptoms after the experiencing of a psychologically traumatic event or events outside the range of human experience usually considered to be normal. The characteristic symptoms involve reexperiencing the traumatic event, numbing of responsiveness to, or involvement with, the external world, exaggerated startle response, difficulty in concentrating, memory impairment, guilt feelings, and sleep difficulties.

PRC-25 Portable Radio Communications, Model 25. A back-packed FM receiver-transmitter used for short-distance communications. The range was 5-10 kilometers, depending on the weather.

R

RA Regular Army, prefix to serial number of enlistees

R&R rest and recreation. A three to seven-day vacation from the war for a soldier.

recon reconnaissance. Going out into the jungle to observe for the purpose of identifying enemy activity.

RF/PF Regional and Popular Forces. The South Vietnamese National Guard-type units. Regional Forces were company-size and protected district areas. Popular Forces were platoon-size and guarded their home villages.

ROTC Reserve Officer's Training Corps. Program offered in many high schools and colleges, geared to prepare students to become military officers.

RTO radio telephone operator. The man who carried his unit's radio on his back in the field.

ruck/rucksack backpack issued to infantry in Vietnam

Ruff Puff derogatory term used by Americans for RF/PF

S

SEATO Southeast Asia Treaty Organization

shrapnel pieces of metal sent flying by an explosion

Silver Star U.S. military decoration awarded for gallantry in action

SOP standard operating procedure

Spec-4 Specialist 4th Class. An Army rank just above Private First Class. Most enlisted men who had completed their individual training and had been on duty for a few months were Spec-4s. Probably the most common rank in the Vietnam-era Army.

stand-down an infantry unit's return from the boonies to the base camp for refitting and training.

steel pot the standard U.S. Army helmet. The steel pot was the outer metal cover.

T

Tet January holiday, Buddhist lunar New Year. Buddha's birthday.

Tet Offensive a major uprising of the National Liberation Front, their sympathizers, and NVA characterized by a series of coordinated attacks against military installations and provincial capitals throughout Vietnam. It occurred during the lunar New Year at the end of January, 1968.

U

USARV U.S. Army Republic of Vietnam. Command of operations unit for all U.S. military forces in Vietnam, based in Long Binh.

USO United Service Organization. Provided entertainment to the troops, and was intended to raise morale.

V

VC Viet Cong, the National Liberation Front

Victor Charlie the Viet Cong; the enemy.

Viet Cong the Communist-led forces fighting the South Vietnamese government. The political wing was known as the National Liberation Front, and the military was called the People's Liberation Armed Forces. Both the NLF and the PLAF were directed by the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP), the southern branch of the Vietnamese Communist Party, which received direction from Hanoi through COSVN, which was located on the Cambodian border. After 1968, as negotiations began in Paris, the NLF established the Provisional Revolutionary Government.

Viet Minh The Vietnamese Allied Independence League. A political and resistance organization established by Ho Chi Minh before the end of World War II, dominated by the Communist Party. Though at first smaller and less famous than the non-Communist nationalist movements, the Viet Minh siezed power through superior organization skill, ruthless tactics, and popular support.

Vietnamese Popular Forces South Vietnamese local military forces.

Vietnamization U.S. policy initiated by President Richard Nixon late in the war to turn over the fighting to the South Vietnamese Army during the phased withdrawal of American troops.

ville Vietnamese hamlet or village

VNAF South Vietnamese Air Force

W

WIA wounded in action

Willy Peter white phosphorus

WP white phosphorus

[Return to Guide](#)