

Vietnam Glossary

Agent Orange — chemical defoliant dropped to strip leaves so the enemy is more visible

AO — area of operations

ARVN — South Vietnamese regular army (Army of the Republic of Vietnam); U.S. ally

Basic — basic training; boot camp

Body bag — a plastic bag used to transport dead bodies back to the States

Body count — number of casualties, often to determine operation's success

Bouncing Betty — U. S. land mine that bounces waist-high and sprays shrapnel

Bush — Area of jungle, mountains, or flooded rice paddies

Charlie — the Viet Cong; an elusive enemy for U.S

Chopper — helicopter, Huey

C.O. status — conscientious objector; moral or religious reasons to avoid combat

Claymore — U.S. antipersonnel mine which throws off a fan-shaped spray of fragments during its explosion; used for defense

Clicks — the measurement (in kilometers) for marches when companies went into the bush; for every

Deceit — convincing someone to believe an untruth; giving misleading, false, or incomplete information

DMZ — demilitarized zone; the "buffer," non-combat zone separating North and South Vietnam

Domino Theory — U.S. idea that if Vietnam fell to the communists, the rest of Southeast Asia would "fall like dominos in a line"

Draft Dodger — a person using legal or illegal methods to avoid the draft and military service

Firefight — a battle or exchange of fire with the enemy

Five O'clock Follies — nickname for the regular afternoon press briefings for U.S. journalists in Saigon, often characterized by reports of exaggerated enemy body counts and questionable claims of U.S. victories in the war (These derided official pronouncements led some reporters to venture into war zones to pursue the truth.)

Free-fire zone — enemy territory; this definition was often a license to kill anyone in the region

Friendly fire — when allies or our own personnel are accidentally killed by friendly forces, not by the enemy

Grunt — (also *ground pounder*) U.S. infantryman

Guerrilla — a member of an irregular military unit operating in small bands to undermine the enemy

Gun ship — armed helicopter used to support ground troops

Hamlet — a small Vietnamese village

Hooch — a hut or simple dwelling for Asian civilians, usually built with flammable thatched roofs

Hot LZ — a landing zone for U.S. helicopters that is under enemy attack

In country — being in Vietnam

KIA — killed in action

Lifer — career soldier (most in Vietnam were not lifers)

Million-dollar wound — a wound serious enough to warrant a return to the U.S.

MIA — missing in action

Napalm — jellied petroleum substance used in flame throwers and bombs that sticks to surfaces, including human flesh

NVA — North Vietnamese Army (foe of U.S.)

PTSD — Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; battle fatigue illness suffered by Vietnam vets

Point man — on U.S. patrols into the bush, the exposed man in front, usually a “cherry”

Punji stakes — sharpened wooden stakes hidden in deep holes; dipped in human excrement, these stakes infected U.S. soldiers if they fell in pit and stakes penetrated flesh

R & R — rest and relaxation; a 3–7 day vacation from the war, often to Saigon, Japan, or Hawaii

Rolling Thunder — President Lyndon B. Johnson’s campaign of bombing North Vietnamese continuously

Short-timer — U.S. soldier with a short time left to serve in Vietnam

Spider hole — a hidden enemy foxhole, or pit

Tour of duty — the period of time a soldier serves his military obligation; for the army, 365 days; for the marines 395 days

VC — (the Viet Cong) guerrilla fighters in South Vietnam who fought against the Saigon government and the U.S.

WIA — wounded in action

War of Attrition — strategy of wearing down the enemy by killing them, rather than conquering territory

The world — the USA, as in a return to the (real) world

Zippo raid — part of a military operation, which includes burning down Vietnamese villages, often ignited with a cigarette lighter