

GLOSSARIES AND A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE VIETNAM WAR

Ty Dodge

There were many “languages” spoken in Vietnam from official military lingo, to GI slang, to the Viet-American lingo the Vietnamese used to praise, admonish, or simply try to communicate with the tall foreigners who had invaded their land

Included are:

1. An Official Glossary
2. A Trooper’s—and Miscellaneous—Glossary
3. A Vietnamese Glossary
4. A very brief bibliography—or sources of information used—in my writing of *The Battle for Buttons*.

These glossaries are terribly incomplete, but they’re likely way-more than you ever wanted to know.

AN OFFICIAL GLOSSARY

The way the military said it—and wanted us to say it, too.

1st Cavalry Division: also known as the 1st Cav. Buttons was a 1st Cav base camp.

11th Armored Cavalry Regiment: also known as the 11th ACR or the Blackhorse Regiment.

ACAV: (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

ACR: Armored Cavalry Regiment.

AK-47: (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

AO: Area of Operations.

APC: Armored Personnel Carrier. See ACAV, M113, and track.

ARA: Arial Rocket Artillery (a rocket-armed helicopter gunship)

ARVN: Army of the Republic of Vietnam; pronounced “ARVIN”.

B-40: also called an RPG (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

battery: the artillery’s version of an infantry company or a cavalry troop.

beehive: (see “weapons” in this glossary)

berm: the earthworks pushed up by bulldozers and forming the basis for defensive bunkers around the perimeter of firebases and other installations. Typically about 6 feet high with bunkers dotted 10-30 meters apart, providing cover from which defenders could fire through firing ports.

Blackhorse Regiment: the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

body bag: rubber or plastic bag used for retrieval of the dead from the battlefield.

Bouncing Betty: (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

C4: (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

C and C ship: a command and control helicopter.

Caribou: (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

Chieu Hoi: Vietnamese for “open arms,” the name of the program for giving enemy soldiers an opportunity to rally to the cause of the government of South Vietnam. One who “Chieu Hoi-ed” (i.e. came over to our side) was called a “Hoi Chanh.”

Chinook: (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

chopper: helicopter.

CIDG: Civilian Irregular Defense Group. Indigenous population recruited to serve with the Special Forces. The 11th Cav worked with them at times.

Claymore mine: (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

coax (“co-ax”): (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

CO: Commanding Officer.

Cobra: (see “weapons” in this glossary)

company: the basic building-block unit for all non-artillery and non-cavalry units in the Army; also, the smallest unit in which the commissioned leader is considered a “commander.” Platoons have platoon “leaders.”

compound: a fortified military installation.

concertina wire: the coiled, barbed wire used as a defensive barrier around an installation. Typically there were several rows, and often anti-personnel mines were sprinkled around between the rows. Trip flares attached to the wire provided a warning of any enemy trying to slip through—which they too often did (see “sapper”).

CONNEX container: corrugated metal shipping crate approximately six feet in length. Some may have been larger (or in some way connected to others) because they served not only as shipping crates, but as living quarters and social clubs, as well. CONNEX is short for “Container, Explosive.”

contact: firing on, or being fired on by, the enemy.

Corps

I Corps (“eye corps”): the northernmost military region of South Vietnam.

II Corps (“two corps”): the Central Highlands military region of South Vietnam.

III Corps (“three corps”): the densely populated, fertile region between Saigon and the Central Highlands in which the Blackhorse Regiment operated.

IV Corps (“four corps”): the marshy Mekong Delta region of the south.

COSVN: Central Office for South Vietnam; Communist headquarters for military and political action in South Vietnam.

C-Ration: box of canned and pre-packaged food including a jungle chocolate bar (made by Cadbury so as not to melt in jungle heat (haven’t liked Cadbury chocolate since); also a couple of smokes, and a tiny pack of toilet paper.

danger close: an air strike or artillery mission within 100 meters of your location.

defilade: the arrangement of fortifications that gives protection from enemy fire.

DEROS: Date Eligible for Return from Overseas; the end of a GI's tour in Vietnam. That was the date from which a GI's short-timer's calendar counted back—the date on which he boarded the Freedom Bird for his trip back to The World.

division: the Army's major maneuver element, ranging in strength from 18,000-24,000 men, depending on type; commanded by a major general.

DMZ: Demilitarized Zone; a line of demarcation between North and South Vietnam, within which and above which there supposed to be no combat; it roughly followed the 17th parallel that divided North and South Vietnam.

Duster: (see M42A1 Duster under "Weapons" in this glossary)

ETS: Estimated Termination of Service—the day you were to leave the Army.

FAC: Forward Air Controller; directed air strikes from the ground or air.

firefight: a sometimes-brief battle (though they could go on for days).

fire support base: a (sometimes) temporary artillery encampment used for fire support of forward ground operations. Abbreviated FSB (as in "FSB Buttons").

flak jacket: a heavy (about 12-14 pounds), fiberglass-filled vest worn for protection from shrapnel

free fire zone: a zone where anyone could be considered hostile and a legitimate target.

friendly fire: officially called "Misadventure" by the DOD.

FSB: Fire Support Base.

green line: the generic term for the outer defensive ring of bunkers at most base camps.

gunship: an attack helicopter armed with machine-guns and rockets.

H&I: Harassment and Interdictment; random artillery fire meant to play with the enemy's mind... and possibly even kill a few.

Ho Chi Minh Trail: a complex of jungle paths through Laos and Cambodia that served as the principle Viet Cong and NVA supply route from the North.

Hoi Chanh ("hoy chan"): the Vietnamese term for an enemy soldier who voluntarily rallied to the cause of the government of South Vietnam. See also "Chieu Hoi."

Hmong ("mung"): a dominant Laotian hill tribe, most of whom opposed the NVA.

Huey: (see UH-1 Iroquois under "Weapons" in this glossary)

illumination: parachute flares dropped by aircraft, or fired by artillery, mortars, or M79 grenade launchers.

KIA: Killed In Action.

Kit Carson scout: former VC or NVA acting as a guide for U.S. units. Some were very good, but we had a hard time putting our faith in many of them.

laager: see NDP.

LOH or Loach: (see "Weapons" in this glossary)

LP: Listening Post. This was an “early detection” position occupied at night by 1-3 soldiers several hundred feet outside friendly lines. Scary, very scary.

LRRP: Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol.

LZ: Landing Zone.

M113 Armored Personnel Carrier (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

M14 rifle (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

M16 rifle (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

M42 Duster (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

M48 tank (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

M551 Sheridan (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

M60 machine gun (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

M60 tank (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

M72 LAW (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

M79 Grenade Launcher (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

Medcap: Medical Civil Action Program providing free treatment of villagers by U.S. and ARVN forces.

medevac: aerial medical evacuation.

mine plate: a steel plate attached to the soft underbelly of an ACAV or Sheridan as protection against anti-tank mines. After an ACAV driver in Jack Andrews’ platoon lost his legs and his life to a mine in September, we started retrofitting our tracks with mine plate. As was often the case, procurement was done on an “unofficial” basis. By the time I was medevaced, 1st and 2nd platoons had mine plate, but 3rd platoon was still without. In the absence of mine plate (and often when mine plate was installed), a layer of sandbags on the track floor, especially in the river’s compartment, provided some measure of protection.

MIA: Missing In Action.

Military time: based on a 24-hour clock (e.g. 9:00 a.m. is written as 0900; 2:30 p.m. is written 1430).

Montagnards: aboriginal tribes-people inhabiting the hills of central and northern Vietnam; most opposed the NVA. Also referred to as ‘Yards. The Vietnamese, from both North and South, disliked them intensely. They were fierce fighters and were intensely loyal to their US Special Forces advisors.

NCO: Noncommissioned Officer.

NDP: Night Defensive Perimeter (or position); a “circling up of the wagons” employed by cavalry and armor that allowed all weapons to point outward in a defensive posture. Also called a laager.

no-fire zone: many areas in which we operated were designated no-fire zones because of the potential presence of supposed-noncombatants. In such zones we could not fire until fired upon or after identifying a definite threat. From the standpoint of not killing civilians (or not killing

our political goodwill) they made perfect sense. But in a no-fire zone, we could not even test fire weapons. They were very dangerous to those of us on the front line.

NVA: North Vietnam Army.

OPCON: being under the operational control of another unit.

platoon: the smallest unit led by a commissioned officer. In the cavalry, there are generally three platoons per troop, each platoon having 25-45 men depending on casualties, etc.. Vehicles included either 9 ACAVs, or 6 ACAVs and 3 Sheridans. Led by a lieutenant. While a platoon is “led” (by a platoon leader), larger units are “commanded” (e.g. by a troop commander, battery commander, regimental commander, etc.). In the Marines, the leader at platoon level is called a platoon commander.

point: the forward man or element on a combat mission.

poncho liner: a nylon insert for the military poncho, often used as a blanket; one of Uncle Sam’s best ideas.

POW: Prisoner Of War.

PRC25: backpack FM radio; primarily used by cav outfits for dismounted ambush patrols.

punji stick: sharpened bamboo stake used in a primitive, but effective, booby trap; often smeared with feces to cause infection.

Radio Telephone Procedure: being thirty-plus years removed from military service, I’m not sure I can accurately separate official radio lingo from the slang we used, but here’s some communications terminology:

Big-Six: a commander two levels above the speaker. See “Six.”

break squelch: if close proximity of the enemy prohibited a voice transmission that might give away your location, you would simply key your mike to communicate: once meant the enemy was near, twice to indicate that a caller’s transmission was heard and understood, or three times to indicate that you heard and would comply with whatever request was made. The squelch control on a radio eliminates unwanted signals and/or noise, but it also weakens conversations you want to hear. Radio signals are stronger when the squelch is turned down, but when not transmitting, a rushing noise is heard. When someone keyed his mike without speaking, squelch was broken and the rushing noise stopped momentarily.

commo check: one trooper would radio another and ask for a “commo check” to be sure their communications were working. If all was well, the reply might be, “Hear you Lima Charlie (i.e. Loud and Clear).” If the person receiving the request were in a night ambush position, he might simply key his mike (microphone) twice instead of responding by voice so that his position wouldn’t be revealed to a nearby enemy (see “break squelch”).

copy: “I copy” meant the last transmission was heard and understood. “No copy,” of course, meant the opposite.

frequency or freek: a radio frequency. Each level of command was assigned a particular frequency which was changed on a regular basis to prevent the enemy from eavesdropping. Sometimes called a “push.”

horn: the radio (“El-Tee, get on the horn! Big 6 wants to talk tou you.”).

lima charlie: international phonetic alphabet words for “LC,” short for “loud and clear” in Army radio parlance.

net: refers to everyone on a given frequency.

over: indicated that you were ending your transmission and required a reply (i.e. the conversation is not yet over).

over and out: never used except in the movies or in jest as it implies that a reply is both requested and not requested. Go figure.

out: indicated that you were ending your transmission and did not require a reply. Your conversation was a done deal.

push: a radio frequency (because you sometimes pushed a button to select it); also called a “freak.” As in, “No copy. Go up on a higher push.”

repeat: a request for artillery or mortars to fire again as they had just done. (See “say again.”)

roger or rog (“rahj”): meaning, “I read (i.e. understand) your transmission.” Also, as in the expression, “That’s a rog (i.e. that’s right), dude”.

RTO: Radio Telephone Operator.

Six: the radio call sign of a unit commander. In my troop I was “Three-Six,” indicating that I was the platoon leader (i.e. the “Six”) of 3rd platoon. Looking at the chain of command from my perspective, I was Three-Six, my troop commander was Six, and our squadron commander was Big-Six (though Big-Six was not referred to as such either to his face or on the radio). To Big-Six himself, though, he was simply Six. Got that?

say again: a request that the last transmission be repeated. The term “repeat” was never used on the radio except when requesting artillery or mortars to do again what they had just done so effectively. You can understand the problem with using the term “Repeat” at the wrong time.

sit rep: a situation report; typically made hourly during the night to the next higher level of command.

SOI: Signal Operating Instructions; codes for radio communications.

wilco: means the speaker “will comply” with whatever request was made.

R&R: Rest and Recuperation. Typically went on R&R at about 6 months into your tour. I didn’t make mine. Popular destinations: Australia, Hawaii, Thailand.

Ranks, Army (with abbreviation and pay grade shown in parentheses)

ENLISTED: **Private** (PVT; E-1), **Private** (PV2; E-2), **Private First Class** (PFC; E-3), **Specialist** (SPC or SP4; E-4), **Corporal** (CPL; E-4), **Sergeant** (SGT; E-5), **Staff Sergeant** (SSG; E-6), **Sergeant First Class** (SFC; E-7), **Master Sergeant** (MSG; E-8), **First Sergeant** (1SG; E-8), **Sergeant Major** (SGM; E-9), **Command Sergeant Major** (CSM; E-9), **Sergeant Major of the Army** (SMA)

WARRANT OFFICER: **Warrant Officer** (W01; W-1), **Chief Warrant Officer** included the grades: CW2 or W-2; CW3 or W-3; CW4 or W-4, CW5 or W-5

OFFICER: **Second Lieutenant** (2LT; O-1), **First Lieutenant** (1LT; O-2), **Captain** (CPT; O-3), **Major** (MAJ; O-4), **Lieutenant Colonel** (LTC; O-5), **Colonel** (COL; O-6), **Brigadier General** (BG; O-7), **Major General** (MG; O-8), **Lieutenant General** (LTG; O-9), **General** (GEN; O-10), **General of the Army** (GOA)

RF/PF: Regional Forces/Popular Forces. Known as “ruff-puffs,” they were considered to be more puff than ruff. They fought for our side.

Rome Plow: (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

RPG: (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

RRF: Rapid Reaction Force (or Ready Reaction Force).

Rules of Engagement: the political and military restrictions that dominated American military tactics. Sometimes ridiculous... and dangerous.

RVN: Republic of Vietnam.

sapper: a soldier trained to attack fortifications (i.e. blow things up). Extensively used by the VC and NVA after TET 1968. When breaching the defenses of a fire support base, sappers typically wore nothing but black cotton shorts so they could more easily slip through the wire. Though many lost their lives plying their craft, they were very, very good.

Sheridan: (see M551 in “Weapons” in this glossary)

short round: an artillery round that falls short of the target. Ouch! See also “Friendly fire.”

Six: designation of a unit leader or commander.

SKS: (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

SOP: Standard Operating Procedure.

spider hole: VC firing position or tunnel opening.

starlight scope: a night observation device that collects and magnifies ambient light; in sizes from hand-held to vehicle-mounted.

strongpoint: any defended position, especially along highways to discourage ambushes.

TC: Track Commander (see below)

TOC: Tactical Operations Center (a unit’s command center)

TO&E: Table of Organization & Equipment. Shows how a unit is made up in terms of personnel and equipment.

tracer: tracer rounds are used to indicate a target to other members of your troop, or to give riflemen and machine-gunners confirmation that they’re shooting on target. The standard ratio in machine-gun ammunition belts is one tracer for every five rounds. U.S. weapons fired red tracers, while the enemy used green—which was handy not only in telling who was shooting at whom, but also made for some very colorful nighttime graphics.

Track Commander (TC): the commander of a particular vehicle. The TC was, by TO&E, to have been a sergeant. In Vietnam, many were SP4s or below.

troop: the cavalry’s version of a company. Each troop consisted of a headquarters group and three platoons. At full strength, had about 180 men. Commanded by a captain.

trooper: a cavalryman. A term also used to imply that a person has held up well despite the difficulty of the task (e.g. “That man is a real trooper.”).

USARV: U.S. Army Republic of Vietnam.

VC: See “Viet Cong.”

Viet Cong: officially *Viet Nam Cong San* (Vietnamese Communists), People’s Liberation Armed Forces in South Vietnam. The term was originally applied by Diem’s regime to Communist troops (about 10,000) left in hideouts in South Vietnam after the Geneva Conference of 1954, following the French Indochina War (1946-54). Most Communist troops, according to the agreements, had withdrawn to North Vietnam. Supported and later directed by North Vietnam, the Viet Cong first tried subversive tactics to overthrow the South Vietnamese regime, then resorted to open warfare. They were subsequently reinforced by huge numbers of North Vietnamese troops infiltrating south, and aided in the reunification of Vietnam following the collapse of South Vietnam in 1975.

Vulcan: (see “Weapons” in this glossary)

WIA: Wounded In Action.

XO: Executive Officer; second in command of a unit.

Weapons, Vehicles, and Aircraft—ours and theirs (a short list)

U.S. AND ALLIED

AC-47 Gunship: Puff the Magic Dragon, or Puffs (sometimes known by their call sign, “Spooky”), were AC-47 transport planes mounting three 7.62-mm Gatling Miniguns, each of which spit out death at a rate of 6000 rounds per minute.

ACAV: Armored Cavalry Assault Vehicle. Basically an M113 armored personnel carrier modified to be a machine-gun platform and fighting vehicle. Ours carried a .50 caliber machine-gun in the cupola and two M60 machine-guns mounted on the deck. Basic load for the machine guns included 1,500 rounds for the .50 caliber and 12,000 rounds for the M60s.

beehive: a tank main-gun round containing several thousand darts or “flechettes.” Officially referred to as “canister.” Effectively used as an anti-personnel weapon. Being on the receiving end could ruin your day.

C4: a plastic explosive used for blowing up any number of things; also used for heating C-rations. Upon manipulation, the material consolidates into a rubbery mass that can be kneaded and pressed into any shape, and sticks tightly to whatever you want to destroy. You never wanted to stomp out a lighted piece of C4 unless you wanted to lose your foot.

Caribou: a small and very tough transport aircraft capable of landing on and taking off from short, rough airstrips.

Chinook: the CH-47 tandem rotor helicopter; also known as a “Hook.”

Claymore mine: an antipersonnel mine that spews out 700 steel balls in a 60 degree arc; lethal up to 60 meters. Fired by an electrical charge triggered by a soldier typically in a defensive position. On one side was inscribed, “FRONT TOWARD ENEMY.” Got to keep it simple.

coax: short for “coaxial” machine gun mounted on a static mount. The coax our Sheridans, the coax was on a fixed-mount on the turrets of our Sheridans and fired in the direction in which the main gun was pointed.

Cobra: the AH-1G gunship that replaced the B-model Huey gunship in 1967. Typically had a toothy shark mouth painted on the nose.

hog: an M60 machine gun.

Huey: See “UH-1 Iroquois helicopter” below.

LOH or Loach: Light Observation Helicopter; a small, mosquito-like helicopter used primarily for scout duty, though sometimes jury-rigged by crazy pilots and crew chiefs to carry armament (machine guns, rockets, etc.).

M113 Armored Personnel Carrier: an armored personnel carrier. Typically modified by cavalry units in Vietnam to be a fighting, rather than transport, vehicle. See ACAV and track.

M14 rifle: wood-stock, 7.62-mm, rifle used early in the Vietnam conflict. It was heavy, but it always worked.

M16 rifle: the basic, light weight, plastic-stock, rifle of the infantryman; caliber 5.56- mm.

M1911A1 pistol: the .45 caliber pistol carried by officers, tankers, and various other soldiers. Rarely hit the side of a barn ... but when it did, that barn was coming down!

M2 machine gun: Browning .50 caliber (12.7-mm) machine gun; a World War II era automatic, belt-fed, recoil operated, air-cooled machine gun; in Vietnam, mounted in the cupola of ACAVs, Sheridans, and tanks, and fired by the Track Commander.

M3A1 Grease Gun: nicknamed the “grease gun” because it looks like one, this relic from WWII is still in use today. It’s a stubby submachine gun that fires .45 caliber bullets from a 30-round magazine. Though it’s heavy, it’s small size makes it a good weapon for tank drivers who operate in a confined space.

M42A1 Duster: using the M41 Walker Bulldog tank chassis, the Duster employed turret-mounted twin 40-mm anti-aircraft guns and a .30 cal. Browning machine gun. A Duster could put out 120 high-explosive rounds per minute. Cool!

M48 tank: U.S. tank used by both U.S. and ARVN forces. Called the Patton tank.

M551 Sheridan: the M551 Sheridan, of which there were three in a cavalry platoon; a light (17 ton, aluminum), diesel powered, airborne (i.e. could be dropped by parachute from an aircraft), tank-like assault vehicle with a 152-mm main gun, a .50 caliber M2 Browning machine-gun mounted on the commander’s cupola, and a coaxially-mounted M73 machine gun. Our Sheridans carried a basic load of 20 main gun rounds (most of them “beehive,” an anti-personnel round that fired a canister filled with several thousand steel darts called flechettes).

M60 machine-gun: a caliber 7.62-mm machine-gun that was carried as a crew-served infantry weapon or mounted on a vehicle. Still used today. Also called a “hog.”

M60 tank: the Patton; used in the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment’s tank companies.

M72 LAW: U.S., shoulder fired, light anti-tank weapon, called a LAW. Fired a 66-mm projectile from a disposable launcher.

M73 machine gun (referred to as a “coax”): the coaxially mounted M73 7.62-mm machine gun on the turret of a Sheridan or other tank.

M79 grenade launcher: U.S. 40-mm grenade launcher that looked like a stubby shotgun. Fired either a high explosive or a buckshot round. Also called a “thumper” because of the hollow “thump” sound it made when fired.

Rome Plow: a standard D7E tractor equipped with a heavy-duty protective cab and a special, canted, tree-cutting blade. It was manufactured in Rome, Georgia. Often used to clear brush on either side of major roads to diminish potential ambush sites.

UH-1 Iroquois (or “Huey”) helicopter: the utility helicopter that was the workhorse of Vietnam; often modified as a gunship. The Army’s official name, Iroquois, never caught on.

Vulcan: a six-barrel 20-mm Gatling gun mounted on a modified personnel carrier.

ENEMY

AK-47: standard NVA assault rifle. Now the standard weapon of bad guys (and some good) around the world. More AK-47s have been manufactured than any other assault rifle.

B-40: Soviet made, rocket-propelled, anti-tank weapon that fired an 82-mm warhead designed to penetrate up to 12 inches of armor. The NVA weapon of choice, along with mines, against armor and armored cavalry. See also RPG.

Bouncing Betty: spring-loaded, anti-personnel mines. Stepping on one depressed a plunger; removing your foot caused it to jump 3-4 feet out of the ground and explode.

Malayan gate: a booby trap device which depends on a fulcrum for action and usually employs spikes as the killing device. Devised by Malay communists during their unsuccessful 10 year fight against the British.

mines: both anti-tank and anti-personnel; sometimes manufactured, often homemade; used with great effectiveness against the Blackhorse.

punji stick: sharpened bamboo stake used in a primitive, but effective, booby trap; often smeared with feces to cause infection.

RPG: Soviet made, rocket-propelled, anti-tank weapon that fired an 82-mm warhead designed to penetrate up to 12 inches of armor. See also B-40. Still as effective as they were forty years ago, RPGs are killing our troops and shooting down our helicopters in hotspots around the world today.

SKS: Soviet carbine.

A TROOPER’S—AND MISCELLANEOUS—GLOSSARY

What you might have heard from a Blackhorse trooper somewhere along Thunder Road.

NOTE: As in every war, a soldier’s language—while ever so descriptive—can be a little unrefined. And so I’ll leave to your imagination a few omissions from this glossary.

betel nut (“beetle nut”): the leaves or root of the betel palm, which are mildly narcotic and are chewed by many Vietnamese, especially aged women, to relieve the pain of diseased gums. The cumulative effect of years of betel nut chewing is to totally blacken the teeth.

Blackhorse Regiment: the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

jungle juice or bug juice: insect repellent.

buy the farm: to be killed; as in, “He just bought the farm,” or “He just bought the six-by-three farm.”

Charlie: the letter C in the phonetic alphabet; in our lingo, also short for “Viet Cong.”

cowboy: a Vietnamese ruffian.

cyclo: three-wheeled conveyance with a seat on the front—sometimes motorized, sometimes pedal-powered.

C’s: C rations. Yum. See description in glossary above.

daisy cutter: a 15,000 pound BLU-82 bomb dropped by C-130 to clear an LZ. It exploded above ground level, flattening everything around.

dismount: in the cavalry of old, “dismount” was a verb meaning to get off your horse; in the cavalry of Vietnam, “dismount” was a noun referring to a dismounted night ambush patrol.

dust off: medical evacuation by helicopter.

El-Tee: short for “lieutenant,” the actual abbreviation of which is “LT.” Often used by a platoon leader’s troops when—and if—they accepted him (as in “No sweat, El-Tee, it’s just another day at The War.”).

fast mover: a jet.

fire up: to shoot at something (e.g. “We saw some lights in the wood line, and fired ’em up.”)

Freedom Bird: the aircraft that returned servicemen to The World—assuming that injury or death didn’t take them home some other way.

grease gun: a .45 caliber machine-gun; often the basic weapon of tank drivers.

grunt (noun): a line infantryman.

gunship: a heavily armed helicopter.

Hanoi Hannah: the Tokyo Rose of the Vietnam war.

higher-higher: the layer of command twice-removed from who you were. As in, “I’ll have to refer that to higher-higher.”

Ho Chi Minh sandals: sandals made from worn-out truck tires. In a hot firefight, the NVA and VC would often run right out of their Ho Chi Minhs, leaving them behind on the battlefield.

hook: a Chinook helicopter.

hootch: a simply constructed dwelling, either military or civilian.

hot: an area under fire (e.g. a hot LZ)

Incoming!: (always exclamatory): “Hit the dirt!”

in country: in Vietnam.

Indian Country: area controlled by the enemy.

Just another day at The War: the Vietnam equivalent of “Been there, done that.” But it was more than that. It was an all-purpose phrase that said “I’ve heard it all before, I’ve seen it all before, and I ain’t gonna let it bother me anymore, cause it’s just another day at The War.”

klick: short for kilometer.

Land of the Big PX: home; The World.

LBJ: 1) Long Binh Jail; the USARV Stockade, 2) Camp Long Binh Junction, home of the 90th Replacement Battalion, through which most individual replacements were processed.

lit up: fired upon (e.g. “You sure lit those guys up!”). See also “fire up.”

P-38: no, it’s not a plane, but it is one of the finest pieces of military equipment ever issued. The P-38 is a small (about an inch and a half long) can opener. It was developed during WWII by the Subsistence Research Laboratory located in Chicago. It’s official designation is “Opener, Can, Hand, Folding, Type I,” but it’s more commonly known by its nickname, P-38, which it supposedly acquired from the 38 Punctures required to open a C-Ration can. It’s also known as a “John Wayne” by many because Wayne allegedly demonstrated its use in a WWII training film. Some troopers carry their Vietnam-era P-38s on their key rings today.

pedicab: a foot-powered cyclo.

P’s: piastres; basic Vietnamese monetary unit. \$1 equaled about 100 piastres.

plastic: another name for C4, a plastic explosive.

pop smoke: to ignite a smoke grenade to identify your location and/or indicate wind direction for pilots. Also used by the enemy to confuse things. If the man on the ground said the pilot, “I’m going to pop a yellow smoke,” to confirm his position, and the enemy heard him and had a smoke grenade of that color, the enemy could pop smoke and the pilot would not know which smoke identified the position of the friendly troops.

Puff the Magic Dragon: Puffs (sometimes known simply as “Puff,” or by their call sign, “Spooky”) were AC-47 cargo planes mounting three 7.62-mm Gatling Miniguns, each of which spit out death at a rate of 6000 rounds per minute. They came to be known as “Puffs” because, to those of us on the ground (and especially to the enemy), they looked like fire-breathing dragons—and *Puff the Magic Dragon* was a popular Peter, Paul & Mary song at the time.

Real Life: (always capitalized): civilian life. As in, “What do you do in Real Life, Jonesie?”

round-eye: Caucasian woman.

Ruff-Puff: Regional Forces/Popular Forces, or RF/PF. Known as “ruff-puffs,” they were considered to be more puff than ruff. They fought for our side.

Saigon tea: colored water (sometimes soda) purchased by GIs in thimble-size glasses for Vietnamese hostesses as the price of a hostess’ company in a bar or nightclub. The hostess got a commission, and she could drink as many as the customer could buy, as fast as he could buy them.

Saigon warrior: drugstore soldier, especially one who serves or has served in Saigon.

shake and bake: a junior NCO who had received his stripes after a very short and intensive period of training.

short: having only a few weeks left on your tour. “He’s so short he can barely see over the tops of his boots.”

short timer: a soldier nearing the end of his tour of duty

short timer’s calendar: a calendar started a month or so before the end of a tour, to count down the days before taking the Freedom Bird back to The World.

slick: a Huey troop transport, so named because the seats were removed leaving a slick floor; it lacked the heavy armament of gunships, though it often carried two door-mounted M60 machine guns.

the 'Nam: Vietnam.

The Pill: any one of several types of tablets taken daily or weekly by all servicemen in Vietnam as a defense against most types of malaria. Malaria became such a problem while I was there that platoon leaders were required to check every man at the end of every day to be sure he'd taken his malaria pill and that, as night fell, his sleeves were rolled down.

The World: (always capitalized): the U.S.A.—as in, “Where you from back in The World, dude?” Also called the “Land of the Big PX.” Interestingly, Vietnam seems to have been the only conflict in which the term “The World” was used.

Thumper: an M79 grenade launcher, so called because it made a hollow "thump" when fired.

tomorrow: never make a date for “tomorrow” with a Vietnamese girl. “Tomorrow nevah come in Vietnam, GI.”

track: any of a number of tracked vehicles such as ACAVs, tanks, Sheridans, etc.

upcountry: any place outside the Saigon-Long Binh/Bien Hoa area.

wasted: killed.

white mice: the *Canh Sat*; the Vietnamese national police force. Its members wore white shirts.

white space: the most prevalent element on the front pages of the best Vietnamese newspapers when censorship was in effect, which was usually.

Willie Pete: White Phosphorous round or grenade (evil stuff that burns unchecked through human bodies and metal objects).

wire: coiled barbed wire, also called concertina wire, that provided a first line of defense against an attacking enemy.

'Yard: short for Montagnard, a French word meaning; “mountaineer.” Member of any one of a number of semi-nomadic, aboriginal tribes which live in the mountains of Vietnam. Disliked by both the North *and* South Vietnamese, they were exceptional fighters and extraordinarily loyal to their U.S. friends.

zap: to kill or seriously wound.

Zoomie: jet jockey.

Zippo or Zippo track: a flame thrower track; usually a modified tank or armored personnel carrier.

A VIETNAMESE GLOSSARY

What they said to us, and we (with little linguistic success) said back to them.

beaucoup: from the French. In Vietnam it can mean many, much, big, huge, very, etc.

cam on (“cahm oon”): Vietnamese for “thank you.”

chao co (ong) (em) (“chow coh [ohm] [em]”): Vietnamese for hello or good-bye, Miss (Sir) (to a child, animal or very close friend).

cheap charlie: anyone, especially a U.S. serviceman, who does not waste his money. (See “plenty cheap charlie.”)

Chieu Hoi (“chew hoy”): the Vietnamese-administered “Open Arms” program for defecting enemy soldiers. (See “Hoi Chanh.”)

chop-chop: food, or eat.

dien cai dao (“dinky-daow”): Vietnamese for “crazy in the head.”

di di (mau) (“dee-dee maow”): Vietnamese for “go away (fast).”

dinky-dao (“dinky daow”): crazy.

dung lai (“zoong lye”): Vietnamese for “halt” or “stop.”

fini: from the French. Vietnamese meanings include: through, finished, depart (as in, “When you fini Vietnam, GI?”) and even kill (as is, “She fini him with knife.”).

Hoi Chanh (“hoyee chahn”): the Vietnamese term for an enemy soldier who voluntarily rallied to the cause of the government of South Vietnam. See also “Chieu Hoi.”

khong lau (“kohng laow”): Vietnamese for “neva hoppen.”

lai da: (“lye dye”): Vietnamese for “come here.”

lam on (“lahm oon”): Vietnamese for “please.”

no bic: I don’t understand.

numbah-one GI: serviceman who spends a good deal of money on the Vietnamese economy, or who is liked for some other reason.

numbah-ten GI: Serviceman who spends little money on the Vietnamese economy, or one who refuses to make a proposed purchase—or who is disliked for any other reason.

nuoc mam (“noouk mum”): the Vietnamese national dish; fermented fish sauce.

piaster: the basic denomination of Vietnamese money. \$1 equaled about 100 piastres.

plenty cheap charlie: one who wastes even less money than an ordinary cheap charlie.

so mot (“sah maht”): Vietnamese for “numbah one,” the best.

so mudi (sah mooee”): Vietnamese for “numbah 10,” the worst.

ti ti (“tee-tee”): Vietnamese for “small” or “very little.”

toi yen em (nhieu lam) (“toy you em [nyoo lahm]”): Vietnamese for “I love you (too much).”

troi oi (“choyee oyee”): an emphatic expression in Vietnamese which can mean just about anything the user wants it to mean. **Troi duc oi** (choyee duck oyee) is the same expression more emphatically stated.

xau lam (“saow lahm”): Vietnamese for “numbah ten thousand” (indescribably bad.).

xin loi (“sin loy”): Vietnamese for “Sorry ’bout that.”

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SORTS

Most of the information contained in my account of *The Battle for Buttons* came from first person interviews—some verbal, some by e-mail. And most of those interviews were with 11th Cav troopers, particularly those with I Troop. But there have been others with cavalrymen, tankers, grunts, aviators, and chaplains I've met along the way who were not with I Troop. A few other sources are noted below.

I don't suppose anything could be written in this day and age without the **Internet**, could it? And everything you find on the Internet is correct and accurate, is it not? Well, of course not. Where possible I've verified my Internet information with first-person sources. And, of course, I've nearly brought Google to its knees on many a late-night patrol into cyberspace.

The **National Archives and Records Administration** at 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD, 20740-6001, is a treasure trove of information: After Action Reports, Duty Officer's Logs, daily logs, lessons learned, and so forth. It's a great place to take a load of quarters for the copier, curl up in a quiet corner, and read about yourself and your unit. Or if you want to get there a little faster, go to <http://www.archives.gov>. Sadly, because I Troop was OPCON to the 1st Cavalry Division during The Battle for Buttons, there is nothing to be found in 11th Cav reports about this action, and very little in 1st Cav reports.

J.D. Coleman has written a wonderful book entitled *Incursion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991). It really focuses on the 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam and Cambodia from 1968 to 1970. But for any Blackhorse troopers who would like to read a bit about themselves, I highly recommend it.