

Vietnam War - facts, figures and trivia

A few facts, figures and trivia about the Vietnam War, the longest war ever fought by the United States of America.

The Vietnam War was officially fought between North and South Vietnam. It lasted for 19 years, five months, four weeks and one day and took place from 1 November 1955 to 30 April 1975.

Although the USA never declared war on North Vietnam, some 2.7 million US troops served in Vietnam.

Besides the United States, seven other countries sent troops to fight or serve on the side of South Vietnam. They were South Korea, Thailand, Australia, Philippines, New Zealand, Khmer Republic and the Kingdom of Laos. The Republic of China provided military support.

The belligerents on the North's side were North Vietnam, Vietcong, Khmer Rouge and Pather Lao. The USSR, People's Republic of China, North Korea and Cuba provided military support.

Vietnam War Trivia

- At the end of the Vietnam War, the crewmen on the aircraft carrier USS Midway pushed \$10 million worth of helicopters into the sea so that a Cessna full of evacuees could land on the deck.
- Hugh Thomson, the man who during the Vietnam War had landed a helicopter in the line of fire to confront and stop American troops who had by that point killed close to 500 unarmed civilians in the My Lai Massacre, was labeled a traitor by Congress and ordered not to speak about the event.
- The Vietnam War is known as "the American War" or *Kháng chiến chống Mỹ* in Vietnam.
- In 2005, NSA documents were declassified that proved that the second Gulf of Tonkin incident, which was used as a justification for the

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (which led to the Vietnam War), never happened.

- In 1967, protesters in USA requested a permit to levitate the Pentagon 300 feet in the air, through songs and chants, to exorcise it of its evil and end the Vietnam War. Authorities agreed to only 3 feet.
- During the Vietnam War, an estimated 125,000 Americans fled to Canada to avoid the military draft. Around half returned to the US when President Carter, in his first day in office, granted them amnesty.
- Congressional Medal of Honor Winner Peter Lemon was high on marijuana when he single-handedly fought off two waves of Vietcong troops and dragged a wounded soldier to safety.
- A popular children's toy in the United States, Slinkys



Slinky

were used in the Vietnam War as mobile radio antennas. They would sling the Slinky over branches and extend the range of their radios.

- During the Vietnam War, the US military produced recordings of ghostly voices and eerie sounds to play to the Vietcong, who believed that if a body wasn't buried, the person's soul would wander the Earth forever. It was known as "Operation Wandering Soul". No one really knows what effect it had, if any. You can listen to "Ghost Tape No. 10" by clicking [here](#). The tape is undeniably creepy, filled with voices claiming to be from Hell, trapped there after dying senseless deaths, looking for their children, and wanting desperately to go home.
- There was a false belief during the war that the Vietnamese had a superstition with the Ace of Spades card, considering it to be a symbol of death and that they would flee at the sight of the Ace. Therefore the U.S. Playing Card Company shipped crates of this card to Vietnam, where they were scattered during raids in an effort to terrify the Vietcong.

- An infamous photograph of what looks like an execution was used by the anti-war movement for propaganda purposes. They claimed that it showed a South Vietnamese officer executing an innocent Vietnamese civilian.
- During the Vietnam War, a US task force known as 'Tiger Force' routinely cut off the ears of its victims to make necklaces from them.
- When Colonel "Chappie" James was Vice Wing Commander under legendary ace Colonel Robin Olds during the Vietnam War, they were known as "BlackMan & Robin."
- During the Vietnam war, Navy Seal teams One and Two amassed a combined kill/death ratio of 200:1.
- The United States' use of Agent Orange during the Vietnam War resulted in 400,000 people being killed or maimed, and 500,000 birth defects.
- During the early 1960s, there was a 'Secret War', where the CIA recruited 50% of the Hmong population to fight for the US in the Vietnam War. Afterwards, they were completely abandoned.
- Duct Tape was used during the Vietnam War to repair helicopter rotor blades.
- A 'liquid land mine' was invented during the Vietnam

Casualties & Loses

South			North		
Country	Dead	Wounded	Country	Dead	Wounded
South Vietnam	313,000	313,000	NVA / Vietcong	849,018	600,000+
United States	58,318	58,318	China	1,100	4,200
Kingdom of Laos	30,000	30,000	North Korea	14	Unknown
South Korea	5,099	5,099			
Australia	521	521			
Thailand	351	351			
New Zealand	37	37			
Republic of China	25	25			
Philippines	9	9			

Approximately two million Vietnamese civilians were also killed during the war.



GAME OVER: South Vietnamese Chief of Police Nguyen Ngoc Loan executes Vietcong intelligence officer Nguyen Van Lem.

War, which was poured on the ground to form a mine, and best of all, it self-deactivated in four days, keeping kids safe from mines that had not been triggered.

- An Air Force Sergeant during the Vietnam War created an “underground” radio station in the back of a Vietnamese brothel where he played hard rock, made vulgar jokes and openly opposed the war. The radio station was operated on channel 69.
- Roy Benavidez, a US soldier in the Vietnam War, performed possibly the most heroic six hours of battle any soldier ever has. When faced with over 1,000 NVA (North Vietnamese Army) troops, Roy P. Benavidez flew into a gunfight to save 12 Special Forces soldiers with only a knife. He was shot multiple times and believed dead, until he spat in the face of the medic trying to put him in a body bag. It took 13 years to get him the Medal of Honor.



Võ Nguyên Giáp

- During the Vietnam War, a US Prisoner of War was forced to do a press conference saying that they were treated well. He managed to convey the truth by blinking “TORTURE” in Morse code.
- Superglue was used during the Vietnam War to slow bleeding until soldiers could get to a hospital.
- During the Vietnam War, one unconventional technique used by the United States against the Vietcong was replacing their ammunition with decoy explosive ammunition, which destroyed their weapons when fired.
- US President Richard Nixon is suspected of sabotaging the Paris Peace Accords, extending the Vietnam War by five years to ensure his own election.
- NVA General Võ Nguyên Giáp not only gave the American a torrid time in Vietnam. He also orchestrated successive defeats of the Japanese and the French. Even Death had a hard time finishing off Giáp – he lived to 102 years of age.
- The majority of the men who fought in Vietnam weren’t drafted - they volunteered.
- In 1985 British pop singer Paul Hardcastle had a hit with a song titled *19*. This, according to the song, was the average age of US soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War. The average age of US soldiers killed in Vietnam was actually 22. Still young, but not a teenager.
- The common belief is that the fighting in Vietnam was



Roy Benavidez

not as intense as in World War II. Yet the average infantryman in the South Pacific during World War II saw about 40 days of combat in four years. The average infantryman in Vietnam saw about 240 days of combat in one year thanks to the mobility of the helicopter.

- One out of every 10 Americans who served in Vietnam was a casualty. 58,148 were killed and 304,000 wounded out of 2.7 million who served. Although the percent that died is similar to other wars, amputations or crippling wounds were 300 percent higher than in World War II. 75,000 Vietnam veterans are severely disabled.
- MEDEVAC helicopters flew nearly 500,000 missions. Over 900,000 patients were airlifted (nearly half were American). The average time lapse between wounding to hospitalization was less than one hour. As a result, less than one percent of all Americans wounded, who survived the first 24



THE BIG LIE: A ceremony honours the arrival of bodies of troops killed in Vietnam. Most of the coffins, however, were empty.

- hours, died.
- The helicopter provided unprecedented mobility. Without the helicopter it would have taken three times as many troops to secure the 1.287 km border with Cambodia and Laos.
- 30,000 American draft dodgers went to Canada during the Vietnam War, while 30,000 Canadians joined the US military to fight in the Vietnam War.
- On his second day in office, President Jimmy Carter pardoned all evaders of the Vietnam War drafts.
- The former Prime Minister of Vietnam moved to Orange County after the war, where he opened and ran a liquor store.
- The U.S. government spent years holding fake arrival ceremonies honouring the return of American soldiers killed in WWII, Vietnam, and Korea to American soil, but the planes were actually empty. The ceremonies were known by staff as “The Big Lie.”
- In the ’60s, the C.I.A. paid Vietnamese spies with merchandise from mail-order Sears catalogs, since they had little use for paper money.
- The Medal of Honor was awarded 259 for acts of bravery during the Vietnam War. 173 were to the US Army, 15 to the US Navy, 57 to the US Marine Corps and 14 to the US Air Force. A Medal of Honor was also awarded to the Vietnam Unknown Soldier.
- The first Medal of Honor presentation for Vietnam was to Captain Roger Donlon for actions on 6 July 1964 as commanding officer of the U.S. Army Special Forces Detachment defending Camp Nam Dong against a Vietcong attack.
- Thomas William Bennett (April 7, 1947 – February 11, 1969) was a U.S. Army medic and the second conscientious objector to receive the Medal of Honor

(Desmond Doss, a medic in World War II, was the first). Bennett was killed in action during the Vietnam War and posthumously received the Medal of Honor.

- Three chaplains received the medal, including Vincent R. Capodanno, who served with the Marine Corps and was known as the “Grunt Padre.”
- The Vietcong became experts at digging tunnels. The Cu Chi Tunnels (about 75 kilometres northwest of Saigon) were a warren of tunnels used the by Vietcong to attack targets around Saigon. Built under fortified villages, where peasants had been forcibly moved, Cu Chi was a 200 kilometre long network of passages with underground hospitals, meeting rooms, multi-level sleeping quarters, trap doors, smokeless kitchens, air raid shelters, weapons factories, strategy rooms and even entire underground villages with theaters and movie halls. In some places the tunnels had three stories.



Medal of Honor

- The Cu Chi tunnel system was so large and complex that road signs were used to help the Vietcong soldiers navigate their way around and avoid bamboo-stake booby traps meant for the American and Australian soldiers that tried to ferret them out. Favored traps included punji stake pits with hidden upward-pointing bamboo stakes, and bamboo sticks that released an extremely poisonous snake called the three step snake, because its venom was toxic that a person collapsed three steps after being bitten.
- American, Australian and New Zealand troops came up with a special way of dealing with Vietcong tunnels - tunnel rats. These were volunteers that would go into the tunnels. Usually they were small in stature. Whenever troops would uncover a tunnel, tunnel rats were sent in to kill any hid-



KITCHEN COMPLEX: One of the many kitchen complexes set in the Cu Chi Tunnels.

ing enemy soldiers and to plant explosives to destroy the tunnels. A tunnel rat was equipped with only a standard issue .45 caliber pistol, a bayonet and a flashlight, although most tunnel rats were allowed to choose another pistol with which to arm themselves.

- The main supply route for weapons, supplies and troops infiltrating into South Vietnam was the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a network of

roads and trails extending from North Vietnam through eastern Laos and Cambodia to South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese called the route the Truong Son Road after the ridge it ran along or Highway 559 after the engineer brigade that built it. The route began in a gorge the North Vietnamese called "Heaven's Gate."

- The object of some of the U.S.'s first military actions in Southeast Asia was to disrupt the movement of supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Throughout the Vietnam War a great deal of money and effort was spent trying to shut it down. Thousands of tons of bombs were dropped on it, key battles such as Hamburger Hill and Khe Sanh were fought to control it. Everything that the U.S. forces tried was ultimately unable to shut it down.
- The Vietcong were skilled at building and employing booby traps. One of the most common booby traps used by the Vietcong was the punji stick. A hole would



SIMPLE BUT EFFECTIVE: Punji sticks were not designed to kill and enemy but rather to wound them.

be dug into the ground and a number of sharpened wooded or bamboo stakes were placed upright in the ground. The presence of punji sticks would be camouflaged by natural undergrowth, crops, grass, brush or similar materials. When someone stepped on the trap the stakes would penetrate through their boot. Often the sticks would be covered in human feces. In the harsh tropical heat this could lead to an infection very quickly. Sometimes a pit would be dug with punji sticks in the sides pointing downward at an angle. A soldier stepping into the pit would find it impossible to remove his leg without doing severe damage, and injuries might be incurred by the simple act of falling forward while one's leg is in a narrow, vertical, stake-lined pit. Such pits would require time and care

to dig the soldier's leg out, immobilizing the unit longer than if the foot were simply pierced.

- Air America was an American passenger and cargo airline covertly owned and operated by the US government between 1950 and 1976. It was used as a dummy corporation for Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operations, including many in Vietnam and surrounding countries.
- The term fragging is used to describe the deliberate killing or attempted killing by a soldier of a fellow soldier, usually a superior officer or non-commissioned officer (NCO). The word was coined by U.S. military personnel during the Vietnam War, when such killings were most often attempted with a fragmentation grenade, sometimes making it appear as though the kill-

ing was accidental or during combat with the enemy. The term fragging is now often used to encompass any means used to deliberately and directly cause the death of military colleagues. The high number of fragging incidents in the latter years of the Vietnam War was symptomatic of the unpopularity of the war with the American public and the breakdown of discipline in the U.S. Armed Forces. Documented and suspected fragging incidents totaled nearly nine hundred from 1969 to 1972.

- By the end of the war, seven million tons of bombs had been dropped on Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia - more than twice the amount of bombs dropped on Europe and Asia in World War II.
- The term "Zippo Raids" was coined during the Vietnam War. These were military operations which involved burning down Vietnamese villages. Often Zippo cigarette lighters were used to ignite the huts.
- 12,000 American helicopters saw action during the Vietnam War.
- Many American troops were not in the least impressed with the M-16 rifle. The weapon was prone to jamming and the inside of the barrel was vulnerable to corrosion in the brutal Vietnam climate.



TUNNEL RAT: Probably one of the most dangerous jobs of the Vietnam War - going into Vietcong tunnels and seeking out the enemy.