

Virginians at War

Vietnam: Air Operations

Resource Packet

Contains: Glossary, Timeline, Images, Discussion Questions, Additional Resources

Program Description: The Vietnam War was one of the major conflicts of the Cold War, and holds a unique place in the minds of the American people. Virginians at War: Vietnam – Air Operations includes personal recollections from veterans of the Vietnam War, with focus on the revolutionary technology of helicopters and American air operations. Helicopters represented the difference between life and death for many of those who served in Vietnam; these are their stories.

Copyright: Virginia War Memorial Foundation, 2014

Length: 19:40

Streaming link: <https://vimeo.com/367042606>

Featured Speakers:

CPL William Akers, Jr., Glen Allen
LT Col John Edgerton, Williamsburg
E-4 James Lee Jordan, Rocky Mount
CW2 Joseph O. Kama, Hampton
BG William Louisell, Richmond
COL Donald Pabst, Richmond
CW2 Philip Cary Shelton, Glen Allen
CW2 Richard Smail, Park City
SSG Stan Whitehead, Richmond
CAPT William Young, Richmond

For a transcript of this program and more information on the Vietnam War, please visit vawarmemorial.org/learn/resources/vietnam.



GLOSSARY

IMPORTANT TERMS

- **Chin bubble:** the plexiglass “bubble” beneath the pilot’s seat on a Huey helicopter.
- **Communism:** a form of government and economic philosophy based on the concept of community or government ownership of business
- **Democracy:** a system of government in which the people exercise the authority of government; democratic governments in the Cold War era included the United States.
- **Jungle penetrator:** a rescue device used to hoist a survivor from the ground to a hovering helicopter.
- **Rice Paddy:** a flooded area of land used for growing rice, common in Vietnam.
- **RPG:** a rocket-propelled grenade
- **VC:** short for Viet Cong, also known as the National Liberation Front; the guerrilla force that fought against the United States and South Vietnam, with the support of the North Vietnamese Army. Also referred to by American soldiers as “Victor Charlie,” or “VC” in the phonetic alphabet.

IMPORTANT PLACES

- Ia Drang Valley
- North Vietnam
- South Vietnam
- Vinh

MEDALS

- **Air Medal:** a military decoration awarded to a member of the United States Armed Forces for single acts of heroism or meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight.
- **Army Commendation Medal:** a military decoration awarded to a member of the United States Armed Forces who “distinguished themselves by heroism, meritorious achievement or meritorious service.”
- **Bronze Star:** a military decoration awarded to a member of the United States Armed Forces for either heroic achievement, heroic service, meritorious achievement, or meritorious service in a combat zone.
- **Distinguished Flying Cross:** a military decoration awarded to a member of the United States Armed Forces who distinguishes himself in support of operations by “heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight.”
- **Purple Heart:** a military decoration for those wounded or killed in action.

HELICOPTERS

Chinook

The Boeing CH-47 Chinook was one of the standard helicopters used by the United States Army in the Vietnam War, and was often used for missions that called for heavy lifting.



Cobra

The Bell AH-1 Cobra was the primary attack helicopter used by the US Army during the Vietnam War.

Huey

The Bell UH-1 Iroquois (often known as the Huey) was a multipurpose, utility helicopter that was commonly used by the United States military in the Vietnam War. Often, UH-1 helicopters would be used for attack missions, medical evacuations, search and rescue missions, and more.



VIETNAM WAR TIMELINE

- **May 7, 1954:** Ho Chi Minh's communist Viet Minh forces defeat the French to end the First Indochina War
- **July 1954:** countries come to an agreement at the Geneva Conference to divide Vietnam into two zones - North Vietnam to be governed by the Viet Minh, and South Vietnam to be governed by the State of Vietnam. Cambodia and Laos created as separate states.
- **November 1, 1955:** the first American advisors are sent to South Vietnam as the American Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was created.
- **December 20, 1960:** National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) established in South Vietnam.
- **August 2-4, 1964:** Gulf of Tonkin incident, Johnson seeks congressional approval for United States involvement
- **March 8, 1965:** First United States Marines land in Vietnam (Danang)
- **November 14-18, 1965:** the Battle of Ia Drang - the first large scale battle between the United States and the North Vietnamese Army. Both sides claim victory.
- **January 21-July 9, 1968:** Battle of Khe Sanh
- **January 31, 1968:** the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong launch the surprise Tet Offensive, attacking provincial capitals and other urban centers throughout South Vietnam.
- **January 27, 1973:** Cease-fire reached between North Vietnam and the United States. POWs begin to return home.
- **March 29, 1973:** last US combat troops leave South Vietnam.
- **April 30, 1975:** Fall of Saigon.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was unique about helicopters that made them a defining aspect of warfare in Vietnam?
2. How does technological innovation and creativity affect warfare? What are some other technological developments that defined major changes in how wars are fought?
3. There are a few different descriptions of homecoming in this film. What do you know about the way Vietnam War veterans were treated when they returned home? Does the portrayal in this film surprise you?
4. How do we determine and evaluate success in war? Do you think that the United States won or lost the Vietnam War? Explain.
5. What is the role of a place like the Virginia War Memorial in telling stories like the ones told in this film? What are other ways to honor and remember those who fought in wars like the Vietnam War? What can you do to make sure these sacrifices are not forgotten?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about the experiences of Virginians in the Vietnam War, view *Virginians at War: Vietnam War - Tet Offensive* at vawarmemorial.org. Looking to do more research? Check out the links below.

- National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/research/vietnam-war>
- Encyclopedia Britannica (for Middle School): <https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Vietnam-War/277599>
- Khan Academy: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/postwarera/1960s-america/a/the-vietnam-war>
- Ken Burns/PBS: <https://vpm.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/ken-burns-the-vietnam-war/>
- Music from Ken Burns' Vietnam War (Spotify): <https://open.spotify.com/album/11jfbjzLcCXOv1R70CosnO>

