

Abstract

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, requires federal agencies to inventory and evaluate their cultural resources as those resources near 50 years of age. Vietnam War-era buildings, structures, and sites in the United States are reaching that age benchmark. This report focuses on resources built in the United States to support the Vietnam War (1962–1975) ground combat training efforts. This work supplements a previous report, *Vietnam and the Home Front: How DoD Installations Adapted, 1962-1975*, produced by ERDC-CERL in 2014 that established the overarching historic context for Vietnam-related construction on many U.S. installations. This project expands on the information in that report to address the role of ground combat training in preparing troops for fighting in Vietnam, and it can be used as a starting point for identifying and evaluating historic Vietnam-related ground combat training resources.

Objective

The purpose of this project is to provide a broad historic context for Vietnam War-era ground combat training properties in the United States. The research on ground combat training establishes what training activities were conducted during the war as well as provides an in-theater context of the Vietnam War from 1962 through 1975. As such, ground combat operations conducted in Vietnam are explored and connections are made between those operations and how training in the United States was adapted to meet the demands of the ever-changing battlefield. This project does not explore the details of Vietnam War combat through important battles and engagements, but provides a context of the war that supports developing military facilities in the United States to meet the unique demands of the war.

Methodology

Very little research has been conducted on DoD construction efforts in direct support of the Vietnam War. The construction history of ground combat training infrastructure that spans 1962-1975 is unlike most historic contexts which typically include a list of important building types, integrity analyses, and character-defining features. Although all branches of the military trained for ground combat, because the Army and the Marine Corps make up the majority of ground forces, this context primarily focuses on the training facilities for those branches. The research process included a literature review, primary and secondary source investigations, field work, and a final report compilation.

Benefits

This project can be used by cultural resource managers to develop more detailed research efforts that will lead to the identification and evaluation of specific Vietnam-era ground combat training facilities at DoD installations. This historic context provides a standardized approach to determining the historical significance of Vietnam-era ground combat training facilities, resulting in efficiencies in identification and evaluation of resources as well as cost-savings throughout the U.S. military cultural resource management programs.



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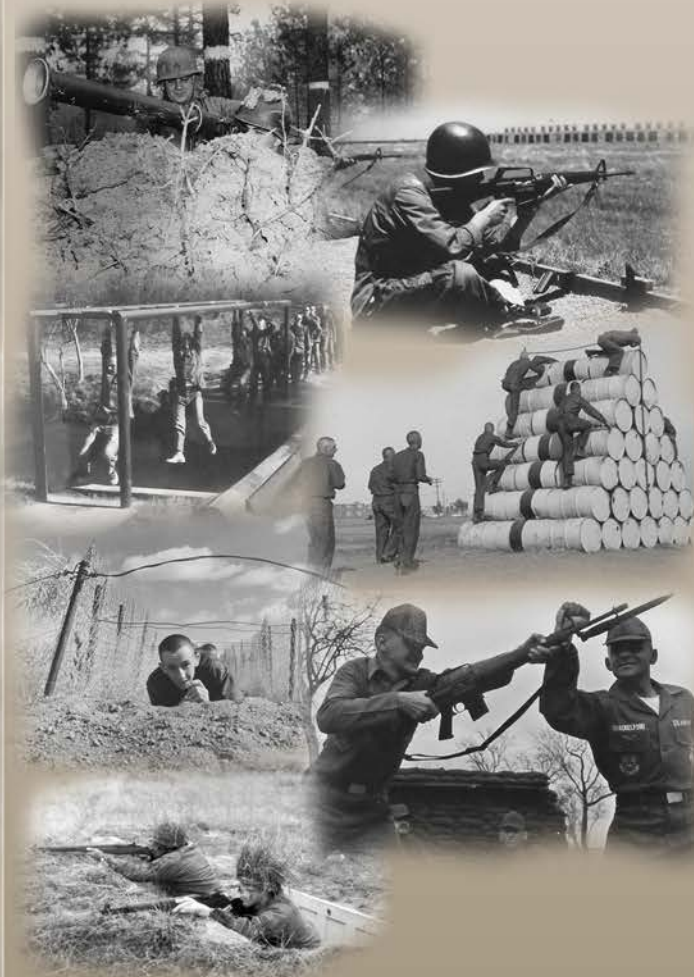
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Vietnam and the Home Front: Ground Combat Training



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U.S. Military Involvement in Vietnam

In August 1964 the United States officially escalated its involvement in the Vietnam conflict when President Lyndon B. Johnson revoked the remaining restrictions on combat in the aftermath of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. Prior to the summer of 1964, the U.S. had been providing military advisors to the South Vietnamese military for over a decade. Even in an advisory role, the U.S. was heavily involved in military operations while working closely and influencing the South Vietnamese government. After the escalation, U.S. involvement in Vietnam would last another decade when, in 1973, President Richard M. Nixon withdrew all remaining troops from the country.

Ground Combat Training in the United States

Ground combat training instructs soldiers in how to conduct battle on the earth's surface by using a variety of techniques and weapons to span a range of distances, from direct contact to several miles. Ground combat training also acclimates soldiers to the unpredictable sights and sounds of battle.¹ Training for ground warfare is conducted in diverse terrains and through all types of weather. Training often takes place on ranges constructed to resemble the types of terrain soldiers encounter during combat, to enhance realism in training. Ground combat training sites include small arms ranges, hand-to-hand combat areas, obstacle courses, cavalry courses, bayonet training, training villages, mock sites, close combat courses, infiltration courses, and large-scale operation areas. Land-based warfare is the dominant form of nearly all U.S. military campaigns, and all troops are trained in the fundamentals of ground combat standards during their basic training. The U.S. Army and the U.S. Marines are the service branches that conduct nearly all ground combat operations.

Although the U.S. military has advanced their fighting capabilities through technological and operational advances, the basics of ground combat training for the U.S. military have remained largely unchanged. Training for ground warfare encompasses the types of weapons being used in the type of terrain that soldiers will encounter. Realistic training prepares ground combat troops by introducing them to the sights and sounds of battle while reducing uncertainties. In this regard, the ground combat training that prepared soldiers for fighting in Vietnam used, or adapted, existing techniques and facilities to expedite the flow of personnel into the conflict. During combat operations in Vietnam, ground combat troops were supported by the Air Force and the Navy.

This project outlines the general types of ground combat training infrastructure used during the Vietnam War. There were three general categories of ground combat training facilities used: ranges, courses, and training villages. Infrastructure for those areas consisted of buildings, targets, obstacles, firing lines, and (in the case of training villages) other structures that conveyed the physical characteristics of the specific type of village.

Training Villages

Training villages increased recruits readiness for the realities of Vietnam combat by creating immersive contexts in which training took place. Mock villages had similar elements to typical Vietnamese hamlets. The main feature was typically a collection of huts or other small buildings, often constructed from grass or tree branches. Some villages were more elaborate and included moats, perimeter fencing, and guard towers. Most had agricultural elements such as animal pens or haystacks. The utility for combat training was emphasized by the inclusion of VC booby traps and tunnels most often made out of concrete or steel pipes.



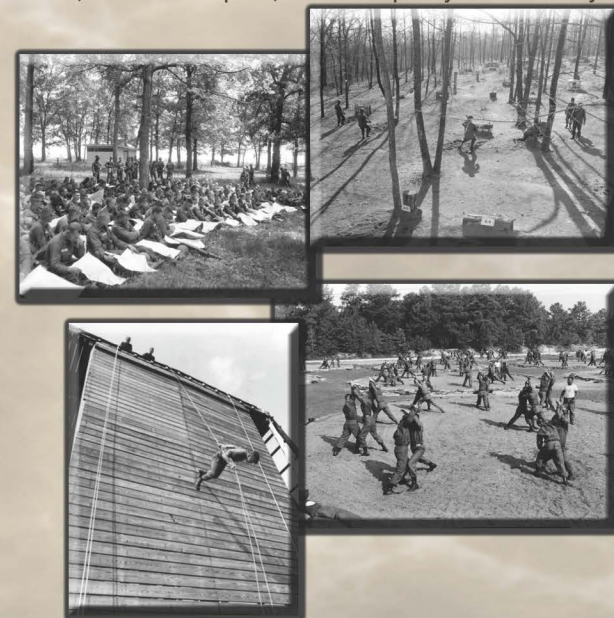
Ranges

Ranges were used for a variety of weapons training and consisted of a firing line, targets, and support buildings. Rangelands were also used for training in navigation, bivouac, and survival techniques.



Courses

Courses were designed as circuits where recruits were trained how to react to a variety of conditions and obstacles. Courses provided realistic training in which soldiers learned how to maneuver, use their weapons, and react quickly and efficiently.



Conclusions

Vietnam and the Home Front: How DoD Installations Adapted, 1962-1975 (ERDC-CERL 2014), established an overall historic context for Vietnam-related construction on many U.S. installations and identified thematic areas, including ground combat training. This supplemental report provides information on the role of ground combat training in the United States and on the types and uses of specialized training facilities. Several types of properties related to ground combat training are identified: ranges, courses, and mock villages. A process is provided in this report for step-by-step evaluation of these resources, allowing for both new construction and modified facilities. This report provides a background and a framework for assisting installation cultural resources personnel to make standardized determinations of NRHP eligibility of Vietnam-era ground combat training resources that is applicable to many military facilities.

¹Dan Archibald, Adam Smith, Sunny Adams, and Manroop Chawla, *Military Training Lands Historic Context: Training Village, Mock Sites, and Large Scale Operations Areas*. ERDC/CERL TR-10-10 (Champaign, IL: U.S. Army Engineer and Research Development Center, March 2010), 5.