

US Army Corps of Engineers®

Vietnam and the Home Front: How DoD Installations Adapted, 1962-1975



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Abstract

In the United States, the buildup for the Vietnam War included construction of mission-related buildings and structures to support the war. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, requires federal agencies to inventory and evaluate their cultural resources, usually as they near 50 years of age. These structures are about to turn 50, and there is currently no existing historic context describing the development, construction, and use of Vietnam War mission-related facilities. In this project, a broad overview from 1962 through 1975 highlights the Vietnam- influenced construction that created facilities on many installations. This new construction augmented the existing World War II-era infrastructure that became heavily utilized in support of the Vietnam War. By providing a broad foundation of the U.S. military's involvement in Vietnam, results of this project can be utilized to develop more detailed research that will lead to identification and evaluation of Vietnam-era facilities at Department of Defense military installations in the United States. This project's historic context provides military cultural resources professionals with a standardized approach to determine the significance of Vietnam-era facilities, greatly increasing efficiency and cost-savings of this necessary effort to the U.S. military.

Objective

The objective of this effort was to research, investigate, and write a broad historic context on how DoD installations in the United States adapted and changed during the conflict in Vietnam. The project highlighted the Vietnam-era influenced construction that created facilities on many installations. This new construction augmented the existing World War II-era infrastructure that became heavily re-utilized in support of the Vietnam War.

Methodology

Since very little has been researched and written about DoD construction history during 1962–1975, this effort looked at the broad history of construction on the home front and highlighted areas that need more in-depth research; in that way, this study is unlike most historic contexts which include a list of important building types, integrity analyses, and character-defining features. In addition, the context contains proportionately more information about the Army, relative to other services, as a result of the Army having proportionally more personnel in-country and more installations at home. The process included a literature review, investigation of primary and secondary sources for content, field work at installations, and report production.



Army recruiters on a cross-country motorcycle trip to talk to youth about the Modern Volunteer Army, 1971.

U.S. Military Involvement in Vietnam

Officially, the United States escalated its involvement in the conflict in August 1964, when President Lyndon B. Johnson revoked existing restrictions on combat in the aftermath of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. However prior to 1964, the United States had already been providing military advisors to the South Vietnamese military for a decade. Even in its advisory role, the United States was already heavily involved in military operations while working closely with the South Vietnamese government. After the war escalated in late 1964, the conflict would last almost another decade until President Nixon withdrew most U.S. troops by 1973.

Vietnam-related Construction in the United States

Simultaneously pursuing the Cold War containment while conducting a hot war in Vietnam strained the U.S. military, and as the financial demands of Vietnam came to overshadow most military decisions and operations, increasingly few resources were allocated for other uses. In this way, mobilizing and supporting the Vietnam War undoubtedly slowed the rate of military construction in the United States. However, the urgency of the conflict and its gradual intensification led to a piecemeal approach of reactive construction efforts that closely corresponded to the immediate demands of ever-changing combat requirements.

Training Villages

As a method of increasing American troops' readiness for Vietnam, certain training bases challenged the recruits with a Vietnam-oriented facility. Mock villages had similar elements, with the overall organization of a Vietnamese hamlet. The main feature was usually a collection of huts or other small buildings, often constructed from grass or tree branches. Some were fortified with 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 booby traps and tunnels. Although some of them were constructed out of permanent materials like concrete and generally all of the "tunnels" consisted of concrete sewer pipes.



Mock village used in advanced infantry training at Fort Polk, Louisiana, January 1966.



Orientation and training at the mock Viet Cong village at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, February 1968.



Southeast Asian Training Village at USMC Base Quantico, 1966.



Workers construct a "long house" at Bau Bang training village at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, 1966.

Academic and Training Schools

Training Schools for many military specialties were either founded or expanded to accommodate the large increase in military personnel during the war. Aviation training facilities were essential to all four service branches, as much of the transportation of personnel, both to/from and within South Vietnam was accomplished by air. Both helicopter and fixed-wing flight training schools were utilized. There were also logistics schools, medical training schools, naval amphibious schools, officer training schools, and many others. Although some were new construction, many of these schools reused older buildings.



Flight simulator training at Fort Lewis, Washington, 1969.



USAF Survival School complex at Fairchild AFB, Washington, 1966.



John F. Kennedy Hall at the Special Warfare Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 1966.



Gates-Lord Hall, Defense Information School, Fort Benjamin Harrison, under construction in 1965.

Airlift Capability

Airlifts were designated as the primary method for transporting troops and light equipment, because they could deliver troops and supplies faster. Heavy equipment and bulk supplies were transported by sealfit. U.S. military personnel deployed to Vietnam flew on a combination of Air Force transport and chartered civilian airplanes. Airlift by helicopter was critical to evacuating wounded soldiers. Mostly flown by the Army, medevac helicopters could transport a patient to an in-country medical facility within minutes. The advances in the medical transportation of battlefield wounded resulted in a great number of saved lives. The most seriously wounded patients were medevaced to the U.S. on Air Force airplanes; the Air Force also flew home the remains of deceased U.S. military personnel.



U.S. Army troops at Travis AFB, CA board World Airways flight to Vietnam, 1968.



An Air Force nurse and a Red Cross nurse attend to patients aboard an Air Force C-141 for an evacuation flight from Vietnam to the U.S., 1967.



Travis AFB Passenger Terminal, 1964.



Travis AFB Passenger Terminal and Airfield, 1960s.

Reuse of Older Buildings

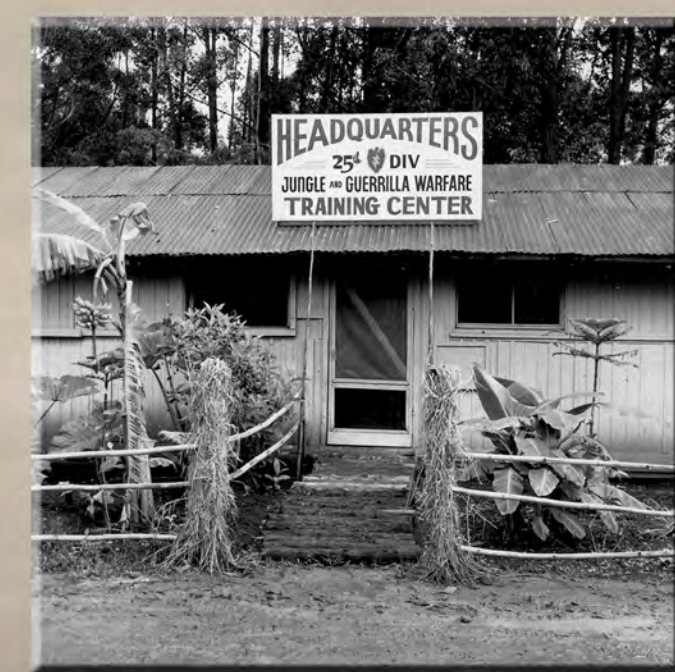
Because of the urgency created by the Vietnam War, existing structures—often WWII facilities—were adapted across the military for reuse as housing, classrooms, or other high-priority functions. Many WWII barracks were used to house enlisted recruits and to provide facilities for training and administration. Some temporary buildings were also constructed to meet war needs, and more recently completed permanent facilities were also repurposed to serve Vietnam War related missions.



A World War II temporary building serving as a reception station for new recruits at Fort Ord, CA, 1965.



Naval Air Rework Facility where many of the East coast's aircraft were overhauled, MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina, 1972.



A temporary type building housing the headquarters of the Jungle and Guerrilla Warfare Training Center, 25th Infantry Division at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, 1962.



Hammerhead barracks reused as the headquarters for the 1st U.S. Army NCO Academy at Fort Knox, Kentucky, 1967.

Results

Determining significance under the Vietnam War of structures built on U.S. installations between 1962 and 1975 is keyed upon answering the question "what facilities here affected soldiers' lives in theater?" Facilities may be significant for NRHP Criterion A during this period if directly related to one or more of the following historical themes:

- housing and training of the Vietnam War U.S. troop buildup
- providing specialized military technical training that was utilized by the U.S. military in fighting the Vietnam War
- meeting the Vietnam War's U.S. medical needs
- meeting the Vietnam War's U.S. logistical needs

Conclusions

While the DoD's construction impact on Vietnam during the conflict period was extensive, there is minimal documentation that records the physical changes the war had on the military's built environment in the United States. While this project documents the lack of a unified building campaign in response to the Vietnam War's requirements, it also highlights that many military bases were impacted significantly by increases in troop levels, changing training requirements, and the engineering demands of the Southeast Asian geography. While many Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force facilities were reopened, expanded, or adapted, there was no identifying architectural style used during that time. The reuse of WWII and 1950s buildings was common, and new construction was often part of the larger modernization initiatives that were being executed by the DoD during the 1950s and 1960s.

Results of this project can be utilized to develop more detailed research that will lead to identification and evaluation of specific Vietnam-era facilities at Department of Defense military installations in the United States. The historic context provides military cultural resources professionals with a standardized approach to determine the historical significance of Vietnam-era facilities, yielding efficiencies and cost-savings to the U.S. military in the necessary work of identification and evaluation.



Soldiers at Fort Polk, LA learn how to apply camouflage, 1969.

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