



US Army Corps of Engineers®

Vietnam and the Home Front: Ground Combat Training

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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.

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.



Southeast Asian Training Village at USMC Base Quantico, 1966.



Mock Asian village at Camp Pendleton, California showing defenses and several buildings, 1964.



During a briefing on booby traps, SSG Glendon D. Davison displays a 200-pound mace, Fort Jackson, South Carolina, 1967.



Recruits receiving POW training being marched into a prisoner compound for interrogation, Fort Irwin, California, 1967.



Rifle record course with firing from fox hole, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, 1962.



Trainees at Fort Lewis, Washington firing the M-14 Rifle on Trainfire Range #7, 1967.



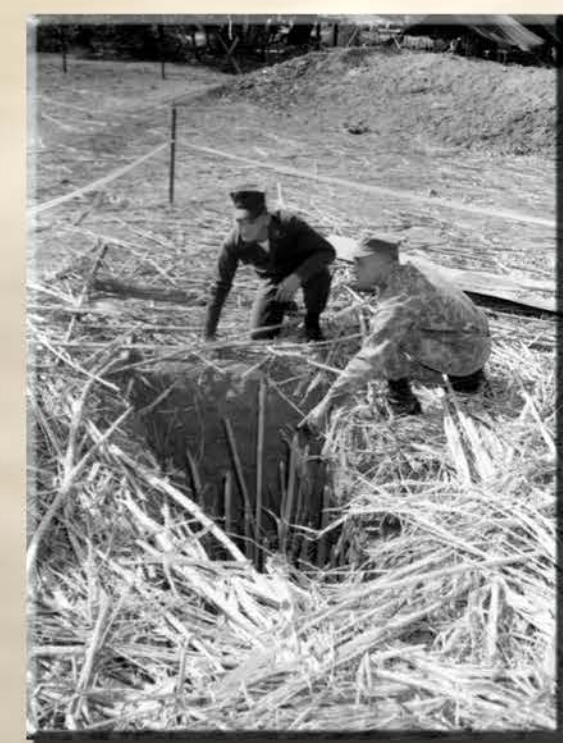
View of Target Detection Range (Trainfire 1) used to teach trainees the various methods of detecting enemy targets and range estimations, Fort Jackson, South Carolina, 1965.

Training Villages

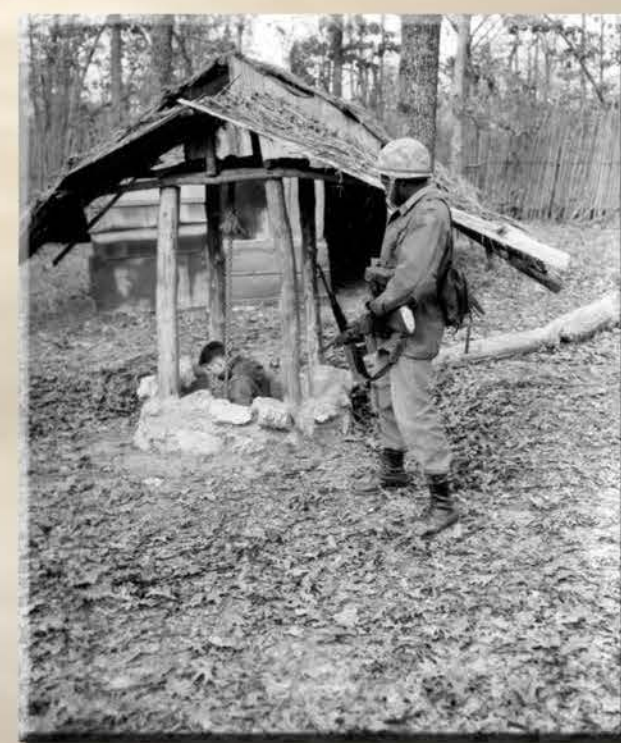
Training villages increased recruits readiness for the realities of Vietnam combat by creating immersive contexts in which training took place. Mock villages had similar elements to typical Vietnamese hamlets. The main feature was typically a collection of huts or other small buildings, often constructed 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.



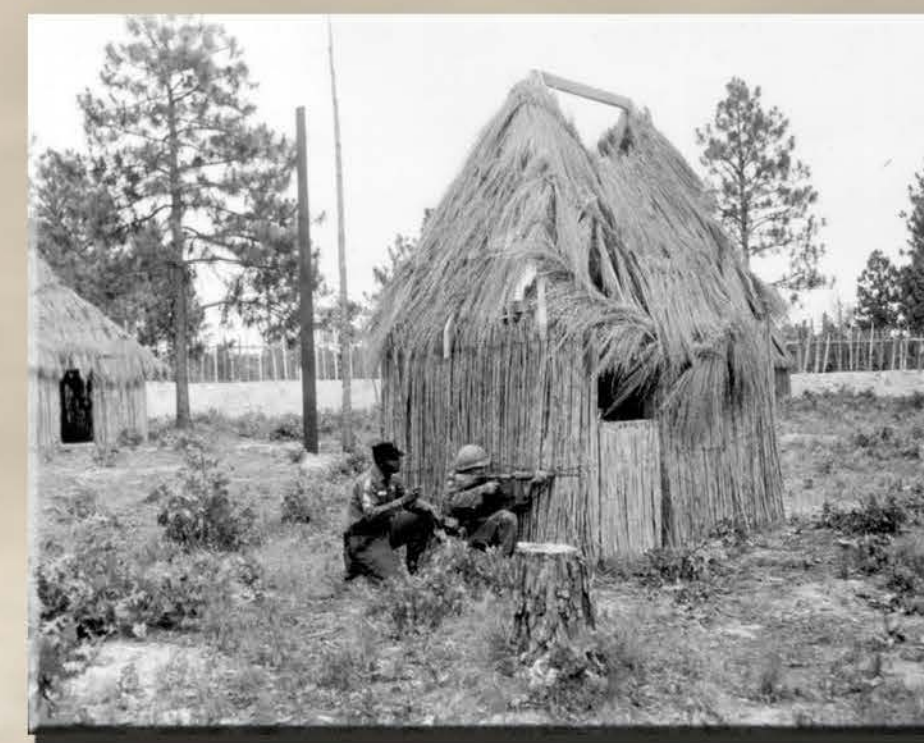
Division Schools personnel pose as villagers and enemy aggressors as 1st Marine Division trainees clear mock village of enemy forces, Camp Pendleton, California, 1964.



1st Marine Division trainees clear mock village of enemy forces, Camp Pendleton, California, 1964.



An Infantry Battalion receives orientation at the Viet Cong Village, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, 1968.



Trainee learns to locate the enemy during Asian village search and seizure training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 1966.



Map Reading course at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, 1966.



Training on the Victory Tower (representative of obstacle course towers), Fort Jackson, South Carolina, 1978.



Individual Tactical Training teaching fundamentals of fire and movement, Fort Knox, Kentucky, 1966.



Basic trainees learn how to disarm an opponent with a knife in hand-to-hand combat training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, 1962.

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, produced by ERDC-CERL in 2014, established the overarching historic context for Vietnam-related construction on many U.S. installations. It provides the background and context for understanding the demand for construction to support operations in Vietnam, and identified several Vietnam-era thematic areas related to stateside construction, one of which was ground combat training. Vietnam and the Home Front discussed specific installations and resource types related to ground combat training activities to aid in evaluating the historic significance of related resources. In the current sub-context report, previous information is expanded to address the role of ground combat training in preparing troops for fighting in Vietnam, and provides information on DoD's ground combat training missions.

The information and guidance in 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. Standardizing determinations of NRHP eligibility allows comparisons between an installation's resources as well as property types found at multiple installations.

Some form of ground combat training was required for nearly all U.S. military personnel deploying to Vietnam. The increased demand for troops in Vietnam required CONUS military installations to adapt to the large influx of personnel. Buildings, structures, and training lands were modified and constructed to address these demands. Because ground combat training was a primary component of preparing a soldier to fight in Vietnam, several types of properties related to ground combat training are identified: training ranges (from hand-to-hand combat to large operations areas), and mock villages (from a few simple huts to entire towns with tunnels and POW compounds). A process is provided in this report for step-by-step evaluation of these resources, allowing for both new construction and modified facilities.

Acknowledgments

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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.