

# THE NVA AND VIET CONG



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### **Editor's Note**

The title of this volume reflects the names by which the  
Vietnamese guerrillas and military forces of North  
Vietnam have been popularly known in the West.  
Throughout the text however they have been given their  
more correct title of The People's Army of Vietnam  
(PAVN).

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## THE FIRST INDOCHINA WAR

During the 1930s an undercurrent of anti-colonial sentiment swept through French Indochina, which comprised Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (Vietnam was sub-divided into the protectorates of Annam and Tonkin, and the colony of Cochin China). It was at this time that the first Communist 'soviets' were organized in the vicinity of Vinh by the Indochinese Communist Party. The core of these paramilitary soviets were Vietnamese defectors from a French colonial rifle unit. The French responded swiftly, crushing the rebels by means of Foreign Legion troops and bombing aircraft. By August 1940 anti-French Vietnamese activists had resumed low-level guerrilla activity. During the same year the Japanese forced their way into Indochina, leaving the French administration in place as a gesture to the Vichy government, but forever destroying the aura of invincibility that had surrounded the French in the eyes of its colonial subjects.

In 1941 Vietnamese nationalists, many of them socialists, expanded their guerrilla resistance campaign against both the French and Japanese. During February Ho Chi Minh, a well-known Vietnamese revolutionary who had been trained in the Soviet Union, returned to Vietnam after a 29-year absence to personally lead the anti-colonial movement. Four months later Ho participated in a plenary session of the Indochinese Communist Party held across the border in China; and a Communist-controlled independence league (the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh, commonly known as the 'Viet Minh') was unveiled. Over

the next four years Ho slowly built revolutionary support cells across northern Vietnam while operating out of his rear headquarters in China. When the Japanese launched an offensive in southern China, however, Ho decided in October 1944 to shift his headquarters to Vietnam. Moving with the headquarters were 200 armed followers organized into a 'Propaganda Detachment of the Liberation Army' under the command of Vo Nguyen Giap. Hanoi now considers this detachment to be the official forerunner of the Quan Doi Nhan Dan, the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN); Giap, meanwhile, is personally credited with creating PAVN. (This acronym will be used throughout, as being faithful to the organization's actual title, rather than the 1960s American formula 'NVA'.)

In March 1945 the Japanese, facing impending defeat, seized full control of Indochina from the French. The Viet Minh forces, meanwhile, had grown to 6,000 full-time guerrillas equipped with weapons given by China and the US. By the end of summer 1945 the Viet Minh counted 60,000 followers, the majority being ill-trained militia. Roughly one-fifth of these forces were in the southern part of the country and had a high percentage of non-Communists.

In September 1945 the defeated Japanese began turning over control of Indochina to indigenous nationalists. Ho's Viet Minh entered Hanoi and declared an independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The French rejected the Viet Minh bid for independence, but did not yet have sufficient forces to prevent Ho

*PAVN squad prior to attack on Gia Lam Airbase, 1953. Note that PAVN uniforms, headgear, and combat shoes have*

*changed little over the ensuing four decades. They appear to be armed with the French MAS36 rifle.*





from consolidating strength in northern Vietnam. Instead, the French spent until the spring of 1946 systematically retaking Laos as a springboard for eventually reconquering all of Indochina. At the same time the Communist elements within the Viet Minh began eliminating non-Communists from the organization. During 1946–47 thousands of non-Communist nationalists, such as the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects, fled the Viet Minh and lent their support to the French.

By January 1947 Giap's ill-equipped People's Army—PAVN—had been pushed from Hanoi by a resurgent French Expeditionary Force and was forced into the jungles. Some PAVN crossed the border into China to operate temporarily alongside Communist Chinese forces against the Koumintang.

PAVN spent the next two years expanding its support and creating larger units. As early as January 1947 the vanguard 308 'Capital' Regiment had been created for operations around Hanoi. (PAVN numbered its first regiments, and later divisions, in the '300' series so as to distinguish them from Communist Chinese units, which were numbered in the '100' and '200' series.) With these larger units, PAVN was able to absorb and frustrate a series of vigorous French offensives launched during the 1947–48 dry season.

By early 1949 Ho's Viet Minh were conducting two simultaneous campaigns. On the one hand, main force PAVN reg-

ulars—known as Chu Luc—were holding the French to a stalemate. On the other hand, they conducted a highly successful grassroots campaign with regional forces at the provincial level and local militia at the district and village level.

Anxious to further expand its capabilities, PAVN in August 1949 created Regimental Group 308. Roughly set at divisional strength, Regimental Group 308 consisted of Regiments 98, 102, and 308 (the original PAVN regiment). PAVN had rushed to create Regional Group 308 in order to attract the attention of the Communist Chinese, who had come to power in November and from whom PAVN hoped to receive substantial military assistance. The Chinese proved co-operative, and by April 1950 were beginning to standardize the equipment of PAVN units with both Chinese and captured US weapons from China and Korea. In July China sent 400 advisors into northern Vietnam to advise PAVN in the field. At the same time, PAVN training camps were established at the Chinese towns of Wenshan, Long Zhou, and Jing Xi; an officer school was set up at the Joint Staff School at Szu-Mao in Yunnan.

By late 1950 PAVN was estimated to have a military reserve virtually equal to the French Expeditionary Forces. Bolstering their forces were the first three formations trained and equipped in China: the 308 'Capital' Division, and Regiments 174 and 209. The 308 Division, built around the earlier Regimental Group 308, followed the standard Chinese structure of three infantry regiments, one heavy weapons (artillery) regiment, and support units.

Eager to create a liberated zone along the Sino-Viet border, Giap in October ordered all his fresh Chinese-trained units to attack French columns totalling 6,000 men carrying out and supporting a withdrawal from Cao Bang east along Route 4. The vulnerable French columns and air-dropped reinforcements were annihilated, prompting local French commanders to evacuate the important border garrison of Lang Son without a fight—leaving behind 1,300 tons of food and military equipment for the PAVN.

Overconfident after its October successes along the border, PAVN launched in early 1951 a series of three set-piece battles against French strongholds in the Red River Delta. The results were disastrous for PAVN. Using Chinese-style human wave assaults in open terrain, the Vietnamese were massacred by superior French firepower. Humbled, PAVN shelved its human wave tactics and focused on expanding its regular forces. Four new 10–15,000-man divisions were created: the 304 Division in Thanh Hoa, equipped in early 1951; the 316 Division in the north-east border region, raised in the spring of 1951; the 320 Division in the north Red River Delta, also formed in spring 1951; and the 351 Heavy Weapons Division, which was not completely equipped until 1952. Numerous other independent regiments and battalions were added to the PAVN order-of-battle.

By late 1951, PAVN was attempting to shift the battlefield away from the strongly defended Red River Delta in order to deny the French effective use of their armour and artillery. The first major battle under this new strategy was at Hoa Binh, south-west of Hanoi in the Black River Delta. Using the 304, 308, and 312 Divisions in frontal assaults on Hoa Binh, the 316 and 320 Divisions infiltrated into the Red River Delta to hit French lines of supply. Fighting lasted until February 1952, with PAVN capturing Hoa Binh and inflicting heavy losses on the French.

During the summer PAVN raised the 325 Division in central Vietnam. Together with its five predecessors, the 325 comprised what PAVN called its six original 'Steel and Iron Divisions'.

By October 1952 PAVN shifted its focus further west toward

## Viet Minh Troop Strengths and Locations May 1954

### *Northern Vietnam*

69 Regular Battalions<sup>1</sup>  
27 Regional Battalions  
50,000 Militia

### *Northern Laos*

4 Regular Battalions  
1 Regional Battalion

### *Central Laos*

5 Regular Battalions  
4 Regional Battalions

### *Central Vietnam*

19 Regular Battalions  
6 Regional Battalions  
30,000 Militia

### *Southern Vietnam*

10 Regular Battalions  
2 Regional Battalions  
22,000 Militia

### *Southern Laos and Cambodia*

4 Regular Battalions  
Regional elements  
4,000 Militia

Total, Regular/Regional Forces: 185,000

Total, Militia: 106,000

291,000

Source: CIA Intelligence Report, May 1954

<sup>1</sup>Includes six Main Force Divisions

Laos. Infiltrating across Vietnam's north-western highlands, ten battalions from the 308, 312, and 316 Divisions swarmed across the Laotian border in April 1953, overwhelming the thin French defences at Sam Neua. The 304 Division, meanwhile, captured the Laotian border town of Nong Het and headed for the strategic Plain of Jars. A third column, composed of elements of three PAVN independent regiments, went from Dien Bien Phu toward the Laotian royal capital of Luang Prabang. Although Giap's Laotian offensive lost impetus in May and PAVN withdrew into Vietnam, it had severely undermined the already weak French position in Indochina. Forced to protect key static positions, the French forfeited their strategic mobility. In addition, Laos was now demanding French guarantees for its national security.

In desperation, the French seized the isolated valley of Dien Bien Phu by air assault in late 1953 to use it as an offensive base and as a resupply centre for pro-French guerrillas operating in PAVN's rear. In theory, these guerrillas would occupy the attention of PAVN, reducing the chances of another PAVN invasion into Laos. As the French moved to build up their assets at Dien Bien Phu, PAVN bypassed the base and began diversionary strikes into Laos. The 308 Division moved south to threaten Luang Prabang in December, while the 325 Division struck west into the upper Laotian panhandle during the opening months of 1954. At the same time, other PAVN units began preparations for a showdown at Dien Bien Phu. In late December 1953 the 312 Division began moving closer to the isolated French garrison. They were soon joined by the 308 and 316 Divisions. Because of the harsh terrain, and French command of the air, the build-up and supply of the PAVN forces around Dien Bien Phu was a tremendous logistical challenge. PAVN proved up to the task, even hauling 200 dismantled artillery pieces from the 351 Heavy Weapons Division into the hills surrounding the base.

As he moved his divisions during late January 1954 into a ring around Dien Bien Phu, Giap entered into a heated debate on strategy with his Chinese advisors. The Chinese advocated a swift attack; Giap argued for a protracted siege in order to better position his artillery and infantry. Giap prevailed. By late March 1954 Giap's four divisions were in place: from the north-west

came elements of the 308 and 351 Heavy Weapons Divisions; from the north were elements of the 308 and 312 Division; from the north-east was the 316 Division and the remainder of the 312 and 351 Divisions.

During April the fighting around the garrison intensified as the north-east front surged forward to overwhelm outlying French posts. Meanwhile, the 351 Division maintained a deadly rain of fire from its 75mm and 105mm howitzers, and anti-aircraft artillery increasingly restricted French resupply and air support missions. At the end of the first week of April, PAVN paused briefly to reinforce its weakened frontline units; within the 312 Division alone an entire regiment had been lost. As the month drew to a close, fresh supplies of Chinese artillery shells arrived and PAVN prepared for its final assault. On 1 May the 308, 312, and 316 Divisions began a unified attack on the remaining French positions. Six days later Dien Bien Phu was captured. The 308 Division was given the honour of establishing its headquarters in the former French command post.

Following the costly but decisive victory at Dien Bien Phu, Giap redeployed his divisions into the Red River Delta. The French quickly agreed to withdraw from Indochina under the terms of an international settlement signed in Geneva. By August 1954 a ceasefire was in effect, and Vietnam was divided into the socialist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), or North Vietnam, and the pro-Western Republic of Vietnam, or South Vietnam. PAVN was now the legitimate army of the DRV.

## BETWEEN THE WARS

In the immediate aftermath of the First Indochina War the PAVN fielded 380,000 men. These were organized under a three-tiered system. At the lowest tier were local militia at the district and village level. At the provincial level were regional forces of

### PAVN Officer Ranks: 1961

<i>PAVN Rank</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>U.S. Equivalent</i>	<i>Level of Command</i>
Dai-Tuong	Senior General	General	—
Thuong-Tuong	Col. General	Lt. General	—
Trung-Tuong	Lt. General	Major General	—
Thien-Tuong	Major General	Brigadier Gen.	CO, Division
Dai-Ta	Senior Colonel	None	XO, Division
Thuong-Ta	Colonel	Colonel	CO, Regiment
Trung-Ta	Lt. Colonel	Lt. Colonel	XO, Regiment
Thien-Ta	Major	Major	CO, Battalion
Dai-Uy	Senior Captain	None	XO, Battalion
Thuong-Uy	Captain	Captain	CO, Company
Trung-Uy	Senior Lieut.	1 Lieutenant	XO, Company
Thien-Uy	Lieutenant	2 Lieutenant	Platoon Leader
Chuan-Uy	Aspirant <sup>1</sup>	None	—

Source: Department of the Army, 'Handbook on the North Vietnamese Armed Forces,' 1961.

<sup>1</sup>A PAVN Aspirant is not an officer but a 'combattant' or NCO who is to be promoted to officer.

*PAVN anti-aircraft crew wearing Soviet steel helmets. The soldier on the left is wearing khaki fatigues; the two others wear white uniforms (1966).*



limited mobility. The remainder were 'Chu Luc' regular forces, centred on the six 'Steel and Iron' infantry divisions. In addition two further infantry divisions, the 330 and 338, were organized from southern Communists who had moved to the DRV in accordance with the Geneva Agreements.<sup>1</sup>

PAVN faced two initial challenges: enforcing internal security, and expanding and modernizing its conventional forces. PAVN's internal operations were especially important during the late 1950s as Hanoi attempted to enforce socialist policies such as land collectivization. Opposition to the central government was especially heavy in Nghe An Province, where in 1956 Roman Catholics began rioting. PAVN spearheaded operations to bring these regions under central control, often by brutal methods.

In 1957 PAVN began a comprehensive modernization plan. Strongly influenced by the Chinese, PAVN reorganized the Viet Minh 'interzones' of the First Indochina War into five military regions. The commander of the military region controlled provincial and militia forces. Regular forces were under the oper-

<sup>1</sup>By 1955, six more divisions were formed: the 328, 332, and 350 in the northern DRV; the 305 and 324 near the De-Militarised Zone; and the 335 Division, of regroupees from northern Laos.



ational control of the PAVN High Command, unless doing regional tasks like road-building, in which case they came under the administrative control of the military region. The High Command also controlled PAVN's new naval and air force directorates. PAVN modernization was encouraged by the USSR and China, both of which were vying for influence within Vietnam. The majority of material aid came from China, while Soviet advisors were attached to the PAVN artillery and engineer schools. PAVN trainees were sent to both countries.

Because of national economic requirements to man collective farms, several PAVN divisions were reduced to brigades in 1958–59. PAVN brigades were composed of four infantry battalions, two artillery battalions, an anti-aircraft battalion, and most division-level support units.

## Going South

In 1956 the Communist Politburo in Hanoi began exploring means of uniting Vietnam by taking over non-Communist South Vietnam. In June of that year a Politburo directive ordered a restructuring of the revolutionary cells which had been left in the south in violation of the 1954 Geneva Agreement. Four months later, Hanoi considered forming a Communist guerrilla force in the southern Mekong Delta, to be known as Unit 250.

Not until 1959 was the next major step taken by Hanoi to escalate the guerrilla presence in South Vietnam. In May that year a directive from Hanoi established Group 559, a logistical unit charged with organizing a supply conduit into South Vietnam via eastern Laos and Cambodia, known later as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. During the same year Group 579 was created as a maritime counterpart to smuggle military supplies into South Vietnam by sea. Within a year, weapons and northern Communist cadres were flowing south along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Most of the early infiltrators came from the PAVN 338 Division, composed of southerners who had gone north in 1954–55. Members of the 338 Division had been settled from 1954–59 at Xuan Mai, 50km south-west of Hanoi, and formed into an agricultural commune. Once the division began infiltrating south in 1959, Xuan Mai became the initial training centre for guerrillas destined for South Vietnam.

In December 1960 Hanoi directed the southern-based Communist guerrillas to establish the National United Front for the Liberation of the Southern Region, known as the NLF. During the next month the DRV enacted a major reorganization of its chain of command with the south by reforming the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) in Tay Ninh Province. COSVN, which co-ordinated guerrilla operations in southern Vietnam beginning in 1951, had been disbanded in 1954. By reviving COSVN under its control, Hanoi was able to get a closer grip over the southern Communist forces.

PAVN assistance to COSVN quickly increased. In June 1961, for example, PAVN sent 1,500 men south, including ten majors and 60 captains. By September–October PAVN assistance enabled COSVN to raise its first two regular battalions. Both Hanoi and the NLF publicly claimed that these battalions were not under PAVN control but rather part of the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF), commonly dubbed the 'Viet Cong'. (Hanoi dropped this fiction immediately after the war.)

*PAVN anti-aircraft gunner with US camouflage parachute material draped over his shoulders. Note headgear insignia pinned to breast pocket (1966).*



Although becoming more involved in the south, PAVN itself was hard-pressed with northern duties during 1960–61. Several more divisions were consolidated into brigades.

In October 1962 the DRV ordered COSVN to reorganize the PLAF command structure into military regions in order to make it more consistent with North Vietnam. With PAVN assistance, the PLAF raised two regiments in 1963; a third regiment was formed the following year. In keeping with its guerrilla roots, the PLAF also controlled rural and urban guerrilla networks.

## THE SECOND INDOCHINA WAR

By early 1964 PAVN had been trimmed down to 215,000 men in six infantry divisions, an artillery division, five infantry brigades, and ten independent regiments. Virtually all of this force was concentrated in the Red River Delta; one division and one regiment were stationed near the De-Militarized Zone separating North and South Vietnam.

During the summer of 1964 Hanoi made the decision to introduce PAVN regular formations into South Vietnam. To fight a largescale war in South Vietnam, PAVN launched a major

expansion effort. By the fall, four regular divisions—the 304, 308, 324, and 325—were converted into training divisions. These divisions would send the bulk of their men south as complete regiments while retaining a skeleton training cadre in the north to rebuild themselves. In this manner, multiple regiments (and even divisions) bearing the same number would soon be seen in the south; in such cases, it became standard practice for letters to be added after the unit number for clarification.

The first PAVN regiments sent south came from the 325 Division based at Dong Hoi. By February 1965 its 101 Regiment had infiltrated into the Central Highlands west of Kontum, carefully avoiding contact. By mid-1965 the 325 Division had raised and trained a new 101 Regiment—the 101B Regiment—which used the codename ‘Worksite 33’. During October this regiment and the newly-infiltrated 66 Regiment of the 304 Division attacked the Plei Me Special Forces camp near Pleiku in an apparent prelude to a general offensive across the Central Highlands. Over the next month the US 1 Cavalry Division battled the two regiments in the Ia Drang Valley, crushing both regiments and sending the remnants fleeing into Cambodia.

*PAVN training, 1966. Note netting on pith helmets and camouflage parachute material over shoulders.*



### Soviet Military Aid to Vietnam

	1965	1966	Jan-June 1967
Surface-to-Air Missiles	200	1,100	1,750
Aircraft	57	85	5

### Chinese Military Aid to Vietnam

Aircraft	8	0	12
Naval Vessels	2	2	6
Artillery	320	140	285

Source: CIA Report, 8 December 1967.

While PAVN divisions were taking control over the northern two-thirds of South Vietnam, the PLAF retained control over the southern third of the country. Within its zone of control the PLAF in 1965 began organizing regular divisions. Three of the PLAF's four existing regiments were renamed the 271, 272, and 273 Regiments and incorporated during September into the new PLAF 9 Division. Later in that year two new PLAF regiments were formed with combined PLAF and PAVN cadres and used as the core for the PLAF 5 Division: the division's third regiment was not brought up to strength until late the following year. Short of manpower, the PLAF then received the completed 141 and 165 Regiments from the PAVN 312 Division as the core for its new 7 Division; this division was not completed until 1967. None of the three divisions included support elements.

By the opening of 1966 the PLAF/PAVN forces were still reeling from heavy losses inflicted the previous year. During July, PAVN infiltrated elements of the 341 and 324B Divisions directly across the DMZ. Encountering US Marines and massive air strikes, PAVN was hit hard and withdrew into the DMZ.

By the end of 1966 one of the most active enemy units was the PLAF 9 Division. Engaging the US 1 and 25 Divisions in fierce combat, the 9 Division was forced into Cambodia. Resuming its offensive early in 1967, the division was smashed. It once again retreated to Cambodia, with the PLAF 7 Division taking its place in Tay Ninh Province. The 9 Division spent until October 1967 regaining its strength, and was then used to hit the town of Loc Ninh in Tay Ninh Province. The ill-fated division was again defeated, with at least 852 killed.

By the end of 1967 PAVN had swollen to 447,000 men in ten infantry divisions, an artillery division, an anti-aircraft division, and over 100 independent regiments. Six of the ten divisions were in the north involved in training assignments.

### The Tet Offensive

Frustrated with the draining pace of the war in the south, Hanoi in late 1967 was confronted with a major strategy decision. On the one hand, prominent DRV officials such as Le Duan and Gen. Tran Van Tra advocated a massive PLAF-led offensive across South Vietnam. In theory, the population would rise to support the liberation forces, quickly bringing an end to the war. On the other hand, Giap and PAVN's Chinese advisors, mindful of PAVN's previous failed offensives in the First Indochina War,

urged a more patient war of attrition. The former strategy was ultimately adopted.

The southern uprising was timed to coincide with the Vietnamese Lunar New Year ('Tet') at the end of January 1968, when many in the South Vietnamese army would be on leave. The PLAF were to throw virtually their entire weight behind attacks on almost every major city and provincial capital. PAVN, meanwhile, would attack the isolated US Marine garrison at Khe Sanh, and provide general support for the PLAF.

In early January US intelligence revealed that elements of the 324B Division, which had seen action near the DMZ in 1966, had moved near Khe Sanh, a US Marine base near the Laotian border in northern South Vietnam. It was joined by the 325C Division, which had been mauled at Khe Sanh the previous spring. Also in the vicinity were the 304 and 320 Divisions. On 22 January the Khe Sanh siege opened with a massive PAVN rocket, artillery and mortar barrage that blew up 1,340 tons of munitions at the Marines' main ammo dump. With the 304 Division attacking from the south-west and the 325C Division pushing from the north-west, the siege lasted 77 days. Not until 8 April was the garrison relieved by a ground column, although aircraft movement in and out of the base was never halted.

The battle for Khe Sanh had resulted in an estimated 10,000-15,000 PAVN casualties. Their failure to capture the base may be blamed on PAVN's inability to take the surrounding hills for use as artillery positions to pound the central garrison, as had been done at Dien Bien Phu. American success also owed much to the tremendous air support given to the Marines: a greater tonnage of bombs was dropped on PAVN at Khe Sanh than had been dropped on all of Germany during the bombing raids of 1943.

### PAVN/PLAF Amphibious Sapper Units/ October 1969

Unit	Strength	Location
126 PAVN Naval Sapper Regiment	300	DMZ/Cua Viet River
K-93 PLAF Swimmer Sapper Company	7	vic. Cam Ranh Bay
V-17 PLAF Swimmer Sapper Company	85	vic. Vung Ro Bay
K-92 PLAF Swimmer Sapper Company	25	north of Nha Trang
8 PLAF Swimmer Sapper Battalion	70	S/SE of Bien Hoa
H-5 PLAF Swimmer Sapper Battalion	70	upper Saigon River
Long An Underwater Warfare School	UNK	Long An Province
Kien Hoa Swimmer Sapper School	UNK	Kien Hoa Province

Note: H-5 PLAF Swimmer Sapper Battalion may be a training unit.

Source: Department of the Navy, 'Assessment of the Enemy Sapper Threat,' 25 October 1969.



*PAVN 122mm field guns in action during the 1972 Nguyen Hue Offensive. (Photo via F.C. Brown)*

On 31 January the general phase of the Tet Offensive opened with over 84,000 PLAF and PAVN troops attacking 36 provincial capitals, 64 district capitals, and 50 villages. At Quang Tri City the PAVN 812 Regiment spearheaded the assault, but was quickly beaten back. A bigger attack was launched on Hue, where the PAVN 6 and 4 Regiments struck in the initial stages, reinforced by three regiments sent from the Khe Sanh battlefield.

The most spectacular attacks were conducted around Saigon. Inside the city the 250-strong PLAF C-10 Sapper Battalion attacked the US Embassy, the Presidential Palace, and the National Radio Station. Ringing the city, the PLAF 5, 7, and 9 Divisions tried to block reinforcements. Although the sapper attack on the US Embassy became headline news, the Tet Offensive had been a military disaster for the PLAF. On every battlefield they had been soundly defeated; PLAF casualties were so high, in fact, that the organization ceased to exist as a major threat to the South Vietnamese government. Moreover, the population had failed to rise in their support.

During May, PAVN briefly attempted to restart the offensive. The 320 Division was sent across the DMZ, where it engaged in ferocious fighting with US Marines. In addition, two PAVN regiments struck at the outskirts of Saigon. This effort, too, ended in failure for the Communists.

By mid-1968 PAVN strength had grown to 475,000 men. With the PLAF destroyed, the need for PAVN to send troops south increased. Tasked with raising more men were six training

divisions and two training groups; each division could assimilate, train, and equip 6–8,000 recruits every three months; the groups could handle up to 6,000 recruits.

### Into Cambodia

The Communists spent early 1969 recovering from the Tet Offensive. Because the PLAF could not replace its losses its 5, 7, and 9 Divisions were largely reconstructed with northern replacements. In addition, the first full PAVN regiment, the 101D, was introduced during May into the Mekong Delta; previously the Delta had been firmly controlled by southern PLAF units with almost no PAVN presence. By September two other PAVN regiments, the 18B and 95A, were also in the Delta. All three regiments were bled white while trying to hold the Seven Mountains along the Cambodian border.

In March 1970, PAVN suffered a major setback when the Sihanouk government in Cambodia was overthrown and replaced by a pro-Western Khmer Republic. Cambodia had become vital to the Communist forces for two reasons. First, the majority of military supplies destined for Communist forces fighting in the Mekong Delta region were trans-shipped through the Cambodian ports of Kompong Som (also known as Sihanoukville) and Ream. Second, eastern Cambodia had become a major PAVN/PLAF sanctuary with supply depots, training centres, and R&R sites<sup>1</sup>.

In conjunction with Khmer Republic attacks from the west, US and South Vietnamese forces launched mechanized incursions into Cambodian territory with the purpose of destroying

<sup>1</sup>See also Men-at-Arms 209, *The War in Cambodia 1970–75*.

the elusive COSVN. Avoiding capture, COSVN fled north to Cambodia's Kratie Province. The ill-fated 9 Division, which was providing security, took heavy losses in rearguard fighting.

Confronted with a hostile Cambodian government, PAVN was forced to divert thousands of troops to confront Phnom Penh. PAVN operations against the Khmer Republic were aimed initially at securing its eastern sanctuaries. By the fall of 1970, however, PAVN moved several regular units west to directly engage the Republican army near the town of Kompong Thom. By the end of the year PAVN had 10,000 troops confronting Republican forces; this included the 1 Division astride Route 4, and elements of the 5, 7, and 9 Divisions operating from plantations east of the Mekong.

On the first day of 1971 PAVN increased its direct involvement in Cambodia by infiltrating 100 commandos near Phnom Penh and destroying virtually the entire Khmer Air Force at Pochentong Airbase.

In the fall of 1971 the Khmer Republic launched a second major offensive toward Kompong Thom. PAVN dispatched the 9 Division to the vicinity, along with two mixed Vietnamese/Khmer regiments from the C-40 Division. At the same time the PAVN 1 Division, considered to be its least effective formation, was sent west of Phnom Penh as a diversion. The total number of Vietnamese troops directly confronting the Khmer Republic had increased to almost 17,000.

*PAVN T-34 crews confer around a sand model, 1972. (Photo via F.C. Brown)*

By the end of 1971 the Republican forces around Kompong Thom had been demolished. In spring 1972, with the Cambodian military severely weakened, PAVN redeployed the bulk of its 1, 5, 7, and 9 Divisions toward South Vietnam to participate in the Easter Offensive. The mixed C-40 Division remained in Cambodia and operated north of the Tonle Sap Lake. By mid-1972 PAVN had sent the 367 Sapper Regiment north of Phnom Penh to put direct pressure on the capital. In the meantime the 1 Division had moved back into south-eastern Cambodia; in July CIA sources reported that the division was being reinforced by sea near the port of Kep.

On 7 October PAVN launched another spectacular attack on Phnom Penh when 103 commandos from the 367 Sapper Regiment dropped a span of the Chhruai Chang War Bridge and destroyed seven armoured personnel carriers at the Municipal Stadium. Republican forces killed 83 Vietnamese and captured seven before the commandos were able to launch attacks on Phnom Penh's power plant and POL facilities.

By the end of 1972 the only PAVN units operating against the Khmer government were the 367 Sapper Regiment and the C-40 Division. The sappers remained active into early 1973, beginning a training programme for Khmer Communist commandos in February and firing rockets at Pochentong Airbase in April. Vietnamese sappers are also believed to have been responsible for firing SA-7 missiles at a US AC-130 gunship on 24 June.

Once the ceasefire in South Vietnam began in January 1973, the PAVN 1 and 5 Divisions floated back across the border into Cambodia. By August, however, open conflict had developed between PAVN and Khmer Communist forces, and an agreement



was reached for PAVN to begin withdrawing combat forces from Cambodia. Probably as part of this effort the 1 Division was dissolved in October, its sole remaining regiment, the 101D, being sent to Chau Duc Province, South Vietnam, as an independent unit; and Vietnamese cadres were removed from the C-40 Division. These moves left less than 1,000 PAVN confronting Republican forces; the remaining 18–24,000 PAVN in eastern Cambodia were administrative and rear service personnel. During 1974 PAVN rarely became involved in the fighting in Cambodia. One exception was the participation by the 275 Regiment, 5 Division, in an attack on Svay Rieng city on 11 August.

In January 1975 the Khmer Communists launched their final offensive on Phnom Penh. Although PAVN was absent from the battlefield when the Communists captured Phnom Penh in April 1975, evidence suggests that one PAVN infantry division was held in reserve in eastern Cambodia in case Vietnamese intervention was needed.

### Lam Son 719 and the Easter Offensive

By late 1970 PAVN appears to have been anticipating a major US-South Vietnamese ground strike into Laos to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail. To counter this, Hanoi established the 70B Corps in the lower Laotian panhandle. This was the first time PAVN organized up to the corps level, bringing together the 304, 308, and 320 Divisions, as well as two artillery regiments and one armoured regiment, under a single operational commander.

In February 1971 PAVN's intuition proved correct when South Vietnam launched Operation LAM SON 719, an ambitious

strike into Laos involving several divisions of marines, paratroopers, infantry, rangers, and tanks. The final objective of the operation was to seize temporarily the Laotian town of Tchepone, a major PAVN trans-shipment centre.

PAVN immediately threw the 70B Corps into a counter-offensive. Command of the corps was held by Maj. Gen. Le Truong Tan, a brilliant tactician who had previously been the PAVN Deputy Chief-of-Staff. Under the corps were elements of the 2, 304, 308B, and 325 Divisions. After two months LAM SON 719 was brought to a close after South Vietnamese forces briefly held Tchepone. Losses were heavy on both sides, with neither gaining a clear victory. The operation, however, probably did disrupt PAVN plans for a major dry season offensive in 1971.

In late 1971 Hanoi began to reassess its military strategy in South Vietnam. Since the disastrous 1968 Tet attacks PAVN had refrained from launching a general offensive. However, the LAM SON 719 operation had proven its ability to operate at the corps level. Furthermore, its December 1971 operation in northern Laos had shown it could conduct a successful multi-division combined arms campaign. Lastly, Hanoi viewed with concern South Vietnam's increasingly successful attempts at pacification and military self-sufficiency. As a result, Hanoi decided to launch a major offensive during Easter 1972. It was to be named after

*Propaganda shot shows camouflaged PAVN T-54s being welcomed by South Vietnamese population*

*during the Nguyen Hue Offensive. (Photo via F.C. Brown)*



Nguyen Hue, the birthname of emperor Quang Trung, a national hero who in 1789 defeated invading Chinese forces near Hanoi.

During December Hanoi began massing forces in or along the De-Militarized Zone dividing North and South Vietnam, including the 304 and 308 Divisions. Significantly, the latter had become PAVN's elite general reserve division and rarely left its Hanoi garrison. Supporting these two regular divisions were independent units under the B5 Front, including three infantry regiments, two tank brigades, two artillery regiments and one sapper regiment. In accordance with PAVN doctrine these independent units would be used in gruelling support roles such as launching diversionary attacks and hitting South Vietnamese lines-of-communication, thus enabling PAVN regular divisions

to minimize losses during final assaults. At the same time PAVN had infiltrated the experienced 324B Division and the 5 and 6 Independent Infantry Regiments into the A Shau Valley along the Laotian border west of Hue.

PAVN strategy for the Nguyen Hue Offensive was significantly different from that of the 1968 Tet Offensive. In 1968 PAVN/PLAF forces had tried to win over the population; this time, PAVN intended to attack population centres with armour and artillery. By March 1972 Hanoi had inundated the DMZ with anti-aircraft units, including surface-to-air missiles. This kept US air support at a distance while PAVN positioned armour, artillery and the 304 and 308 Divisions. Incredibly, many US and South Vietnamese intelligence analysts refused to recognize the signs of an imminent invasion because few believed Hanoi would commit such a blatant violation of the 1954 Geneva Accords.

On 29 March 1972 PAVN began the Nguyen Hue Offensive with a massive 130mm artillery barrage across the DMZ that paralyzed South Vietnamese forward defences. On the following day the 304 and 308 Divisions and 300 armoured vehicles poured across the border, with the 308 Division moving toward Dong Ha and the 304 Division curving below the Cua Viet River to the west. Their target was the provincial capital of Quang Tri, which PAVN intended to capture in a week.

Within the first four days PAVN made deep penetrations, overwhelming the weak South Vietnamese 3 Division and reaching the banks of the Cua Viet River opposite Dong Ha. At the last moment two US Marine advisors destroyed the Dong Ha Bridge, bringing PAVN's momentum to a halt.

At the same time the 324B Division moved from the A Shau Valley toward Hue, while the 312 Division, which had seen heavy action in northern Laos since December 1971, moved into Khe Sanh as a reserve. PAVN intended to capture Hue for psychological reasons: it had been the only major city seized by the Communists during the 1968 Tet Offensive.

Continuing its offensive on Quang Tri City, PAVN diverted its armour west and crossed the Cam Lo Bridge. Bringing in two regiments of the 320B Division and one regiment of the 325C Division, PAVN was able to overwhelm Quang Tri's defences by the first week of May.

While fighting was taking place in the north, PAVN opened a second front on 6 April in the extreme southern part of the country. One day later PAVN launched its third front in the Central Highlands as infantry and tanks moved on Kontum.

On the southernmost front, the PAVN 5 Division captured Loc Ninh on 8 April. Four days later PAVN began a major armoured assault on An Loc with over 100 tanks and armoured fighting vehicles. The 9 and 7 Divisions were ordered to participate in the attack on An Loc, but COSVN failed to co-ordinate its infantry, artillery, and armour; as a result, when the 1 Battalion, 203 Armour Regiment penetrated into the city, neither infantry division moved forward to provide support. PAVN was humiliated, losing 36 armoured vehicles inside the city. PAVN again tried to take the city in late April, this time combining elements of the 5 and 7 Divisions south of the city while the 9 Division hit the city proper. Again, PAVN showed poor co-ordination in combined arms tactics and the assault failed.

In the Central Highlands PAVN had some initial successes as

*PAVN Forces stationed in North Vietnam, July 1972. This does not include elements of the 304, 308, 312, 316, 320, 324, and 325 Divisions, all refitting at that time in North Vietnam.*

### PAVN Forces Stationed in North Vietnam 9 July 1972

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Location</i>
Northwest Military Region	
168 Artillery Regiment	Nasan
Viet Bac Military Region	
Armor Command	Vinh Yen
368 Artillery Regiment	Phu Tho
396 Artillery Regiment	Phu Tho
304B Training Division	Thai Nguyen
Military Region III	
PAVN High Command	Hanoi
Air Force-Air Defense Command	Hanoi
367 Air Defense Division	Hanoi
351 Artillery Command	Hanoi
'Thu Do' Independent Inf Regt	Hanoi
2 Regional Regiment	Ha Dong
49 Artillery Regiment	Ha Dong
364 Artillery Regiment	Ha Dong
82 Artillery Regiment	Xuan Mai
305 Sapper Command	Xuan Mai
350 Division	Haiphong
330 Division	Thai Binh
320B Training Division	Quang Te
154 Artillery Regiment	Quang Te
338 Training Division	Thanh Hoa
22 Training Group	Hoang Xa
10 Regional Regiment	Ninh Binh
Military Region Northeast	
8 Regional Regiment	Con Chon
248 Independent Inf Regt	Quang Yen
Military Region IV	
14 Regional Regiment	Muong Hinh
200 Medical Regiment	Vinh
201 Armor Regiment	Dong Hoi
53 Independent Inf Regt	Dong Hoi
138 Independent Inf Regt	Dong Hoi
213 Air Defense Regiment	Vinh Linh (DMZ)

Source: MACV, 'NVA Order of Battle,' 9 July 1972.



*ZSU-57 self-propelled anti-aircraft gun on display in Hanoi, early 1970s. (Photo via F.C. Brown)*

Pleiku and Kontum came under artillery and rocket attack. The 320 and 2 Divisions moved north of Kontum, while the weak 711 Division advanced into the Que Son Valley. Along the coastal lowlands, the 3 'Gold Star' Division hit Houai An, Houai Nhan, and Tam Quan. On 23 April PAVN forces brought Kontum under siege, but strong air support turned them back.

At An Loc PAVN resumed their attack on 11 May. Incredibly, their deficiencies in combined arms tactics were not corrected, and an unescorted armour thrust was again wiped out. On 23 May PAVN tried one more time, using elements of the 5 Division to hit from the south-east while the 7 Division advanced from the south-west and the 9 Division from the north-east. Again, the South Vietnamese defenders held and PAVN withdrew in defeat. Some 80 per cent of the armour used against the city had been destroyed.

Following the fall of Quang Tri City the South Vietnamese formed a strong defensive line north of Hue. The 324B Division was hit hard as it attempted to gain control of the west and south-west approaches to Hue.

By the end of June the Easter Offensive had run out of steam; the South Vietnamese were able to retake most lost territory over the following three months. PAVN's losses were heavy, including at least 600 armoured vehicles. Moreover, South Vietnamese morale was high after repulsing a fullblown PAVN invasion by 14 divisions and 26 separate regiments of infantry, armour, and artillery.

## Battlefront C: Laos

After the First Indochina War Hanoi was obliged under the Geneva Agreements to remove its combat forces from Laos. This promise was not fully kept, as PAVN advisors under Group 100 remained at the Communist Pathet Lao headquarters in Sam Neua. In addition, Pathet Lao cadres continued training at bases inside the DRV. In September 1959 Group 100 was expanded into the new Group 959. With a forward headquarters in Sam Neua, Group 959 increased training and material support for the Pathet Lao.

In December 1960 PAVN sent an artillery battery to Vientiane to support Neutralist and Pathet Lao forces. By the following year PAVN was making regular appearances as advisors, trainers, and support crews among Pathet Lao and Neutralist units. PAVN operations in Laos were designated 'Battlefield C'. Although Hanoi was required to remove its combat forces from Laos in October 1962 under the terms of a new Geneva Agreement, an estimated 9,000 troops remained in country. PAVN slowly increased its combat presence through the mid-1960s<sup>1</sup>.

By 1968 PAVN had assumed primary responsibility for battling Lao government forces in northern Laos. In 1969 the PAVN 316 Division, which had operated regularly in Laos since 1961, was assigned control of the strategic Plain of Jars. In 1970 two PAVN divisions, the 312 and 316, were in northern Laos. Both were again in the north at the beginning of the following year, along with the 335, 766, and 866 Independent Regiments.

In December 1971 PAVN launched its biggest combined

<sup>1</sup>See Men-at-Arms 217, *The War in Laos 1960-75*.

arms operation to date in an attempt to regain control of the Plain of Jars, employing the 316 and 312 Divisions, as well as T-34 tanks, artillery, and even MiG reconnaissance support. The operation, which succeeded in three days, was commanded by one of Hanoi's best commanders, Gen. Le Truong Tan. Simultaneously PAVN used its new 968 Division to retake the Bolovens Plateau in southern Laos.

In mid-1972 PAVN held the Plain of Jars with the 316 Division and 335 and 866 Independent Regiments. During October the 88 Regiment of the 308B Division was sent to the plain as an independent unit to protect PAVN's forward headquarters.

Laos was important to PAVN as a testing ground for tactics and equipment. For example, PAVN's December 1971 offensive allowed Hanoi for the first time to co-ordinate use of its 130mm field guns, T-34 tanks, and MiG-21 jets in the recon and interceptor roles.

Following a Laotian ceasefire in February 1973 PAVN withdrew the bulk of its combat forces directly confronting the Lao government. Retained in Laos were its massive defence and logistics structure on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, as well as advisory and support units working alongside the Pathet Lao. At least one PAVN regiment was located in northern Laos until the fall of the pro-Western Lao government in May 1975.

## THE HO CHI MINH CAMPAIGN

The Nguyen Hue Offensive had been costly to PAVN in manpower and armour; over 190,000 North Vietnamese had been killed, taken prisoner, or rallied, and PAVN's general reserve had been all but expended. In this weakened state PAVN spent the remainder of 1972 trying to hold ground against an equally exhausted South Vietnamese Army.

On 27 January 1973 the Paris Agreements were signed, ostensibly bringing an end to the Second Indochina War. At that time PAVN had as many as 160,000 soldiers in South Vietnam. Around Quang Tri were the 304, 324B, and 325 Divisions. Along the coast were two weak divisions, the 711 and 2. In the Central

Highlands PAVN fielded the 10, 320, and understrength 3 Divisions. In Tay Ninh Provinces were the 7 and 9 Divisions, both in a very weakened state. In the Mekong Delta were the 1, 5, and 6 Divisions.

Because of its military losses and weak economy, Hanoi concluded in February 1973 that a largescale offensive could not be conducted in the near future. Instead PAVN focused on sending reinforcements to South Vietnam. Hanoi claims to have dispatched 180,000 men south during 1973-74; most of these went to bolster the weakened divisions already deployed in the field. Throughout 1972-73 PAVN also dramatically rebuilt its General Reserve. At the height of the 1972 Nguyen Hue Offensive only one general reserve division, the 308B, had remained in the north. Soon after the offensive concluded, however, the 308 Division returned from the Quang Tri battlefield. By the year's end the 312 and 320B Divisions also left Quang Tri and went north into the general reserve. In mid-1973 they were followed by the 316 Division from northern Laos. In addition, the 341 Division had its mission redesigned from territorial defence to the general reserve, while the 338 Division was converted from a training division to a general reserve formation. PAVN also began a programme of improving its support units; for example, the 377 Anti-Aircraft Division was formed, and armour regiments were upgraded to brigade strength.

By autumn 1973 PAVN had been able to build tremendous advantages over the South Vietnamese armed forces: it had more anti-aircraft weapons, more air defence units, more tanks, more infantry divisions, and a sizeable general reserve. PAVN had also created at Thanh Hoa its first strategic army corps—I Corps—composed of the 308, 312, and 320B Divisions.

From the end of 1973 and throughout the following year, PAVN engaged in a series of strategic raids designed to wear down the South Vietnamese forces and slowly extend its territory. It was not until December 1974, however, that PAVN decided to test South Vietnamese—and American—resolve by attacking the provincial capital of Phuoc Long.

For its attack on Phuoc Long PAVN organized the new 301 Corps, using the veteran 7 and new 3 Divisions. Some 8,000 North Vietnamese began a concerted attack on Phuoc Long's 3,000 South Vietnamese defenders during the first week of January 1975. Also used in the attack was COSVN's M-26 Armour Group, while the new PAVN 6 Division was held in reserve. Within days Phuoc Long had fallen, becoming the first provincial





capital to be captured since Quang Tri in 1972.

Significantly, the US had not come to the assistance of Saigon. As a result, PAVN decided to launch a major offensive during 1975, with optimistic plans to capture the south by 1976. The initial focus of the offensive was to be the city of Ban Me Thuot in the Central Highlands. The Ban Me Thuot operation—code-named ‘Campaign 275’—was commanded by Gen. Van Tien Dung. Spearheading the campaign would be the 316 Division, which became the first division infiltrated south since the 1973 Paris Agreement. Also involved were the 10 and 320 Divisions, both of which had secretly shifted south from Pleiku. Meanwhile the 968 Division was infiltrated from southern Laos to conduct diversionary operations near Kontum.

On 10 March 1975 Campaign 275 began with the PAVN 198 Sapper Regiment seizing Ban Me Thuot airfield. While armour, artillery, and the 10 and 316 Divisions attacked the perimeter, the 320 Division cut off the city’s escape route. Ban Me Thuot quickly fell, sending panic across the Central Highlands. A disorganized retreat toward the coast left the highlands in the hands

► *PAVN aspirant, Armour Command, 1972. He wears standard green PAVN fatigues and a Soviet tanker helmet. Note armour branch insignia on the collar tabs.*

▼ *A contingent of PAVN pilots posing in front of MiG-21 jet fighters, 1973. Their flight gear is of Soviet origin.*



of PAVN; South Vietnam had been cut in half. On the evening of 19 March PAVN threw pontoon bridges across the Thanh Hoa River north of Quang Tri. Tanks poured over the bridge, followed by PAVN’s II Corps, composed of the 304, 324B, and 325 Divisions.

At Danang South Vietnam’s two key units—the Marine Division and the 1 Division—were smashed. With the South Vietnamese defences quickly unravelling, Hanoi decided on 31 March to launch a massive general offensive during April. To bolster its southern forces I Corps (minus the 308 Division, which remained in Hanoi as a general reserve division) was sent from Thanh Hoa across the DMZ toward Danang. This allowed II Corps to rush south toward Saigon.

In the Central Highlands the three divisions that had captured Ban Me Thuot—the 10, 316, and 320—were grouped into III Corps under Gen. Dung. This corps pushed to the coast, then headed south toward Saigon.

By the first week of April PAVN had committed over 300,000 troops in 18 divisions to its offensive, which was code-

named the Ho Chi Minh Campaign. Gen. Dung was given command of the operation, with Gen. Le Truong Tan as his deputy. According to Hanoi's latest plan Saigon would be assaulted on three fronts, with the main access from the east in order to seize Bien Hoa (where Saigon had over half of its war material stockpiled). By mid-April the final phase of the Ho Chi Minh Campaign was underway. I Corps—which had swollen to include the 312, 320B, 325, and 338 Divisions—moved into Phuoc Long, then cut the highway from Tay Ninh to Saigon. III Corps moved through Tay Ninh toward the capital; while six divisions from II and the new IV Corps, combined under Gen. Le Truong Tan, attacked Bien Hoa and Xuan Loc. Meanwhile, the 232 Tactical Group under the command of Gen. Le Duc Anh moved north from the Mekong Delta along Route 4. In every sector the South Vietnamese were being quantitatively and qualitatively overwhelmed by PAVN.

By 21 April, after a spirited defence, Xuan Loc fell to PAVN. Six days later Gen. Le Truong Tan moved in from the east, hitting Bien Hoa and Saigon's perimeter. Meanwhile, surface-to-air missiles and artillery were positioned within range of the capital. On 30 April 1975, at 0530 hours, T-54 tanks from the 203 Armour Brigade crossed the final bridge to Saigon and smashed through the gates of the Presidential Palace. South Vietnam had fallen.

## Counter-insurgency in Laos

One year after the defeat of South Vietnam the PLAF, which had effectively ceased to exist as a separate fighting force after the 1968 Tet Offensive, was officially disbanded and integrated into the PAVN of the newly renamed Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). At the same time Soviet military assistance to the SRV dropped, forcing PAVN to cut back slightly on its overall strength.

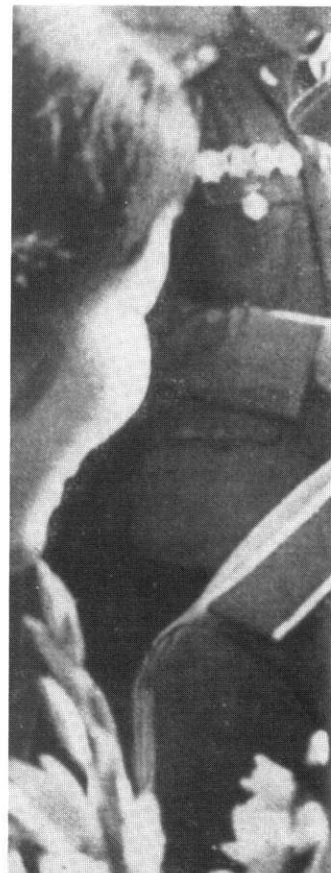
By 1977 turmoil in neighbouring Laos brought about large-scale PAVN intervention. An increasingly active anti-Communist resistance movement based just south of the Plain of Jars led to an agreement in September between Vientiane and Hanoi for PAVN to help turn the Lao People's Liberation Army into a regular conventional force. During the same year PAVN units were used to spearhead counter-insurgency operations against resistance bases in the Phou Bia massif. Heading the PAVN force was the 335 Independent Regiment, which already had amassed years of fighting experience in northern Laos. PAVN infantry, heavily supported by artillery and airstrikes, were instrumental in breaking the back of the resistance after three years of difficult fighting.

Although anti-Communist resistance activity subsided in Laos by 1980, substantial numbers of PAVN troops remained. By early 1983 three divisions were stationed in Laos; the 324 Division was believed to be in the north and two others in the south. During the following year the 397 Division became the primary PAVN formation in the north, with elements spread across Luang Prabang and Phongsaly provinces. Total PAVN strength in Laos was estimated at 45,000 troops.

By 1987 PAVN had established Front 317 in north-east Laos; within the front were 15,000 troops in five regiments. Another 15,000 troops in three engineer and economic construction divisions were building airfields and roads in the north and east. In addition, infantry detachments were stationed outside the administrative capital of Vientiane and the royal capital of Luang Prabang. Elements of an infantry division were believed to be located in Savannakhet province in the south. In 1989 the 384

*Heavily-decorated PLAF and PAVN combatants at a youth conference, 1973.*

*The two PLAF members (right) wear soft bush hats, and lack rank insignia. Their shirts, with notched collars and shoulder loops, were more often seen among PAVN ranks. The PAVN student is wearing what appears to be Engineer insignia on his collar tabs. While not officially detailed in PAVN's 1958 uniform code, the dark brown jacket with closed convertible collar seen here became the summer dress uniform of choice for PAVN officers until the early 1980s.*



Division, an economic construction unit, was engaged in road-building on Route 9 in the panhandle. In addition, several PAVN divisions withdrawing from Cambodia were repositioned along the southern Bolovens Plateau.

# THE THIRD INDOCHINA WAR

While the SRV quickly cemented its relations with Laos after 1975, Vietnam's relations with its other Indochinese neighbour, Cambodia, soon deteriorated. As early as May 1975 Cambodia's fanatical Khmer Rouge leaders had begun launching raids against Communist Vietnamese forces on Phu Quoc Island. Sporadic border clashes continued through 1976, then sharply increased early the next year. Following serious Khmer Rouge raids into Vietnam's Chau Duc Province in April 1977 PAVN retaliated in May by moving the 207, 968, and 325 Divisions from southern Laos 16km across the border into Cambodia's Ratanakiri Province.

A renewal in fighting during September led Gen. Giap to initiate a multi-divisional incursion into the southern border region. The 9 Division (probably), with artillery and armour support, crossed 20km into Cambodia from Tay Ninh Province, while a



second division pushed down Route 7 into Mimot. A Khmer Rouge counter-offensive reclaimed most of the territory.

During November PAVN resumed its offensive, encircling Svay Rieng. Feinting a retreat, PAVN armour caught several hundred Khmer Rouge in a deadly trap. Other PAVN columns pushed into Takeo and Kampot provinces. On 16 December PAVN increased pressure on the Khmer Rouge by launching its largest military operation since the 1975 Offensive. Involved were two of PAVN's four Strategic Army Corps (SACs): 3 SAC (10, 31, and 320 Divisions) and 4 SAC (7 and 9 Divisions). Also involved were elements of six other divisions, including the 5, 305, 330 and 335.

With no quarter given by either side, the 4 SAC, with the 9 Division in the lead, moved toward Kompong Cham. The 3 SAC, led by T-54 tanks and ex-US M-113 APCs, fought along Route 1, bypassing Svay Rieng and moving toward Neak Luong. Additional divisions, probably from Military Region 5, pushed into Mondolkiri, while the 305 division from southern Laos threatened Stung Treng. In this way PAVN sought to capture all of Cambodia east of the Mekong River. As a diversion, other PAVN divisions pushed once again toward Kampot and Takeo. By January 1978 the Khmer Rouge began to launch counterattacks, causing PAVN to partially withdraw by February. In the process, however, most of the Khmer Rouge eastern units had been destroyed.

PAVN was far from pleased with its Cambodian incursion. With many of PAVN's seasoned troops diverted into economic construction units after 1975, southern draftees, including

former South Vietnamese Army troops, had been used to fill the ranks of southern infantry divisions. These southern divisions, Hanoi felt, lacked motivation in battle. As a result, beginning in 1978, PAVN began a major reorganization to expand and modernize its forces, as well as to professionalize its officer corps. Significantly, this ended the 'dual commander' system in place since 1952: under the earlier system a political officer was equal, if not superior, to the military commander of a regiment or division. Under the new system the political officer became subordinate to the military commander, thereby streamlining the chain of command.

During the first half of 1978 the Khmer Rouge worked feverishly to expand its army. At the same time Phnom Penh continued with its cross-border raids. As a result, in February 1978 the Vietnamese Communist Party Central Committee is believed to have made the decision to overthrow the Khmer Rouge government. Hanoi's initial strategy, supported by Giap, was built around assisting a renegade Khmer Rouge faction in Cambodia's Eastern Region; this faction had already begun an open rebellion against Khmer Rouge leaders in Phnom Penh. Increasingly, however, Giap was opposed by those who supported a Soviet-style blitzkrieg invasion to overthrow Phnom Penh.

By the fall of 1978 PAVN had decided to invade Cambodia during the upcoming dry season. To facilitate the operation Hanoi launched a 350,000-man mobilization/induction campaign. In addition, PAVN forces along the Cambodian border were increased to three divisions in the Fishhook enclave and seven others spread along the border. These included fresh



northern units from the 2 SAC, joining the 3 and 4 SAC already in place. Significantly, engineer brigades—vital for river-crossing—were attached to each of the three SACs. In late November PAVN made its final preparations for the invasion. PAVN Chief-of-Staff Senior General Le Duc Anh took over as theatre commander, bringing Lt. Gen. Le Ngoc Hien and Lt. Gen. Phuong The Tai as his ground and air commanders, respectively. To coordinate the multi-corps assault, Front 478 was established as a headquarters in Military Region 9.

Late in November 1978 the invasion began with noisy PAVN feints toward Kompong Cham and Svay Rieng. Tying up the Khmer Rouge in these two locations, PAVN then plunged task forces into north-east and southern Cambodia. Moving through

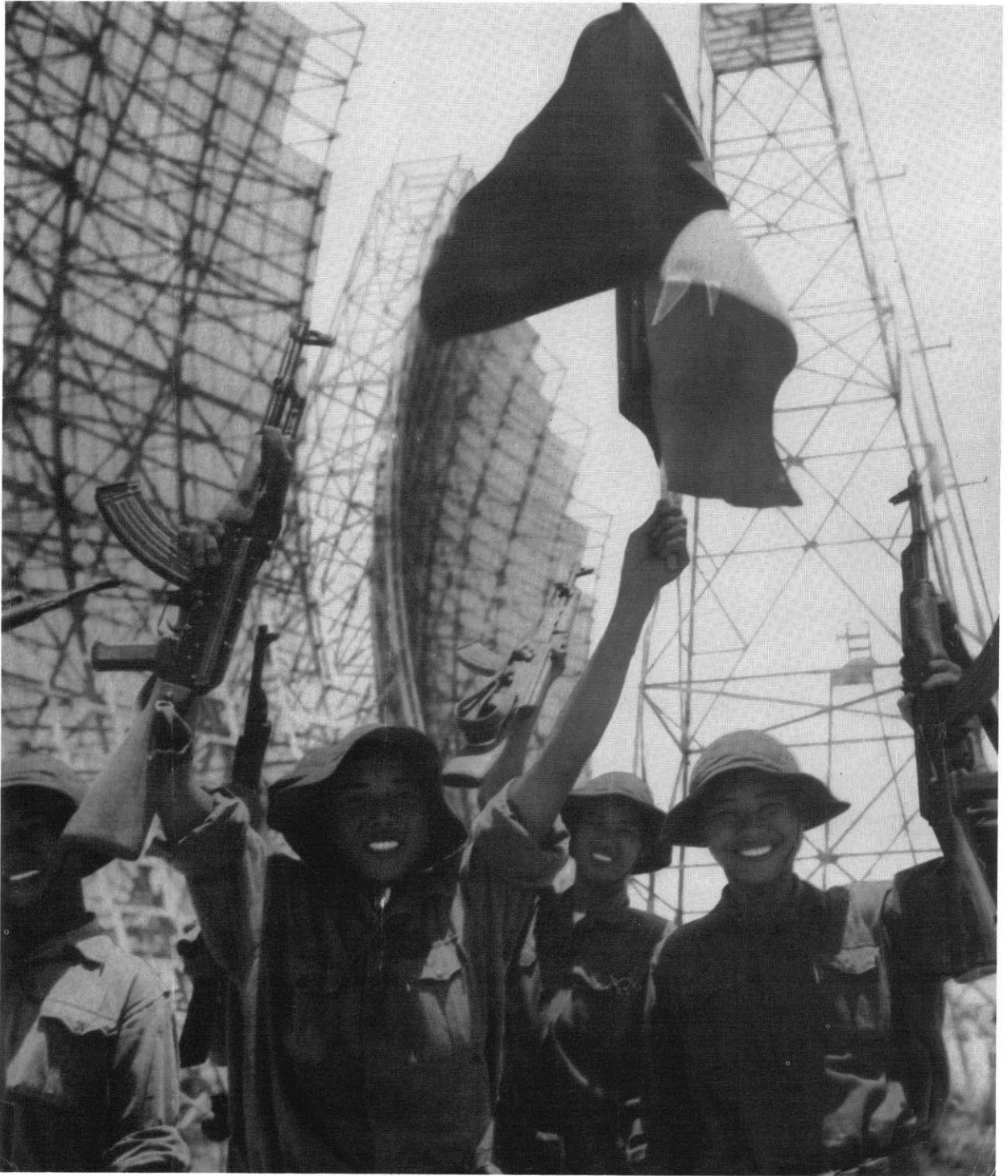
established border enclaves in the north-east, the 3 and 5 Divisions pushed forward to cut off the town of Kratie, while the 305 Division moved from Laos toward Stung Treng and the 2 Division cut east from Pleiku. In the south, PAVN columns hit Takeo and cut between Kampot and Phnom Penh. By 13 December PAVN Dac Cong commando teams were already near the strategic Pich Nil Pass and threatening to sever Route 4, Phnom Penh's vital artery to the sea.

Pausing briefly to bring forward its bridging equipment, PAVN began the final phase of its invasion on the night of 24 December. By 30 December Kratie was captured and PAVN soon began to cross the Mekong. These forces then rushed south toward Kompong Cham, while the 3 SAC advanced on the town

◀ *A PAVN infantry lieutenant and aspirant pose with a Quyet Thang ('Determined to Win') battle flag covered with Military Exploit (Second Class) and Combatant (First Class) Orders, 1974.*



▶ *A PAVN soldier with war spoils from Saigon, 1975. Note the three-pocket Chinese field pack.*



from the east. Simultaneously, PAVN crossed the Mekong with Soviet pontoon bridges south of Kompong Cham, effectively cutting off the two Khmer Rouge divisions defending the town. PAVN routed the Khmer Rouge from Kompong Cham by 6 January, then sent these forces west, cutting off Phnom Penh from the north. At the same time, in order to prevent the Khmer

Rouge in the north-east from withdrawing west and creating guerrilla bases in the Dongrek Mountains, two PAVN columns, including one from southern Laos, converged on Stung Treng. The town was taken by 3 January 1979. PAVN now had effective control of everything east of the Mekong.

In the south, PAVN faced tough Khmer Rouge opposition

◀ *PLAF soldiers unfurl the Viet Cong flag after the capture of Saigon, 1975. All wear soft bush hats and US web belts, with an assortment of Soviet RGD-5 and US M-26 grenades.*



▶ *PAVN militiawomen in the southern city of Can Tho, late 1975. They wear black pyjamas and a combination of blue and olive drab soft bush hats. Their weapons are the Soviet AK-47; in the late 1970s PAVN militia were often equipped with US-made M-16 assault rifles.*

while trying to seal Cambodia's coastline to prevent Chinese supplies from reaching Cambodian forces. The 12 Division hit Kampot City on 25 December, but was smashed back by fanatical Khmer Rouge resistance. On the same day PAVN began the first in a series of amphibious landings when a battalion of the 126 Marine Brigade established a blocking force west of Kampot.

After almost two weeks of heavy fighting between the 12 Division and the Khmer Rouge, Kampot fell and the combined infantry-marine force headed toward the port of Kompong Som. On 11 January another battalion made a night landing at Ream, securing the port and neighbouring islands in bloody fighting.

In the central part of the country, PAVN columns from the



*Politburo member Trung Chinh poses with armour Captain Trinh To Tam and infantry Senior Captain Bui Quang Than, December 1976. Both officers wear dark brown versions of the summer dress uniform.*



*An excellent study of the variations in PAVN dress uniforms, December 1976. On the left is an APSF colonel wearing a blue summer dress uniform, green collar tabs, and green shoulderboards with horizontal yellow stripes. To his left is Senior General Van Tien Dung, wearing an identical blue jacket with bare collar tabs (until 1982 infantry officers used no branch insignia). On the right is Senior General Vo Nguyen Giap, wearing a dark brown summer dress uniform. As is standard PAVN practice, all officers are wearing service bars from ribboned medals and hero awards on the left breast; other awards go on the right breast. Note in the background an officer of unknown branch in dress whites. Judging from the number of colour variations, even within the same branch, PAVN appears to have been lax in enforcing uniform codes during the 1970s.*



*Captain Nguyen Tanh Trung, Deputy Commander of the 935 Air Force Wing, 1977. Trung allegedly was both a Communist sympathizer and an F-5 pilot in the South Vietnamese Air Force. On 8 April 1975 he flew his plane to Communist territory, later leading a flight of captured A-37s in bombing Tan Son Nhut Airbase. After the capitulation of Saigon he became Deputy Commander of the 935 Wing, composed entirely of captured aircraft. Note his equipment is of US origin.*



north and south-east converged on Phnom Penh. Two Dac Cong commando teams had tried to infiltrate the city by boat on the morning of 2 January with the purpose of kidnapping Cambodian leader Norodom Sihanouk; they were discovered on the riverbanks, however, and all but one man were killed. Three days later the capital was surrounded and, after heavy aerial bombardment, Vietnamese forces entered the abandoned city on 7 January 1979.

Once Phnom Penh was in PAVN hands a puppet Cambodian government was immediately established. Up to that time PAVN had lost some 10,000 troops; however, its Soviet blitzkrieg tactics and heavy use of airpower had been a tremendous success.

Still, the battle for Cambodia was far from over. After softening up targets with airpower, PAVN tanks entered Siem Reap on 11 January; three days later they arrived at the border. Along the coast, an amphibious landing by (probably) the 950 Marine Brigade on 16 January at Koh Kong Island was conducted simultaneously with a land sweep into the Cardomom Mountains. Because of the difficult terrain, however, PAVN was unsuccessful in rooting out the Khmer Rouge guerrilla bases. Though weakened, the Khmer Rouge refused to stop fighting. Counteroffensives in the south allowed them to briefly retake Kompong Som and the Pich Nil Pass. In the west, north, and north-east, heavy Cambodian guerrilla activity kept the Vietnamese confined to bases.

In March 1979 PAVN began a renewed offensive to disrupt the Khmer Rouge before the end of the dry season. Bringing in Pathet Lao troops to garrison Stung Treng, PAVN airlifted three more divisions aboard Soviet-piloted aircraft to the western part of the country. The operation began on 27 March with a Dac Cong commando assault on a suspected Khmer Rouge headquarters 10km south of Pailin. Over the next two months heavy fighting took place around Pailin, Poipet, and the northern Cardamom Mountains. Although PAVN inflicted heavy losses

on the Cambodian guerrillas, the Khmer Rouge were far from finished.

## The Sino-Vietnamese War

Following the PAVN invasion of Cambodia, Sino-Vietnamese relations fell to a new low. In the pre-dawn hours of 17 February 1979, 85,000 Chinese troops surged across the border to 'teach Vietnam a lesson'. The Chinese had three primary targets: in the west, Lao Cai; in the centre, Cao Bang; and in the east, the strategic city of Lang Son, only 80 miles from Hanoi.

PAVN now faced a two-front war. In the north, it fielded about 100,000 troops, mostly paramilitary forces. Regular divisions assigned to the northern military regions and economic construction divisions assigned to the General Economic Development Command maintained the second line of defence, but were soon committed as the Chinese made early gains.

During the first five days of the war Chinese forces suffered heavy casualties but managed to push their way into Lao Cai, where PAVN paramilitary forces took heavy losses, as did the 345 Division defending the phosphorus mines south of the town. Elements of the 316 Division holding positions to the south-west were badly weakened in a failed counterattack. At Cao Bang the 346 Division took heavy casualties as the Chinese pushed into the town by 27 February. The 338 Division, south-west of the town, was not committed to the battle. The heaviest fighting took place around the provincial capital of Lang Son. On 24 February elements of the PAVN 3 'Gold Star' Division, blocking the approach to Lang Son at the town of Dong Dang, were overrun by Chinese forces. Three days later the battle for Lang Son began, with both sides engaging in a massive artillery duel.

With the Chinese massing around Lang Son, PAVN rushed troops to the north of the country. Four divisions, the 304



◀ *Senior General Vo Nguyen Giap (left) reviews PAVN honour guard with Laotian Defence Minister Khamtay Sithandone, September 1977. He wears a green summer dress uniform nearly identical to that later adopted under the 1982 dress code.*

▶ *PAVN squad, c.1977. The private in the left foreground wears a green field cap; since the late 1970s, the field cap has become a common item in PAVN combat units.*

and 325 from the 2 SAC and the 10 and 320 from the 3 SAC, were airlifted north from Cambodia. The 320 joined the elite 308 Division (1 SAC) in holding the final line of defence north of Hanoi. The 325 Division was sent to blocking positions south of Lang Son. Already deployed were the 327 Division at Ha Bac south of Lang Son, and elements of the 3 'Gold Star' Division inside Lang Son.

By 2 March the Chinese had cut all roads around Lang Son. In spite of savage Vietnamese resistance, including PAVN use of tanks and armoured personnel carriers, Chinese forces pushed into the town on 4 March. This was a Pyrrhic victory, however, as Beijing realized that holding Lang Son would be too costly. On 5 March China announced that its 'lesson' was over and that it would be withdrawing its forces from Vietnam.

The Sino-Vietnamese War cost at least 35,000 Vietnamese and 15,000 Chinese casualties. While Beijing had met its limited objectives along the border, PAVN regional forces had given a good account of themselves.

## THE CAMBODIAN OCCUPATION

By July 1979 the Vietnamese had consolidated their control over all major Cambodian towns and cities. PAVN had now come full circle: once a guerrilla movement, it was now a fully conventional army occupying a foreign country and facing local insurgents. To conduct its counter-insurgency campaign PAVN established its General Headquarters, Front 478, at Chamka Morn in Phnom Penh. Cambodia was divided into four military regions each corresponding to a PAVN front. Military Region 4, in western Cambodia, fell under Front 479. Based at Barai Toek Thla Airport in Siem Reap, this front faced the greatest resistance threat. Military Region 5, which covered the north-east, fell under Front 579 in

Stung Treng. Military Region 7, in the east, was under Front 779 in Kompong Cham. Military Region 9, along the coast, fell under Front 979. In addition, PAVN established a Special Military Administrative Zone around Phnom Penh, and Naval Zone 5 off Cambodia's coast.

PAVN's occupation forces briefly reached 224,000 men in 1979, then stabilized at an average of 170,000–180,000 troops, including 11 combat divisions. Up to eight divisions operated along the border in a wide arc, venturing forth in the dry season (December to June) and pulling back to established garrisons during the heavy rains (July to November). Combat divisions made up less than two-thirds of PAVN's total strength, the remainder being headquarters and support personnel.

Opposition from Cambodian resistance groups during the first two years of PAVN occupation was low. After two years of rebuilding, however, in January 1981 the Khmer Rouge consolidated control over Phnom Malai, a mountainous jungle region near the Thai border 20 km south of Poipet. Phnom Malai had been a PAVN complex controlling access to the Thai border, but was abandoned as PAVN moved inland to consolidate garrisons during the build-up to the 1981 elections for the Hanoi-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) government in Phnom Penh.

### Operations 1981–82

In May 1981 PAVN moved the 309 Division to the border town of Pailin to counter Khmer Rouge advances at Phnom Malai, but the beginning of the rainy season in July forced the Vietnamese to pull back. With the dry season in late 1981 PAVN moved swiftly against the re-emerging resistance threat. In December they began a search-and-destroy sweep against a key Khmer Rouge infiltration base in the Thailand–Laos–Cambodia triborder area. However, the Khmer Rouge managed to slip through the Vietnamese cordon without suffering heavy losses. Continuing with their dry season offensive into January 1982, PAVN next planned an ambitious pincer operation against Phnom Malai. PAVN



hoped to capture the base by at least the end of March, to coincide with the opening of the Fifth Vietnamese Party Congress in Hanoi.

The Phnom Malai operation, PAVN's largest since the December 1978 invasion, involved elements of two infantry divisions, tanks, and artillery. The main thrust began on 6 February with attacks from the north and east. Initially successful, PAVN

*PAVN first lieutenant instructs female tribal militia in the use of the Soviet PPSH-41 sub-*

*machine gun, 1979. He wears green trousers and an off-white shirt over a yellow sweatshirt.*

soon faced tough Khmer Rouge resistance. Both sides began taking excessive casualties, forcing the Khmer Rouge to withdraw from the southern sector. For PAVN, its pincer strategy began to unravel when its second task force, ordered to cross into Thailand and manoeuvre behind the Khmer Rouge, failed to move into place. The two defending Khmer Rouge divisions then began infiltrating through the Vietnamese lines and struck at PAVN's supply columns. With the rainy season still several months away, PAVN began withdrawing in March, allowing the Khmer Rouge to retake all of Phnom Malai.

At the same time elements of the PAVN 7 Division were launched against Sokh San, an isolated border garrison controlled



by the anti-Communist Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF). The base was overrun in mid-March and looted, giving PAVN its only clear success of the dry season.

Once the rainy season began in June 1982 PAVN began its first major troop rotation since 1978. Arriving in Cambodia were up to 20,000 fresh soldiers, many of them southern draftees sent to complete their basic training at the forward bases of under-strength divisions. They replaced an equal number of PAVN sent home in July.

### Operations 1983

PAVN delayed their next dry season offensive until the last week of March 1983. Their strategy was the same as the previous dry season, only on a larger scale. Relying primarily on the 5 Division, PAVN threw over double the previous number of troops against the Khmer Rouge stronghold at Phnom Malai. The attack began on 31 March with a massive artillery barrage; a tank assault followed the next day. To complete the pincer against the Khmer Rouge, units from the 5 Division crossed the border into Thailand twice. On the second occasion Thai artillery shelled the invading PAVN force for three days before prompting a Vietnamese withdrawal.

Further north, on 3 April PAVN opened a second front against the non-Communist Sihanoukist forces at O-smack. However, both this front and the Phnom Malai offensive began too late, leading to a PAVN withdrawal from the border in May because of the approaching rainy season.

In May, PAVN also conducted its second major troop rotation. Returning home was the 'Cuu Long Divisional Group', believed to be a composite formation loosely formed into an infantry division and six smaller units.

During the 1983 rainy season the Khmer Rouge increased the tempo of their attacks on PAVN garrisons. As a result, once the dry season began in December, PAVN immediately deployed the 5 and 309 Divisions opposite Khmer Rouge bases along the western border. At the same time the PAVN 302 Division moved to the north-west border to engage the non-Communist resistance.

### Operations 1984

These troop movements proved to be a diversion, as PAVN began a major counter-insurgency sweep in early 1984 along the north tip of the Tonle Sap Lake. This involved over one division, helicopter gunships, and pallet-bombing from An-26 transport aircraft. The operation was generally successful, though it did reveal the extent to which the resistance had penetrated into the interior.

Once the interior had been cleared, PAVN turned its attention back to the border. First, on 29 March, PAVN infantry from the 302, 307, and 9 Divisions, with tanks and artillery, hit the Phra Palai Pass, a key Khmer Rouge infiltration route near the tri-border region. In yet another attempt to sandwich the Khmer Rouge in a pincer movement, 400 Vietnamese crossed the border into Thailand. The operation was a failure as the bulk of the Khmer Rouge had already slipped through the Vietnamese lines; in addition, Thai artillery sent PAVN scrambling back into Cambodia.

In mid-April PAVN launched the next phase of its dry season offensive with an attack on the KPNLF headquarters complex at Ampil. For the operation PAVN committed elements of



*Women soldiers from Transport Company 20 during the 1979 war with*

*China. Note that their shirts lack chest pockets.*

the 5 Division, the 8 Border Defence Regiment, tanks and artillery. As had become standard, the attack began with a sapper assault and artillery barrage, followed by infantry charges over the next two days. However, the KPNLF held firm, bringing in reinforcements and inflicting heavy casualties on PAVN. Surprisingly, PAVN had not committed most of its armour, and even left 200 of its men to bleed to death on the slopes around the camp. Part of the reason for this fiasco was Hanoi's unsuccessful attempt to encourage greater participation by the armed forces of the PRK.

In June 1984 PAVN conducted another troop rotation, sending home the 2 and 10 Border Defence Regiments (also called the 688 and 690 Brigades), and a third brigade. These were replaced by an estimated 14,000 fresh troops, many of whom were sent to reinforce the weakened 5 Division.

### Operations 1985

In December 1984, PAVN was ordered to make up for its embarrassing defeats earlier in the year by launching its biggest dry season offensive to date, bringing in the fresh 2 and 7 Divisions to bolster its forces. On 25 December the PAVN offensive opened with the 9 Division crushing and burning the KPNLF's Rythisen border camp. Next the 5 Division, sappers, tanks, and artillery



◀ *Female corporal with a radio unit of the PAVN Navy, c.1981.*

completely overwhelmed the KPRLF defences around Ampil on 7 January 1985. After crushing the KPRLF, PAVN turned next toward the Khmer Rouge's Phnom Malai base. From the south came elements of the 309 Division, joined by regiments from the 5 and 9 Divisions. By 1 February two battalions from the 309 Division had battled their way into outlying outposts. From the north-east, the 7 and 8 Divisions pushed into heavy Khmer Rouge defences. By mid-February, the southern prong had lost momentum, but the north-east column continued to take ground. To bolster the offensive PAVN sent tanks and armoured personnel carriers to join the north-east front. On 15 February the Khmer Rouge melted into the jungle, allowing PAVN to capture Phnom Malai for the first time since 1981.

For their final drive PAVN shifted their forces toward the Sihanoukist base at Tatum on the northern border. A frontal attack in early March failed, so elements from the 302 Division circled through Thailand and hit the base from the rear. After six days Tatum fell.

In April 1985 PAVN claimed to withdraw from Cambodia four technical brigades which had been conducting counter-insurgency and civic action operations in the interior. Two months later the 2 and 7 Divisions were quietly recalled to Viet-

nam; both had been sent to Cambodia the previous December to participate in the dry season offensive.

Remaining in Cambodia were ten PAVN combat divisions; all were understrength, some with as few as 5,000 troops. Front 479, which saw the most action along the border, included the 5, 302, 309 and 330 Divisions. Front 979, on the coast, included the 4 and 8 Divisions. Front 579, in the north-east, had the 307 Division. Front 779, in the interior, was composed of a division and several technical brigades. The 9 and 339 Division formed a reserve around Phnom Penh.

In late 1985 the non-Communist resistance were still recovering from the previous PAVN dry season offensive. The Khmer Rouge, meanwhile, had saturated the Cambodian interior with mobile guerrilla units, depriving PAVN of large basecamp targets. PAVN consequently used the 1985-86 dry season to conduct sweeps and train the PRK army. In addition PAVN initiated the K5 Plan, an attempt to seal off the Thai-Cambodian border with a line of trenches, minefields, and patrols. Air support was also increased, including Mi-24 gunships. PAVN's growing frustration with border sanctuaries and an elusive guerrilla enemy were strikingly reminiscent of the problems faced by the US military in the Second Indochina War.

## Operations 1986–89

In the summer of 1986 PAVN withdrew from Cambodia Divisional Group 98, composed of the 8 Division, the 95 Brigade, and the 37 Infantry Regiment. Part of this withdrawal was compensated for by fresh troops sent to Cambodia. Another year of counter-insurgency sweeps followed, with PAVN trying—usually in vain—to encourage greater participation by the PRK military. PAVN was also trying to lower its profile in Cambodia by conducting more artillery barrages and less infantry sweeps.

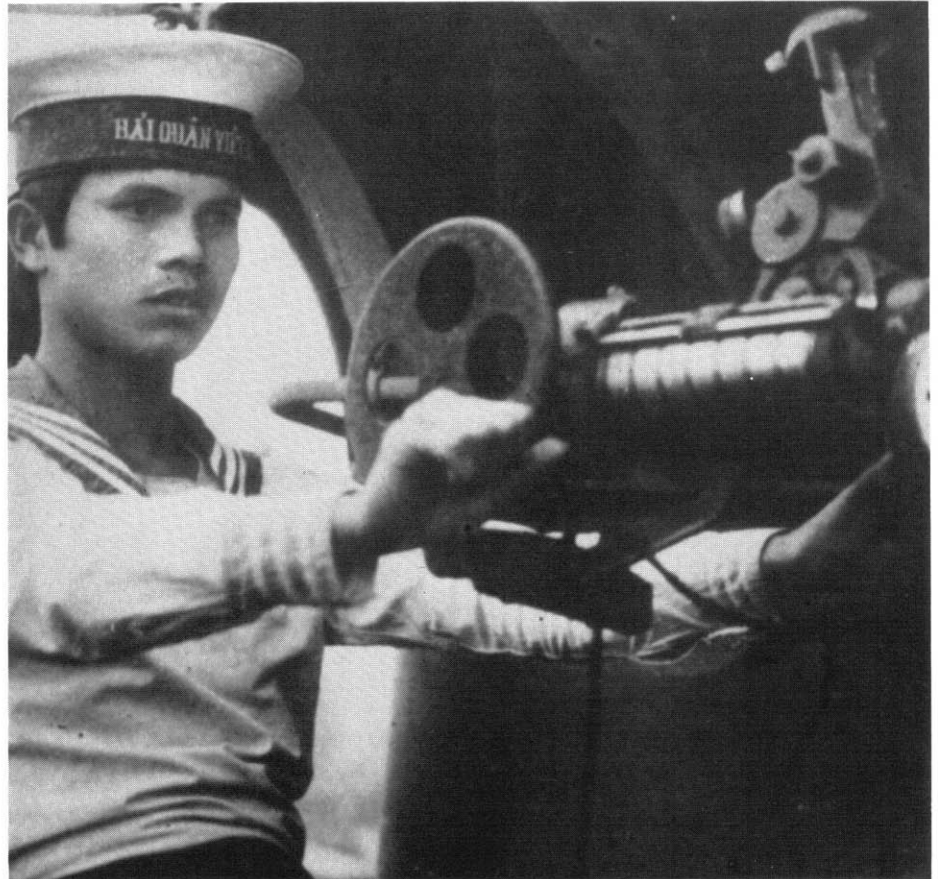
In November 1987 PAVN withdrew the 94 Divisional Group from Battambang, allegedly composed of a division (possibly the 9 Division) and two brigades. Also withdrawn by sea from Kompong Som was the 99 Divisional Group, consisting of two brigades, eight M-113 armoured personnel carriers, and two tanks. Approximately three-fourths of these returnees were replaced by fresh arrivals; total PAVN strength in Cambodia was down to about 120,000 men.

By mid-1988 PAVN had moved the bulk of its combat troops inland, with PRK forces increasingly deployed on the border. The inadequacies of this arrangement became apparent in September, when the Khmer Rouge recaptured PRK-held Phnom Malai.

In December 1988 PAVN conducted its largest withdrawal to date, bringing out elements of the 4, 5, 307, 309, and 339 Divisions, as well as support personnel from the 479 and 579 Fronts. PAVN strength in Cambodia was reduced to approximately 80,000 men.



▲ Major Nguyen Van Duong, commander of an armoured battalion, c.1984. He is wearing the green summer dress uniform for field-grade officers.



► PAVN sailor, c.1984. 'Vietnamese Navy' is printed across his cap. The PAVN naval working uniform is nearly identical to that worn by the Chinese Navy.

# PAVN TODAY

During the first eight months of 1989 PAVN continued with counter-insurgency sweeps and training the PRK army, navy, and air force. In September most of the remainder of PAVN's occupation forces were withdrawn as follows:

*14 September* Units of PAVN 5 Naval Region begin evacuation by sea from Kompong Som to Phu Quoc Island. *16 September* 302 Division (probably) begins evacuation from Oddar Meanchey through Stung Treng, links up with Front 579, and crosses border to Duc Co. *21 September* 330 Division and remaining units of Front 479 begin moving by boat down the Tonle Sap and by land through Battambang, Pursat and Phnom Penh; links up with Front 478 and PAVN 901 Regimental Command (Air); proceeds by boat down Mekong to Hong Ngu, and by land through Takeo to Tinh Bien. *25 September* Front 979 (probably) begins moving through Kampot to Hatien. *25 September* Front 797 moves from Kompong Cham and arrives Samat; other elements of the front move from Svay Rieng and arrive at Moc Bai.

Although Hanoi claims to have removed its last combat forces from Cambodia in September 1989, PAVN forces remain in Cambodia in several capacities. These include advisors to the PRK military; specialized units such as artillery, armour, and Dac Cong commandos; and 'fillers' and cadre for PRK units. The latter category appears to be drawn primarily from the PAVN 5, 302, 330, and 339 Divisions.

*In the mid-1980s the PAVN Air Force began admitting civilian students for parachute training. This propaganda shot shows*

*high school girls after their first jump. They wear standard green PAVN field uniforms with laced leather boots.*

PAVN currently has 1.25 million soldiers on active duty: including its 2.5 million reserves, Vietnam has the fourth largest land army in the world. Often called the 'Prussians of Asia', its infantry is today the most experienced in Asia. Because of prohibitions in the 1954 Geneva Agreements Hanoi was forbidden to create a navy and air force. To skirt these restrictions PAVN created naval and air 'branches' within PAVN. Hanoi continues this game of semantics, even though it has the largest navy and air force in South-East Asia.

## Infantry

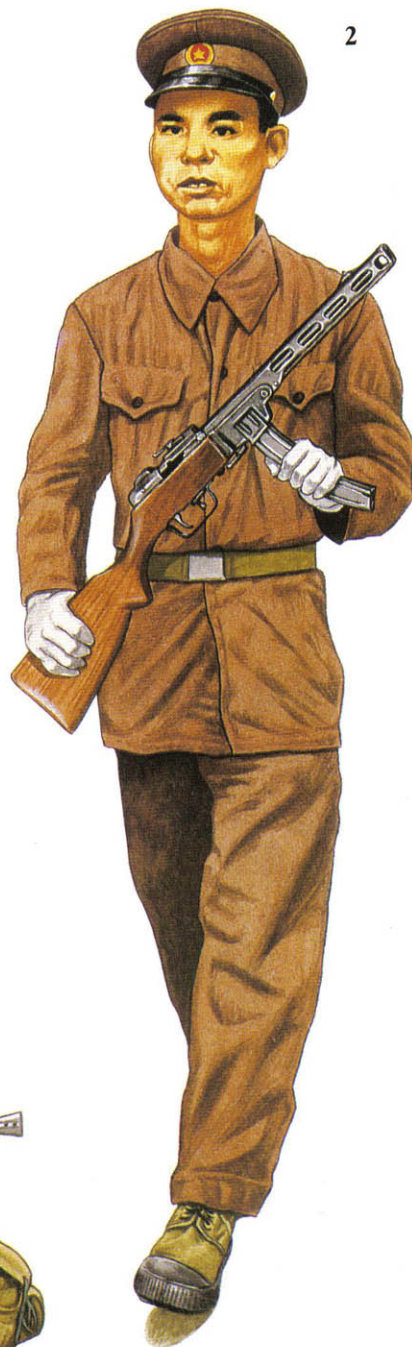
Since its inception the backbone of PAVN has been the infantry. Strongly influenced by China, the organization of PAVN's infantry units has changed little. Infantry divisions are composed of three 2,500-man regiments, an artillery regiment (in PAVN, mortars and heavy machine guns can be considered artillery), a tank battalion, and support elements. Each regiment has four 600-man battalions, in turn composed of four companies. On occasion infantry are organized into independent regiments, many of which trace their lineage back to ethnic minority units raised during the First Indochina War.

PAVN places great importance on the unit histories of its infantry divisions. Of special significance are the original six 'Steel and Iron' Divisions, many of which have assumed an honoured status similar to the Guards Divisions in the Soviet Army. The Steel and Iron Divisions usually get the best equip-





1: Viet Minh officer, Hanoi, 1954  
2: PAVN officer, Hanoi, 1955



SIMON  
— SM Couaig —

1&2: PLAF Main Force guerrillas, Saigon, 1968  
3: PLAF cap badge, 1973



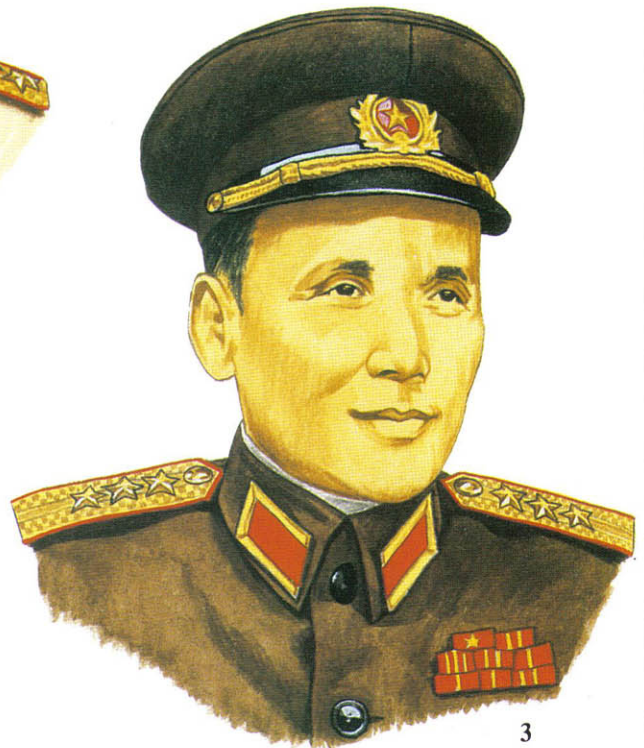
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- 1: General Vo Nguyen Giap, early 1960s
- 2: Senior General Van Tien Dung, early 1970s
- 3: Major General Chu Huy Man, early 1970s

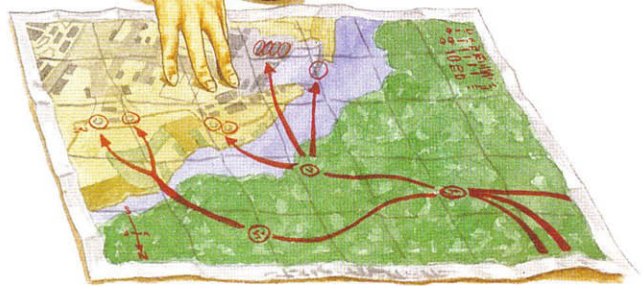


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1&2: PAVN Air Force officers, 1972



2



- 1: Artillery first lieutenant, 1972  
2: Artillery officer, 1972  
3: Artillery NCO, 1972



1&2: Ministry of Interior officers, early 1980s  
3: Cong An cap badge



3

1

2



- 1: PAVN first lieutenant, 1987
- 2: PAVN cap badge
- 3: Field-grade officer cap badge
- 4: General-grade officer cap badge



2



3



4



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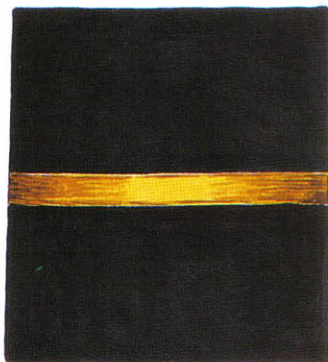
- 1: Navy Seaman, Cambodia, 1988  
2: Seaman, second class  
3: Seaman, first class  
4: Petty officer, third class  
5: Petty officer, second class  
6: Petty officer, first class



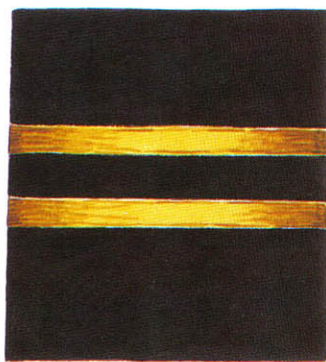
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6







1: Tanker, 203 Armour Brigade, Saigon, 1975  
2: Armour first lieutenant, Cambodia, 1988

1: Enlisted man, Economic Construction Division 1980  
2: Border Guard, Chinese border, 1980s



- 1: Colonel General Le Ngoc Hien, Cambodia, 1988
- 2: Navy senior lieutenant, 1988
- 3: Infantry senior colonel, 1988
- 4: Air Force senior captain, 1988





1: PRKAF Guerrilla, 1 PRKAF Brigade, 1980  
2: PRKAF private, 1990  
3: PRKAF General Tie Banh, Phnom Penh, 1989



ment, and some have been chosen for conversion to mechanized divisions.

During times of decreased hostilities, regular divisions are sometimes reduced to brigades. Since 1975 infantry divisions have occasionally been reduced to economic construction divisions under the PAVN General Economic Construction Directorate or engineer divisions under the PAVN Engineer Directorate. Lighter than regular infantry divisions (about 4,000 men), these units have primarily economic tasks, e.g. building bridges and roads, as well as forward defence. In times of conflict they can be used on the front line, as they were in the 1979 war with China.

PAVN currently maintains about 36 regular infantry divisions. These range in size from 5,000 to 12,500 men, with 9,000 being the average. An additional 28 divisions are kept at cadre strength. Engineer and Economic Construction Divisions number eight and ten, respectively; this number is likely to increase as PAVN converts several of its regular divisions because of budgetary constraints.

## Armour

As early as August 1950 French intelligence reported that PAVN students were training with 15 light tanks at the Sino-Viet tank school near Canton. Armour, however, was not used by PAVN in the First Indochina War. In the mid-1950s PAVN sent 202 students to China and the USSR for armour training. Upon their return the 202 Armour Regiment was established in October 1959, taking its number from the 202 students trained overseas. Among the regiment's assets were Soviet Su-76 guns, ex-US M-8 armoured cars and M-24 light tanks, and possibly some World War Two Japanese equipment.

Elements of the regiment were first used in Laos in December 1961, seeing action as armour instructors to the Pathet Lao and neutralist Laotian forces; PAVN PT-76 amphibious tanks and armoured scout cars also began making regular appearances on the Plain of Jars in northern Laos by 1962. In addition, PAVN armour cadres were sent as anti-armour advisors to COSVN by at

*PAVN Marines pose for a propaganda shot on the Spratly Islands after the brief 1988 confrontation*

*with China. They wear a green version of the Navy working uniform.*

least 1962.

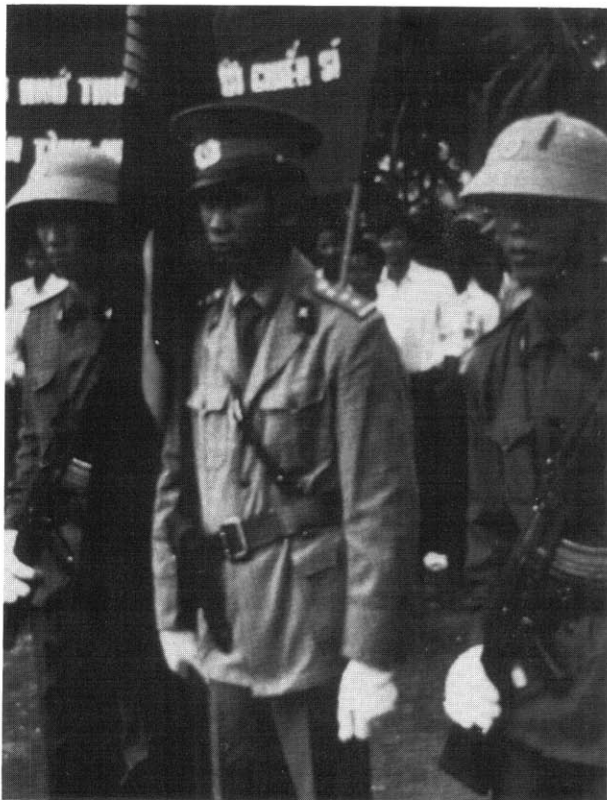
During the summer of 1965 PAVN organized an Armour Command at Vieng Phu to run the armour training centre and to improve command and control over PAVN's growing armour assets. In the same year cadres from PAVN's second armour regiment, the 201, were sent to COSVN to plan for the establishment of a PLAF armour unit.

By 1967 PAVN had moved some of its armour down the Ho Chi Minh Trail; Tank tracks were spotted during that year in Laos across from the South Vietnamese special forces camp at Lang Vei. In February of the following year PAVN armour finally saw combat when nine PT-76s overran Lang Vei.

In March 1969 US and PAVN armour confronted each other for the first and only time near the Ben Het Special Forces camp in the Central Highlands; two PT-76s from the 4 Battalion, 202 Armour Regiment were destroyed. During the same year PAVN lost 16 PT-76s to Laotian government forces on the Plain of Jars.

PAVN's next major use of armour came in 1971 during the LAM SON 719 operation in the Laotian panhandle; employing one armour regiment, PAVN attacked South Vietnamese armour beginning on 19 February. By the time the campaign concluded in April PAVN armour had taken heavy losses, with over 100 tanks destroyed by air attacks. During December 1971 PAVN armour played a major role in the brief but successful operation to conquer the Plain of Jars in northern Laos. Using T-34s, PT-76s, and Chinese M-1967 APCs in conjunction with artillery and infantry, PAVN was able to totally overwhelm the Laotian government defences on the plain in only three days.

After gaining experience on the Plain of Jars PAVN's next major operation, the spring 1972 Nguyen Hue Offensive, was planned around tank-led assaults. Over 600 armoured vehicles were used in the offensive, with the largest number committed to



the fighting near Quang Tri. Using the T-54 for the first time in battle, the PAVN columns near Quang Tri took heavy losses: before 1 May over 90 had been destroyed.

Elsewhere during the offensive, T-54s approached the city of Kontum only to be beaten back by air power. Further south, repeated armour attacks by the 203 Regiment against An Loc were all defeated with heavy North Vietnamese losses.

PAVN had made poor use of armour during the 1972 offensive, consistently failing to co-ordinate its infantry, artillery, and tanks. To improve armour tactics cadres from the Armour Command were sent during late 1972 to the Soviet Armour Training School in Kiev. At that time PAVN fielded four armour regiments; in addition COSVN organized the M-26 Armour Group.

In 1973-74 PAVN expanded its armour regiments into brigades, each composed of about five to six tank battalions. These brigades were put to good use in the 1975 Ho Chi Minh Offensive, with T-54s of the 203 Brigade leading the advance into Saigon in April.

Soviet-style armour tactics have now become an integral part of PAVN strategy. During the December 1978 invasion of Cam-

◀ *PAVN troops withdrawing from Cambodia, 1988. An infantry senior captain (centre) wears a light grey variant of the summer dress uniform with an open rolled collar, notched lapels and a Soviet Sam Browne-style belt. He is flanked by two*

*complete with white gloves, NCOs in service dress infantry insignia on the collar tabs, and shoulder-boards.*

▼ *Ex-US 155mm howitzer (with Soviet tyres) being withdrawn from Cambodia, 1988.*





bodia, for example, Soviet doctrine was apparent as PAVN T-54s and M-113 APCs crushed the Khmer Rouge in blitzkrieg fashion.

Today the PAVN Armour Command runs the armour school and maintains nominal control over about seven armour brigades. In reality, however, brigades are normally broken into battalions and placed under the operational control of infantry or mechanized divisions, and possibly fronts. PAVN's armour assets continue to be built around the PT-76, T-34, and T-54. In 1989 the T-62 was seen with increased frequency, while the 2S3 self-propelled howitzer made its first appearance in early 1990. In addition, the US M-113 APC remains in service, some refitted with Soviet engines and a 12.7mm machine gun on the cupola.

### Artillery

Vietnamese first began training with artillery at Tsin-tsi and Long Chow in Kwangsi, China, in 1950. By that September PAVN gunners already had won their first artillery duel at Dong Khe. During 1951 PAVN began consolidating its artillery assets under the 351 Heavy Division, which was decisive during the 1954 battle at Dien Bien Phu.

After the First Indochina War the 351 Heavy Division became the artillery headquarters, a position which it still retains. Today, much as with the Armour Command, the 351 controls PAVN's artillery school and holds nominal control over PAVN's ten artillery brigades.

### Special Operations

During the late 1950s PAVN established an airborne unit; expanded into the 305 Airborne Brigade, the unit was never committed to battle. Claims that it conducted an airborne jump in Laos in December 1960 are in error. (For further discussion, see Osprey Elite 33, *South-East Asian Special Forces*.)

In March 1967 the 305 Airborne Brigade—by then at only skeleton strength—transferred the bulk of its personnel to the

*First published picture of PAVN's new T-62 tank, operating with the 102*

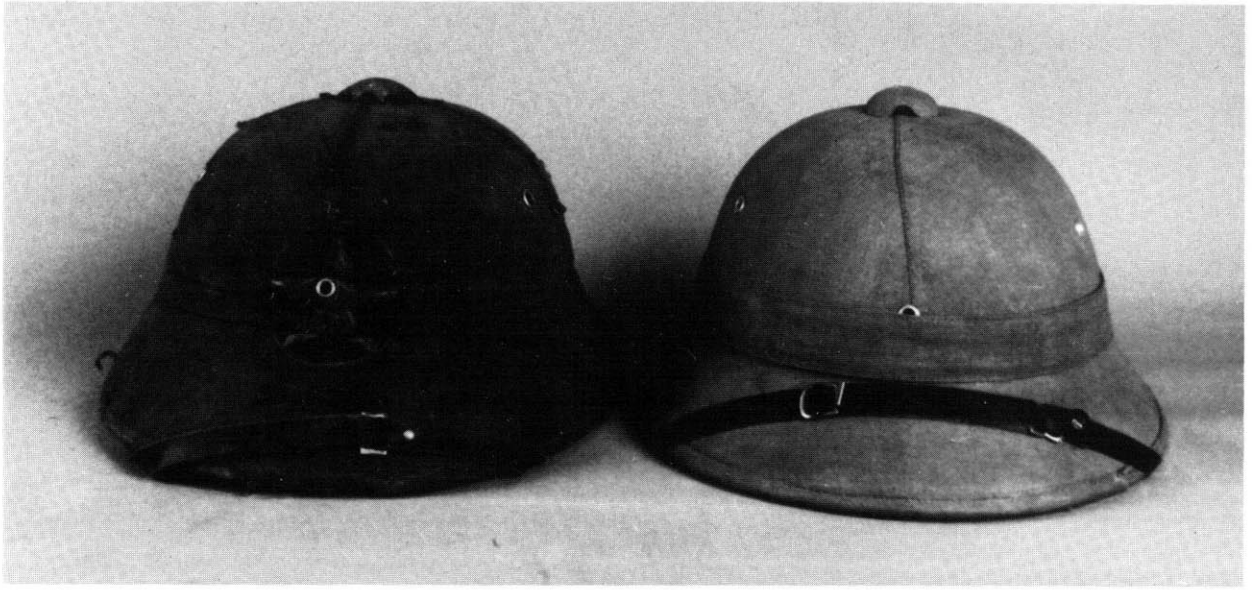
*Regiment of the 308 Division (Mechanized), February 1990.*

new 305 Dac Cong Command, also known as the 305 Sapper Command<sup>1</sup>. The command, headed by a major-general, ran the Sapper Training Centre at Xuan Mai and maintained nominal control over all sapper assets. According to PAVN doctrine, sappers could be assigned such varied tasks as long-range reconnaissance, commando raids, demolitions, and breaching minefields. Because of the need to train sappers quickly during the war, sapper courses were often conducted in the field. By 1969 there even existed a PLAF Underwater Warfare School in Long An and a Swimmer Sapper School in Kien Hoa, South Vietnam. Sapper training varied considerably, ranging from a year of intensive training in the DRV to a couple of lectures in South Vietnam. By October 1969 PAVN/PLAF forces in South Vietnam included one sapper regiment, 47 sapper battalions, and 31 independent sapper companies. In addition, 13 infantry units were slated for conversion to sappers.

In spring 1970 PAVN began raising special commando units to combat US reconnaissance teams. For example, the PAVN 11A and 11B Counter-recon Companies were deployed during that year into the A Shau Valley to engage US Marine Force Recon teams. In February 1972 a similar PAVN unit was targeted against US reconnaissance patrols from 1 Cavalry Division. The organization, tactics, and even equipment of these Vietnamese teams were nearly identical to the US forces they confronted.

In early 1975 PAVN raised the 198 Sapper Regiment. Although sapper companies, battalions, and regiments had been in the PAVN and PLAF order-of-battle for years, Hanoi now claims that the 198 was its first 'Special Forces' regiment. During the decisive battle at Ban Me Thuot in March 1975 the 198 Sapper Regiment spearheaded the assault, infiltrating the city and capturing the airfield. The regiment was then given the sensitive

<sup>1</sup> PAVN claims that the brigade was not officially abandoned until 1968.



*Well-worn PAVN pith helmet with star drawn on front (left). Taiwanese-made copy of PAVN*

*pith helmet issued to MACVSOG reconnaissance teams (right).*

assignment of capturing the city of Dalat, which contained many of South Vietnam's scientific and academic institutions.

Following the fall of South Vietnam the 305 Sapper Command retained direct control over the Sapper School at Xuan Mai and nominal control over all PAVN's sapper units. Individual sappers can become airborne qualified; despite reports to the contrary in Western sources, however, PAVN has not reconstituted an airborne brigade. Select teams within the Command are also qualified for long-range reconnaissance and amphibious warfare. Sappers and reconnaissance units (PAVN often uses the term interchangeably) are assigned to infantry battalions, regiments, and divisions; sappers are also directly assigned to SACs or Fronts. In addition, it is believed that at least three sapper regiments are kept at Xuan Mai, including the 113 and 117 Regiments (one or more of which may be at brigade strength).

### Air Force

Despite prohibitions in the Geneva Agreement PAVN began forming an air force in 1955, when it was revealed that Vietnamese pilots, technicians, and paratroopers were training in China. During the same year an 'Air Studies Bureau' was created within PAVN. By 1956 it was believed that a few Vietnamese were serving in the Chinese Air Force. With additional pilot training provided by the USSR, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany, PAVN had 250 men serving in air support functions by 1958. Several of these pilots formed an 'Air Sports Club' at Cat Bi Airbase at Haiphong; others flew the DRV's civil transport fleet, operating since 1956.

In accordance with PAVN's modernization campaign, the Air Studies Bureau was expanded on 1 May 1959 into an Air Directorate. Under the directorate, PAVN received aircraft to form the 919 Military Air Transport Squadron. By 1960 the squadron had eight light transports, believed to include the An-2,

the Il-12, Il-14, and the Li-2. During that year Vietnamese transports began Operation 'Freefall', dropping pallets without parachutes from low-flying aircraft to resupply Communist cadres moving down the Laotian panhandle toward South Vietnam.

In November 1962 the Soviet Union abruptly stopped its airlift operation from Hanoi to Communist forces in northern Laos. Most of these aircraft were then turned over to PAVN, doubling its assets. Hanoi continued the Laotian airlift, but halted operations into the Laotian panhandle by 1964 because of the danger from Laotian and US airstrikes. PAVN maintained military flights to the Pathet Lao headquarters in Sam Neua.

PAVN claims to have begun airstrikes on 7 March 1960, when a PAVN plane strafed and sank an enemy boat off Thanh Hoa Province. Given PAVN's lack of aircraft, it is doubtful that this incident took place.

During the early 1960s Vietnamese pilots began receiving jet training in China and the USSR. In early 1962 the Chinese began building an 8,700-foot runway at Phuc Yen near Hanoi, apparently for use by jet aircraft. Soon after the August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident Hanoi received 36 MiG-15 and MiG-17 fighters. These were stationed at Phuc Yen Airbase, but were not used to interdict any of the US or South Vietnamese airstrikes on North Vietnam made during that year. By that time the PAVN 'air force' consisted of 500 men.

On 15 February 1965 Hanoi claims to have engaged in its first aerial combat when it used captured T-28s to shoot down a C-123 over north-western North Vietnam. This claim appears to be a fabrication as it does not correspond with any known infiltration mission involving C-123s. Moreover, although T-28s were widely used at the time by the Laotian, Thai, Cambodian, and South Vietnamese Air Forces, not a single T-28 was ever known to have found its way into the DRV.

On 3 April 1965 PAVN MiG-17s participated in their first confirmed aerial combat when they damaged a US Navy F-8E. On the following day MiG-17s shot down two US F-105 jets. Despite these early successes, the PAVN Air Force soon began taking heavy losses. From August 1965 to April 1966 Hanoi ordered a complete stand-down in order for its pilots to receive



better foreign training. During this time the DRV also received its first MiG-21 fighters and Il-28 bombers. By April 1966 PAVN had 63 MiG-17s and 14 MiG-21s. On 23 April the MiG-21 entered combat with US aircraft and almost immediately began taking heavy losses. On 2 January 1967 US Air Force fighters set an intentional trap for the PAVN Air Force, destroying almost half of PAVN's operational MiG-21 inventory. Hanoi once again ordered a stand-down in order for its pilots to receive better training.

In neighbouring north-eastern Laos, PAVN in January 1968 launched an unusual air attack with An-2 biplanes. Outfitted with gunpods, rockets, and mortars dropped from a modified hydraulic dispenser, the An-2s hit a key US mountaintop radar facility. The mission was a total failure as two aircraft were lost: one ran out of fuel, and a second was shot down by a helicopter gunner.

By the time the US announced its total bombing halt against North Vietnam the PAVN Air Force had taken such heavy losses that it had ceased to exist as an effective air deterrent. During the bombing halt North Vietnam attempted again to increase the proficiency of its fighter pilots; meanwhile, with generous Soviet aid, it was able to almost triple its number of strike aircraft over the next three years. In addition, its fleet of 66 fixed-wing transports and three dozen helicopters remained active, with occasional missions extending into Cambodia during 1969.

PAVN did not use its jets again until December 1971, when MiG-21s were used in the reconnaissance and air superiority role during a major North Vietnamese offensive on the Plain of Jars. At least one US F-4 fighter was shot down at this time along the Lao-North Vietnamese border. Infrequent MiG-21 reconnaissance missions over north Laos continued through the spring of 1972. In 1972 the US lifted its bombing halt and once again set targets in North Vietnam. Meeting the challenge was a rebuilt PAVN Air Force, totalling 80 MiG-17s, 33 MiG-19s, and 93 MiG-21s. By the end of October heavy aerial combat with US forces had de-

stroyed over two-thirds of the MiG-21 fleet. Also during October, PAVN made the first and only use of its Il-28 bombers when two of these aircraft attacked the northern Laotian garrison at Bouamlong. A dozen civilians were killed but little other damage was done to the base.

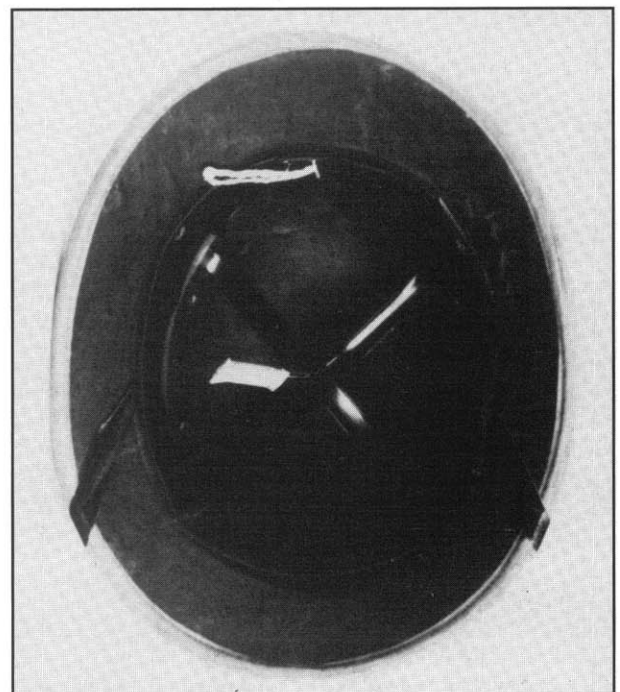
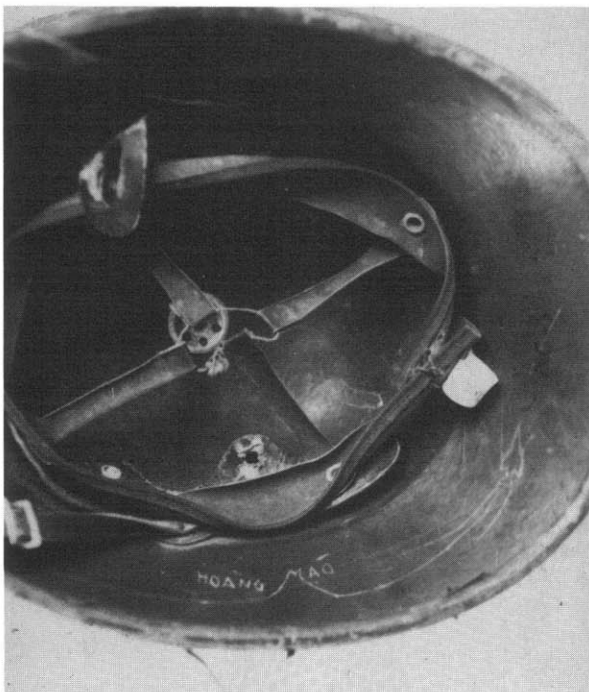
In December 1972 the US launched its massive *LINEBACKER II* B-52 raids over North Vietnam. Totally overwhelmed, the PAVN Air Force did almost nothing to stop the US bombardment.

Following the 1973 ceasefire the PAVN Air Force saw little major action until the 1975 Ho Chi Minh Campaign. Although Hanoi had improved airfields just north of the DMZ—apparently to support MiG strikes into South Vietnam—the sudden collapse of northern South Vietnam did not allow the PAVN Air Force to launch offensive missions. Even before the fall of Saigon PAVN fixed-wing transports and helicopters immediately began ferrying troops and supplies into captured airfields at Hue, Danang, and Kontum. On 28 April, two days before the South's capitulation, two former South Vietnamese A-37s captured at Pleiku were used to bomb Tan Son Nhut Airbase.

Following the Second Indochina War, PAVN inherited the massive South Vietnamese Air Force. By the end of 1975 ex-South Vietnamese C-130A transports were flying regular shuttles between Saigon, Hanoi, and Vientiane. One year after the war the PAVN Air Force was already being used against Vietnam's next opponent: Cambodia. A particularly devastating bombing attack was conducted on Siem Reap on 25 February 1976, when a MiG-21 staging out of Pakse bombed the Cambodian town in retaliation for Khmer Rouge border attacks. By 1977 Vietnamese

*Interior of PAVN pith helmet showing rubberized canvas suspension system (left). Note etching of US aircraft*

*and Vietnamese words. Interior of MACVSOG copy (right) shows plastic suspension system.*





retaliatory strikes into Cambodia had become commonplace. Heavy use was made of ex-US equipment, including A-37s, OV-10s, A-1s, and UH-1 gunships. During the same year PAVN MiG-21s were used in airstrikes against Laotian anti-Communist guerrillas in the Phou Bia massif.

Throughout the first half of 1978 Vietnamese A-37s and F-5s made repeated strikes into Cambodia. To bolster the airpower available for Cambodian operations PAVN began redeploying MiGs from the north to southern bases at Chu Lai, Bien Hoa, and Can Tho. In addition Hanoi received an additional 20 MiG-21 fighters in late November after it signed a Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation with the Soviet Union.

During November 1978 PAVN ground operations in Cambodia quickly escalated, and Vietnamese air operations were similarly increased. This included helicopter gunship strikes near Kratie, and the use of C-130As for pallet-bombing near Stung Treng. In December MiG-21s, A-37s, and F-5s were on hand to soften up key targets, including Kompong Som and Kompong Cham. In January 1979 PAVN air strikes in Cambodia reached a peak, with all major cities, including Phnom Penh, being bombed. In battles such as that for Kompong Som air power proved to be the key to PAVN success. PAVN airlift operations took on major significance in February when transports, including C-130As, were used to rush several divisions of troops from Cambodia to Hanoi during the brief war with China. Apart from the use of transports, however, no airstrikes were conducted during the China war. In March Vietnamese and Soviet transports were used to haul PAVN troops from north-eastern to western Cambodia to participate in a major clearing operation.

Over the next decade PAVN air operations were focused primarily in Cambodia. In February 1982 PAVN even began experimenting in the use of An-26 transports outfitted for intelligence-gathering; during that month one such aircraft crashlanded on the Thai-Cambodian border. An analysis of its sophisticated electronics revealed that it was being used to monitor Cambodian guerrillas and Thai troop movements.

PAVN soon found that its jet fighter-bombers were ill-suited for counter-insurgency operations; more promising was its helicopter gunship fleet. In early 1984 Hanoi sent nine of its new Mi-24 gunships to Tan Son Nhut Airbase for possible use in Cambodia. In April of that year, however, PAVN opted to use its Mi-8 helicopters in the gunship role, attacking resistance forces

*PLAF bush hat (left); a nearly identical US MACVSOG copy of PLAF bush hat (right). The words 'Recon Sidewinder' printed*

*across the side of the MACVSOG copy refer to the reconnaissance team of that name.*

near the Tonle Sap Lake. During the same operation PAVN also used An-26s for pallet-bombing.

By 1985 it is suspected that PAVN's entire fleet of former South Vietnamese aircraft was grounded because of spare parts shortages and maintenance problems. The C-130As, many of which had been grounded even before 1975 because of chronic structural failures in the wings, had left the inventory long before. A handful of F-5 fighters made a final public appearance during April 1985 celebrations commemorating the fall of South Vietnam, then were quietly retired. UH-1 helicopters have been depicted in various states of repair as late as 1989, but have not seen active use since the early 1980s.

PAVN Air Force Headquarters is at the Bac Mai Airbase near Hanoi. Following Chinese practice, the basic Air Force unit is the regiment, usually composed of three squadrons of a specific aircraft model; three regiments of a specific role are then grouped into divisions. The backbone of the Air Force remains the MiG-21, totalling some six fighter regiments. An additional five attack regiments are fielded, at least one of these flying the MiG-23. Transports are grouped into three regiments, some of which PAVN has publicly criticized for lack of spare parts and aging airframes. Helicopters compose three regiments. Four training regiments are maintained; in addition, PAVN students attend the Soviet Air Academy at Bataisk.

## Navy

In 1953 PAVN assigned 500 soldiers to a Coastal Defence Bureau; this force had grown to 600 in 1955 and 1,000 in 1958. Although PAVN was prohibited from forming a navy, it expanded its Coastal Defence Bureau into the Navy Directorate and Coastal Defence Force on 12 October 1959. Officially the navy remained a 'branch' of PAVN, and had no representation at the ministerial level. By 1964, when North Vietnamese vessels were involved in the Tonkin Gulf Incident, the PAVN Navy had grown to 2,500 men. Aside from occasional resupply missions to

## PAVN Unit Terminology

PAVN terminology can be exceedingly vague, with the same term often referring to units of vastly different size.

Quan Doan	Strategic Army Corps (SAC)
Binh Doan	Regional Army Corps (RAC), or SAC
Su Doan	Division
Lu Doan	Brigade
Trung Doan	Regiment
Tieu Doan	Battalion
Doan	Literally 'group.' A general term for a Front, SAC, RAC, division, brigade, regiment, and sometimes a battalion.
Mat Tran	Front <sup>1</sup>
Don Vi	Literally 'unit.' A general term for regiments, battalions, and sometimes a brigade.
Dai Doi	Company
Phan Doi	Literally 'section.' Used for companies, and sometimes regiments.

Source: Bill Ridenouer

<sup>1</sup>A Front refers to a command structure coordinating at least two regiments in a military operation of specific duration.

the south, however, the navy was not a factor in the Second Indochina War.

Following the fall of Saigon PAVN inherited 1,300 ex-South Vietnamese vessels. Some of these, including two Admiral-class corvettes, were used extensively during the 1978 invasion of Cambodia, as were two Soviet Petya II-class frigates which had been delivered in November 1978 immediately following the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation.

During the 1980s Soviet aid focused on modernizing the PAVN Navy. Although the largest navy in South-East Asia, it remains totally outclassed by the Chinese fleet; most recently, Hanoi was embarrassed when the Chinese navy was able to sink at least two Vietnamese supply ships attempting to operate in the disputed Spratly Islands in March 1988.

PAVN Naval Headquarters is in Hanoi. Five naval regions are maintained: Haiphong, Vinh, Danang, Vung Tau, and Rach Gia (which had control over the Cambodian coast during PAVN's eleven-year occupation). A small Naval Air Service contains seaplanes and anti-submarine Ka-25 helicopters.

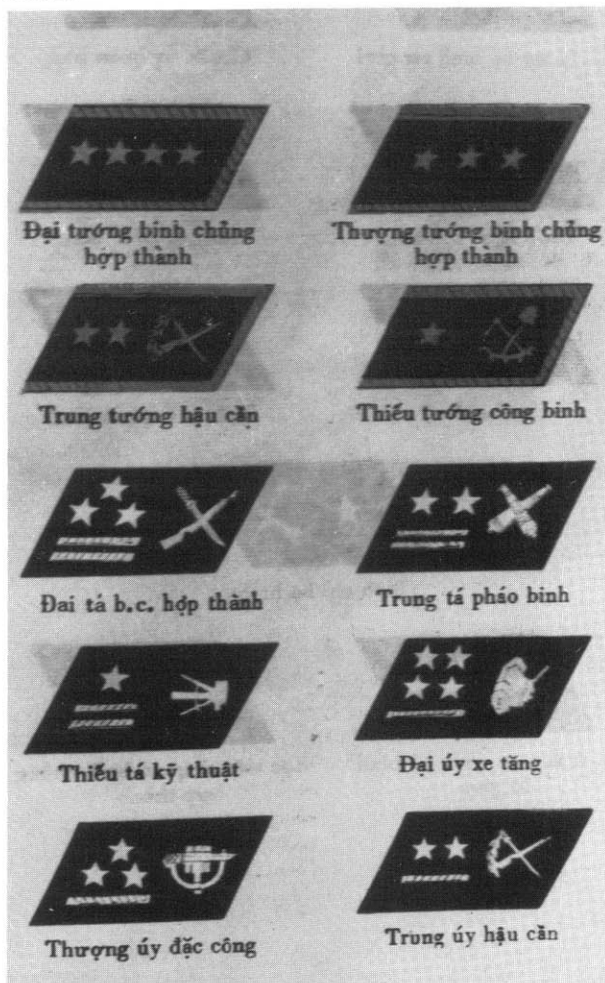
► *Samples of the PAVN 1982-style officer collar tabs for ground units. All are scarlet parallelograms, with gold-coloured devices and edging on general-officer ranks and silver-coloured devices for the remaining ranks. Left column (top to bottom): Senior General; Lieutenant-General, Logistical/Financial Affairs; Senior Colonel,*

*Infantry; Major, Technical Sector; Captain, Sappers. Right column (top to bottom): Colonel-General; Major-General, Engineers; Lieutenant-Colonel, Artillery; Senior Captain, Armour; First-Lieutenant, Logistical/Financial Affairs. Note that the rank of Colonel has been completely phased out of PAVN since the late 1970s.*

## Naval Infantry

By 1969 PAVN had raised the 500-man 126 Naval Sapper Group in the vicinity of the Cua Viet River, just south of the DMZ. During the last days of the Second Indochina War sappers from this group conducted a surprise amphibious landing on the South Vietnamese-held Spratly Islands. After the war the 126 Naval Sapper Group was expanded into the 126 Marine Brigade. By the 1978 Cambodian invasion a second brigade, the 950, had been raised, and both took part in the invasion. Elements of the 126 Marine Brigade subsequently remained stationed at the Cambodian port of Kompong Som through the mid-1980s. In April 1984 Vietnamese marines also took part in an amphibious assault exercise with Soviet Naval Infantry south of Haiphong.

PAVN currently maintains one of the largest Marine corps in the world, believed to number over 27,000 men. These are divided into at least five brigades numbered 126, 147, 148, 149, and 950. Each brigade has three to five infantry battalions, an armoured battalion, and artillery, anti-aircraft, and armoured reconnaissance companies. Vietnamese marines are entrusted with both coastal defence and amphibious assaults. They have conducted more battalion-sized amphibious landings (about ten) than any other nation since World War Two. In 1991 one, and perhaps two marine brigades were believed to have been disbanded.



# PAVN ORGANIZATION

## Strategic Army Corps

From 1973–75 PAVN developed four army corps for its final offensive in South Vietnam. These evolved into PAVN's current four Strategic Army Corps (SAC). Each SAC has two to three regular divisions and an engineering brigade, and is tasked with offensive and counter-offensive missions. While a SAC is generally assigned to a geographical section of Vietnam it can be shifted for major operations. The December 1978 invasion of Cambodia, for example, involved elements of 2, 3, and 4 SACs. Similarly, elements of 1, 2, and 3 SACs were rushed to Hanoi for a planned counter-offensive against China during the 1979 war.

SAC divisions are considered the élite of PAVN. 1 SAC, located in the Thai Nguyen-Red River Delta region, consists of the 308 and 312 Divisions, and the 390 Infantry Regiment. It is targeted north toward China or south toward Laos. 2 SAC covers the region north-east of Hanoi and comprises the 304, 306, and 325 Divisions. 3 SAC, originally located in the Red River Delta, has shifted to the Central Highlands to cover Cambodia; it consists of the 10, 31, and 320 Divisions. 4 SAC, in the extreme south, has two former PLAF divisions, the 7 and 9.

During the past three years PAVN has been implementing a modernization programme to mechanize some of the SAC divisions. From 1 SAC the élite 308 Division (PAVN's original division and traditionally Hanoi's strategic reserve) was the first to become mechanized. Now under its operational control are a wide range of armoured vehicles, including BTR-152 half-tracks and BMP-1s, as well as an anti-aircraft regiment. The 304 Division of 2 SAC was the second to become mechanized; the 312, 320 and 325 Divisions have begun similar conversions. As yet no division from 4 SAC has been mechanized, possibly because of the difficult terrain in the far south of Vietnam.

## Regional Army Corps

Following the 1979 war with China PAVN formed four Regional Army Corps (RACs). All are located along the Chinese border and are tasked with counterattack and limited counter-offensive missions. Although each RAC is primarily concerned with operations in a specific portion of the border, it can be moved in emergency situations. RACs vary in size from three to six divisions. Each appears to contain at least one good regular division as its core. In addition, each RAC contains an engineer regiment of three battalions.

## Paramilitary Forces

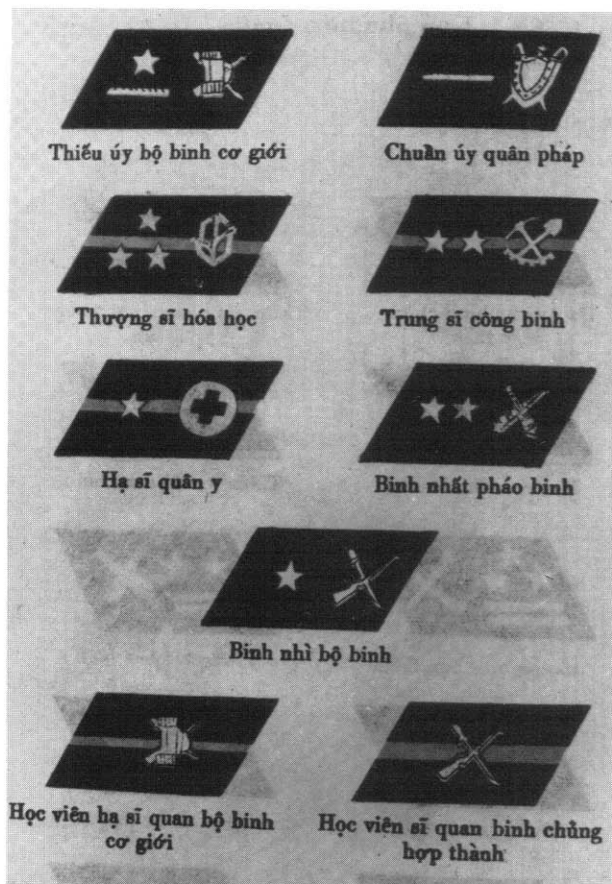
PAVN contains numerous paramilitary forces; the two largest organizations are the Regional and Militia/Self-Defence Forces, which together form PAVN's Strategic Rear Reserve. In a major war the Strategic Rear Reserve could be upgraded to regular formations, or, in an invasion, act as stay-behind guerrillas.

## People's Regional Force

Numbering some 500,000 men, these forces constitute PAVN's 'second tier'. Regional Forces maintain a regimental headquarters at each provincial capital. They are issued small arms and usually operate as rural infantry companies. Some northern regiments are believed to be organized into divisions.

## People's Militia/Self-Defence Force

Totalling nearly one million men, these forces are PAVN's lowest tier. Militia operate across the countryside as lightly-armed companies at the district and village level. The Self-Defence Force is the militia's urban counterpart.



◀ *Samples of PAVN 1982-style collar tabs for ground units. All devices are silver-coloured metal on scarlet parallelograms. Centre stripes on NCO tabs are yellow. Top row (left to right): 2 Lieutenant, Armour; Aspirant, Military Justice. Second row: Master Sergeant, Chemical Branch; Sergeant, Engineers. Third row: Corporal, Medical unit; PFC, Artillery. Fourth row: Private,*

*Infantry. Fifth row: Student, Armour; Student, Infantry. Note that the rank of Aspirant, with the exception of Border Defence and some support units, has almost completely been phased out of PAVN. The rank of Student (Hoc Vien) is worn by any NCO or enlisted man who is attending advanced specialized training, such as the Armour or Sapper Schools.*

## PAVN Unit Designations (Part I)

Although many exceptions exist, PAVN generally employs a simple numeric code to identify its combat formations.

### Unit Number Identification

1-12	All infantry divisions formed in South Vietnam from 1965-1975
xx	Infantry Regiments
1xx	Brigades or Infantry Regiments
14x	Marine Brigades
17x	Navy Brigades
2xx	Brigades
20x	Armor Brigades
24x	Air Defense Regiments or Air Defense Brigades
25x	Air Defense Regiments or Air Defense Brigades
26x	Air Defense Regiments or Air Defense Brigades
3xx	Divisions; all PAVN divisions were numbered in the 3xx series until the mid-1960s.
5xx	Transportation or Engineer Divisions
6xx	Engineer or Economic Construction Divisions
7xx	Air Force, Air Defense, or Economic Construction Divisions
8xx	Training units
9xx	Infantry Divisions

Source: Bill Ridenouer

## PAVN Unit Designations (Part II)

PAVN further complicates identification of its combat formations by employing an alphabetic code based on the spelling of numbers 1-9 in the Vietnamese language.

Numeral	Vietnamese Spelling	Code Letter
1	Moi	M
2	Hai	H
3	Ba	B
4	Bon	B
5	Nam	N
6	Sau	S
7	Bay	B
8	Tam	T
9	Chin	C

Under this system, the first digit in a unit designation is replaced by its corresponding code letter derived from the number's Vietnamese spelling. For example, the 308 Division may be referred to as the B08 Division. Unfortunately, positive identification may be difficult because the numbers 3, 4, and 7 all use the code letter B.

Source: Bill Ridenouer

## Reserves

PAVN maintains a 500,000-man reserve as its Tactical Rear Force. Composed of veterans and over-age males, the Tactical Rear Force would be upgraded to the status of Strategic Rear Force in the time of a major war.

## Border Defence Force

On 3 March 1959 the Ministry of Public Security formed the Armed Public Security Force (APSF), vaguely tasked with protecting the borders, as well as safeguarding the 'peace and security of the DRV'. Its first commander was Maj. Gen. Phan Trung Tue, the DRV Vice Minister of Public Security.

Given its wide mandate, the APSF quickly became the 'infantry' of the Ministry of Public Security. In 1960-61, when PAVN consolidated several of its divisions into brigades, the

► *Samples of PAVN Air Force and Navy branch and qualification insignia. All Air Force collar tabs are sky blue parallelograms; Navy tabs are dark blue/purple parallelograms. Branch devices and edges for general-grade officers are gold; devices are silver for all other ranks. Left*

*column (top to bottom): General-grade officer, Air Force; Airborne; General-grade officer, Air Defence; Anti-Aircraft unit; General-grade officer, Navy; Marines. Right column (top to bottom): Air Force; Air Force Medical unit; SAM unit; Radar unit; Navy; Naval Aviation.*



excess infantrymen were incorporated into the APSF. By July 1964 there were at least 25,000 in the APSF, divided into one battalion per province, and 20 additional frontier and coastal security battalions. The APSF also provided guards for prisons holding US POWs.

By 1977 strains in Sino-Vietnamese relations led to a slow transition of APSF border units from subordination under the Ministry of Interior (formerly called the Ministry of Public Security) to the Ministry of National Security. During the 1979 war with China these border units took heavy casualties. Later in the same year the APSF was renamed the Border Defence Force (BDF) and formally transferred to the Ministry of National Defence. Organized up to regimental level, the BDF has been primarily deployed along the Chinese border, but at least two BDF regiments were in Cambodia until 1984. The BDF has a current strength of 60,000 men.

## UNIFORMS

PAVN uniforms and insignia can be generally divided into three periods: 1950–1958; 1958–1982; and 1982–present. In the period before 1950 PAVN regulars, regional troops, and militia wore a wide variety of civilian and quasi-military garb. Only after the Chinese started sending large quantities of material assistance in 1950 did PAVN uniforms begin to take on a more military appearance. At that point regional and militia forces retained

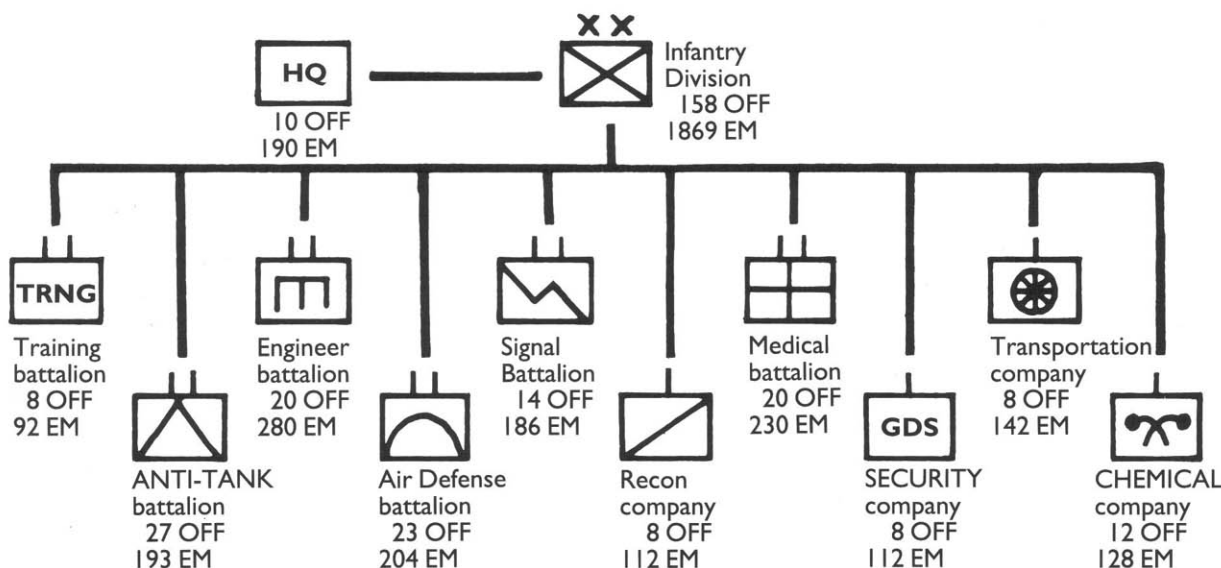
their civilian clothing, while PAVN most often wore khaki or green cotton uniforms and padded jackets supplied by China. Headgear usually consisted of khaki cotton stretched over a wooden ‘helmet’ frame with camouflage netting. Also worn were woven straw hats and, occasionally, pith helmets. Rank insignia were not generally worn during this early period, although exclusive use of headgear insignia was adopted as a means of distinguishing officers.

### 1958–1982

In 1958, in accordance with its modernization campaign, PAVN began to standardize its uniform code. The basic PAVN uniform became the field uniform made of green denim-like material. Colour variations existed in olive drab and faded khaki. Officers wore the field uniform for field training, manoeuvres, and combat. It consisted of a single-breasted coat with matching trousers, a web belt, and canvas shoes, sandals, or sneakers. Headgear included berets, service caps, cloth helmets with khaki cotton stretched over a wooden frame, woven straw hats, and pith helmets. During the hot monsoon season a khaki or green lightweight cotton shirt and trousers were worn. The shirt had two pleated breast pockets with buttoned flaps and buttoned cuffs.

Enlisted men wore the field uniform for all occasions. Two differences distinguished the officer and NCO/enlisted man’s field uniform: the NCO/enlisted man’s coat had no lower pocket.

### PAVN Infantry Division Headquarters and Support Units



#### Weapons:

321 × 7.62mm Pistols (Soviet M1933/Chicom Type 51)  
 729 × 7.62mm Carbines (Soviet SKS/Chicom Type 56)  
 677 × 7.62mm Assault Rifles (Soviet AK-47/Chicom Type 56)  
 11 × 7.62mm LMG (Soviet RPD/Chicom Type 56)  
 11 × 7.62mm LMG (Soviet RP 46/Chicom Type 58)  
 12 × 12.7mm HMG (Soviet DSHK 38 & 38/46 Chicom Type 54)

22 × 40mm RL (Soviet RPG 2 (Soviet RPG 7) Chicom Type 56)  
 1 × 60mm Mortar (Chicom Type 31/copy of US)  
 4 × 57mm RR (Chicom Type 36/copy of US)  
 8 × 75mm RR (Chicom Type 52/copy of US)  
 8 × 82mm RR (Soviet B-10)  
 8 × 107mm RR  
 6 × 37mm AAA (Soviet M-1939)

ets, and the trousers had tie-string cuffs. In addition, NCO/enlisted men were permitted to wear a service cap only on special occasions.

A service dress uniform for general-grade officers was authorized on 20 June 1958. This included a peaked service cap with red and gold pine branches on the front of the crown; a double-breasted coat with two rows of gold buttons embossed with a star and two rice stalks; one stripe of red piping and two stripes of gold on the sleeve cuffs; a gold star encircled by two gold pine branches on the collar; trousers with red and copper piping on the outer seams; black necktie in summer and light grey necktie in winter; white shirt; white gloves; and black leather boots. The uniform came in green, brown, white and even blue; colour appears to have been dictated by personal preference or, more probably, availability from foreign sources. In practice the piping on the sleeves and trousers was rarely seen. Field-grade officers wore a similar uniform except that the peaked cap had no gold pine branches, there was no star on the collar, and the piping on the trousers was narrower.

All PAVN ranks were issued, when available, a cold weather uniform during November to March. It consisted of blue or olive drab padded trousers and coat, a cloth belt with buckle, a pile-type cap, and padded canvas shoes.

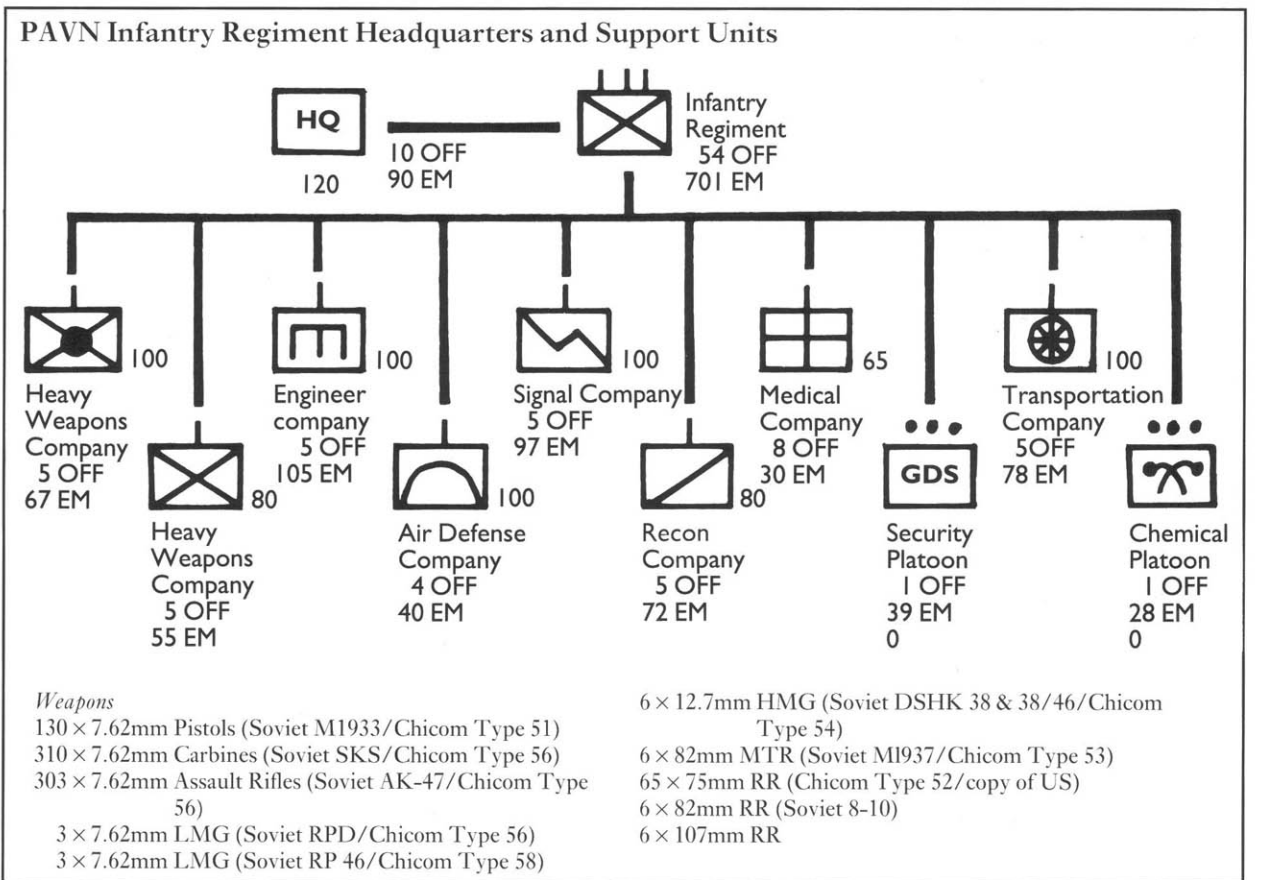
As the Second Indochina War escalated during the 1960s PAVN strayed even further from its 1958 uniform code. Most often worn was a basic grey or khaki cotton uniform for all occasions, including parades and combat. The shirt was single-breasted, with a collar, four-button front, long sleeves, a straight

bottom, and two breast pockets with box pleats. The trousers had a pleated front, two-inch belt loops, and two side pockets. Soldiers often dyed their uniforms, confirmed variations including blue, tan, yellow, brown, white, green, and black. Versions existed with and without shoulder loops.

PAVN field-grade officers were issued a grey-green cotton twill tunic. It had a soft collar, long sleeves with plain banded cuffs, two loops for shoulderboards, and five-button closure. There were four front pockets with pointed flaps and single button closures. The inside front of the tunic was partially padded. The tunic was worn tucked into matching trousers. This uniform was well constructed and more suitable for barracks duty and parades than for combat. Tunics issued to enlisted men lacked the two lower pockets.

PAVN company-grade officers received a tan cotton twill tunic. It had an open rolled collar with notched lapels, shoulder loops, long sleeves, and four-button closure. There were two large patch pockets below the belt with slightly scalloped flaps and a single button closure. The belt was secured by two wide button-and-strap attachments, one at each side. The two breast pockets had slightly scalloped flaps and single button closures. It was designed for rugged duty, but was too warm for most of South Vietnam.

For units operating in cool climates, such as South Vietnam's Central Highlands, a variety of heavier clothing was issued. Seen among PLAF and PAVN soldiers was a brown uniform made from heavy, waterproof cotton; the shirt was single-breasted with two box-pleated breast pockets and a four-button front. The



trousers had a looped waistband and button fly. This differed from the standard PAVN fatigue uniform only in the kind of material used.

Also seen in the Central Highlands were cotton pullover sweatshirts and brown wool turtleneck sweaters of Soviet/East European manufacture. PAVN also used a quilted vest that was blue-black on the outside and white on the inside; the cotton-like insulating material was a product of the tropical ceiba tree, sewn in quilted diamond patterns. Buttons and loops secured the vest across the left shoulder and down the left side.

PAVN troops frequently used a pullover olive drab cotton shirt. It had a square neck, no collar, quarter length sleeves, and a single button closure for partial access from the neck to the shoulder. The shirt was lightweight and cool, but not very durable.

Most commonly seen among the PLAF, and occasionally in PAVN, were black, grey, or brown pyjamas. The material used was either lightweight cotton or rayon. A common civilian item, they were procured locally in South Vietnam. The shirt was usually collarless and single-breasted with six buttons, long sleeves, and either a round or V-shaped neck. Grey shirts sometimes had a collar and five front buttons. Versions existed both with and without pockets. Trousers had a loose-fitting waist with a draw string or elastic band, although some had belt loops. Black cotton shorts were also used.

In the southern Delta region PLAF Main Force units commonly used a thin rayon-acetate uniform. The shirt was single-breasted with a collar and box-pleated pockets similar to PAVN

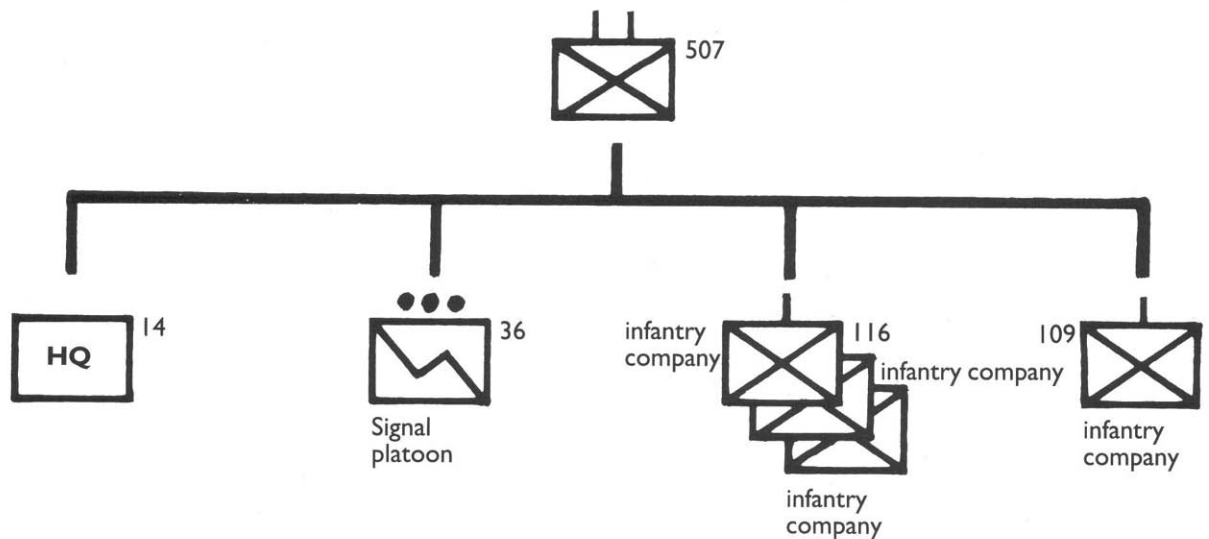
fatigues. The trousers had looped or elastic waistbands. The uniform was lightweight and dried quickly when wet. By 1971 PLAF Main Force units attempted to standardize on a brown cotton uniform with two breast pockets, long sleeves, five-button front, and a collar. Men wore the shirt tucked into matching trousers; female uniforms were similar except the shirt had two tapered lower pockets and was worn outside matching trousers. PLAF female combatants also used a close-fitting green cotton blouse of local manufacture, to be worn with either green or black pyjama trousers. Also seen during the war among both PAVN and PLAF Main Force combatants were khaki short pants with a three-button fly, belt loops, and two rear pockets with single button closures.

Captured US and South Vietnamese clothing was occasionally used by PLAF and PAVN infiltration units, including 'tiger stripe' camouflage. In addition, PLAF guerrillas on occasion, fashioned shirts from US camouflage parachute material.

### 1982–Present

In 1982 PAVN adopted a new field and dress uniform code, replacing the earlier code in effect since 1958. The male summer field uniform for all officer ranks comes in two variations. The first consists of a long-sleeve green shirt with high collar, two pleated chest pockets with single button closures, six-button front closure, buttoned cuffs, matching trousers, and canvas shoes. The second version has short sleeves and an open collar.

#### PLAF (main force) Infantry Battalion



*Personnel:* 507

*Weapons:*

- 23 × 7.62 Pistols (Soviet M1933/Chicom Type 51)
- 193 × 7.62 Carbines (Soviet SKS/Chicom Type 56) (Soviet 7.62 MI944 Carbine for VC (70%))
- 132 × 7.62 Assault Rifles (Soviet AK-47/Chicom Type 56) (US M1 Rifle for VC (70%))
- 27 × 7.62 LMG (Soviet RPD/Chicom Type 56) (Soviet 7.62 LMG DPM for VC (70%))

- 6 × 7.62 LMG (Soviet RP-46/Chicom Type 56) (Soviet 7.62 LMG DPM for VC (70%))
- 6 × 7.62 HMG (Soviet SG-43 Goryunov/Chicom Type 53) (Delete for VC (70%))
- 27 × 40mm RL (Soviet RPG-2/Chicom Type 56)
- 6 × 60mm Mortar (Chicom Type 31)
- 3 × 82mm Mortar (Soviet M1937/Chicom Type 53)
- 2 × 57mm RR (Chicom Type 36)
- 1 × 75mm RR (Chicom Type 52 or 56)



Female officers exclusively wear the first version. All versions use a green service cap; general-grade officers, on occasion, wear a tan cotton twill service cap.

The male officer's winter field uniform consists of a darker green single-breasted tunic with open collar, four pleated pockets with single button closures, four-button closure, matching trousers, lighter green shirt, black tie, and matching service cap. Females use a tunic with no chest pockets.

The standard officer's summer dress uniform consists of a green peaked cap, green short-sleeved shirt (identical to the short-sleeved summer field uniform), matching trousers and black shoes. General-grade officers are distinguished by their peaked cap, which has a red edge, gold piping at the base of the visor, and a distinctive general-grade cap badge.

While on overseas assignment in warm climates officers wear a dress uniform consisting of a green peaked cap, a green long-sleeved shirt (identical to the long-sleeved summer field uniform), matching trousers, a dark green tie, and black shoes.

On parade, officers have also been seen in white or dark brown summer dress uniforms.

The male general officer's winter dress uniform consists of a general officer's version of the peaked cap in tan colour, a single-breasted tan coat with open collar and four pleated pockets with single button closures, a three-button closure, matching trousers, a tan long-sleeved shirt, dark brown tie, and black shoes. A metallic gold star and pine branch are worn on each coat lapel. The front buttons are often gold, embossed with a star and two rice

stalks; in addition, the lapel may be trimmed in the service colour. White gloves are optional. Variations of this uniform exist in a darker brown.

Other officer ranks wear a winter dress uniform similar to that of generals except in a dark green colour and without the star and pine branches on the lapel. Female officers wear the same dark green uniforms except that the coat has no chest pockets.

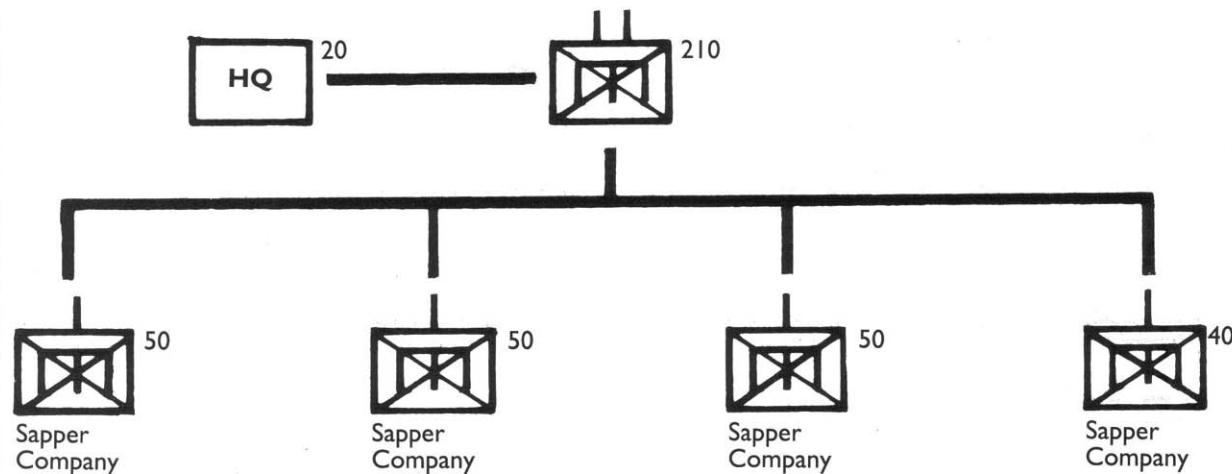
## Insignia

As with uniforms, PAVN insignia can be divided into three periods. Prior to 1958 PAVN had no system of rank and branch insignia. One exception was the use of headgear insignia to denote officers.

Insignia of grade were adopted by PAVN on 20 June 1958 in an attempt to standardize rank structure. Collar tabs for officers were adopted on 21 May 1959. All enlisted men and officers wore collar tabs on field uniforms; officers wore shoulderboards on dress uniforms; non-commissioned officers used either collar insignia or shoulderboards on dress uniforms, while enlisted men wore only collar tabs.

Collar tabs are red cloth-covered cardboard parallelograms 60mm long by 35mm wide. Officers used metallic silver stars and longitudinal silver bars to denote ranks; generals used metallic gold stars with gold piping on three edges. Enlisted tabs have gold stripes in the centre. Before its incorporation into the PAVN the APSF used a similar system of stars and bars to denote officer

### PAVN Sapper Battalion



#### Equipment & Weapons:

- 4 × 60mm Mortar
- 1 × 57mm Recoilless Rifle
- 12 × RPG-7
- 12 × RPG-2
- 4 × Flame-throwers
- 2 × machine gun
- 92 × Rifles/Carbines
- 1 × 15 watt radio
- 4 × Field telephones
- 20 × rolls of commo wire
- 18 × Pistols

- 100 × AK SMGs
- 2 × RP 46 ARs
- 2 × grenades (Per man)
- 3KG × Explosive charge (Per man)
- Anti-Tank Mines
- Anti-Personnel Mines

*Note:* Ammo bearers for the B-40 rounds and machine guns do not carry individual weapons.

rank, the only difference being that field- and company-grade officers used latitudinal stripes.

Shoulderboards for officers and non-commissioned officers used an identical system of metallic gold/silver stars and stripes. PAVN shoulderboards were yellow with red edges.

On 20 June 1958 PAVN authorized branch of service insignia for use on collar tabs; eleven different metallic branch insignia were developed. Infantry—which constituted the bulk of

PAVN—was conspicuous in that it wore no branch insignia. Known branch insignia included:

*Cavalry*: Crossed rifle and sword over a horseshoe. *Armour*: Tank. *Medical Corps*: Red Cross inside a circle. *Artillery*: Crossed cannons. *Engineer*: Crossed pick and shovel above a half cogwheel. *Ordnance*: Crossed rifles over a full cogwheel. *Transportation*: Steering wheel above a suspension spring. *Signal*: Radio waves within a circle. *Chemical*: Radiation ray inside a coil. *Military Justice*: Crossed swords behind a shield. *Quartermaster*: Hoe beside a panicle of rice.

The APSF wore its own series of branch insignia, such as an anchor for Coastal Defence units, on green collar tabs and shoulderboards. In 1965 the PAVN Air Force initiated its own branch insignia consisting of copper-coloured metallic wings on a blue parallelogram.

Headgear insignia, worn by all ranks, consisted of a metallic red circle with gold star, crescent-shaped gold wheel, and two gold rice stalks. The APSF wore a badge of similar design but with a green background and the letters 'CA' ('Cong An'—Public Security) at the bottom.

In 1982 PAVN instituted a new system of rank and branch insignia. On field uniforms all ranks wear collar rank insignia; on dress uniforms, however, all ranks are now able to use shoulderboards. Officers' shoulderboards are bright yellow trimmed on the edge with the colour of service. Metallic stars, bars, and buttons denote rank. Shoulderboards for non-commissioned officers and enlisted men are light grey trimmed on the edge with the colour of service; V-shaped stripes and bars denote rank.

The colour of the background of collar tabs and the edge of the shoulderboards indicates branch of service: *Army*: Scarlet. *Air Force and Air Defence*: Sky blue. *Border Defence*: Green. *Navy*: Purple/dark blue. *Specialist*: Light gray<sup>1</sup>.

PAVN now has 25 branch and specialist insignia used by all ranks on collar tabs:

### Branches:

*Infantry*: Crossed sword and rifle.

*Special Operations*: Dagger above a satchel charge.

*Armour*: Tank (unchanged from 1958).

*Artillery*: Crossed cannons (unchanged from 1958).

*Engineer*: Crossed pick and shovel above a crescent-shaped wheel (unchanged from 1958).

*Border Defence Force*: Crossed sword and rifle above horseshoe (formerly used by Cavalry).

*Chemical*: Radiation ray inside an elongated hexagon.

*Air Force*: Star in the middle of wings.

*Air Defence*: Two crossed anti-aircraft guns.

*Naval Infantry*: Anchor over crossed rifle and sword.

*Navy*: Anchor.

*Anti-aircraft*: Anti-aircraft gun.

*Rocket*: Rocket on cloud.

### Specialist:

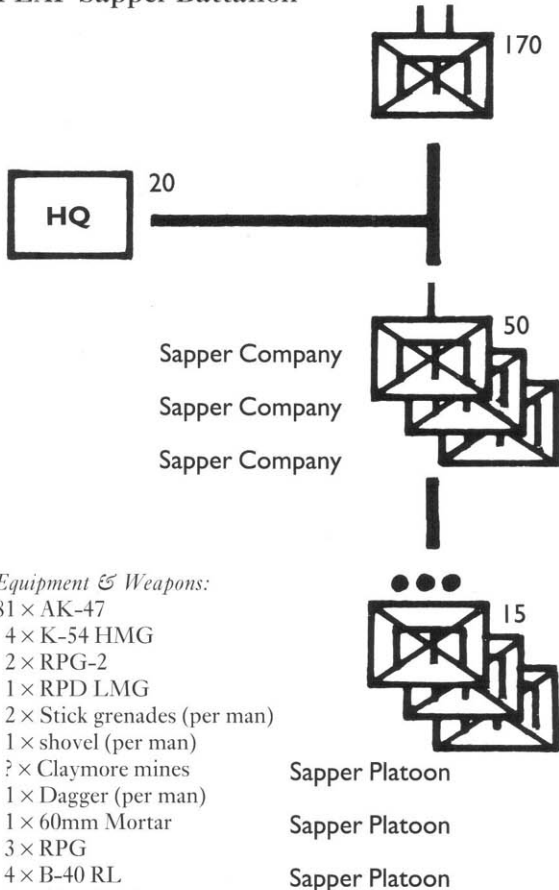
*Mechanized Infantry*: Crossed sword and rifle under an armoured vehicle.

*Medical*: Red Cross in a circle (unchanged from 1958)

*Transportation*: Steering wheel above a suspension spring (unchanged from 1958).

<sup>1</sup>The light gray 'specialist' tabs and shoulderboards are rarely seen; instead, specialized personnel normally wear the colour of their parent combat branch.

## PLAF Sapper Battalion



### Equipment & Weapons:

- 81 × AK-47
- 4 × K-54 HMG
- 2 × RPG-2
- 1 × RPD LMG
- 2 × Stick grenades (per man)
- 1 × shovel (per man)
- ? × Claymore mines
- 1 × Dagger (per man)
- 1 × 60mm Mortar
- 3 × RPG
- 4 × B-40 RL
- 1 × .30 cal MG
- 3 × Thompson SMG
- 15 × Pistols
- 3 × SKS
- 6 × CKC
- 3 × K44 Carbines
- 4 × AR
- 35 × Carbines/Rifles
- 2 × Grenades (per man)
- 3Kg × Explosive charges (per man)

Each man in each section carries two hand grenades, three kg of 04 explosive and one dagger. In each section, nine men carry AK-47s.

*Signal:* Radio wave in a circle (unchanged from 1958).

*Radar:* Mounted radar antenna.

*Military Justice:* Crossed swords behind a shield (unchanged from 1958).

*Airborne:* Airplane wing above fully opened parachute.

*Logistics/ Financial Affairs:* Crossed sword and rifle above rice stalk.

*Technical Sector:* Compass surmounted on a hammer.

*Military Band:* Crossed trumpet and flute.

*Art Troupe:* Musical note and moon-shaped lute.

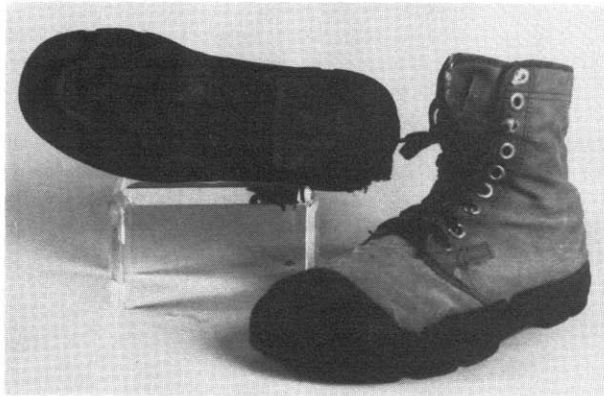
*Physical Education:* Bow and arrow.

Headgear insignia used by all ranks on pith helmets and field caps is the standard PAVN gold star on red background with half-wheel and rice stalks. With peaked caps, field-grade officers wear a variation with two silver pine branches. General-grade officers wear a similar design with two gold pine branches.

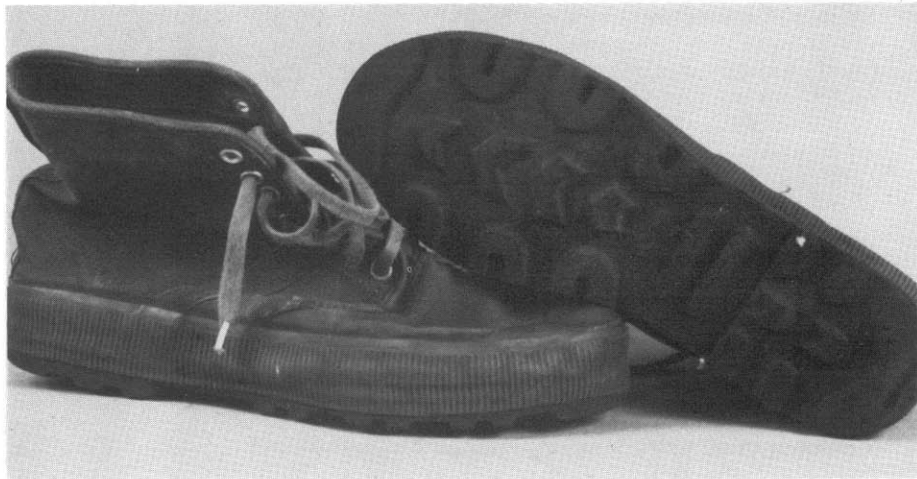
## THE PLATES

### *A1: Viet Minh officer, Hanoi, 1954*

Members of PAVN's six Main Force infantry divisions began celebrating in Hanoi in the days immediately after the August 1954 ceasefire. These combatants were the best equipped in PAVN, with virtually every piece of clothing and equipment obtained from Communist China. The headgear is a woven bam-



*Two versions of the PAVN combat shoe. As of 1990, Vietnam had started exporting the combat shoe to East European armies.*



boo helmet with a plastic cover and camouflage netting; it was issued to all ranks. The Chinese canteen and French canvas musette bag over his shoulder—the second a privileged piece of equipment—identify this soldier as an officer. He wears canvas combat shoes, a simple piece of footwear adopted from the French model that PAVN still uses to this day. At his feet is a Chinese field pack with sleeping mat and cooking cup tied to the sides. The weapon is a Czech Model 27 light machine gun.

### *A2: PAVN officer, Hanoi, 1955*

On 1 January 1955 PAVN held a formal parade through Hanoi. Taken from a photo of the event, this officer's dress uniform is heavily influenced by that of Communist China, and may well be of Chinese manufacture. Use of the PAVN cap badge at that time was limited to officers. The weapon is a Soviet PPSH-41 sub-machine gun with a 31-round magazine.

### *B1 and B2: PLAF Main Force guerrillas, Saigon, 1968*

Adapted from a propaganda photo taken during the Tet Offensive, these guerrillas are fairly representative of the PLAF Main Force units being fielded by 1968. The jungle hat and khaki fatigues were made in North Vietnam and commonly associated with the PLAF. The pistol belts, 75mm recoilless rifle parts bag, and grenade pouch (with Soviet RPG-43 grenades) are all of Chinese origin; only the ammunition pouch on the guerrilla on the left is of local manufacture. Their weapon is the Soviet 82mm mortar.

### *B3: PLAF cap badge, 1973*

During the early 1970s, apparently in a bid to convey a maturing from its guerrilla roots, the PLAF developed a variation of the PAVN cap badge. With the background in the colours of the flag of the National Liberation Front, the badge was put into limited production and rarely seen.

### *C1: General Vo Nguyen Giap, early 1960s*

General Giap, the 'father' of PAVN, was North Vietnam's first Senior General. His white service dress jacket with open rolled collar and notched lapels follows the 1958 PAVN uniform code. On his peaked cap is an early version of the general-grade officer badge. For formal occasions General Giap more commonly wore a dark brown summer dress uniform with buttoned collar.

### *C2: Senior General Van Tien Dung, early 1970s*

Commander of the 1975 Ho Chi Minh Campaign, General Dung wears a tan version of the 1958-style dress uniform. Note the gold star and pine branches on the lapels for general-grade officers.

### *C3: Major General Chu Huy Man, early 1970s*

General Man, first commander of the 316 Division and later a key PAVN commander in the Central Highlands, wears the popular closed-neck dress uniform, which by the early 1970s was generally worn in preference to the 1958-style jacket and tie combination. Most officers wore a dark brown version of this uniform, although blue and white variations were seen on occasion (probably depending on availability from foreign suppliers and personal preference). He wears general-grade collar tabs and an early version of the general-grade cap badge.

### *D1 and D2: PAVN Air Force officers, 1972*

Throughout the Second Indochina War, PAVN Air Force pilots wore flight suits supplied by either China or the Soviet Union. As with other Communist air forces, uniforms were spartan, with no rank, branch, or unit patches. Officer's dress uniform was generally identical to that of the ground forces, but with blue collar tabs with Air Force branch insignia. A unique Air Force headgear insignia consisting of a set of wings superimposed over a standard PAVN cap badge was adopted in the mid-1960s and worn on a soft field cap; since the mid-1970s, however, the Air Force has standardized with the standard PAVN cap badge.

### *E1: Artillery first lieutenant, 1972*

During the Second Indochina War air defence and artillery units were the only ones regularly issued Soviet steel helmets. This officer, wearing branch and rank insignia on his collar tabs, is taken from a propaganda picture of a 122mm artillery crew during the 1972 Nguyen Hue Offensive. Note the North Vietnamese-made shoulder bag with buckle-and-strap closure.

### *E2: Artillery officer, 1972*

Dressed similarly to E1, this officer adds a grenade pouch to the Chinese leather belt. Although not practised during the Second Indochina War, PAVN artillery units photographed in 1990 showed PAVN headgear insignia affixed to the front of their steel helmets.

### *E3: Artillery non-commissioned officer, 1972*

PAVN artillery crews were occasionally seen wearing soft jungle hats, more commonly associated with PLAF Main Force units. On his belt are two PAVN ammunition pouches, a grenade pouch, and a locally-produced knife.

### *F1, F2: Ministry of Interior officers, early 1980s*

Although the Border Guards have been placed under PAVN, the Ministry of Interior continues to deploy paramilitary units along the borders, including the volatile Chinese frontier. These officers wear two versions of the pile-type cap popular among PAVN and paramilitary forces deployed in the cold northern highlands. The cap badge (see F3) was worn earlier by the APSF, but is now used by select Ministry of Interior police and paramilitary units. Note the commercial sweaters worn under the uniform, a common practice during the cold months. Also note the single yellow stripe on the shoulderboards, which distinguishes Ministry of Interior officers from their PAVN counterparts.

### *F3: Cong An cap badge*

In order to distinguish itself from PAVN, the APSF wore a green variant of the headgear insignia with the letters 'CA' ('Cong An', or police) inscribed on the bottom. Certain Ministry of Interior police units continue to wear this badge. Since being integrated into PAVN the Border Guards have started wearing standard PAVN cap and rank insignia; however, the Border Guards wear a unique green collar tab as a reminder of their APSF lineage.

### *G1: PAVN first lieutenant, 1987*

This junior officer wears a standard PAVN field uniform that has been 'upgraded' with a Soviet belt, white gloves, and shoulderboards. The headgear insignia is the basic PAVN cap badge (see G2). The weapon is the Soviet SKS rifle.

### *G2: PAVN cap badge*

Though there have been slight variations in size and manufacture, PAVN has maintained the same design for its basic cap badge since the First Indochina War. Prior to 1958 use of the badge was limited to officers; since then it has been issued to all ranks.

### *G3: Field-grade officer cap badge*

In 1982 PAVN began to issue this new variant for use with dress uniforms.

### *G4: General-grade officer cap badge*

Early versions of the general-grade badge have been seen since the mid-1960s. Not until 1982, however, was it officially described as part of the general-grade officer's dress uniform.

### *H1: Navy Seaman, Cambodia, 1988*

Since the 1960s the PAVN naval working uniform has been virtually identical to that worn by the Chinese Navy. The inscription across the cap reads 'Vietnamese Navy'. Rank insignia, not visible here, are on each shoulder. In 1989 official PAVN photos depicted naval personnel in a new working uniform consisting of a white short-sleeved shirt, slacks, and a standard PAVN field cap.

### *H2-H6: PAVN Navy Insignia*

*H2:* Insignia for naval personnel are worn on the shirt sleeves. Significant confusion exists concerning naval rank insignia issued after 1982. The insignia for seaman, second class shown here is taken from an official PAVN publication. However, photos of PAVN naval enlisted men in 1988 show the horizontal line to be V-shaped, similar to the insignia used by privates in other PAVN branches.

### *H3:*

Seaman, first class.

### *H4:*

Petty officer, third class.

### *H5:*

Petty officer, second class.

### *H6:*

Petty officer, first class.

*An unusual PAVN jacket captured in South Vietnam with fasteners for camouflage. Stitching on the inside pocket (inset) reveals the owner belonged to the 308 Division.*



***I1: Tanker, 203 Armour Brigade, Saigon, 1975***

The final collapse of Saigon came as the PAVN 203 Armour Brigade entered the city and crashed through the gates of the Presidential Palace. The old South Vietnamese flag was torn down; in its place was raised the NLF flag. His uniform is standard for PAVN armour crews: green fatigues, a Soviet tanker helmet, and a Soviet leather belt. Sandals are worn for comfort.

***I2: Armour first lieutenant, Cambodia, 1988***

Tank crew uniforms have only slightly changed since the Second Indochina War. Of note are the imported leather boots, a rare departure from PAVN's famed combat shoe. Also note the Cambodian and Vietnamese flags pasted to the turret; the Cambodian flag—used by the pro-Vietnamese regime in Phnom Penh—is a new design adopted in 1988.

***J1: Enlisted man, Economic Construction Division, 1980***

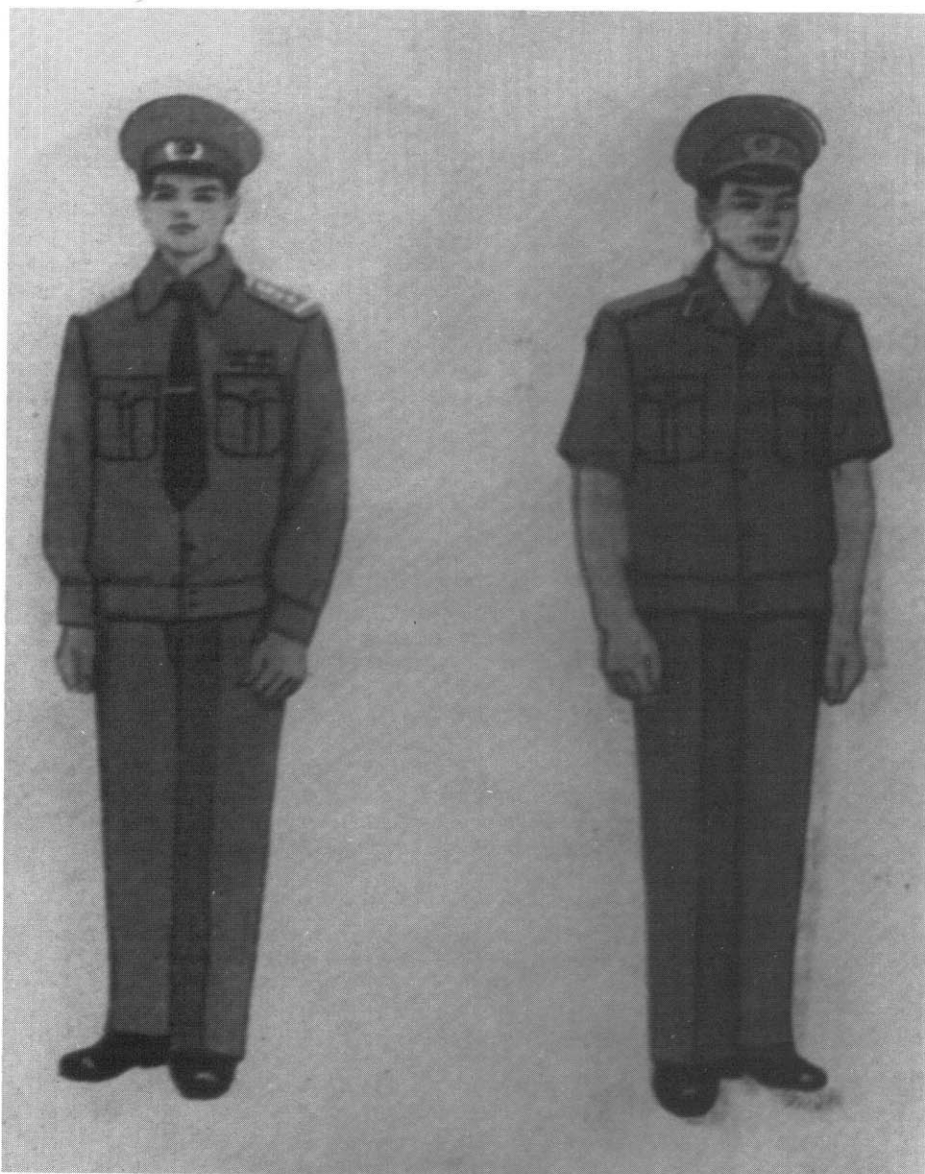
Economic Construction Divisions bore the brunt of initial fighting during the Sino-Vietnamese War and remain heavily deployed along the northern frontier. A commercial sweater and a pile-type cap under the pith helmet are worn to fend off the mountain chill. Economic Construction Divisions are low on the priority list for new equipment; this enlisted man is using an old US canteen cover for his Chinese-style canteen.

***J2: Border Guard, Chinese border, 1980s***

Aside from green collar insignia (and shoulderboards on dress uniforms), little distinguishes the Border Guards uniform from other PAVN ground units. A rice roll is worn over the shoulder. His hat is the standard PAVN field cap with PAVN insignia.

***K1: Colonel General Le Ngoc Hien, Cambodia, 1988***

In 1988 General Hien, the commander of PAVN forces in Cambodia, led a highly-publicized 'withdrawal' ceremony in Phnom



*PAVN publication shows the 'official' 1982-style overseas summer service dress (left) and summer service dress (right).*

Penh. Taken from a photo of the event, Hien is being followed by a representative from each of PAVN's main branches. He is dressed in the 1982 officer's summer dress uniform. Note that the collar insignia bear no branch devices, a practice adopted by some PAVN generals. His peaked cap, curiously, lacks the red edging normally used by general-grade officers.

#### **K2: Navy senior Lieutenant, 1988**

This Navy senior lieutenant (equivalent to an Army senior captain) wears an officer's winter dress uniform, but in unique Navy colours not officially described in the 1982 uniform code. Around his waist is a Soviet Sam Browne-style belt.

#### **K3: Infantry senior colonel, 1988**

This senior colonel is an almost perfect case study of the 1982-style officer's winter dress uniform. The only modification is the Soviet Sam Browne belt.

#### **K4: Air Force senior captain, 1988**

Unlike the Navy, the PAVN Air Force appears to have retained the same dress uniform colours as the ground forces. Note the Air Force collar tabs and the light blue edging to the shoulderboards.

#### **L1: PRKAF Guerrilla, 1 PRKAF Brigade, 1980**

During 1978, PAVN began raising a Cambodian guerrilla force to combat the Khmer Rouge. Following PAVN's invasion of Cambodia these guerrillas became the core of the new People's Republic of Kampuchea Armed Forces (PRKAF). The vanguard 1 PRKAF Brigade was initially only lightly equipped with AK-47s, rocket launchers, and mortars. Completely dependent on Vietnamese logistical support, PRKAF uniforms were all imported

from PAVN sources. To set them apart from Vietnamese troops PRKAF guerrillas wore distinctive Mao-style caps used by the Pathet Lao to give an 'indigenous' impression.

#### **L2: PRKAF private, 1990**

Since the mid-1980s the PRKAF has ceased wearing the Mao-style cap and instead adopted a full-brimmed khaki bush hat, popularized by the Soviet army in Afghanistan. Also worn is a khaki field cap with a black plastic visor (the PAVN version has a cloth-covered visor) and a coloured band at the base of the visor to denote branch affiliation. PRKAF ground forces have standardized on khaki PAVN fatigues. Footwear in the field consists of either local sandals or the PAVN combat shoe. This private wears a Chinese-style AK-47 magazine pouch and a *krama*, a traditional Cambodian scarf. Rank insignia is rarely seen in the field. On occasion a circular PRKAF pin is worn on the field cap; it strongly resembles the basic PAVN cap badge, with the gold star replaced by a five-domed rendition of the Angkor Wat temple.

Much as with the earlier APSF in Vietnam, the PRK has fielded a second 'military' under the Ministry of Interior. Known as 'A3' units, they can be distinguished from the PRKAF by their matching light green fatigues and field cap.

#### **L3: PRKAF General Tie Banh, Phnom Penh, 1989**

Appointed Defence Minister in August 1988, Tie Banh faced the difficult task of making the PRKAF less reliant on PAVN. He wears a new style general-grade cap badge and a service dress almost identical in everything but colour to the PAVN winter dress uniform. The red edge to the lapels indicates that Tie Banh came from the infantry; the collar tabs are for the General Staff.

#### **Notes sur les planches en couleur**

**A1** Membre de l'une des six Divisions de la Force Principale, bien équipé en grande partie avec des pièces chinoises. Notez le casque, en plastique sur du bambou; gamelle chinoise et havresac français – tous deux des articles de distribution 'privilegiés' identifiant un officier; bardas de campagne chinois, et mitraillette légère M27 tchèque. **A2** Uniforme de grande tenue de type et probablement de fabrication chinoise; seuls les officiers portaient alors des écussons sur la casquette.

**B1, B2** Guérilleros caractéristiques de la 'Force Principale du Viêt-Cong' de l'offensive du Têt; le chapeau de brousse kaki et l'uniforme de combat étaient confectionnés au nord du Vietnam, le ceinturon, les pièces du fusil sans recul de 75 mm, le sac et le porte-grenades sont de fabrication chinoise; l'étui porté par le soldat de gauche est de fabrication locale. Le mortier est le modèle soviétique de 82 mm. **B3** Une variation du badge de la PAVN produite pour la PLAF au début des années 1970 – un article rare.

**C1** Le premier soldat qui ait atteint le rang de Général supérieur, Général Giap porte un uniforme blanc de grande tenue selon les réglementations de 1958, avec badge sur la casquette d'officier pour général d'un type plus ancien. Il portait plus souvent un uniforme d'été brun foncé de grande tenue au col fermé. **C2** Dung, commandant de la dernière campagne victorieuse de 1975, porte un uniforme de grande tenue de couleur fauve, selon le style de 1958; les badges sur les revers ne sont pas ceux d'officier courant. **C3** Un commandant clé dans les Hautes Terres du centre, Man porte l'uniforme de grande tenue au col fermé qu'on vit de plus en plus à partir des années 1970 – généralement brun foncé, mais quelquefois bleu ou blanc.

**D1, D2** Les uniformes de vol, soviétiques ou chinois, n'avaient en général aucun insigne. L'uniforme de grande tenue différait du style militaire par les écussons bleus sur le col. On a vu des badges sur la casquette avec des ailes au-dessus de l'emblème courant du PAVN sur des casquettes souples de combat au milieu des années 60–70, mais dès le milieu des années 70, le badge standard fut de nouveau courant.

**E1** L'artillerie anti-aérienne et celle de combat au sol surent les seules branches qui reçurent des casques d'acier, de type soviétique. Notez la branche de cet officier et l'insigne de rang sur les écussons de col, et le havresac nord-vietnamien; il appartient à une équipe pour canon de 122 mm photographiée pendant l'offensive de 1972. **E2** Notez l'étui à grenades sur le ceinturon chinois. L'artillerie de 1990 semblait préférer les badges de casquette PAVN fixés aux casques d'acier; mais ceci n'a pas été rapporté dans les années 60–70. **E3** Des photos occasionnelles montrent l'artillerie portant le chapeau de brousse mou qu'on vit généralement sur les unités de la

#### **Farbtafeln**

**A1** Mitglied einer der 6 Divisionen der Hauptarmee, gut mit hauptsächlich chinesischen Stücken ausgerüstet. Helm aus kunststoff über Bambus; chinesische Feldflasche und französischer Rucksack, beides privilegierte Ausrüstungsstücke, die einen Offizier kennzeichnen; chinesischer Feldrucksack und tschechisches leichtes MG Typ M27. **A2** Formelle Uniform chinesischer Art und wahrscheinlich auch Herkunft; Kappenabzeichen damals nur von Offizieren getragen.

**B1, B2** Typische Vietcong-Guerillas in der Tet-Offensive; khakifarbener Dschungelhut und Tarnuniform Made in Vietnam, der Gürtel, der Beutel für Teile des 75mm-Gewehrs und der Granatenbeutel Made in China; die Tasche des Mannes links wurde lokal hergestellt. Wir sehen einen sowjetischen 82mm-Granatwerfer. **B3** Abart des PAVN-Abzeichens, hergestellt Anfang des 70er Jahre für die PLAF – ein seltenes Stück.

**C1** Der erste Mann, der führenden Generalsrang erreichte; Giap trägt eine formelle weiße Uniform nach der Vorschrift von 1958, mit einem frühen Generalsabzeichen an der Kappe. Häufiger trug er eine dunkelbraune formelle Sommeruniform mit geschlossenem Kragen. **C2** Dung war Kommandant der letzten erfolgreichen Kampagne von 1975; er trägt eine formelle braune Uniform im Stil von 1958 ohne Generalsaufschläge. **C3** Man, ein wichtiger Kommandant im zentralen Hochland, trägt die formelle Uniform mit geschlossenem Kragen, wie man sie ab Anfang der 70er Jahre immer häufiger sah – meist in dunkelbraun, manchmal aber auch in blau oder weiß.

**D1, D2** Sowjetische oder chinesische Fliegeruniformen hatten meistens keine Rangabzeichen. Formelle Uniformen unterschieden sich von den Felduniformen nur durch die blauen Kragenabzeichen. Kappenabzeichen mit Schwingen über dem PAVN-Zeichen waren auf weichen Feldkappen Mitte der 60er- und Anfang der 70er Jahre zu sehen, aber Mitte der 70er Jahre wurde wieder das Standard-Abzeichen getragen.

**E1** Fliegerabwehr- und Artilleriepersonal waren meist die einzigen, die mit Stahlhelmen ausgerüstet waren – nach sowjetischer Art. Dieser Offizier trägt Waffengattungs- und Rangabzeichen am Kragen, sowie einen nordvietnamesischen Rucksack; er war Teil einer Besatzung einer 122mm-Kanone, die während der Offensive von 1972 fotografiert wurde. **E2** Siehe Granatenbeutel an dem chinesischen Gürtel. Die Artilleristen von 1990 scheinen es vorzuziehen, das PAVN-Kappenabzeichen an den Stahlhelmen anzubringen, doch wurde darüber um den 60er- und 70er-Jahren nicht berichtet. **E3** Manche Fotos zeigen Artilleristen in den weichen Dschungelhelmen, die sonst mehr von den Einheiten der Vietcong-Hauptmacht getragen

Force Principale du Viêt-cong. Il a deux sacs de munition PAVN, un étui à grenade, et un couteau local.

**F1, F2** Bien que les gardes frontières dépendent maintenant du PAVN, des unités paramilitaires du Ministère de l'Intérieur continuent à patrouiller les frontières, en particulier celle avec la Chine. On voit souvent des pulls du commerce et différents types de casquettes de montagne dans les hautes terres froides du nord. La rayure unique et jaune sur les pattes d'épaule distingue les officiers du Ministère de l'Intérieur, qui portent toujours l'ancien badge des casquette APSF. **F3** Le badge vert avec les lettres 'CA' pour 'Cong An' (police) porté par l'APSF avant que soient intégrés les Gardes frontières dans la PAVN; bien qu'ils portent maintenant des badges de casquette PAVN, ils conservent les écussons verts de col.

**G1** Un jeune officier en uniforme standard de combat PAVN, une note d'élégance a été ajoutée avec le ceinturon soviétique, des gants blancs et des pattes d'épaule. Il porte un fusil SKS. **G2** Le même modèle de badge de casquette est porté depuis les années 1950; c'était avec 1958, la marque d'un officier. **G3** Ce badge a été porté par les officiers supérieurs au-dessous du grade de général, avec l'uniforme de grande tenue. **G4** On a vu des versions antérieures du badge de casquette de général depuis le milieu des années 60, mais ce n'est qu'en 1982, qu'il fut décrit officiellement comme faisant partie de l'uniforme de cérémonie des généraux.

**H1** Depuis des années 1960, l'uniforme de corvée ressemble au modèle de la marine chinoise; les lettres sur la casquette indiquent 'Marine vietnamienne'; l'insigne de rang, qui n'est pas montré ici est porté sur les épaules. Des photos montrent depuis 1989 un nouvel uniforme de corvée comprenant une chemise blanche à manches courtes, un pantalon, et la casquette de combat standard du PAVN. **H2-H6** Il existe une certaine confusion sur les badges post-1982; celui-ci (**H2**) d'un marin de seconde classe parut dans une publication officielle du PAVN, mais des photos datées de 1988 montrent que le ligne horizontale a une forme en V. **H3** Marin de troisième classe. **H4** Officier marinier de troisième classe. **H5** Officier marinier de seconde classe. **H6** Officier marinier de première classe.

**I1** L'un des membres d'équipage de l'unité de chars qui prit le palais présidentiel à Saigon. Il porte l'uniforme standard, vert, le casque de char soviétique, un ceinturon soviétique et des sandales pour plur de confort. **I2** Bottes de cuir importées, une variation peu courante des chaussures de toile communes, sont quasiment le seul changement depuis 1975. Au Cambodge des drapeaux vietnamiens et le nouveau drapeau cambodgien du régime de Phnom Penh ont été déployés.

**J1** Ces divisions essayèrent le plus lourd des combats au début de la guerre avec la Chine; notez l'accoutrement pour temps froid; et l'ancien étui de gamelle US - les unités de construction se trouvaient tout en bas de la liste de distribution d'un nouvel équipement. **J2** Notez l'insigne de col vert, le rouleau de toile contenant la ration de riz sur l'épaule et la casquette et le badge standards du PAVN.

**K1** Cette gravure montre le Commandant du PAVN au Cambodge, avec des représentants de tous les services, d'après une photo d'une cérémonie de 'retrait'. Hien porte l'uniforme d'été de grande tenue, de style 1982, pour officiers; certains généraux portaient l'insigne de col sans les emblèmes de la branche de service; et il ne porte pas le liseré rouge courant pour les généraux sur sa casquette, ce qui est curieux. **K2** Uniforme de grande tenue d'hiver des officiers, mais dans les couleurs de la Marine, qui n'ont pas été décrites officiellement dans le code d'uniforme de 1982 et avec un ceinturon soviétique 'Sam Browne'. **K3** Hormis le ceinturon soviétique, ce colonel porte l'uniforme de 1982 de grande tenue réglementaire pour officier. **K4** En dehors des écussons de col et du liseré bleu sur les pattes d'épaule, l'Armée de l'air semble avoir conservé le même uniforme de grande tenue que les forces au sol.

**L1** En 1978, le PAVN a levé des recrues Guérilleros cambodgiennes pour lutter contre les Khmers Rouges, celles-ci constituaient le noyau de la nouvelle PRKAF levée après l'invasion vietnamienne. Recevant un uniforme complet et un équipement (léger) du PAVN, les recrues avaient des casquette distinctives de 'style-Mao', comme celles portées par le Pathet Lao, afin de leur donner un aspect indigène. **L2** La casquette Mao fut remplacée par un chapeau de brousse kaki de style soviétique dans le milieu des années 80; la casquette souple de combat de la forme de celle du PAVN est une autre alternative, avec visière noire en plastique et bandeaux de la couleur de la branche de service à la base de la visière. Des uniformes de combat kaki et des sandales ou des chaussures de toile de combat sont maintenant standards. Les casquettes vertes, légères de combat et les uniformes distinguent maintenant les troupes du ministère de l'Intérieur. On porte sur les casquettes de combat un badge circulaire PRKAF, qui ressemble au badge PAVN mais avec l'emblème du temple à cinq dômes remplaçant l'étoile. Notez les sacs chinois AK-47, et l'écharpe *krama* locale. **L3** Le Ministre de la Défense, Tie Banh porte un nouveau type d'écusson de casquette de générale, et un uniforme similaire, mais sa couleur est celle de l'uniforme d'hiver de grande tenue. Il porte un insigne de col de l'état-major générale, et un liseré rouge sur le revers indiquant ses antécédents dans l'infanterie.

wurden. Er trägt zwei PAVN-Munitionsbeutel, einen Granatenbeutel und ein lokales Messer.

**F1, F2** Obwohl die Grenztruppen jetzt PAVN unterstellt sind, werden die Grenzen immer noch von paramilitärischen Einheiten des Innenministeriums patrouilliert, besonders an der chinesischen Grenze. Im kalten nördlichen Hochland sieht man oft kommerzielle Pullover und verschiedenartige Winterkappen. Der gelbe Streifen auf den Schulternspangen kennzeichnet Offiziere des Innenministeriums, die auch noch immer das alte APSF-Kappenabzeichen tragen. **F3** Das grüne Abzeichen mit 'CA' für 'Cong An' - Polizei - wurde vom APSF-Personal getragen, ehe die Grenzer in die PAVN integriert wurden; obwohl sie jetzt PAVN-Kappenabzeichen tragen, haben sie die grünen Kragenaufschläge beibehalten.

**G1** Subaltern-Offizier in der normalen PAVN-Felduniform, ergänzt durch einen sowjetischen Gürtel, weiße Handschuhe und Schulteraufschläge; er trägt eine SKS-Gewehr. **G2** Dasselbe kappenabzeichen wird seit den 50er Jahren getragen; vor 1958 kennzeichnete es einen Offizier. **G3** Seit 1982 wird dieses Abzeichen von Offizieren im Rang über einem Hauptmann und unter einem General getragen, zusammen mit der formellen Uniform. **G4** Frühe Versionen Kappenabzeichens für generale waren seit Mitte der 60er Jahre zu sehen, doch gehört es erst seit 1982 zur offiziellen formellen Uniform.

**H1** Seit den 60er Jahren sehen die Felduniformen sehr wie chinesische Marineuniformen aus; die Kappenaufschrift lautet 'Vietnamesische Navy'; die hier nicht gezeigten Rangabzeichen werden auf den Schultern getragen. Seit 1989 zeigen Fotos eine neue Felduniform mit weißem, kurzärmeligen Hemd, Hose und Standard PAVN-Feldkappe. **H2, H3** Es herrscht einige Verwirrung über Abzeichen nach 1982; dieses (**H2**) Abzeichen für Matrosen zweiter Klasse stammt aus einer offiziellen PAVN-Publikation, aber Fotos von 1988 zeigen die horizontale Linie v-förmig. **H3** ist ein Seemann dritter Klasse. **H4** Bootsmann dritter Klasse. **H5** Bootsmann zweiter Klasse. **H6** Bootsmann erster Klasse.

**I1** panzersoldat der Einheit, die den Präsidentenpalast in Saigon erstürmte, in grüner Standarduniform, sowjetischem panzerhelm und Gürtel, mit bequemen Sandalen. **I2** Importierte Lederstiefel, eine unübliche Variation der sonstigen Segeltuchschuhe - fast die einzige Veränderung seit 1975. In Kambodscha wurden sowohl die vietnamesische als auch die Flagge des neuen Pnom Penh-Regimes von 1988 gezeigt.

**J1** Diese Divisionen trugen die stärkste Kriegslast am Anfang der Kämpfe gegen China; Kaltwetterausrüstung und alte amerikanische Feldflaschenhülle; die Bauernheiten bekamen nicht viel neue Ausrüstung. **J2** Siehe graue Kragenabzeichen und Reissack über der Schulter; Standard-PAVN-Feldkappe und Abzeichen.

**K1** Diese Tafel zeigt Hien, den PAVN-Kommandant in Kambodscha, mit Vertretern aller Waffengattungen auf einem Foto anlässlich einer 'Rückzugs'-Zeremonie. Er trägt offizielle Offiziers-Sommeruniform von 1982; manche Generale trugen Kragenaufschläge ohne Waffengattungsbezeichnung; Hiens Kappe zeigt seltensamerweise nicht den roten Besatz für Generale. **K2** Formelle Offiziers-Winteruniform, aber in Marinefarben, nicht offiziell beschrieben in den Uniformvorschriften von 1982, und mit sowjetischem Sam Browne-Gürtel. **K3** Vom sowjetischen Gürtel abgesehen trägt dieser Oberst die reguläre Offiziers-Winteruniform von 1982. **K4** Abgesehen von dem Kragenaufschlägen und dem blauen Besatz der Schulternspangen scheint die Luftwaffe dieselbe Ausgehuniform behalten zu haben wie die Infanterie.

**L1** 1978 bildete PAVN Kambodschanische Guerillas zum Kampf gegen die Khmer Rouge aus, und diese Guerillas wurden die Kerntruppe der neuen PRKAF, die nach der vietnamesischen Invasion aufgestellt wurde. Völlig von PAVN uniformiert und (leicht) ausgerüstet, erhielten diese Einheiten Mao-ähnliche Kappen wie sie auch die Pathet Lao trug, um ihnen einen einheimischen Anstrich zu geben. **L2** Die Mao-Kappe wurde Mitte der 80er Jahre von einem Khaki-Buschhut in sowjetischem Stil ersetzt; eine Alternative ist eine weiche Feldkappe mit schwarzem Kunststoffschirm mit Waffengattungsabzeichen. Khaki-Felduniformen und entweder Sandalen oder Segeltuchschuhe sind Standardausrüstung. Hellgrüne Feldkappen und Uniformen unterscheiden die Truppen des Innenministeriums. Ein rundes PRKAF-Abzeichen wird auf den Feldkappen getragen, ähnlich dem PAVN-Abzeichen, aber mit dem funfkuppeligen Tempelzeichen anstelle des Sterns. Siehe chinesische AK-47-Taschen und das örtliche 'Krama'-Halstuch. **L3** Verteidigungsminister Tie Banh trägt ein neuartiges Generalkappenabzeichen und eine Uniform, die abgesehen von der Farbe der formellen PAVN-Winteruniform ähnelt. Generalrang-abzeichen am Krage; rote Aufschlagseinfassung weist auf Infanterie hin.



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Avec annotations en français sur les planches en couleur.  
Mit Aufzeichnungen auf Deutsch über den Farbtafeln.

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