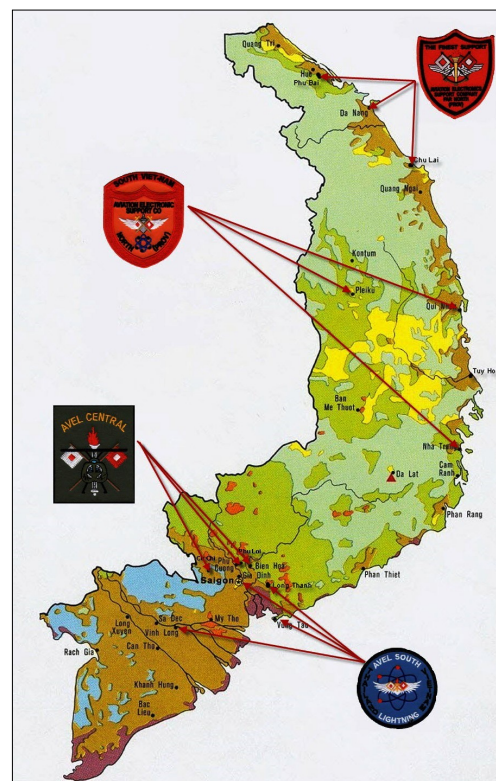
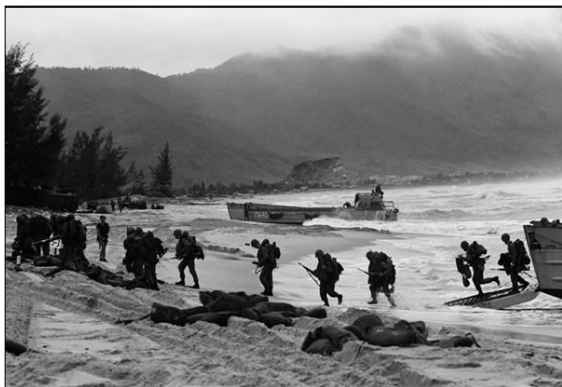


### THEN AND NOW



Early morning. A solitary fisherman crouches in the surf, his eyes skimming the surface for signs of movement in the shallows. A conical hat protects him from the afternoon sun. He is alone on the beach, which lies 14km north of the central Vietnamese city of Da Nang. The sun bathers and beach goers have not started to crowd the peaceful beach yet. Many years ago another event happened here. One of historical significance.

It was on this unremarkable stretch of this Vietnam beach where, at 9.03am on 8 March 1965, 3,500 US marines disembarked from their landing crafts and waded on to Vietnam's shores, becoming the first American ground troops to arrive in the country.

At the time, the US-backed government in South Vietnam was suffering from power struggles among its leadership and troops were deserting its army. Communist forces from North Vietnam were taking advantage, advancing down the Ho Chi Minh trail and gaining control in the countryside. Viet Cong guerrillas had attacked a US compound in the Central Highlands in February. Now, they were approaching Da Nang. General William Westmoreland requested two battalions of US marines to provide support, and at this crucial turning point, President Lyndon B Johnson agreed.

The landing was carefully stage managed. The troops were given a warm welcome by a delegation of smiling children and traditionally dressed Vietnamese women brandishing garlands of flowers. A sign held aloft read: "Welcome, Gallant Marines." It was an incongruous beginning for the marines, and their mission – to defend the city's air base during the Operation Rolling Thunder bombing campaign against targets in the North – seemed straightforward. Nobody on the beach that day had any idea of the long and tortuous conflict that was to follow. By the end of the year, nearly 185,000 troops had been deployed as the war escalated. A decade later when Saigon fell and US soldiers made their final exit, 2.7m Americans had served in Vietnam – more than 58,000 were killed.

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In the last two decades, Vietnam has transformed from one of Asia's poorest countries to one of its fastest developing. The decision of the Communist government to implement wide-ranging economic reforms, known as "Đổi Mới" (renovation) in 1986 opened up its new "socialist-oriented market economy" to the world. The subsequent economic growth has led to rapid improvements in living standards and sharp declines in poverty. More than 7.8 million international visitors came to Vietnam last year for business and tourism.

Culturally, much has changed too. Visiting Americans may be surprised to see McDonald's, Starbucks and KFC. Cinemas show many of the latest Hollywood releases; urban malls sell Levi's jeans and Converse shoes; iPads are everywhere.

In many respects, Da Nang represents the nation's astonishing development in microcosm. Today, it is a modern and well-run metropolis of high-rise buildings, sweeping tree-lined boulevards and dramatic river bridges. Under the visionary leadership of Nguyen Ba Thanh – the city's populist former leader, whose death last month sparked an outpouring of public grief – the shacks and tin huts of old have been replaced by stylish office blocks, motorbike showrooms, mega malls and trendy cafes. The spotless sands of "China Beach", once a popular R&R spot for US soldiers, are now dominated by a long line of lavish luxury hotels and five-star golf courses. The air base fought over so fiercely is now a modern international airport, connecting Da Nang with the world.

Now this is a resort town that hosts thousands of foreign visitors each year. Many Americans come to Vietnam and I am sure some who landed on this beach in 1965.

***Would you go back? Send me an email and let me know. [jmccabe51@gmail.com](mailto:jmccabe51@gmail.com)***

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## Vietnam songs

Over the years war stories have been told through movies, theater, books and even songs. The 1960s brought with it musicians who wanted to voice their opinions through their music, and particularly about their anger over the Vietnam War. Even when the war ended in 1975, it was a source for song writers around the world.

So many songs in the 1960s and 1970s discussed the Vietnam War, but few were popular with the troops. An exception was The Animals' 'We Gotta Get Out of This Place' and this song wasn't intentionally written about the Vietnam War. It was written by a married couple who were talking about their own lives. But the song became so popular with the troops since the sentiment of wanting to get out of Vietnam resonated so much with them.

REM's 'Orange Crush' originated long after the Vietnam War had ended, but few know that the band's lead singer's father served in the Vietnam War. Michael Stipe used his knowledge and experience generated through his father to write the song, and there has been much speculation about the meaning of the words. Some believe that the Orange in the title refers to the poison agents used by troops during the war to kill off crops so that the enemy would not be able to farm its land or grow crops to eat. The song's video features a man with dog tags.

Bruce Springsteen's 'Born in the USA' is a prime example. Most fans already know this but for many of us, there is no clue to lead us to think that it has anything to do with the Vietnam War. Even Ronald Reagan's 1980s presidential campaign used the song as its anthem, but little did they realize that the song's words tell the story of fierce fighting in Vietnam, while a war veteran back at home in the US is struggling to find a job, the CNN Edition reports.

'Charlie Don't Surf' is by UK band The Clash and was released in 1980. It was brashly critical of the US involvement in Vietnam and the title of the song came from the 1979 war epic, *Apocalypse Now*.

The Monkees' 'Last Train to Clarksville' is very upbeat and that was with the intention of the writers to conceal its true meaning. If they had tried to write a song that was straightforward and said what they wanted to say it would have been too controversial for that time and for the light-hearted Monkees.

The song tells of a soldier before he is heading off to Vietnam and meets his girlfriend for the last time. The band kept the tempo of the song deliberately high in order to hide the meaning of the words. Its catchy tune ensured it went to number one in the US, with its meaning lost to the thousands of teenage fans of the Monkees.

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## NEW AVEL, AVIONICS AND VIETNAM VETERANS REGISTERED

**Sott, Kenneth W. (SP/5)**

6618 Fieldwood

Topeka, KS 66619

785-862-9469

*Avel Central, Phu Loi: 24 Oct. 1968-13*

*Aug. 1970*

[kwds49@yahoo.com](mailto:kwds49@yahoo.com)

MOS 35M20

**Roth, Gary T. (SP/5)**

3875 St. Armend Circle

Melbourne, FL 32934

253-350-9154

*614th Maintenance Co. (LEM), Tuy*

*Hoa, Nha Trang: May 1970-April 1971*

[gtrwa@comcast.net](mailto:gtrwa@comcast.net)

MOS 35K20

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### TAPS

None submitted

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### PHOTOS

None submitted

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We have **85** people who have registered for the Reunion so far. They include 48 Vets and 37 guests.

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**AVEL North:** Dave & Rachel Abrahams, Aaron & Judy Bass, Burland Brown, Betty, Joe, Carmie, Leon Chlebowski, Bob & Kathryn Crutchfield, Brad & Mel Del Torto, Fred & Carla Enslin, Greg Gudahl & Gloria Adams, Orbin & Carolyn Hall, Dan & Dee Harmon, Jerry Hicks & Pamela Harrell, Jerry Parks, John Peacock, Andy Yancey.

**AVEL Central:** Ed & Darla Ardell, Pete & Bianca Biancalana, Gary Bishop, Mike & Dawn Blatt, Harold Emde, Bill Fesus, Greg & Gayle Garrison, Bruce & Ruth Goff, Dale & Marsha Link, Bob Madore, Jerry & Debbie Mahanay, Russ & Pat Mason, Joe & Joan Matos, Jack & Pat McCabe, Hector & Nancy Ramirez, Lynn (Rock) Rothrock, Roger & Jane Shiley, Bob & Linda Smith, Tony & Jean Stribling, John & Jane Veers

**AVEL South:** John, Leah & Sarah Chapman, Mario & Marcela De Leon, Bill & Nettie Engels, Carl Hagenstein

**Non-AVEL Vets:** John Bishop, Chuck James, Tom McCabe

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## TET 1968

### The story behind the photo

Perhaps one of the most iconic images to come out of the Vietnam War was the photo of Major General Ngoc Loan shooting a prisoner in the head. When you look into it, however, there is much more to this story than first meets the eye. Eddie Adams – who won a Pulitzer Prize for capturing this photo – later admitted that it didn't tell the whole story and he stated that he wished he hadn't taken it at all.



Looking at this image out of context, it appears as though an officer is gunning down an innocent prisoner, perhaps even a civilian. You are apparently witnessing a savage war crime. That is the reason this image was adopted by anti-war protesters as an indictment against the Vietnam War. Without understanding the background, there is no reason to think that is not the case. It seems like yet another image showing someone acting horrifically and immorally during war time. But, when you learn the story behind the man who is being executed in this photo, the image and the reasoning behind the execution becomes a little bit clearer.

This man's name was Nguyen Van Lem, but he was also known as Captain Bay Lop. Lem was no civilian; he was a member of the Viet Cong. Not just any member, either, he was an assassin and the leader of a Viet Cong death squad who had been targeting and killing South Vietnamese National Police officers and their families.

Lem's team was attempting to take down a number of South Vietnamese officials. They may have even been plotting to kill the shooter himself, Major General Nguyen Ngoc Loan. It is said that Lem had recently been responsible for the murder of one of Loan's most senior officers, as well as the murder of one of the officer's family.

According to accounts at the time, when South Vietnamese officers captured Lem, he was more or less caught in the act, at the site of a mass grave. This grave contained the bodies of no less than seven South Vietnamese police officers, as well as their families, around 34 bound and shot bodies in total. Eddie Adams, the photo-journalist who took the shot, backs up this story. Lem's widow also confirmed that her husband was a member of the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong), and that he disappeared before the beginning of the Tet Offensive.

After being captured with the bodies during the Tet Offensive, Nguyen Van Lem was taken to Major General Ngoc Loan. In a street in Saigon, Loan executed Lem with his .38 caliber Smith & Wesson.

The photographer, Eddie Adams, had this to say of capturing the photo:

"I just followed the three of them as they walked towards us, making an occasional picture. When they were close – maybe five feet away – the soldiers stopped and backed away. I saw a man walk into my camera viewfinder from the left. He took a pistol out of his holster and raised it. I had no idea he would shoot. It was common to hold a pistol to the head of prisoners during questioning. So I prepared to make that picture – the threat, the interrogation. But it didn't happen. The man just pulled a pistol out of his holster, raised it to the VC's head and shot him in the temple. I made a picture at the same time..."

The General then walked up to Adams and said, "They killed many of my people, and yours, too," then walked away.

This may have been the end of Lem's life, but it was not the end of the story. The image of Lem's execution, and public reaction to it, demonized General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, which was something Eddie Adams was extremely sorry for. He was quoted as saying.

A few months after the execution picture was taken, Loan was seriously wounded by machine gun fire that led to the amputation of his leg. Following the war, he was reviled where ever he went. After an Australian hospital refused to treat him, he was transferred to the United States, where he was met with a massive (though unsuccessful) campaign to deport him. In 1975, the former General, Nguyen Loan, opened a pizza parlor, which he ran until 1991, when his identity was discovered and he was forced to retire after receiving many threats.

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Nguyen Van Lem's secret Viet Cong name, Captain Bay Lop, came from his wife, whose first name was Lop. Nguyen Thi Lop knew her husband, Van Lem, was a Viet Cong officer. But until she picked up a newspaper in February 1968, she didn't know he had been arrested—or that he was dead, until she saw Eddie Adams' photo of her 36-year-old husband being executed three days before by Saigon's police chief, Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan.

Newly pregnant and fearful of the South Vietnamese authorities, Lop took her two daughters, then 13 and 3, from their house near Saigon's airport and moved in with relatives nearby. She struggled, working a multitude of odd jobs, until the war ended. After the war she was given a monthly pension, a "gratitude house" and a scholarship for her son who was born eight months after his father's death.



General Loan in his Pizza shop



Nguyen Thi Lop

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## Vietnam Veteran License Plates

Mike Blatt (*AVEL Central* 1969-1970) sent in the photo of his "AVEL" Vietnam License Plate. Many states offer these veteran plates. Most charge extra for a veteran plate.

Does your state offer them? Do you have one? Send me a photo if you do!



**AVEL**  
**VIETNAM**



**August 2015 Newsletter**

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