

## ARMY TALK IN VIETNAM

From A (*ao dai*) to Z (*zoomie*)

By WAYNE DRAPER

Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—If, as Emerson said, language is the archives of history, then U.S. soldiers in Vietnam are writing history with words as well as weapons.

So many slang terms, Vietnamese words and specialized usages are used by U.S. soldiers in Vietnam that language poses a bit of a problem to the new man coming over. Until he picks up the current slang, he is marked as a recent arrival.

With the Vietnam-bound replacement in mind, Army Times has compiled the following list of non-standard terms used in Vietnam.

Each Vietnam-bound soldier should find several terms below which will speed his adjustment to Vietnam.

**ao dai** ("owzeye"): the native costume of Vietnamese women. It has a mandarin collar and is very tight in the bodice with the skirt split to the waist. Worn over loose silk pants.

**ba muol lam** ("baa-mooee-lahm"): Vietnamese for the number 35. A brand of beer.

**ba muol lam** ("baa-mooee-lahm"): Vietnamese for the number 35. Means the same as "butterfly," a playboy.

**beaucoup**: from the French. In Vietnam it can mean many, much, big, huge, very, etc.

**betel nut** ("beetle nut"): the leaves or root of the betel palm, which are mildly narcotic and are chewed by many Vietnamese, especially aged women, to relieve the pain of diseased gums. The cumulative effect of years of betel nut chewing is to totally blacken the teeth.

**broken arrow**: serviceman who tried to be a straight arrow and failed. (See straight arrow.)

**butterfly**: playboy.

**buy the farm**: to be killed. Some-



IDIOT STICK

**di di (mau)** ("dee-dee (maow)": Vietnamese for "go away (fast).")

**dien cai dao** ("dee-in-kee-dao"): Vietnamese for "crazy in the head."

**Disneyland Far East**: Hq building of the U.S. Military Assistance Comd Vietnam. Name is derived from "Disneyland East" (the Pentagon).

**dolphin**: a five-ton tractor. (See "guppy.")

**dung lai** (pronounced "zoong lye"): Vietnamese for "halt" or "stop."

**duster**: a 25-ton tank armed with twin 40mm cannon.

**dustoff**: the medevac helicopter system.

**FAC**: forward air controller. A light plane pilot who directs air strikes and artillery fire from the air.

**FIGMO**: acronym for "Finally I get my orders." Especially in "Figmo chart," a shorttimer's calendar, usually a drawing of an undraped female form, with numbered sections which are filled in, one each day, as the shorttimer keeps track of days

"And to think I could have bought stock in Hong Kong Rubber when it was down to 31."

**Howard Johnson's**: any of a multitude of pushcart vendors selling food in the street.

**idiot stick**: 1. a rifle 2. the curved yoke used by Vietnamese, usually old women or children, to carry two rice baskets, water buckets or what have you, one hung from each end of the yoke.

**incoming!** (always exclamatory): "Hit the dirt!"

**incountry**: in Vietnam.

**Khong lau** (pronounced "kohng laow"): Vietnamese for "nevah hoppen."

**lai day** (pronounced "lye dye"): Vietnamese for "come here."

**lam on** (pronounced "lahm oon") Vietnamese for "please."

**LBJ**: 1. Long Binh Jail; the US-ARV Stockade. 2. Camp Long Binh Junction, home of the 90th Replacement Bn, through which most individual replacements are processed.

**Lima charlie**: international phonetic alphabet words for "LC," short for "loud and clear" in Army radio parlance.

**LZ**: landing zone.

**Malayan gate**: a booby trap device which depends on a fulcrum for action and usually employs spikes as the killing device. Devised by Malay communists during their unsuccessful 10-year fight against the British.

**mau len** (pronounced "maow len"): Vietnamese for fast, or speed. As in, "Let's mau len it up a bit. Papasan."



HONG KONG RUBBER

**plenty cheap charlie**: one who wastes even less money than an ordinary cheap charlie.

**P's**: piastres; basic Vietnamese monetary unit. \$1 equals 118 piastres, as this is written.

**Puff**: originally "Puff the Magic Dragon"; a C-47 armed with miniguns or other rapid fire weapons.

**punji stick**: sharpened stake, usually bamboo, planted in the ground with the point sticking up. Often used in booby traps and often employed with the point smeared with feces as a poisoning element.

**Quan Canh** (pronounced "kwuhn keen"): Vietnamese military police.

**Rats**: an "in" term used by some Saigon warriors for "white mice."

**Real Life** (always capitalized):

a hostess' company in a bar or nightclub. The hostess gets a commission, and she can drink as many as the customer can buy, as fast as he can buy them.

**Saigon warrior**: drugstore soldier, especially one who serves or has served in Saigon.

**so mot** ("sah maht"): Vietnamese for "numbah one," the best.

**so mudi** (sah mooee): Vietnamese for "numbah 10," the worst.

**sapper**: a soldier, especially an enemy soldier, whose job is to blow things up.

**siesta**: Vietnam quits from noon to 2:30 p.m. This period of each day is known as siesta.

**slant**: noun a Vietnamese.

**slick**: transport helicopter. (See "gunship.")

**slope**: noun, a Vietnamese.

**STIF**: acronym for "Saigon Tea Is Fini," a now-defunct organization formed to combat increases in the price of Saigon Tea. Members would fill a bar which had raised its prices and sit sipping beer without buying Tea. Their "drink-ins" met with limited success.

**straight arrow**: serviceman who remains faithful to his wife or Stateside girl friend throughout his Vietnam tour. (See "broken arrow.")

**the country store**: any one of thousands of village shops catering to U.S. servicemen.

**the 'Nam**: Vietnam.

**The Pill**: any one of several types of tablets taken weekly by all servicemen in Vietnam for defense against most types of malaria.

**The World** (always capitalized): the U.S.A. As in, "Where you from back in The World, Sarge?"

are chewed by many Vietnamese, especially aged women, to relieve the pain of diseased gums. The cumulative effect of years of betel nut chewing is to totally blacken the teeth.

**broken arrow:** serviceman who tried to be a straight arrow and failed. (See straight arrow.)

**butterfly:** playboy. buy the farm: to be killed. Sometimes "buy the six-by-three farm."

**cam on** ("cahm oon"): Vietnamese for "thank you."

**Canh Sat** ("cahn zaht"): White mice. (which see.)

**chao co (ong) (em)** (pronounced "chow coh (ohm) (em)": Vietnamese for hello or goodbye, Miss (Sir) (to a child, animal or very close friend).

**cheap charlie:** anyone, especially a U.S. serviceman, who does not waste his money. (See "plenty cheap charlie.")

**Chieu Hoi** ("chew hoyee"): the Vietnamese-administered "Open Arms" program for defecting enemy soldiers. (See "Hoi Chanh.")

**chop-chop:** food, or eat. **CIDG:** Civilian Irregular Defense Group. Friendly indigenous forces, usually organized and led by Army Special Forces teams.

**Coka:** Vietnamese pronunciation of "Coke."

**coup qualified:** very old Viet hands, and only those who served in Saigon during a violent overthrow of a Vietnamese government, are said to be "coup qualified."

**cowboy:** a Vietnamese ruffian. **crow's foot:** a four-pointed booby trap device which, when thrown, will land with one point up.

**C's:** "C" rations. **cycle:** three-wheeled motorized conveyance with a seat on the front.

**day off:** see "khong lau." **dep lam** ("dep lahm"): Vietnamese for "too pretty (or handsome)."

**dep qua** ("dep whah"): Vietnamese for "pretty." **dep trai** ("dep cheye"): Vietnamese for "handsome."

**FAC:** forward air controller. A light plane pilot who directs air strikes and artillery fire from the air.

**FIGMO:** acronym for "Finally I get my orders." Especially in "FIGMO chart," a shorttimer's calendar, usually a drawing of an undraped female torso, with numbered sections which are filled in, one each day, as the shorttimer keeps track of days to go.

**fini:** from the French. Vietnamese meanings include through, finished, depart (as in, "When you fini Vietnam, GI?") and even kill (as is, "She fini him with knife.")

**flower seeker:** a term used, especially in the Vietnamese press, to describe a man in search of a prostitute.

**freedom bird:** a jet aircraft which flies returning servicemen to the U.S.

**FSA:** forward support area (or activity); a one-stop service base established by logistical units near an operation or forward base camp.

**grunt:** noun, an infantryman, especially a marine infantryman.

**gunship:** armed helicopter with the primary mission of fire support.

**guppy:** a stake-and-platform trailer of the type pulled by a fifteen-ton tractor. (See "dolphin.")

**Hanoi Hannah:** the Tokyo Rose of the Vietnam war.

**headman:** the boss man of a local community. His word is usually law.

**Ho Chi Minh sandals:** sandals made from worn-out truck tires.

**Ho Chi Minh trail:** the complex of jungle paths through Laos and Cambodia which serves as the principle Viet Cong and NVA supply route.

**Hoi Chanh** (pronounced "hoyee cahn"): a returnee. An enemy soldier who voluntarily gave himself up. Many are employed by the Vietnamese government or the U.S. Army.

**Hong Kong rubber:** the variety used by many Vietnamese girls to help them put on a good front. Standing joke among Vietnam-based servicemen:

**Malayan gate:** a booby trap device which depends on a fulcrum for action and usually employs spikes as the killing device. Devised by Malay communists during their unsuccessful 10-year fight against the British.

**mau len** (pronounced "maow len"): Vietnamese for fast, or speed. As in, "Let's mau len it up a bit, Papasan."

**medevac:** short for medical evacuation.

**Mike Boat:** landing craft, mechanized.

**numbah-one GI:** serviceman who spends a good deal of money on the Vietnamese economy.

**numbah-ten GI:** serviceman who spends little money on the Vietnamese economy, or one who refuses to make a proposed purchase.

**nuoc mam** ("noouk mom"): the Vietnamese national dish; fermented fish sauce.

**pedicab:** a foot-powered cyclo.

**plastic:** type of explosives favored by sappers. As in, "I was in the middle of a steak at the Hoa Lu BEQ when they found 200 pounds of plastic behind the bar, so I stuck my fork in my steak and di-di-maued." (which see)

**roundeye:** Caucasian woman.

**Saigon Tea:** colored water (sometimes soda) purchased in thimble-size glasses as the price of

up. Often used in booby traps and often employed with the point smeared with feces as a poisoning element.

**Quan Canh** (pronounced "kwuhn kehn"): Vietnamese military police.

**Rats:** an "in" term used by some Saigon warriors for "white mice."

**Real Life** (always capitalized): civilian life. As in, "What do you do in Real Life, Jonesie?"

**Redball:** 1. the system used in Vietnam to expedite delivery of critical supplies and repair parts. 2. Camp Redball, a small base camp near Go Vap, a Saigon suburb.

**RF/PF:** Regional Forces/Popular Forces.

**rice wine:** an alcoholic drink, very inexpensive, made from rice. Usually tastes like kerosene.

**Rog** (pronounced "rahj"): short for "Roger," the radio term for "I read (understand) your transmission." Also, in the expression, "That's a Rog, Baby" (That's right).

**roundeye:** Caucasian woman.

**Saigon Tea:** colored water (sometimes soda) purchased in thimble-size glasses as the price of

the 'Nam: Vietnam.

**The Pill:** any one of several types of tablets taken weekly by all servicemen in Vietnam as defense against most types of malaria.

**The World** (always capitalized): the U.S.A. As in, "Where you from back in The World, Sarge?"

**ti ti** ("tee-tee"): Vietnamese for "small."

**Toi khong biet** ("toy khong bee-ech"): Vietnamese for "I don't know" or "I don't understand."

**Toi yeu em** (nhieu lam) ("toy you em (nyoo lahm)": Vietnamese for "I love you (too much).")

**tomorrow:** never make a date for "tomorrow" with a Vietnamese girl. "Tomorrow' nevah come in Vietnam, GI."

**troi oi** ("choyee oyee"): an emphatic expression in Vietnamese which can mean just about anything the user wants it to mean. Troi duoc oi (choyee duck oyee) is the same expression more emphatically stated.

**upcountry:** any place outside the Saigon-Long Binh-Bien Hoa area.

**USELESS:** homonymic pun on USIS, the United States Information Service.

**white mice:** the Canh Sat; the Vietnamese national police force. Its members wear white shirts.

**white space:** the most prevalent element on the front pages of the best Vietnamese newspapers when censorship is in effect, which is usually.

**Wickham trolley:** an armored railroad locomotive of the type developed by the British during the Malayan rebellion.

**xau lam** ("saow lahm"): Vietnamese for "numbah ten thousand sand" (indescribably bad).

**xin loi** ("sin loyee"): Vietnamese for "Sorry 'bout that."

**Yard:** short for Montagnard, a French word meaning "mountaineer." Member of any one of a number of semi-nomadic, aboriginal tribes which live in the mountains of Vietnam.

**zap:** to kill or seriously wound. **Zoomie:** jet jockey.



PEDICAB — Drawings by Jack Auldrige.