

# FLIGHT LINES

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# HUNTER-KILLER "PINK" TEAMS



The "Pink" team diorama at the Southern Museum of Flight honors the veterans of Vietnam and presents a downed "killer" gunship (*Bell AH-1F "Cobra"*) with a "scout" (*Hughes OH-6 Cayuse "Loach"*) overhead providing cover to a wounded aircrew with a camouflaged enemy returning fire.

During the Vietnam war, the United States relied on helicopters as never before. Its role in combat was expanded in this conflict as thousands of "choppers" rapidly transported personnel throughout the war zone. Heavily armed helicopters also offered a fearsome component to ground operations as close air support.

In 1965, the concept of helicopter-borne fighting forces was still new and largely untested. To hunt for encampments, bunkers, or other signs of the enemy, commanders would deploy a flight of one scouting **Loach** (known as the **White Team**) and one supporting **Cobra** (known as the **Red Team**). Working as a hunter-killer team, this combination was called a **Pink Team**. The Loach would fly very low seeking targets visually or by drawing fire. The Cobra would fly high in a position to bring immediate fire on the target and cover the escape of the Loach. Four troop-carrying Hueys (called a **Blue Team**) often sat idle somewhere nearby, ready to insert troops if the Pink Team discovered an interesting target—or were shot down and needed rescuing. The Blues would also search out bunker complexes, possible cache sites, and conduct ground reconnaissance. The Pink team would provide air cover for the Blues at all times while on the ground.

For most of the war, there was no formal Army training to prepare scout pilots and observers. Headquarters developed doctrine by building on what worked in the field, rather than the other way around, and each unit in-country did things slightly differently. Though Cobra

pilots were trained Stateside, most Loach pilots didn't take control of the aircraft until arriving in Vietnam.

The hunter-killer tactic worked well for a few years, but by the time the United States left Vietnam, it was obsolete. SA-7 heat-seeking missiles could down a Loach before its crew even realized they were under fire. The Cobras high above had a few seconds of warning - they could spot the missile's exhaust plume - but were all the more tempting because at their higher altitudes they were more easily seen than the smaller.

Out of 1,419 Loaches built, 842 were destroyed in Vietnam, most shot down and many others succumbing to crashes resulting from low-level flying. In contrast, of the nearly 1,100 Cobras delivered to the Army, 300 were lost.

Both Loach and Cobra have been in production, on and off, in one form or another ever since. The guidance systems on newer attack helicopters - often working with or even controlling the cameras of reconnaissance drones - have relegated the hunter role, in the hunter-killer missions, to history. The killer role still persists.





# THE VIETNAM WAR



## PLANES OF VIETNAM NOW ON DISPLAY



**C**urrently, the museum has 94 aircraft in its inventory. Of those, 25% are aircraft that served during the Vietnam War. Here are those service veterans:

**Listed here are museum aircraft currently on display that actually flew in Vietnam during this conflict:**

Douglas **A-4F** "Skyhawk"  
General Dynamics **F-111A** "Aardrark"  
Hughes **OH-6** Cayuse "Loach"  
Lockheed **A-12** "Blackbird"  
Lockheed **F-104C** "Starfighter"  
LTV **A-7E** "Corsair II"  
McDonnell-Douglas **F-4N** "Phantom"  
North American **F-100C** "Super Sabre"  
Republic **F-105** "Thunderchief"

**Listed below are museum aircraft that were in service during the conflict:**

Antonov **AN-2T** "Colt"  
Bell **AH-1F** "Cobra"  
Bell **UH-1** "Huey"  
Cessna **O-2A** "Skymaster"  
Cessna **T-37B** "Tweet"  
Convair **TF-102A** "Delta Dagger"  
Douglas **B-26** "Invader"  
Douglas **R4D-6Q** "Skytrain"  
McDonnell **F-101** "Voodoo"  
Mikoyan-Gurevich **MiG-21** "Fishbed"  
North American **T-2C** "Buckeye"  
North American **T-28C** "Trojan"  
Sikorsky **CH-54** Skycrane "Tarhe"

**Listed below are museum aircraft in service at the time, but not utilized in the conflict::**

Aero **L-39C** "Albatros"  
Mikoyan-Gurevich **MiG-15** "Fagot"  
Mil **Mi-24** "Hind"

## JANUARY HISTORICAL EVENTS

**J**anuary at the Southern Museum of Flight is a time when memories of the Vietnam War are recounted, and two events score big in that regard.

The Vietnam War was a conflict in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from 1 November 1955 to the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975. It was the second of the Indochina Wars and was officially fought between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. North Vietnam was supported by the Soviet Union, China, and other communist allies; South Vietnam was supported by the United States, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, Thailand and other anti-communist allies. The war, considered a Cold War-era proxy war by some, lasted 19 years, with direct U.S. involvement ending in 1973, and included the Laotian Civil War and the Cambodian Civil War, which ended with all three countries becoming communist in 1975.

**January 30, 1968** - Beginning of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam as North Vietnamese troops attacked 36 provincial capitals and 5 major cities in South Vietnam, including an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Saigon and the presidential palace. Although U.S. forces eventually fended off the massive surprise attack and achieved a military victory, Tet became a propaganda victory for the Vietnamese due in part to graphic news reports on television which helped turn U.S. public opinion against continuation of the war.

**January 27, 1973** - U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War ended as North Vietnamese and American representatives signed an agreement in Paris. The U.S. agreed to remove all remaining troops within 60 days thus ending the longest war in American history. Over 58,000 Americans had been killed, 300,000 wounded and 2,500 declared missing. A total of 566 prisoners-of-war had been held by the North Vietnamese during the war, with 55 reported deaths.





# THE VIETNAM WAR

## ON DISPLAY IN THE "SHADOW GALLERY"



The United States Embassy in Saigon was first established in June 1952, and eventually closed in 1975. The embassy was the scene of a number of significant events of the Vietnam War, most notably the Viet Cong attack during the Tet Offensive, and the evacuation during the Fall of Saigon.

While the embassy attack (like much of the Tet Offensive) was tactically insignificant, it had a political and psychological impact. The United States had been fighting in Vietnam for over two-and-a-half years, 20,000 Americans had been killed and despite the presence of nearly 500,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam earlier, the U.S. embassy had been penetrated.

*Operation Frequent Wind* was the final evacuation phase prior to the takeover of the city by the North Vietnamese People's Army of Vietnam in the fall of Saigon. It was carried out on 29–30 April 1975.

The Seal of the U.S. Department of State that was located above the embassy's entrance was removed and is now displayed in the museum's Shadow Gallery.



## THE MEMORIAL

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is located in the nation's capital north of the Lincoln Memorial near the intersection of 22nd St. and Constitution Ave. NW.

Its construction and related issues have been the source of controversies, some of which have resulted in additions to the memorial complex. This is reflected in the fact that the Vietnam memorial is now made up of three parts: the **Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall** which includes the names of over 58,000 servicemen and women who gave their lives in service in the Vietnam conflict (*completed first and the best-known part of the memorial*); **The Three Soldiers**; and the **Vietnam Women's Memorial**. The Three Soldiers is a bronze statue depicting three life-size American servicemen (Caucasian, African American and Hispanic American). The threesome looks towards the Memorial Wall. The Women's Memorial to women who served in the war is south of the Memorial Wall and depicts three female soldiers and a wounded soldier.

On April 27, 1979, four years after the fall of Saigon, The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Inc. (VVMF), was incorporated as a non-profit organization to establish a memorial to veterans of the Vietnam War. The selected design was very controversial, in particular, its unconventional design, its black color and its lack of ornamentation. Some public officials voiced their displeasure, calling the wall "*a black gash of shame*." Two prominent early supporters of the project, H. Ross Perot and James Webb, withdrew their support once they saw the design. Said Webb, "*I never in my wildest dreams imagined such a nihilistic slab of stone*." James Watt, secretary of the interior under President Ronald Reagan, initially refused to issue a building permit for the memorial due to the public outcry about the design. Since its early years, criticism of the Memorial's design faded. "*It has become something of a shrine*."

Visitors to the memorial leave sentimental items at the memorial since its opening. One story claims this practice began during construction when a Vietnam veteran threw the Purple Heart his brother received posthumously into the concrete of the memorial's foundation

The memorial was dedicated on November 13, 1982, after a march to its site by thousands of Vietnam War veterans.