Epic Battlefields of the Vietnam War

Detailed Itinerary

Thursday, October 30, 2014 - Day 1: USA/Aloft.
Friday, October 31 - Day 2: Cross International Dateline
Saturday, November 1 - Day 3: Saigon. Arrive at Tan Son Nhut International Airport and transfer to our hotel in central Saigon. Balance of the day free until 5PM when we meet for a Welcome Dinner with Tour Leader and Guide orientation. (D)

Sunday, November 2 - Day 4: Saigon/My Tho/Saigon. Today we get a feel for the battlefield conditions faced by US Army and Navy personnel in the Mekong Delta. We drive down Highway #1 (formerly Highway #4), cross the Van Co Dong (“Oriental River”) at Ben Luc and proceed to My Tho where we board a motorized boat for a journey up the Mekong River, with stops at several points to see local village life and to take a sampan ride along nippa-palm bordered narrow canals that lead to and from the Mekong. After lunch at a riverside restaurant, we return to My Tho and then go overland to Dong Tam, former 9th Infantry Division Headquarters. The base is still an active military site. We will visit a reptile preserve just outside the gate where we see live specimens of pythons, cobras, bamboo vipers and other wildlife US military had to cope with throughout much of Vietnam during the war. Later we return to Saigon. Note: throughout our tour program we will make every effort to visit the “special places” of our tour participants if they are along or not far from our route of travel. Please advise us of any “special places” you would like to visit so that we can plan accordingly. (B, L, D)

Monday, November 3 - Day 5: Saigon. Today we visit several sites associated with the Battle of Saigon in the 1968 Tet Offensive. We see the US Consulate (site of the former Embassy) where VC sappers attacked the embassy. They never breached the building before they were all slain, but their actions captured the attention of the Saigon press corps living only blocks away and inaccurate early reports that the embassy had been taken made one of Tet ‘68’s smallest battles one of its most memorable. On the grounds of the Consulate is a plaque honoring the Soldiers and Marines who died defending the Embassy. This is one of only two places in Vietnam where US personnel are officially honored. We will visit the other later in our journey. Along Hwy #1 at the western boundary of Tan Son Nhut we see where a US cavalry unit battled a large force, part of a body of over 1,500 enemy who were trying to capture Tan Son Nhut on the first day of the Tet Offensive of 1968. We drive by the site of the radio station captured by the VC early in the battle for Saigon and then we go to Cholon. We see the narrow streets that Soldiers of the 9th Infantry Division and 199th LIB fought house-to-house to get to the Race Track where the US established a defendable and helicopter accessible base of operations. Finally, we visit Unification Hall, the former Presidential Palace of RVN President Nguyen Van Thieu. Here we see the
massive iron gates NVA tanks broke through on April 30, 1975, to capture the seat of power held briefly by Gen. Duong Van “Big” Minh after Thieu’s flight to Europe. Tonight a Dinner Cruise on the Saigon River. (B, L, D)

**Tuesday, November 4 - Day 6: Saigon/Tay Ninh.** This morning we go north on Hwy 1, past the former 25th Division Cu Chi basecamp and drive into the Ho Bo Woods. After visiting a military cemetery, we go to the infamous “Tunnels of Cu Chi” where we have an opportunity to see the fortifications and connecting tunnel complex of a communist basecamp. Some of the tunnels have been enlarged to accommodate Western visitors, so we have the option of going through several of these tunnels. This Ho Bo Woods region was heavily fought over from 1966 through to the end of US deployments in III Corps five years later. We continue on to Tay Ninh City where we observe part of a worship service at the world-famous Cao Dai Temple. We will discuss the role of the Cao Dai before, during and after the war. Following lunch at a local restaurant owned by a lady who was an enemy during the war, we go to **Nui Ba Den**, the “**Black Virgin Mountain**.” The US maintained a rock quarry at the base and a well-defended radio relay station atop the mountain. VC and NVA fighters often occupied hundreds of acres between the base and the peak. The relay station at the top was the target of several vicious attacks during the war, one of which temporarily resulted in a breach of the perimeter. The mountain was often explored by Long Range Reconnaissance (LRRP) patrols and occasionally by US infantry conducting Reconnaissance in Force (RIF) operations. The RIFs often resulted in combat, made more difficult by massive granite boulders, natural caves and deep foliage. We will take a gondola lift about halfway up the mountain where a temple complex that existed during the war has been greatly expanded and a nearby gulch was the site of an NVA hospital. We have panoramic views of parts of Tay Ninh Province as well as the “**Razorbark Mountains**” to the east. We overnight in Tay Ninh City. (B, L, D)

**Wednesday, November 5 - Day 7: Tay Ninh.** Today we explore north of Nui Ba Den, all the way to the Cambodian border. In 1966 the US launched **Operation Attleboro** with units of the 196th LIB, the 25th ID, 1st ID, 4th ID and 173rd Airborne Brigade. During this operation a US Fire Support Base (FSB) named Suoi Tre or “**FSB Gold**” was attacked and partly overrun before reinforcement broke through the communist stranglehold. Thirty-six US Soldiers were KIA and almost 200 wounded. The communist lost over 600 KIA. Today that battlesite is submerged in the waters of Lake Dau Tieng; a man-made post-war lake that was visible to us yesterday as we rode the gondola up Nui Ba Den. Several kilometers north of Nui Ba Den is a village that once was the site of Camp St. Barbara or “French Fort,” an old-fashioned artillery base surrounded by 12-foot high embankments. We will pass through **Prek Klok Special Forces Camp**, where several Junction City battles occurred. Just east of Katum was **FSB Burt** or “**Soui Cut**.” On January 1, 1968, US forces at Burt were attacked. One Soldier at FSB Burt, SPC Oliver Stone, later incorporated a fictionalized account of this battle into the climatic battle scene in his movie, **Platoon**. We may visit this site where washed in trenches and fighting positions were still visible just a few years ago. The 173rd conducted the only
combat parachute assault of the war by a US unit on 22 February 1967, as part of
*Operation Junction City.* North of Katum, we will visit their Drop Zone. Unlike
many other places in Vietnam, it is little changed in 47 years. Then we travel a
road running parallel to the border with Cambodia, at times within site of
Cambodia, until we turn south into dense jungle and find COSVN (“Central Office
for South Viet Nam,” the US designation of the VC’s main headquarters). Although
there was no permanent location for COSVN during the war (it often fled across the border into Cambodia when US forces approached), the site we will visit is recognized by the Vietnamese government as the wartime HQ and a
historic site. We enter the jungle and follow a path (paved now) through the
vegetation to see bunkers, trench lines and reconstructed buildings representing
the base as it once was. Exiting from the jungle, we pass within sight of the
Cambodian border checkpoint and past the location of FSB Pace (1971). The
route of Highway 22 takes us along the “Collar” of the “Dog Face,” a fought-over
patch of territory protruding into Cambodia and resembling the face of a dog on a
map. We return for one more night in Tay Ninh. (B, D)

**Thursday, November 6 - Day 8: Tay Ninh/Long Binh.** Leaving Tay Ninh we
take Hwy 26, the Tay Ninh – Dau Tieng MSR, passing several notable battle sites
including FSB Rawlings III and the Cau Khoi Rubber Plantation to “Checkpoint
Tango” where we turn north into the Ben Cui Rubber Plantation. Here SSG
Marvin Young, 1st Bn, 5th Infantry, earned the Medal of Honor in August 1968
during the *Battle for Tay Ninh.* During that same battle a Soldier went missing
who remains MIA. In Dau Tieng we see several landmarks of the former brigade
size basecamp here including one of two runways whose crumbling Macadam
surface is still visible. We pass through the much fought over *Michelin Plantation*
to Hwy 13, one of several roadways in Vietnam that earned the nickname,
“Thunder Road.” Driving north we arrive at An Loc. Here NVA forces
surrounded ARVN units and their American advisors in the 1972 *Battle for An
Loc.* American ground units were largely absent from Vietnam by this point in the
war. For 90 days the ARVN, with the assistance of their American advisors and
massive US airpower, held off repeated attacks by NVA armor and infantry that
laid ruin to the town. By mid-July, the NVA were forced to withdraw. Hwy 13
continues north to Loc Ninh, just short of the Cambodian border and one of the
main routes of US forces attacking into *Cambodia* in 1970. Turning back south,
we pass through the Lai Khe rubber plantation that was once home to a the 1st
Infantry Division basecamp. We continue through Ap Bau Bang and Ben Cat,
passing along the eastern boundary of the *Iron Triangle.* We overnight in Long
Binh, together with neighboring Ben Hoa, once one of the USA’s largest
logistical bases in South Vietnam. (B, L, D)

**Friday, November 7 - Day 9: Long Binh/Pleiku.** We return to Tan Son Nhut
today to fly to Pleiku. After hotel check-in, we drive around the former *Camp
Holloway,* still a military base. In February 1965, VC attacked here killing eight
Americans, wounding over 100 others, destroying 17 aircraft and prompting LBJ
to launch airstrikes against North Vietnam. We will drive northwest through the
former *Plei Mrong Special Forces Camp* to a Montagnard Village. We tour through the village on foot before returning to Pleiku for the evening. (B, D)

**Saturday, November 8 - Day 10: Pleiku.** Driving south on Highway 14, we pass “Dragon Mountain,” known to a generation of GI’s as “Titty Mountain” for the gorge on the south of the mountain that gave the geographical landmark the appearance of cleavage. To the east of Dragon Mountain is Camp Enari and Hensel Field, 4th ID headquarters for several years. Turning west we proceed to the site of *Plei Me Special Forces Camp*. From this point we overlook the *Ia Drang Valley* and the Chu Phong Massif beyond. We have requested permission to visit the site of *LZ X-Ray* in the Valley and negotiations are ongoing with local authorities toward this end. Later we get on Highway 19 and drive all the way to the Cambodian border checkpoint. Along the way we pause at the site of *Duc Pho Special Forces Camp*. The NVA attacked this camp several times in 1965. During one of those battles Major Norman Schwarzkopf was the senior American advisor on site. On the way back to Pleiku we may sidetrack to Jackson Hole or The Oasis if any tour participants served at either of these 4th ID bases. (B, D)

**Sunday, November 9 - Day 11: Pleiku:** Today we drive north through Kontum to Dak To. We will stop at the site of the *Dak To SF Camp* and the 2KM long paved airstrip that served as a major operations base for the 4th ID and the 173rd Airborne Brigade. Proceeding west on Rt. 512, we get on a local road and drive to *Hill 875*, site of a significant battle between the NVA and the 173rd Airborne in November 1967. Returning to the main roadway, we stop at *Ben Het SF Camp* and climb the road in the former camp that gives us a good view of the former runway and the tri-border region beyond. US and RVN forces were under siege here in 1969. The NVA utilized tanks against Ben Het. This was one of the few times that that US armor battled with NVA armor. In 1975, after US forces had withdrawn, there were several armor battles between NVA and ARVN forces, especially northwest of Saigon. Returning to Kontum, we visit the Vinh Son Orphanage, an institution actively supported by US Veterans for the past decade. (B, L, D)

**Monday, November 10 - Day 12: Pleiku/Quy Nhon.** On our trip to the coast we stop in the *Mang Yang Pass*. Here French Groupement Mobile 100, a mechanized infantry unit, was finally decimated in June 1954, after a series of ambushes as it moved from An Khe toward Pleiku. In An Khe we see “Hong Kong Mountain” that once overlooked the 1st Cavalry Division’s helicopter base known as “The Golf Course.” We continue over the scenic An Khe Pass to tour a significant Cham Tower complex on a hilltop outside of Quy Nhon. We check into our oceanfront hotel. (B, L, D)

**Tuesday, November 11 - Day 13: Quy Nhon/Hoi An.** Driving north on Hwy 1, we pass near Phu Cat, a former USAF base and current Vietnamese Air Force base. We drive north with the *Bon Song Plain* to our west and the South China Sea to our east. North of Quang Nhai we detour to Son My, also known as *My Lai*. The government has constructed a destroyed village here to represent the actual destruction of My Lai by US forces in March 1968. We will see the only representation of an honor for a US Soldier here where the government has cited
the heroic intervention of CWO Hugh Thompson, who landed his helicopter between Vietnamese civilians and out-of-control infantry. We continue on to Hoi An, with stops for “photo ops” and cultural sites along the route. (B, L, D)

**Wednesday, November 12 - Day 14: Hoi An.** We begin with a gondola ride up *Ba Na Mountain* where the USMC had a radio relay station. Then we tour areas of “*Dodge City*” and “*Arizona Territory*” where USMC units engaged VC and NVA for years. We will see An Hoi, Liberty Bridge, Goi Noi Island and the area around Hill 55. Later we climb *Marble Mountain*, visit the caves in the mountain and see majestic views of China Beach and the territory to the west from lookouts near the mountain’s peak. (B, L, D)

**Thursday, November 13 - Day 15: Hoi An/Hue.** This morning we pass through DaNang and climb the *Hai Van Pass* along the winding mountain road where convoys were often ambushed. After hotel check-in, we go to the *Citadel*, ancient seat of Vietnam emperors where USMC, American advisors and ARVN fought deadly battles for much of *February 1968*. We see restored buildings in the Citadel and also much evidence of the destruction of Tet in unrestored areas of the fortress. (B, L, D)

**Friday, November 14 - Day 16: Hue.** Today we drive north on Highway #1, the “Street Without Joy,” so named by French writer Bernard Fall. Fall’s book documented a series of battles during the French war with the Viet Minh in the early 1950s. Ironically, the renowned author was killed on patrol with US Marines on this same stretch of road in 1967. We stop at the ruins of a Catholic Church along the highway that was the scene of intense combat in the 1972 *Easter Offensive*. Continuing to *Dong Ha*, we see a bridge over the river that replaced one famously blown to stop advancing NVA tanks by USMC Captain John Ripley during the *Easter 1972 Offensive*. Then we turn west on Hwy 9. We pass through Cam Lo and go to *Con Thien*, scene of fierce shelling and combat in 1967 and 1968. Then to *Camp Carroll*, once a 101st Airborne firebase. Stop along Hwy 9 to photograph “*The Rockpile*” and continue on to the site of the *Battle of Lang Vei Special Forces Camp*, on February 6-7, 1968. The NVA overran the camp. At *Khe Sanh Combat Base* we can see remnants of the long-ago airstrips that famously sustained the Marines during a nearly half-year siege in 1968. Enroute back to Hue we may stop and see the rebuilt *Quang Tri Citadel*, destroyed by B-52s when overrun by NVA during the *Easter ’72 Offensive*. (B, L, D)

**Saturday, November 15 - Day 17: Hue.** Today we drive southwest of Hue, through FSBs Birmingham and Bastogne across the mountains into the *A Shau Valley*. We visit *Hamburger Hill*, site of a bloody battle between the 101st Airborne, ARVN and NVA in 1969. Returning to Hue, we tour restored royal tombs south of the city. (B, D)

**Sunday, November 16 - Day 18: Hue/Hanoi.** We visit the site of Camp Rodriguez (82nd Abn) and Camp Eagle (101st Abn) on the way to Phu Bai Airport for our flight to Hanoi. After hotel check-in, we take a tour of the ancient commercial district of “38 streets and wares” by cyclo. Tonight a dinner of typical Hanoi fare. (B, D)
Monday, November 17 - Day 19: Hanoi. On our last full day in Vietnam we visit the Army Museum, Ho Chi Minh Trail Museum, Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum (if open), One-Pillar Pagoda and take a driving tour of the city. Our final site will be the Hoa Lo Prison, infamous as the “Hanoi Hilton.” Here we can see depictions of mistreatment of Vietnamese by the colonial French authorities and ponder the hardships suffered by hundreds of American POWs who were imprisoned here and at other sites around what was then North Vietnam. Tonight we wrap up this tour through history with a Farewell Dinner at an exceptional restaurant. (B, L, D)

Tuesday, November 18 - Day 20: Hanoi/USA. Morning transfer to the international airport for our flight home. Crossing the International Dateline again, we arrive back in the USA the same day. (B)

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