

9-2020

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Publication Info

Published in *Legacy*, Volume 24, Issue 1, 2020, pages 28-30.

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Applied Research

A Vietnam War-Era Training Village at Fort Jackson

By Stacey L. Young, Director, SCIAA Applied Research Division

Introduction

In November and December of 2019, the Applied Research Division (ARD) investigated the remains of a mock-training village on Fort Jackson. The site was thought to be the remains of Bau Bang, a Vietnam War-era training site constructed in 1966. Previously, the mock-village location had been shown to Fort Jackson archaeologist Chan Funk, and the location was visited in 2014 by Funk and members of the United States Army Engineer Research and Development Center/Construction Engineering Research Lab (ERDC/CERL) as part of an installation-wide effort to document all Vietnam War-era buildings, structures, and sites. The fieldwork conducted by SCIAA-ARD included shovel testing and documentation of above ground architectural remains and landscape features. Documentary research in conjunction with the fieldwork has revealed that the site is not Bau Bang, but likely one of two additional Vietnam War-era training villages constructed circa 1967.

Training Villages

Training villages and mock sites were first used by the US military during World War II; at that time, the mock sites resembled European villages. The simulated environments were designed so that personnel received immersive training

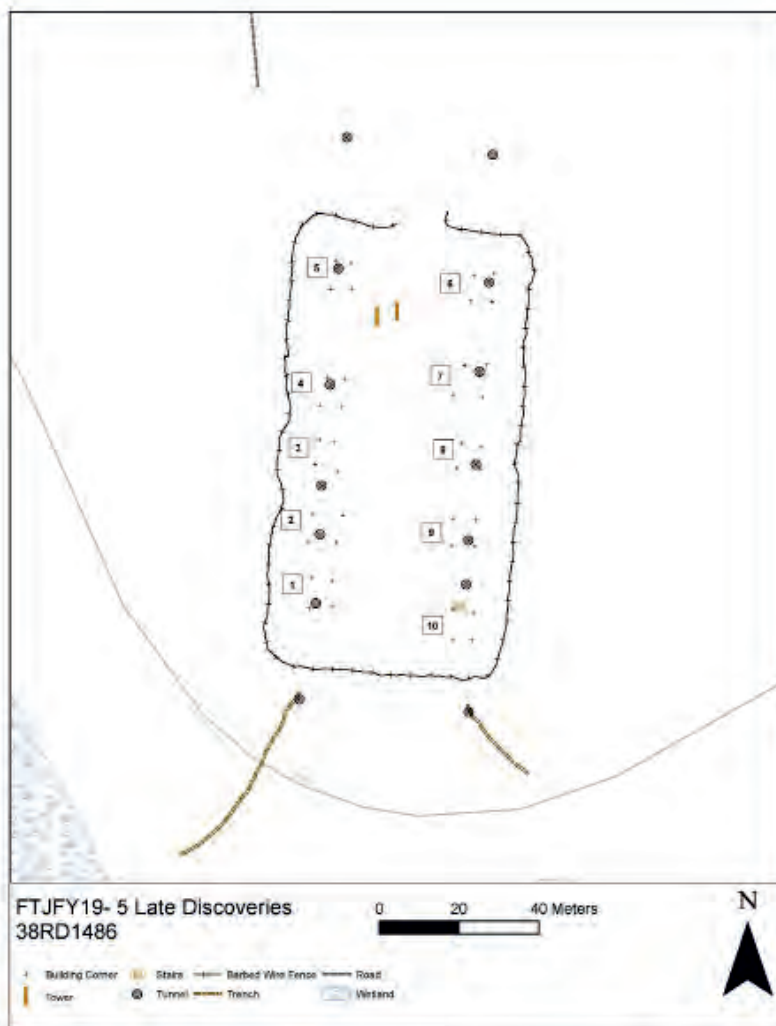


Figure 2: Site Plan Map. (ArcGIS map SCIAA-ARD)



Figure 1: Officers touring Bau Bang Village at Fort Jackson. Photograph taken in 1969, from The State Newspaper Photograph Archive (Photograph courtesy of Richland County Library, Columbia, SC)

with weapons and mental conditioning for the experience they were expected to encounter. The first mock-Vietnamese Village, referred to as Atlantica, was constructed in 1963 on Fort Bragg, North Carolina. This location was likely chosen because Fort Bragg was home to the Special Operations Forces Group who were trained in guerilla warfare, infantry and parachute skills, counter-insurgency operations, as well as other specialized skills that proved pivotal for missions in Vietnam. In 1963, the U.S. military operated in an advisory role in Vietnam. By 1965, as tensions in Vietnam had increased, additional mock-Vietnamese



Figure 3: Montagnard-style house at Bau Bang. (Photograph courtesy of U.S. Army Basic Combat Training Museum, Fort Jackson, SC)

villages were constructed on other military installations. Typically, these mock-villages replicated fortified strategic hamlets constructed by the South Vietnamese government. The replica-villages were used as part of an escape and evasion course. Trainees received instruction on ambush drills, sanitation, as well as booby traps and weapons used by Communist groups in Vietnam. In some circumstances the mock-village was enemy-occupied, and trainees utilized search and seizure tactics to clear houses and tunnels. In addition to being used for military training purposes, Bau Bang was visited on several occasions by school groups, community organizations, and Army veterans and demonstrations were given (Figure 1).

At least four mock-Vietnamese training villages were constructed on Fort Jackson. The first, Bau Bang, was constructed in 1966 by the 3rd Infantry Brigade and located in the south central portion of Fort Jackson. Two additional mock-villages, Vien Hoa and Pien Chu, were constructed around 1967 by a contracting group from Georgia and were located in a northeastern training area. In 1969, Bau Bang was re-located in association with the creation of Weston Lake. At this time, no contemporary maps showing the training site locations or plan drawings illustrating details of the mock-villages have been located. According to Chan Funk, the remains of another village site may be located about one mile to the northeast of the site investigated by SCIAA.

Fieldwork

Results of the fieldwork documented the remains of 10 buildings situated in two parallel rows, an observation tower, two tunnel systems, and a barbed wire fence perimeter enclosing an area measuring 110 X 60 meters. Entryways for the tunnel systems are outside (to the north and south) of the village, and it is not apparent if the two tunnel systems connect along an east-west axis (Figure 2). Tunnel entryways are aligned with the building footprints and most of the entrances are within a building. Little above ground evidence of the buildings remained, although at least two construction types were

observed. Three of the buildings contained evidence of interior posts suggesting a raised house on stilts, a type typical of the Central Highlands region (Figures 3 and 4). Two of these did not contain visible tunnel entrances within the buildings. The remaining seven buildings contained no evidence of interior posts and likely represent earthen-walled houses typical of the Lowlands (Figure 5).

Of the 301 shovel tests excavated across the area, nine contained artifacts associated with either architectural elements of the village or from military training activities. The artifacts include 5.56 millimeter and 7.62 X 51 millimeter blank cartridges; a .30 caliber bullet, an M201a1 smoke grenade spoon; a clip and spring part from a small trap, a wire nail, roofing shingle fragment, and a tack. A Vietnam-era hot weather field cap and a pile of flares and wires were found in two locations along the edge of the village site near the wetlands. In addition to the artifacts, sub-surface features were encountered in some of the shovel tests; a concrete tunnel and disturbances interpreted as filled trenches. Years of 1967 thru 1971 were noted stamped on the cartridge casings found. The 5.56 millimeter blanks are consistent with ammunition used in an M16 rifle while the 7.62 X 51 millimeter blanks are consistent with ammunition used in M14 rifles and the M60 machine gun. The .30 caliber bullet pre-dates the training site. The M14 was the standard-issue rifle for the U.S. Army from about 1959, until it was replaced with the lighter M16



Figure 4: Building remains (Building 10) and tunnel. (Photo by SCIAA-ARD)

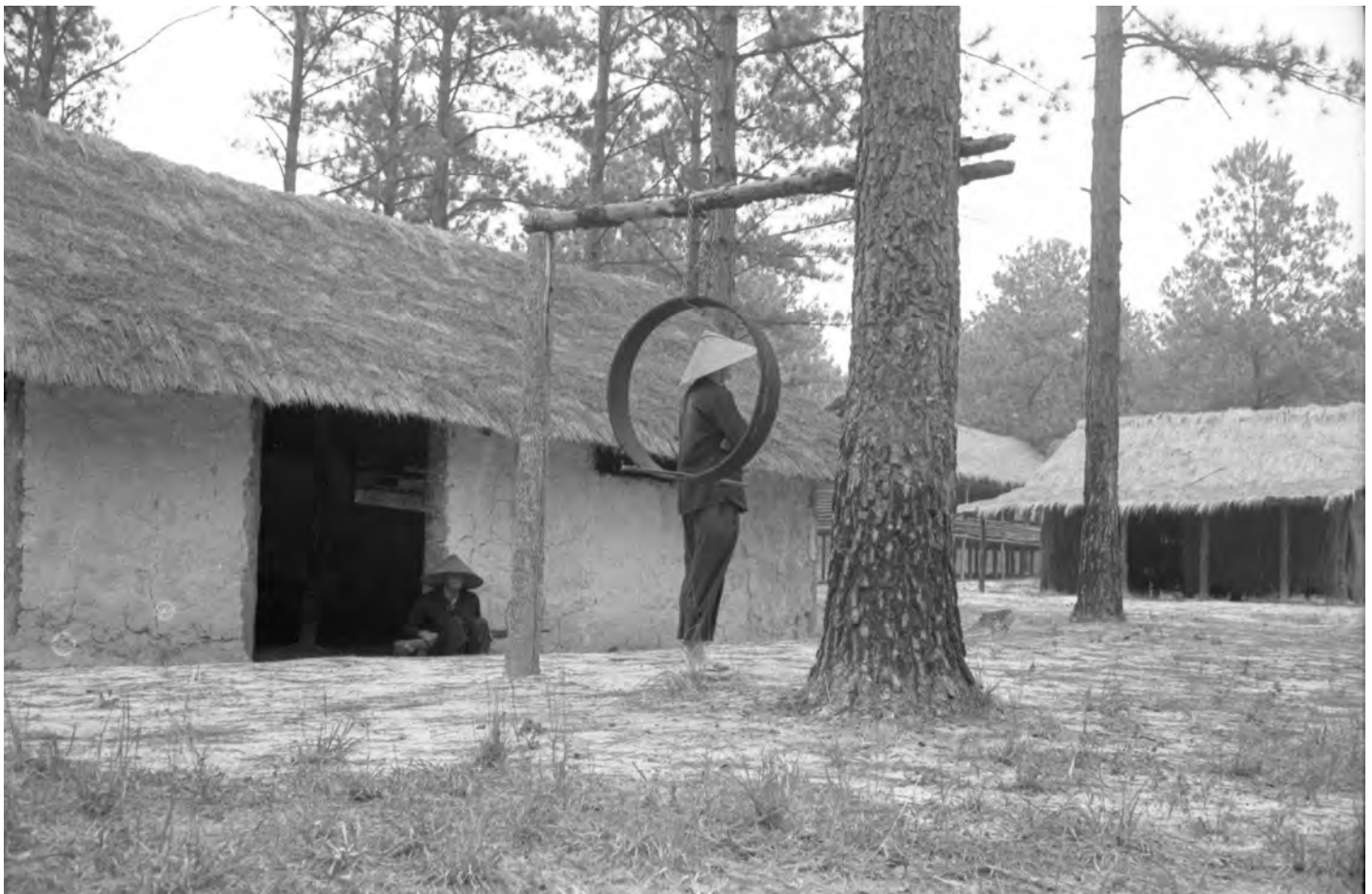


Figure 5: View of Bau Bang replica Vietnamese village. Photograph taken in 1967, from the *The State Newspaper Photograph Archive*. (Photo courtesy of Richland County Library, Columbia, SC)

beginning in 1966. Initially, the M14 was used in Vietnam, but proved difficult to maneuver in the jungle environment. The M16 was introduced in 1964, gradually replacing the M14. By 1967, the M16 rifle had been incorporated into the training at Fort Jackson, although the rifle was under investigation because there were reports from Vietnam that the rifle would become jammed causing injury or death. By 1968, the M16 was modified with a chrome plated bore and the M16A1 issued.

Summary

From the artifacts recovered and historic research conducted, it is not clear when the mock-Vietnamese village was constructed or last used for training purposes. Based on the site location somewhat in the northeastern portion of Fort Jackson, the organization and layout, and type of cartridge casings found, it likely represents one of the two villages (Vien Boa or Pien Chu) constructed circa 1967 and not Bau Bang. The first Bau Bang was constructed circa 1966 and located in what is now Lake Weston. The village was moved in 1969 in association with

construction of the lake. The location of the second Bau Bang is not known, but the site was rebuilt in 1969, so it would have been used between circa 1969 and 1973. The U.S. military involvement in Vietnam ended in 1973, with the Paris Peace Agreement and the Vietnam War officially concluded in 1975. While it is possible that the remains of another Vietnam War-era mock

training village are located to the north of the site recently documented, additional fieldwork is needed to investigate the location. Since no contemporary maps or engineering plans have been located, archaeological investigations are essential to understanding the organization, layout, and period of use for these sites.



Figure 6: Close-up view of concrete daub-like building material. (Photo by SCIAA-ARD)