

**Bạch Mã:  
Historical Archaeology  
at a French Colonial Hill Station,  
Central Vietnam, 1930-1991**

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A thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at

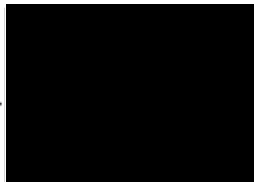
**The University of New England**

June 2009

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

.....  
L. R. Fife.



## **Abstract**

Bạch Mã Hill Station was a French mountain resort, built on top of Bạch Mã Mountain in Central Vietnam between 1932 and 1945. Bạch Mã was one of seven similar sites in Indochina intended to provide a cool mountain retreat for the French expatriate population, in this case, of Huế. Hill stations throughout Asia became symbols of European colonialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the postcolonial period, Bạch Mã continued to be represented in significant historical developments that have shaped Central Vietnam at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Through an examination of the archaeological fabric of the hill station in the context of the historical period in which it developed, this study addresses four issues related to colonial occupation and the postcolonial experience in Central Vietnam.

The study examines the broader historical context that influenced Central Vietnam, and the development of Bạch Mã, in the first part of the twentieth century. The 1930s was a turning point for French colonialism in Indochina and for the Vietnamese nationalist movement. From 1940 to 1945, Indochina was occupied by the Japanese and was an important base for their war against the allies in the Pacific. The pro-Vichy colonial government of French Indochina was the only European administration retained under Japanese occupation in Southeast Asia during World War II. This study relates the character of Bạch Mã to the changing political environment in Indochina and suggests that hill stations represented more than a holiday retreat for the colonial elite.

The study examines how the material character of the hill station developed from its inception in 1932 until its abandonment by the French in 1945. Subsequent occupations combined with the challenging tropical montane environment have caused the ruin of most of the French villas. The colonial structures at Bạch Mã remain symbols of the colonial identities the French were trying to redefine as the country came under foreign military occupation, and the indigenous population continued to demand greater autonomy.

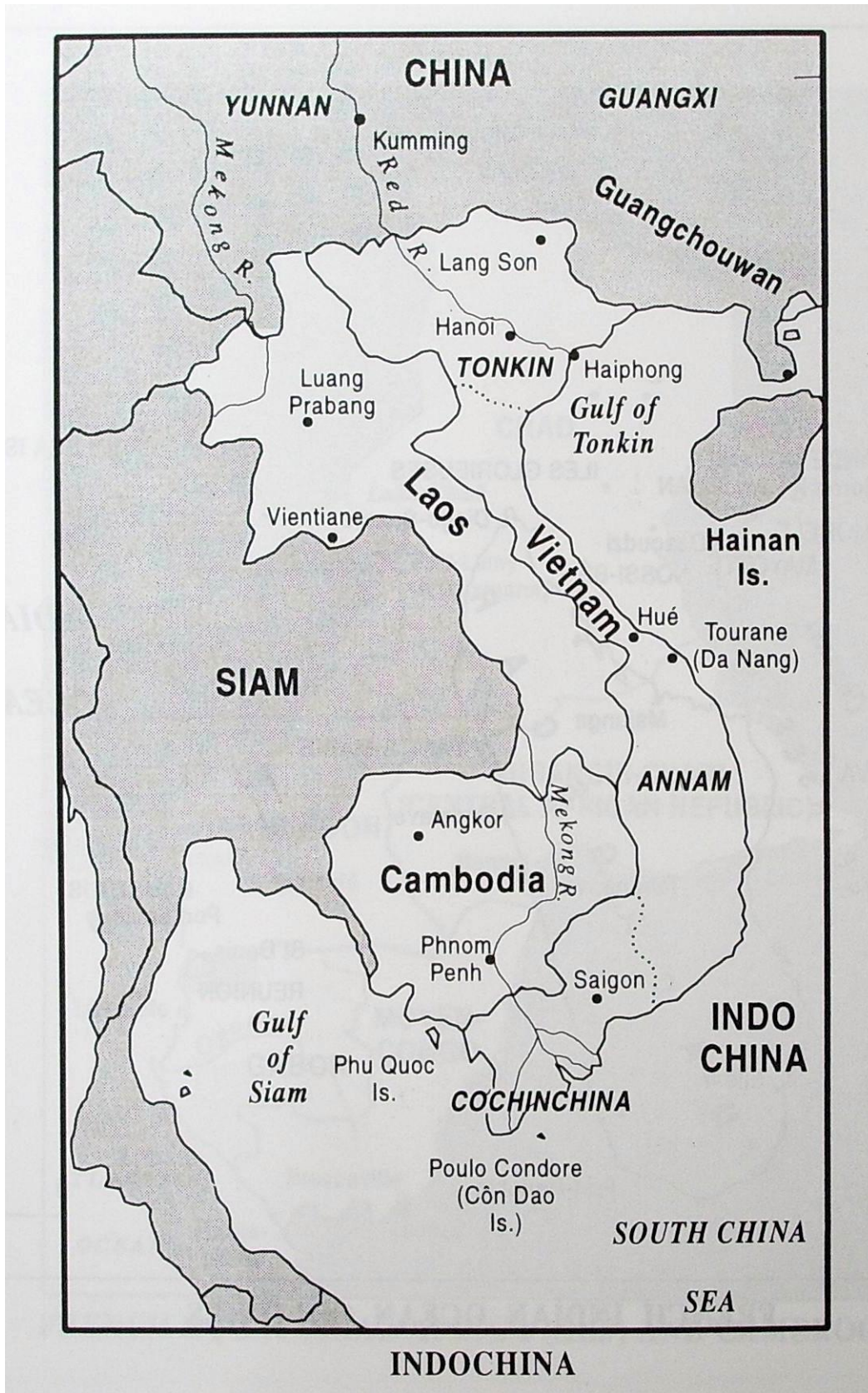
The short period of development at Bạch Mã provides an opportunity to examine issues of colonialism for which historical archaeology is well suited. This study examines colonial issues at Bạch Mã through the archaeological expression of social

status and intercultural social interaction, in particular through the concepts of collaboration and resistance between the French and various Vietnamese social groups. The study identified three Vietnamese social groups at Bạch Mã, and noted different approaches to intercultural interaction for each. Oral history evidence showed underlying resistance to the colonial occupation, at the same time that Bạch Mã provided the first opportunity for local communities to earn a cash-income.

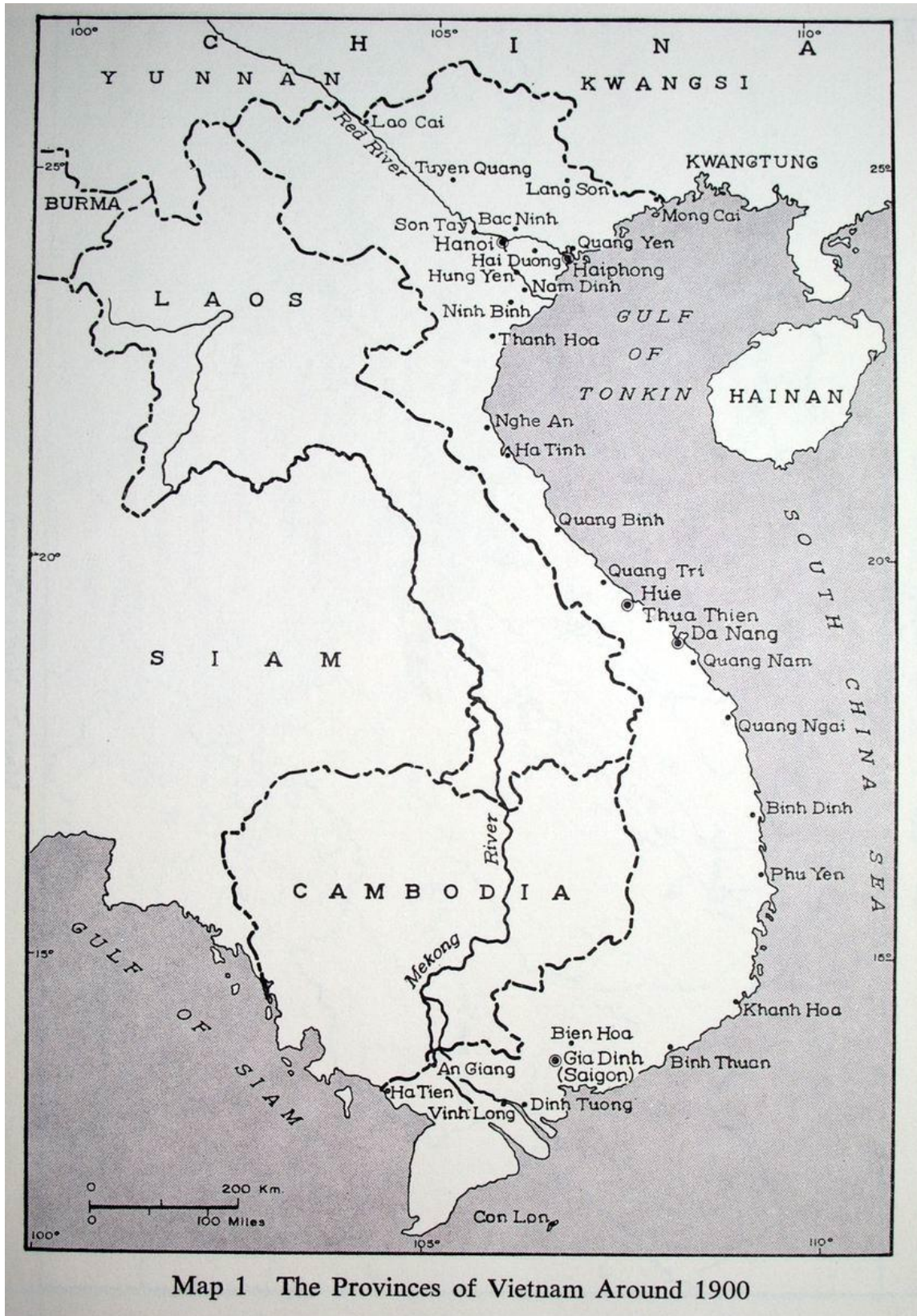
Archaeological evidence and historical postcolonial events associated with Bạch Mã are also examined to explore Vietnamese attitudes to colonialism and to the symbols of colonialism represented in Bạch Mã. The study suggests that resistance to the inequity and injustice inherent in the colonial venture in Indochina continued into the postcolonial period. By integrating the documentary, material and oral evidence, the study suggests that Bạch Mã not only reflects a number of aspects of French colonial policy, but highlights the Vietnamese people's roles, initially in maintaining the colonial venture, later in resisting it. Bạch Mã not only symbolises the grandeur of the French colonial vision, it also reflects the persistence of Vietnamese resistance.



**Figure 0- 1 The Hôtel Bany lower bulding at Bạch Mã in 2003**



Map 0-1 The five regions of Indochina, Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Cambodia and Laos, and Guangchouwan from Aldrich (1996)



Map 1 The Provinces of Vietnam Around 1900

Map 0-2 Indochina showing the general location of Vietnamese provinces, normally named after their principal city, during French colonial occupation, from Marr (1971).

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## **Preface and Acknowledgments**

Vietnam has been in my consciousness since the 1960s when I was lucky not to be picked in Australia's National Service lottery. By that time the Vietnamese people had been at war for twenty years. Like most people in Australia from my generation, Vietnam made a deep impression on me as a consequence of the Second Indochina War that showed the world what an extraordinary people are the Vietnamese. My first direct experience of the country was not until 2003. This study of Bạch Mã Hill Station grew out of a period I spent working in Bạch Mã National Park in 2003, in a teaching role organised through Australian Volunteers International. During my stay in Bạch Mã I became fascinated by the Vietnamese people, their culture and history. When I returned to Australia I applied to the University of New England, Armidale, and was offered a scholarship to undertake a PhD research project into Vietnamese archaeology, commencing late-2005. One of UNE's research priorities is in the field of Asian archaeology and I already had a background in Australian archaeology.

During my candidature I spent over a year in Vietnam during three fieldwork seasons, mostly based in Huế in Central Vietnam, but I was able to spend some months also in Hanoi and visited Hồ Chí Minh City as well. During that time I met so many people who have all had an influence on me and my understanding of the country and its culture. This research has opened a whole new world for me. Working in a foreign country, with limited language skills and understanding of local policies and practices, meant that I had to rely completely on the help and support of many Vietnamese people during the fieldwork. I cannot hope to include everyone who has helped me in undertaking my research in Vietnam between December 2005 and July 2007. However, a number of people were crucial to my research.

In Huế, firstly, my friend Mr Cao Hữu Tuệ was a constant support in so many ways. Well before I started my research, Mr Tuệ spent many hours introducing me to Vietnamese and, in particular, Huế culture. During my early days in Huế in 2006, discussing my proposal with local researchers and government officials, Mr Tuệ introduced me to key people who were instrumental in my research gaining official approval. He introduced me to Dr Trần Đức Anh Sơn, then at the Imperial Museum in Huế, who saw the potential for an archaeological study of a French colonial site.

Dr Son introduced and supported the proposal to the Thừa Thiên - Huế Peoples Committee which, with the support of Vice Chairman Mr Ngô Hòa, approved the research in July 2006. Mr Ngô Hòa designated Bạch Mã National Park and the Huế Monuments Conservation Centre as partners in the research and I wish to thank Mr Phan Thanh Hải of the latter for his support during the research. Also in Huế, Mr Nguyễn Hữu Thông, Director of the Vietnam Institute of Culture and Information Studies, Central Vietnam Sub-Institute (VICAS) in Huế, and his staff member Mr Trần Đình Hằng, took a particular interest in my research and were a great support and always happy to give their advice and opinions on my approach, as well as providing help in searching for documents. I'm sorry I could not always fulfil their ambition for my study's potential.

Special mention must also go to Mr Thân Trọng Ninh of Huế for his help and friendship. Mr Ninh gave me access to his private library, and I was able to copy many documents that were unavailable elsewhere. Also in Huế, Mr Nguyễn Thúc Tuấn introduced me to local Boy Scout leaders and to the Scouting movement in Vietnam, and provided copies of several documents. Mrs Nguyễn Thị Diệu Vân, also in Huế, was a constant support in many ways and undertook the difficult job of transcribing and translating oral history interviews as well as translating a number of other documents.

The staff of the Thừa Thiên - Huế Foreign Affairs office was most supportive in my application for approval to undertake the research programme. Their translation service, FORSCE, provided prompt translations of several Vietnamese documents. In particular, my thanks to Ms Vo Thi Huong Lan who translated Nguyễn Phúc Chu's (1691 – 1725) poem *Spring cloud on mountain pass* (p. 148) from the Vietnamese historical work, *Đại nam nhất thống chí*. Mr Tuan and his staff at the photocopy shop at 5-7 Hoang Hoa Tham, Huế always provided a first class and professional printing and photocopy service, often at short notice and at local rates; much appreciated.

At Bạch Mã National Park all the staff were friendly and helpful. Special thanks to Dr Huỳnh Văn Kéo (Director), and Mr Ngô Việt Nhơn (Vice Director) for their support and help. Mr Lê Quý Minh and Mr Tôn Thất Hoáng Vinh were crucial to the project. Minh undertook many of the interviews with local people and transcribed the

recordings in the local dialect. Minh's knowledge of Bạch Mã is great and he guided me to many of the old villas deep in the forest at the summit plateau. Vinh provided translation services and support in many meetings in Huế. At the summit plateau Mr Nguyễn Thanh Nhan and the staff at the guesthouse and restaurant were always friendly and helpful, and Nhan looked after my fieldwork equipment, and collected artefacts, between my trips to the summit. Among the forest guards, Mr Cái Ánh (head of the forest guards at the summit) organised support for me during my fieldwork and Mr Nguyễn Tất Vinh and Mr Trương Cẩm did the hard work clearing a trail through the canes and 'wait-a-while' palms into the old ruins and introduced me to the local flora and fauna.

At UNE in Australia in 2007 to 2009 during the preparation of the thesis, I have been lucky to have the advice of Dr Peter Grave of the UNE Department of Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology who originally convinced me that a PhD project was possible. Associate Professor Barbara Rugendyke of the UNE Department of Geography and Planning shared her experience doing fieldwork in Vietnam. Associate Professor Wendy Beck from UNE Archaeology helped me work out just what it was I was writing a thesis about, and Dr Andrew Piper contributed so much to the development of the thesis. Dr Deb Vale was a constant support throughout the whole process, and without her encouragement the thesis would never have been completed

I also want to thank my family for their support and confidence in me. This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Tom and Lily. I'm sorry they couldn't see it completed.

The following work could not have been completed without the help and support of those mentioned. I also wish to acknowledge and thank so many other Vietnamese people in particular, who must remain nameless, but who contributed in many ways. Any flaws and weaknesses with the study are entirely my own responsibility.

Ray Fife. 24 June 2009.

## Note on Language Use

Bach Ma Hill Station was developed and occupied by the French from 1932 to 1945. The colonial hill station is referred to here as OBM, the acronym for Old Bạch Mã after a paper by Thân Trọng Ninh, *To look for Old Bach Ma* (Thân Trọng Ninh, 2002). OBM is used to distinguish the colonial occupation from the later developments related to Bạch Mã Mountain, to the mountain itself and to the general area which may be referred to simply as Bạch Mã. Thân Trọng Ninh's paper is reproduced here in translation in Appendix B.

The thesis uses French terms in places as the most appropriate form of reference. The regions that made up French Indochina, for example, Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina, are referred to as *pays*, the French word for country, region, homeland. Similarly, *metropole*, the French for metropolis or home country, is often used to refer to France itself. French terms used in the text are shown in italics. Table 0-1 lists the main French terms used in the text with their English translations

**Table 0-1 French – English translation of terms used in the text**

French	English
<i>chaises à porteurs, chaise</i>	Literally - chair with porters, palanquin
<i>Colon</i>	Planter, colonist.
<i>Hexagone</i>	France – refers to the shape of the country
<i>Métropole</i>	Metropolis, Mother country, France
<i>Pays</i>	Country, fatherland, district,
<i>Station d'altitude</i>	Hill station
<i>Indigène</i>	An indigenous person

I use the term 'indigenous' in this thesis to refer to the majority Việt ethnic group of Central Vietnam. As far as I am aware, all my Vietnamese informants belonged to this ethnic group.

The study of Bạch Mã Mountain in Vietnam refers to both Vietnamese and French people and places, and to both Vietnamese and French documents, but is written in English. Table 0-2 provides the English, French and Vietnamese expression for several places and features that are discussed in the thesis.

**Table 0-2 Comparative place names referred to in the text, English, French, Vietnamese**

English	French	Vietnamese
Indochina Union of French Indochina	<i>Indochine,</i> <i>Union Française</i> <i>Indochinoise</i>	Việt Nam, Laos, Kampuchea
Northern Vietnam	Tonkin	Bắc Bộ
Central Vietnam	Annam	Trung Bộ
Southern Vietnam	Cochinchina	Nam Bộ
Hue	Huế	Huế
Danang	Tourane	Đà Nẵng
Hoi An, a town near Danang	Faifo, or Faifoo	Hôi An
Rhododendron Falls	<i>Grande Cascade</i>	Thác Đổ Quyên

The use of Vietnamese names and terms is more problematic. Because the focus of the study is on Vietnam and the Vietnamese, I have attempted to include the appropriate diacritics used in written Vietnamese to indicate the appropriate tone, and therefore meaning of names and words. This is not common practice in English texts discussing Vietnamese issues, so where the correct diacritics could not be determined, they are not shown. I have not used diacritics with the names of Vietnam, Hanoi and Saigon, because these names in particular have long been anglicised and their expression as Việt Nam, Hà Nội and Sài Gòn does not enhance the meaning. In the oral history section, in Chapter 6-6, I have used the Vietnamese terms of respect, Ông and Bà in preference to Mr and Mrs, in reference to several oral history participants, especially where their full name is not known. Table 0-3 lists the main abbreviations and acronyms used in the text.

**Table 0-3 Abbreviations and acronyms used in the text**

ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
BM	Bach Ma
BMNP	Bach Ma National Park
DMZ	Demilitarised Zone
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
G-G	Governor-General
GPS	Geographic Positioning System
ha	hectares
HCMC	Hồ Chí Minh City, formerly Saigon.
ICP	Indochinese Communist Party
IFP	Information for participants
KMT	Kuomintang
m, mm	Metres, millimetres
masl	Metres above sea level
NLF	National Liberation Front
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
OBM	Old Bach Ma
USA, & US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VNQDD	Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng Vietnam National Party
WWI, WWII	World War I (1914-18) and World War II (1939-45)