**The Vietnam Game**

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**Version 0.8.5**

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| **Change Log**3/29/2001Site goes up with version 0.5.1, which is a slight modification to the firing blind rules.3/30/2001Version 0.6, with my first stab at the [madness](http://web.archive.org/web/20101106200505/http%3A/wso.williams.edu/~msulliva/campaigns/vietnam/index.html#stress) rules.3/30/2001Version 0.6.1, added some preliminary examples of Violence hardening to above.4/2/2001Version 0.6.2, changed the Violence stress chart to be more lenient.4/3/2001Version 0.7, added character creation rules. (They're probably broken).6/20/2001Version 0.7.1, minor typographic corrections and explicitely defined Cool to include charisma.7/30/2001Version 0.7.5, redefined the Supernatural stress meter to be "Weirdness," coverring things which aren't explicitely supernatural, but are still strange.9/11/2001Version 0.7.6, added a character sheet.9/12/2001Version 0.8, combined Reflexes and Physique into one attribute: Body. Modified character creation to make low-accuracy characters more viable. Due to these changes, had to remove the character sheet.9/17/2001Version 0.8.5, added injury rules. Modified stress rules to make losing cool somewhat less likely. Changed firing blind rules to make it more possible to spot hidden opponents. Added general preamble to character creation section. A few other minor corrections. |

**Basic Mechanics**

Attributes are rated from -4 to +4, in increments of 2, like so:

-4, -2, 0, +2, +4

Where 0 is human average.

Skills are -2, 0, +2, +4, +6, +8, etc, where -2 is untrained.

The standard check is rolling 2d10 and adding attribute and skill to get a number that's hopefully 11 or higher:

11 - 15: Success

16 - 19 : Good success

20 +: Great success

A natural roll of 2 is a critical failure, and a natural 20 is a critical success.

**Character Creation**

**General Notes**

*TVG* is focussed on playing U.S. soldiers immersed in the heart of the Vietnamese infantry struggle, threatened by Viet Cong soldiers, an unfamiliar and often hostile environment, the psychological pressure of war, and supernatural horrors hunting them. The default assumption is that you will begin play as a squad of new recruits, young men just out of boot camp. As this is the default assumption, you will find that the character creation system is geared towards creating characters who are not well-suited to the tasks they will be asked to perform. They have a minimum of training and competence. This system is not appropriate for creating highly-trained special ops troops, or even six to eightteen month combat veterans. If your gaming group wants to begin play with more capable, experienced characters, we suggest giving out significantly more "military" skills (possibly more than twice as many as are currently offered), significantly more violence hardening (+4 or +6 hardening is not inappropriate for experienced veterans), and possibly some pain hardening or higher attribute scores.

**Attributes**

There are five attributes in The Vietnam Game. You'll notice a bias towards attributes which have to do with combat. It is, after all, a game set in a war, and a particularly nasty and personal war at that.

**Accuracy**

Accuracy encompasses a character's innate dexterity, his ability to perform delicate operations, or, yes, line up an accurate shot. A character with a high accuracy would be good at either throwing or catching a ball, rarely stumbles, and is in generally good control of his movements. A character with a low accuracy is a klutz.

**Perception**

Perception is a character's all-round sensitivity to his enviroment. It includes being able to read someone else's face to see if they're lying and to spot a Viet Cong ambush. Perception is not specifically related to the keenness of one's senses so much as how good one is at processing the information of one's senses. A character with a high perception is rarely surprised by what's around him. A character with a low perception is generally a bit out of it.

**Cool**

Cool rates a character's mental stability and collectedness. It includes being able to cope with horrible circumstances and remain calm in the face of adversity. Because people respond well to calm, collected folks, Cool also often relates to how well-regarded a character is. A character with a high cool has nerves of steel in the face of danger. A character with a low cool tends to magnify the danger of any situation.

**Body**

Body measures a character's raw physical prowess, including things like strength, endurance, and reaction time, as well as natural resiliance and ability to recover from wounds. A character with a high body is hale, hearty, strong, and fast both on his feet and with his hands. A character with a low body is sickly, weak, anemic, or has a bad reaction time.

**Intellect**

Intellect is a character's general mental faculties. It encompasses ability to absorb new information, decipher complex situations, remember obscure facts, and generally behave rationally. Intellect does *not* attempt to rate "intelligence" per se; players will have to make their own decisions for characters and come up with their own ideas. Rather, intellect is much of what traditionally attends intelligence. A high intellect character will do well in school and give off the impression of being a smart person, even if he's unable to come up with any particularly brilliant ideas. A low intellect character will find that, even if he's very smart, he has difficulty learning what he needs to know and impress others with his ideas.

Attributes are, as has been previously stated, rated from -4 to +4 in increments of 2. Unlike many roleplaying games, the Vietnam Game is not attempting to simulate epic heroes or once-in-a-generation figures. Rather, the PC's are assumed to be fairly ordinary boys in a fucked up situation. Hence, the extremal values (+4 and -4) should not be considered the peak or nadir of the human condition. Rather, they're the top and bottom 10% or so. A person with a body of -4 is weak, not bedridden. A person with a body of +4 is very strong, but probably not olympic caliber.

GM's wishing a more epic-scale game may wish to add the very rare +6/-6 level to attributes. The designers recomend that such attributes remain very rare and not allow them to proliferate across everyone's useful stats.

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| Example: Jeff is making a character. He sees his character as a sniper type, calm and accurate under fire. He puts two +2's in his Accuracy trait, giving himself a +4, and another +2 in his Perception trait (very useful for a sniper!). He decides that he wants another +2 for his Cool, to represent his character's collected worldview, so he must distribute two -2's. He puts one each in Body (his character is small and light-framed) and Intellect (he's the stereotypical midwestern boy, not very well educated).Jeff now decides to take some minor traits. As he sees it, his character is cool and collected, but doesn't put forth the good impression that high Cool people normally do (a negative minor trait connected with Cool). Further, while his eyesight is good, he has no better hearing than average (a negative minor trait pertaining to Perception). On the up-side, though he's not well educated and generally doesn't consider himself brilliant, he does have a good memory for little facts (a positive minor trait having to do with Intellect). His character sheet now looks like this:Accuracy: +4Perception: +2 (only +0 in hearing)Cool: +2 (only +0 in charisma)Body: -2Intellect: -2 (+2 in memory) |

**Generating Attributes**

The United States never got so desperate in Vietnam as to throw thoroughly unprepared soldiers on the field. A standard combat-duty soldier will be a bit above average in the areas measured above. In general, players will have three +2's and one -2 to distribute amongst their characters' attributes. They can take an additional +2 at the cost of an additional -2. All attributes start off at zero. +2's can accumulate on +2's, and -2's on -2's (creating +4's or -4's), but it is not possible to cancel a -2 with a +2.

**Minor Traits (Optional)**

If the players wish to further differentiate their characters, and the GM agrees, each character can have one pair of "minor traits." The attributes as written are broad and cover a lot of ground. Naturally, not everyone who's big and brawny is going to be fleet of foot as well, not everyone who's an accurate shot is going to be sure-footed, etc. A player who wishes to subdivide an attribute can increase one "sub-area" of the attribute any amount, in +2 increments, (to a maximum of +4), as long as he reduces another subrealm of the same or a different attribute by the same total amount (to a minimum of -4). It is also possible to have, for example, two negative minor traits and one positive, so long as they total to zero.

In general, the GM should probably avoid allowing minor traits for things like "firing a gun" with Accuracy or "getting initiative" with Reflexes. Minor traits are not an invitation to min-max a character — rather, they're mechanical aids to roleplaying. Players should exercise restraint in assigning minor traits. Only use them if there's a real and major disrepency between how you visualize the character and how the stats turn out.

**Skills**

The Vietnam Game does not attempt to put forward an exhaustive skill list that covers anything a character might want to have specialized knowledge of. Rather, we will cover some basic ground, and players (with the GM's collaboration) are invited to make up their own skills as well.

In boot camp, all U.S. military personnel learn certain basic skills. Infantrymen invariably get a basic introduction to the rifle (bringing them from untrained (-2) to minimally conservant (0)), and then further training as necessary to bring their total accuracy + rifle skill to +2 or higher. In addition, characters have a total of four additional +2's to apply to any skill that they might reasonably have learned in boot-camp. Military personnel who are not pure infantry (like helicopter pilots or medics) get basic training in rifle (to 0), and in their field (like Pilot: Helicopter or Medicine), as well as an additional four +2's, but do not get additional training in Rifle if their total Rifle + Accuracy is under +2.

Characters may also allocate 4 +2's to skills that do not have a military application (after all, nobody was raised a soldier in this time period). The non-military skills are modified by the PC's intellect rating — for example, a character with a -2 Intellect will have only 3 +2's for non-military skills. Remember that skills start at -2, so putting a single +2 into a skill will raise it to +0.

Skills often seem like they're destined to be used with one particular attribute: for example, Rifle will most often be used with Accuracy. However, don't forget other applications of the skill. For example, the Intellect attribute plus the Rifle skill might be used to effect a field repair on a malfunctioning gun.

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| Example: Jeff's assigning skills for the character that he created above. First, he takes basic training in rifle skill, bringing him to 0. Since his Accuracy is +4, that's all the standard training he gets. However, since rifle skill will be important to a sniper, he allocates another +2 to the skill from his four military bonuses to it. He allocates the other three +2's from his military background to Infiltration, the better to find a good sniping site. Because Jeff's character's intellect is only -2, he has only 3 +2's for non-military skills. Jeff decides that he's a farmboy, and assigns 2 +2's to "Farming," a skill which probably won't come up a lot in Vietnam, but supports his character's background, and the final +2 to Drive Car, as just a general kind of thing. Jeff adds this to his character sheet:Rifle: +2Infiltrate: +4Farming: +2Drive Car: +0 |

Skills can potentially go much higher than attributes. In general, a +4 skill is about the minimum that you need before you'll get any kind of real respect from others who practice that skill: below that, you're "dabbling."

Here are some of the most commmon skills:

* Rifle (includes shotguns, if it comes up)
* Pistol
* Grenade
* Hide/Sneak/Infiltrate
* Spot Camoflage
* Speak Vietnamese
* Brownnose to Officers
* Threaten
* Fly Copter
* Tactics

**Hardening**

Almost everyone picks up one level of Violence hardening (+2) in boot camp. Unless you have a strong reason not to want that, note it down on your character sheet.

**Socialization**

At this point, the mechanical parts of your character are all done. However, you should spend some time thinking about how your character's going to work in the game. The other PC's will probably be your squad-mates. You'll want to talk to them, figure out how your characters have interacted in the past. Think about what your character's opinion on the Vietnamese is, what he thinks of the war effort as a whole, and what his goals are, be they in the war or after it.

It's tempting, especially in a game like this, which features combat as a heavy aspect of the game, and in which PC death is particularly possible, to consider each character an interchangeable grouping of combat abilities. However, not all of the game will be combat. You'll have a lot easier time with much of the game if you give some thought to your character.

**Combat**

**Initiative**

We use Body unaided to determine initiative — this means that there's a lot of simultaneous action, given the low level of granularity in the attribute system, which seems appropriate for the messy, chaotic warfare of the time.

**Attacking**

A basic attack (when your opponent's in sight and all that) is a standard resolution roll, based on Accuracy and the skill for your weapon.

Defender's Body level counts against you (so, if they've got a +4 Body, you take a -4 to hit)

But only if they can see you aiming at them.

If you walked this round, -2

Doesn't apply to melee combat.

If you ran this round, -4

Doesn't apply to melee combat.

If they walked this round, -2

Doesn't apply to melee combat.

If they ran this round, -4

Doesn't apply to melee combat.

If they're partially obscured (this happens in jungle), -2

If they're heavily obscured, -4

If they've got 25-50% hard cover, -4

If they've got 50%-90% hard cover, -6

If you're shooting at something like just a head or hand, -10

If you're firing a 3 round burst, -2, but, if you hit, roll 1d3 times on damage

If you're firing a full burst (50% of magazine), -4, but, if you hit, roll 1d6 times on damage

If they're within 10 feet but not in melee, add +2 if you're using a pistol (no bonus for rifles)

For every full round you spend aiming, take a +2 to a max of +6

If you're aiming and you have a telescopic sight, take a +2

Add in your own accuracy and gun skill, and roll.

**Damage**

If you hit, roll damage as a normal resolution task, with these modifiers:

-4 if you're attacking with your hands

-2 if you're attacking with a knife or club

0 if you're shooting a pistol

+2 if you're shooting a rifle

+4 if you're throwing a grenade, or using a flamethrower

+2 if you rolled a "good success" to hit

+4 if you rolled a "great success" to hit

-2 if they're wearing a bulletproof vest or the like

Add or subtract your Body score if you're using a muscle-based weapon.

If you roll a "failure" on damage, then you just grazed 'em. They make a pain stress test at +2 (see the [Stress](http://web.archive.org/web/20101106200505/http%3A/wso.williams.edu/~msulliva/campaigns/vietnam/index.html#stress) rules).

If you roll a "success" on damage, then you hit 'em. They have to make a pain stress test at -2 (see the [Stress](http://web.archive.org/web/20101106200505/http%3A/wso.williams.edu/~msulliva/campaigns/vietnam/index.html#stress) rules).

If you roll a "good success" on damage, then they make their pain stress test at -4 (see the [Stress](http://web.archive.org/web/20101106200505/http%3A/wso.williams.edu/~msulliva/campaigns/vietnam/index.html#stress) rules).

If you roll a "great success" on damage, then they're out of action immediately, and could very easily die.

**Pain, Medicine, and Healing**

Injury and pain are shockingly unrelated. Injuries which, in the throes of battle, seem unimportant can actually be life-threatening. Injuries which are incapacitatingly painful may prove to be, on sober reflection, superficial.

After combat is over, for every actual wound (that is, a "success" or "good success" that somone rolled against you in combat) that you took, roll a Body check to see how much you're actually injured.

If you roll a **failure**, you're in serious trouble. You need competent medical attention to survive, and you'll be a long time healing. Any activity more strenuous than walking provokes a pain check at -4.

If you roll a **success**, then you've got a noticeable, but not life-threatening, wound. Any stressfull activity like climbing trees, belly-crawling, or engaging in hand-to-hand combat provokes a pain check at -2.

If you roll a **good success**, then you've got a minor wound. Any stressfull activity like climbing trees, belly-crawling, or engaging in hand-to-hand combat provokes a pain check.

If you roll a **great success**, then the wound is pretty negligable. Once it's bound up, you can ignore it.

If you have multiple wounds, use only the highest applicable penalty to any pain roll. However, each wound requires a different medicine roll to treat.

If a character is constantly stressing his wounds, the GM should assign a new body roll to see if he's done himself further injury.

Having someone around who knows how to treat wounds is critical after a combat situation. Anyone who makes an intellect + medicine roll can help alleviate the conditions noted above.

If the victim is quickly dying (that is, they were the victims of a great success on a damage roll), then a failure on a medicine roll indicates that the victim is dead. A simple success stabilizes them for a few minutes, long enough to roll again. A good success stabilizes them for several hours, long enough to medevac them. A great success stabilizes them permenantly, and they can begin healing.

If the victim is slowly dying (that is, they rolled a failure on a body roll against a wound), a failure on the medicine roll indicates that they're still dying; they have a few hours, long enough to medevac. A success indicates that they are no longer dying, but it will be a month before they are fully healed. A good success indicates that it will be three weeks before they are fully healed. A great success indicates that it will be two weeks before they are healed.

If the victim is injured (that is, they rolled a success or a good success on a body roll against a wound), a failure on the medicine roll indicates that they will take two weeks to heal. A success indicates one week. A good success indicates three days. A great success means that the wound no longer troubles them.

Appropriate medication can cancel all pain-based impairment. However, heavy or extended use of medication can quickly create dependencies, particularly with the drugs available to medics in the early 1970's. A character who is dependent on morphine or other drugs receives an impairment whenever he has not recently used the drug, and may suffer Cool loss.

**Combat Complications**

Much of the combat in a Vietnam setting is going to be in dense jungle, where you may not even be able to see your opponents.

**Enviroment**

We'll define the enviroment as:

Open

Cluttered

Impenetrable

Open enviroments would include things like plains or city streets or the like, where you might be able to find cover, but in general, lines of sight are largely clear.

Cluttered is your standard jungle. There's a lot of overgrowth and the like, but you can still see for a good ways in certain directions.

Impenetrable enviroments mean that there is no unobstructed line of sight for more than a few meters. The densest jungle would count.

In an open enviroment, you have to specifically find a hiding spot (like "behind that car") if you want to hide.

In a cluttered enviroment, you can always find a hiding spot that shields you from a 180 degree arc with one action. You have to get down on your knee or prone, and you can't be dancing around, to maintain your cover. That means your Body doesn't help you in avoiding gunfire (not that it probably will anyhow -- see below).

In an impenetrable enviroment, unless you're at less than 10 feet from your opponent (or ally!), you're considered hidden.

**Hidden Opponents**

If you're trying to find someone who's hiding, you have two options: You can perform the search as a "free action," (which is to say, you glance around, but still act normally that turn), or as a normal action (which is to say, you really look and spend the round on it).

You are using a normal action to search the area: +2 per consecutive round spent looking around.

Your opponent is moving in such a way that they retain cover: +2

Your opponent is firing at you: +2

You saw your opponent enter cover: +2

The terrain is impenetrable: -2

You're in an arc that they don't expect: +4

You're less than 20 feet from one another: +2

A friend points out their position: +2

If you're less than 10 feet from one another, you can only remain undetected by remaining absolutely motionless.

If you roll a failure, you have no idea where they are. You can spray the area, but your odds of hitting are slim to none.

If you roll a success, you have a general idea of where they might be. It's still something of a crapshot as to where they are, but you've got some kind of idea.

If you roll a good success, you have a very good idea of where they are -- but you still can't see them. Your odds of hitting are decent if you fire a good burst.

If you roll a great success, you can actually see your opponent, and take an aimed shot with the usual modifiers as described in the last thread -- probably at -2 or -4 for the cover, but your accuracy comes into play.

**Firing Blind**

So, if you don't roll a great success, and hence actually see your opponent, you have no chance of hitting unless you fire a burst and spray the area. You don't roll anything, and your Accuracy and gun skill don't enter into it. Instead, the GM makes a roll to see if you hit anything, modified as follows:

You rolled a failure on your Perception test: -8

You rolled a success on your Perception test: -4

You rolled a good success on your Perception test: -2

There are two or more people very near each other: +2 (you only hit one, chosen randomly)

You fired a long burst (half your magazine or more): +2

Your opponent is prone or has some kind of hard cover: -2

If you roll a failure, you miss entirely.

If you roll a success, you didn't hit, but they must make a cool test at +2 or duck and cover for the turn.

If you roll a good success, then you hit and they must make a pain stress test at -2.

If you roll a great success, then they are hit and taken out of action.

**Stressful Situations**

Vietnam is filled with stressful situations, and Vietnam populated by supernatural badness even moreso. Hence, stress/madness rules, mostly inspired by Unknown Armies.

**Stresses**

You can be stressed along several different axes, and grow resistant to stress on the same. Just because you're used to being shot at doesn't mean that you're used to seeing a ten foot tall demon from otherworldly dimensions tear your friend apart.

There are, currently, three different axes on which stresses can lie: Violence, Pain, and Weirdness. Stresses are rated by how much of a bonus or penalty you get to your stress check (see below) when you're exposed to them. Some examples:

**Violence**

+4: Getting involved in a brawl or other non-lethal fight.

+2: Being attacked with a lethal weapon.

0: Being attacked from ambush.

-2: Witnessing an act of extreme violence (graphic death or something) up close.

-4: Witnessing an sustained brutality (like a massacre).

-6: Witnessing something too horrible to comprehend (extended torture or the like)

**Pain**

+2: You're grazed -- an attack more painful than debilitating.

0: Something that's seriously painful, but still not really damaging.

-2: You're hit and will require medical attention.

-4: You're hit and will require serious medical attention, quickly.

-6: Sustained serious damage, like being tied up and used as a punching bag.

-8: Extensive torture.

**Weirdness**
This is both straight out supernatural experiences (seeing Creatures That Shouldn't Be) and also general conspiracy/paranoia stuff or just aberrant behaviour. You might make a Weirdness test if all of the jungle sounds stopped abruptly for fifteen minutes, and then started again, for example. I don't know enough of the cosmology of the game to offer a chart here, yet.

**The Stress Check**

When you're stressed in some way, you make a cool check to keep functioning normally. It's *hard* to function normally in the face of these kinds of stresses, and this roll is correspondingly difficult to make.

It's a standard cool check, modified by the severity of the stress, and, potentially, by any hardening that you have (see below). When you make the test:

If you **fail**, you've been seriously hurt by the situation. You fall into animal instincts. For a pain test, you go into shock and can do pretty much nothing until you get medical attention. For a violence test, your fight-or-flight reflex is triggered, and you can choose to go berserk and attack without thought of your own safety, or cower in the worst cover until the fighting's over. For supernatural, you just totally wig out, probably developing temporary neuroses for the time being.

If you get a **simple success**, then you're more or less rational, but severely shaken. You take -2 to all voluntary actions until you calm down. You also are momenatrily gripped by your animal instincts and do nothing but cower under cover for one round.

If you get a **good success**, then you're momentarily shaken up, but otherwise okay. You do nothing but cower under cover for a round, but after that you're okay.

If you get a **great success**, then you're totally unfazed by the stress.

Whenever a situation noticeably changes — for example, if combat worsens from "you're being shot at," to "they just got Fred!" — you make a new Cool test, and the results supercede the last one. Yes, that means that even if things get worse, you can be less affected by it. Basically, some people just act in really impressive, heroic ways when the situation's at its worst.

**Hardening**

If you're overexposed to a stress, then you become hardened to it. This is your mind's natural defense mechanism, and, to a large extent, it's a good thing. It helps you behave normally in stressful situations. However, it tends to desocialize you to the normal world.

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| **Battle Hardened**Soldiers tend to pick up Violence hardening in short order. Since this game is designed around the idea that the PC's will be U.S. soldiers, here's an idea of how that works:+2 HardeningUsually obtained in boot camp+4 HardeningVeteran of a few combats+6 HardeningA year or two in 'Nam.+8 HardeningBaby-killing black ops stuff |

The GM assigns hardened marks when he feels it appropriate. Each hardening mark gives you a +2 to stress rolls in a particular meter. However, under some circumstances, they'll give you equivalent penalties to other actions.

People who are hardened to pain become unempathetic to the pain of others, be it emotional or physical. They find it hard to lend a sympathetic ear to those who've been hurt less than they, themselves, have.

Those who are hardened to violence lose the ability to understand when it is and isn't appropriate. They tend to respond to little things in a violent way, or to escalate from threats to violence to deadly violence with little provocation.

Those who are hardened to weirdness tend to question everything. They become conspiracy theorists, convinced that behind every seemingly placid surface roil strange, awful things. They find it difficult to trust others.

**Losing Your Cool**

The other extreme from hardening is losing your cool. Whenever you out-and-out fail a stress test, roll another test. If you fail that one as well, you get a "lose your cool" mark. When you've accumulated four "lose your cool" marks, then your Cool attribute goes down one step: For example, from +2 to 0.

If your Cool attribute goes below -4, you're a neurotic wreck, totally incapable of facing even the day-to-day stresses of the real world. The character should probably be retired at that point.

**Low Cool, high Hardening**

It can happen that some people have lost a lot of cool, but are highly hardened to certain stimuli. This is very, very bad. In general, because of their low cool, the person is incapable of dealing with the real world, but, unlike someone who's simply lost their cool normally, they're still capable of exposing themselves to stressful situations without going pretty much catatonic. All the negative effects of hardening are more and more pronounced with low cool.

If you're highly hardened to violence and have a very low cool, you'll probably end up killing someone in the very near future. If you're highly hardened to pain and have a very low cool, you're probably a very extreme masochist. If you're hardened to weirdness and have a low cool, you may end up a cultist.

In the movie *Conspiracy Theory*, Mel Gibson's character is the classic example of a low cool, high hardening character. But don't expect things to go as well for you as they did for him.