



# The Tunnels of Cu Chi: A Harrowing Account of America's Tunnel Rats in the Underground Battlefields of Vietnam

*Tom Mangold*

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At the height of the Vietnam conflict, a complex system of secret underground tunnels sprawled from Cu Chi Province to the edge of Saigon. In these burrows, the Viet Cong cached their weapons, tended their wounded, and prepared to strike. They had only one enemy: U.S. soldiers small and wiry enough to maneuver through the guerrillas' narrow domain.

The brave souls who descended into these hellholes were known as "tunnel rats." Armed with only pistols and K-bar knives, these men inched their way through the steamy darkness where any number of horrors could be awaiting them—bullets, booby traps, a tossed grenade. Using firsthand accounts from men and women on both sides who fought and killed in these underground battles, authors Tom Mangold and John Penycate provide a gripping inside look at this fearsome combat. *The Tunnels of Cu Chi* is a war classic of unbearable tension and unforgettable heroes.

## **The Tunnels of Cu Chi: A Harrowing Account of America's Tunnel Rats in the Underground Battlefields of Vietnam Details**

Date : Published May 8th 2013 by Presidio Press (first published 1985)

ISBN :

Author : Tom Mangold

Format : Kindle Edition 320 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, War, Military Fiction, Military, Military History, Cultural, Asia



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## **From Reader Review The Tunnels of Cu Chi: A Harrowing Account of America's Tunnel Rats in the Underground Battlefields of Vietnam for online ebook**

### **George says**

There are many, many bad books about the war in Viet-Nam. This is one of the GOOD books about the war in Viet-Nam. If you want to learn a bit about the war on the ground, buy this book.

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### **Omnipotent Dystopian Now says**

This is a fascinating read about the underground tunnels that kept Americans from defeating the Vietnamese. What's interesting about this book is that it examines the topic from a dual point of view, sharing experiences from both Vietnamese and American veterans, providing the reader with a more objective point of view than is commonly found in military history texts. I highly recommend this well-researched book.

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### **Lucynell says**

For whatever reason one of the most important aspects of the whole Vietnam conflict (if not the most important, as this book quietly implies), the tunnel wars, seem neglected by popular culture. Maybe because it is too harrowing.

British journalists Tom Mangold and John Penycate refuse to take sides, which is always, always, a blessing. They lay out their interviewees' accounts and you can decide for motives.

The tunnel system, and the people who lived, fought, killed and died in them, Vietnamese and Americans alike, are the central theme. Small, mean, and the closest you can get to fearlessness they were some of the toughest specialized units in the history of war. Any war.

The book strays away from the tunnels to discuss politics, geography, social structure, weaponry, and general warfare in an informative way that again, refuses to take sides.

There a few small 'glitches' here and there but they are lost under the weight of the stories of some of the most incredible, and downright scary people you can meet in a book. If you have even the slightest interest in military journalism this I consider essential.

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### **Endah setiolaksono says**

i just can say this war just a mistake. Viet cong just defence her country from US army. What Us army done in vietnam war so ... ughh. If u come to vietnam go to War museum. U will see what US army done to this people who want defance they beloved country.

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### **Zach says**

The book provides an interesting and highly detailed description of the development of the tunnel complexes, how they were used by the VC, and US efforts to counter them. The book is effective in that it remains relatively neutral describing the ingenuity of the VC (use of animals as traps/warning; concerts in the tunnels; jury rigging equipment (such as tubes from mines for surgical operations)) but also the bravery of the US Tunnel Rats. The author makes it clear that much of the US efforts were unsuccessful, but that does not diminish the efforts of the US soldiers who fought in the tunnels.

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### **Christopher Rex says**

Incredible. If you truly want to understand the "American War" (aka: Vietnam War) and why things went so disastrously wrong for The World's Most Powerful Military, then this book is an essential. What the Vietnamese were able to accomplish "one basketful of dirt at a time" is beyond all comprehension. This book provides an incredible insight into the elaborate tunnel-system of over 250km that was built by the VC during the "French War" and continued during the "American War."

The author's base their book on a multitude of interviews w/ Vietnamese, Americans and others who built, lived-in and experienced the tunnels first-hand. As such, the book is very evenly-balanced and objective in its presentation. Well worth any historians (or casual reader's) time, if they wish to gain a greater understanding.

To put it simply, this book and the tunnels will blow your mind. The dedication, ingenuity, creativity and simple willpower of the Vietnamese is beyond compare - this book (and the tunnels) demonstrates that better than anything.

This book, coupled with a visit to the Cu Chi Tunnels has marked one of the highlights of my life as a historian. I knew of the tunnels, but one cannot really appreciate them unless you get inside the head and lives of those who were there - on both sides of the conflict. If you can't get to Cu Chi yourself, this book will take you there better than anything I've ever come across. If you can get to Cu Chi, read this as a fascinating supplement.

Highly recommended. Also recommended - "Patriots: The Vietnam War Examined on All Sides" (amazing).

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### **Jarrell Fisher says**

A fantastic book, balanced and fair. The author while obviously writing from the perspective of an American doesn't have a bias against the Vietnamese, but neither is he especially critical of the American war effort, instead he focuses on the tunnels. The book is neatly divided into various chapters that explore different facets of the tunnels. You get chapters on women in the tunnels, apparently the Vietnamese have been very progressive and allowed women to own property since ancient times, so you even had female units among the Vietnamese rebels. You also get a good account of the American military units tasked with clearing out the tunnels. The book spans more or less a large part of the Vietnam war, up until that is the tunnels no longer played a major role in the war. It is amazing that the American military never fully came to grips with the tunnels, however part of the explanation lies obviously in a misconception about the war itself, and a

misunderstanding of the enemy.

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### **Theo Chen says**

Fascinating and an interesting in-depth look at the ingenious tunnels used by the Communist guerillas in Vietnam. A fine attention to detail and the book manages to convey the cramped and terrible conditions that the guerilla's had to endure without making it too grim. The tactics used by the guerilla's were very clever and fascinating to discover.

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### **Clare says**

Who would have foreseen that over a million GIs would serve in Vietnam, and that the war would drag on for over ten years? How did a 'backward' nation outface the world's greatest superpower? Largely in part to the battle in the tunnels of Cu Chi between Viet Cong guerrillas and American 'Tunnel Rats.'

This area covered 200 miles of underground tunnel complexes of as many as four separate levels.

'In one month, throughout South Vietnam, the Americans fired about a trillion bullets, 10 million mortar rounds, and 4.8 million rockets. And this was just the beginning of the war.' Americans relied heavily on their overwhelming superiority in weapons technology. Most of the GIs had only a sketchy idea of what they were fighting for. Australia's military involvement was initially supported because of the concern of spreading Communism.

The English writers have talked to the soldiers on both sides and it makes for a fascinating read. For example, I didn't know about the psychological operations. American loudspeakers would broadcast children's voices, crying out in Vietnamese.

Most of the Viet Cong's Tet operations were failures. But it was at that moment at which American casualties surpassed those in the Korean War. Public and political opinion in America never recovered. Vietnam had spent 30 years in war for independence and although the Viet Cong could honestly claim the victory, it was North Vietnam that took the glory, and the power.

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### **Art says**

Why We didn't win in Vietnam, is what I would have titled this book.

This book gives account of how the 25th Infantry Division set up shop right on top of the tunnels of their enemy.

The Lessons Learned were not learned and countless lives were hurt and destroyed because of American Pride and ignorance.

I was almost lynched and considered to be a traitor of my outspokenness of what I learned from this story. Very good reading and not a dull moment.

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### **Susan says**

I found this gem of a book in a half price book store and was amazed at how ingenious the Viet Cong were during the war effort. The author wrote a fair and balanced perspective of the Vietnam war effort. I was amazed of how the tunnel system worked to the advantage for the Viet Cong against the Special Forces who became known as Tunnel Rats. The so called Tunnel Rats had to explore, destroy, and hopefully not find the enemy and lose their life. The Tunnels were booby trapped with punji sticks, venomous snakes and other means to keep the Americans out of their efficient and effective tunnel system.

The tunnel system for the Viet Cong provided them to create hospitals for the wounded, communication stations, places for strategic plans to ambush the Americans in the jungle. The Americans never grasped the enormity of the tunnels which allowed the Viet Cong to stay elusive and disappear in a second without detection. It kept American forces baffled as to why they could never find the Viet Cong. It amounted to great losses in the jungles of Vietnam for the American soldiers.

But despite the risk of being killed of going into the tunnels, the Americans continued to risk their lives to win the war against of the sneakiest and ingenious enemies they have ever encountered.

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### **Evan says**

As military journalism goes, this is a superlative example. It details the struggle for a specific patch of real estate near Saigon during the Vietnam War. There's no point in trying to summarize any of this book; the stories are incredibly grim, heartbreakingly, and alternately uplifting (though those are few and far between). With the benefit of hindsight, the authors dissect the American campaign on the ground and devote equal or greater weight to the perspectives of the Viet Cong guerrillas, whose incredible fighting kept the war at a standstill. Chock with rich biographies and detailed (but not overly complex) technical facts, the book gives a chillingly clear picture of what life was like in the Iron Triangle. A fitting tribute to the victims of the Vietnam War on all sides.

Addendum: If you read the reviews on Amazon, you'd think that the authors worked for Charlie. I didn't get this impression at all. Sun Tzu said the army with a moral hold on its reason for fighting is invincible. By all accounts (the Tunnel Rats being the exception) the American strategy in Vietnam was confused, unfocused, and weighted in abstracts (ie. protecting the "people" from an -ism). The fact that the Vietnam war was nearly tactically won is attributable to incredible technical superiority and grotesque attrition on the VC side. Americans couldn't just defect and walk home.

Bottom line: war is an affront to humanity all the way around. Both sides committed demonically violent acts against each other - by their own admission in this book. Depending on what country you live in, parts of the book will be stomach turning, as you read accounts of the gruesome deaths of your countrymen. The unspoken questions are: what did these people die for, and was it all worth it in the end?

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### **Michael Burnam-Fink says**

Do you think you're hard? Do you think you're some sort of Tier Zero Modern Warfare Elite Ops Deniable Badass? Do you even think you know about such people? Until you've read this book, you don't know shit.

Cu Chi was a district just 25 miles from Saigon. Starting from the French Indochina War, local guerrillas carved tunnels out of the strong laterite clay that made up the district. By 1968, the Iron Triangle had over 200 miles of tunnels, with three and four level base camps including barracks, hospitals, and weapons shops. This book covers the Vietnamese men and women who lived and fought in the tunnels, and the American soldiers tasked with going in and smoking them out, the stone crazy tunnel rats.

The authors have compiled an extensive body of interviews with veterans on both sides of the conflict, bring forth the survivors own words as they describe living without sunlight or fresh air for months on end, and the terror of chasing the enemy into the bowels of the Earth. A secondary topic is weapons, from madcap high-tech schemes to destroy the tunnels, to the trained wasps and snakes that the VC used to defend their bases. Both the human and military elements are well-represented.

In the end, America never learned how to fight in the tunnels. Instead, in the wake of the Tet offensive, the army simply obliterated the entire district, first with defoliants, then with Rome plows, then with B-52 strikes that blew 10m craters in the ground. The guerrillas were essentially destroyed, but only at the cost of the entire region. *The Tunnels of Cu Chi* is a fascinating micro-history that amply demonstrates the fractally fucked up nature of the war.

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### **Matt says**

As "war" books go, this is a great one. The authors took one slice of the Vietnam war and painstakingly interviewed and researched everything about it. The result is a very dense and complete discussion of the tunnels. I imagine this is a favorite for anyone who studies this war in particular. For my purposes, it may be a little much.

There is one big reason to read this book, and that's the fact that the story itself is impossibly remarkable. You read some books for their style and others for their content, and this one is squarely in the latter category. The writing is dry and a bit rambling, but the details of the tunnel-building and life in the tunnels is incredible. The Vietnamese who spent years underground and the American teenagers who came after them are both groups whose stories should be told.

That said, it seems to go beyond the ridiculous sometimes, sticking with the theme of high melodrama. The writing is heavy in intrigue and symbolism, laden with language contrasting the high-tech west with the rag-tag east. A literal underground railroad. Coke cans turned into hand grenades. "The knife, the pistol, and the flashlight were to be the basic tools of combat and survival inside the tunnels of Cu Chi. Indeed, the very reverse of high-tech weapons development took place within the tiny ranks of the tunnel rats." Admittedly, the contrast is hard to exaggerate, but sometimes I might as well have been reading about ewoks taking on Darth Vader and the Empire. ("The most precious currency below ground was the plastic or steel containers the Americans left as litter on the battlefield above us.") Napalm versus coconut mines and crossbows. There's a whole section devoted to the baby born in a tunnel. And a whole chapter about the bugs and vermin. "They rediscovered the satisfaction of old-fashioned unarmed combat, where individual strength, guts, and cunning counted for more than massive air and artillery support." It's an amazing story, and the treatment here is fairly balanced and decidedly thorough.

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## **Patrick Hogenboom says**

Read this in preparation for my trip to vietnam (my first trip to asia ever) to visit my girlfriend who worked there as a tour guide.

I read this book, describing the US side and The Sorrow of War: A Novel of North Vietnam describing the vietnamese side. This combination gave me some insight and a lot of respect for the resilience and resourcefulness of the vietnamese. Who had been at war or occupied for centuries by that point, and for whom war had become engrained into their culture.

When I met up with my girlfriend in Saigon, it turned out that she had become good friends/drinking buddies with a group of ex-GI's that had returned to vietnam after not being able to fit back in in america.

Hearing their stories was amazing, especially to hear the respect they held for their vietnamese adversaries.

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