

## Songs of the Vietnam War Lyrics

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*Introduction:* Throughout history, the strong feelings raised by the sacrifices, ideals, heartbreaks, and triumphs of war have often been expressed by poets and artists in songs. Songs that best captured the strong feelings of Americans became very popular and lived on long after the details of the conflict were forgotten. Whether they expressed patriotism and national ideals such as in *The Star-Spangled Banner* and *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, sacrifice and heroism such as in *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, or disappointment and loss such as *All Quiet Along the Potomac Tonight*, these songs have become part of the history. The Vietnam War was no exception. Below is a small selection of the many songs written by Americans, Vietnamese, and French about the Vietnam War.

### Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation

By Tom Paxton (1965, folk) < <http://youtu.be/JQqapCkf4Uc> >

I got a letter from L.B.J., it said, "This is your lucky day.  
It's time to put your khaki trousers on. Though it may seem very queer,  
we've got no jobs to give you here, so we are sending you to Viet Nam"

*chorus*

*And Lyndon Johnson told the nation, "Have no fear of escalation,  
I am trying ev'ryone to please. Though it isn't really war,  
we're sending fifty thousand more to help save Viet Nam from Viet Namese."*

I jumped off the old troop ship, I sank in mud up to my hips,  
And cussed until the captain called me down, "never mind how hard it's raining,  
Think of all the ground we're gaining, just don't take one step outside of town."

Every night the local gentry slip out past the sleeping sentry  
They go out to join the old V.C. in their nightly little dramas,  
They put on their black pajamas and come lobbing mortar shells at me.

We go 'round in helicopters like a bunch of big grasshoppers  
Searching for the Viet Cong in vain. They left a note that they had gone,  
They had to get back to Saigon, their government positions to maintain.

Well, here I sit in this rice paddy, wondering about Big Daddy,  
And I know that Lyndon loves me so; yet how sadly I remember  
Way back yonder in November when he said I'd never have to go.

The word came from the very top that soon the shooting war would stop  
The pockets of resistance were so thin. There just remained some trouble spots,  
Like Viet Nam, Detroit and Watts, Gene McCarthy and Ho Chi Minh.

They sent me to some swampy hole we went out on a night patrol.  
Just who was who was very hard to tell. With Martha Raye and 13 Mayors,  
Half of Congress, 6 ball players and Ronald Reagan yelling, "Give 'em hell!"

## Le Déserteur (The Deserter)

By Boris Vian (1954, ballad), translated by Lucille Duperron < [http://youtu.be/f0xfog\\_ShY](http://youtu.be/f0xfog_ShY)>

Monsieur le Président	<i>Mister President</i>	Quand j'étais prisonnier	<i>When I was a prisoner</i>
Je vous fais une lettre	<i>I'm writing you a letter</i>	On m'a volé ma femme	<i>They stole my wife</i>
Que vous lirez peut-être	<i>That you might read</i>	On m'a volé mon âme	<i>They stole my soul</i>
Si vous avez le temps	<i>If you have time</i>	Et tout mon cher passé	<i>And all my dear past</i>
Je viens de recevoir	<i>I just received</i>	Demain de bon matin	<i>Tomorrow at dawn</i>
Mes papiers militaires	<i>My military orders</i>	Je fermerai ma porte	<i>I close my door</i>
Pour partir à la guerre	<i>To go to war</i>	Au nez des années	<i>To the face of the dead</i>
Avant mercredi soir	<i>Before Wednesday night</i>	mortes	<i>years</i>
		J'irai sur les chemins	<i>And I go on the road</i>
Monsieur le Président	<i>Mister President</i>	Je mendierai ma vie	<i>I will beg for my life</i>
Je ne veux pas la faire	<i>I don't want to do it</i>	Sur les routes de France	<i>On the roads of France</i>
Je ne suis pas sur terre	<i>I'm not on earth</i>	De Bretagne en Provence	<i>From Brittany to Provence</i>
Pour tuer des pauvres gens	<i>To kill poor people</i>	Et je dirai aux gens	<i>And I'll tell the people</i>
C'est pas pour vous	<i>It is not that I want to make</i>	Réfusez d'obeir	<i>Don't obey</i>
fâcher	<i>you angry</i>	Réfusez de la faire	<i>Don't do it</i>
Il faut que je vous dise	<i>But I have to tell you</i>	N'allez pas à la guerre	<i>Don't go to war</i>
Ma décision est prise	<i>My decision is made</i>	Réfusez de partir	<i>Don't go!</i>
Je m'en vais déserteur	<i>I'm going to desert</i>		
Depuis que je suis né	<i>Since I was born</i>	S'il faut donner son sang	<i>If one has to shed blood</i>
J'ai vu mourir mon père	<i>I've seen my father die</i>	Allez donner le votre	<i>Then go and shed yours</i>
J'ai vu partir mes frères	<i>I've seen my brothers</i>	Vous êtes bon apôtre	<i>Practice what you preach</i>
	<i>leave</i>	Monsieur le Président	<i>Mister President</i>
Et pleurer mes enfants	<i>And my children cry</i>	Si vous me poursuivez	<i>If you search for me</i>
		Prevenez vos gendarmes	<i>Tell your policemen</i>
Ma mère a tant souffert	<i>My mother suffered so much</i>	Que je n'aurai pas d'armes	<i>That I'll be unarmed</i>
Qu'elle est dedans sa	<i>That she is in her grave</i>	Et qu'ils pourront tirer	<i>And that they can shoot</i>
tombe			
Et se moque des bombs	<i>And laughs at bombs</i>		
Et se moque des vers	<i>And laughs at decay</i>		

## The Ballad of the Green Berets

By Barry Sadler and Robin Moore (1966, country) < <http://youtu.be/1OSXB79I6PU>>

Fighting soldiers from the sky, fearless men who jump and die,  
Men who mean just what they say, the brave men of the Green Beret.

*chorus*

*Silver wings upon their chest. These are men, America's best.  
One hundred men will test today, but only three win the Green Beret.*

Trained to live off nature's land, trained in combat hand to hand,  
Men who fight by night and day, courage big from the Green Beret.

Back at home a young wife waits. Her Green Beret has met his fate.  
He has died for those oppressed, leaving her his last request.

Put silver wings on my son's chest. Make him one of America's best.  
He'll be a man they'll test one day. Have him win the Green Beret.

## The March of Liberation

By Luu Nguyen and Long Hung, North Vietnamese (1966, march), translation  
< <http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=3948>> listen to track 201

Our native land is shuddering, filled with hate for him who causes  
So much suffering for our people. It calls on us for vengeance,  
To repay the debt of blood. Workers and farmers rise up!  
Intellectuals rise up! A thundering storm gathers in the China Sea  
The tide is rising, and the whole people rise up as high as the tide!

*chorus*

*For our people we march to the front! We'll wipe out the very last Yankee,  
And proudly fly our Liberation flag! Let's raise our voices together,  
Determined to fight and to win. Our people await the great day  
When we sing the song of victory in freedom!*

Our hearts are filled with wrath, broken from too much suffering,  
From seeing the countryside burnt into ashes, and our cities turned into flames!  
We long to be back in our hometowns, but we swear never to go home  
Until the enemy is driven out forever, and our land is set free!

We must overcome all our problems! More exploits dared and won,  
We must push forward! The golden star lights our road,  
The path of revolution! At Kontum we avenge all the suffering.  
At Ap Bac the blood debt is paid. We turn our hate into energy,  
To make the enemy tremble and fall!

Dawn is breaking everywhere! We grasp our rifles firmly,  
And resolutely press on forward. We will have a new life, or die!  
The day is not far away, when our people will be happy and free.  
From Ca Mau to Vinh-Linh the enemy is in his death-throes.  
The sky is rosy with glory, and our golden star flies proudly in the free wind!

### Soldier's Last Letter

*Recorded by Merle Haggard (originally written in 1944, recorded in the late 1960s, country)*  
< <http://youtu.be/qgZPnsoc818> >

When the postman delivered a letter, it filled her dear heart full of joy.  
But she didn't know till she read the inside, it was the last one from her darling boy.

*chorus*

*Dear Mom, was the way that it started. I miss you so much, it went on.  
Mom, I didn't know that I loved you so, but I'll prove it when this war is won.*

I'm writing this down in a trench, Mom. Don't scold if it isn't so neat.  
You know as you did when I was a kid and I'd come home with mud on my feet.

The captain just gave us our orders, and Mom we will carry them through.  
I'll finish this letter the first chance I get, but now I'll just say I love you.

Then the mother's old hands began to tremble and she fought against tears in her eyes.  
But they came unashamed for there was no name, and she knew that her darling had died.

That night as she knelt by her bedside, she prayed Lord above hear my plea.  
And protect all the sons that are fighting tonight, and dear God, keep America free!

### Missing In Action

*By Arthur Smith and Helen Kaye, recorded by Ernest Tubb in 1951 (country)*  
< [http://www.authentichistory.com/1946-1960/2-korea/3-music/19511130\\_Missing\\_In\\_Action-Ernest\\_Tubb.html](http://www.authentichistory.com/1946-1960/2-korea/3-music/19511130_Missing_In_Action-Ernest_Tubb.html) >

The warship had landed and I came ashore,  
The fighting was over for me evermore;  
For I had been wounded, they left me for dead, a stone for my pillow and snow for my bed.  
The enemy found me and took me away and made me a prisoner of war so they say;  
But God in his mercy was with me one day; the gate was left open and I ran away.

I returned to the old home, my sweet wife to see, the home I had built for my darling and me.  
The door I then opened and there on a stand, I saw a picture of her and a man.  
The clothes she was wearing told me a sad tale, my darling was wearing a new bridal veil.  
Then I found a letter and these words I read: "Missing in action;" she thought I was dead.

So I kissed her picture and whispered goodbye; my poor heart was breaking but my eyes were dry.  
I knew she'd be happy if she never learned, I knew she must never know I had returned.  
A vagabond dreamer, forever I'll roam, because there was no one to welcome me home;  
The face of my darling no more will I see, for missing in action forever I'll be.

**A Tale of Two Soldiers**

*By Pham Duy, South Vietnamese folk singer (1968, folk), translation*

There were two soldiers who lived in the same village  
Both loved the fatherland—Vietnam.  
There were two soldiers who lived in the same village  
Both loved the fields and the earth of Vietnam.

There were two soldiers, both of one family,  
Both of one race—Vietnam.  
There were two soldiers, both of one family,  
Both of one blood—Vietnam.

There were two soldiers who were of one heart,  
Neither would let Vietnam be lost.  
There were two soldiers, both advancing up a road,  
Determined to preserve Vietnam.

There were two soldiers who traveled a long road,  
Day and night, baked with sun and soaked with dew.  
There were two soldiers who traveled a long road,  
Day and night they cherished their grudge.

There were two soldiers, both were heroes,  
Both sought out and captured the enemy troops.  
There were two soldiers, both were heroes,  
Both went off to “wipe out the gang of common enemies.”

There were two soldiers who lay upon a field,  
Both clasping rifles and waiting.  
There were two soldiers who one rosy dawn  
Killed each other for Vietnam  
Killed each other for Vietnam.

**Pulling Our Artillery**

*Author unknown, Vietminh work song (1954), translation*

How do we sing, two three how.  
How do we sing, pulling our artillery through mountain passes.  
How do we sing, two three how, pulling our artillery across streams.  
How do we sing, two three how, pulling our artillery across mountains.

The mountains are steep,  
But the determination in our hearts is higher than mountains.  
The chasms are deep and dark,  
But what chasm is as deep as our hatred?

How do we sing, two three how,  
The fowl are about to crow on the mountain tops.  
Pulling our artillery across mountain passes, before the early dawn.

## Song of the Coats

By Xuan Hong, Vietcong (date uncertain), translation

<[http://www.authentichistory.com/1946-1960/2-korea/3-music/19511130\\_Missing\\_In\\_Action-Ernest\\_Tubb.html](http://www.authentichistory.com/1946-1960/2-korea/3-music/19511130_Missing_In_Action-Ernest_Tubb.html)>  
listen to track 203

Brothers brave the rain and sun, heat of day and cold of night.  
Coats we sew for ev'ry one, help to warm your will to fight.  
Brothers risking death each day as winter hurries on its way.  
Oh know that we will do our best, Oh faster sisters take no rest.

*chorus*

*Early to the front they'll go, still, while we hold the coats in our hands,  
We pray the sun soon will rise on free Vietnam.*

In the forest, dark and green, like a stream of silk our vengeance runs,  
Little speedy sewing machines move as one with distant guns,  
Oh my fingers, nimbly sew, that our fighters warmly may go.  
All of us must do our best, flying fingers, take no rest.

Winter is here, the coats are done. One to warm each fighting girl and boy.  
We've sewn our love in every one, filling them with courage, hope and joy.  
Early to the front they'll fly, still while we hold them in our hands,  
With every coat we pledge our lives to drive the invaders from our land.

## Bring the Boys Home

By Freda Payne (1971, soul) <<http://youtu.be/V3aeDRNlc3Y>>

Fathers are pleading, lovers are all alone.  
Mothers are praying—Send our sons back home.  
They marched them away on ships and planes,  
To a senseless war, they see death in vain.

*chorus*

*Bring the boys home,  
Bring the boys home,  
Bring the boys home,  
Bring the boys home.*

Turn the ships around, lay your weapons down.  
Can't you see them march across the sky,  
The soldiers that have died, trying to get home.

Cease all fire, on the battle field.  
Enough men have already been wounded and killed!

## A Souvenir for You

*By Linh Phuong, South Vietnamese army officer later killed in combat (1970, folk ballad), translation*

You ask me, you ask me when will I return?  
Let me reply, let me reply, that I will soon return.  
I will return, perhaps as a wreath of flowers.  
I will return to songs of welcome upon a helicopter painted white.

You ask me, you ask me when will I return?  
Let me reply, let me reply, that I will soon return.  
I will return on a radiant afternoon, avoiding the sun,  
Wrapped tightly in a poncho which covers all my life.

I will return, I will return upon a pair of wooden crutches.  
I will return, I will return as one with a leg blown off.  
And one fine spring afternoon you shall go down the street  
To sip a cold drink beside your crippled lover.

You ask me, you ask me when will I return?  
Let me reply, let me reply that I will soon return.  
I will return and exchange a moving look with you.  
I will return to shatter your life.

We shall look at each other as strangers  
Try to forget the days of darkness, my dear.  
You ask me, you ask me when will I return?  
Let me reply, let me reply that I will soon return.

## Fixin' to Die Rag

*By Joe McDonald (1968, rock) < <http://youtu.be/8rArmFRkaFY>>*

Well come on all of you big strong men Uncle Sam needs your help again,  
He's got himself in a terrible jam, way down yonder in Viet Nam,  
So put down your books and pick up a gun, we're gonna have a whole lot of fun.

*chorus*

*And it's one, two, three, what are we fighting for, don't ask me I don't give a damn, next stop is Viet Nam.*

*And it's five six, seven, open up the pearly gates, well, there ain't no time to wonder why, whoopee! we're all gonna die.*

Come on Wall Street don't be slow. Why, Man, this is war a-Go-Go.  
There's plenty good money to be made by supplyin' the Army with the tools of their trade.  
But just hope and pray that if they drop the bomb, they drop it on the Viet Cong.

Come on Mothers through the land, pack your boys off to Vietnam.  
Come on fathers, don't hesitate, send your sons off before it's too late.  
And you can be the first ones on your block to have your boy come home in a box.

Come on Generals, let's move fast; your big chance has come at last.  
Now you can go out and get those Reds—cause the only good Commie is one that's dead.  
And you know that peace can only be won, when we've blown 'em all to kingdom come.

## I Must See the Sun

*By Trinh Cong Son, South Vietnamese anti-war composer (1969, folk), translation*

I must see a bright sun upon this homeland filled with Humanity.

I must see a day,

A day when our people rise up to obtain peace,

Calling to each other from all regions: Life!

I must see peace, the happy villages of yesterday have been deserted.

The people of Vietnam have forgotten each other amidst the bullets and bombs.

The days of Vietnam have been darkened by hatred.

I must see peace. I must see peace.

All my beloved brothers, Rise up!

Let's walk in the flickering soul of the nation.

A million pounding human hearts await a million footsteps.

Keep moving forward!

I must see,

I must see a day with peace glowing brightly all around.

## Honor Our Commitment

*By Jacqueline Sharpe (1966, folk) < <http://youtu.be/9OKdQ-J4qDg>>*

O, gather round you bully boys and hear just what I say.

We've got a Great Society in the good old U. S. A.

So listen, nations of the earth, we give our promise true:

If you don't obey your Uncle Sam, his troops will visit you.

*chorus*

*And we'll honor our commitment, honor our commitment,*

*Even if the world goes up in the smoke of a mushroom cloud.*

*Honor our commitment, honor our commitment.*

*Get buried with our brothers in one great communal shroud.*

Now, widows all like candy canes, and orphans all like jam,

And Band-aids come in handy for the wounded in Vietnam.

So send your package out today to the homeless kids and wives,

We're sure the ones we haven't killed will love us all their lives.

We dream of peace 'most every night, we talk of peace each day,

And we have learned a little game we'll teach you how to play.

Now, which hand holds the olive branch and which hand holds the bomb?

You guessed it—this one offers peace, and that one drops napalm.

You marching intellectuals, you poets and you priests,

You mothers with your babes in arms, you longhaired, bearded beasts.

It's all right when you talk of beauty, love and all that pap,

But when it comes to life and death, you'd better shut your trap.

## Waist Deep in the Big Muddy

By Pete Seeger (1967, folk) < <http://youtu.be/uXnJVkEX8O4> >

It was back in nineteen forty two, I was part of a good platoon  
We were on maneuvers in a-Loozianan, one night by the light of the moon  
The captain told us to ford a river, and that's how it all begun  
We were knee deep in the Big Muddy, but the big fool said to push on

The sergeant said, "Sir, are you sure, this is the best way back to the base?"  
"Sergeant, go on; I once forded this river just a mile above this place  
It'll be a little soggy but just keep slogging. We'll soon be on dry ground."  
We were waist deep in the Big Muddy and the big fool said to push on.

The sergeant said, "Sir, with all this equipment, no man will be able to swim."  
"Sergeant, don't be a nervous nellie," the captain said to him.  
"All we need is a little determination; Man, follow me, I'll lead on."  
We were neck deep in the Big Muddy and the big fool said to push on.

All of a sudden, the moon clouded over, we heard a gurgling cry.  
A few seconds later, the captain's helmet was all that floated by.  
The sergeant said, "Turn around men, I'm in charge from now on."  
And we just made it out of the Big Muddy with the captain dead and gone.

We stripped and dived and found his body stuck in the old quicksand.  
I guess he didn't know that the water was deeper than the place he'd once before been.  
Another stream had joined the Big Muddy just a half mile from where we'd gone.  
We'd been lucky to escape from the Big Muddy when the big fool said to push on.

Well, maybe you'd rather not draw any moral; I'll leave that to yourself.  
Maybe you're still walking and you're still talking and you'd like to keep your health.  
But every time I read the papers that old feeling comes on:  
We're waist deep in the Big Muddy and the big fool says to push on.

Waist deep in the Big Muddy and the big fool says to push on!  
Waist deep in the Big Muddy and the big fool says to push on!  
Waist deep! Neck deep! Soon even a tall man'll be over his head!  
Waist deep in the BIG MUDDY! AND THE BIG FOOL SAYS TO PUSH ON!