

Scenario Designer's Notes for Dien Bien Phu

Dien Bien Phu conjures up many images for the average wargamer – a bloody, muddy siege, the failure of a colonial empire to hold onto its possessions in the aftermath of World War II, the Legion Etrangere holding positions to the end, paratroopers dropping into a doomed situation, the list goes on. However, the French Indochina War was much more than that. In the Legion tradition, small outposts and their defense were a fixture throughout the war. There were riverine assaults, a tactic that would bloom in the American War 10+ years later. Aggressive paradrops were a regular feature before the development of the heliborne assault. There were convoys and endless patrols.

Vietnam in the aftermath of World War 2 was a power vacuum. Even as France tried to reassert its authority, Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh, having fought the Japanese for years, were capitalizing on the nascent nationalism of the Viet peoples and setting the stage for the future war on their terms. They were able to capture weapons destined for Nationalist Chinese forces as well as supplies of captured Japanese rifles and other infantry weapons. Local defense committees were established and would provide recruits and training in the coming guerrilla war. The cadres of the regular armies were established and grew. (For a better and detailed explanation of the development of the Viet Minh forces, please see Martin Windrow's *The Last Valley*.)

Vietnam in 1946 had a bit of a wild west frontier aspect to it, and the French exhibited a knack for '*demerder*', or as it is more politely called – 'muddling through.' This is reflected in the rather eclectic mix of weapons and vehicles depicted in the game. The confiscated Japanese equipment (E13A1 'Jake' floatplane, Type 89b and Type 95 tanks as well as various infantry weapons) were pressed into service in the early years. You will also find a motley mix of boats and ships at the core of the Dinnassauts. While some units were well armed with standardized, modern weapons, many were supplied with rifles and arms from World War 1 and beyond. With the excess of British arms left over from the war against Japan, many formations were armed with British rifles, machine guns and vehicles. Naturally, as the 'Arsenal of Democracy', there were plenty of American weapons in the mix, eventually becoming the dominant supplier to the French.

The first big test for the French came along the North East Frontier in battles along Colonial Route 4. The French had established bases at Cao Bang, Dong Khe and Son La. However, to protect the supply lines they needed to establish a string of small outposts and firebases to hold the road. Convoys became the center of several sharp fights along the RC4. Over time the French would increase the firepower and armor of the escorts and the convoys themselves. RC4 would also see some of the first airborne operations of the war with the combat drop into Dong Khe being most notable. It was along the RC4 at the outposts that the Viet Minh would develop and perfect the tactics that would serve them well throughout the war: isolation of a strong point, heavy preparatory bombardment, followed by an overwhelming rush of human bodies. Eventually they would force the French to withdraw from the region, securing the support and supply of the Communist Chinese.

The forces of Ho Chi Minh were not alone in adopting and developing new tactics. The French were quite resourceful in this regard. Combat drops by the French in Vietnam would become quite common during the first Indochina War, and eventually be a source of inspiration for the Americans who would introduce airmobile groups in the 1960's based on the helicopter assault, but the concept was developed by the French 10 years prior. The list ranges from the small insertion of forces deep inside enemy territory to large operations like 'Castor' (which would lead directly to the disaster known as Dien Bien Phu). Perhaps the high water mark for airborne operations was the battle of Na San in late 1952. The successful establishment and defense of a fortified 'hedgehog' (*hérisson*) around the airfield at Na San in Son La province was viewed as a 'proof of concept' and was a primary reason for the high self confidence of the French in the Dien Bien Phu valley 15 months later.

Probably the most enduring tactical innovation to come from this period was the Riverine Assault Force, Dinnassauts. Again, in the spirit of muddling through, all sorts of ships were pressed into service as the French tried to deny the Viets the use of waterways for infiltration, as well as use them for supply themselves. The surplus Higgins boats and landing craft of World War 2 found a welcome home in the service of France. Perhaps the biggest failure of the riverine war was probably Bien Hoa. The Viet Minh were able to wrest control of the river banks from the French and turn them into places of ambush. The French had to return to the old formula of an overland route guarded by outposts. And of course as along the RC4 and elsewhere, they failed forcing the French to withdraw from their base at Bien Hoa. However, the Americans 10 years later would look to the French model when they developed their own brown water navy and develop the concept further to great success.

Finally, the French made use of Commandos based on the British SAS model. Small groups of French, in partnership with local fighters participated in just about every campaign during the war. In addition they operated far and wide in enemy terrain. While time and space limitations prohibited me from fully exploring this aspect of the war, I did include some fairly detailed oob's based on my sources for home designers to tinker with.

Range of scenarios

I think I was able to include a broad range of scenarios that should be enough to satisfy the Squad Battles players out there, no matter their preferences. Some thoughts on them follow:

001.Ad Hoc.scn: I will admit to a fascination with the mix of vehicles and equipment found in Indochina during this time period. I put together this scenario to highlight some of them. It is a hypothetical, but an interesting scenario nonetheless.

002, 003.Khoan Bo: A bit of a longer scenario, but I had a detailed description available, and it was a fight that was one of the easier riverine actions to model. The alternate deployments for the Viet Minh allows for replay value. The loss of a loaded landing craft is disastrous for the French, so that certainly should be kept in mind. However, they will need to make good time if they hope to make the exit objectives.

004.Lung Vai: Another hypothetical based on numerous accounts of convey duty along RC 4. I think this is one of my favorites for solo play against the Viet AI. This makes heavy use of random reinforcements as well as multiple reinforcement locations. It is a challenge to win, and never plays the same way twice. The randomness makes it work for PBEM as well. This area is the site of a major VM ambush later, but I had done enough set piece convoy ambushes already.

005, 006.Song Ky Cong: A nice, small, quick playing scenario. The French have a few options for the units outside the walls, and the Viet Minh have the choice of where to place their attack. It was hard to balance for both types of play, so there is an alternate version with weaker VM forces meant for PBEM.

007.Deo Cat: Similar to the above, although the French have less options. It really comes down to the hand to hand fighting within the walls. There is ground for exploration here as the 3e BCCP fought a running engagement just to the north/northeast of here a bit later.

008, 009, 010.Dong Khe: The fights here were on my 'must include' list. There were aerial photos, tons of ground photos, first hand accounts, maps, etc in the Indoeditions books. You have the outpost falling to the VM, paratroopers landing on it and taking it back, and the VM coming back once more and taking it a few months later. To make them playable, I tended to focus on specific areas of the action. Naturally, there is a ton more material for a home designer to explore. Of note is 010 which makes use of Asymmetric Scoring.

Please see the User's Manual for more detail on how this works. In short, The Viet Minh must take objectives quickly. The French gain points each turn they hold them. In addition, casualty points are calculated differently. Don't despair by looking at the points too early. It is actually pretty well balanced.

011, 012, 013.Mao Khe: The fight here is given prominence in *Street Without Joy*, so it was easy to include these. I liked that I could use Panhard armored cars and include a city/industrial fight. My favorite of the three is 012 with the paratroopers trying to break through to the besieged Thos.

014.Tu Vu: As above, it makes an appearance in *Street Without Joy*, and gave an excuse to get a river map produced. Also included in that map was the Rocher Notre Dame and some of the massif to the east, again proving fertile ground for further exploration. The tanks are dug in and incorporate the new 'Hull Down' feature. It makes them a bear to ferret out, so the Viet player will need to use his AT assets judiciously.

015.Dong Vong: I wanted to do something smaller, and since commandos were the tip of the spear here, it seemed a nice fit. The result is a good, fast playing scenario. Given the vast expanse of maps included with the game, I hope to see a lot of DIY scenarios of this type produced out there.

016, 017.Chan-Muong: The description of the ambush here is also featured in *Street Without Joy*, but the break out seemed a bit extra ordinary. The Legion is there, so that is always a plus. I like the mix of weapons here as well. The French are really presented with options in the attack, and the VM have a plethora of options in the counter. 017 also has a bit of randomness in the deployments, so there is good replay value here. I don't really consider this a convoy ambush type of scenario, although the French have an exit objective. The French may or may not attempt to take the fixed position objectives and can win either way.

018-025.(Na San PA's): Although the siege of Dien Bien Phu was the focus of the title, and certainly the fight with the most name appeal, the stage for DBP was set at Na San a year earlier. PA8 saw legionnaires stave off a rushed attack by the first VM units to reach the valley. There were three separate attacks that night covered in the first three PA8 scenarios. The fourth PA scenario is PBEM only but spans the entire night. The VM player has all the options, but patient play will be rewarded. You could burn all your Human Waves early, but you will soon find yourself out of leaders. There is a lot of dead time here. Your effectiveness will go back up. However, harassing fire will make it a bit harder for the defenders to re arm. A bit of randomness in the reinforcements keeps it interesting. The PA22bis and 24 scenarios are interesting in that the French paratroops are retaking positions that had fallen the night before. PA22 is one of my favorites to play. The PA21bis scenarios are an experiment in the asymmetric scoring. There are a lot of VM units, so if you are click-averse, these are probably not for you.

026 - 028.Muong Khoua: This set of three scenarios form the basis of a campaign. There is significant coverage of this in *Street Without Joy*, including maps. (Actual topo maps were used in creating the game maps however.) The river escape is tough for the French to win, but I will say that it can be done (the shallows are safer and get your force up from Muong Khoua as soon as possible).

029.Amphib: John Tiller did this one initially. I just did the AI scripting. I will say that the AI does well in this scenario and is quite active on the defense – it is certainly no cake walk! I enjoy this vs VM AI and it also is a good fight in PBEM. A word of caution – the crabs and alligators are rather thin skinned. I made time an issue for gameplay balance reasons.

030.Dong Que: Another that I inherited from John. I really worked over the deployments and AI on this, as well as the oob. The result is similar to the above – the AI is aggressive and entertaining to play. It is still balanced for PBEM and there are options for both sides.

031.Operation Castor: So it begins at Dien Bien Phu. The map had to be redone to reflect the valley before it was stripped for fortification material. A bit of a scattered combat drop, crews unable to find their support weapons. It could have ended far differently than it did. The French player will need to get organized and moving toward the objectives in short order. The Viet Minh can concentrate and put pressure on at selected points.

032, 033 Ban Him Lam: This was inherited from the original Scenario Designer for this project, Jesse Chang. Jesse did a lot of the original oob development on the title and had done quite a few scenarios. Most of the scenarios have since evolved beyond recognition, but this one really just had me doing AI scripts and working with the playtesters on balance. Jesse's groundwork on this title should be acknowledged here.

034-036.633 & 781: The idea here was to show the French out of their DBP fortifications. 781 was done later in development and takes advantage of a lot of the new AI scripting features that John introduced. I think there is enough randomness in it that it will not always play out the same. Reinforcements appear on various map edges and may take different paths to the objectives. What worked the first time through, may not work the second.

037.Beatrice: John Tiller did the initial work here. It is a big scenario and the French will be hard pressed to hold on. It is a big one, but both sides have enough to do the job.

038, 039.Gabrielle: The first scenario I did that focused on the fall of a position. Naturally it is going to be a larger scenario. The French considered this an important position and it was considered well prepared and able to handle whatever the Viet Minh could throw at them. They would be proved wrong – and they would learn a hard lesson in relying too much on unsteady troops. The *suppletifs* have a chance to be withdrawn, leaving a flank open at what is surely to be an inopportune moment. Jeff Conner (playtester, TFE4 hand, and currently at work on another SB title) wanted to contribute a scenario on the relief of Gabrielle and so did 039/ The French have to fight their way through to the survivors on Gabrielle. They have their work cut out for them.

040, 047.Ban Kho Lai Clearing the road south was a regular task during the opening stages of the siege. Eventually, it became too costly and Isabelle was left to fend for herself. Ban Kho Lai was a convenient place for the VM to set up a road block. Here we have a couple of variations on a theme and based on descriptions in Windrow's *The Last Valley*

041, 052, 066-070. Plei Rinh PK15s, Dak Ya Ayun, PK3, Chu Dreh: I decided to lump these all in together since they were all inspired by the 'End of a Task Force' chapter in Fall's *Street Without Joy*. The Korea Regiment, 2 veteran battalions of fierce fighting in Korea along with the *Battalion du Marche (BM)* of the 43rd Colonial Infantry were the backbone of two *Groupe Mobiles* patrolling the Central Highlands. They would be involved in major operations all along the Route 19 corridor during the waning months of the war. I will say that in general, for an ambush scenario, the French need to ride out the initial Viet Minh attacks and hold on for reinforcements. If they can weather the initial surge, they have a good chance of winning the scenario. With the exception of Plei Rinh, these are all convoy ambushes. However, they each use different design mechanics and should not be considered 'cookie cutter' by any stretch of the imagination. The Chu Dreh scenarios are a pair of ambushes, the second giving the French a bit of an easier time, wrap up the struggles of the Korean Regiment. The French have a choice as to where they can escape. The main tactic here is to form solid groups and then cause as much pain for the Viet Minh as possible. If the French can form a 'safe pocket' they may be able to push out to an escape hex. (Coincidentally, Route 19 was a contested area 10+ years later when it was part of the II Corps area of operations. You can find some excellent topo maps and photos of the terrain at Ray's Map Room: http://www.rjsmith.com/topo_map.html)

042.Dominique 6: A nice small one with the French on the attack to retake a fallen position. The units in D1 and D2 are fixed, so don't look for help from there. There is a question of whether the Viet Minh will get help, so the French can't delay. Also 9 turns does not give the French a whole lot of time to dally.

043, 044. Ban Ong Pet(-Ban Ban): Jesse originally set up this scenario focusing on the northern prong of this attack. I refined this quite a bit to get the balance right. The massive scenario, Ban Ong Pet-Ban Ban covers the entire attack. The impetus to do this scenario was twofold: first, I wanted to incorporate the Barrage feature that John added during the development of DBP. Secondly, there have been people posting on various bulletin boards asking for longer scenarios and bigger ones. When the Rest & Refit feature was added in with SAW, longer scenarios became a possibility. Well, this is a pretty good size one and certainly long enough. Given the time, the French have the ability to decide where to strike the hammer blow. They should not feel compelled to simply advance. That may or may not be the path to victory. It may not be everyone's cup of tea, but there are people who wanted to see this sort of thing.

045.Dominique: Another large scenario. There are a lot of VM units, so do not play this if you are click averse. A lot of desperate fighting for the French is in store. Aggressive and judicious use of counter attacks is the key. In my own playings, I found that these massive assaults tended to break down into individual fights for isolated objectives.

046, 048-050, 055, 058.Elianes: This is really the heart of the struggle for the main fortified camp. The Viet Minh would hammer these positions incessantly. As the French, players will need to patch together a force to hole the position from extremely limited resources. The French often have tanks at their disposal, but the Viet Minh have some serious AT capability as well. Some of these scenarios were developed into a campaign (actually a pair – you pick your unit – Legion or Para?).

051, 053. Huguette 7: The first I think offers some tough trench clearing on a smaller scale. This got played a lot in playtesting and often came down to the last turn. The Return of Bizard expands on the scope a bit with both sides having more available to them.

054, 057, 059.Huguette 6: The first two of this set has the timely arrival of French forces breaking up the Viet Minh attack. If the Viets spend too much time coming to grips with the French in the position, they will be in a bit of trouble. The final is a break out from the position. Here the French need to be speedy and the Viets need some luck to be released in order to get into position.

056.Pk-15: I gave this a separate listing from the other GM100 battles since this does not involve the Korean Regiment. A small engagement, but the French can approach from east or west (50/50 chance). In addition, the Viet Minh reinforcement can arrive at 1 of 5 locations and range of turns. The small size and high variability should make for excellent replay value.

060.Huguette 1: The French in another counterattack to take a fallen position, with some armor. Both sides receive some reinforcements, so anything that can be done to slow their progress will be helpful. The French can enjoy life for a bit without worry of VM AT capability, but their tanks already start a bit battered.

061.Isabelle (Weime):A small and tight scenario with the French on the attack clearing trenches. This is a size I love. The French need to move quickly, but also need to be careful with those tanks. The VM have some powerful AT capability so be careful.

062, 063.Huguette 4: A pair of AI/PBEM scenarios for the fall of Huguette 4. There is some variability in the Viet Minh reinforcement which can present challenges. The French have some extra weapons laying around. They will need them. Hold on, target the leaders and make the most of your limited artillery.

064.Eliane 4: The end at the main camp of DBP. A hodgepodge of French units make a stand, hopefully lasting long enough to take a moral victory. The faithful Bisons are standing by, although immobile. The title of the scenario is taken from the account in *The Last Valley*

065.Isabelle: The breakout from Isabelle. The decision was made in the south to attempt to breakout to French forces moving northward to break the siege. Those forces were bogged down and much further than expected. Only a few individual groups were able to rejoin the French, and for the most part they would be caught by the encircling VM forces or lost forever in the jungle. The VN must attack and not sit back and wait. The French need to move quickly and avoid contact. At the same time, there are objectives to hold within the strong point.

Future expansion

While my focus in design was covering the major operations, I would like to see some more ‘anonymous’ scenarios developed (specifically, I am thinking about the commando operations mentioned above). There is still a ton of material out there that can be explored with what has shipped with this game. First off, make sure you explore the various pdf documents that are in the main folder. There is a listing of all the master maps that shipped with the game, including snapshots of the jump maps to give you an idea of the terrain. If you have never made a scenario before, there is also a step by step guide to creating a scenario from scratch.

You have the following program tools that are exactly the same that the Squad Battles Scenario Designers use for our scenarios: sqsub.exe – the sub map editor which allows you to cut up the master maps to find the perfect terrain for your scenario; sqparam.exe – the parameter data editor which allows you to modify just about any value you could want in the game in regards to defense, terrain, movement, etc.; sqoob.exe – which allows you to customize or build from scratch full orders of battle for both the French and Viet-Minh; sqdata.exe – which allows you to modify the values used for vehicles, weapons and their loads for the game; and finally the sqedit.exe program which allows you to design a scenario, program an AI and set all the conditions you could want for your scenario.

I can’t emphasize enough how much territory is covered in the master maps. In addition to the entire valley of Dien Bien Phu, there are kilometers and kilometers worth of Route 19, scene of the GM 100 battles. While I think those are fairly well covered, that road was patrolled constantly for years. The same goes for Colonial Route 4. The conflict along RC 4 raged for 2 years+. There were so many actions there, I could not cover them all.

As noted above, one thing I tried to do in the weapons database is to include any and all equipment that one could want. Did we really need a Type 89b Japanese tank or 3 variants of the Bren Carrier? No, but they were in the theater, and so are in the game for those of you who like to tinker. There are a wide range of rifles as well. They all have slight variations in range, reliability, etc and for a heterogeneous force like the early VM or even the early French it points out some of what they struggled with and adds to the flavor of the era.

Sources

While there is a full Bibliography elsewhere, I wanted to cite a few specific works here. When I took on this project Martin Windrow’s *The Last Valley* was a recent release and had been sitting on my shelf for some time. It became invaluable as a resource. His endnotes should definitely be read as you go. Many of ‘the wargamer’s details’ are found there. (What type of rifle were they using, exact numbers, etc., etc.) His maps are generally very good, but don’t always match up to the topo maps of the area very well. Mr. Windrow also wrote several Osprey volumes on the French Indochina War that have some good details, but really

provide a broad overlook to the conflict. I used *The Last Valley* as a source for the Na San battles and much of the DBP battles.

My first exposure to the conflict came many years prior however when I was given a leather bound copy of Bernard Fall's *Street Without Joy*. If you do not know, Mr. Fall was an American journalist who covered the war 'embedded' with several French units. He set a standard for war reporting that stands to this day. He was also the author of *Hell in a Very Small Place*, which focuses specifically on the siege of Dien Bien Phu. In general the works have held up well, but they are close to 50 years old and many Vietnamese sources have since come to light. Fall's works were a source for Groupe Mobile 100 battles, Muong Khoua, the DBP battles, as well as some of the earlier fights.

Much as there is now a plethora of material now on the American involvement in Vietnam, in France there is an ample amount of material on the French involvement there. Indo Editions is a publisher that specializes in memoirs and unit histories of this era. <http://www.indoeditions.com/> I relied heavily on their *3e BCCP en Indochine* and *Les Combats de la RC4* for the early war battles. These books are large format, include invaluable maps, first hand accounts, photos and documents that made this period come to life for me. They are in French, so unless you have French language skills, be prepared to spend sometime with an internet translator or dictionary to get full value.

-- Mike Cox
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Glossary

ALOA	Aviation Légère d'Observation Artillerie - Light Artillery Observation Aviation
ANV	Armée Nationale du Vietnam - Vietnam National Army
BCCP	Bataillon Colonial de Commandos Parachutistes - Colonial Commando Parachute Battalion
BCCP	Bataillon Colonial de Chasseurs Parachutistes - Colonial Parachute Battalion
BCL	Bataillon de Chasseurs Laotiens - Laotian Chasseurs Battalion
BDP	Bataillon de Dragons Portés - Motorised Dragoon Battalion
BEP	Bataillon Etranger de Parachutistes - Foreign Legion Parachute Battalion
BG	Bataillon du Génie - Engineer Battalion
BI	Bataillon d'Infanterie - Infantry Battalion
BM	Bataillon de Marche - March Battalion (provisional unit)
BMEO	Brigade Marine d'Extrême-Orient - Far East Marines Brigade
BMI	Bataillon de Marche Indochinois - Indochinese March Battalion
BMTS	Bataillon de Marche de Tirailleurs Sénégalais - African Infantry March Battalion
Bo Doi	Viet Minh regular soldier, or general term for a military unit
BPC	Bataillon de Parachutistes Coloniaux - Colonial Parachute Battalion
BPCP	Bataillon Parachutiste de Chasseurs à Pied - Chasseurs à Pieds Parachute Battalion
BPL	Bataillon de Parachutistes Laotiens - Laotian Parachute Battalion
BPVN	Bataillon Parachutiste Vietnamien - Vietnamese Parachute Battalion
BT	Bataillon Thaï - Tai Battalion
BTA	Bataillon de Tirailleurs Algériens - Algerian Infantry Battalion
BVN	Bataillon Vietnamien - Vietnamese Battalion
CC	Capitaine de Corvette - RN Lieutenant Commander
CCA	Compagnie de Commandement et d'Appui - Command and Support Company
CCB	Compagnie de Commandement de Base - Base Command Company
CCL	Compagnie de Commandos Laotiens - Laotian Commando Company
CCPL	Compagnie de Commandos Parachutistes Laotiens - Laotian Para Commando Company
CCR	Compagnie de Commandement Régimentaire - Regimental Command Company
CCS	Compagnie de Commandement et des Services - Command and Services Company
CEFEO	Corps Expéditionnaire Français d'Extrême-Orient - French Far East Expeditionary Corps
CEML	Compagnie Etrangère de Mortiers Lourds - Foreign Legion Heavy Mortar Company
CEPML	Compagnie Etrangère Parachutiste de Mortiers Lourds - Foreign Legion Parachute Heavy Mortar Company
Can Bo	Viet Minh political officer or commissars
CF	Capitaine de Frégate - RN Commander
Chi Doi	Viet Minh unit of 200 to 1500 men
Chu Luc	Viet Minh Main Force
CIP	Compagnie Indochinoise Parachutiste - Indochinese Parachute Company
CIPLE	Compagnie Indochinoise Parachutiste de Légion Etrangère - Foreign Legion Indochinese Parachute Company
CL	Commando Léger - Light Commando
CLA	Compagnie Légère d'Accompagnement - Light Support Company, native light infantry unit attached to a Dinassaut, typically 80 natives with 4 European officers/NCOs
CLI	Corps Léger d'Intervention - Light Intervention Corps

CLSM	Compagnie Légère de Supplétifs Militaires - Military Auxiliaries Light Company
CSM	Compagnie de Supplétifs Militaires - Military Auxiliaries Company
CV	Capitaine de Vaisseau - RN Captain
Dai doi	Viet Minh company
DBLE	Demi-Brigade de Légion Étrangère - Foreign Legion Half-Brigade (regimental grouping of independent battalions or battalions from different parent units)
DBMP	Demi-Brigade de Marche Parachutiste - Parachute Half-Brigade (regimental grouping of independent battalions or battalions from different parent units)
DCA	Défense contre avions - Anti-aircraft
Dinassaut	Division Navale d'Assaut - Naval Assault Division
DLO	Détachement de Liaison et d'Observation - Liaison and Observation Detachment, artillery forward observers
DNA	Division Navale d'Assaut - Naval Assault Division
DNEO	Division Navale d'Extrême Orient - Far East Naval Division
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
DUKW	US amphibious truck
DZ	Drop Zone
EA	Engin d'Assaut - Assault Craft, French steel copy of the LCVP
ECS	Escadron de Commandement et des Services - Command and Services Squadron (cavalry units)
ER	Escadron de Reconnaissance - Reconnaissance Squadron
ERVN	Escadron de Reconnaissance Vietnamien - Vietnamese Reconnaissance Squadron
FM	Fusil mitrailleur - Light Machine Gun
FMEO	Forces Maritimes d'Extrême Orient - Far East Naval Forces
FOM	Forces d'Outre-Mer - Overseas Forces
GAC/AOF	Groupe d'Artillerie Coloniale d'AOF - West African Artillery Battalion
GAOA	Groupe Aérien d'Observation d'Artillerie - Artillery Aerial Observation Squadron
GAP	Groupement Aéroporté - Airborne Group
GAVN	Groupe d'Artillerie Vietnamien - Vietnamese Artillery Battalion
GB	Groupe de Bombardement - Bomber Squadron
GC	Groupe de Chasse - Fighter Squadron
GCCP	Groupement Colonial de Commandos Parachutistes - Colonial Parachute Commando Group
GCP	Groupement de Commandos Parachutistes - Parachute Commando Group
GLAP	Groupement Léger Aéroporté - Light Airborne Group
GM	Groupe Mobile - Mobile Group, all-arms task force similar to WW2 combat commands
GMEO	Groupement de Marche d'Extrême Orient - Far East March Group
GMNA	Groupe Mobile Nord-Africain - North African Mobile Group
GONO	Groupement Opérationnel du Nord-Ouest - North-West Operational Group
GT	Groupe de Transport - Transport Squadron
GTM	Groupement de Tabors Marocains - Moroccan Tabor Group
LCA	Landing Craft, Assault
LCI	Landing Craft, Infantry
LCM	Landing Craft, Mechanised
LCT	Landing Craft, Tank
LCVP	Landing Craft, Vehicle Personnel
LSIL	Landing Ship Infantry (Large)
LSSL	Landing Ship, Support (Large)
LV	Lieutenant de Vaisseau - roughly a senior Naval Lieutenant in British terms
LVT	Landing Vehicle, Tracked - US amphibious vehicles
LVT(A)	Landing Vehicle, Tracked (Armoured) - armoured version of LVT
OAP	Opération Aéroportée - Airborne Operation
PA	Point d'appui - strongpoint
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PB	Pháo binh - Field Artillery
PC	Poste de Commandement - Command Post
PIM	Prisonniers et Internés Militaires - POWs and Interned Military Personnel, often assigned to French combat units to serve as porters
PK	Poste Kilométrique – roadside kilometer marker
PM	Pistolet mitrailleur - Machine Pistol
RAA	Régiment d'Artillerie d'Afrique - Artillery Regiment of Africa
RAC	Régiment d'Artillerie Coloniale - Colonial Artillery Regiment
RACM	Régiment d'Artillerie Coloniale du Maroc - Moroccan Colonial Artillery Regiment
RAP	Régiment d'Artillerie Parachutiste - Parachute Artillery Regiment

RBFM	Régiment Blindé de Fusiliers-Marins - Marines Armoured Regiment
RC	Route Coloniale - Colonial Road
RCC	Régiment de Chasseurs à Cheval - Chasseurs à Cheval Regiment (armoured cavalry)
RCP	Régiment de Chasseurs Parachutistes - Parachute Chasseurs Regiment
REC	Régiment Étranger de Cavalerie - Foreign Legion Cavalry Regiment (i.e. armoured)
REI	Régiment Étranger d'Infanterie - Foreign Legion Infantry Regiment
RF	Route Fédérale - Federal Road
RFM	Régiment de Fusiliers-Marins - Marines Regiment
RIC	Régiment d'Infanterie Coloniale - Colonial Infantry Regiment (French personnel)
RICM	Régiment d'Infanterie Coloniale du Maroc - Colonial Infantry Regiment of Morocco
RMIC	Régiment de Marche d'Infanterie Coloniale - Colonial Infantry March Regiment
RMSEO	Régiment de Marche de Spahis d'Extrême-Orient - Far-East Spahi March Regiment (spahis are North African cavalrymen)
RP	Route Provinciale - Provincial Road
RSA	Régiment de Spahis Algériens - Algerian Spahi March Regiment
RSM	Régiment de Spahis Marocains - Moroccan Spahi March Regiment
RTA	Régiment de Tirailleurs Algériens - Algerian Infantry Regiment
RTM	Régiment de Tirailleurs Marocains - Moroccan Infantry Regiment
RTS	Régiment de Tirailleurs Senegalais - Senegalese Infantry Regiment
RTT	Régiment de Tirailleurs Tunisiens - Tunisian Infantry Regiment
SGB	Sous-Groupement Blindé - Armoured Task Force
SKZ	Sung Khong Ziat (locally produced recoilless rifle)
Tabor	Moroccan battalion-size unit recruited in mountain areas
td	Tieu Doan - Viet Minh battalion
TD	Trung Doan - Viet Minh regiment
TDKQ	Tieu Doan Kinh Quan (Vietnamese Light Infantry Battalion)
TDND	Tieu Doan Nhay Du - Vietnamese Parachute Battalion
Tu Vê	Viet Minh local militia
VM	Viet Minh, abbreviated form of "Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi" (Revolutionary League for the Independence of Vietnam).
VNQDD	Vietnam Quôc Dân Dang - Nationalist Party of Vietnam
Xà	Village

Note: The most frequently encountered family names are single word such as:

Nguyen, Tran, Le, Vu, Vo, Hoang, Huynh, Pham, Ngo, Truong, Phan, Doan, Thai, Trinh, Dang, Bui, Lam, Cao, Duong, Dinh, Do, Luu, Ly, etc.