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From War Memory to Heritage Preservation and Valorization: The Vinh Loc Civilian Wartime Logistics Workers Memorial Site and the 1968 Tet Offensive

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Abstract

The Vinh Loc Civilian Wartime Logistics Workers Memorial Site commemorates 32 civilian wartime logistics workers who lost their lives during an air attack on the night of 15 June 1968. Twenty-five were women, most of them very young. Their story sheds light on the role of civilians in the logistical networks that supported military operations around Saigon–Gia Dinh during the 1968 Tet Offensive. The event has remained part of local memory for more than half a century, preserved through family narratives, eyewitness accounts, and a collective death-anniversary ceremony held each year. Using documentary sources, field observations, and accounts from witnesses and local participants, this study reconstructs the historical setting of the Vinh Loc event and traces the ways in which its memory has been maintained and passed on. Historical analysis and source criticism are combined with perspectives from memory and heritage studies. The significance of Vinh Loc lies not only in the wartime event itself. It also rests on the

continuing connection between the site, the people who died there, their families, and the community that has kept their memory alive. Seen from this perspective, Vinh Loc offers a distinct case within Vietnam’s war heritage and draws attention to the experiences of civilian wartime logistics workers, especially young women, whose contribution has received less attention than that of combat forces. Preserving the site requires careful historical documentation as well as continued attention to community memory, commemoration, and historical education. Memory tourism can bring this history to a wider public, but its development needs to respect the commemorative character of the site and the historical experiences it represents. Rather than turning wartime loss into a tourism commodity, the valorization of Vinh Loc should help preserve and communicate the memory of those who died and deepen public understanding of the human costs of war.

Keywords: Civilian Wartime Logistics Workers, Vinh Loc, 1968 Tet Offensive, War Memory, War Heritage, Memory Tourism

1. Introduction

The 1968 Tet Offensive occupies an important place in the history of the Vietnam War. While much attention has been devoted to military operations and combat units, the offensive also depended on extensive local logistical networks. Weapons, food, medical supplies, and wounded soldiers had to be moved between revolutionary bases and the battlefield, often under difficult and dangerous conditions. In the Saigon–Gia Dinh area, much of this work was undertaken by *dân công hỏa tuyến*—civilian wartime logistics workers recruited largely from local communities. Their duties included carrying ammunition, transporting wounded soldiers, digging shelters, concealing revolutionary cadres, and providing other forms of logistical support. In Vinh Loc, many of these workers were young, and women constituted a significant part of the force.

Located on the western outskirts of Saigon, Vinh Loc lay close to routes linking the city with surrounding revolutionary bases. Its wetland landscape also facilitated the movement of personnel and supplies. These conditions gave the area an important logistical role during the war. On the evening of 15 June 1968, during the second phase of the Tet Offensive, a group of 55 civilian wartime logistics workers assembled at Tan Hoa 1. They were assigned to transport wounded soldiers of the 9th Division to Duc Hoa and carry ammunition back toward Saigon. While crossing the Lang Cat wetlands near Ong Choi field, the group was detected and attacked from the air. Thirty-two people were killed—25 women and seven men—while 23 survived, many of them wounded (Binh Chanh District Party Committee, 2012)^[2]. Most of those killed were young. The event later came to be remembered locally as the “White Night of Vinh Loc.”

In the decades after the war, memories of the victims continued to be preserved by their families, surviving members of the logistics force, and the local community. The event also gradually entered official forms of commemoration. In 2005, the Vinh Loc site was designated a municipal-level historical site by the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee. In 2010, the 32 civilian wartime logistics workers who had lost their lives were collectively awarded the title Hero of the People's Armed Forces. These developments gave formal recognition to a memory that had previously been sustained primarily by survivors, families, and the local community.

Community remembrance, however, has remained central to the way the Vinh Loc event is remembered. Each year, on the twentieth day of the fifth lunar month, a collective death-anniversary ceremony is held at the site. Survivors, relatives of the victims, and local residents return to commemorate those who died. Students and social organizations also take part in site visits, meetings with witnesses, commemorative activities, and the reading of the victims' names. Such practices have allowed memories held by the wartime generation to be passed on to people with no direct experience of the conflict. Vinh Loc is therefore more than a place associated with a historical event. It is also a place where the memory of that event continues to be maintained within community life.

This continuing relationship between memory, place, and social practice provides a useful point of departure for examining Vinh Loc. Assmann's (1995) ^[1] concept of *cultural memory* draws attention to the ways in which memories of the past are sustained beyond the generation of direct witnesses through symbols, rituals, and recurring social practices. Studies of war-related sites have likewise shown that commemorative rituals, memorials, and museums can give collective remembrance a durable social and spatial form, turning historical places into *sites of cultural memory*. In Vinh Loc, survivors' recollections, family remembrance, the annual ceremony, the memorial site, educational activities, and official recognition have developed over different periods rather than as part of a single process. Examining these layers makes it possible to consider not only what happened in June 1968, but also how the event has been remembered and how that memory has acquired heritage value.

Existing publications and local historical records provide substantial information on Vinh Loc, including the history of the area, the organization and activities of the civilian wartime logistics force, the events of 15 June 1968, the victims, and the subsequent development of the memorial site. These sources are essential for reconstructing the event and establishing its historical significance. Less attention, however, has been given to the relationship between the historical event, its persistence in community memory, and the gradual recognition of that memory as heritage. The Vinh Loc case is particularly relevant in this regard because those commemorated were not members of a regular combat unit. They were civilian logistics workers, most of them young, and 25 of the 32 people killed were women. Their experience brings into view a less prominent aspect of the war: the participation and sacrifice of local civilians, particularly women, in the logistical networks that sustained military operations around Saigon.

The question of how Vinh Loc should be preserved and presented today is closely connected to these historical and

commemorative meanings. War-related sites may serve as places of remembrance and historical education while also attracting visitors. Studies of *battlefield tourism* have emphasized the role of such places in bringing visitors into direct contact with the landscapes and material settings of war. At the same time, the use of traumatic pasts for tourism requires caution. Carbone (2024) ^[3] notes the risk that wartime suffering may be commodified when war-related sites are presented primarily as emotionally charged visitor experiences, weakening their educational and commemorative purposes. For Vinh Loc, heritage valorization therefore needs to remain grounded in the historical character of the site and in the memories of the community for whom it continues to have personal and social meaning.

This article examines the Vinh Loc case through three related issues: the historical setting and activities of civilian wartime logistics workers during the 1968 Tet Offensive; the ways in which memories of the events of 15 June 1968 have been preserved and transmitted within the local community; and the historical, socio-cultural, and educational values that have developed around the memorial site. It then considers the preservation and valorization of the site in the present, including the place of memory-related tourism within its broader educational and commemorative functions. The study seeks to clarify how a local wartime event became part of community memory and, over time, acquired heritage value. In doing so, it offers a case through which to examine the relationship between war memory, community, and heritage in post-war Vietnam.

2. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach grounded primarily in historical research, with perspectives from memory and heritage studies used where relevant. This approach reflects the nature of the Vinh Loc case, which cannot be understood solely through the events of 15 June 1968. In the decades following the war, memories of those who lost their lives continued to be preserved within families, among surviving members of the civilian wartime logistics force, and in the local community. They were subsequently expressed through commemorative practices, official recognition of the site, and educational activities. The study therefore examines Vinh Loc in both its wartime historical setting and its post-war development as a place of remembrance and heritage.

2.1 Analytical Framework

Historical analysis provides the foundation for the study. It is used to establish the position of Vinh Loc within the wartime landscape of Saigon-Gia Dinh, its place in the logistical networks supporting military operations, the activities of the civilian wartime logistics workers, and the events of 15 June 1968. Establishing this historical context is necessary for distinguishing the event itself from the memories and interpretations that developed around it in the post-war period.

To examine the latter, the study draws on Assmann's (1995) ^[1] concept of *cultural memory*. Of particular relevance to Vinh Loc is the understanding that memories of the past can be sustained beyond the generation of direct witnesses through places, symbols, rituals, and recurring social practices. Studies of war-related sites have similarly shown that commemorative rituals, memorials, and museums contribute to *collective remembrance* and may give

historical places a continuing role as *sites of cultural memory*.

At Vinh Loc, remembrance of those who died has taken several forms. Alongside the recollections of survivors and bereaved families, the annual death-anniversary ceremony on the twentieth day of the fifth lunar month continues to be held at the memorial site. Meetings with witnesses, commemorative readings of the names of the dead, and educational activities have also brought the history of 1968 to students and younger generations with no direct experience of the war. The designation of Vinh Loc as a municipal-level historical site in 2005, followed by the posthumous award of the title Hero of the People's Armed Forces to the collective of 32 civilian wartime logistics workers in 2010, marked a further stage in this history of remembrance. A memory maintained largely by families, survivors, and the local community thus also acquired formal recognition by the state.

A heritage perspective is used to consider the present-day significance of Vinh Loc. In this article, *heritage valorization* is understood more broadly than the tourism use of a historical site. It includes the preservation of commemorative space, historical education, heritage interpretation, and continued community participation in the life of the site. Memory-related tourism is considered one possible form of such engagement rather than its principal purpose. This distinction is important for war-related sites, where public presentation needs to retain the historical and commemorative meanings of place and avoid the commodification of wartime suffering.

The analysis consequently considers the relationship between the historical event, community memory, commemorative practices, official heritage recognition, and the present-day preservation and valorization of the site. These are not treated as successive stages in a predetermined or linear process. Rather, they provide a means of examining the different meanings that have accumulated around Vinh Loc since 1968.

2.2 Materials

The principal historical sources consist of local histories and publications dealing directly with the Vinh Loc civilian wartime logistics workers. Works compiled by the Binh Chanh District Party Committee are used to establish the local historical context, Vinh Loc's position on the outskirts of Saigon–Gia Dinh, the activities of the civilian logistics force, and the events of 1968. Among these, *Dân công hỏa tuyến Vinh Lộc Mậu Thân năm 1968* provides detailed information on the composition of the force, its duties in transporting wounded soldiers and ammunition, and the events of the night of 15 June 1968.

A second body of sources consists of legal documents, heritage records, and materials concerning the management of the site. These include the decision designating Vinh Loc as a municipal-level historical site, documents relating to the official recognition of the 32 civilian wartime logistics workers, the establishment of the site management board, and records issued by the relevant cultural authorities. These materials are used to trace the formal recognition and subsequent management of the memorial site. Current heritage legislation provides a legal point of reference for considering its preservation and valorization, as well as the possibility of proposing Vinh Loc for national-level heritage designation.

A third group of sources concerns commemorative and educational activities associated with the site, particularly the annual death-anniversary ceremony, commemorative visits, meetings with witnesses, and historical education programmes. These materials are used to examine how memories of the 1968 event have been maintained and transmitted within the community. They are not treated as direct evidence for reconstructing the wartime event itself.

The study also draws on scholarship concerning *cultural memory*, *collective remembrance*, war memorial sites, *battlefield tourism*, and heritage conservation. These works provide an analytical point of reference for interpreting the Vinh Loc case and for placing it in comparison with selected war-related sites in Vietnam and elsewhere. They are used as theoretical and comparative sources rather than as substitutes for historical evidence relating directly to Vinh Loc.

2.3 Research Methods

Historical analysis is the principal method employed in this study. Sources are examined with attention to their provenance, date of production, authorship, and purpose. Information concerning chronology, location, participants, assigned duties, and the course of events is compared across the available documentary record before being incorporated into the historical reconstruction. This provides the basis for examining Vinh Loc's position within the logistical hinterland of Saigon–Gia Dinh and the activities of civilian wartime logistics workers during the 1968 Tet Offensive.

Historical source criticism is particularly important for accounts compiled years or decades after the war. Local historical publications are used primarily to reconstruct the setting and course of events; administrative and heritage records document the subsequent recognition and management of the site; materials concerning annual ceremonies, commemoration, and educational activities provide evidence of how the event has been remembered in later periods. Maintaining this distinction helps avoid treating post-war remembrance as an unchanged record of the events of 1968.

A case-study approach is used to examine Vinh Loc through the relationship between place, people, and memory. The unit of analysis is therefore not confined to the physical features of the memorial site. It also encompasses the 1968 event, those commemorated at the site, their families, surviving civilian wartime logistics workers, the local community, and the commemorative practices associated with the place. This makes it possible to examine changes in the meaning of Vinh Loc from a wartime location to a place of remembrance and, subsequently, an officially recognized historical site.

Comparison is used primarily in the discussion section. Vinh Loc is considered alongside selected war-related memorial sites in Vietnam and elsewhere, with attention to particular aspects such as the subjects of commemoration, the organization of commemorative space, educational functions, and the ways in which wartime memories are presented to the public. Among the Vietnamese examples, Dong Loc Junction provides a particularly relevant point of comparison because it likewise commemorates young people engaged in wartime support activities and gives prominence to the participation and sacrifice of women. Other cases, including the Cu Chi Tunnels, the Central

Office for South Vietnam historical site, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., are used only where particular aspects are comparable. The purpose is to clarify the characteristics of Vinh Loc rather than to equate sites that emerged from different historical circumstances.

2.4 Source Analysis and Interpretation

The sources were examined in relation to four main issues: the historical setting and events of 1968; memories preserved by participants, families, and the local community; subsequent commemorative practices and official recognition of the site; and its preservation and contemporary heritage use.

For the reconstruction of the 1968 event, particular attention was paid to source provenance, chronology, and the circumstances in which individual accounts were produced. Details recorded in publications compiled long after the event were considered in relation to their date and purpose and, where possible, checked against other available evidence. For post-war materials, the focus shifts from reconstructing the event to examining remembrance: who participates in commemoration, how the past is recalled, which practices have persisted, and how memories have been transmitted to generations with no direct experience of the war.

Reading these different bodies of evidence together makes it possible to trace changes in the meaning attached to Vinh Loc over time. A place associated with the deaths of civilian wartime logistics workers in 1968 subsequently became a place of remembrance for families and the local community, received formal heritage recognition, and later assumed broader educational and interpretive functions. These developments are not understood as a straightforward progression. Community memory, official recognition, and heritage value emerged under different circumstances and have not always followed the same trajectory.

The interpretation of the evidence is finally used to consider the preservation and valorization of the Vinh Loc Civilian Wartime Logistics Workers Memorial Site in the present. Particular attention is given to historical education, the continuation of commemorative practices, community participation, and the potential for memory-related tourism. These possibilities are assessed in relation to the historical character of the site and the need to respect the memories of those commemorated there. In this sense, preservation and valorization are treated not as separate objectives, but as closely related aspects of maintaining the historical and social significance of Vinh Loc in contemporary life.

3. Results

1. Historical Context of Vinh Loc and the “White Night of Vinh Loc”

Before 1 July 2025, Binh Chanh was an outlying district of Ho Chi Minh City, comprising Tan Tuc Township and fifteen communes, including Vinh Loc A and Vinh Loc B. Vinh Loc has a relatively long history of settlement and land reclamation. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, migrants from northern and central Vietnam came to the area to reclaim land and establish hamlets and villages. This history is reflected in such place names as Tan Loc, Vinh Loc, Xuan Hoa, Thoi Hoa, and Tan Hoa. According to Trinh Hoai Duc's *Gia Dinh thanh thong chi* (*Gia Dinh Gazetteer*), Vinh Loc was a village in Tan Binh District, Gia Dinh Prefecture. When the French colonial

administration established Tan Binh Province on 19 May 1944, Vinh Loc was placed under Go Vap District. After the August Revolution of 1945, Tan Binh Province was incorporated into Gia Dinh Province (Binh Chanh District Party Committee, 2012)^[2].

During the resistance war against French colonial rule (1945–1954), Vinh Loc and the wider Binh Chanh area were sites of sustained resistance activity. Vinh Loc assumed greater strategic importance during the subsequent war. By the mid-twentieth century, it lay on the western outskirts of Saigon, approximately 17 km from the city centre and 6 km from Tan Son Nhat Airport, and bordered the Vuon Thom base area. Several important roads passed through or near the area, including the Dai Han Highway (now National Highway 1), Provincial Road 10, and Provincial Road 9. These routes connected Vinh Loc with Saigon to the east and the base areas farther west.

The terrain was also important to wartime activities. Small paths ran from residential settlements into the marshy fields of Vinh Loc–Tan Hoa. Places where village paths met the marshlands were locally known as *Goc*, among them Goc Ba Choi and Goc Nam Rua. In ordinary life, these were routes used by local residents to reach the wetlands for fishing, gathering pineapple and reeds, and grazing livestock. During the war, the same paths connected residential areas with the surrounding marshlands. Low-lying fields, wetlands, bamboo, and dense vegetation provided cover for movement and helped maintain communications between Vinh Loc, the Vuon Thom base area, and areas farther west.

After 1954, Vinh Loc Commune belonged to Tan Binh District, Gia Dinh Province. It covered approximately 56.7 km² and comprised the former areas of Vinh Loc, Xuan Hoa (Tan Hoa I), and Thoi Hoa (Tan Hoa II). In 1963, the Ngo Dinh Diem government established a number of strategic hamlets in the area, including Vinh Hoa, Vinh Thanh, Vinh Tin, Vinh Phuoc, and Vinh Hanh. Controls over residents and movement made the operation of local revolutionary networks increasingly difficult. Local organizations and support networks nevertheless continued to operate in different forms.

From the mid-1960s, Vinh Loc was an operational area for forces of the Saigon–Gia Dinh Military Region, the 9th Division, Sub-region 2, and local revolutionary organizations. Situated between the base areas and Saigon, Vinh Loc was used for maintaining forces, logistics, and communications. Village paths, marshlands, and support networks among local residents linked the peripheral areas with the Saigon battlefield. Its role as a wartime logistical hinterland therefore rested on the combination of geographical conditions, local routes, and support from the resident population.

By late 1967, preparations for the 1968 Tet Offensive led to the expansion of civilian wartime logistics groups in Vinh Loc. Under the direction of the Binh Tan District Party Committee and local Party cells, hundreds of young men and women joined these groups. They carried ammunition and wounded soldiers, breached barriers around strategic hamlets, cleared routes, and performed other tasks in support of military operations. Most were in their late teens or early twenties, although some were younger, and women made up a substantial part of the force.

Most of these civilian wartime logistics workers came from local families and continued to take part in household and

agricultural work. Many worked in the fields during the day; at night, or whenever required, they transported ammunition and food, evacuated wounded soldiers, and assisted combat units. Wartime logistics in the outskirts of Saigon therefore depended in part on the participation of local residents rather than solely on specialized military units. The large number of young women involved in these activities is also noteworthy in considering women's participation in wartime logistics in the Saigon–Gia Dinh area.

During the offensives of 1968, routes carrying weapons, food, and wounded soldiers from the outskirts towards Saigon were an important part of the logistical system. The Vinh Loc civilian wartime logistics workers operated along these routes. Much of their work took place at night, across marshy terrain and in areas exposed to military operations.

On the night of 15 June 1968, the twentieth day of the fifth lunar month in the Mau Than year, fifty-five civilian wartime logistics workers from Vinh Loc Commune assembled at the Tan Hoa I crossroads. Their assignment was to carry four wounded soldiers of the 9th Division to Binh Thuy in Duc Hoa, Long An, and then return to transport ammunition. The group moved across the marshlands, carrying the wounded through sections of flooded terrain. While they were carrying out the mission, they were detected and attacked by U.S. aircraft. Thirty-two people were killed, most of them young women between sixteen and twenty years of age (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee Commission for Information and Education, 2024) ^[10].

The following morning, while the area remained under tight control, relatives and local residents recovered the bodies and brought them back for burial. The events of 15 June 1968 later came to be remembered locally as the “White Night of Vinh Loc.” The incident was closely connected with Vinh Loc's wartime role as a logistical hinterland, the supply routes serving operations in and around Saigon, and the participation of local residents in the 1968 Tet Offensive.

After the war, memories of the event and of those who died remained within the families of the victims, among surviving civilian wartime logistics workers, and in the local community. Over time, memories held by those who had directly experienced the event became part of a broader community remembrance maintained through commemorative practices. The location associated with 15 June 1968 gradually became a place of commemoration and was later officially recognized as a historical site.

The history of Vinh Loc can therefore be read at two closely related levels. The first concerns the historical setting of the 1968 event and the place of civilian wartime logistics within the Saigon–Gia Dinh battlefield. The second concerns the ways in which the event continued to be remembered after the war. The relationship between the event, the people who experienced it, the place where it occurred, and subsequent practices of remembrance provides the historical basis for examining the preservation and valorization of the Vinh Loc memorial site in the sections that follow.

2. Historical and Cultural Values of the Vinh Loc Civilian Wartime Logistics Workers Memorial Site

The Vinh Loc Civilian Wartime Logistics Workers Memorial Site is closely associated with the events of 15 June 1968 and with the civilian logistics network that supported military operations in the Saigon–Gia Dinh area. In the decades after the war, memories of those who died

were preserved by their families, surviving members of the logistics force, and the local community. Annual death-anniversary ceremonies, commemorative and educational activities, and later official recognition gave the site a continuing place in local life. Its significance today can be considered in terms of its historical, socio-cultural, and educational values.

2.1 Historical Value

The deaths of 32 civilian wartime logistics workers during the 1968 Tet Offensive at Hamlet 4, Vinh Loc A Commune, Binh Chanh District, constituted a major loss among those providing logistical support on the outskirts of Saigon–Gia Dinh. In 2010, the collective of 32 Vinh Loc civilian wartime logistics workers was posthumously awarded the title “Hero of the People's Armed Forces” (Binh Chanh District Party Committee, 2012) ^[2].

The historical significance of Vinh Loc needs to be understood within the wider logistical network of the Saigon–Gia Dinh battlefield. Located between the western base areas and Saigon, Vinh Loc had a network of village paths and marshlands, as well as local support networks, that facilitated the movement of personnel, food, weapons, and wounded soldiers. Civilian wartime logistics workers were directly involved in these activities. The events of 15 June 1968 were thus part of the broader role played by the urban periphery in supporting military operations towards Saigon in 1968.

The composition of the Vinh Loc logistics force is particularly noteworthy. Most of its members were young people recruited from the local population. Of the 32 who died, 25 were women. Their work included carrying wounded soldiers and ammunition through areas exposed to military operations. The evidence from Vinh Loc adds to the historical record of civilian participation in the war, especially the involvement of young women in battlefield logistics. This aspect deserves attention alongside the more familiar histories of combat units and military operations in the Saigon–Gia Dinh area.

Local accounts and memories have also preserved details of the circumstances in which the logistics workers died while carrying out their duties without protective fortifications. Survivors and relatives continued to recount these details in the decades that followed, and they became part of the remembered history of the “White Night of Vinh Loc.” The importance of the site lies less in the scale of a particular battle than in the experience of a local civilian logistics force and the losses it sustained.

On 12 July 2005, the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee issued Decision No. 119/2005/QĐ-UB recognizing the Vinh Loc Civilian Wartime Logistics Workers site as a municipal-level historical site (Ho Chi Minh City Department of Culture and Sports, 2024) ^[8]. In 2010, the collective of 32 civilian wartime logistics workers was posthumously awarded the title “Hero of the People's Armed Forces” (Binh Chanh District Party Committee, 2012) ^[2]. These two forms of recognition brought into the official commemorative sphere an event that had already been remembered within local families and the Vinh Loc community for several decades.

Among the war-related heritage sites of Ho Chi Minh City, Vinh Loc is also distinctive in terms of whom it commemorates. It is not a military headquarters or a site associated primarily with a combat unit, but a place dedicated to local residents who served in wartime logistics,

most of those killed being young women. This provides an important basis for considering Vinh Loc alongside other war memorial sites discussed later in this study.

2.2 Socio-cultural Value: Community Memory and Local Identity

In the years following the “White Night of Vinh Loc,” memories of those who died were kept first within bereaved families, among survivors, and by local residents. Over time, these personal and family memories were shared more widely through commemorative activities and became part of the collective memory of the Vinh Loc community.

The most visible expression of this remembrance is the collective death-anniversary ceremony held each year on the twentieth day of the fifth lunar month, the date of the 1968 event. Local authorities, relatives, residents, and community organizations take part in commemorating the 32 civilian wartime logistics workers. Survivors and family members return to the site to offer incense, meet one another, and recall those who died and the events surrounding their deaths. The persistence of this practice over several decades shows that the memory of the event remains embedded in community life rather than surviving only in historical records or heritage documentation.

Death-anniversary observance is a familiar practice in Vietnamese family life. At Vinh Loc, however, remembrance extends beyond individual households to a group of people who died together while carrying out the same wartime duty. They are remembered both as members of particular families and as members of the Vinh Loc civilian logistics force. Family remembrance and community remembrance therefore meet within the same commemorative practice.

Assmann (1995) ^[1] argues that cultural memory extends beyond individual recollection through forms of representation and practice that carry the past across generations. Vinh Loc offers a useful case in this respect. Memories once held mainly by survivors and bereaved families have continued through the annual death anniversary, oral accounts, the memorial site itself, the names of those who died, and other commemorative activities.

Place is central to this process. For survivors and relatives, the site is associated with particular people and lived experiences. Those born after the war encounter the events of 1968 differently: through witness accounts, photographs, documentary sources, lists of names, commemorative ceremonies, and visits to the site. The physical setting anchors these different forms of remembrance to the place where the event occurred.

This connection has acquired added importance as Vinh Loc and the wider Binh Chanh area have undergone rapid urbanization. The present landscape differs substantially from the marshlands, rice fields, and settlements of the wartime period. Against this changing setting, the memorial site and the annual ceremony retain a tangible connection with the locality’s past. The “White Night of Vinh Loc,” initially remembered by a generation that experienced the war, has gradually entered the shared historical memory of the community and become associated with local identity.

2.3 Educational Value and the Transmission of Memory

The educational value of the Vinh Loc memorial site can be seen in visits, commemorative programmes, and extracurricular activities involving school and university students and community organizations. Meetings with

witnesses, visits to the site, incense-offering ceremonies, and the reading of the names of those who died bring younger generations into contact with the history of the event through place, documentary evidence, and personal testimony.

This form of engagement is particularly relevant as the generation with direct memories of the war grows smaller. For those born after 1975, the 1968 Tet Offensive is known mainly through historical sources, oral testimony, and inherited forms of remembrance. At Vinh Loc, these different ways of encountering the past are brought together at the place associated with the event itself.

The history of the civilian wartime logistics workers also broadens the way in which the war can be presented to younger generations. Alongside the military history of the 1968 Tet Offensive, Vinh Loc draws attention to work behind the front lines: transporting weapons, carrying wounded soldiers, organizing supplies, and mobilizing local resources. It brings into view the involvement of communities on the urban periphery, whose contribution is less visible in accounts centred on battles and combat units.

The participation of young women is especially relevant. Twenty-five of the 32 people who died were women, most of them very young. Their experiences provide evidence for examining women’s roles in wartime logistics in southern Vietnam and, more broadly, the extent to which the war entered the everyday lives of communities on the outskirts of Saigon.

The transmission of this history cannot rely on commemorative activities alone. With fewer surviving witnesses, oral testimonies, photographs, lists of civilian wartime logistics workers, and related records need to be collected, compared, and preserved. For historians, these materials are sources that require critical assessment and comparison with written records. At the memorial site, the same materials can support interpretation, exhibitions, and educational activities.

Preserving Vinh Loc therefore involves more than maintaining its physical structures. Documentary evidence, the names and experiences of those involved, witness testimony, and the annual commemorative practices maintained by the community are equally important to the meaning of the site. Preserving these materials and practices, and passing them on to later generations, is essential to sustaining the heritage values associated with Vinh Loc.

3. The Vinh Loc Memorial Site in Relation to Selected War Heritage Sites in Vietnam and Beyond

Within Vietnam’s system of war-related heritage sites, the Vinh Loc Civilian Wartime Logistics Workers Memorial Site may be considered in relation to several prominent sites, including the Cu Chi Tunnels in Ho Chi Minh City, the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) Base in Tay Ninh, and Dong Loc Junction in Ha Tinh. Each is associated with particular places, events, and people of the war and has subsequently become a site of commemoration, preservation, and public engagement. Beyond Vietnam, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. provides a useful point of reference for considering how memories of war are given material form, interpreted, and communicated to the public.

The comparison is not intended to establish a hierarchy among these sites. Rather, it considers three related aspects:

the people and events commemorated; the relationship between memory and place; and the ways in which memories of war have been preserved, interpreted, and transmitted in the present. Seen in this context, Vinh Loc occupies a distinctive place within the wider landscape of war heritage and commemoration.

3.1 The Cu Chi Tunnels: From Wartime Landscape to Heritage Site

The Cu Chi Tunnels were designated a Special National Site by the Prime Minister under Decision No. 2367/QĐ-TTg dated 23 December 2015. Extending for more than 200 km, the tunnel system reflects the organization of combat and everyday life under severe wartime conditions. In 2010, the Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee initiated the renovation and upgrading of the Ben Duoc Memorial Temple, retaining its nine-part spatial arrangement under the theme “The Resilient and Indomitable People of Saigon–Cho Lon–Gia Dinh,” which presents the history of resistance from the war against French colonial rule to the spring of 1975 (Ho Chi Minh City Department of Culture and Sports, 2015) [8].

Cu Chi and Vinh Loc formed part of the same broader wartime landscape of Saigon–Gia Dinh, but they preserve different aspects of that past. At Cu Chi, the tunnel system, defensive structures, and other physical remains allow visitors to encounter the wartime environment in a relatively direct manner. The historical landscape itself has become an important part of the way memories of the war are preserved and interpreted.

Vinh Loc is different in character. The site is associated with a particular event and with a logistics force drawn largely from the local population. These civilian workers did not primarily serve as combatants. Their duties included carrying wounded soldiers, transporting ammunition, and undertaking other forms of logistical support for military operations. At Vinh Loc, the historical significance of the site consequently rests to a considerable extent on the people involved and on the memories associated with them. The collective death-anniversary ceremony held on the twentieth day of the fifth lunar month, attended by relatives, surviving civilian logistics workers, and members of the local community, continues to connect the events of 1968 with the present.

The experience of Cu Chi also suggests that the future development of Vinh Loc need not depend on reconstructing a large-scale battlefield environment. More important is the careful presentation of the historical setting in which the event took place: the route followed by the civilian logistics workers, the marshland landscape, the duties assigned to them, the events of the night of 15 June 1968, and the individual histories of those involved. Witness testimony, photographs, maps, lists of participants, and personal records can provide the documentary basis for interpreting the site.

3.2 The Central Office for South Vietnam Base: Preserving Place and Interpreting Historical Context

The Central Office for South Vietnam Base was associated with the leadership of the revolutionary movement in southern Vietnam during the war and with a number of major political and military decisions. On 10 May 2012, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 548/QĐ-TTg designating the site as a Special National Site (Government Portal of Vietnam, 2012) [5]. Its surviving and reconstructed

spaces provide evidence of the activities of an institution that exercised strategic leadership during the war.

Vinh Loc differs substantially in both scale and historical function. It was not the location of a strategic command or leadership institution, but a place associated with civilian logistics on the outskirts of Saigon. Whereas the Central Office for South Vietnam represents the history of wartime leadership and organization at the strategic level, Vinh Loc offers another perspective, centred on local logistical networks and the participation of ordinary residents.

The two cases nevertheless demonstrate the importance of relating wartime activities to their physical and geographical settings. At Vinh Loc, the marshlands, the places locally known as *Goc*, village paths, and networks of support among residents formed part of a logistical landscape connected with routes leading towards Saigon. Much of this landscape has since been transformed by urbanization. Identifying, documenting, and where possible mapping the historical landscape of Vinh Loc during the 1960s would therefore contribute both to historical research and to a fuller interpretation of the memorial site.

Vinh Loc also retains a form of remembrance that is closely rooted in local community life. The collective death-anniversary ceremony on the twentieth day of the fifth lunar month continues to bring together relatives, survivors, local residents, and public institutions. The ceremony is therefore not simply an activity conducted at the memorial site; it is part of the continuing relationship between the community and the wartime past.

3.3 Dong Loc Junction: Remembering Individuals and Transmitting Memory Across Generations

Among the Vietnamese cases considered here, Dong Loc Junction has particularly close parallels with Vinh Loc. Located in Can Loc District, Ha Tinh Province, Dong Loc was a strategic transportation point associated with the deaths of ten young female volunteers during the war. On 9 December 2013, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 2383/QĐ-TTg recognizing Dong Loc Junction as a Special National Site (Government Portal of Vietnam, 2013) [6]. The deaths of the ten young women subsequently became one of the most widely remembered examples of the wartime contribution and sacrifice of Vietnamese youth (People’s Army Newspaper, 2023) [15].

There are notable similarities between Dong Loc and Vinh Loc. Both sites commemorate young people engaged in work supporting military operations, and young women occupy a prominent place in the memory of both. Their historical settings, however, were different. Dong Loc was a strategic transportation junction, whereas Vinh Loc lay on the outskirts of Saigon–Gia Dinh and was associated with a civilian logistics force recruited largely from the local community. Of the 32 people who died at Vinh Loc, 25 were women.

Dong Loc has since developed into an important site of commemoration and historical education. Memorial ceremonies, incense offerings, and educational activities are regularly held there. In July 2023 alone, the site received more than 36,000 visitors who came to visit and pay tribute (Ha Tinh Provincial People’s Committee, 2025) [7]. Its development shows how the histories of identifiable individuals, when closely connected with place and supported by sustained interpretation, can continue to transmit memories of war to later generations.

For Vinh Loc, the personal histories of the civilian logistics workers deserve similar attention. Their names, ages, family backgrounds, occupations, wartime duties, and the circumstances in which they died are not merely supplementary details. Taken together, they form an important part of the historical record and of the way the site is remembered today. Collecting, verifying, and organizing these materials would provide a stronger documentary basis for exhibitions, educational programmes, and historical interpretation.

Vinh Loc also has a distinctive commemorative practice of its own. The collective death anniversary has continued to be observed annually. While memorial structures, monuments, and inscribed names give material form to remembrance, the annual ceremony shows that memory is also maintained through social practice. Relatives and surviving members of the civilian logistics force remain involved in this process, allowing memories of the event to continue within the community rather than being confined to the memorial structures themselves.

3.4 Vinh Loc in Relation to Selected War Memorial Sites Beyond Vietnam

At the international level, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., dedicated in 1982, offers a useful example of the relationship between individual memory and commemorative space. Designed by Maya Lin, the memorial consists of two black granite walls inscribed with the names of more than 58,000 U.S. service members who died or were listed as missing during the Vietnam War. Rather than relying primarily on conventional representations of military victory or heroism, the memorial places the names of individuals at the centre of the commemorative experience. Its reflective surface brings the image of the visitor into visual contact with the inscribed names, creating a direct relationship between the living and the dead (Korzilius, 2022)^[11].

Wagner-Pacifi and Schwartz (1991)^[19] regard the Vietnam Veterans Memorial not simply as a monument but as a space in which memories of the war are shaped and negotiated in public life. Korzilius (2022)^[11] likewise draws attention to the memorial's restrained representation of loss, in which individual names provide one of the principal means through which visitors encounter the human consequences of war.

The historical and political contexts of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Vinh Loc are clearly different. The comparison is therefore not intended to equate the historical meanings of the two sites. Its relevance lies instead in the place given to individual identity within commemorative practice. In Washington, memory is given material form through thousands of names inscribed in stone. At Vinh Loc, the names and stories of the 32 people who died have been preserved through the memorial site, family and community memory, the testimony of survivors, and the annual collective death-anniversary ceremony.

This comparison also draws attention to the importance of individual life histories in the interpretation of war. At Vinh Loc, presenting the civilian logistics workers through their names, ages, family backgrounds, occupations, assigned duties, surviving testimonies, photographs, and other documentary evidence would allow visitors to approach the "White Night of Vinh Loc" through the lives of those who experienced it, rather than only through the figure of 32

casualties. Their individual histories can be presented within the broader context of civilian logistics, the 1968 Tet Offensive, and the wartime landscape of Saigon–Gia Dinh.

The cases discussed above show that war memory has been preserved and given heritage meaning in different ways. At Cu Chi, surviving physical remains and the wartime landscape play a central role in interpretation. The Central Office for South Vietnam is associated with the history of strategic leadership and wartime organization. At Dong Loc Junction, the stories of young volunteers, particularly women, have become central to commemoration and historical education. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial demonstrates how names and individual identities can become powerful elements in the public remembrance of wartime loss.

The Vinh Loc case is different in several respects. Its significance derives from the close relationship between a specific place and event, the memory of the 32 people who died, the prominent participation of young women, the testimony of survivors, and commemorative practices that remain part of community life. These elements—**place, people, memory, and commemorative practice**—together form the core of the site's heritage significance.

For Vinh Loc, the cases examined here are best understood as points of reference rather than models to be replicated. The priority remains the documentation of the historical landscape, the preservation of archival and family materials, the recording of surviving witnesses, and further research into the lives of the civilian logistics workers. The annual commemorative practices maintained by local families and the community are equally important. Together, these elements provide the historical and social basis for preserving the memory of the "White Night of Vinh Loc" and for the continued preservation and valorization of the site's heritage values.

4. Discussion

4.1 From War Memory to Heritage Value

The significance of Vinh Loc lies not only in what happened there in June 1968, but also in how the event has been remembered over the decades that followed. The deaths of 32 civilian wartime logistics workers were first remembered by those who had taken part in the mission, by survivors, and by families who had lost relatives. These memories remained strong within Vinh Loc and, over time, became part of the wider historical memory of the war on the outskirts of Saigon–Gia Dinh.

Several layers of memory can still be traced. The first belongs to those who experienced the event directly. Their recollections concern the work of carrying wounded soldiers and ammunition, the routes across the marshlands, the air strike, and the recovery of the dead the following morning. Many details have survived through oral accounts rather than contemporary written records. Within families, they were passed down through stories, ancestor worship, and death-anniversary observances. The annual collective death anniversary brought these family memories into a broader commemorative setting. Relatives, former civilian logistics workers, local residents, and local authorities now gather at the memorial site to remember the dead. In this sense, the Vinh Loc case illustrates the process described by Assmann (1995)^[11], in which memories rooted in lived experience are carried beyond the generation that experienced them through ritual, commemoration, and other cultural practices.

Place has remained important in keeping these memories connected to the event. The “White Night of Vinh Loc” is associated with a specific historical landscape: the marshlands, the routes taken by the civilian logistics workers, the location of the air strike, and local place names that continue to appear in community accounts. These were once part of the wartime landscape on the outskirts of Saigon. Much has changed as Vinh Loc has become increasingly urbanized, and many features of the former landscape are now difficult to recognize. For this reason, the heritage significance of Vinh Loc cannot be understood solely through the commemorative structures erected after the war. The location itself, the historical landscape surrounding it, and the traces of the 1968 setting that can still be identified are also part of the history of the site.

The individual histories of the civilian logistics workers are equally important. The figure of 32 deaths conveys the scale of the loss, but tells us little about the people themselves. Twenty-five were women, and most were young. They came from local families and had lived ordinary lives in Vinh Loc before joining the logistics force. Their ages, family backgrounds, occupations, assigned duties, and the circumstances in which they died deserve to be documented more fully. Such evidence would add a human dimension to the history of the event, while also contributing to a better understanding of civilian participation, particularly that of young women, in the logistical networks supporting military operations around Saigon–Gia Dinh.

The designation of Vinh Loc as a municipal-level historical site in 2005, followed by the posthumous award of the title “Hero of the People’s Armed Forces” to the collective of 32 civilian wartime logistics workers in 2010, gave official recognition to an event that had already been remembered locally for decades. Yet official recognition did not replace community remembrance. Families and local residents continue to return to the site each year, offer incense, observe the collective death anniversary, and recall those who died. The present significance of Vinh Loc has developed through the interaction of these two processes: remembrance within the community and recognition within the official heritage system.

The comparative cases discussed above make clear that memories of war are preserved in different ways. At Cu Chi, physical remains and the wartime landscape are central to the interpretation of the site. The Central Office for South Vietnam is closely associated with the history of strategic leadership and wartime organization. Dong Loc Junction is remembered above all through the young volunteers who died there, particularly the ten women whose story has become part of national commemoration. At the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, individual names form the central element of remembrance. Vinh Loc has no surviving wartime complex comparable in scale to Cu Chi, but it retains a close connection between place, identifiable individuals, witness memory, and continuing community commemoration. This combination gives the site much of its particular character.

There is, however, an important distinction between memory and historical evidence. More than half a century has passed since the events of 1968. Witness accounts may change over time through repeated retelling, later experiences, and the influence of narratives that developed after the war. Oral testimony remains an important historical source, but it needs to be treated critically. Wherever

possible, witness and family accounts should be compared with archival records, maps, photographs, administrative documents, and other contemporary materials. It is also useful to distinguish between what witnesses saw or experienced themselves, what they learned from others, and interpretations that emerged later. This becomes especially important when oral accounts are incorporated into exhibitions or public narratives at the memorial site.

Such source criticism does not place documentary evidence above community memory. The two preserve different kinds of information. Written records may establish dates, administrative decisions, locations, or the organization of wartime activities, while oral testimony may preserve details of personal experience and local knowledge that were never recorded in official documents. Reading these sources together offers a fuller account of the event and reduces the risk of turning commemoration into a simplified historical narrative.

This point has practical implications for the preservation of Vinh Loc. New monuments, reconstructed settings, or other physical additions may help visitors understand the site, but they should not overshadow the people and memories that give it meaning. At the same time, interpretation based largely on remembered narratives, without sufficient comparison with historical evidence, may gradually detach the story from the circumstances of 1968. The physical setting and community memory therefore need to be preserved together, with careful attention to the historical evidence available for interpreting both.

The movement from war memory to heritage at Vinh Loc has thus taken place over several decades. It began with the memories of survivors and bereaved families, continued through local commemorative practices, became attached to a recognized memorial site, and eventually entered the formal heritage system. What is now regarded as the heritage of Vinh Loc includes more than its physical structures. It also includes oral testimony, the names and life histories of those who died, family memories, the annual collective death anniversary, and the continuing relationship between the local community and the place.

Seen in this way, the future valorization of Vinh Loc is not simply a question of increasing visitor numbers or adding new facilities. A more fundamental question is what should be preserved from this past and how it should be presented to later generations. Historical research, heritage preservation, education, and memory tourism all have a place in that process, but they depend on the same foundation: a historically grounded interpretation of the 1968 event and continued attention to the community that has kept its memory alive.

4.2 Heritage Valorization through Memory Tourism

Changes in tourism over recent decades have also affected the ways in which cultural heritage is approached and experienced. Visitors increasingly look beyond monuments and physical attractions to the histories, local identities, and cultural experiences associated with particular places. Richards (2011)^[17] notes that cultural tourism has gradually expanded from the consumption of tangible cultural products towards experience, creativity, and engagement with the cultural life of destinations. Historical sites, including those associated with war, have consequently acquired a wider role in tourism. Their use, however, raises

questions not only about tourism development but also about how the past is preserved and presented.

The literature uses several terms for tourism associated with war and its remembrance, including *war tourism*, *battlefield tourism*, *memory tourism*, and *memory-of-war tourism*. Their meanings overlap but are not identical. What matters here is that a war-related site is more than a surviving physical trace of an event. It is also a place where the past is remembered and interpreted, and where later generations encounter histories they did not experience themselves. Memory tourism, in this sense, involves more than visiting a former wartime location. Its value depends largely on what visitors are able to learn about the place, the people associated with it, and the memories that have survived there.

Recent studies have likewise moved away from treating heritage as something that can be separated from the communities in which it exists. Pranskūnienė and Zabulionienė (2023)^[16] examine heritage across different levels, from individuals and local communities to broader regional settings, and emphasize its changing meanings in different contexts. Zhang *et al.* (2025)^[20] approach the issue spatially, linking the identification and classification of heritage resources with conservation and sustainable development under conditions of urbanization. In Vietnam, Nam and Thanh (2024)^[13] draw attention to the role of local communities in safeguarding heritage and transmitting the knowledge associated with it. These observations are relevant to Vinh Loc because much of what gives the site meaning has been preserved outside its physical structures—in witness accounts, family memories, and commemorative practices maintained locally.

Vinh Loc has a number of features that could support the development of memory tourism. The event itself can be located in time and place, and the people involved can be identified. Thirty-two people died, 25 of them women. Their names, ages, family backgrounds, occupations, wartime duties, and the circumstances of their deaths make it possible to reconstruct the event through individual lives. The annual collective death anniversary on the twentieth day of the fifth lunar month adds another dimension. More than half a century after the event, relatives and local residents continue to return to the site. The memory of the “White Night of Vinh Loc” therefore survives not only in official commemoration but also in community practice.

This gives Vinh Loc a character different from war heritage sites where the visitor experience depends primarily on surviving military structures or battlefield remains. At Vinh Loc, much of the historical interpretation would have to be built from documentary and oral evidence: witness testimony, photographs and records relating to the 32 civilian logistics workers, family documents, historical maps, wartime routes, the former marshland landscape, and local place names connected with the events of 1968. These materials first need to be collected, checked against other sources, and systematically documented. Digitization would make them more accessible for both research and public presentation.

The individual histories of the civilian logistics workers should occupy an important place in this work. Presenting their names alone is not enough. Where evidence survives, exhibitions could include photographs, age, occupation, family background, wartime duties, and accounts given by relatives or survivors. Such material would allow visitors to

understand the event through the lives of particular people rather than through the figure of 32 deaths alone. It would also bring greater attention to a less visible aspect of wartime history: the participation of civilians, especially young women, in the logistical networks around Saigon–Gia Dinh.

Interpretation at the site need not depend on extensive physical reconstruction. A digital map could trace the route taken by the group in June 1968. QR codes could provide access to individual biographies, photographs, maps, and recorded testimony. For school and university groups, visits could include the examination of historical sources, conversations with witnesses or relatives where possible, and discussion of changes in the Vinh Loc landscape since the war. These forms of interpretation would make use of the evidence that survives without attempting to recreate a battlefield environment that no longer exists in its earlier form.

Vinh Loc could also be connected with other historical sites in Ho Chi Minh City through thematic routes dealing with war and the history of Saigon–Gia Dinh. There is little reason for the site to reproduce the model of the Cu Chi Tunnels or to be evaluated against Cu Chi in terms of scale and visitor numbers. Its historical importance lies elsewhere. Vinh Loc tells the story of civilian wartime logistics on the urban periphery, of ordinary local residents who became part of the war effort, and of the particularly prominent participation of young women. In this respect, it can add a different dimension to the history presented at better-known war heritage sites in the city.

There are also limits to how such a site should be used for tourism. Carbone (2024)^[3] warns that war-related attractions may become vehicles for politicized or nationalist narratives, or that suffering itself may be commercialized as a sensational visitor experience. These concerns are especially important at Vinh Loc. Most of those commemorated were young, many were women, and they died while carrying out logistical duties. The air strike and the deaths of the 32 should not be dramatized simply to heighten the emotional impact of a visit.

The historical context and the people involved should remain at the centre of interpretation. This does not require the tragedy of the event to be softened. Rather, it means explaining why the civilian logistics workers were there, what they were doing, who they were, and what their deaths meant to their families and community. Their histories also offer an opportunity to discuss the wider participation of civilians and women in wartime logistics and the effects of war on communities living around Saigon. Remembering wartime sacrifice can, in this way, lead to a broader reflection on the human consequences of war and the value of peace.

The local community has an important place in this process. Relatives of those who died, surviving civilian logistics workers, and local residents should not be treated simply as informants for researchers or heritage managers. They have been involved in keeping the memory of the event alive for decades. Their participation is therefore relevant when decisions are made about exhibitions, the use of photographs and oral testimony, commemorative activities, and the stories presented to visitors. This is also one way of ensuring that tourism development does not gradually detach the memorial site from the community whose memories gave it much of its present meaning.

For Vinh Loc, memory tourism is better understood as a means of bringing the history of the site to a wider public than as an end in itself. Visitor numbers alone would say little about whether the heritage has been successfully valorized. Of greater importance is whether visitors understand what happened in 1968, the role played by civilian wartime logistics workers, the lives behind the names commemorated at the site, and the losses experienced by the local community.

Vinh Loc therefore has the potential to become a meaningful memory-tourism site in Ho Chi Minh City, but its development should remain closely tied to historical research and heritage preservation. Rather than turning the memorial into a conventional war-tourism attraction, the emphasis should be on its functions as a place of commemoration, historical interpretation, and education. Preserving the historical character of the site, treating the dead with respect, and maintaining the involvement of the local community would allow its heritage values to reach a wider public without weakening the memories that have been preserved there. In this way, the history of Vinh Loc can be transmitted to later generations not only as a memory of war, but also as a reminder of its human cost and of the value of peace.

4.3 Heritage Valorization through Memory Tourism

Over recent decades, changing patterns of tourism have broadened the ways in which cultural and heritage resources are experienced. Visitors increasingly seek not only places to visit, but also the stories, local identities, and layers of memory associated with particular destinations. Richards (2011)^[17] notes that cultural tourism has gradually moved beyond an emphasis on tangible cultural products towards experience, creativity, and engagement with the cultural life of destinations. War-related sites and places of remembrance can therefore become important heritage tourism resources, provided that tourism does not compromise their historical significance or commemorative character.

In heritage tourism studies, terms such as *war tourism*, *battlefield tourism*, *memory tourism*, and *memory-of-war tourism* are used to describe different forms of travel associated with war, conflict, and remembrance. Although their meanings are not entirely interchangeable, they share a common concern with places where the past continues to be remembered and interpreted. A war-related site is more than a physical remnant of an event that has ended. Its meaning is continually shaped by historical narratives, personal memories, commemorative practices, and the ways later generations encounter the past. Memory tourism, in this sense, is less about visiting a former battlefield than about understanding history through places, individual lives, and the memories attached to them.

Recent scholarship has likewise questioned approaches that treat heritage as a fixed resource detached from the communities in which it exists. Pranskūnienė and Zabulionienė (2023)^[16] understand heritage as an ongoing process through which meanings are formed and reinterpreted at individual, community, and regional levels. Zhang *et al.* (2025)^[20] examine the identification and classification of heritage resources in relation to preservation and sustainable development under conditions of urbanization. In Vietnam, Nam and Thanh (2024)^[13] emphasize the role of local communities in safeguarding

heritage and transmitting the knowledge and values associated with it. These approaches are relevant to Vinh Loc because the significance of the site lies not only in the memorial itself. It also survives in eyewitness accounts, family memories, and commemorative practices that have remained part of local community life.

Vinh Loc offers a distinctive basis for the development of memory tourism. The events of 15 June 1968 can be located in a specific historical landscape and, importantly, connected to identifiable individuals rather than an anonymous body of wartime casualties. Thirty-two people died, including 25 women, most of them still very young. Information concerning their ages, family backgrounds, wartime duties, and circumstances of death makes it possible to approach the event through individual lives. At the same time, the memory of the “White Night of Vinh Loc” continues to be sustained locally, most visibly in the collective death-anniversary ceremony held on the twentieth day of the fifth lunar month. The event is therefore remembered not only through a physical memorial, but also through a commemorative practice that continues to bring the past into the social life of the community.

In this respect, Vinh Loc differs from many war-related heritage sites where interpretation is built largely around surviving battlefields, military structures, or wartime artefacts. Its historical narrative can instead draw on eyewitness testimony, records and photographs of the 32 civilian wartime logistics workers, family documents, historical maps, wartime transport routes, the former marshland landscape, and place names associated with the events of 1968. The lives of the individuals involved deserve particular attention. Placing them at the centre of interpretation would enable visitors to see beyond the figure of 32 casualties and encounter the young men and women themselves—their families, their daily lives, and the circumstances in which they became involved in wartime logistics on the outskirts of Saigon–Gia Dinh.

This approach does not require large-scale reconstruction of the wartime landscape. Digital maps could trace the routes used by civilian logistics groups in 1968; QR codes could provide access to individual biographical records; historical photographs and recorded interviews could preserve the voices of witnesses and relatives. For school and university students, visits could combine learning at the historical site with documentary sources, historical maps, and discussion of how the Vinh Loc landscape has changed from the war years to the present period of urbanization. Research on Cu Chi has shown that local communities and tour guides are not simply custodians of memory. Through the stories they tell, they also shape how visitors understand and engage with the past (Madigan & West, 2023; Gillen, 2018)^[12, 4].

Vinh Loc could also form part of a wider network of historical sites, including the Cu Chi Tunnels, the Rung Sac historical area, the Phu Tho Hoa secret tunnels, and other places associated with the wartime history of Saigon–Gia Dinh. Such connections would be meaningful only if each site retained its own historical character. Vinh Loc should not reproduce the narrative already presented at Cu Chi or elsewhere. Its contribution lies precisely in a different history: wartime logistics, communities on the urban periphery, and the substantial participation of young women. This would broaden the historical content of heritage tourism in Ho Chi Minh City while providing opportunities

for connections with historical tourism across the wider Southeast region of Vietnam (Van, 2025)^[18].

There are, however, ethical limits to the tourism use of places associated with death and loss. Carbone (2024)^[3] points to two recurrent problems at war-related tourist sites: the use of wartime memory to sustain politicized or nationalist narratives and the commercialization of suffering as a sensational visitor experience. Both deserve attention at Vinh Loc. Most of those commemorated were young; many were women; and they were killed while carrying out logistical duties. The air strike and the deaths of the 32 should therefore not be dramatized simply to heighten emotional impact or make the site more attractive to visitors. Interpretation should instead remain grounded in historical context and individual experience. Who were these people? Why did they join the civilian wartime logistics force? What work did they perform? How did their deaths affect their families and the local community? Addressing such questions does not diminish the tragic character of the event. It makes that tragedy historically intelligible. The story of Vinh Loc can thereby provide a fuller understanding of the roles played by civilian logistics workers, women, and local communities during the war, while also drawing attention to the consequences of armed conflict for ordinary lives.

Memory tourism, then, is better understood as a means of communicating the historical significance of Vinh Loc than as an end in itself. Visitor numbers alone say little about whether the site has been effectively valorized. More important is whether a visit enables people to understand what happened in 1968, the place of civilian wartime logistics workers in the conflict, and the individual lives behind the collective memory. Approached in this way, Vinh Loc can remain first and foremost a place of remembrance while also serving historical education and public interpretation. The history preserved there speaks not only of wartime sacrifice, but also of the human cost of war and, consequently, the value of peace.

4.4 Long-term Heritage Preservation and the Prospect of National Heritage Designation

The long-term valorization of Vinh Loc depends first on the preservation of the historical evidence and memories from which the site's significance derives. This requires more than maintaining the existing memorial structures. Attention must also be given to the historical setting, surviving elements of the landscape, documentary sources, memories of witnesses and relatives, and commemorative practices that have connected the community to the events of 1968 for more than half a century. The issue has become increasingly urgent as urbanization transforms the surrounding landscape and the generation with direct memories of the war grows older.

Further historical research and systematic documentation should therefore be a priority. The route followed by the civilian wartime logistics group, locations mentioned in oral testimony, the former marshland, the site of the air strike, and the wider logistics network in Vinh Loc need to be reconstructed from different categories of evidence. Oral accounts from witnesses and relatives are indispensable, but they should be read critically and compared, where possible, with contemporary maps, photographs, administrative records, military documents, and other written sources. Such source criticism is necessary not only for historical reconstruction but also for determining which places,

memories, and material traces can be reliably associated with the event.

The documentation of the 32 people who died is equally important. Individual records should be developed wherever the available evidence permits, including names, dates and places of birth, family backgrounds, occupations, participation in civilian logistics work, duties on the night of 15 June 1968, photographs, personal belongings, and memories preserved by relatives. The purpose is not simply to provide additional material for an exhibition. Recovering these individual histories would restore the dead to the historical record as people rather than numbers. It would also provide a valuable body of evidence for further research on civilian wartime logistics, women's participation in the war, and the involvement of communities on the outskirts of Saigon–Gia Dinh.

The historical landscape also requires attention. Much of the setting in which the events of 1968 occurred has been altered, and a complete physical reconstruction of the former landscape would be neither feasible nor necessarily appropriate. A more useful approach would be to identify, survey, map, photograph, and document locations that can still be established with reasonable certainty. Historical maps, GIS, and digital modelling may help reconstruct the spatial relationship between settlements, marshland, transport routes, and the location of the air strike. Used carefully, these methods can make a largely vanished wartime landscape intelligible without creating a speculative reconstruction of the past.

Preservation also needs to account for community memory and commemorative practice. The annual collective death-anniversary ceremony, accounts of former civilian wartime logistics workers, family memories, and the continuing involvement of local residents have kept the events of 1968 present in community life. These are not secondary additions to the physical site; they are part of the way Vinh Loc has acquired and retained meaning over time. They should be documented and transmitted, but not converted into performances designed primarily for tourists. Local residents and families should remain active participants in decisions concerning the use of oral testimony, photographs, personal documents, and commemorative practices in exhibitions and public interpretation.

Digitization offers practical support for this work. A digital database of the 32 civilian wartime logistics workers, historical maps of the 1968 logistics routes, recorded oral histories, photographs, and family documents would provide resources for both research and public access. It would also help preserve materials that are currently dispersed among families and institutions and may otherwise be lost. The value of digital technology here lies in making historical evidence more secure and accessible. It should support, rather than substitute for, careful historical research and the authenticity of the surviving evidence.

Within this broader preservation strategy, the possibility of national heritage designation deserves consideration. The Vinh Loc site was designated a municipal-level historical site by the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee under Decision No. 119/2005/QĐ-UB dated 12 July 2005. In 2006, the Binh Chanh District People's Committee issued Decision No. 3455/QĐ-UBND establishing a management board responsible for the preservation and promotion of the site (Ho Chi Minh City Department of Culture and Sports, 2024)^[8]. Two decades after municipal designation, there is

reason to reassess the scope of its significance in light of further research, newly collected documentation, and the continuing place of the event in community memory.

The case for such reassessment rests partly on the nature of the event and the people whose lives it commemorates. Vinh Loc was not the site of a major battle in the conventional sense. Its historical significance comes instead from the collective deaths of civilian wartime logistics workers engaged in transporting wounded soldiers and ammunition and in other forms of logistical support. Twenty-five of the 32 people who died were women, most of them very young. The site therefore preserves a dimension of wartime history that has not always been equally visible in established narratives and heritage sites: the contribution of civilian logistics networks, local communities, and young women.

The comparisons with the Cu Chi Tunnels, the Central Office for South Vietnam, and the Dong Loc T-junction discussed earlier help to clarify this point. Cu Chi represents a landscape of underground warfare and local resistance; the Central Office for South Vietnam is associated with strategic leadership; and Dong Loc has become a national symbol of the sacrifice of youth volunteers on a major wartime transport route. Vinh Loc represents something different: civilian wartime logistics on the periphery of a major urban centre. Its significance should therefore not be judged solely by the scale of the military event. The site adds another social dimension to the history of the war and, more specifically, to the memory of the 1968 Tet Offensive. The continuing relationship between the site and the local community provides another reason for reassessment. The collective death-anniversary ceremony on the twentieth day of the fifth lunar month still brings together relatives, former civilian wartime logistics workers, and local residents. Memory has thus been sustained through more than official designation and the physical memorial. It also survives through repeated acts of remembrance within the community. Any evaluation of Vinh Loc's heritage significance should take account of this relationship between historical place, identifiable individuals, family memory, and continuing commemorative practice.

Any proposal for national designation must, however, be considered within the provisions of Vietnam's Law on Cultural Heritage No. 45/2024/QH15, effective from 1 July 2025 (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2024) ^[14]. The historical and community values identified in this study do not, by themselves, establish that the site meets every requirement for national designation. A stronger evidential basis is still needed to demonstrate its representative significance and the extent to which its value reaches beyond the local level. This would require a systematic inventory of documentary sources, verification of the biographies of the 32 people who died, comparison of oral accounts with independent historical evidence, identification of locations associated with the logistics route and the air strike, and assessment of changes to the historical landscape.

National designation should therefore not become the overriding objective of preservation at Vinh Loc. The more immediate task is to build a reliable historical record and to identify more precisely what gives the site its significance. That work would strengthen long-term preservation regardless of the eventual level of designation. It would also bring into wider historical discussion a group that remains comparatively less visible in accounts of the war: civilian

wartime logistics workers, young women, and communities living on the outskirts of Saigon–Gia Dinh. If subsequent research demonstrates that Vinh Loc possesses representative significance beyond the local level, national designation can then be considered as an outcome of heritage recognition rather than its starting point.

For Vinh Loc, long-term preservation ultimately depends on four related areas of work: historical research and documentation; the protection of the site, its historical landscape, and associated memories; continued community participation; and public interpretation and education. Digitization, memory tourism, and any future proposal for national designation should support these priorities rather than determine them. The central concern is therefore not how many new facilities are added or how many visitors the site receives, but whether the historical relationship between the place, the events of 1968, the people involved, and the community that has remembered them can still be understood. Preserving that relationship would allow Vinh Loc to remain a site of remembrance while bringing a relatively underrepresented history—that of civilian logistics workers, young women, and communities on the outskirts of Saigon–Gia Dinh—into a wider understanding of the war.

This study is limited by the uneven survival of contemporary documentary evidence relating to the Vinh Loc event. Much of the available local documentation was compiled after the war, while personal recollections were recorded at different points in time and under different commemorative circumstances. The study therefore does not treat later accounts as direct substitutes for contemporary evidence. Further research drawing on archival records, individual biographies, and a more systematic collection of oral histories would help refine the reconstruction of the event and clarify the changing meanings attached to the site.

4. Conclusion

The Vinh Loc Civilian Wartime Logistics Workers Memorial Site commemorates 32 people who lost their lives on the night of 15 June 1968. Twenty-five of them were women, most still very young. Their deaths were part of the heavy human losses experienced on the outskirts of Saigon–Gia Dinh during the 1968 Tet Offensive, but they also reveal another side of the war: the work of civilian logistics networks that carried wounded soldiers, ammunition, and supplies between rear bases and the battlefield. Vinh Loc brings particular attention to civilians, young women, and local communities whose contribution to the war has often remained less visible than that of combat forces.

More than half a century later, the event has not disappeared from local memory. It is remembered in eyewitness accounts and family narratives, and especially through the collective death-anniversary ceremony held on the twentieth day of the fifth lunar month each year. These practices have maintained a close connection between the place, those who died there, and the community that remembers them. Vinh Loc is thus more than the site of a wartime tragedy. Over time, it has also become a place of commemoration and historical education, with historical, socio-cultural, and educational values that continue to be reproduced through community remembrance.

The comparison with other war-related sites examined in this study also helps clarify what is distinctive about Vinh Loc. Its importance does not rest on the scale of a major battle or on an extensive concentration of surviving military

structures. The site tells the story of civilian wartime logistics workers operating on the outskirts of Saigon–Gia Dinh, many of whom were young women. This gives Vinh Loc a place of its own within the wider landscape of Vietnam's war heritage. It also adds a social dimension to the history of the conflict by drawing attention to people and forms of wartime participation that can easily be overshadowed in accounts centred on battles, military units, and strategic sites.

There is considerable scope to bring this history to a wider public. Memory tourism, links with other historical sites, educational programmes, eyewitness testimony, biographical records of the 32 people who died, and digital interpretation can all contribute to this process. Yet tourism should remain a means of communicating the site's history rather than becoming the main purpose of its preservation. Any future development needs to respect the historical evidence, the commemorative character of the place, and the community that has sustained its memory. The effectiveness of such efforts should be judged less by visitor numbers than by whether visitors leave with a better understanding of the people, events, and circumstances behind the memory of Vinh Loc.

The findings also suggest that the possibility of national heritage designation deserves further consideration. Before such a proposal is advanced, however, the historical record needs to be strengthened. Further work is required to verify and supplement the documentary evidence, complete the biographical records of those who died, identify the surviving elements of the historical landscape, and establish more clearly the representative significance of the site beyond the local context. If these requirements can be met, national designation could provide a stronger legal and institutional basis for long-term preservation and help mobilize additional resources. It should follow from a well-established understanding of the site's historical and heritage significance rather than become an end in itself.

The Vinh Loc case shows that war memory does not become heritage through official recognition alone. It acquires lasting heritage significance when memories remain connected to a place, are carried by families and communities, and continue to be transmitted and interpreted by later generations. At Vinh Loc, this relationship between place, event, people, and community memory has endured for more than half a century. Preserving it is especially important as urbanization continues to transform the historical landscape of Ho Chi Minh City. Doing so will keep alive not only the memory of the Vinh Loc civilian wartime logistics workers, but also a less visible history of the 1968 Tet Offensive—the history of civilians, young women, and local communities whose wartime experiences deserve a place in the broader historical record. Their story also offers later generations a way to reflect on the human cost of war and the value of peace.

5. References

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