

Basic Detail Report



Crossbow

Date

1960s

Medium

Wood and hemp fiber

Description

This object is a wooden crossbow with a hemp fiber string from the Montagnard people of Vietnam. The name

Montagnard derives from the French for "mountain dwelling peoples," and is used today as an acceptable term to describe a group of minority indigenous cultures who reside in Vietnam's Central Highlands region. Given that this piece was collected near the city of Pleiku in Gia Lai Province, it is possible that an individual from the Jarai subculture may have made this crossbow. However, its design is more in keeping with the Sedang subculture. The Jarai, and Montagnard peoples in general, served an important role as fighters for the United States and its allies during the Vietnam War. Facing centuries of prejudice from the predominant Kinh (or Viet) ethnic group in Vietnam's lowlands and coastal regions, the Montagnard people were recruited and trained by American and Australian Special Forces. Valued for their excellent tracking skills and knowledge of the region, they specialized in unconventional warfare and used crossbows such as this one to hold back the Viet Cong forces. Traditional bows used bamboo fiber strings - this one has been replaced with a common hemp fiber string. It is estimated that 40,000 Montagnard people fought alongside the US, with only half of them surviving the war. In the aftermath, they suffered additional persecution and prejudice. Many were driven from their land and made refugees, and some were relocated to the US, primarily in North Carolina. Although their population was severely damaged by the war, their numbers have quadrupled since the 1960s and many Indigenous and American Montagnards are continually advocating to restore their lands and autonomy.

Dimensions

28 × 2 × 40 1/2 in. (71.1 × 5.1 × 102.9 cm)