

# Section V: Cold War/Vietnam



**Title:** The Soldier’s Experience—Vietnam versus World War I

**Grade Level:** Middle/High School

**Objectives:** Compare and contrast the daily lives of soldiers in World War I and Vietnam.

**National History Standards:**

Standard 3: Historical analysis and interpretation; Standard 4: Historical Research; Standard 5: Engage in historical issues—analysis; Era 8:2: Causes and global consequences of World War I; Era 9:2: Search for community, stability, and peace in an interdependent world.

**Time:** 90 minutes

**Background:**

In **Vietnam**, ground troops were equipped with M16A1 automatic rifles, ammunition, anti-personnel devices, flak jackets, helmets, and two-way radios. Helicopters airlifted them into widely dispersed locations to engage the enemy, then extracted and redeployed them. This tactic of ground warfare (referred to as airmobility) was devised for a war with no front lines. Helicopters also retrieved the dead and evacuated the wounded—most were on a surgeon’s table in a hospital within an hour.

Because extreme heat, humidity, and frequent rains wreaked havoc with standard-issue equipment, many infantrymen modified or even abandoned their gear. Some adopted captured enemy equipment (Ho Chi Minh-style sandals, for example). They prized their flop hats, extra socks, ponchos, and multiple canteens. These things made the going a bit easier as they worried about enemy ground fire and air attacks—and the constant threat of booby traps: trip-wired crossbows, concealed nail-studded boards, even excrement-coated bamboo punji sticks that could pierce a boot.

During **World War I**, opposing armies dug in and faced each other in trenches that ran nearly 500 miles across northern France—the notorious western front. Automatic rifles, machine guns, flamethrowers, improved grenades and trench mortars, and poison gas killed or disabled tens of thousands on both sides; thousands more died under the rain of artillery shells fired from highly accurate, long-range “big guns.” For the first time in a war, airplanes buzzed overhead: pilots conducted reconnaissance missions, dueling with each other, and also tossed bombs from their cockpits. On the ground, internal-combustion engines powered trucks and ambulances as well as armored tanks, first deployed in 1916. Miles of telephone line strung in the field allowed instant communication, but the lines proved vulnerable; the army often relied on traditional means to relay messages—human runners and carrier pigeons.



Resupplied U.S. Army troops  
in Phuoc Tuy Province  
*Courtesy of National Archives*

“We commuted to and from the war.”

—Marine commenting on the use of the Huey helicopter

“It rained continuously—  
the mud was 2" to 6"  
deep—there was no place  
to sleep—no fires—  
no water to drink—and  
very little warm food.”

—Major J. N. Douglas,  
Quartermaster Corps, 1918

Drawing of World War I doughboy  
with full pack *National Museum of  
American History*



### Materials:

- [Online Video -- First-person account: Hal Moore](http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/moore.aspx)  
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/moore.aspx>
- [Online Video -- First-person account: Fred Castleberry](http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/castleberry.aspx)  
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/castleberry.aspx>
- [Online Video -- First-person account: Clarence Sasser](http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/sasser.aspx)  
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/sasser.aspx>
- [Online Video -- Vietnam documentary footage of the Huey](http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/huey.aspx)  
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/huey.aspx>
- [Online Video -- World War I Overview](http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/wwi.aspx)  
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/wwi.aspx>
- Vietnam objects: rifle and helmet
- Vietnam photograph of soldiers with Huey in background
- Vietnam photograph of soldier with rifle
- World War I objects: entrenching shovel, gas mask, machine gun
- Drawing of World War I doughboy with full pack

### Lesson:

Break students into two groups. Each group's goal is to write and produce a newscast that investigates the conditions of the everyday soldier on the ground. (One team's newscast should be about the soldier's experience in Vietnam, the other team's about soldiers in World War I.)

Groups should assign each member a particular role to research and perform, such as news anchor, reporter on the scene, soldier, camera operator, producer, or director. The newscasts should be developed and presented using modern technology, even though set in the actual time periods of World War I (1914–1918) and Vietnam (1960s–1970s).

Those playing the role of soldiers should be able to answer questions such as:

1. What are your living conditions?
2. What do you eat? Where do you eat?
3. What kind of gear do you have?
4. What happens if you get wounded?
5. How do you learn about what is happening "back home"?
6. How do you communicate during battle?
7. What tactics do you use? (For example, search and destroy, take a hill, guard a perimeter, go "over the top" of the trench, move the front line forward.)
8. Why did you fight?

When ready, the teams will present their newscasts to the class—either acted out live or, if time and resources permit, shown as a video. After the presentations, hold a class discussion about the extent to which conditions for the soldier changed in the half century between World War I and Vietnam. What were the contributing factors for the change?



Soldier with rifle in Vietnam *Courtesy of National Archives*



Vietnam GI helmet and rifle  
*National Museum of American History*



World War I entrenching shovel, machine gun, uniform including gas mask  
*National Museum of American History*



# Bibliography

## General

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## Section I: War of Independence

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Marrin, Albert. *George Washington and the Founding of a Nation*. Dutton Children's Books, 2001.

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## Section II: Wars of Expansion

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## Section III: Civil War

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## Section IV: World War II

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## Section V: Cold War/Vietnam

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## Section VI: September 11 and Its Aftermath

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# *The Price of Freedom: Americans at War* Teacher's Manual DVD Menu

## ***Americans at War*, produced by The History Channel**

An introduction to the themes of the exhibition

### **War of Independence**

**First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:**

- Lydia Minturn Post, Long Island housewife, 1776
- James Collins, teenage soldier, no date
- Doonyontat, Wyandot chief, 1779
- Elijah Churchill, recipient of the first Purple Heart, 1783

### **Mexican War**

**First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:**

- José María Tornel y Mendivil, Mexican secretary of war, 1837
- George Ballentine, English volunteer for the United States, 1853
- Juan Bautista Vigil y Alarid, acting governor of New Mexico, 1846
- Ulysses S. Grant, American soldier, 1885

### **Civil War**

**First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:**

- Louis Myers, Third West Virginia Infantry, 1862
- William G. Christie, Minnesota soldier, 1863
- Eugenia Phillips, spy for the South in Washington D.C., 1861
- Spottswood Rice, African American Union soldier, 1864

### **World War I**

**World War I Overview, produced by The History Channel**

### **World War II**

**World War II Cartoons, produced by The History Channel**

**World War II Overviews in the Newsreel format,  
produced by The History Channel**

- From World War I to World War II
- The North Atlantic and North African Theater
- The European Theater
- The Pacific Theater

**The USO in World War II, produced by The History Channel**

**First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:**

- George Hynes, U.S. Army, a last letter home, 1942
- Robert Morris, U.S. Coast Guard, fighting in Italy, 1943
- Robert Sherrod, journalist, the beach at Tarawa, 1943
- Ann Darr, Women Airforce Service Pilots, 1997
- Daniel Inouye, Medal of Honor recipient, 2000

### **Vietnam**

**Excerpt from *Huey Helicopter—Air Armada*, The History Channel  
documentary, 2002**

**First-Person Accounts, produced by Arrowhead Film & Video:**

- Hal Moore, commander of a Seventh Cavalry Regiment  
battalion, 2003
- Fred Castleberry, veteran of the Twenty-fifth Infantry Division, 2002
- Clarence Sasser, recipient of the Medal of Honor, 2004,  
(produced by Pyramid Studios)



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