



# The End of the War and Its Legacy

## MAIN IDEA

President Nixon instituted his Vietnamization policy, and America's longest war finally came to an end.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Since Vietnam, the United States considers more carefully the risks to its own interests before intervening in foreign affairs.

## Terms & Names

- Richard Nixon
- Henry Kissinger
- Vietnamization
- silent majority
- My Lai
- Kent State University
- Pentagon Papers
- War Powers Act

## One American's Story

Alfred S. Bradford served in Vietnam from September 1968 to August 1969. A member of the 25th Infantry Division, he was awarded several medals, including the Purple Heart, given to soldiers wounded in battle. One day, Bradford's eight-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, inquired about his experience in Vietnam. "Daddy, why did you do it?" she asked. Bradford recalled what he had told himself.

### A PERSONAL VOICE ALFRED S. BRADFORD

"Vietnam was my generation's adventure. I wanted to be part of that adventure and I believed that it was my duty as an American, both to serve my country and particularly not to stand by while someone else risked his life in my place. I do not regret my decision to go, but I learned in Vietnam not to confuse America with the politicians elected to administer America, even when they claim they are speaking for America, and I learned that I have a duty to myself and to my country to exercise my own judgment based upon my own conscience."

—quoted in *Some Even Volunteered*



▲ A U.S. soldier sits near Quang Tri, Vietnam, during a break in the fighting.

The legacy of the war was profound; it dramatically affected the way Americans viewed their government and the world. Richard Nixon had promised in 1968 to end the war, but it would take nearly five more years—and over 20,000 more American deaths—to end the nation's involvement in Vietnam.

## President Nixon and Vietnamization

In the summer of 1969, newly elected president **Richard Nixon** announced the first U.S. troop withdrawals from Vietnam. "We have to get rid of the nightmares we inherited," Nixon later told reporters. "One of the nightmares is war without end." However, as Nixon pulled out the troops, he continued the war against North Vietnam, a policy that some critics would charge prolonged the "war without end" for several more bloody years.

**THE PULLOUT BEGINS** As President Nixon settled into the White House in January of 1969, negotiations to end the war in Vietnam were going nowhere. The United States and South Vietnam insisted that all North Vietnamese forces withdraw from the South and that the government of Nguyen Van Thieu, then South Vietnam's ruler, remain in power. The North Vietnamese and Vietcong demanded that U.S. troops withdraw from South Vietnam and that the Thieu government step aside for a coalition government that would include the Vietcong.

In the midst of the stalled negotiations, Nixon conferred with National Security Adviser **Henry Kissinger** on a plan to end America's involvement in Vietnam. Kissinger, a German immigrant who had earned three degrees from Harvard, was an expert on international relations. Their plan, known as **Vietnamization**, called for the gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops in order for the South Vietnamese to take on a more active combat role in the war. By August of 1969, the first 25,000 U.S. troops had returned home from Vietnam. Over the next three years, the number of American troops in Vietnam dropped from more than 500,000 to less than 25,000. **A**

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Synthesizing

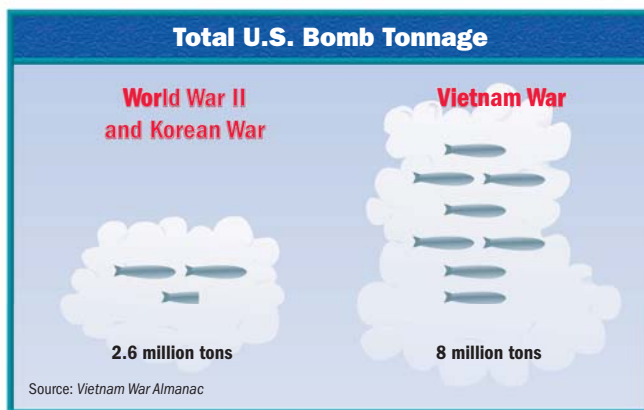
**A** What was the impact of Vietnamization on the United States?

**“PEACE WITH HONOR”** Part of Nixon and Kissinger's Vietnamization policy was aimed at establishing what the president called a “peace with honor.” Nixon intended to maintain U.S. dignity in the face of its withdrawal from war. A further goal was to preserve U.S. clout at the negotiation table, as Nixon still demanded that the South Vietnamese government remain intact. With this objective—and even as the pullout had begun—Nixon secretly ordered a massive bombing campaign against supply routes and bases in North Vietnam. The president also ordered that bombs be dropped on the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia, which held a number of Vietcong sanctuaries. Nixon told his aide H. R. Haldeman that he wanted the enemy to believe he was capable of anything.

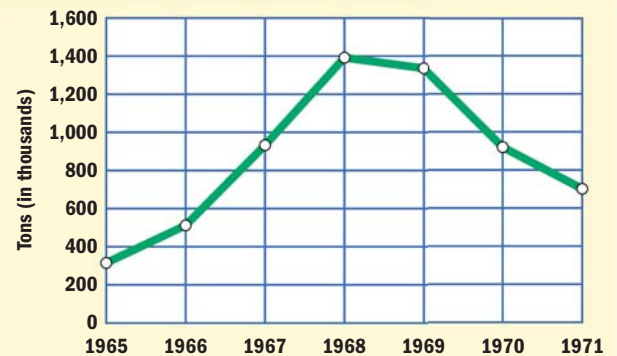
#### A PERSONAL VOICE RICHARD M. NIXON

“I call it the madman theory, Bob. . . . I want the North Vietnamese to believe I've reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war. We'll just slip the word to them that ‘for God's sake, you know Nixon is obsessed about Communists. We can't restrain him when he's angry—and he has his hand on the nuclear button’—and Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace.”

—quoted in *The Price of Power*



#### U.S. Aerial Bomb Tonnage, 1965–1971



#### SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Graphs

1. Examine the graph. How did the Vietnam conflict change over time?
2. Based on the chart, what type of war would you say was fought in Vietnam?

## Trouble Continues on the Home Front

Seeking to win support for his war policies, Richard Nixon appealed to what he called the **silent majority**—moderate, mainstream Americans who quietly supported the U.S. efforts in Vietnam. While many average Americans did support the president, the events of the war continued to divide the country.

**THE MY LAI MASSACRE** In November of 1969, Americans learned of a shocking event. That month, *New York Times* correspondent Seymour Hersh reported that on March 16, 1968, a U.S. platoon under the command of Lieutenant William Calley, Jr., had massacred innocent civilians in the small village of **My Lai** (mě' li') in northern South Vietnam. Calley was searching for Vietcong rebels. Finding no sign of the enemy, the troops rounded up the villagers and shot more than 200 innocent Vietnamese—mostly women, children, and elderly men. “We all huddled them up,” recalled 22-year-old Private Paul Meadlo. “I poured about four clips into the group. . . . The mothers was hugging their children. . . . Well, we kept right on firing.”

The troops insisted that they were not responsible for the shootings because they were only following Lieutenant Calley’s orders. When asked what his directive had been, one soldier answered, “Kill anything that breathed.” Twenty-five army officers were charged with some degree of responsibility, but only Calley was convicted and imprisoned.

**THE INVASION OF CAMBODIA** Despite the shock over My Lai, the country’s mood by 1970 seemed to be less explosive. American troops were on their way home, and it appeared that the war was finally winding down.

On April 30, 1970, President Nixon announced that U.S. troops had invaded Cambodia to clear out North Vietnamese and Vietcong supply centers. The president defended his action: “If when the chips are down, the world’s most powerful nation acts like a pitiful, helpless giant, the forces of totalitarianism and anarchy will threaten free nations . . . throughout the world.”

Upon hearing of the invasion, college students across the country burst out in protest. In what became the first general student strike in the nation’s history, more than 1.5 million students closed down some 1,200 campuses. The president of Columbia University called the month that followed the Cambodian invasion “the most disastrous month of May in the history of . . . higher education.”

### Background

Calley was imprisoned only a short time before President Nixon granted him house arrest. Calley was paroled in 1974, having served three years.



▲ President Nixon points to a map of Cambodia during a televised speech on April 30, 1970.

**VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS** Disaster struck hardest at **Kent State University** in Ohio, where a massive student protest led to the burning of the ROTC building. In response to the growing unrest, the local mayor called in the National Guard. On May 4, 1970, the Guards fired live ammunition into a crowd of campus protesters who were hurling rocks at them. The gunfire wounded nine people and killed four, including two who had not even participated in the rally.

Ten days later, similar violence rocked the mostly all-black college of Jackson State in Mississippi. National Guardsmen there confronted a group of antiwar demonstrators and fired on the crowd after several bottles were thrown. In the hail of bullets, 12 students were wounded and 2 were killed, both innocent bystanders.

In a sign that America still remained sharply divided about the war, the country hotly debated the campus shootings. Polls indicated that many Americans supported the National Guard; respondents claimed that the students “got what



**KENT STATE**

Photographer John Filo was a senior at Kent State University when anti-war demonstrations rocked the campus. When the National Guard began firing at student protesters, Filo began shooting pictures, narrowly escaping a bullet himself.

As he continued to document the horrific scene, a girl running to the side of a fallen student caught his eye. Just as she dropped to her knees and screamed, Filo snapped a photograph that would later win the Pulitzer Prize and become one of the most memorable images of the decade.

Mary Ann Vecchio grieves over the body of Jeffrey Glenn Miller, a student shot by National Guard troops at Kent State. In the original photograph, a fence post appeared behind the woman's head. It is believed that someone manipulated the image in the early 1970s to make it more visually appealing.

**SKILLBUILDER Analyzing Visual Sources**

1. Why do you think this photograph remains a symbol of the Vietnam War era today? Explain your answer with specific details of the photograph.
2. What do you think is the most striking element of this photograph? Why?



SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R23.

**MAIN IDEA****Analyzing Issues**

**B** How did the campus shootings demonstrate the continued divisions within the country?

they were asking for." The weeks following the campus turmoil brought new attention to a group known as "hardhats," construction workers and other blue-collar Americans who supported the U.S. government's war policies. In May of 1970, nearly 100,000 members of the Building and Construction Trades Council of New York held a rally outside city hall to support the government. **B**

**THE PENTAGON PAPERS** Nixon and Kissinger's Cambodia policy, however, cost Nixon significant political support. By first bombing and then invading Cambodia without even notifying Congress, the president stirred anger on Capitol Hill. On December 31, 1970, Congress repealed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which had given the president near independence in conducting policy in Vietnam.

Support for the war eroded even further when in June of 1971 former Defense Department worker Daniel Ellsberg leaked what became known as the **Pentagon Papers**. The 7,000-page document, written for Defense Secretary Robert McNamara in 1967–1968, revealed among other things that the government had drawn up plans for entering the war even as President Lyndon Johnson promised that he would not send American troops to Vietnam. Furthermore, the papers showed that there was never any plan to end the war as long as the North Vietnamese persisted.

For many Americans, the Pentagon Papers confirmed their belief that the government had not been honest about its war intentions. The document, while not particularly damaging to the Nixon administration, supported what opponents of the war had been saying.

## KEY PLAYER



**HENRY KISSINGER**  
1923–

Henry Kissinger, who helped negotiate America's withdrawal from Vietnam and who later would help forge historic new relations with China and the Soviet Union, held a deep interest in the concept of power. "You know," he once noted, "most of these world leaders, you wouldn't want to know socially. Mostly they are intellectual mediocrities. The thing that is interesting about them is . . . their power."

At first, Kissinger seemed an unlikely candidate to work for Richard Nixon. Kissinger declared, "That man Nixon is not fit to be president." However, the two became trusted colleagues.

## America's Longest War Ends

In March of 1972, the North Vietnamese launched their largest attack on South Vietnam since the Tet offensive in 1968. President Nixon responded by ordering a massive bombing campaign against North Vietnamese cities. He also ordered that mines be laid in Haiphong harbor, the North's largest harbor, into which Soviet and Chinese ships brought supplies. The Communists "have never been bombed like they are going to be bombed this time," Nixon vowed. The bombings halted the North Vietnamese attack, but the grueling stalemate continued. It was after this that the Nixon administration took steps to finally end America's involvement in Vietnam.

**"PEACE IS AT HAND"** By the middle of 1972, the country's growing social division and the looming presidential election prompted the Nixon administration to change its negotiating policy. Polls showed that more than 60 percent of Americans in 1971 thought that the United States should withdraw all troops from Vietnam by the end of the year.

Henry Kissinger, the president's adviser for national security affairs, served as Nixon's top negotiator in Vietnam. Since 1969, Kissinger had been meeting privately with North Vietnam's chief negotiator, Le Duc Tho. Eventually, Kissinger dropped his insistence that North Vietnam withdraw all its troops from the South before the complete withdrawal of American troops. On October 26, 1972, days before the presidential election, Kissinger announced, "Peace is at hand."

**THE FINAL PUSH** President Nixon won reelection, but the promised peace proved to be elusive. The Thieu regime, alarmed at the prospect of North Vietnamese troops stationed in South Vietnam, rejected Kissinger's plan. Talks broke off on

December 16. Two days later, the president unleashed a ferocious bombing campaign against Hanoi and Haiphong, the two largest cities in North Vietnam. In what became known as the "Christmas bombings," U.S. planes dropped 100,000 bombs over the course of eleven straight days, pausing only on Christmas Day.

At this point, calls to end the war resounded from the halls of Congress as well as from Beijing and Moscow. Everyone, it seemed, had finally grown weary of the war. The warring parties returned to the peace table, and on January 27, 1973, the United States signed an "Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam." Under the agreement, North Vietnamese troops would remain in South Vietnam. However, Nixon promised to respond "with full force" to any violation of the peace agreement. On March 29, 1973, the last U.S. combat troops left for home. For America, the Vietnam War had ended.

**THE FALL OF SAIGON** The war itself, however, raged on. Within months of the United States' departure, the cease-fire agreement between North and South Vietnam collapsed. In March of 1975, after several years of fighting, the North Vietnamese launched a full-scale invasion against the South. Thieu appealed to the United States for help. America provided economic aid but refused to send troops. Soon thereafter, President Gerald Ford—who assumed the presidency after the Watergate scandal forced President Nixon to resign—gave a speech in which he captured the nation's attitude toward the war:

### MAIN IDEA

#### Chronological Order

Summarize what led to the agreement to end the war in Vietnam.

## MAIN IDEA

### Evaluating Decisions

**D** Why might the United States have refused to reenter the war?

"America can regain its sense of pride that existed before Vietnam. But it cannot be achieved by refighting a war that is finished as far as America is concerned." On April 30, 1975, North Vietnamese tanks rolled into Saigon and captured the city. Soon after, South Vietnam surrendered to North Vietnam. **D**

## The War Leaves a Painful Legacy

The Vietnam War exacted a terrible price from its participants. In all, 58,000 Americans were killed and some 303,000 were wounded. North and South Vietnamese deaths topped 2 million. In addition, the war left Southeast Asia highly unstable, which led to further war in Cambodia. In America, a divided nation attempted to come to grips with an unsuccessful war. In the end, the conflict in Vietnam left many Americans with a more cautious outlook on foreign affairs and a more cynical attitude toward their government.

**AMERICAN VETERANS COPE BACK HOME** While families welcomed home their sons and daughters, the nation as a whole extended a cold hand to its returning Vietnam veterans. There were no brass bands, no victory parades, no cheering crowds. Instead, many veterans faced indifference or even hostility from an America still torn and bitter about the war. Lily Jean Lee Adams, who served as an army nurse in Vietnam, recalled arriving in America in 1970 while still in uniform.

### A PERSONAL VOICE LILY JEAN LEE ADAMS

"In the bus terminal, people were staring at me and giving me dirty looks. I expected the people to smile, like, 'Wow, she was in Vietnam, doing something for her country—wonderful.' I felt like I had walked into another country, not my country. So I went into the ladies' room and changed."

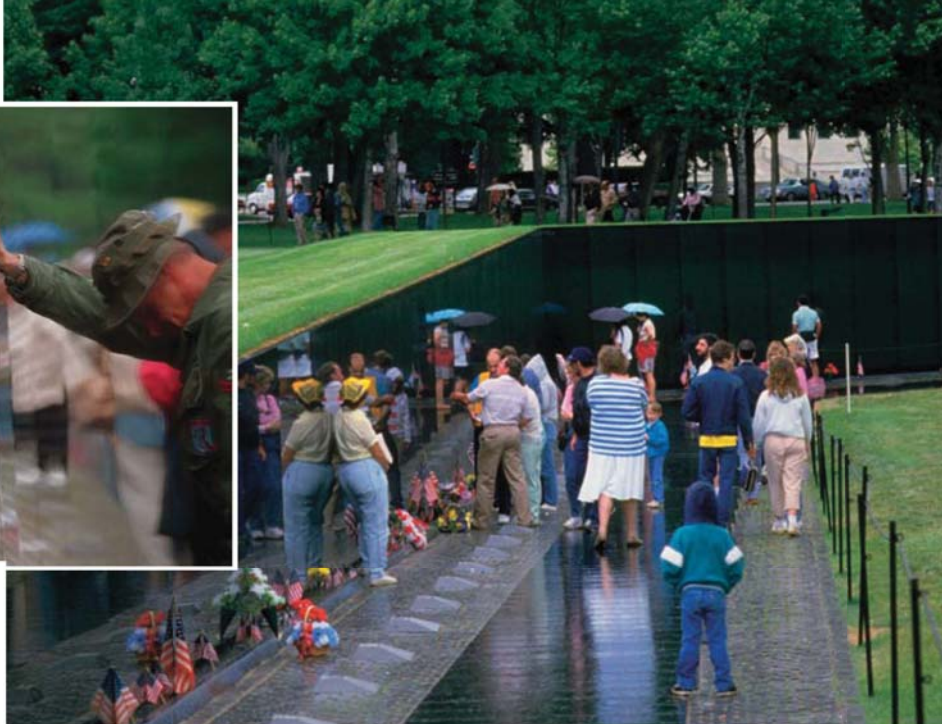
—quoted in *A Piece of My Heart*

Many Vietnam veterans readjusted successfully to civilian life. However, about 15 percent of the 3.3 million soldiers who served developed post-traumatic stress disorder. Some had recurring nightmares about their war experiences, while many suffered from severe headaches and memory lapses. Other veterans became



◀ Lieutenant Colonel Robert Stirm, a returning POW, receives a warm welcome from his family in 1973. The longest-held Vietnam POW was Lieutenant Everett Alvarez, Jr., of California. He was imprisoned for more than eight years.





## HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT



### VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL: THE WALL

In 1981, a national competition was held to determine the Vietnam memorial's design. Maya Ying Lin, above, a 21-year-old architecture student of Chinese descent, submitted the winning design—two long, black granite walls on which are etched the names of the men and women who died or are missing in action.

"I didn't want a static object that people would just look at," Lin said, "but something they could relate to as on a journey, or passage, that would bring each to his own conclusions." Lin's design became known simply as "the Wall."

▲ Each year, over two million people visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Many leave remembrances that are collected nightly by park rangers and stored in a museum. Inscribed on the memorial are over 58,000 names of Americans who died in the war or were then still listed as missing in action.

highly apathetic or began abusing drugs or alcohol. Several thousand even committed suicide.

In an effort to honor the men and women who served in Vietnam, the U.S. government unveiled the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., in 1982. Many Vietnam veterans, as well as their loved ones, have found visiting the memorial a deeply moving, even healing, experience.

**FURTHER TURMOIL IN SOUTHEAST ASIA** The end of the Vietnam War ushered in a new period of violence and chaos in Southeast Asia. In unifying Vietnam, the victorious Communists initially held out a conciliatory hand to the South Vietnamese. "You have nothing to fear," declared Colonel Bui Tin of the North Vietnamese Army.

However, the Communists soon imprisoned more than 400,000 South Vietnamese in harsh "reeducation," or labor, camps. As the Communists imposed their rule throughout the land, nearly 1.5 million people fled Vietnam. They included citizens who had supported the U.S. war effort, as well as business owners, whom the Communists expelled when they began nationalizing the country's business sector.

Also fleeing the country was a large group of poor Vietnamese, known as boat people because they left on anything from freighters to barges to rowboats. Their efforts to reach safety across the South China Sea often met with tragedy; nearly 50,000 perished on the high seas due to exposure, drowning, illness, or piracy.

The people of Cambodia also suffered greatly after the war. The U.S. invasion of Cambodia had unleashed a brutal civil war in which a communist group known as the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, seized power in 1975. In an effort to transform the country into a peasant society, the Khmer Rouge executed professionals and anyone with an education or foreign ties. During its reign of terror, the Khmer Rouge is believed to have killed at least 1 million Cambodians.

## MAIN IDEA

### Contrasting

**E** Contrast the two viewpoints regarding the legacy of the Vietnam War.

**THE LEGACY OF VIETNAM** Even after it ended, the Vietnam War remained a subject of great controversy for Americans. Many hawks continued to insist that the war could have been won if the United States had employed more military power. They also blamed the antiwar movement at home for destroying American morale. Doves countered that the North Vietnamese had displayed incredible resiliency and that an increase in U.S. military force would have resulted only in a continuing stalemate. In addition, doves argued that an unrestrained war against North Vietnam might have prompted a military reaction from China or the Soviet Union. **E**

The war resulted in several major U.S. policy changes. First, the government abolished the draft, which had stirred so much antiwar sentiment. The country also took steps to curb the president's war-making powers. In November 1973, Congress passed the **War Powers Act**, which stipulated that a president must inform Congress within 48 hours of sending forces into a hostile area without a declaration of war. In addition, the troops may remain there no longer than 90 days unless Congress approves the president's actions or declares war.

In a broader sense, the Vietnam War significantly altered America's views on foreign policy. In what has been labeled the Vietnam syndrome, Americans now pause and consider possible risks to their own interests before deciding whether to intervene in the affairs of other nations.

Finally, the war contributed to an overall cynicism among Americans about their government and political leaders that persists today. Americans grew suspicious of a government that could provide as much misleading information or conceal as many activities as the Johnson and Nixon administrations had done. Coupled with the Watergate scandal of the mid-1970s, the war diminished the optimism and faith in government that Americans felt during the Eisenhower and Kennedy years.

## NOW & THEN

### U.S. RECOGNITION OF VIETNAM

In July of 1995, more than 20 years after the Vietnam War ended, the United States extended full diplomatic relations to Vietnam. In announcing the resumption of ties with Vietnam, President Bill Clinton declared, "Let this moment . . . be a time to heal and a time to build." Demonstrating how the war still divides Americans, the president's decision drew both praise and criticism from members of Congress and veterans' groups.

In an ironic twist, Clinton nominated as ambassador to Vietnam a former prisoner of war from the Vietnam War, Douglas Peterson, a congress member from Florida. Peterson, a former air force pilot, was shot down over North Vietnam in 1966 and spent six and a half years in a Hanoi prison.

## SECTION 5

### ASSESSMENT

#### 1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

•Richard Nixon  
•Henry Kissinger

•Vietnamization  
•silent majority

•My Lai  
•Kent State University

•Pentagon Papers  
•War Powers Act

### MAIN IDEA

#### 2. TAKING NOTES

In a web like the one shown, list the effects of the Vietnam War on America.



Choose one effect to further explain in a paragraph.

### CRITICAL THINKING

#### 3. ANALYZING EFFECTS

In your opinion, what was the main effect of the U.S. government's deception about its policies and military conduct in Vietnam? Support your answer with evidence from the text. **Think About:**

- the contents of the Pentagon Papers
- Nixon's secrecy in authorizing military maneuvers

#### 4. MAKING INFERENCES

How would you account for the cold homecoming American soldiers received when they returned from Vietnam? Support your answer with reasons.

#### 5. SYNTHESIZING

In the end, do you think the United States' withdrawal from Vietnam was a victory for the United States or a defeat? Explain your answer.



# Literature of the Vietnam War

Throughout history, soldiers as well as citizens have written about the traumatic and moving experiences of war. The Vietnam War, which left a deep impression on America's soldiers and citizens alike, has produced its share of literature. From the surreal fantasy of *Going After Cacciato* to the grim realism of *A Rumor of War*, much of this literature reflects the nation's lingering disillusionment with its involvement in the Vietnam War.



▲  
Tim O'Brien in 2002.

## GOING AFTER CACCIATO

In *Going After Cacciato*, Vietnam veteran Tim O'Brien tells the story of Paul Berlin, a newcomer to Vietnam who fantasizes that his squad goes all the way to Paris, France, in pursuit of an AWOL soldier.

"How many days you been at the war?" asked Alpha's [Alpha Company's] mail clerk, and Paul Berlin answered that he'd been at the war seven days now.

The clerk laughed. "Wrong," he said. "Tomorrow, man, that's your first day at the war."

And in the morning PFC [Private First Class] Paul Berlin boarded a resupply chopper that took him fast over charred pocked mangled country, hopeless country, green skies and speed and tangled grasslands and paddies and places he might die, a million possibilities. He couldn't watch. He watched his hands. He made fists of them, opening and closing the fists. His hands, he thought, not quite believing. *His hands.*

Very quickly, the helicopter banked and turned and went down.

"How long you been at the war?" asked the first man he saw, a wiry soldier with ringworm in his hair.

PFC Paul Berlin smiled. "This is it," he said. "My first day."

—Tim O'Brien, *Going After Cacciato* (1978)



▲  
U.S. 101st Airborne Brigade memorial service—  
Lai Khe, Vietnam, 1965

## A RUMOR OF WAR

In *A Rumor of War*, considered to be among the best nonfiction accounts of the war, former marine Philip Caputo reflects on his years as a soldier in Vietnam.

At the age of twenty-four, I was more prepared for death than I was for life. . . . I knew how to face death and how to cause it, with everything on the evolutionary scale of weapons from the knife to the 3.5-inch rocket launcher. The simplest repairs on an automobile engine were beyond me, but I was able to field-strip and assemble an M-14 rifle blindfolded. I could call in artillery, set up an ambush, rig a booby trap, lead a night raid.

Simply by speaking a few words into a two-way radio, I had performed magical feats of destruction. Summoned by my voice, jet fighters appeared in the sky to loose their lethal droppings on villages and men. High-explosive bombs blasted houses to fragments, napalm sucked air from lungs and turned human flesh to ashes. All this just by saying a few words into a radio transmitter. Like magic.

—Philip Caputo,  
*A Rumor of War* (1977)

## FALLEN ANGELS

Richie Perry, a 17-year-old Harlem youth, describes his harrowing tour of duty in Vietnam in Walter Dean Myers's novel *Fallen Angels*.

The war was about us killing people and about people killing us, and I couldn't see much more to it. Maybe there were times when it was right. I had thought that this war was right, but it was only right from a distance. Maybe when we all got back to the World and everybody thought we were heroes for winning it, then it would seem right from there. . . . But when the killing started, there was no right or wrong except in the way you did your job, except in the way that you were part of the killing.

What you thought about, what filled you up more than anything, was the being scared and hearing your heart thumping in your temples and all the noises, the terrible noises, the screeches and the booms and the guys crying for their mothers or for their wives.

—Walter Dean Myers,  
*Fallen Angels* (1988)

## THINKING CRITICALLY

1. **Comparing** What similar views about war do you think these books convey?



SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R8.

2.  **INTERNET ACTIVITY** [CLASSZONE.COM](http://CLASSZONE.COM)

Visit the links for American Literature to research personal accounts of the Vietnam War, such as interviews, letters, and essays. Copy several excerpts you find particularly interesting or moving and assemble them in a book. Write an introduction to your collection explaining why you chose them. Share your book with the class.