

Consumerism And Soldiering In The Vietnam War:

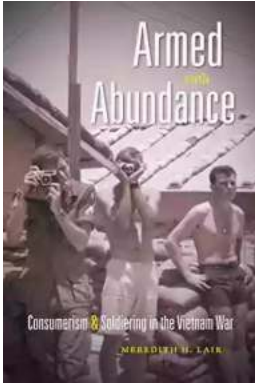
How did consumerism impact the soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War? During the height of the conflict, soldiers found themselves caught between the intensity of warfare and the allure of consumer culture. This article explores the complex relationship between consumerism and soldiering in the Vietnam War, shedding light on how materialism and capitalism permeated the lives of those on the battlefield.

Consumerism As Comfort

For many soldiers, consumer goods served as a comforting reminder of life back home. The longing for familiar products and the desire to maintain a connection with normalcy pushed soldiers to buy and trade for goods that brought a sense of comfort amidst the chaos of war. From cigarettes and music records to magazines and personal hygiene items, consumerism found its way into the hands of soldiers, offering temporary respite from the atrocities they experienced daily.

The consumer culture of the United States at the time played a significant role in shaping the desires of soldiers fighting in Vietnam. Advertising campaigns portrayed consumer goods as symbols of success and happiness, and soldiers immersed in war wanted a taste of that American dream. Consumerism acted as a carrier of hope, reminding soldiers of the life they aspired to return to once their service ended.

**Armed with Abundance: Consumerism and
Soldiering in the Vietnam War**



by Meredith H. Lair (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.1 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 2150 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Word Wise : Enabled

Print length : 313 pages



Accessibility and the Black Market

While access to consumer goods on the battlefield was limited, soldiers found inventive ways to attain them. The emergence of a thriving black market became an integral part of soldier life, with various goods being traded at inflated prices. Items such as alcohol, drugs, cameras, and even firearms found their way into the hands of soldiers, providing a means for escape and facilitating connections between soldiers and locals.

The influx of consumerism into the war zone created an unexpected dynamic in which capitalism impacted the very foundation of war. It blurred the lines between friend and foe, soldier and civilian, as the pursuit of material possessions became a central focus for many service personnel.

Escapism and Entertainment

Consumerism not only impacted the material aspects of soldiering but also played a significant role in providing entertainment and escapism for soldiers. Items such as radios, televisions, and music players became highly sought after, offering soldiers a break from the constant stress and psychological toll of war.

Films, books, and magazines transported soldiers to a different world, providing temporary relief from the realities of combat.

The provision of entertainment became a psychological necessity for soldiers, as it allowed them to momentarily detach from the brutality and horrors they faced on a daily basis. Consumer goods acted as a temporary respite, granting soldiers a few moments of normalcy in a wildly unfamiliar and hostile environment.

Post-War Consumerism and Soldier Transition

Once soldiers returned home from Vietnam, consumerism took on a new meaning. The booming economy of the 1960s and 1970s beckoned soldiers to spend their hard-earned money on a wide array of products and services. Car ownership, fashionable clothing, and technological advancements became symbols of success and reintegration into civilian life.

Consumerism played a vital role in healing the wounds of war by providing opportunities for soldiers to reconnect with society and rebuild their lives. As survivors of an intensely divisive conflict, soldiers sought solace in the consumer culture that surrounded them, allowing them to restore a sense of normalcy in the aftermath of the war.

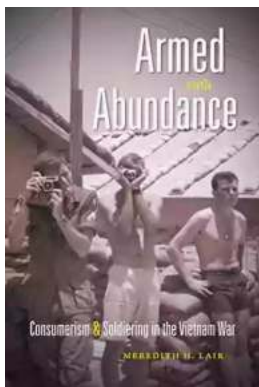
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Consumerism had a profound impact on soldiers fighting in the Vietnam War. From serving as a form of comfort in the face of chaos to providing entertainment and escape, consumer goods played a significant role in the lives of soldiers on the frontlines. Additionally, the black market and its trade of consumer goods blurred the lines between soldier and civilian, showcasing the power of capitalism even in the midst of conflict.

Furthermore, as soldiers returned home, consumerism played a crucial role in their transition back to civilian life, offering a sense of normalcy and aiding in their reintegration into society.

Overall, the intricate relationship between consumerism and soldiering in the Vietnam War serves as a reminder of the far-reaching influences of capitalism and materialism, even in the most extreme circumstances.

Keywords: Vietnam War, consumerism, soldiering, black market, capitalism, materialism, entertainment, escapism, consumer goods, reintegration



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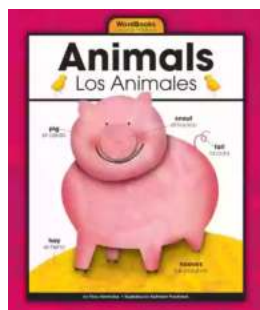
Popular representations of the Vietnam War tend to emphasize violence, deprivation, and trauma. By contrast, in *Armed with Abundance*, Meredith Lair focuses on the noncombat experiences of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam, redrawing the landscape of the war so that swimming pools, ice cream, visits from celebrities, and other "comforts" share the frame with combat.

To address a tenuous morale situation, military authorities, Lair reveals, wielded abundance to insulate soldiers--and, by extension, the American public--from boredom and deprivation, making the project of war perhaps easier and certainly more palatable. The result was dozens of overbuilt bases in South Vietnam that grew more elaborate as the war dragged on. Relying on memoirs, military documents, and G.I. newspapers, Lair finds that consumption and satiety, rather than privation and sacrifice, defined most soldiers' Vietnam deployments. Abundance quarantined the U.S. occupation force from the impoverished people it ostensibly had come to liberate, undermining efforts to win Vietnamese "hearts and minds" and burdening veterans with disappointment that their wartime service did not measure up to public expectations. With an epilogue that finds a similar paradigm at work in Iraq, *Armed with Abundance* offers a unique and provocative perspective on modern American warfare.



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