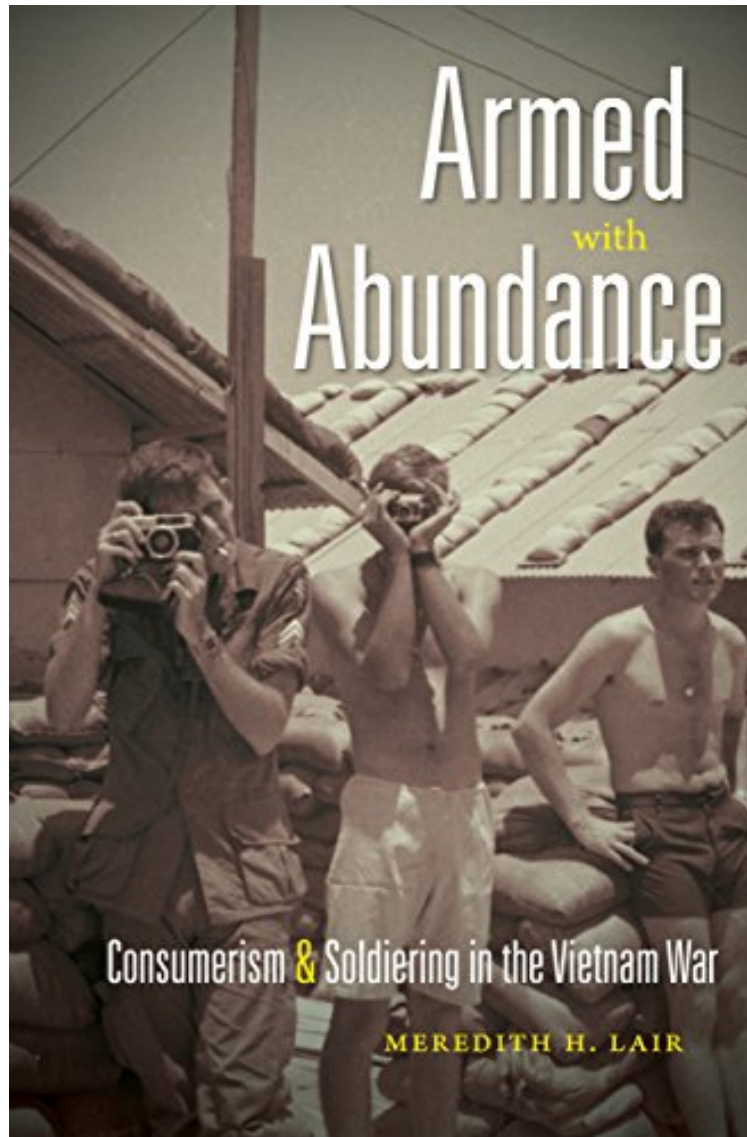


[Ebook free] Armed with Abundance: Consumerism and Soldiering in the Vietnam War

Armed with Abundance: Consumerism and Soldiering in the Vietnam War

Meredith H. Lair

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Meredith H. Lair : Armed with Abundance: Consumerism and Soldiering in the Vietnam War before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Armed with Abundance: Consumerism and Soldiering in the Vietnam War:

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. So-So ReadBy HarryI was a REMF in Vietnam, and this book doesn't ring true to my experience. One factor that stymies a lot of writers about the war is that conditions varied dramatically from year to year and from region to region throughout the years. It's hard to pin down a generalized Vietnam War experience among Americans. By the time I arrived in 1970, command had seriously broken down in parts of the rear, and Americans had divided into gangs. My biggest fear was not the Vietnamese. It was other U.S. soldiers. In my unit, we were all armed with illicit weapons. Mine included a Bowie knife. Fistfights were common, and we had to watch our backs. We now know that this dangerous situation was part of an institutional meltdown throughout the U.S. armed forces that made battle readiness problematic, even in Europe where it really counted. By 1970, soldiers in Vietnam regularly refused orders and negotiated with commanders who had limited control. Despite this disintegration, my medical unit continued to perform at top-notch, but not because of our allegiance to the Overall War Effort. We just did the right thing for sick and injured soldiers. I'm not sure of what the book's point is, other than to document that the rear was awash in consumer products and that we had it a lot easier than the grunts. The book fails to address the apparent strategic function of high American consumerism in the rear, a topic covered by many other historical analyses, nor does it do justice to the vibrant backmarket in the rear. Small fortunes were made, just on illegal money exchanges alone, and we all knew it was going on. Nevertheless, persons interested in the war's history will find some fascinating points, as long as they do not conclude that this book is the definitive work on the very complex experiences of REMFs and our relationships with the grunts.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Author is a fantastic, engaging writerBy Paul GorskiI come from a military family and occasionally look for something interesting to read about the intricacies of war. This is among the most unique books I've read focusing on the daily material lives of Vietnam soldiers. It made me look at war and service in a more nuanced way. Author is a fantastic, engaging writer.

3 of 7 people found the following review helpful. War machine, or community organizers?By Silly GranddaddyA well-written, extensively documented commentary, which begs two large questions: One, why have our military leadership -- from field grade, through flag rank, to the Commander-in-Chief, failed our service men and women-- and our nation-- so badly? The American fighting men have not lost a single battle since WWII-- yet, we have never won a war in that same period. American military leaders need to read Sun Tzu's Art of War, rather than "Rolling Stone" magazine. The military is supposed to be a "lean, mean, fighting machine," not a social club, bent on making us "...happy in our work." Two. Isn't this more a commentary on the new American culture? You know, where protestors, living off welfare, and communicating over "free" phones can castigate the people who are willing to work for a living. The protestors, of course, know the liberal press will support them. This book is difficult to read, because the truth hurts!! Each page contains extensive facts and data. Reading through it reminded me of slogging knee-deep through the "sucking" mud of Vietnam under a driving rain. I did not like the mud or the rain, but, they existed, no matter how much I tried to rationalize them away! One clarification: The author correctly states the military had three official working categories: combat, combat support, and combat service support. However, she implies that there were two categories in the minds of us soldiers: "Grunts" and "REMFs". For us "grunts" there were three categories: "Grunts", the support folks, and the REMFs. Grunts recognized and appreciated the support troops. They worked their butts off to support us-- thanks, again. Then, there were the REMFs. And, you know who you are. REMFs were the ones who actively sought those cushy positions, and were more interested in "the soft life" than in supporting the grunts. Incidentally, the REMF mentality (today, I understand they are called "FoBbits") existed at least as far down as combat battalions. Unfortunately, few battalion commanders had the courage and/or wisdom to send them out to the line units. For another view of REMFs-- see the book *The Best Government Money Can Buy*. On

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.

Leading a much-needed re-evaluation of Americans' Vietnam War experiences and all the layers of complexity that are buried under public memory and myth.--*Journal of Social History*Fluid and engrossing.--A Nota Bene selection of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*A valuable work for any student of this war. Highly recommended. All

levels/libraries.--ChoiceIn this refreshing, original book, Meredith Lair attempts to disrupt and transform traditional narratives of the [Vietnam] war by focusing on the overwhelming majority of American personnel in Vietnam who served in noncombat positions. . . . [Her] bold and courageous book encourages us to ask difficult questions about what this means for traditional and often-outdated ideas about the military, soldiers, and citizens during wartime.--Register of the Kentucky Historical SocietyBreak[s] new ground in scholarship on American experiences of the war in Vietnam. . . . Boldly and skillfully venture[s] into new historical terrain, and complicates the war story in the process.--Diplomatic HistoryLair has laid the foundation stone for a new historiographical approach, a research field that focuses on the other aspect of warfare, the leisure culture during wartime and between battles. This research can serve as a model for the examination of similar phenomena in other wars.--H-WarBelongs on any reading list on the American experience in Southeast Asia.--Journal of American History We are entering a new era of Vietnam War scholarship, and Lair's book will be one that leads the way. Lair upsets the traditional combat narrative and reframes it on non-combat experience to devastating effect. With crisp prose and her hands on seemingly every relevant source, she tells the neglected (but fully American) story of a militaristic society's war machine in full bloom.-- Michael S. Foley, author of *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War*Meredith Lair's fascinating analysis of rear-echelon life among American G.I.s dramatically challenges our most common conceptions of U.S. military experiences in Vietnam. From steaks to steam-baths, swimming pools to giant PXs, the amenities provided on large bases not only belie conventional images of that war, but also stand as dramatic testimony to the desperate and unsuccessful effort of American officials to bolster flagging troop morale as the war lurched toward its final failure.--Christian G. Appy, author of *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*About the AuthorMeredith H. Lair is associate professor of history at George Mason University.