



## **VETERAN PRESENTATION GUIDE**

As many Vietnam veterans have discovered, audiences are eager to learn about the first-person experiences of those who lived through this historic event. If you are invited to speak to a class or group, this advice may be useful.

### **Use Visuals**

A Powerpoint or similar short slide show with visuals is a great way to help people “see” the who/what/when/where of your experience. Keep it short (no longer than five minutes) to leave plenty of time for questions. Be sure to tell the teacher in advance that you have this so the proper equipment can be ready.

### **Consider Your Audience**

Talk to the teacher about the students’ prior knowledge and ability levels so that you can reach them “where they are.”

### **Avoid or Define Technical Terms**

The non-veteran audience will not be familiar with military terminology or war dialect. If you use a term like “I Corps” or “hooch,” you will need to explain what it means. Keep

### **Know What You Want Them to Know**

Go in with an idea of your key take-away points. Prepare to talk for no more than five minutes before taking questions.

### **Expect the Unexpected**

Remember that young people might have a “Hollywood” view of war as glamorous and a lack of understanding about the realities of combat. Sometimes students who are uncomfortable will express this through inappropriate interaction. If this happens, try not to react emotionally. Helping this student reframe the question, or disarming a comment with a simple, “That is not appropriate. Next?” will prevent an uncomfortable or ill-behaved person from dominating the event.

### **Don’t Be Afraid To Show Your Feelings**

Be authentic. If you find yourself choking up, that’s okay. Your audience will empathize with you and respect you for your honesty. If someone asks a

question that makes you uncomfortable, say so and move on. Remember that this may be the only interaction that these people ever have with a Vietnam veteran, and that means that you are representing 3.2 million of your brothers and sisters who served. What do you want the world to know about them?

### **Enjoy Your Presentation**

You may be nervous at first, but if you are like most veterans who have done this, you will soon find that answering questions and talking about your experience is a truly gratifying experience. The enthusiastic curiosity and unexpected perspectives of young people are often refreshing, provocative, and satisfying in ways that will surprise you. As someone who has lived through an important part of their nation's history, you have a lot to bring to their educational experience, and you will very likely find that they are excited and awed to have you in their midst.