

Hello. Welcome to the Washington State Historical Society's podcast series. The following is an excerpt from part of a visitor audio tour accompanying the exhibition, MARKING TIME: VOYAGE TO VIETNAM on display at the Washington State History Museum in Tacoma, WA, from September 17, 2009 to December 13, 2009.

Narrator: Thousands of American troops went to Vietnam in 1966 and 1967 aboard troopships like General Nelson M. Walker. Soldiers and Marines, most still in their teens, slept in cramped, claustrophobic quarters in berthing units four and five men high.

Voyages lasted about three weeks, and to relieve boredom, the young men played cards and bingo, listened to music, wrote letters, chatted with comrades or simply stared at the vast Pacific Ocean. They also attended tactics classes, watched movies and performed shipboard duties. Sometimes they expressed themselves by writing graffiti on the canvas berthing unit bunks.

By early 1968 ship transportation of troops ended. The big, slow-moving transports were replaced by airplanes. The "Marking Time: Voyage to Vietnam" exhibit presents a unique look at how American soldiers and Marines went to war the long way, and the messages they left behind.