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HVL LESSON TITLE:

THE DONUT DOLLIES

DEVELOPED BY: ERIN COGGINS

THE DONUT DOLLIES

GUIDING QUESTION:

Who were the Donut Dollies and how did they contribute to troop morale?

OVERVIEW:

The American Red Cross recruited young women to serve in war as morale builders. These women became known as the Donut Dollies. Through primary source analysis, this lesson will introduce students to the roles of these brave women, the danger they experienced, and how the roles changed during the wars.



SUBJECT(S):
Social Studies



WWII Veteran:
Donut Dollies



DURATION:
60 minutes

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“As a Donut Dolly during Vietnam, seeing young men in military hospitals was especially disturbing. These guys who were my age, and what they had been through, was really challenging.”

Donut Dolly, Katherine Huff

OVERVIEW:

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

“Donut Dollies” were American Red Cross female volunteers who boosted military morale by providing recreation and refreshments, often under dangerous conditions, during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Volunteers were typically required to be at least 25 years old, college-educated, and possess an “outstanding personality”.

Known for their bright uniforms and, in Vietnam, light blue dresses, they brought a “taste of home” to soldiers through games, music, and conversation.

Though non-combatants, they worked in active war zones, facing dangers like rocket attacks and ambushes.

OBJECTIVES:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- Students will identify who the “Donut Dollies” were and describe their roles in WWII (Red Cross volunteer responders), Korea, and Vietnam.
- Students will analyze how women’s wartime service affected military morale, public perceptions of gender roles, and veterans’ experiences.
- Students will evaluate primary and secondary sources to compare continuity and change in the Donut Dollies’ activities across the three conflicts.

STANDARDS:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2: Determine central ideas of primary/secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2: Write informative/explanatory texts.

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MATERIALS & DOCUMENTS

[Donut Dollies News Video](#)

[Donut Dollies Photo](#) (Doc A)

Who Were the Donut Dollies Handout (Doc B)

Source Analysis Activity and Cards (Doc C)

Assessment Letter (Doc D)

PROCEDURES

ACTIVITY 01

- Show students the [Donut Dollies News Video](#).
- After the video, project the photo or distribute the [Donut Dollies \(Doc A\)](#). Instruct students to answer the questions on the handout. Discuss.

ACTIVITY 02

- Distribute the Who Were the Donut Dollies Handout (Doc B). Discuss this handout with your students, pointing out the following: Continuity (morale, emotional support, noncombatant service) and change (scope, mobility, danger, media coverage, volunteer demographics). Discuss.

ACTIVITY 03

- Divide students into small groups (2-3 students). Give each group the Source Analysis Activity and Cards (Doc C). Read the directions aloud as students read along.
- Give students 10-15 minutes to analyze the sources and complete the chart on Doc. C.
- After all groups have finished, complete a whole-class synthesis where each group shares one thought from their analysis.

ACTIVITY 04

- Distribute the Assessment Letter handout (Doc D). If time allows, students should complete in class. If not, this can be assigned for homework.

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PHOTO OF DONUT DOLLIES

DOC A



July 1945. Arles France. ARC clubmobile worker Elizabeth Williamson, Mitchell, South Dakota holds the tray, while Mary Teresi from Portland, Oregon, does a neat balancing job to hand out doughnuts to obviously satisfied customers Pvt Earl Watson, Los Angeles, California; Pfc Warren Hawkins, Pine Island, Minnesota; T5 John Brewer, Lake Charles, Louisiana; Pvt Raymond Wlaker, Tallahassee, Florida; and T4 Wayne Bringgold, Springfield, Missouri. Photo by Jerry Walle
<https://redcrossnw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/10758-076.jpg>

1. What do you notice first in this photograph?
2. Describe the expressions on the soldiers' faces?
3. From this photograph, what do you think the role of the Donut Dolly was?

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WHO WERE THE DONUT DOLLIES HANDOUT

DOC B



Who They were:

- “Donut Dollies” is an informal name given to civilian women volunteers who provided recreation, refreshments, and morale services to U.S. military personnel. The term is most commonly associated with American Red Cross and USO volunteers in World War II, the Korean War, and especially Vietnam.
- These women were noncombatant volunteers who visited bases, hospitals, and front-line areas to offer conversation, games, snacks, letter-writing help, and brief respite from combat stress.

Core duties and activities

- **Hospitality:** serving coffee, donuts, baked goods, and cold drinks in canteens, hootch maws, and mobile recreation units.
- **Recreation:** organizing games, dances, movie nights, reading groups, and arts-and-crafts to reduce isolation and boredom.
- **Communication support:** helping soldiers write letters home, reading mail aloud, and offering a friendly listener for personal concerns.
- **Medical/hospital visits:** sitting with wounded service members, delivering small comforts, and aiding morale during recovery.
- **Mobility and risk:** in WWII and Korea many work sites were relatively safe rear areas; in Vietnam volunteers sometimes traveled by helicopter to remote field units and faced greater danger and exposure to combat conditions.

Continuity and change across conflicts

- **Continuity:** core mission—boosting morale, providing human connection, and supporting mental well-being—remained constant. Volunteers were framed as wholesome, supportive, and civilian.
- **Change:** scale, mobility, and public perception shifted. Vietnam-era volunteers often operated closer to combat zones, used helicopters and mobile units, and faced media attention amid a controversial war. The profile of volunteers broadened (age, education) and encounters with soldiers could be more emotionally intense due to the guerrilla nature of the conflict and length of tours.

Impact and significance

- **Immediate:** provided psychological relief, normalized daily routines, and created safe moments of civilian connection for service members.
- **Cultural:** helped shape public narratives about women’s wartime roles—noncombatant but central to sustaining morale—and influenced later discussions about women in military-adjacent positions.
- **Memory:** Donut Dollies appear in veterans’ oral histories, photographs, and memorial projects; their stories illuminate gender, civilian-military relations, and the human dimensions of war.

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SOURCE ANALYSIS ACTIVITY AND CARDS

DOC C



DIRECTIONS: In your small groups, analyze the six primary source cards and complete the chart below.

Source Card Basic Info (origin, war, tone)	What does the source reveal about the Donut Dollies' role and risks?
Source Card One	
Source Card Two	
Source Card Three	
Source Card Four	
Source Card Five	
Source Card Six	

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SOURCE ANALYSIS ACTIVITY AND CARDS

SOURCE CARD ONE



February 1945. France. American Red Cross clubmobile Margaret Lamb, Norfolk, Virginia, samples one of her wares in company with two fellow Virginians: Cpl Earl A. Conn, Charlottesville, and T5 James E. Parker, Hampton, Virginia. As in this case, American Red Cross clubmobile girls carry their donuts and coffee in trucks over roads too rough for regular clubmobile travel to reach units that are an isolated spots. Photo by Hazel Kingsbury

**What do you notice about their clothes?
What are their expressions?**

SOURCE CARD TWO:

Letter Excerpt (Anonymous Korean War Donut Dolly, 1951)

“I rode out to the evacuation hospital today. Some of the boys were too weak to speak; I read their letters for them and passed their hands through mine. They clung to that small piece of home like treasure.”

SOURCE CARD THREE:

Oral History: American Red Cross volunteer interview, Vietnam, 1969

“We flew out in a Huey, landed in a clearing, and set up our recreation kit. A medic told me later that the guys had not laughed in days. For an hour they forgot the mortar fire. That’s why we went.”

SOURCE CARD FOUR:

Instruction manual excerpt (Red Cross clubmobile/USO Guide)

“Volunteers must maintain cheerful demeanor, respect soldier privacy, and never discuss politics. Comfort and discretion are essential to sustaining morale.”

SOURCE CARD FIVE:



November 1969. Tuy Hoa, Vietnam. SRAO Rec Center staff. From left to right: Dolly Hasselwander, Sharon Bernardi, Mary Gin Kennedy, and Sandy Rhoten. Photo by James E. Caccavo/American Red Cross

1. What do you notice about the ladies' clothing? How does the clothing differ from the clothing worn in Source Card One?
2. Where are these ladies in Vietnam? What do you think their duties are at this location?

SOURCE CARD SIX:

Interview of Pat Prince Edmondson in the article "The Wartime Tales of Red Cross Donut Dollies"

Donut Dollie, Pat Prince Edmondson was a Red Cross volunteer since she was an 8th grader, and a Donut Dollie during the Korean War. Edmondson recalls arriving at a front-line battle station the day President Kennedy imposed a Naval blockade on Cuba. Fearful the North Koreans would respond by attacking U.S. positions, the Red Cross team was rushed to safety over nearly impassable roads, and confined to the rear echelon until danger of an imminent attack had passed.

Edmondson recalls how soldiers "found" generators to provide heat when temperatures fell to zero. Trying to stay clean with no hot water was challenging. Speaking of her days as a Donut Dollie, Edmondson says "It was truly a privilege to get to know so many intelligent, funny, creative, spirited, talented women."

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ASSESSMENT LETTER ACTIVITY

DOC D



Directions: You will create a 2 minute (2 full paragraphs) first-person monologue from the perspective of a Donut Dolly in one of the wars (WWII, Korea, Vietnam). Incorporate at least two of the primary sources or information from the Who Were the Donut Dollies Handout.