



American Military History



| HIST 174 | Fall 2025 | Mon-Wed 1815-1930 | Meliora 221 |

| Instructor: Morris A. Pierce, PhD | m.pierce@rochester.edu | Office hours M-W 1630-1730 RRL 401 |

Required Coursework and Grading

- This course is primarily a survey of American Military History that will broadly cover the people and events that affected the course of American history. A few significant individuals and battles will be mentioned, but students are encouraged to dig into topics of interest for their course papers, which can include strategy, tactics, technology, weapons, ships, planes, vehicles, uniforms, logistics, manufacturing, medical care, women and minorities, veteran pensions and organizations, technology, war reporting, and the home front, along with many others. Class attendance is not required, but is appreciated.
- Five Papers** are required as described below and must be handed in or e-mailed by the end of class on the date due – be aware that late papers will lose points. Papers should be double-spaced with a 10 to 12-point font and 1-inch margins. Papers should be e-mailed to me in PDF format. Send me your paper to me at least a week before it is due if you want me to look it over.
 - Papers 1-3 – Topic Papers (20 points each, 5-7 pages):** Select a topic from each of the three chronological sections and write a 5 to 7-page paper for each that are due on September 24th, October 27th, and November 24th. You may use any citation style you are comfortable with and are encouraged to include maps, photographs, and other graphics that are relevant to the topic. The military has had enormous impacts on American society, culture, politics, technology, medicine, food, consumer goods, transportation, race relations, etc. In addition, wars and the military have left many lasting impacts ranging from veteran health care, education and pensions to environmental issues such as toxic wastes, cluster bombs, and land mines. These are all good topics along with many more. Use at least three references for each paper using your preferred citation style. References can be primary or secondary sources such as books and articles. Provide a link to the source of each reference, as shown below. E-mail me if you have any questions about your chosen topic(s) or sources.
 - Paper 4 – Battlefield or Museum Review (10 points, 2-3 pages)** – Due at the last class meeting on December 8th.
 - Visit a battlefield and write a review describing the battle, who was involved, why it happened when and where it did, and what the current battlefield site offers tourists and historians. Nearby battlefields include Ganondagan in Victor; Lundy's Lane in Niagara Falls; Newtown; Saratoga; Bennington; Oriskany; Ticonderoga; Concord, Lexington and Bunker Hill in Massachusetts; Fort Necessity & Gettysburg in Pennsylvania, Antietam in Maryland, and the Erie Maritime Museum and USS *Niagara* at Erie, Pennsylvania.
 - Or visit a military museum and write a review describing the museum, who runs it, what exhibits they have, and your impression of what it offers tourists and historians. Examples include the Intrepid Sea Air Space Museum in New York City; the USS *Constitution* Museum in Boston (which is very close to the Bunker Hill battlefield and monument); the National Warplane Museum in Geneseo; the Buffalo and Erie County Naval & Military Park in Buffalo; the New York State Military Museum in Latham; and the Destroyer Escort Historical Museum in Albany.
 - If you are unable to visit a battlefield or museum in person, many offer web pages or virtual tours that allow you to complete the assignment.
 - Paper 5 – Veteran Interview (30 points, 5+ pages)** – Due at 10 am EST on Friday, December 19th (after last day of finals). Track down a relative, friend or anyone else who has served in the U.S. Military (ROTC service alone does not count) or another country's military. It is not necessary that they served during wartime. Interview them about their military career and submit a 5-page (or longer) summary of their experience along with your reaction based on what you have read and learned in this course. The subject's name or other specific details need not be identified if anonymity is requested. A narrative is preferred rather than a list of questions and answers. Provide some background on the subject's unit and location at the time they served, including pictures, maps, and other information. As an option, you can write about a veteran (such as a grandfather, etc.) who is no longer with us but left enough information for you to write a decent paper. Make sure to ask if they would want their children to serve in the military. See additional guidelines at the end of this syllabus, including how to find a veteran if you don't know any.
- Grades** will be posted for each assignment on the course gradebook on Blackboard. Course grade will be determined on the total number of points earned in the course, with letter grades assigned based on the following scale:

95-100	A	83-84	B-	73-74	D+
92-94	A-	80-82	C+	70-72	D
88-91	B+	78-79	C	67-69	D-
85-87	B	75-77	C-	64-66	E

- Movies/videos** – Documentary videos and movies related to the course will be shown.
- Reading** – Literally thousands of books and articles have been written about American Military History. Some general histories available on-line are listed on Blackboard and others are on the course reference page.
- Other resources** – Class lecture slides will be posted on Blackboard, along with links to relevant videos, articles and other material. Feel free to suggest additional materials that should be included.

Section I - Conquest, Settlement, and Independence - 1607-1820

1	25 August Introduction and Historical Background	Discussion of course objectives and grading. What is military history, and why is it important? Sources of military history. How did White people get all the cargo?
2	27 August Background	Agricultural Surpluses and the Rise of Ancient Empires Video Guns, Germs & Steel – Part 1, Out of Eden
	1 September	Labor Day – No class
3	3 September Background	The Crusades Video Guns, Germs & Steel – Part 2, Conquest
4	8 September Background	Wars of Religion – “Kill them all. God will know His own” Arnaud-Arnaury, the Abbot of Citeaux, 1209. Video Guns, Germs & Steel – Part 3, Into the Tropics
5	10 September European exploration and settlement of America	"The discovery of America was due to the failure of the crusade against the Turks," <i>The Catholic Encyclopedia</i>
6	15 September Colonial Wars	How George Washington started the French and Indian War. Video - When the Forest Ran Red.
7	17 September Colonial Wars	"Discipline is the soul of an army. It makes small numbers formidable; procures success to the weak, and esteem to all." George Washington, 1759
8	22 September The Revolutionary War	"Don't one of you fire until you see the whites of their eyes." Prescott at Bunker Hill
9	24 September The Revolutionary War and the War of 1812	<i>Status quo ante bellum</i> , Treaty of Ghent, December 24, 1814 Paper #1 – 1607-1820 due by end of class

Section II - Building a New Nation - 1821-1930

10	29 September Indian Removal, Manifest Destiny, and War with Mexico	"I know [the battle] is lost, but the volunteers don't know it. Let them alone, we'll see what they do." Taylor at Buena Vista.
11	1 October King Cotton and Civil War	"If you like your slaves, you can keep them."
12	6 October The Civil War 1861-1862	"Those not skinning can hold a leg." Lincoln "The Emancipation Proclamation was uttered in the first gun fired at Sumter," Seward
13	8 October The Civil War 1862-1863	"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free." Lincoln
	13 October	Fall Break – no class
14	15 October The Civil War and Reconstruction 1863-1877	"The government of the United States has in North Alabama any and all rights which they choose to enforce in war, to take their lives, their houses, their land, their everything, because they cannot deny that war exists there, and war is simply power unconstrained by constitution or compact." Sherman
15	20 October Steam, Oil and Steel	"The supreme ships of the Navy, on which our life depended, were fed by oil and could only be fed by oil. The decision to drive the smaller craft followed naturally upon this. The camel once swallowed, the gnats went down easily enough." Churchill, 1923.
16	22 October The Frontier and the Empire	"Naval power can reach no further ashore. For tenure of the land you must have a man with a rifle." Admiral George Dewey, 1898.
17	27 October The Great War and the Bad Peace	"Good lord! You're not going to send soldiers over there, are you?" U.S. Senator Thomas S. Martin, April 6, 1917. Paper #2 – 1821-1930 due by end of class

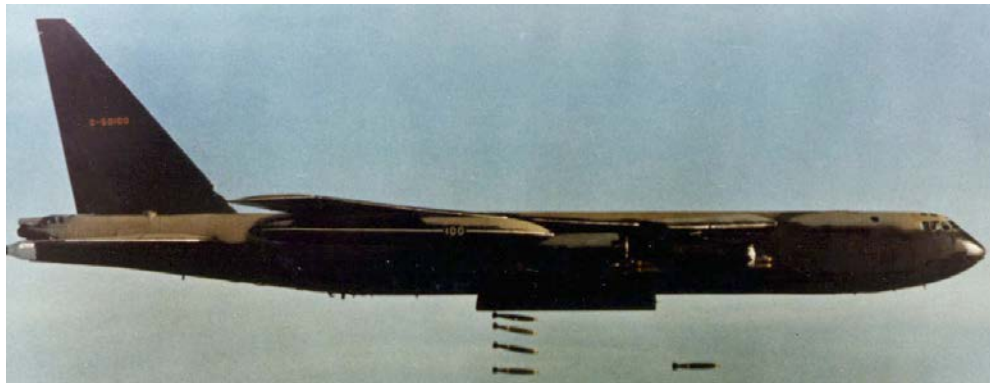


Section III - America as a World Power - 1930-?

18	29 October The Road to World War II	"The war isn't over. The hate and evil is greater now than ever. Very soon war will break out again and overwhelm you ... the Germans will soon rise again." D. H. Lawrence, November 11, 1918
19	3 November World War II – Poland, France, and American Rearmament	"I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again; your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars." FDR campaign address in Boston, October 30, 1940
20	5 November World War II – Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal and North Africa	"As for the Japanese, they will be ground to powder," Churchill, December 7, 1941
21	10 November World War II - Sicily, Normandy, Pacific Island Hopping, and Submarines	"You will enter the continent of Europe and, in conjunction with the other United Nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces." Directive to Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, February 12, 1944.
22	12 November The War in Europe – D-Day to Berlin	"Nuts!" General Anthony McAuliffe's response to German surrender demand at Bastogne, December 22, 1944.
23	17 November The War in the Pacific	"Thank God for the Atomic Bomb," Lt. Paul Fussell
24	19 November The Cold War: Korea, Cuba, Berlin, and Mutual Assured Destruction	"I am beginning to think that what we need is a type of staff officers with at least three heads-one political, one economic, and one military," Gen. George Arthur Lincoln, 1945. "An iron curtain has descended across the Continent," Winston Churchill, March 5, 1946
25	24 November Vietnam and the Race to the Moon	"We shan't have to leave our fortress, now, when we want to blow up civilization," Mark Twain Paper #3 – 1930-present due by end of class
	26 November	Thanksgiving break – no class
26	1 December The Cold War Won (wasn't it?)	"It is beneath our dignity to retaliate against the terrorists who blew up the Marine barracks," Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. John W. Vessey, 1983 "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" Reagan, June 12, 1987
27	3 December Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and the Limits of Military Power	"We Will, In Fact, Be Greeted as Liberators," Dick Cheney, 2003 "The American people are weary of war without victory," Donald Trump, 2017
28	8 December Rare earths, drones, and the next war	"I have seen much war in my lifetime and I hate it profoundly. But there are worse things than war; and all of them come with defeat." Ernest Hemingway Paper #4 Museum/Battlefield Paper Due
	19 December (Friday)	Paper #5 Veteran Interview due at 10 AM

Making a reference link. There are two ways to do this:

- Insert separate text showing the URL of the reference source - *American Military History, Volume I: The United States Army And The Forging Of A Nation 1775-1917* <https://history.army.mil/Publications/Publications-Catalog/American-Military-History-Volume-I-The-United-States-Army-And-The-Forging-Of-A-Nation-1775-1917/>
- Create a hyperlink - [American Military History, Volume I: The United States Army And The Forging Of A Nation 1775-1917](https://history.army.mil/Publications/Publications-Catalog/American-Military-History-Volume-I-The-United-States-Army-And-The-Forging-Of-A-Nation-1775-1917/)



The College's credit hour policy on undergraduate courses is to award 4 credit hours for courses that meet for the equivalent of 2 periods of 75 minutes each week. Students enrolled in HIST 174 are expected to devote at least one hour each week to identifying the main lines of argument in course readings, working alone or in groups, and to researching in depth their topics for their papers.

Students with disabilities: The University of Rochester respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. In the event you encounter any barrier(s) to full participation in this course due to the impact of disability, please contact the Office of Disability Resources. The access coordinators in the Office of Disability Resources can meet with you to discuss the barriers you are experiencing and explain the eligibility process for establishing academic accommodations. You can reach the [Office of Disability Resources](mailto:disability@rochester.edu) at: disability@rochester.edu; (585) 276-5075; Taylor Hall.

Academic honesty: All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and will be treated as such. Anyone who engages in such activities will be turned over to the College Board on Academic Honesty for disciplinary action, as outlined at <http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/>. For a helpful discussion of plagiarism (including subtle instances), see the American Historical Association's "[Defining Plagiarism](#)"



Veteran Interview Guidelines

Finding a Veteran

If you don't know any veterans these two groups can put you in touch with one:

UR Veterans Alliance: veteransalliance@rochester.edu

Veteran Outreach Center, 447 South Avenue, Rochester 14620, (585) 546-1081, info@vocroc.org

Track down a relative, friend or anyone else who has served in the U.S. Military (ROTC service alone does not count) or another country's military. Wartime service is not necessary. Interview them about their military career and submit a 5-page (or longer) summary of their experience along with your reaction based on what you have read and learned in this course. The subject's name or other specific details need not be identified if anonymity is requested. A narrative is preferred rather than a list of questions and answers. Provide some background on the subject's unit and location at the time they served, including pictures, maps, and other information. As an option, you can write about a veteran (such as a grandfather, etc.) who is no longer with us but left enough information for you to write a decent paper. Likewise you can use autobiographies, memoirs and letters, etc. to write about someone not related to you.

Tell a story, not just a list of questions and answers.

- Potential topics:

- Where did s/he grow up?
- Any relatives or friends in the military?
- Ever join Boy Scouts, Junior ROTC, Civil Air Patrol, etc?
- What motivated him/her to join the military? Patriotism, drafted, sentenced (join the Marines or go to jail)
- How did they pick the branch of service?
- Where was basic training?
- What advanced training and where?
- Duty locations (CONUS or overseas)?
- Wartime service?
- Military duties?
- How did they like it then?
- How do they look back on it now?
- Would they recommend military service to others? Their kids?
- General observations and memories

- Any additional information you can add about his/her service (pictures, maps) is welcome.

- These guidelines can also be shared with your interview subject.

- About five pages is good, no maximum as some vets just won't shut up.