The narrator of *The Things They Carried* reflects on the experiences of the soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

*from* *The Things They Carried*  
by Tim O’Brien

They carried USO\(^1\) stationery and pencils and pens. They carried Sterno, safety pins, trip flares, signal flares, spools of wire, razor blades, chewing tobacco, liberated joss sticks\(^2\) and statuettes of the smiling Buddha, candles, grease pencils, *The Stars and Stripes*,\(^3\) fingernail clippers, Psy Ops leaflets, bush hats, bolos, and much more. Twice a week, when the resupply choppers came in, they carried hot chow in green mermitc cans and large canvas bags filled with iced beer and soda pop. They carried plastic water containers, each with a two-gallon capacity. Mitchell Sanders carried a set of starched tiger fatigues for special occasions. Henry Dobbins carried Black Flag insecticide. Dave Jensen carried empty sandbags that could be filled at night for added protection. Lee Strunk carried tanning lotion. Some things they carried in common. Taking turns, they carried the big PRC-77 scrambler radio, which weighed 30 pounds with its battery. They shared the weight of memory. They took up what others could no longer bear. Often, they carried each other, the wounded or weak. They carried infections. They carried chess sets, basketballs, Vietnamese-English dictionaries, insignia of rank, Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts, plastic cards imprinted with the Code of Conduct. They carried diseases, among them malaria and dysentery. They carried lice and ringworm and leeches and paddy algae and various rots and molds. They carried the land itself — Vietnam, the place, the soil — a powdery orange-red dust that covered their boots and fatigues and faces. They carried the sky. The whole atmosphere, they carried it, the humidity, the monsoons, the stink of fungus and decay, all of it, they carried gravity. They moved like mules. By daylight they took sniper fire, at night they were mortared, but it was not battle, it was just the endless march, village to village, without purpose, nothing won or lost. They marched for the sake of the march. They plodded along slowly, dumbly, leaning forward against the heat, unthinking, all blood and bone, simple grunts, soldiering with their legs, toiling up the hills and down into the paddies and across the rivers and up again and down, just humping,\(^4\) one step and then the next and then another, but no volition, no will, because it was automatic, it was anatomy, and the war was entirely a matter of posture and carriage, the hump was everything, a kind of inertia, a kind of emptiness, a dullness of desire and intellect and conscience and

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\(^1\) *USO* — United Service Organizations  
\(^2\) *joss sticks* — sticks of incense  
\(^3\) *The Stars and Stripes* — a military newspaper  
\(^4\) *humping* — a slang term for carrying a heavy load
hope and human sensibility. Their principles were in their feet. Their calculations were biological. They had no sense of strategy or mission. They searched the villages without knowing what to look for, not caring, kicking over jars of rice, frisking children and old men, blowing tunnels, sometimes setting fires and sometimes not, then forming up and moving on to the next village, then other villages, where it would always be the same. They carried their own lives. The pressures were enormous. In the heat of early afternoon, they would remove their helmets and flak jackets, walking bare, which was dangerous but which helped ease the strain. They would often discard things along the route of march. Purely for comfort, they would throw away rations, blow their Claymores and grenades, no matter, because by nightfall the resupply choppers would arrive with more of the same, then a day or two later still more, fresh watermelons and crates of ammunition and sunglasses and woolen sweaters — the resources were stunning — sparklers for the Fourth of July, colored eggs for Easter — it was the great American war chest — the fruits of science, the smokestacks, the canneries, the arsenals at Hartford, the Minnesota forests, the machine shops, the vast fields of corn and wheat — they carried like freight trains; they carried it on their backs and shoulders — and for all the ambiguities of Vietnam, all the mysteries and unknowns, there was at least the single abiding certainty that they would never be at a loss for things to carry.

14. Read the sentences from lines 12 and 13 in the box below.

They took up what others could no longer bear. Often, they carried each other, the wounded or weak.

What do the sentences mainly emphasize?
A. the long duration of the war
B. the strong bond among the soldiers
C. the overwhelming support for the war
D. the growing frustration of the soldiers

15. What is emphasized by the length and rhythm of the sentence in lines 24–31?
A. the changing of the seasons
B. the perseverance of the soldiers
C. the consistency of the landscape
D. the variety of items the soldiers needed

16. What do the examples show about the soldiers?
A. They were not properly trained.
B. They were not driven by a larger purpose.
C. They were concerned about the local people.
D. They were disappointed by the lack of community.

17. Read the phrase from lines 47 and 48 in the box below.

... and for all the ambiguities of Vietnam, all the mysteries and unknowns, ...

When the author refers to Vietnam’s ambiguities, he means that Vietnam is
A. difficult to understand.
B. suffering from poverty.
C. solving its own problems.
D. filled with beautiful areas.
Question 18 is an open-response question.

• Read the question carefully.
• Explain your answer.
• Add supporting details.
• Double-check your work.

Write your answer to question 18 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

Based on the excerpt, explain what the things the soldiers carried reveal about the soldiers’ experiences in Vietnam. Support your answer with relevant and specific information from the excerpt.