

Statistics about the Vietnam War



In case you Vietnam Veterans haven't been paying attention these past few decades after you returned from Vietnam, the clock has been ticking.

The following are some statistics that are at once depressing yet, in a larger sense, should give some a sense of pride. "Of the 2,709,918 Americans who served in Vietnam; less than 850,000 are estimated to be alive today, with the youngest American Vietnam veteran's age approximated to be 54 years old."

So, if you're alive and reading this, how does it feel to be among the last 1/3rd of all the U.S. Vets who served in Vietnam? Don't know about you, but feels a little strange considering this is the kind of information we are used to reading about WWII and Korean War vets.

So the last 14 years we have been dying at a faster rate than most. Too fast, only a few will survive by 2015,if any.

Every day, 390 Vietnam Veterans die. So in 2,190 days from today you will be lucky to be alive.

These statistics were taken from a variety of sources to include: The VFW Magazine, the Public Information Office, and the HQ CP Forward Observer -1st Recon, April 12, 1997.

STATISTICS FOR IN-COUNTRY VIETNAM VETERANS:

A total of 9,087,000 military personnel served on active duty during the Vietnam Era (August 5, 1964 - May 7, 1975).

A total of 8,744,000 GIs were on active duty during the war (Aug 5, 1964-March 28, 1973).

A total of 2,709,918 Americans served in Vietnam, this number represents 9.7% of their generation.

A total of 3,403,100 (Including 514,330 offshore) personnel served in the broader Southeast Asia Theater (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, flight crews based in Thailand and sailors in adjacent South China Sea waters).

A total of 2,594,000 personnel served within the borders of South Vietnam (Jan. 1, 1965 - March 28, 1973). Another 50,000 men served in Vietnam between 1960 and 1964.

Of the 2.6 million, between 1M and 1.6 M (40-60%) either fought in combat, or provided close support or were at least fairly regularly exposed to enemy attack.

7,484 women (6,250 or 83.5% were nurses) served in Vietnam.

Peak troop strength in Vietnam: 543,482 (April 30, 1968).

CASUALTIES:

The first man to die in Vietnam was James Davis, in 1958. He was with the 509th Radio Research Station. Davis Station in Saigon was named for him.

Hostile deaths: 47,378

Non-hostile deaths: 10,800

Total: 58,202 (Includes men formerly classified as MIA and Mayaguez casualties). Men who have subsequently died of wounds account for the changing total.

8 nurses died -- 1 was KIA.

61% of the men killed were 21 or younger..11,465 of those killed were younger than 20 years old.

Of those 47,378 hostile deaths in Vietnam:

29,869 were single

17,509 were married.

Average age: 23.1 years.

Enlisted Personnel: 30,274.

Officers: 6,598 28.43

Warrant Officers: ,2,724

E1(Private): 12,520.34

11B (Infantry, Rifleman) MOS: 18,465

Five men killed in Vietnam were only 16 years old.

The oldest man killed was 62 years old.

Highest State death rate: West Virginia - 84.1% (national average 58.9% for every 100,000 males in 1970).

Wounded: 303,704

153,329 hospitalized

150,375 injured requiring no hospital care

Severely disabled: 75,000

23,204: 100% disabled

5,283 lost or severely impaired limbs

1,081 sustained multiple amputations

Amputation or crippling wounds to the lower extremities were 300% higher than in WWII and 70% higher than Korea. (Expanded use of land mines)

Multiple amputations occurred at the rate of 18.4% compared to 5.7% in WWII.

AT THE END OF THE WAR

58,338 - Missing in Action

POWs: 766 (114 died in captivity)

As of January 15, 2004, there are 1,875 Americans still unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

DRAFTEES VS.. VOLUNTEERS:

25% (648,500) of total force in country were draftees.

66% of U.S. armed forces members were drafted during WWII Draftees accounted for 30% (17,725) of combat deaths in Vietnam.

Reservists: 5,977

National Guard: 6,140 served: 101 died

Total draftees (1965 - 1973): 1,728,344

Army Draft: 1,685,711

Marine Corps Draft: 42,633

Last man drafted: June 30, 1973.

RACE AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND:

88.4% of the men who actually served in Vietnam were Caucasian
10.6% (275,000) were black
1% belonged to other races.

Killed in Action

86% Caucasians
12% (7,241) were black
2% Hispanic
1% belonged to other races

70% of enlisted men killed were of North-west European descent.
14.6% (1,530) of non-combat death were among blacks.
34% of blacks who enlisted, volunteered for the combat arms.

Overall blacks suffered 12% of the deaths in Vietnam at a time when the percentage of blacks of military age was 13.5% of the total population.

Religion of Dead: Protestant -- 64.4%; Catholic -- 28.9%

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS:

Vietnam veterans have a lower unemployment rate than the same non-vet age groups.

Vietnam veterans' personal income exceeds that of our non-veteran age group by more than 18 percent.

76% of the men sent to Vietnam were from the working class 75% had family incomes above the poverty level
50% were from middle income backgrounds.

Some 23% of Vietnam vets had fathers with professional, managerial or technical occupations.

EDUCATION:

79% of the men who served HAD a High School education or higher.
63% of Korean War vets
45% of WWII vets had completed High School

DEATH BY REGION:

South -- 31%
West --29.9%
Midwest -- 28.4%
Northeast -- 23.5%.

DRUG USAGE & CRIME:

There is no difference in drug usage between Vietnam Veterans and non-Vietnam Veterans of the same age group. (Source: Veterans Administration Study, 1995/National Association of Chiefs of Police)

Vietnam Veterans are far less likely to be in prison - only one-half of one percent of Vietnam Veterans have been jailed for crimes.

85% of Vietnam Veterans made successful transitions to civilian life.
82% of veterans who saw heavy combat strongly believe the war was lost because of lack of political will.
75% of the public agrees it was a failure of political will, not of arms.

HONORABLE SERVICE:

97% of Vietnam-era veterans were honorably discharged.
91% of actual Vietnam War veterans
90% of those who saw combat say they were proud serve their country.
74% say they would serve again, even knowing the outcome.
87% of the public now holds Vietnam veterans in high esteem.

INTERESTING CENSUS STATISTICS:

THOSE WHO CLAIM TO HAVE "Been There": (Census Figures)

1,703,823 of those who served in Vietnam were still alive as of August, 1995

9,492,958 Falsely claim to have served in Vietnam (Census Stats., 2000)

1995 FEDERAL CENSUS:

Vietnam Veteran population estimate is: 1,002,511. This is hard to believe, losing nearly 711,000 between '95 and '00.

Vietnam Veterans are dying at a rate of 390 per day.

During the most recent Federal Census (yr. 2000), the number of Americans falsely claiming to have served in-country is: 13,853,227. (This means that FOUR OUT OF FIVE WHO CLAIM TO BE Vietnam vets are not.)

The Department of Defense Vietnam War Service Index officially provided by The War Library originally reported that 2,709,918 U.S. military personnel as having served in-country (Corrections and confirmations to this erred index resulted in the addition of 358 U.S. military personnel confirmed to have served in Vietnam but not originally listed by the Department of Defense. All names are currently on file and accessible day and night.)

Isolated atrocities committed by American Soldiers produced torrents of outrage from anti-war critics and the news media while Communist atrocities were so common that they received hardly any media mention at all. The United States sought to minimize and prevent attacks on civilians while North Vietnam made attacks on civilians a centerpiece of its strategy. Americans who deliberately killed civilians received prison sentences while Communists who did so received commendations.

From 1957 to 1973, the National Liberation Front assassinated 36,725 Vietnamese and abducted another 58,499. The death squads focused on leaders at the village level and on anyone who improved the lives of the peasants such as medical personnel, social workers, and school teachers. (Nixon Presidential Papers)

Myth and Fact

Myth: The domino theory was proved false.

The domino theory was accurate. The ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand stayed free of Communism because of the U.S. commitment to Vietnam. The Indonesians threw the Soviets out in 1966 because of America's commitment in Vietnam. Without that commitment, Communism would have swept all the way to the Malacca Straits that is south of Singapore and of great strategic importance to the free world. If you ask people who live in these countries that won the war in Vietnam, they have a different opinion from the American news media. The Vietnam War was the turning point for Communism. [\[Westmoreland\]](#)

Democracy Catching On - In the wake of the Cold War, democracies are flourishing, with 179 of the world's 192 sovereign states (93%) now electing their legislators, according to the Geneva-based Inter-Parliamentary Union. In the last decade, 69 nations have held multi-party elections for the first time in their histories. Three of the five newest democracies are former Soviet republics: Belarus (where elections were first held in November 1995), Armenia (July 1995) and Kyrgyzstan (February 1995). And two are in Africa: Tanzania (October 1995) and Guinea (June 1995). [\[Parade Magazine\]](#)

Myth: The fighting in Vietnam was not as intense as in World War II.

The average infantryman in the South Pacific during World War II saw about 40 days of combat in four years. The average infantryman in Vietnam saw about 240 days of combat in one year thanks to the mobility of the helicopter.

One out of every 10 Americans who served in Vietnam was a casualty. 58,169 were killed and 304,000 wounded out of 2.59 million who served. Although the percent who died is similar to other wars, amputations or crippling wounds were 300 percent higher than in World War II. 75,000 Vietnam veterans are severely disabled. [\[McCaffrey\]](#)

MEDEVAC helicopters flew nearly 500,000 missions. Over 900,000 patients were airlifted (nearly half were American). The average time lapse between wounding to hospitalization was less than one hour. As a result, less than one percent of all Americans wounded who survived the first 24 hours died. [\[VHPA 1993\]](#)

The helicopter provided unprecedented mobility. Without the helicopter it would have taken three times as many troops to secure the 800 mile border with Cambodia and Laos (the politicians thought the Geneva Conventions of 1954 and the Geneva Accords of 1962 would secure the border) [\[Westmoreland\]](#)

More helicopter facts:

Approximately 12,000 helicopters saw action in Vietnam (all services). [\[VHPA databases\]](#)

Army UH-1's totaled 9,713,762 flight hours in Vietnam between October 1966 and the end of American involvement in early 1973. [\[VHPA databases\]](#)

Army AH-1G's totaled 1,110,716 flight hours in Vietnam. [\[VHPA databases\]](#)

We believe that the Huey along with the Huey Cobra have more combat flight time than any other aircraft in the history of warfare assuming you count actual hostile fire exposure versus battle area exposure. As an example, heavy bombers during World War II most often flew missions lasting many hours with only 10 to 20 minutes of that time exposed to hostile fire. Helicopters in Vietnam seldom flew above 1,500 feet which is traffic pattern altitude for bombers and were always exposed to hostile fire even in their base camps.

Myth: Air America, the airline operated by the CIA in Southeast Asia, and its pilots were involved in drug trafficking.

The 1990 unsuccessful movie "Air America" helped to establish the myth of a connection between Air America, the CIA, and the Laotian drug trade. The movie and a book the movie was based on contend that the CIA condoned a drug trade conducted by a Laotian client; both agree that Air America provided the essential transportation for the trade; and both view the pilots with sympathetic understanding. American-owned airlines never knowingly transported opium in or out of Laos, nor did their American pilots ever profit from its transport. Yet undoubtedly every plane in Laos carried opium at some time, unknown to the pilot and his superiors. For more information see <http://www.air-america.org>

Facts about the fall of Saigon

Myth: The American military was running for their lives during the fall of Saigon in April 1975.

The picture of a Huey helicopter evacuating people from the top of what was billed as being the U.S. Embassy in Saigon during the last week of April 1975 during the fall of Saigon helped to establish this myth.



This famous picture is the property of UPI Corbus-Bettman Photo Agency. It is one of 42 pictures of this helicopter that UPI photographer, [Hubert Van Es](#) took on 29 April 1975 from UPI's offices on the top floor of the Saigon Hotel which was several blocks from the Pittman Apartments. [\[People\]](#)

Here are some facts to clear up that poor job of reporting by the news media.

It was a "civilian" (Air America) Huey not Army or Marines.

It was NOT the U.S. Embassy. The building is the Pittman Apartments, a 10 story building where the CIA station chief and many of his officers lived, located at 22 Ly Tu Trong St. The U.S. Embassy and its helipad were much larger. The platform is the top of the elevator shaft for the building and was not designed as a helipad. [\[People\]](#)

The evacuees were Vietnamese not American military. Two high ranking Vietnamese were among those taken that day to Tan Son Nhut airport, General Tran Van Don and the head of the secret police Tran Kim Tuyen. Both immigrated to Europe and both have since died. [\[People\]](#)

The person who can be seen aiding the refugees was CIA operations officer, Mr. O.B. Harnage, who is now retired in Arizona. The pilots who were flying this helicopter, tail number N4 7004, were Bob Caron who lives in Florida and Jack "Pogo" Hunter who died in 1997. [\[People\]](#)

Another famous picture.



Myth: Kim Phuc, the little nine year old Vietnamese girl running naked from the napalm strike near Trang Bang on 8 June 1972, was burned by Americans bombing Trang Bang.

No American had involvement in this incident near Trang Bang that burned Phan Thi Kim Phuc. The planes doing the bombing near the village were VNAF (Vietnam Air Force) and were being flown by Vietnamese pilots in support of South Vietnamese troops on the ground. The Vietnamese pilot who dropped the napalm in error is currently living in the United States. Even the AP photographer, Nick Ut, who took the picture was Vietnamese. The incident in the photo took place on the second day of a three day battle between the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) who occupied the village of Trang Bang and the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) who were trying to force the NVA out of the village. Recent reports in the news media that an American commander ordered the air strike that burned Kim Phuc are incorrect. There were no Americans involved in any capacity. "We (Americans) had nothing to do with controlling VNAF," according to Lieutenant General (Ret) James F. Hollingsworth, the Commanding General of TRAC at that time. Also, it has been incorrectly reported that two of Kim Phuc's brothers were killed in this incident. They were Kim's cousins not her brothers.

Myth: The United States lost the war in Vietnam.

The American military was not defeated in Vietnam. The American military did not lose a battle of any consequence. From a military standpoint, it was almost an unprecedented performance. (Westmoreland quoting Douglas Pike, a professor at the University of California, Berkley a renowned expert on the Vietnam War) [\[Westmoreland\]](#) This included Tet 68, which was a major military defeat for the VC and NVA.

THE UNITED STATES DID NOT LOSE THE WAR IN VIETNAM, THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE DID after the U.S. Congress cut off funding. The South Vietnamese ran out of fuel, ammunition and other supplies because of a lack of support from Congress while the North Vietnamese were very well supplied by China and the Soviet Union.

Facts about the end of the war:

The fall of Saigon happened 30 April 1975, two years AFTER the American military left Vietnam. The last American troops departed in their entirety 29 March 1973. How could we lose a war we had already stopped fighting? We fought to an agreed stalemate. The peace settlement was signed in Paris on 27 January 1973. It called for release of all U.S. prisoners, withdrawal of U.S. forces, limitation of both sides' forces inside South Vietnam and a commitment to peaceful reunification. [\[1996 Information Please Almanac\]](#)

The 140,000 evacuees in April 1975 during the fall of Saigon consisted almost entirely of civilians and Vietnamese military, NOT American military running for their lives. [\[1996 Information Please Almanac\]](#)

There were almost twice as many casualties in Southeast Asia (primarily Cambodia) the first two years after the fall of Saigon in 1975 then there were during the ten years the U.S. was involved in Vietnam. [\[1996 Information Please Almanac\]](#)

POW-MIA Issue (unaccounted-for versus missing in action)

Politics & People, On Vietnam, Clinton Should Follow a Hero's Advice, contained this quote about Vietnam, there has been "the most extensive accounting in the history of human warfare" of those missing in action. While there are still officially more than 2,200 cases, there now are only 55 incidents of American servicemen who were last seen alive but aren't accounted for. By contrast, there still are 78,000 unaccounted-for Americans from World War II and 8,100 from the Korean conflict.

"The problem is that those who think the Vietnamese haven't cooperated sufficiently think there is some central repository with answers to all the lingering questions," notes Gen. John Vessey, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Reagan and Bush administration's designated representative in MIA negotiations. "In all the years we've been working on this we have found that's not the case." [\[The Wall Street Journal\]](#)

More realities about war: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - it was not invented or unique to Vietnam Veterans. It was called "shell shock" and other names in previous wars. An automobile accident or other traumatic event also can cause it. It does not have to be war related. The Vietnam War helped medical progress in this area.

Myth: Agent Orange poisoned millions of Vietnam veterans.

Over the ten years of the war, Operation Ranch Hand sprayed about eleven million gallons of Agent Orange on the South Vietnamese landscape. (the herbicide was called "orange" in Vietnam, not Agent Orange. That sinister-sounding term was coined after the war) Orange was sprayed at three gallons per acre that was the equivalent of .009 of an ounce per square foot. When sprayed on dense jungle foliage, less than 6 percent ever reached the ground. Ground troops typically did not enter a sprayed area until four to six weeks after being sprayed. Most Agent Orange contained .0002 of 1 percent of dioxin. Scientific research has shown that dioxin degrades in sunlight after 48 to 72 hours; therefore, troops exposure to dioxin was infinitesimal.