

Statistics about the Vietnam War

"No event in American history is more misunderstood than the Vietnam War. It was misreported then, and it is misremembered now. Rarely have so many people been so wrong about so much. Never have the consequences of their misunderstanding been so tragic."[Nixon]

The Vietnam War has been the subject of thousands of newspaper and magazine articles, hundreds of books, and scores of movies and television documentaries. The great majority of these efforts have erroneously portrayed many myths about the Vietnam War as being facts. (Nixon Library)

Myth: Most American soldiers were addicted to drugs, guilt-ridden about their role in the war, and deliberately used cruel and inhumane tactics.

The facts are:

- 91% of Vietnam Veterans say they are glad they served (Westmoreland papers)
- 74% said they would serve again even knowing the outcome (Westmoreland papers)
- There is no difference in drug usage between Vietnam Veterans and non veterans of the same age group (from a Veterans Administration study) (Westmoreland papers)
- Isolated atrocities committed by American soldiers produced torrents of outrage from antiwar critics and the news media while Communist atrocities were so common that they received hardly any attention 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 South 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 schoolteachers. (Nixon Library) Atrocities - every war has atrocities. War is brutal and not fair. Innocent people get killed.
- Vietnam Veterans are less likely to be in prison - only 1/2 of one percent of Vietnam Veterans have been jailed for crimes. (Westmoreland papers)
- 97% were discharged under honorable conditions; the same percentage of honorable discharges as ten years prior to Vietnam (Westmoreland papers)
- 85% of Vietnam Veterans made a successful transition to civilian life.(McCaffrey Papers)
- Vietnam veterans' personal income exceeds that of our non-veteran age group by more than 18 percent. (McCaffrey Papers)
- Vietnam veterans have a lower unemployment rate than our non-vet age group. (McCaffrey Papers)
- 87% of the American people hold Vietnam Vets in high esteem.(McCaffrey Papers)

Myth: Most Vietnam veterans were drafted.

2/3 of the men who served in Vietnam were volunteers. 2/3 of the men who served in World War II were drafted. (Westmoreland papers) Approximately 70% of those killed were volunteers.(McCaffrey Papers)

Myth: The media have reported that suicides among Vietnam veterans range from 50,000 to 100,000 - 6 to 11 times the non-Vietnam veteran population.

Mortality studies show that 9,000 is a better estimate. "The CDC Vietnam Experience Study Mortality Assessment showed that during the first 5 years after discharge, deaths from suicide were 1.7 times more likely among Vietnam veterans than non-Vietnam veterans. After that initial post-service period, Vietnam veterans were no more likely to die from suicide than non-Vietnam veterans. In fact, after the 5-year post-service period, the rate of suicides is less in the Vietnam veterans' group." [Houk]

Myth: A disproportionate number of blacks were killed in the Vietnam War.

86% of the men who died in Vietnam were Caucasians, 12.5% were black, 1.2% were other races. (CACF and (Westmoreland papers)

Sociologists Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler, in their recently published book "All That We Can Be," said they analyzed the claim that blacks were used like cannon fodder during Vietnam "and can report definitely that this charge is untrue. Black fatalities amounted to 12 percent of all Americans killed in Southeast Asia - a figure proportional to the number of blacks in the U.S. population at the time and slightly lower than the proportion of blacks in the Army at the close of the war." [All That We Can Be]

Myth: The war was fought largely by the poor and uneducated.

Servicemen who went to Vietnam from well-to-do areas had a slightly elevated risk of dying because they were more likely to be pilots or infantry officers.

Vietnam Veterans were the best educated forces our nation had ever sent into combat. 79% had a high school education or better. (McCaffrey Papers)

Here are statistics from the Combat Area Casualty File (CACF) as of November 1993. The CACF is the basis for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (The Wall):

Average age of 58,148 killed in Vietnam was 23.11 years. (Although 58,169 names are in the Nov. 93 database, only 58,148 have both event date and birth date. Event date is used instead of declared dead date for some of those who were listed as missing in action)(CACF)

Category	Deaths	Average Age
Total	58,148	23.11 years
Enlisted	50,274	22.37 years
Officers	6,598	28.43 years
Warrants	1,276	24.73 years
E1	525	20.34 years
11B MOS	18,465	22.55 years

Five men killed in Vietnam were only 16 years old.[CACF]

The oldest man killed was 62 years old.[CACF]

11,465 KIAs were less than 20 years old.[CACF]

Myth: The average age of an infantryman fighting in Vietnam was 19.

Assuming KIAs accurately represented age groups serving in Vietnam, the average age of an infantryman (MOS 11B) serving in Vietnam to be 19 years old is a myth, it is actually 22. None of the enlisted grades have an average age of less than 20. [CACF] The average man who fought in World War II was 26 years of age. (Westmoreland papers)

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 papers)

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 multiparty 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 percentage 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 Papers)

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 Databases)

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 papers)

More helicopter facts:

Approximately 12,000 helicopters saw action in Vietnam (all services). (VHPA Databases)

Army UH-1's totaled 7,531,955 flight hours in Vietnam between October 1966 and the end of 1975. (VHPA Databases)

Army AH-1G's totaled 1,038,969 flight hours in Vietnam. (VHPA Databases)

NOTE*

[All That We Can Be] All That We Can Be by Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler [CACF] (Combat Area Casualty File) November 1993. (The CACF is the basis for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, i.e. The Wall), Center for Electronic Records, National Archives, Washington, DC

[Houk] Testimony by Dr. Houk, Oversight on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, 14 July 1988 page 17, Hearing before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs United States Senate one-hundredth Congress second session. Also "Estimating the Number of Suicides Among Vietnam Veterans" (Am J Psychiatry 147, 6 June 1990 pages 772-776)

[McCaffrey] Speech by Lt. Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey, (reproduced in the Pentagon, June 4, 1993) assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Vietnam veterans and visitors gathered at "The Wall", Memorial Day 1993

[Parade Magazine] August 18, 1996 page 10.

[VHPA Databases] Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association Databases.

[Westmoreland] Speech by General William C. Westmoreland before the Third Annual Reunion of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association (VHPA) at the Washington, DC Hilton Hotel on July 5th, 1986 (reproduced in a Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association Historical Reference Directory Volume 2A)

Note: This was submitted by Joseph H. Luginsland (ET1(SS) 1980-1983)

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