

Demography of the U.S. Armed Forces in Vietnam

Big Picture

2,594,000 military personnel served in VN between 1/1/65 and 3/28/73

(50,030 served between 1/1/60 and 12/31/64)

7,484 women, 83.5% of whom were nurses, served in the military in VN

543,482 (on April 30, 1968) was the maximum US troop level in VN

Butcher's Bill

Total deaths 58,202

Hostile deaths 47,378;

Non-hostile deaths 10,800

61% of the dead were 21 or younger

Deaths by Branch of Service

Army: 38,179; 2.7% of Army personnel; 65.6% of all fatalities

Marines: 14,836; 5% of Marine personnel; 25.5% of all fatalities

Navy: 2,556; 2% of Navy personnel; 4.4% of all fatalities

Air Force: 2,580; 1% of Air Force personnel; 4.4% of all fatalities

Total Wounded 303,704

153,329 were hospitalized

75,000 were severely disabled of whom 23,214 were totally disabled

Amputation / crippling wounds to lower extremities were:

300% higher than in WWII;

70% higher than in Korean War.

Multiple amputations were 18.4% compared to 5.7% in WWII

Missing in Action 2,338

POWS 766 (114 died in captivity)

Draftees vs. Volunteers

648,500 or 25% of the armed forces in Vietnam were draftees (vs. 66% of US Armed Forces in WWII)

2,594,000 or 75% were volunteers

17,725 draftees died in Vietnam, 30.4% of the total deaths

Race / Ethnicity

Of the men who served in Vietnam

88.4% were white

10.6% were black

1% were "other"

Of the men who died in Vietnam

81.1% were white

12.5% were black

5.2% were Hispanic

1.2% were "other"

Of the men who were killed in action

86.8% were white (Hispanics included)

12.1% were black

1.1% were "other"

Religion

Protestant - - 64.4%

Catholic - - 28.9

Other/None - - 6.7%

Socio-Economic Status

Of all the men who served in Vietnam:

75% came from families whose incomes were above the poverty level;

50% came from middle income families;

80% had a high school education or less

20% had a semester of college or more

Of enlisted men and NCOs in line infantry companies:

67% had a high school education or less

The Demography Reflects Fundamental Unfairness

The perception persists that a highly disproportionate number of those who died in Vietnam were members of minority groups, but that's not accurate. Of those killed in action, 12.5 percent were black and slightly over 5 percent were Hispanic, which is close to their proportion of draft-age males in the national population.

Nevertheless, it is notable that at the beginning of the war (1964-66) blacks comprised more than 20 percent of American combat deaths, about twice the black portion of the U.S. population. As a result of criticism by Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders, however, the military revamped their assignment system so that fewer black GIs were given a combat-related military occupation specialty ("MOS"). Consequently, the portion of black casualties declined over time so that, for the war as a whole, black casualties were only slightly disproportionate, namely 12.5% combat deaths from a black civilian population that constituted 11% of the total US population and from a black males-of-military-age population that constituted 13.5% of the total US population.

The initial over-representation of blacks in combat was an aspect of the most fundamental inequality at work throughout the war, namely, that the draft and its ripple effect of voluntary enlistments, coupled with the deferment system, resulted in a military that had proportionately more lower-income, rural, and less-educated Americans than their share of the general population would warrant. You were not only more likely to wind up in the armed forces if you were from these disfavored socio-economic groups, but also more likely to be assigned a combat MOS and to be killed or wounded in battle.

<history-world.org/Vietnam_war>; <americanwarlibrary.com/Vietnam>; *The New York Times*; *The Vietnam War* (Episode Eight), Ken Burns