

## 2.7 POST-VIETNAM ERA: 1976-1989

### Statistics

- Vietnam Vets: 9.7% of their generation.
- 9,087,000 GIs served on active duty in the Vietnam Era 8/05/1964-5/07/1975.
- 40 - 60% either fought in combat, provided close support or were at least fairly regularly exposed to enemy attack.
- 2,644,000 served within the borders of South Vietnam 1/01/1960-3/28/1973.
- Peak troop strength in Vietnam: 543,482 - 3/30/1968.
- 7,484 women served; 83.5% were nurses. 8 died, one KIA.
- Total casualties: 58,202 (Includes men formerly classified as MIA and Mayaguez casualties).
- Severely disabled: 75,000 (23,214 were 100% disabled), 5,283 lost limbs.
- MIA: 2,338. POWs: 766 (114 died in captivity).
- Soldiers were an average of 22.8 years old: 61% of those killed were 21 or younger.
- Servicemen were 88.4% Caucasian (including Hispanic), 10.6 % Black, 1% other.
- 170,00 Hispanics served in Vietnam; 5.2% (3,070) died there.
- 25% (648,500) of total forces in this country were draftees (66% were drafted in WWII).
- Total draftees (1965-1973): 1,728,344. 38% actually served in Vietnam.
- Draftees accounted for 30.4% of combat deaths in Vietnam.
- National Guard: 6,140 served, 101 died.
- 76% of all personnel sent were from lower middle/working class (above poverty level); 50% from middle-income backgrounds; 23% had fathers with professional, managerial or technical occupations.
  - 79% had high school education or better at the time they entered the service.
  - 97% of all vets were honorably discharged.
  - 91% of Vietnam War vets and 90% of those who saw heavy combat are proud to have served their country.
  - 82% of veterans who saw heavy combat strongly believe the war was lost because of lack of political will.
  - 87% of the public now holds Vietnam veterans in high esteem.



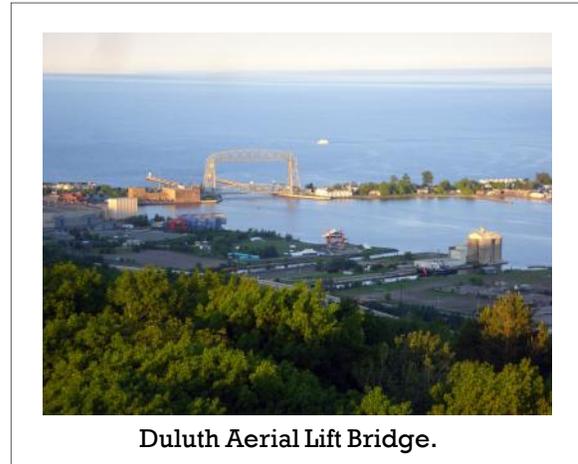
Rare Vietnam Era Navy Special Forces urban uniform prototype. Grey-tone scramble was never officially used until 1987.



—Courtesy of VFW Magazine, 4/12/1997. Facts listed: <http://www.history-world.org/stics.htm>

## Whitewash

Addicted to battle adrenalin,  
Invincible, in limbo  
With nothing more to lose,  
His face a white flag blocking the sun.<sup>1</sup>  
He dangled between heaven and earth,  
Swinging from a single thread  
Cleaning and painting bridges<sup>2</sup>  
After his war  
While the government  
Spun its silken web of  
Sanitized reports  
And whitewashed casualties.



Duluth Aerial Lift Bridge.

—For Ron C., with thanks to Becky Liestman<sup>1</sup> for inspiration.

<sup>2</sup>Aerial Lift Bridge and others were painted by Ron in Duluth, MN, circa 1970, after his discharge.

## O, Say

10 years after practicing as a surgical nurse in Vietnam, the only thing I got was gossip and complaints when people had to cover my job so I could serve as a reservist.

Then one day I was asked to march in a parade and people actually shook my hand. They said, “I’m from the Vietnam War, too. Just wanted to make sure you are welcomed home.”

Now when people thank me it feels amazing. How should I reply?  
I could never say, “It was my pleasure.”

Not exactly “You’re welcome”, either.  
I’ve settled on “It was an honor.”

—Retired Colonel Donna Alt



Duffle bag.

## Nibs

They were acquaintances, so she'd written regularly  
While he still lived out of his duffle,  
Though her fountain pen was no match for machetes<sup>1</sup>  
Nor her ink for monsoon rains.  
He came home but never found the time to look her up;  
Went back to his sweetheart, tied the knot,  
And got on with life.

Except for keeping company with Jack Daniels,  
Things seemed OK.  
Then Jesus re-introduced Himself  
And the half empty glass got clearer, then stayed dry.  
18 years later at a church camp retreat,  
He saw the writer of those friendly letters  
That had spoken of nothing, of everything, of home.

She greeted his wife warmly,  
Then looked into his eyes  
Earnestly, tenderly, simply:  
"I never actually thanked you  
For fighting just because  
Your country asked you to."  
They caught him, those words.

—For George and Carol J.



<sup>1</sup>A reference to the pen being mightier than the sword.

## Take No Prisoners

He'd been a general in the Vietnamese Army  
Trained by Americans, but  
Proud to fight his own war.  
19 years after Saigon fell  
He awoke in his Minnesota pajamas,  
The snub nose of his service revolver  
Inhaling his loving wife's blonde hair;  
Her, kneeling in POW stance,

Pleading for him to recognize her  
Before he pulled the trigger.

—For his son, Nam

## Filling Those Boots

My oldest brother signed on.  
Had a terrible temper: he'd throw things at people,  
Refused to listen or have goals.  
He was angry at the world.  
2 years made a tremendous difference.  
He came home changed:  
Polite, courteous, gracious, respectful.  
He needed the discipline.  
Every young man should go in  
To make him appreciate what he's got.  
He went in a selfish boy and came out a good man.  
I'm glad it worked for him.

—Sue T.

## Set In Stone

A replica of the Vietnam Memorial came to Chisholm.  
My uncle's name on that wall did something for me,  
Knowing *others* commemorate *our* great loss.  
KIA<sup>1</sup> doesn't just affect the deceased;  
It changes the entire family structure going forward.

I wonder if the country of Vietnam has created a memorial, too?  
When soldiers have to kill someone,  
They must know it was some other family's child, husband.  
How difficult to be put in that position,  
To take a life!

What if countries made memorials for each other's dead?  
Calling a solemn assembly,



Carving those names in hard  
That were once too easily taken away;  
Mixing letters with the DNA of stone.

Learning someone Over There  
Is as remorseful,  
As penitent, as willing to bear in mind,  
As grateful  
As I am right now.

—With Sue Tammaro

<sup>1</sup>Killed in Action



**Note:** Architect Maya Lin, Chinese American, designed the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial completed in 1982. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam\\_Veterans\\_Memorial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_Veterans_Memorial)

## Engaged in Battle

I was engaged to a man in the service.  
Age 16, and he wanted me to wait for him.  
He was gone a year, stationed in Germany. We wrote.  
Then his sister died and even with the help of the Red Cross<sup>1</sup>  
It took 3 weeks to get him home for the funeral.  
Everyone was overwrought so it fell to me  
To make the arrangements and represent the family.  
He was only home 3 days.  
With everything else, we hardly saw each other.  
Her death skewed our relationship.

When he was finally discharged,  
We didn't know each other anymore.  
He'd become a very different person, while I was still a farm girl.  
He expected me to be a girlfriend, a sister, and a mom to him.  
How can a 17 year-old possibly know how to do that?  
2 days before the wedding, I called it off.  
He was being macho, saying, "You'll never see me cry,"  
But we were both crying.  
It ripped us in two, but we both knew  
Dissolving the relationship was the right thing to do.

He died in an accident 10 years ago.  
I'd given the engagement ring back,  
But it was sent to my care after he died.  
He'd wanted me to have it.

People change.  
They change when they are together, too,

But they seem to evolve as a couple  
So it is not such a stark reality.  
When sweethearts endure the service  
They change alone.

—Sue Tammaro

<sup>1</sup>The names of the hospital, attending physician, coroner, and funeral home must all be supplied with the death certificate in order to gain emergency leave for a service member. In addition, since she was doing the paperwork, she also had to prove she was a family member.

## R & R<sup>1</sup>

A bobber or two on clear water  
A calm Canadian fishing trip  
A bonding experience for two brothers:

The One,  
    A nuclear power plant trainer,  
    A thyroid cancer survivor with  
    A fission submarine still under his skin.

The Other,  
    A conscientious medic *cum* beloved doctor,  
    A glaucoma much worse  
    (Agent Orange exposure now forcing retirement).



A harmless helicopter whirled by;

The Other propelled back 46 years to  
Another side of the world:  
da Nang, a Huey,  
A canvas medic bag

A flash of phosphorous grenade  
A body on fire acrid fire infernal fire horrible fire  
A reaching in, blood boiling his wrists.

A short vacation  
A serene lake  
A simple peace  
All shot to hell.

—With D. R.

<sup>12</sup> brothers with a last name R, wanting to enjoy one another's company, both with the effects of their service still with them.

## Engraved in Time

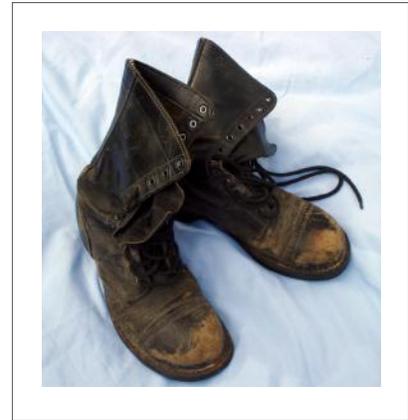
Most wars *are* political.  
When we get involved, it might be a very important thing  
Or a mistake.  
The service of soldiers is by definition political, too.  
Where they end up, what they have to do:  
They've taken an oath to a government to uphold it,  
Whether they now believe in the new strategy or new administration.

If you go in,  
You will have that era etched  
On your soul for the rest of your life.  
If you don't go in,  
You might have a buddy who never made it back,  
And that, too, changes who you might've become...  
We are all en-graved, in time.

—With Sue Tammaro

## Boots

Government issue,  
Smelling of spit and polish and pride;  
Scuffed on dust and rubble and mud,  
Hauled over wire and wood and wall,  
Tramped through sand and slough and swamp:  
Black Cadillacs<sup>1</sup>  
Saluting the fear that was overcome;  
Shipped away and, gratefully, back;  
Now stowed in closet-homage to brotherhood;  
Suddenly feeling booted out.



—To career-man David, knowing that you haven't felt the same since.

<sup>1</sup>Black Cadillacs: one's service transportation; combat boots. Due to the densely shaded undergrowth, Vietnam was the first war where all U.S. ground troops wore black rather than brown ones, similar to the WWII paratrooper boots above.

## Uniform

Non-soldier families can't know  
What it means to sacrifice a member.  
Having mandatory service would be a leveler:  
    Provide a common frame of reference,  
    Give solidarity around ideals,  
    Acculturate our undisciplined and ungrateful children.  
If we actually had to consider  
Where freedom of religion comes from  
On an individual basis,  
Maybe there would be a less casual approach to God.

—With Sue Tamaro

## Raw Recruits

Early summer at the lake,  
and the waves lined up  
by a brusque CPO wind,

white caps at jaunty angles,  
march for the nearest shore  
to bivouac on the beach.  
These are the raw recruits  
training hard for their role  
in the skirmish of seasons.  
Soon will come fall with  
its bright banners waving,  
to promise liberation from  
the stifling August<sup>1</sup> heat  
only to sell us out at last to  
be taken prisoner by winter.

—John Thornberg, June 2011

<sup>1</sup>August: a month; also: marked by majestic dignity or grandeur. Webster's Dictionary, p. 74.



U.S. Regal mess kit, 1967 design. What a luxury it would have been to enjoy C-Rations with the trifecta of table knife, fork AND spoon! (Forks and knives were NOT U.S. issue, but were used for camping gear from the 1980s on.) Soldiers had only a spoon and their bowie knife.



Canadian Flag from 1965.

## Fire and Brimstone

The American government didn't like draft dodgers  
Any more than the Canadian government did.  
“Stay on your side of the line.” [what America said]  
“We don't want *you* here.” [what Canada said]

Before the close of the war,  
When we moved to Canada and wanted to become citizens,  
We heard plenty of derogatory remarks, but one day, to one  
Ron said, “What do you mean? I served my time in hell.”  
He never heard another slur.

—Cheri

## Normative Behavior

They'd tried to bring him, a Ranger, back to non-feral,  
But when released back into the tame,  
His musky instinct was still whispering "jungle".  
He saw the world through one glass iris in too much black and white;  
Healing from his injuries, wanting to get back to living,  
Sure of what he knew; not about to retreat from what he didn't.

"Dominant male seeks recessive female."  
Testosterone competing with bravado on the Richter Scale,  
He was looking for a woman who could be meek enough,  
But women had struggled free while he was at war,  
And the field was foreign now.  
Some of them, anyone could tell him, were positively independent.

Flummoxed,  
He dismissed most summarily.  
One, he mildly tolerated  
For the mental parlay over dinner prep,  
Scrubbing potatoes in KP competition  
With her until the eyes were gone.

—For Norm



1969 Postage stamp  
honoring Rev. Martin  
Luther King, Jr.

### **Trading Up? Non-Violence for an M-16?**

Blacks had a war of Ideology on their hands at home, some would say, as powerful as any battles in Asia. Blacks saw service in Vietnam as a more level playing field than the streets at home, thus signing on for combat. Equal rights demonstrators on domestic turf determined to stand as courageously, albeit without weapons, against fully armed and armored National Guardsmen. During the Vietnam Era, 13.5% of our total population were Black. 34% of Blacks who enlisted volunteered for combat roles. 12.1% of combat fatalities were Black.

—VFW Magazine, 4/12/1997. Facts listed: <http://www.history-world.org/stics.htm>

**Vietnam War Title Sampler**  
Carver County Library System 2016

959.704 CHI **Air War in Vietnam** / Phil Chinnery.

**327.1747 ZAK 2016 Almighty : courage, resistance, and existential peril in the nuclear age** / Dan Zak.

959.70437 NOR **Bouncing Back : how a heroic band of POWs survived Vietnam** / Geoffrey Norman.

641.59597 JAC **Cafe Vietnam** (cookbook) / Annabel Jackson ; photography by Jeremy Hopley.

J LYN Fiction Series 2013-2014 : **Casualties of War ; Free-fire zone ; Sharpshooter** / Chris Lynch.

CD POP ROCK CRY **Crystal Castles** / (Musical Group - Also title of their album.)

DVD HISTORY BIO DIC **Dick Cavett's Vietnam** / directed by John Scheinfeld ; produced by Steve Burns.

959.7043 DUN **Dirty Little Secrets of the Vietnam War** / James F. Dunnigan and Albert A. Nofi.

KUB **Dong Xoai, Vietnam 1965** / written and illustrated by Joe Kubert ; lettering and production by Pete Carlsson.

REF 959.703 ENC **Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War : a political, social, and military history** / Spencer C. Tucker, editor.

641.59596 BAS **The Food and Cooking of Vietnam & Cambodia : discover the deliciously fragrant cuisines of Indo-China; with over 150 authentic step-by-step recipes and over 750 photographs** / Ghillie Basan ; with photographs by Ghillie Basan.

959.70434 SUM **Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War** / Harry G. Summers, Jr. ; introduction and epilogue by Stanley Karnow.

DVD HISTORY BIO LAS **Last Days in Vietnam** / Moxie Firecracker Films ; directed and produced by Rory Kennedy ; written by Keven McAlester, Mark Bailey.

915.97 NAT **National Geographic Traveler. Vietnam.**

959.704 PRI **Primary Sources: Vietnam War** / edited by David M. Haugen.

DVD HISTORY BIO VIE **Vietnam** / a production of Millennium III Communications for Istituto Geografico de Agostini ; distributed by Film Ideas, Inc.

959.70438 CHA **Vietnam : a portrait of its people at war** / David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai.

959.704 DAV **Vietnam at War : the history, 1946-1975** / Phillip B. Davidson.

915.9704 VIE 2012 **Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos & Northern Thailand** (travel).

DVD HISTORY BIO VIE **Vietnam in HD** / produced by Lou Reda Productions for History.

959.7044 LAM **Vietnam, Now : a reporter returns** / David Lamb.

959.7043 VIE **The Vietnam Reader : the definitive collection of American fiction and nonfiction on the war** / edited by Stewart O'Nan.

959.7 ISA **Vietnam Shadows : the war, its ghosts, and its legacy** / Arnold R. Isaacs.

DVD HISTORY BIO VIE **Vietnam Soldiers' Story : the invisible enemy** / produced by Ron Steinman ; an ABC News Production for the Learning Channel.

959.7043373 LIN **Vietnam, the Necessary War : a reinterpretation of America's most disastrous military conflict** / Michael Lind.

J959.70436 DUB **The Vietnam Veterans Memorial** / by Muriel L. Dubois.

ZIM **The Vietnam War : a graphic history** (graphic novel) /written by Dwight Zimmerman ; art by Wayne Vasant ; foreword by General Chuck Horner. 2009.

J REF 959.7043 HIL **Vietnam War: almanac** / Kevin Hillstrom and Laurie Collier Hillstrom ; Diane Sawinski, editor.

959.7043 DUD **The Vietnam War: opposing viewpoints** / William Dudley, book editor.

REF 973 CHA **The Vietnam War: the Tet Offensive onward** / Christopher Chant.

J 959.70438 KEN **The Vietnam Women's Memorial** / Deborah Kent.

TRA **Vietnamerica: a family's journey** / by GB Tran.

495.9223 VIE **Vietnamese Phrasebook & Dictionary.**

DVD HISTORY BIO VIE **Vietnam's Unseen War : pictures from the other side** / MSNBC and National Geographic Television ; producer, David Clark, Brian Breger ; writer, Brian Breger.

DVD HISTORY BIO WEW **We Were Heroes : 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), Viet Nam** / Madacy Video presents.

303.484 BIN 2016 **Witness to the Revolution : radicals, resisters, vets, hippies, and the year America lost its mind and found its soul** / Clara Bingham. 2016.