



Greetings from the President

by **Richard Shand**

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I had the somewhat unique experience of being a Canadian in Vietnam. My family emigrated to Albuquerque New Mexico from Vancouver, British Columbia in August, 1963. As an alien resident, I was now eligible for the draft and I registered with the draft board when I turned 18 in 1965.

After I graduated from high school, I wanted to join the Special Forces. This desire didn't have anything to do with Vietnam - the war was only beginning to heat up then. No, I had been enticed by the recruiting brochures with pictures of camouflaged men shooting the rapids and climbing cliffs, just the sort of adventure I craved. I went down to the recruiter and boldly stated my purpose. He sized me up - 5' 7 1/2" (171 cm), 140 lb. (77.5 kg) - then told me I should go to university instead.

Now here's the irony. I did end up attending the University of New Mexico, majoring in philosophy with a minor in political science. My father tried to get me into the ROTC (Reserved Officers Training Corps) program but I was ineligible because I was not a US citizen. So instead I worked and my father got a US Defense Loan to help defer the expenses of my education. After completing the first semester of my Junior year (2 1/2 years), my father suddenly got the news that, as a Canadian, I was also ineligible for the US Defense Loan. Not only would there be no funding for the next semester but the bank demanded payment for all the proceeding semesters.

Although my grades were good, the lack of funding and my lack of purpose in attending university made me decide to drop out. I moved back to Vancouver in February 1968 where I became part of the psychedelic revolution. In April a couple of good friends visited me from New Mexico and I returned home with them - the prodigal son. In my absence the Selective Service Board declared me draft delinquent for not reporting my change of address. I quickly wrote the board and explained that my stay to Canada had only been temporary and that I had returned to the States. My letter seemed to satisfy them. They moved me to the top of the selection list and two months later I received a letter - "Greetings from the President of the United States". I had been inducted into the army.

Anonymous Warriors

"The worst of ours are going north, and the best of theirs are coming south."

- Unknown marine quoted in *Leatherneck* magazine

When I was in Vietnam I was told that there were only 100 other Canadians in-country at the time (including my brother who served up north as a tech inspector for the choppers of the 2nd Signal Brigade at Phu Bai.) I had been drafted but almost all Canadian Vietnam veterans I have met were volunteers who crossed the border to enlist. Since most Canadians gave the US border city they enlisted in as their point of origin, the actual number of Canadians who served in Vietnam may never be known. In addition, many Canadians serving in Vietnam become US citizens and stayed in the United States after their return.

"Colonel Shields said the Defense Department had no figures because the records of soldiers who served in Vietnam had been retired."

"Roderick Engert, chief of the reference branch of the Center of Military History of the Pentagon, said the number might be only **2,500** to **3,000**. He extrapolates his figures from the casualty ratio in the war, in which 2.7 million Americans served and 58,000 died. A Canadian Government official said he doubted that more than **5,000** Canadians had served in Vietnam."

- Christopher S. Wren, "Vietnam War Also Haunts Canadian Volunteers", *The New York Times*, Jan. 24, 1985

"...The war also lured an estimated **5,000** Canadians to enlist in its jungle hells."

- Marci McDonald, "Vietnam's Bitter Legacy", *Maclean's*, Apr. 29, 1985.

"Some estimate that their numbers far surpassed the more than 30,000 American draft dodgers who fled to Canada to avoid military service during the war. While exact numbers are impossible to obtain, from my work as a military historian with the Canadian War Museum, I estimate that of the many thousands who served in the U. S. Vietnam-era military, some **12,000** Canadians actually served in Vietnam itself."

- Fred Gaffen in "Perspectives", *Vietnam* magazine, August 1991

Fred Gaffen is the chief historian at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

From 1986 to 1987 I handled public relations for Canada's largest Vietnam veterans organization, Vietnam Veterans in Canada (VVIC). Based on the size of the organization and the number Canadian Vietnam veterans VVIC came in contact with, I estimated that Canadians serving in Vietnam numbered no more than **3,000**.

If a significant number of Canadian Vietnam vets live in the United States or have chosen not to make their presence known to veterans' groups, the actual number may be significantly higher. Will the total still be in the lower range of official estimates or will it approach the 30,000 or even 50,000 figure commonly bandied about by the media?

Information is available which allows one to calculate a reasonable estimate¹. These include several undisputed facts about Canadians who served in the US armed forces during the Vietnam war:

- (a) **The number who took out US citizenship**
- (b) **The number of known KIA's and MIA's**
- (c) **Documented service statistics on 166 personal, living and dead**

For my primary sources I will use Fred Gaffen's book *Unknown Warriors - Canadians in the Vietnam War* and the VVIC membership list for 1988.

1. How did Canadians end up in Vietnam?

Unknown Warriors lists **48** Canadian Vietnam veterans where information about citizenship, place of residency and service status is available.

VVIC lists **39** Canadian Vietnam veterans who had submitted DD 214s (the official record of service). The citizenship and service status of **12** is known.

Service status breaks down into the following categories:

- (a) Volunteers, most of whom crossed the border to serve in Vietnam;
- (b) Career soldiers who had served time in the US armed forces before Vietnam;
- (c) American residents who received draft notices and either enlisted or were drafted.

Many Canadian Vietnam veterans became naturalized citizens of the United States before, during and after the Vietnam War.

Table 1
Service Status of Canadian Veterans in Vietnam

	Career Soldiers	Volunteers	Draftee/Enlistees
With US Citizenship	(6) 33%	(7) 39%	(5) 28%
Without US Citizenship	(12) 36%	(17) 52%	(4) 12%

2. How many Canadians with US citizenship served in Vietnam?

Unknown Warriors lists **22** Canadian Vietnam veterans who became US citizens where information about service status and date of citizenship is available. **67%** of the career soldiers (4/6), **20%** of the volunteers (1/5), and **50%** of the draftee/enlistees (2/4) became naturalized between 1967 to 1975 (the years of US peak involvement in Vietnam).

If we apply Table 1 to the percentages above, we can calculate what percentage of each service status gained US citizenship from 1967 to 1975 .

Table 2
Canadian Vietnam Veterans Naturalized Between 1967 and 1975

Career Soldiers	Volunteers	Draftee/Enlistees	Total
25%	6.3%	14.7%	45.5%

- **FACT:** From 1964 to 1973, **2,100,000** men and women served in Vietnam. That was exactly **24%** of the **8,444,000** who were in the active armed forces during those years.²
- **FACT:** **3,244** Canadians in the US armed forces became naturalized US citizens between 1967 and 1975.³

39% of Canadian Vietnam veterans with US citizenship in Vietnam were volunteers (Table 1), most of whom joined specifically to serve in Vietnam. We can allow that 24% of all Canadians in the regular US Armed Forces served in Vietnam, based on the percentage that applied to the Armed Forces as a whole. If we increase this percentage by 39% to allow for new volunteers crossing the border, then **33%** of the Canadians in the US armed forces who became naturalized US citizens served in Vietnam, numbering **1,071**. Since this figure represents 45.5% of all Canadian Vietnam veterans with American citizenship (Table 2), their total would equal **2,354** - which can be rounded off to:

2,500

3. How many Canadians with US citizenship were killed in Vietnam?

(The following data on all personnel was obtained from Bill Abbott's article "Names on the Wall", *Vietnam Magazine*, June 1993. The data on Canadians was obtained from the VVIC membership list and *Unknown Warriors*).

Table 3
US Armed Forces in Vietnam by Branch of Service

	Army	Marines	Navy	Air Force
All Personnel	67%	14%	6%	13%
Canadians With US Citizenship	(13) 50%	(2) 8%	(2) 8%	(9) 34%

These are rough estimates, but they indicate that Canadian Vietnam veterans with US citizenship were much more likely than average to have served with the air force and less likely to have served in the Marine Corps. If we apply these percentages of Canadians with US citizenship to our estimated total of **2,500**, we arrive at the following numbers:

Table 4
Canadians With US Citizenship in Vietnam by Branch of Service

Army	Marines	Navy	Air Force
1,250	200	200	850

Table 5
Percent Dead and Wounded in Vietnam by Branch of Service

Army	Marines	Navy	Air Force
9.5%	22.5%	5.3%	1.2%

We can apply the casualty rates to our group of Canadians with US citizenship to estimate the number of casualties in each branch of the service.

Table 6
Estimated Dead or Wounded in Vietnam

	Army	Marines	Navy	Air Force	Total
Canadians With US Citizenship	119	45	11	10	185
Percent of Total	64.3%	24.3%	6%	5.4%	100%

The difference in the distribution of Canadian casualties in the different branches of service from the overall percentages is reflected in the overall casualty rate:

Table 7
Total Percentage of Dead or Wounded in Vietnam

	Number Serving	Killed and Wounded	Percent
All Personnel	2,100,000	211,454	10.0%
Canadians With US Citizenship	2,500	185	7.4%

We can then expect that if the casualty rate of our group of Canadians is **74%** that of the overall rate, the same ratio can be applied to the mortality rate.

- **FACT:** The names of **58,151** MIAs and KIAs are etched on the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC - about **2.8%** of the 2.1 million men and women who served in the Vietnam.

If the mortality rate of the 2,500 Canadians with US citizenship figures was 74% of the 2.8% baseline rate, the result would be 2%. Therefore, the number of Canadians from this group who were killed or missing in action would be:

50

4. How many Canadians in total were killed or missing in action in Vietnam?

- **FACT:** **93** Canadians are officially listed as killed in action and **7** as missing in action.⁴

The names of 105 Canadian KIAs and MIAs listed on the "[North Wall](#)" in Windsor Ontario should be not be considered complete {as of July 2000). 3 of 16 Canadian

Vietnam veterans whose date of US citizenship is known, or **20%**, were raised in the United States and naturalized years before they arrived in Vietnam. If any from this group had been killed or missing in action, they would be amongst the least likely to be listed as Canadian fatalities. In addition, many of the Canadians who were not US citizens may also be unaccounted for, despite intensive efforts by Canadian veterans groups to locate them. Consequently, total Canadian-born KIAs and MIAs could be as high as 200.

According to our figures, **80%** of the Canadians with US citizenship and virtually of those without who were killed or missing in action in Vietnam grew up in Canada. It is inconceivable that more than a few have not yet been identified as Canadian citizens by close relatives and friends. Only three new names have been added to the North Wall since 1995 [to April 2000]. This suggests that most MIAs and KIAs have been accounted for. 200 would thus be a unrealistically high estimate. The actual number of Canadian KIAs and MIAs in Vietnam would appear to be closer to:

150

(Note that calculations based on the number of career soldiers listed on the North Wall reveal that the number Canadian KIAs and MIAs in Vietnam range from **135** to **149**. See [Appendix A](#).)

5. How many Canadians without US citizenship served in Vietnam?

Unknown Warriors lists the branch of service of 79 Canadians killed or missing in action in Vietnam. (Note: these figures based on information available in 1996.)

Table 9
Known Canadian KIAs and MIAs by Branch of Service

	Army	Marines	Navy	Air Force
Total Serving	(43) 54%	(30) 38%	(3) 4%	(3) 4%

We can apply the percentages in Table 9 to the estimated 150 Canadian KIAs and MIAs. In addition, if we apply the estimated percentages of dead or wounded in each branch of service (Table 6) to the 50 Canadian KIAs and MIAs with US citizenship. then take the difference, we derive the following numerical breakdown:

Table 10
Estimated Number Canadian KIAs and MIAs by Branch of Service

	Army	Marines	Navy	Air Force
All Canadians (150)	81	57	6	6
Canadians With US Citizenship (50)	32	12	3	3
Canadians Without US Citizenship (100)	49	45	3	3

We can then compare these calculations with actual numbers using the VVIC membership list and *Unknown Warriors*.

Table 11
Percentages of Canadians Without US Citizenship in Vietnam by Branch of Service

	Army	Marines	Navy	Air Force
Estimated	49 %	45%	3%	3%
Actual	(38) 50%	(33) 44%	(2) 3%	(2) 3%

There is very close agreement between our estimate and the actual percentage of Canadians known to served in each branch of the military service.

2.8% of all who served in Vietnam were killed or missing in action. (As a comparison, out of the 26,000 Canadians who served in the Korean war, 516 or 2% were killed in action.) If the 100 KIAs and MIAs represented the same percentage, over 3,500 Canadians without US citizenship served in Vietnam. The mortality rate of the Canadians, however, was much higher than average. For instance, volunteers who returned back across the border (and chose not to become US citizens) were **3 times** more likely to have served with the **US Marine Corps** than their American counterparts (44% to 14% - see Table 3).

The US Army paid a high price for its long involvement in South Vietnam. American military deaths exceeded 58,000, and of these about two thirds were soldiers. The majority of the dead were low-ranking enlisted men (E-1 and E-3), young men twenty-three years old or younger, of whom approximately 13% were black. Most deaths were caused by small-arms fire and gunshot, but a significant portion, almost 30%, stemmed from mines, booby traps, and grenades. Artillery, rockets, and bombs accounted for only a small portion of the total fatalities.

- Vincent H. Demma, *American Military History*,

Overall, Canadians without US citizenship were **4 times** more likely to fight as **combat infantrymen** than the average serviceman in Vietnam.

Table 12
Combat Status of US Armed Forces in Vietnam⁵

	Combat Infantry	Artillery & Engineers	Aviation	HQ & Logistics
All Personnel (1967)	10.46%	12%	2%	75%
Canadians With US Citizenship	(5) 28%	(1) 6%	(2) 11%	(10) 55%
Canadians Without US Citizenship	(11) 41%	(6) 19%	(4) 12%	(9) 28%

If we subtract the percentage of Canadians without US citizenship who served in HQ, logistics and engineering units, the majority of these Canadians served in what are termed "**maneuver battalions**".

"A maneuver battalion is a combat unit of battalion size, usually infantry, armored cavalry, tanks, or mechanized infantry, that is able to move under its own resources and engage the enemy with its organic weapons. In April 1968, the United States had 112 maneuver battalions, and Department of Defense figures showed 29 percent of total Army personnel in Vietnam and 34 percent of the Marines as serving in maneuver battalions."

- Ronald H. Spector, *After Tet - The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (The Free Press)

Table 13
**Annual KIA Rate per 1000 Average Strength
 For US Armed Forces in Vietnam (Jan 67- Sep 68)**

	Army	Marines	Overall
Maneuver Btns	99.9	130.2	108.9
Non-maneuver Btns	5.5	15.9	7.3
All Forces	25.2	54.5	31.1
Ratio Maneuver to All Forces	4/1	5/2	7/2

Using Table 5 - Percent Dead and Wounded in Vietnam by Branch of Service, we can take our percent breakdown of Canadians without US citizenship in Table 10 and extrapolate the number who served in each branch.

Table 14
Number of Canadians Without US Citizenship by Branch of Service in Vietnam

Army	Marines	Navy	Air Force	Total
(49/9.5%)	(45/22.5%)	(3/5.3%)	(3/1.2%)	
516	200	57	250	1,023

Based on these figures and allowing an additional 50% for margin of error, the total number of Canadians without US citizenship who served in Vietnam would have been no more than:

1,500

Confirming the Estimates

"Staff Sergeant Girolodi ended his career as a drill instructor at Parris Island, South Carolina. While there, recruits, some of whom would be going to Vietnam, had their training period reduced from 13 weeks to 8 or 9 to meet quotas. While at Parris Island, he never came across any Canadian recruits."

- Fred Gaffen *Unknown Warriors - Canadians in the Vietnam War*

If we add together our estimates of the number of Canadian Vietnam Veterans with and without US citizenship, the total number of Canadians who served in Vietnam is **3,500**. The sample of Canadian Vietnam veterans used as the basis for these calculations amount to only 2% of this total, however. Calculations based on the number of career soldiers killed or missing in action could raise this total to **4,000**. (See [Appendix A](#).)

The VVIC membership list contains the name of any alleged Vietnam veteran given to the organization either by the individual himself, or by someone else (relative, friend, associate, word of mouth.) The VVIC has been in operation since 1985 and has received exceptionally high exposure on TV, radio and the newspapers. If 1/3 of the Vietnam vets in British Columbia and Alberta were made known to the VVIC, the total number of Canadian Vietnam veterans in these provinces would be **300**. These provinces constitute 22.2 % of Canada's population. Allowing 10% for post-service mortality (see [Appendix B](#)), the total number of Canadian Vietnam veterans without US citizenship would be approximately:

1,500

CONCLUSION

My estimate has stirred up some controversy here at home since it was published in the Canadian Legion magazine. Some veteran's organizations have uncritically been publicizing much higher figures, partially in the expectation that this would help generate more funding. I wholeheartedly support the efforts of these organizations to assist Vietnam veterans and have benefited myself from the dedicated work of the VVIC. I think that an honest examination of the subject will help more than hinder these groups. It is important to know how many Canadians were in Vietnam to gauge the effectiveness of any outreach program in treating Vietnam related problems such as PTSD. Should resources here in Canada be directed to reach all those unaccounted for thousands, or should resources be concentrated on helping those here in need now?

Only a full review of the military records of all those who served in Vietnam (specifically form DD 47) will yield an accurate list of those who entered their place of birth as in Canada and their citizenship as non-American. In the meantime checking the

records of all those who were killed or missing in action should help provide a much more reliable count than the guestimates we have now.

Foot Notes

- 1. All numbers were calculated to three decimal places then rounded for presentation.
- 2. Bill Abbott, "Names on the Wall", *Vietnam Magazine*, June 1993
- 3. Statistical Analysis Branch of the Department of Immigration and Naturalization Service of the US Department of Justice (Fred Gaffin, *Unknown Warriors*).
- 4. Canadian Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Windsor, Ontario.
- 5. Charles B. MacDonald's chapter "The in-country enemy: battle with the Viet Cong" in *The Vietnam War*

Appendix A - The Problem of the Missing Career Soldiers

"...The DOD percentages reveal that nearly 75% of Army enlisted casualties were privates or corporals. The Marine Corps losses were skewed even more to the lower ranks: 91% were privates or corporals. If the two branches are combined, then **80%** of the Army and Marine enlisted casualties were privates - or corporals - grades E-1 to E-4."
- Bill Abbott, "Names on the Wall", *Vietnam Magazine*, June 1993

Unknown Warriors lists the ranks, birth dates and dates of service of 80 Canadians killed or missing in action in Vietnam. 34 or **42%** were E-5 or higher in rank, 46 or **58%** were E-4 or lower. Most enlisted casualties were quite young amongst all servicemen in Vietnam.

"...83% of Marine enlisted casualties, 65% of Army enlisted casualties, and nearly **70%** of all enlisted casualties were 21 or under. Only the Navy, with 50% of its enlisted casualties over 21, and the Air Force, with 75% over 21, showed an older, more experienced demographic."
- Bill Abbott, "Names on the Wall", *Vietnam Magazine*, June 1993

In contrast, of the Canadian officially listed as KIAs or MIAs, only **48%** were 21 or under. Canadians serving in Vietnam were thus 1.7 times more likely than the average serviceman to be E-5 or above, and 1.4 times more likely to be over 21 years of age.

To derive the number of career soldiers killed or wounded in action from our estimates we must first determine what percentage of career soldiers served in combatant units (infantry, artillery, combat engineers and aviation).

Table 15
Ratio of Canadians Serving in Combat Units in Vietnam

	Career Soldiers	Volunteers	Draftee/Enlistees
With US Citizenship	(2/9) 22%	(3/9) 33%	(1/4) 25%
Without US Citizenship	(4/13) 30%	(12/16) 75%	(3/6) 50%

According to Table 13, the annual KIA rate for **maneuver battalions** in Vietnam from January 67 to September 68 was 10.8%, compared with 3.1% overall. This overall percentage is 9% higher than the 2.8% killed in action during the entire duration of the war. If we adjust the KIA rate for maneuver battalions down 9% to correct for the difference, we can expect KIA rate for the duration of the war to have been around **9.7%**.

The KIA rate for **non-maneuver battalions** in Vietnam from January 67 to September 68 was .73%. Adjusted down 9%, we can expect that this percentage for the duration of the war was around **0.7%**.

Using 9.7% and 0.7% for the KIA rates of combat and non-combat units respectively and applying them to the ratios in Table 15, we can now derive the mortality rates of Canadians serving in Vietnam according to career status.

Table 16
Expected Mortality Rates of Canadians Serving in Vietnam

	Career Soldiers	Volunteers	Draftee/Enlistees
With US Citizenship			
Non-combat (X .007)	(88%) 0.62%	(67%) 0.47%	(75%) 0.53%
Combat (X .097)	(22%) 2.1%	(33%) 3.2%	(25%) 2.4%
Total (rounded)	2.7%	3.7%	2.9%
Without US Citizenship			
Non-combat (X .007)	(70%) 0.49%	(25%) 0.18%	(50%) 0.35%
Combat (X .097)	(30%) 2.9%	(75%) 7.3%	(50%) 4.8%
Total (rounded)	3.4%	7.5%	5.2%

If we take the service status percentages of Canadian Vietnam veterans with and without US citizenship in Table 1 and multiply them by 2,500 and 1,000 respectively, we can estimate how many were in each service status. We can then multiply these amounts by the expected mortality rates in Table 16 and derive the number of expected KIAs and MIAs.

Table 17
Estimated Number of Canadians in Vietnam According to Service Status

	Career Soldiers	Volunteers	Draftee/Enlistees
With US Citizenship			
Total Serving	825	975	700
KIAs/MIAs	22	36	20
Without US Citizenship			
Total Serving	360	520	120
KIAs/MIAs	12	39	6

According to this calculation, the **number of Canadian KIAs and MIAs** in Vietnam was **135**.

There is a discrepancy in the various percentages given for Canadians who served as career soldiers, however.

Table 18
Percentage of Canadians Serving as Career Soldiers in Vietnam

Estimate from Mortality Rates (Table 17)	Known KIAs/MIAs	Veterans' Lists (Table 1)
(1,185/2,500) 30%	(34/80) 42%	(18/51) 35%

The estimate from mortality rates should be **1.4** times higher to be in accord with the data from known Canadian KIAs and MIAs. (One possibility for this discrepancy is that the sample used from *Unknown Warriors* and the VVIC membership list may not be

fully representative.) If the number of career soldiers in Table 17 is increased by 1.4 to agree with the KIA and MIA data, the **total number of Canadian KIAs and MIAs** in Vietnam would then be **149**.

Applying the expected Mortality Rates from Table 16, the number of Canadians who served as career soldiers would rise from 1,185 to **1,648**. This would increase the **total number of Canadians** who served in Vietnam from 3,500 to around **4,000**.

Appendix B - Factoring in Post Service Mortality

A percentage of Canadian Vietnam veterans with US citizenship would have died before the studies were undertaken and thus are missing from the total. The Centers for Disease Control Vietnam Experience Study compared 9,324 US Army veterans who served in Vietnam with 8,989 Vietnam-era Army veterans who served in Korea, Germany, or the United States.

"Over the entire follow-up period, total mortality in Vietnam veterans was **17%** higher than for other veterans. The excess mortality occurred mainly in the first five years after discharge from active duty and involved motor vehicle accidents, suicide, homicide, and accidental poisonings. Thereafter, mortality among Vietnam veterans was similar to that of other Vietnam-era veterans, except for drug-related deaths, which continued to be elevated. An unexpected finding was a deficit in deaths from diseases of the circulatory system among Vietnam veterans. The excess in postservice mortality due to external causes among Vietnam veterans is similar to that found among men returning from combat areas after World War II and the Korean War."

- "Postservice Mortality Among Vietnam Veterans, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Feb. 13, 1987

By 1983, 246 or **2.6%** of the Vietnam veterans had died since discharge from active duty (compared with 200 or 2.2% of the non-Vietnam veterans.) "Both groups of veterans had a significantly lower overall mortality rate for 'natural causes' than the general US male population." The expected percentage, based on the mortality rates among US men, standardized for age, calendar year, and race, is 2.8%.

1.4% of Vietnam veterans died 6 years or more after discharge from active duty to the date of the study in 1983.. If we use this percentage and allow for a slight increase in the mortality rate as the veteran population ages, I would estimate that, at most, an additional 7% of the Vietnam veterans have died since 1983. This raises the total percentage of Vietnam veterans who have died since discharge to just under **10%**.