

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

A partnership between Portland State University, Portland Public Schools and the Beaverton School District, funded by the U.S. Department of Education

The Vietnam Conflict ArcReader and ArcView Project

One of the most salient features of the Vietnam conflict was the extent to which it involved the entire country and permeated the social, political and economic spheres. One of the ways in which to explore this aspect of the war is to ask questions and develop “stories” around the every-day people that were affected by the conflict.

The ArcReader and ArcView GIS Projects utilize the U.S. Vietnam Casualty list to create a backdrop for asking more probing questions about, and providing a more personal look at, how the Vietnam War affected various people and regions of the country.

U.S. Vietnam Casualties Spreadsheet:

This excel spreadsheet was compiled from the U.S. Department of Defense casualty lists and includes all casualties for the U.S. states and territories from the Vietnam era (deaths only, not wounded). Field entries include:

- Name
- City & State of Residence
- Rank & Service Branch
- Birthdate
- Date & Location of Death
- Age at Death
- Mortality Category (hostile fire, non-hostile, injury/accident, etc.)
- BNR (Body not Recovered)

Students can use this spreadsheet to create various charts and graphs about Vietnam casualties that will inform other foundational knowledge and help them to answer basic questions about the conflict such as:

- Graph the age at death to determine the average casualty’s age. Who was the oldest? The youngest?
- Choose an entry from the Vietnam Memorial Wall (<http://thewall-usa.com>) and find the corresponding record in the spreadsheet to tell a more detailed “story” about that person.
- Create a graph that shows the number of casualties for each service branch and link that to what you know about the various Vietnam offensive actions and who was involved (Tet Offensive versus the Secret Cambodian War).
- Graph the Date of Death to determine when the most casualties occurred – how does that support other information about the course of the Vietnam conflict? When was the first recorded casualty – under what circumstance?

Note: There will be a few anomalous entries for “date of death” (in the 1980s and 1990s) well past the official “end” of the Vietnam conflict and are the result of recording the date of death for missing persons when confirmed, not when the person was listed as missing.

Vietnam ArcView and ArcReader Projects:

The Vietnam Conflict ArcView and ArcReader Projects contain layers that map the Vietnam Casualty List: one at the national scale and a more detailed Oregon scale.

Vietnam Casualties – The first map view (in ArcView) shows the extent of casualties at the national scale (including Alaska and Hawaii). The point file represents the number of casualties suffered by specific cities in the U.S. (U.S. territories and foreign countries are excluded). For example, New York City (the casualty winner) records 1365 residents lost in the war.

Note: There are approximately 7000 casualties (out of 50,564 total) not included in this map layer due to the fact that the GIS-referenced city map layer (used to link the number of casualties with a city) did not include all the places listed on the casualty spreadsheet. The missing records, for the most part, represent very small, rural towns and villages. An additional layer has been included which shows the extent of missing records for each state – use the ID tool to find out how many missing records exist for a state (e.g. California has 549 missing records) to assess how many additional casualties should be included for a state. Updated ArcView and ArcReader projects will be posted on the Teaching American History website as the cities for these missing towns are located at mapped.

Use this national map view to ask questions about the patterns evident in the distribution of Vietnam casualties. Who was affected by the casualties? Was one region/state disproportionately affected more than others? Are there rural-urban patterns? What are the social/political ramifications of the patterns that you see? Zoom in to a particular state (or region) and make inferences about how the social and political climate might have been affected by the nature and numbers of Vietnam casualties.

A second layer (<US Vietnam Casualties>) is a geocoded layer at the national level. Zoom in to a region of interest. Use the ID tool and click on any point. The individual casualties will show in the list in the left box. Click on any of the individuals to see the full record.

OR Vietnam Casualties – the second map view (in ArcView) drills down to the scale of the state of Oregon. In this layer you can see how the casualties were distributed throughout Oregon as well as identifying individual casualty records through the ID tool.

Note: The ArcReader Project does not have 2 views as does the ArcView Project. To look at the individual casualties for the state of Oregon in ArcReader, use the zoom tools to navigate to the boundaries of the state of Oregon and turn on the <OR Casualties> layer.

NOTE: A more detailed record of any single individual can be found at the U.S. Department of Defense's Access to Archival Databases (AAD) website at <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/>. The database used here is from the 1997 Combat Area Casualties Current File (CACCF) for the Vietnam War. You can also search the archive for "wounded" (a database of close to 300,000 entries)