

Veterans Studies Interest Group Listserv

Issue #46 October 2020

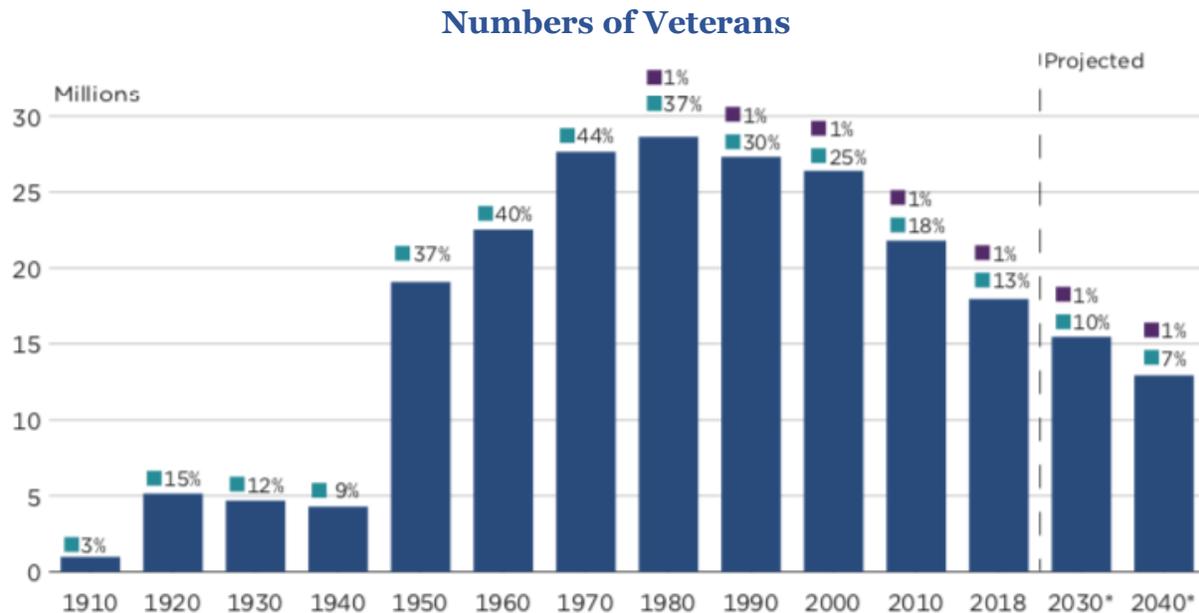
The Veteran's Creed

1. *I am an American Veteran*
2. *I proudly served my country*
3. *I live the values I learned in the military*
4. *I continue to serve my community, my country and my fellow veterans*
5. *I maintain my physical and mental discipline*
6. *I continue to lead and improve*
7. *I make a difference*
8. *I honor and remember my fallen comrades*

This month's Listserv includes Census Bureau Tallies of Veterans; VA Coronavirus Numbers; Eisenhower Memorial Dedication September 17; Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act of 2019; and, Burn Pits

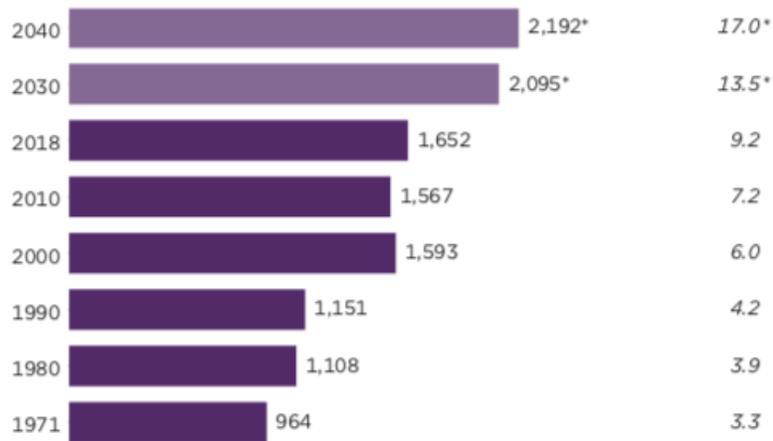
Census Bureau Tallies of Veterans

This last June, the Census Bureau published its latest data about veterans gathered in 2018. Here are depictions of some of the [data](#):



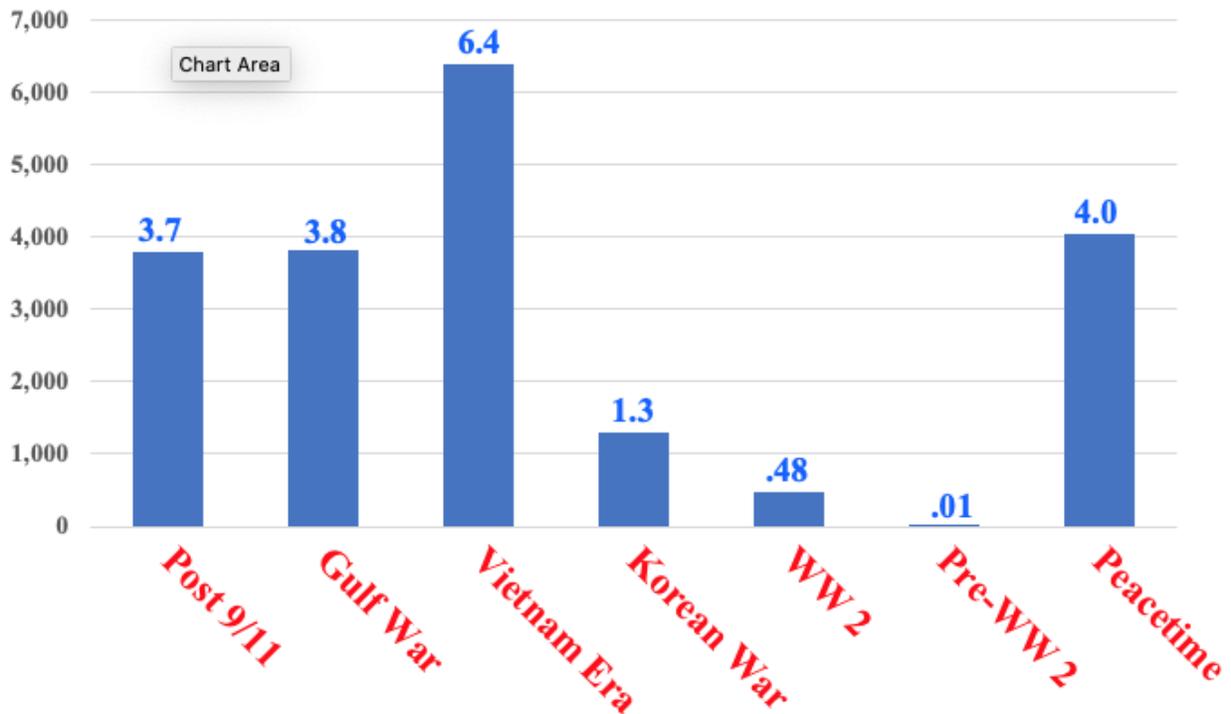
Rise and fall of Veteran numbers with peak at 1980 when significant numbers of World War II Korean War, and Vietnam War veterans were alive. In 1980 veterans comprised 12.6% of the US population down to 5.5% in 2018. These changes have important implications in that one is much less likely to know a veteran or have a living veteran in the family. From Census [Bureau](#).

Women Veterans



Rise in the number of women veterans since 1971 with predictions of continued rise through 2040. From Census [Bureau](#)

Proportion of Veterans from Each Era



Proportion of veterans from each era of service with the most numerous being the Vietnam era veterans at 6.4 million. Chart in 1000s, Bar #s in millions. From Census [Bureau](#).

Overall, highlights include the [following](#):

- The number of veterans in the U.S. dropped from 26.4 to 18.0 million veterans.
- World War II veterans have declined from over 5.7 million in 2000 to less than 500,000 today and they are dying at a rate of 294 per day.

- Vietnam era (1964-1975) veterans are the largest cohort of veterans at 6.4 million.
- Women now make up 9.2% of veterans (1.7 million) and by 2040 are projected to comprise 17%. They are about 15% of active military persons with somewhat higher numbers among the reserves.
- The median age of veterans today is 65 years.
- Veterans from more recent service have the highest level of education with more than ¾ of post 9/11 and Gulf War veterans having at least some college experience.
- Post 9/11 veterans have a 43 percent chance of Service-Connected Disability which is significantly higher than for veterans of other eras.

VA Coronavirus Numbers

VA COVID-19 Care Numbers Week of September 29 – October 5	
Vets and VA Employees Tested	752,237
VA-Diagnosed Vets with COVID-19	63,134
COVID-19 Patients Admitted to VA	11,759
Current COVID-19 Patients in hospital	340
COVID-19 Patients Reaching Convalescence	48,421
VA Population Coronavirus Deaths	3,528*
Weekly Telehealth Visits	175,690
Increase in Telehealth Visits (Mar 1-Aug 29)	1,470%

*As of October 7, [2020](#)

Additionally, over the past few weeks there has been a drift upward in the number of cases in the [VA](#).

Coronavirus and the Disabled

One of the devastating consequences of the coronavirus pandemic and our response to it has been the sense of isolation that we all feel. Nowhere is this isolation more profound than among the disabled. The Wounded Warrior Project surveyed 28,000 wounded veterans, about 95% of whom receive disability payments from the [VA](#). They found that in this special group, 61% felt disconnected from family friends or communities and 52% said their mental health and 49% their physical health suffered. The unemployment rate among this group of veterans is 16%, up from 11.5% in 2019. A full 41% thought that their employment or work prospects were hurt by the isolation. About 30% reported

having suicidal thoughts though this was down slightly from 1/3 in [2019](#). It is no surprise that this special group of people is most affected by isolation, and it is surely a problem among disabled non-veterans as well. Importantly, medical and social service agencies and especially employers need to take these findings into account as we proceed through the storm.

Eisenhower Memorial Dedication September 17

After an initial conflict between famed architect Frank [Gehry](#) and the Eisenhower family and several design changes, the Eisenhower [Memorial](#) has been raised just south of the National Mall. The dedication was on September 17th, [2020](#). The Memorial takes the visitor through Eisenhower's career including West Point; World War II; D-Day; First Supreme Allied Commander of NATO; election as the 34th U.S. President by a landslide; governing the country during crucial years of the Cold War; sending federal troops to integrate Central High School, Little Rock AR and thereby establishing the federal position in one of the early post-war civil rights battles; and, launching America's space program after the Russians sent Sputnik into [orbit](#). The memorial was spearheaded by Rocco Siciliano, a World War II veteran who had a number of titles in the Eisenhower administration (he is also a graduate of Georgetown law school), and Senators Daniel Inouye (D-HI) and Ted Stevens (R-AK). It has a stainless steel "woven tapestry" which depicts the cliffs of Normandy (D-Day) and is designed by Thomas [Osinski](#). In front of the tapestry are 2 sculpted clusters by Sergey [Eylanbekov](#), one of which depicts General Eisenhower speaking to paratroopers of the 101st airborne on the eve of D-Day and the other President Eisenhower standing with three assistants in front of a map of the world carved into the limestone [wall](#). There is also a sculpture of Eisenhower as a boy which was part of the initial controversy. This sculpture was meant to convey how Eisenhower never forgot where he came from and was moved from a prominent position in the center of the memorial (Gehry's original plan) to its [side](#).

It is said that Frank Gehry did not know much about Eisenhower until he read Stephen Ambrose's biography "Eisenhower: Soldier and President". Apparently, the character traits he liked best about Eisenhower were his modesty, diplomacy and willingness to give credit to [others](#), all important reasons that he was picked as Supreme Allied Commander amidst the flock of egos around [him](#).





Above: sculpture of Eisenhower speaking to paratroopers of the 101st airborne on the Eve of [D-Day](#). Below: photograph of the event, which Eisenhower kept on his [desk](#)

Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act of 2019

Veterans Treatment Courts are for veterans who have committed low level crimes that often trace back to PTSD or TBI. The courts provide counseling, care and support services via mentors to make for better transitions to civilian [life](#). The Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act of 2019 is to further help provide a second chance to these veterans. The Act creates programs to provide funding and technical assistance to local and tribal governments who either have or intend to have such courts which number 551 in 22 states (nearly half in [Florida](#)) and are funded [locally](#). The Act, which had strong support in the criminal justice system, provides federal funding and asks the Department of Justice to work with the Secretary of DoD and Attorney General to offer grants, technical assistance and best practices information. It is hoped that this type of approach will gain currency throughout the nation in the special circumstances of veterans with lesser infractions. However, the Act's funding of \$20 million is probably not up to this goal.

Burn Pits

On September 16th, a group of veterans and lawmakers led by comedian Jon Stuart, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and former VA Secretary David Shulkin, announced legislation to compensate veterans for the health effects of burn pits. In battle theaters over a number of wars, but especially Post 9/11, large amounts of waste have been burned in open air pits. These pits included all sorts of known and unknown items including lithium ion batteries, solvents, amputated limbs and human waste material. Jet fuel was used to ignite the pits and some of them were larger than a football field. One pit at Balad Air Force Base, Iraq burned for years, at one time incinerating 147 tons

of waste/day. Claims are that service members who inhaled the burn pit fumes have had a variety of illnesses, most prominently in the lungs with symptoms of cough, shortness of breath and wheezing, but also cancers. It is said that upwards of 3.5 million veterans were exposed to burn pits and between 2007-2020 with 12,582 disability claims made and 2,828 [approved](#).

There are data on lung pathological findings due to burn pits but the VA has maintained that there is not enough scientific evidence to conclusively link the exposures to the diseases that veterans are claiming they [have](#). Bolstering this view is a recent National Academy of Science, Engineering and Medicine consensus report stating that *none* of the 27 illnesses thought to be due to burn pits actually met sufficient criteria for a linkage to be [made](#).

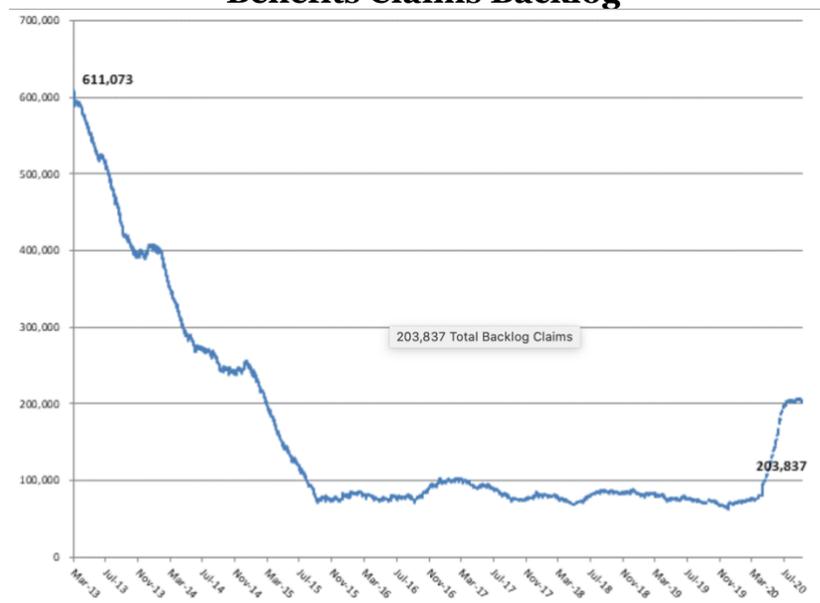
Senator Gillibrand, who has been a major advocate for New York first responders inhaling toxic substances at Ground Zero, is also prominent in this battle. The bill she introduced would establish exposure to burn pits as a “presumptive” benefit for veterans. That is the link between burn pits and certain conditions would be presumed and not have to be proven *de novo* with each claim, considerably simplifying the acquisition of [benefits](#). Conditions noted in the bill include asthma, cancer of any type, chronic bronchitis, chronic pulmonary obstructive disease, pulmonary fibrosis, emphysema and sarcoidosis among others and the Bill lists a total of 35 countries in which exposure may have [occurred](#).

The Listserv is available as an archive on the Georgetown University Library website under the title “Veterans Interest [Newsletters](#)”.

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Stats Section

Benefits Claims Backlog



Downward drift in the backlog VA benefits claims showing marked decline since 2013 but a recent uptick since the coronavirus pandemic. At one time the backlog was well over 1,000,000. From [VA](#).