

Commemorating Cold War Combat Casualties

“People don’t really understand and know that the Cold War was a real war with real casualties. Real people died.”

—Lorna Bourg, sister of a 1958 KIA, Fort Myers, Va., *Military Post Chapel*, April 2, 1997

—By The Editors —

Some 382 Americans were killed as a result of direct enemy action during the Cold War—those military actions between 1945 and 1991 *beyond* the scope of the Korean and Vietnam wars. This tally includes only those documented military personnel or government operatives killed by communists. In some operations, other servicemen were killed accidentally or in “friendly-fire” incidents.

Still others, Air Force and Navy aviators, were lost in operational flights directed at the enemy, but died in aircraft accidents. Hence they are not part of this figure. If the cause of a downed aircraft is inconclusive, the crew members are nonetheless included.

Moreover, many thousands of GIs were killed on maneuvers, training for potential major confrontations with communist forces. During the Korean and Vietnam war eras, tens of thousands of Americans in uniform died outside the war zones from non-hostile causes: 2,329 in Germany alone between 1965 and 1975, for example. This fatal casualty count is for the hostile deaths the U.S. public has so long been led to believe never occurred.

A word on the enemy: The nation’s Cold War adversaries included conventional forces

of the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, Yugoslavia and Cuba. But they also encompassed a host of Third World Marxist guerrilla and terrorist movements that targeted Americans. If a GI or CIA operative was killed by a group or individual espousing the communist ideology, he is among those counted.

This is VFW’s tribute to America’s Cold War killed in action, one that the nation as a whole has far too long neglected to offer. No doubt, due to the secretive nature of the Cold War, some American hostile deaths are missing.

Memorials and Monuments

A grateful nation pays tribute to its warriors by respecting their service in some permanent fashion. Traditionally, this has taken the form of memorials, monuments and museums.

Politics should not interfere with such commemoration, but it has in the case of the Cold

Located in the Memorial Gardens of the U.S. Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio, the 55 names of the 55th Strategic Recon Wing members killed during the Cold War are prominently displayed.



“There has been something peculiar in how America and Americans responded to this victory: The country did not celebrate it. There were no victory parades. There are no monuments or museums built, no special day designated to mark the victory and to honor the sacrifices made by Americans and others to achieve it. It did not rate even fireworks.”

—Zalmay Khalilzad, *Director of RAND Strategic Studies, on the end of the Cold War after 1991*

War, our country’s longest-running conflict. “In modern-day America, there is too much fashionable tampering with authentic tradition,” wrote Willie Morris, former editor of *Harper’s*. “This juggling with expressions of the past is reminiscent of the way the communists are eternally rewriting history.”

For 40 years, GIs of every service manned ramparts along communist borders in East Europe, Northeast Asia and the Caribbean Rim. At least 382 were killed as a result of hostile enemy action in a war that was reputedly waged “without firing a shot.” Thousands of other Americans died while maneuvering to prevent global conflict.

So how have their memories been served by the nation that called them to duty? A comprehensive survey of museum exhibits and memorial reminders clearly shows the need for a single, unifying site that honors the service of Cold War veterans, especially those who paid the ultimate price for keeping the West free.

Until then, those unit and specific service memorials scattered across the country will have to suffice. ❖

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Cold War: U.S. Hostile Deaths

American military personnel and civilian operatives killed as a result of enemy action. Listed by adversary.

Enemy	U.S. Killed
Communist Terrorists/Guerillas	107
Soviets	105
North Koreans	92
Chinese	55
Others (Yugoslavs, Cubans, Grenadians)	23
Total U.S. KIA	382

NOTE: These figures do not include the thousands of GIs killed by the Chinese in the Korean War (1950-53) or the hundreds of airmen killed by the Soviets in aerial duels during that war.



COURTESY LANCE MARTIN/L-3 COMMUNICATIONS INTEGRATED SYSTEMS

Found on the grounds of L-3 Communications Integrated Systems in Greenville, Texas, the Reconnaissance Memorial (originally erected by Raytheon) memorializes crewmembers lost on 10 Cold War missions. It was dedicated Oct. 9, 1998.



PATRIOTS POINT NAVAL & MARITIME MUSEUM

The Cold War Submarine Memorial at Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum in Mt. Pleasant, S.C., incorporates seven educational stations to tell the submariners’ story. It was dedicated Dec. 6, 2002.



NSA PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

The National Security Agency Cryptologic Memorial at Fort Meade, Md., lists names of Americans killed in the line of duty from all services. Many were casualties of the Cold War. This memorial was unveiled to the public on Sept. 2, 1997.