

# 6,843 Armed Services Desertions in the Last Year

## Can the Troops Do Better?

Igor Talliss

The ruling elite's successful management of mass-mediated news coverage during the US invasion of Kuwait and Iraq in 1990 was a revolution in governmental social control. Of course, psychological warfare has been a vital component in all war efforts since civilization's first forays into organized butchery thousands of years ago, but arguably it was the Gulf War campaign that taught the Pentagon and the White House what Orwell had tried to warn us all about in 1948: in times of international conflict, the State's administration of perception is the most critical part of any war strategy.

Before the second US invasion of Iraq began in 2003, it was announced that body counts of the dead and wounded-soldiers, enemies, non-combatants-would not be made available to news organizations. "We don't count Iraqi dead," occupation proconsul Paul Bremer infamously told a group of reporters in 2002, a sentiment echoed by General Tommy Franks and Secretary of War Donald Rumsfeld when they said that they "don't do body counts."

Obviously, it's a blatant lie that the war-makers don't keep track of such things-all around the clock, the Pentagon's corpse-accountants are generating mountains of number-crunched spreadsheets that provide statistics for offices full of the little Eichmanns responsible for this horror show. But these figures are a closely-guarded military secret because of the ways that these macabre scorecards were used by growing segments of the public to undermine the war effort in Southeast Asia in the very late 1960s.

The effort made to keep these numbers secret speaks volumes about the wide-spread belief in the mythical powers of statistics to provide accurate representations of reality-you can see this tediously dull exercise in faith-based numerology in the news media's baloney about the latest presidential candidate voter polls and pro-war propaganda about the signs of impending victory thanks to the latest Troop Surge ". But the numbers games get particularly murky around the issues of desertion.

How many US troops have deserted their posts since the war began? What does this number mean? One newswire report from mid-November claimed that desertion (bureaucratically defined as "absent without leave for longer than 30 days") has increased 80% in the last four years and is now at its highest rate since 1980. During the Vietnam War, desertion was at an all-time high of 5%, a surprisingly low number considering that GIs were being forced into service by a military draft. (The late great war criminal General William "Bungalow Bill" Westmorland's request for 200,000 more troops in the spring of 1968 was torpedoed by the White House because of fear that massive draft resistance could spiral out of control.)

The US Army insists that only 4,698 soldiers deserted between October 1, 2006, and September 30, 2007, an increase of more than 40% over the previous year. The Marines, meanwhile, average out to more or less a 1000 per year since 2001, while the Navy purports a steady decline in deserters in that period, with the most recent figures of those on "French leave" said to be only 1,129. The Air Force claims a mere 16 deserters last year. Surely, the actual numbers are higher; with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq dragging on endlessly and with daily threats of new wars in Iran and Pakistan, we can only guess how much greater the percentage of AWOL troops actually is.

We here at *Fifth Estate* call upon the 1.4 million men and women currently in uniform to do everything they can to help increase those numbers whatever they are. The good news is that, by most accounts, the military does little to find those who go AWOL, and rarely punishes those that they are able to find-some are put back with their units, while most get less-than-honorable discharges. So why the hell not make a break for it?

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