

DoD discloses new figures on Korean War dead

by Tara Rigler

WASHINGTON (Army News Service, May 30, 2000) -- As the Department of Army plans for the 50th anniversary of the Korean War commemoration, Defense Department officials have disclosed the number of U.S. casualties suffered in the Korean War was about 17,000 fewer than the 54,000 casualties usually cited.

The U.S. Bureau of the Census and the Social Science Research Council first published the erroneous 54,000 figure in the Statistical History of the United States shortly after the Korean War.

Since 1960, this number has been commonly accepted by scholars, published in textbooks, etched on monuments and published in official Department of Defense publications.

However, during the 1990s, DoD officials began reviewing the Surgeon General's original records of the dead and wounded from the Korean War. They re-examined the numbers of service members killed in action, those who died of wounds, service members missing in action, and prisoners of war who died while in captivity. The officials concluded the inaccurate war-related death figure was due to confusion with the category "other deaths."

Allan Millett, a historian at Ohio State who is writing a book on the Korean War, raised the issue last year. "In part from his prompting, we re-examined the figures," said Joel Meyerson of the Army's Center of Military History.

Officials confirmed that the figure for "other deaths" included both non-battle deaths in Korea and other deaths in the armed forces that occurred outside Korea during the years of war. As a result, officials have adjusted the casualty figures, excluding the 17,730 who died elsewhere. The total number of deaths in theater now stands at 36,616 - of whom 33,686 were battle deaths and 2,830 were non-battle deaths.