

An Integrated Curriculum For The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

The Cost of War



- Think Like a Reporter: Relate and Illustrate the Numbers
- Post Reprint: “Unknown Soldier”
- Meet the National Security Correspondent: Ernesto Londoño
- Post Reprint: “The Last Casualties: As a long war ends, risks still prove real”

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Relate and Illustrate the Numbers

Civil War casualties of different battles and skirmishes are listed in the Civil War 150 timelines prepared by *Washington Post* NewsArt Cartographer Gene Thorp. A “casualty” is a military person who has died, been wounded or injured. The person may also be unable to perform service because of illness, capture and imprisonment or is missing.

The figures that are related are as accurate as can be discerned from war records.

Many historians believe the figures for the Union are more complete because more records were preserved. As stated on the Civil War Trust website, officers kept records of casualties in their command: “If a soldier was unable to perform basic duties due to one of the above conditions, the soldier would be considered a casualty. This means that one soldier could be marked as a casualty several times throughout the course of the war.”

Use Informational Graphics

Read the Civil War 150 timeline “Fight to the death: May to September 1864.”

1. The first battle related is the Wilderness. Did the Union or Confederate States have the most casualties? How many more?
2. In which encounter were the fewest Confederate casualties?
3. In which battle were the most Union casualties?
4. In the timeline, between May and September 1864, how many total Federal casualties are reported?
5. In the timeline, between May and September 1864, how many total Southern casualties are reported?
6. Write a short statement about what the numbers tell you about the Civil War activities between May and September 1864.
7. Read the text that accompanies each map and highlights Brice’s Crossroads. What information clarifies the 2,240 Union casualties?
8. Read the text that relates information about the selected battles and skirmishes. Which encounters stand out for you based upon the information? Explain your response.
9. Read the Petersburg assaults map.
 - a. How are Northern and Southern forces identified?
 - b. Who has the most forces at his command — Lee or Grant?
 - c. What information is related by the arrows?
 - d. In what way does the map relate casualties?
10. What are the sources of data for the reported casualties in the timeline?

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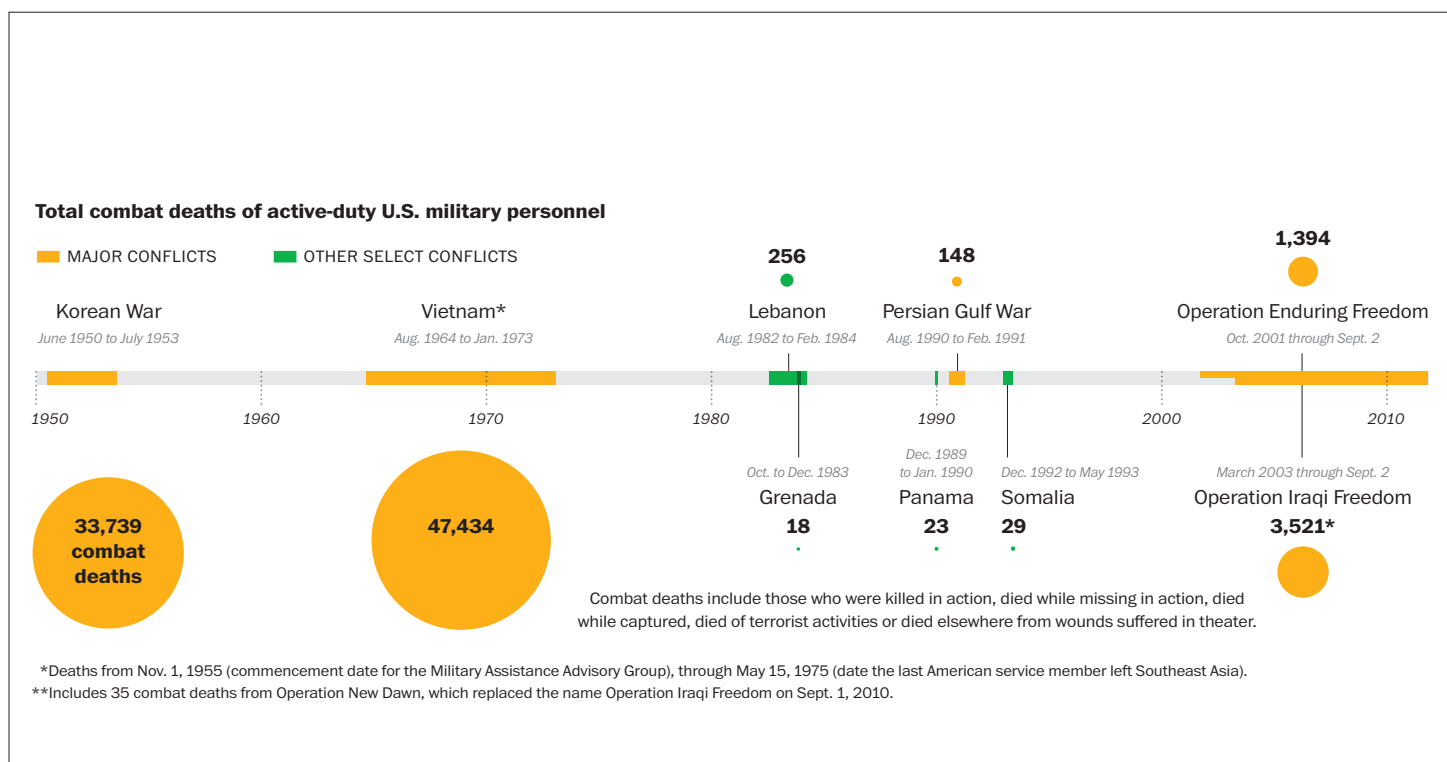


Contemporary War Correspondents and Pentagon Reporters

Contemporary war correspondents receive statistical information from the U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. officials and eyewitnesses. Just as newspapers sent reporters to the battlefield to photograph scenes and to telegraph stories to the newspapers, modern war correspondents use the latest technology to transmit the news of actions, interviews, photographs and discernible information about casualties.

Relate One War's Casualties to Those of Another War

A reporter's responsibility is to inform readers. Understanding the scope of a battle or war may be best comprehended through comparison. This is done through words, numbers and informational graphics.



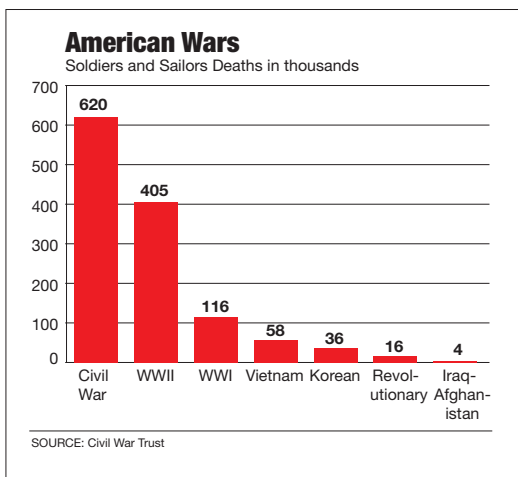
The Washington Post's Ernesto Londoño has the Pentagon beat. He may be reporting from The Pentagon, Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, or Tokyo, Japan, and Ulaan Baatar, Mongolia, traveling with the secretary of defense.

Read “The last casualties: As a long war ends, risks still prove real.” He reports from Afghanistan on March 4, 2014, as troops are being withdrawn to end U.S. involvement and the ending of America’s longest war. *Post* photographer Nikki Kahn accompanied Londoño for full coverage. Discuss the aspects of modern casualties of war — retrieval of the injured, medical care, and impact on families.

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Think Like a Reporter

Understanding One War by Comparison and Contrast to Another



The Washington Post Civil War 150 special coverage includes an interactive map, “Battles and Casualties of the Civil War map” (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/lifestyle/special/civil-war-interactive/civil-war-battles-and-casualties-interactive-map/>).

The Civil War Trust provides an overview of the deaths, impairment and captivity during the Civil

War. Visit “Civil War Casualties” (<http://www.civilwar.org/education/civil-war-casualties.html>) to review different ways to illustrate the numbers.

Your Assignment

You are a reporter. You want your readers to understand the extent of casualties in a war. You will do this by relating information from one war to that of another, as *Post* writers have done in the *Civil War 150: Grant Takes Command* articles.

Compare and contrast the Civil War casualties to those in other conflicts during a similar time period in words.

Compare and contrast the Civil War casualties to those in other conflicts in informational graphics (charts, graphs).

Wars and Where to Begin

The suggested websites provide a variety of sources for data. Begin here to gather the statistics that you need.

http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/World_War_I_casualties.html

World War I

<https://archive.org/details/ArmyBattleCasualtiesAndNonbattleDeathsInWorldWarIiPt3Of4>

World War II

<http://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/korean-war-2>

Korean War

<http://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html>

Vietnam Conflict or Second Indochina War

<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/war.casualties/>

Iraq War

<http://apps.washingtonpost.com/national/fallen/>

Afghanistan War

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JOEL RICHARDSON/THE WASHINGTON POST

UNKNOWN SOLDIER

BY JOEL ACHENBACH

Originally Published April 24, 2014

The Ulysses S. Grant Memorial is the Lost Monument of Washington. It might as well be invisible. No one knows it's there. ¶ Its location is actually spectacular, right at the foot of Capitol Hill, at the opening to the Mall. The memorial features one of the largest equestrian statues in the world, set on a platform 250 feet wide, with ancillary sculptures that are heaving with action and drama. Grant is, appropriately, the calm man at the center of the storm. He stares fixedly down the Mall toward Lincoln in his memorial. His horse is so passive-looking it appears to be waiting for someone to insert a quarter. ¶ Washington is full of statues to Civil War heroes whose achievements have been largely forgotten. Logan. Thomas. Sheridan. Scott. Farragut. McPherson. But at least these folks are surrounded by pedestrians and motorists. ¶ Grant, huge as he is, is dwarfed by the Capitol and is flanked by lots with signs reading "Permit Parking Only." The oceanic Capitol Reflecting Pool was built in 1971 as if to block Grant from charging onto the Mall. The memorial is a hike from the museums, Union Station or any Metro stop. Tour buses stop nearby, but everyone walks toward the Capitol — except groups that pose on the steps of the memorial because it offers an excellent spot to capture the Capitol as a backdrop. Grant is left out of the frame.

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A crowd surrounded the Ulysses S. Grant Memorial near the west front of the Capital in 1922 on the 100th anniversary of his birth. As the decades have passed, the fame of the Union general who engineered the Confederacy's defeat has faded.

One hundred and fifty years ago this spring, Ulysses S. Grant took command of all the armies of the United States. He developed a grand strategy to defeat the Confederacy and ultimately, with much struggle, succeeded. As much as any person not named Abraham Lincoln, Grant saved the Union. He went on to serve two terms as president and write some of the most celebrated memoirs in the history of American letters. More than 1 million people, and possibly as many as 1.5 million,

attended his funeral procession in New York in 1885 on a national day of mourning.

A million people attended the dedication of his tomb on the northern tip of Manhattan in 1897.

And then the veterans of the war died off, and the populace as a whole largely forgot why they had once revered the little man from Ohio.

When Groucho Marx asked on his 1950s TV quiz show, "Who's buried in Grant's Tomb?" he was just being silly (no one is actually buried there — the remains of the 18th president and his wife,

Julia, are in sarcophagi). But by then the tomb was no longer one of the most visited sites in New York. It had fallen into disrepair, marred by graffiti and vandalism. That matched the decline in Grant's reputation among historians.

Many ranked him among the very worst presidents. They maligned his military prowess. The "Lost Cause" interpretation of the war, created by the Confederate generation and later adopted by such influential historians as Douglas Southall Freeman, portrayed Southern commanders as chivalrous

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aristocrats waging a noble war against the industrialized and more populous North. They heaped praise on Robert E. Lee at the expense of the man to whom Lee surrendered.

Grant has been on the \$50 bill for 101 years, but even there he's an outlier — because how often do you see a fifty?

“Grant has been forgotten. And I don't know that it's ever going to change that dramatically,” said Joan Waugh, a professor of history at the University of California at Los Angeles and the author of *U.S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth*.

Her book is among a number of favorable reassessments of Grant. Additional biographies are forthcoming from such acclaimed historians as Ronald C. White Jr. and Ron Chernow. Lee's reputation has suffered in recent decades, while Grant's has been gradually rehabilitated. Even if this is so, Waugh writes, his reputation in popular culture is that of a “drunken butcher” (he was periodically a heavy drinker and, yes, many soldiers died because of his straight-ahead style of warfare) and “worst president.”

Something about Grant got lost over time, which is why, when Waugh would eat her lunch at the Grant Memorial while researching her book, she would often hear people say as they looked up at the horseman, “Who's that guy?”

Named by accident

Hiram Ulysses Grant, the son of a tanner, was born in Point Pleas-

ant, Ohio, on April 27, 1822. When a congressman nominated the teenage Grant to West Point, he mistakenly wrote the boy's name down as Ulysses S. Grant, which stuck. At West Point, Grant proved to be an average student. He was an excellent horseman and fought with distinction in the Mexican War.

Rough times followed. Military duty often separated him from his wife, with whom he would raise four children. After serving at a lonely outpost on the California coast and struggling with alcohol, he resigned from the army and bounced around for a few years, trying his hand at farming and winding up working in his father's leather goods store in Galena, Ill.

Then the war came.

“He had unknown qualities that were just waiting for an opportunity to be revealed,” said Steve Laise, chief of cultural resources for the National Park Service's New York City sites, including Grant's Tomb.

He racked up victories in the West, including at Shiloh, Vicksburg and Chattanooga. He earned his nickname, “Unconditional Surrender Grant,” at Fort Donelson in Tennessee when the opposing commander asked for terms of capitulation and he replied, “No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted. I propose to move immediately upon your works.”

He added stars to his shoulders until finally, in March 1864, Lincoln elevated him to lieutenant general, the first officer to be promoted to that rank since George Washington.

Grant would now be general in chief.

He was no majestic figure like Washington. Grant was 5 feet 8 inches tall, not quite 140 pounds, slouchy, rough-looking, and handsome only in the renderings of artists. People noticed his steely gaze and headlong way of walking.

One Union officer famously wrote that Grant “habitually wears an expression as if he had determined to drive his head through a brick wall, and was about to do it.”

In the Army of Northern Virginia, the rebel general James Longstreet, who knew Grant well from their military adventures long before the great rupture, knew what was coming: “That man will fight us every day and every hour 'til the end of the war.”

At photographer Mathew Brady's studio, an assistant to Brady fell partway through a skylight and showered potentially lethal glass shards all over the floor next to Grant, who had been sitting for a portrait. Grant barely flinched. He was almost superhumanly imperturbable. He was the kind of man who did not seem to hear the shrieking of the world.

“I think his secret was his utter unflappability and his ability to keep his eye on the ball no matter what else was going on,” said Gary W. Gallagher, a historian at the University of Virginia and author of numerous books about the war.

That's what the Union would need in the painful spring and summer of 1864, which Gallagher calls the low point of the war for the U.S.

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government because civilian morale had plummeted. All eyes were on the coming presidential election. The Democrats were angling to nominate

Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, who ran as a War Democrat but whose party's platform called for a negotiated peace with the Confederacy that could permit the survival of slavery.

Against this backdrop, the Confederacy didn't need to defeat the Union forces; it needed merely to hang on. The Union's will to fight might well succumb to exhaustion.

Lincoln and Grant both understood this.

Grant had planned to return to the West, but the public was clamoring for him to face Lee head-on. Half a dozen Union offensives in Virginia had already failed, and although from a purely military perspective the war in the West was just as important, the Eastern theater produced the greatest political reverberations.

Grant decided to attach himself to the Army of the Potomac, which, while officially commanded by Maj. Gen. George Meade, became in the public's mind and for practical purposes "Grant's Army."

His broad strategy called for simultaneous advances on Confederate positions from multiple angles. Grant would press upon Lee directly over land from the north, while other forces would move up the James River and in the Shenandoah Valley. Advancing in the West were multiple Union armies, including one under the

command of Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, who had his eye on Atlanta. Grant knew that if he fully occupied Lee's army, Lee could not send reinforcements to the rebels trying to halt Sherman's march through the heart of the Confederacy.

On May 4, the Army of the Potomac crossed the Rapidan River, heading south. So began what came to be known as the Overland Campaign. Grant's goal was to fight Lee's army, destroy it and march on to Richmond.

As Grant wrote in his memoirs, "This was not to be accomplished, however, without as desperate fighting as the world has ever witnessed; not to be consummated in a day, a week, a month, single season... . We had to have hard fighting to achieve this. The two armies had been confronting each other so long, without any decisive result, that they hardly knew which could whip."

Virtues of obstinateness

The key moment came early in the campaign. As soon as Grant's army had crossed the river, and as his men moved through a forest dense with underbrush known as the Wilderness, Lee pressed the attack. Lee was outnumbered nearly 2-1 and did not want to let the battle get onto open ground. The rebels charged and the woods quickly filled with smoke. Wounded men were immolated as fire swept through the forest. The Battle of the Wilderness proved to be a ghastly

two-day affair that prefigured more horrors to come.

At the end of the battle, the Army of the Potomac had 18,000 casualties, and it looked like another defeat in Virginia. But when Grant rode his horse to a crossroads, he turned south, not north.

His men let out a cheer. Grant would not retreat back toward Washington as so many other generals had done after previous battles. He pressed on, toward Spotsylvania Court House.

The history books tell of discrete battles at Spotsylvania, North Anna and Cold Harbor, but in fact this became a single 40-day, meat-grinder engagement with barely a quiet interlude long enough to pick up the bodies on the battlefield.

Grant's one grave error was ordering an assault on fortified rebel positions at Cold Harbor, and he forever regretted it. After that bloodbath, Lincoln wrote, "It can almost be said that the 'heavens are hung in black.'"

In the words of Confederate commander Evander Law, "It was not war, it was murder."

The critics called Grant a butcher. None other than Mary Lincoln used the term after Cold Harbor. She called Grant an "obstinate fool."

Lee assumed that Grant would gather strength for another charge at his main line, but Grant slyly slipped away south, sneaking the bulk of his army across the James and advancing to Petersburg. He hoped to cut the supply lines from the south leading into Richmond,

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but his men were too slow and too exhausted, too frazzled by six weeks of unrelenting combat, to take advantage of their numerical advantage. Lee reinforced Petersburg and the two sides dug in for what would become a 10-month siege. This became trench warfare.

It looked bad for Lincoln and Grant. The prize of Richmond had

not been seized and Lee remained in the field. Sherman in the West had yet to reach Atlanta. The Confederate general Jubal Early staged a raid on the nation's capital, reaching Silver Spring, so close to the White House that Lincoln himself ventured (a bit recklessly) to the front line to see his first Civil War battle up close. Early was

driven back, but this hardly seemed a season of triumph for the Union cause. Lincoln's reelection looked increasingly unlikely.

Everything that happened in the spring and summer of 1864 proved the adage of Clausewitz that war is politics by other means. The events also showed that war is a contest of wills. Battlefield victories and the occupation of territory do not necessarily yield what you need, which is capitulation.

But in the darkest days for Lincoln and the Union cause, Grant's strategy finally paid off. On Sept. 2, Sherman marched into Atlanta, bearing his chilling message, "War is cruelty and you cannot refine it." The news of Atlanta's capture reversed public opinion in the North about the war.

Now came the endgame — Sherman's march to the sea, Gen. Philip Sheridan's campaign in the Shenandoah Valley and the tightening noose on Lee in Virginia. Lincoln would win reelection; the war's duration would be measured in months.

It is not reckless to guess that without Grant's bullheaded determination, the story of the Civil War would have played out differently, perhaps ending with the inauguration of President George B. McClellan and the perpetuation of slavery.

A reluctant president

Grant got a fourth star, and as the embodiment of the Union he almost inexorably followed the path to the



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Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant at his Cold Harbor, Va., headquarter, June 1864.

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White House. He was not eager to be president nor particularly adept at the job. His presidency was troubled by scandals among his aides and appointees and sectional strife over Reconstruction. He won a second term, handily, and in his second inaugural address said, "I have been the subject of abuse and slander scarcely ever equaled in political history, which today I feel that I can afford to disregard in view of your verdict."

Soon thereafter came the Panic of '73, a deep depression, the takeover of Congress by Democrats and the disintegration of Reconstruction.

Grant's admirers note many accomplishments: He pushed for passage of the 15th Amendment giving male African Americans the vote, sent federal troops to fight the Ku Klux Klan and reformed the government's Indian policy.

In his farewell address, Grant said, "It was my fortune, or misfortune, to be called to the office of Chief Executive without previous political training. ... Mistakes have been made, as all can see, and I admit."

He told a reporter, "I was never as happy in my life as the day I left the White House."

Still just 55, he spent two years on a world tour amid adoring throngs. He visited Europe, the Pyramids, the Taj Mahal, China and Japan.

As Waugh recounts in her book, the German leader Otto von Bismarck said to Grant that it was a shame that the United States had to endure so terrible a war. Grant answered, "But it had to be done."

Bismarck: "Yes, you had to save the Union."

Grant: "Not only save the Union, but destroy slavery."

He finally returned home, arriving in San Francisco to a parade and fireworks. About 350,000 people honored him with a parade in Philadelphia. Then he lost almost everything in a financial swindle. He wrote magazine articles for money and decided to write his autobiography. (Mark Twain's new company published the two volumes, offering an excellent royalty arrangement, but Twain did not, as some mistakenly think, write a word of the memoirs.)

The historian White notes, "He had a remarkable ability to use strong verbs, which are action words, and the ability not to use adjectives and almost no adverbs." On the battlefield, White said, "those who received the orders knew exactly what they were supposed to do. This is no small thing."

Grant raced to finish the memoirs before throat cancer could silence him. The country learned of his grave illness and followed daily

reports of his condition. He finished just in time, and the memoirs were hugely popular. He died July 23, 1885, at the age of 63.

Frederick Douglass eulogized Grant as "a man too broad for prejudice, too humane to despise the humblest, too great to be small at any point. In him the Negro found a protector, the Indian a friend, a vanquished foe a brother, an imperiled nation a savior."

Waugh's book on Grant recounts a scene in the 1936 Frank Capra movie, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* in which the protagonist, Longfellow Deeds (Gary Cooper), visits Grant's Tomb.

A cynical newspaper reporter asks him what he sees.

He answers, "I see a small Ohio farm boy becoming a great soldier. I see thousands of marching men. I see General Lee with a broken heart, surrendering, and I can see the beginning of a new nation, like Abraham Lincoln said. And I can see that Ohio boy being inaugurated as president. Things like that can only happen in a country like America."

In 2013, according to the National Park Service, 83,400 people visited Grant's Tomb, a drop of 9,000 from the previous year.

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Meet the National Security Correspondent

Q: When did you decide to become a journalist?

A: Journalism appealed to me from an early age. I declared it as my major during my first semester in college and quickly fell in love with the craft.

Q: You covered criminal justice in suburban Maryland for The Post. What would you advise young reporters about finding and covering community stories?

A: Finding good stories as a beat reporter requires being at the right place at the right time. That means going to lots of places and spending a lot of time out and about. Even events that might seem to hold little news value often offer interesting ideas and insights. If you're not finding good stories you're probably spending too much time at your desk.



THE WASHINGTON POST

Ernesto Londoño

Q: When you were a roving foreign correspondent in the Middle East, you covered Baghdad, Cairo and Afghanistan. How did being an international correspondent prepare you for the Pentagon beat?

A: I got to spend time with the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan, which allowed me learn about

how the military works and make good contacts.

Q: How much access do reporters have to the secretary of defense and other military leaders?

A: I often travel with the secretary of defense overseas. These trips offer a valuable window into his thinking. Some senior military leaders are fairly accessible and friendly with the press. Others are all but invisible to us.

Q: When students read your stories (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/pb/ernesto-londono>), they discover an interesting variety of topics. How do you find the story and decide on the angle?

A: It varies. Much of what I write about is driven by news. But other stories are simply about issues I find interesting and want to learn more about. >>>

Byline — Ernesto Londoño



U.S. officers fatally shot armed civilians in Yemen



U.S. prepares to dispatch small team to Nigeria to assist in search for kidnapped girls



U.S. should have reacted more aggressively to Benghazi attack, ex-general testifies

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Q: Since becoming *The Post's* Pentagon reporter in Sept. 2012, you have reported from Afghanistan. How important is it to go to areas where U.S. military are stationed, including a war zone?

A: It's vital to cover wars on the ground. This type of journalism is the best antidote to spin.

Q: With U.S. troops involved in wars in Afghanistan, you have had to report about casualties. Does the Pentagon provide information about casualties on a regular basis?

A: They do. The Pentagon discloses when it has lost troops in combat and identifies them shortly after relatives have been notified. There is virtually no public information released about the wounded.

Q: Do you have additional sources to confirm information?

A: Sometimes relatives and comrades give us additional insight into fallen troops.

Q: Students are reading about the casualties of the U.S. Civil War. In what ways do you think your job is different from those of war reporters 150 years ago?

A: Information travels much more quickly. In that era reporters needed to cover a lot of ground to find out what was happening and it took a long time for reports to get to readers. When there's an attack in Kabul these days, early reports and photos are usually available on social media within minutes.

Q: Students are reading your March 4, 2014, story "The last casualties: As a long war ends, risks still prove real." Would you share with us some of the background on getting this story? What was it like to take the trip with Lance Cpl. Paul Shupert? To interview his family?

A: He was very easy to speak to and spend time with. It was sobering and a bit depressing at times to spend long periods of time with wounded troops coming home, but I felt it was an important story to tell.



U.S. officials say Syria is using remaining chemical weapons stockpile as leverage



U.S.-China differences are clear even as Hagel stresses cooperation in Beijing visit



Obama calls on Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine's border

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The last casualties: As a long war ends, risks still prove real



NIKKI KHAN/THE WASHINGTON POST

Capt. Nicholas Ingham is loaded onto a bus after his arrival at Bagram air base from Kandahar.

BY ERNESTO LONDOÑO

• *Originally Published March 4, 2014*
AT BAGRAM AIR BASE — AFGHANISTAN — Shortly after midnight on this frigid night, Capt. Nicholas Ingham arrived at this massive air base, in the belly of an

Air Force C-130. As the back door swung open, flooding the cabin with light, the heavily sedated Marine, strapped onto a stretcher, blinked away a tear. An American flag tattooed on his chest rose and fell gently as a ventilator pumped air into his collapsed lung.

A team of doctors, nurses and medical technicians assigned to the trauma center here gently offloaded Ingham and a handful of other

injured troops with mechanical precision, the first stop on their journey home.

It would be the same journey thousands of wounded warriors had made before them.

These days, 12 years after the start of America's longest war, far fewer U.S. troops are being killed or wounded in Afghanistan. The military's drawdown has picked up pace, and Afghans have begun to

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shoulder the brunt of the fighting. But the war continues to churn out American casualties by the dozen each week. Their injuries rarely make headlines.

Still, military health-care experts say those wounded in battle are coming home more severely injured than at any time since 2006, a sobering sign of the strength of the insurgency at the twilight of the war. Many of the injured arrive on the medical evacuation flights that land twice a week at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland physically intact but mentally wrecked, struggling with the demons of multiple deployments over the past decade.

Their caretakers, part of a massive wartime medical evacuation system

that is being wound down, have a rare and often grim vantage on the final chapter of the Afghan war — a conflict that is increasingly being endured, rather than fought, largely out of sight.

Ingham is monitored in the base's emergency room. The Marine captain was seriously injured in a suicide bombing in Afghanistan's Helmand province.

"Are you feeling any pain?" Maj. Scott A. Zakaluzny, a surgeon at Bagram's hospital, asked Ingham as his colleagues inspected the gashes torn into his back, arms and legs by shrapnel from a suicide bombing. Looking miserable, Ingham, 27, opened his eyes slightly and shook his head.

Out of mind

In Washington, among policy-makers, the Afghan war is increasingly discussed with exasperation, like a curse. It is the type of warfare the United States must avoid at all cost, President Obama argued during his State of the Union address.

"We must fight the battles that need to be fought," Obama told those in attendance, among them a soldier disfigured by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan. "Not those that terrorists prefer from us — large-scale deployments that drain our strength and may ultimately feed extremism."

Also in the House chamber that night was Rep. Adam Kinzinger



NIKKI KHAN/THE WASHINGTON POST

A doctor, nurse and medical technician tend to Ingham on the eight-hour flight from Bagram to Landstuhl, Germany.

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(R-III.), a former Air Force pilot who flew intelligence and medevac missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“I think there is a sense in the military that Americans are not paying attention anymore,” he had told a reporter a few weeks earlier, shortly after returning from a visit to Kabul. “I think they’re right, to be honest. There is a sense that it’s over, but it’s not.”

There are roughly 33,700 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, down from a peak of more than 100,000 in the spring of 2011.

Those who have been wounded here have had a better chance at survival than in any previous U.S. war — a result of stunning achievements in battlefield care. But in some ways, combat medics say, the work in Afghanistan has become more challenging. The injury severity score, a measure that takes into account the extent of a patient’s

wounds, has gone up gradually in Afghanistan since 2006, according to data compiled by the military.

Col. Kirby Gross, a physician who studies trauma care for wounded troops and who is deployed at Bagram, struggled to find the right words to explain how insurgents have become so proficient at killing and maiming American service members.

“They’re nimble,” was as much of a compliment as he was willing to pay.

Medical professionals say the combat evacuation system that sprang up at the height of the Iraq war to care for the wounded is being pared down. In December, Bagram became the only base in Afghanistan with a top-tier trauma center, which means that patients across the battlefield in need of specialized care face longer journeys. As the footprint becomes smaller in coming

months, the margin of error will widen, said Lt. Col. Mary Danko, the chief Air Force flight nurse in Bagram.

“Right now, it’s a great process we have,” she said. “But you worry about the one life you won’t be able to save because of the lack of resources.”

At the U.S. military hospital in Landstuhl, Germany, the three miles of hallways that were once brimming with war victims are now largely empty. Air Force Lt. Col. David Zonies, the chief of trauma and critical care at Landstuhl, expressed longer-term concerns on this morning, noting that when his tour was up, he wouldn’t be replaced.

“There’s a very serious concern that we will potentially not learn the lessons of this war for the next one,” he said. “After Korea and Vietnam, the money ran out, the resources ran out, skills started to wane. Are we going to make the same mistake after this conflict?”

‘I felt my lung bubbling’

Ingham had deployed twice before to Afghanistan during periods when U.S. troops battled insurgents every day. His last wartime assignment was to lead a group of Georgian soldiers tasked with preventing militants from firing rockets into a sprawling NATO base in Helmand province, in southwestern Afghanistan.

Early in the afternoon of Dec. 14, a lone driver in a blue sedan steered his vehicle toward a patrol he was leading. The Georgian soldiers appeared edgy, and Ingham worried



NIKKI KHAN/THE WASHINGTON POST

At Joint Base Andrews, Army Col. Michael J. Worth greets wounded troops returning from Afghanistan.

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that if they overreacted, he could have a civilian casualty incident on his watch. So he walked toward the driver, alone, hoping to wave him off.

“Civilian casualties in Afghanistan are a particularly touchy subject,” he would say later. “I was trying to prevent something that could have turned into a very bad event.”

As Ingham moved toward the car, the driver pressed on toward him. The lanky captain raised his rifle in a final effort to get him to back off. By then, he was close enough to hear the man at the wheel utter “Allahu akbar,” or “God is great,” words that could have meant only one thing in that context. Ingham opened fire, pumping 18 bullets into the driver, whose vehicle continued to inch toward him.

“I turned around and got a step and a half and it exploded,” Ingham said, comparing the fury of the blast to a massive wave that thrusts you from behind. The explosion sent the car’s engine flying 100 meters and dug out a massive crater in the ground. As he limped away from the plume of smoke toward his men, Ingham took a breath and realized he had been badly hurt.

“I felt my lung bubbling,” he said, recounting the attack and its aftermath weeks later at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda. “I knew something had gone through my chest.”

‘They think the war’s over’

Ingham’s doctors expect he will make a full recovery and could soon lead Marines in combat again. But



NIKKI KHAN/THE WASHINGTON POST

The ground crew at Andrews prepares to unload a C-17.

as he spoke on this morning, he was surrounded by service members who won’t. One, Lance Cpl. Paul Shupert, who had been deployed in the same province as Ingham, had arrived at Walter Reed a few weeks before, missing part of his right leg.

“It’s a shame you guys are coming home hurt,” Ingham told the 22-year-old Marine, shaking his head.

“We know what we signed up for,” Shupert replied quietly, his legs draped by a heavy black blanket with leopard-print edges.

There was no sense talking Shupert out of following in his father’s footsteps when, at 17, he persuaded his parents in Jefferson City, Tenn., to sign a waiver allowing him to join the Marines. When he deployed to Afghanistan for the first time last summer, his mother was paralyzed by fear.

“Everyone was thinking I was

taking it too hard,” Tonya Shupert said. “They think the war’s over.”

Tonya Shupert is nothing if not a patriot, often donning “Marine Corps Mom” T-shirts. But like many in military families, she struggled to understand why men such as her son were still being sent to Afghanistan.

“I think there are some things we shouldn’t be involved in,” she said one evening while doing laundry at the patient living quarters. “Some of those people have been fighting for years and years, and us going there is not going to change that.”

The war changed her son permanently the afternoon of Nov. 25, after he had volunteered to help explosive ordnance disposal experts search a compound. Shupert had carefully followed the footsteps of the Marine in front of him, mindful that the compound could be surrounded by land mines.

“I guess I must have missed a

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spot,” he would say later. “I did back flips through the air and remember landing on my back and looking at my legs. My pants were blown off, and I saw it had taken off the foot.”

Shupert has not allowed himself a moment of self-pity since that day, arguing that dwelling on his loss will not make the limb grow back. When he first saw his family at Walter Reed after being evacuated, they were comforted that he had not lost his sense of humor. The ordeal was a perfect excuse for a new tattoo, Shupert told them. He would ink the words “Part A” on his thigh and label his prosthetic leg “Part B.”

Keeping a record

After each flight arrives at Andrews, Army Col. Michael J. Worth writes a report with tiny narratives about each wounded warrior he has debriefed.

A few are bizarre, for instance the ordeal of a female lieutenant nurse who was accidentally shot in the foot by her boss.

“She doesn’t know precisely what her boss was doing to cause the discharge,” wrote Worth, who is tasked with making sure patients get to the right final destination for additional care.

Some of the narratives are haunting. Only after failing to get a young soldier to talk after one flight did Worth realize that the Army Ranger had sustained serious wounds to his genitals.

But it is perhaps the mental wounds that trouble the colonel the most. He had recently welcomed home an Army couple. The wife, a staff sergeant assigned to a transportation unit who had been deployed seven times, had shot herself in the abdomen in an apparent suicide attempt. Her husband was relieved to be home but ashen as he escorted his unconscious spouse off the plane.

Like most military officers, Worth tries to focus on the mission and not dwell on the politics of war.

“We execute the lawful orders of the president,” he said. “What I see

on the airplane is a consequence of that, and I’m here to help them and deal with them. Any thoughts I have as a private citizen will have to wait until I leave.”

And so there was stoic silence among the military personnel awaiting Shupert’s flight on a cold, windy evening in early December. As the plane turned on its landing lights and tipped its nose down, it was commanded to turn back skyward and circle overhead for more than 30 minutes. Vice President Biden’s team was ready to take off for a trip to Asia, so authorities at Andrews froze all other movement on the airfield.

On the ground, some in the medical team awaiting Shupert shivered, but they kept their thoughts to themselves. The Marine never knew the flight was diverted. Told about it later, his only reaction was: “Oh.”