

Updated September 9, 2022

Trends in Active-Duty Military Deaths From 2006 Through 2021

Summary of Deaths

Congress has had a sustained interest in military deaths during peacetime and wartime. From 2006 through 2021, a total of 19,378 active-duty servicemembers have died while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. Of those who died, 24% were killed while serving in in what the Department of Defense (DOD) categorizes as Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO)—primarily within the territories of Iraq and Afghanistan. The remaining 76% died during operations categorized as Non-Overseas Contingency Operations (Non-OCO). The categories with the highest number of active-duty servicemember deaths were accidents, self-inflicted wounds, and illnesses or injuries. **Table 1** summarizes all active-duty military deaths by category from 2006 through 2021. The data starts in 2006 because DOD implemented a new casualty reporting system then, so the analysis excludes casualties that occurred in earlier years, including during combat operations from 2001 to 2005. DOD Instruction (DODI) 1300.18 details department policies and procedures for reporting military casualties. The instruction lists but does not define all casualty categories.

Table 1. U.S. Active-Duty Military Deaths, 2006-2021, by Category

Category	Total Deaths	Deaths as % of Total
Accident	6,198	32.0%
Self-inflicted	4,930	25.4%
Illness/Injury	3,470	17.9%
Killed in Action	2,740	14.1%
Died of Wounds	891	4.6%
Homicide	619	3.2%
Undetermined	329	1.7%
Pending	176	0.9%
Terrorist	21	0.1%
While Captured	4	0.0%
Total	19,378	100%

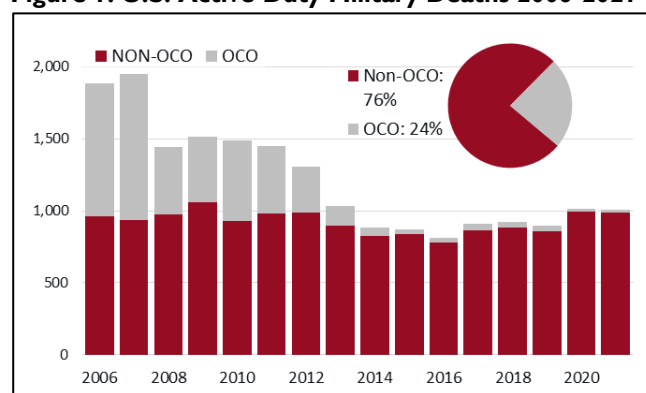
Source: U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), Defense Casualty Analysis System report provided to CRS, April 1, 2022.

Notes: The “self-inflicted” subcategory includes an apparent-suicide designation. For comprehensive statistics on this subject, please consult the Defense Suicide Prevention Office (DSPO). Numbers have been rounded to the nearest tenth of a percentage.

Source of Casualty Data

Data in this product were provided by the DOD’s Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). When a U.S. casualty occurs, the service is required to complete a form (DD 1300 Report of Casualty) that includes circumstances related to death. This information is subsequently entered into the service’s Casualty and Mortuary Affairs database (Defense Casualty Information Processing System, or DCIPS), which is made accessible to DMDC. Casualty data are refreshed daily and past records are subject to change. Throughout this product, the designation “active duty” refers to all active-duty troops, including mobilized Reserve and Guard components.

Figure 1. U.S. Active-Duty Military Deaths 2006-2021



Source: DMDC Defense Casualty Analysis System report provided to CRS, April 1, 2022.

Deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan

Scope and Reference

Title 10, Section 101 of the *U.S. Code*, defines a *contingency operation* as any Secretary of Defense-designated military operation “in which members of the armed forces are or may become involved in military actions, operations, or hostilities against an enemy of the United States or against an opposing military force.” OCO activities related to *Afghanistan* include Operation Enduring Freedom (2001-2014) and Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (2014-2021). In April 2022, President Joseph R. Biden Jr. announced a drawdown of all 2,500 U.S. troops remaining in that country beginning May 1 and all troops left Afghanistan on or before August 30, 2021. OCO activities primarily related to *Iraq* include Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003-2010), Operation New Dawn (2010-2011), and Operation Inherent Resolve (2011-present).

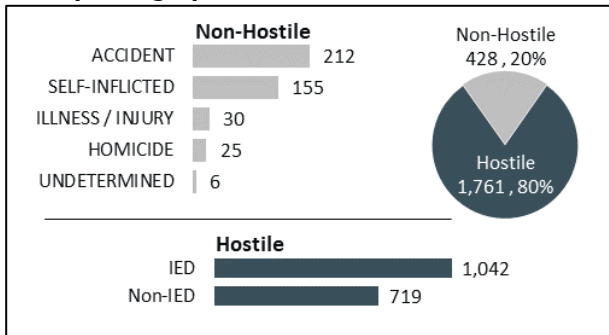
In 2006, OCO and non-OCO deaths were fairly evenly divided; in 2021, OCO deaths accounted for 2% of active-duty deaths.

Overall Deaths

On December 15, 2011, U.S. Armed Forces in Baghdad marked the official end of the war in Iraq. The three operations in Iraq (i.e., Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, and Operation Inherent Resolve) claimed the lives of 4,599 U.S. troops. From 2006 through 2021, 2,189 U.S. troops died as part of OCO operations in Iraq, with 48% of these deaths attributable to improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and their variants. Of those who were not killed in IED related incidents, 37% died under non-hostile conditions, primarily from accidents (including loss of aircraft or ground vehicle) or as a result of self-inflicted injury.

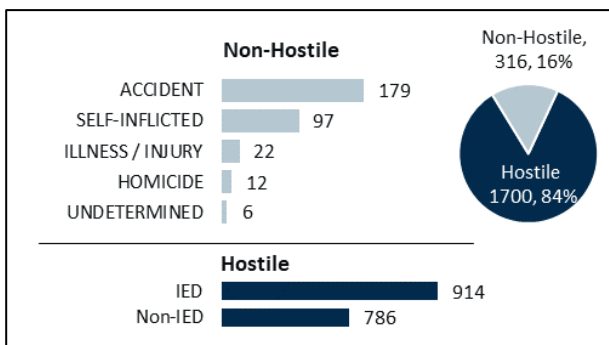
The U.S. military and diplomatic withdrawal and evacuation operation in Afghanistan concluded on August 30, 2021. From 2006 through 2021, the military operations in Afghanistan (i.e., Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Freedom's Sentinel) claimed the lives of 2,016 U.S. troops. Nearly half (45%) of these deaths are attributable to IEDs and their variants, which took their greatest toll between 2009 and 2012. Most U.S. personnel not killed by IEDs during this period died as the result of gunshot wounds or after suffering other physical trauma in action.

Figure 2. U.S. OCO Active-Duty Deaths in Iraq, 2006-2021, by Category



Source: DMDC Defense Casualty Analysis System report provided to CRS, April 1, 2022.

Figure 3. U.S. Active-Duty Deaths in Afghanistan, 2006-2021, by Category



Source: DMDC Defense Casualty Analysis System report provided to CRS, April 1, 2022.

Notable Trends

From 2006 through 2021, 4,620 U.S. military personnel died in (or as the result of) OCO operations in 28 countries

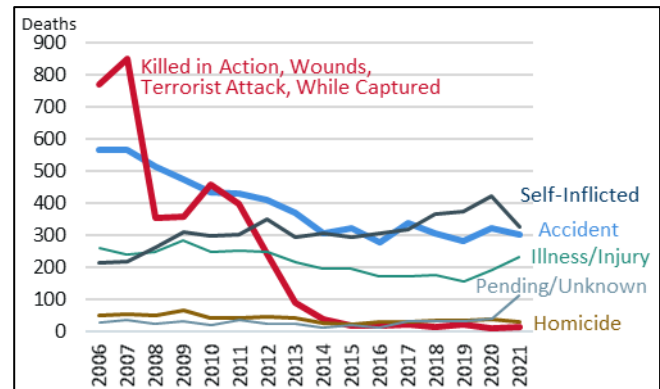
and locations at sea. IEDs caused almost half (44%) of all U.S. deaths in war zones.

During this period, 14,758 servicemembers died in circumstances unrelated to OCO operations. On average, this amounts to approximately 922 non-war-related deaths each year. In non-OCO operations, personnel perished in 75 countries (and at sea), with the majority (93%) of deaths occurring in the United States. Other top locations included Germany, Japan, South Korea, Italy, and the United Kingdom, all of which have U.S. military garrisons.

From 2006 through 2011, 25% of deaths were due to being killed in action, terrorist attacks, and dying while captured. From 2012 through 2021, these categories made up 3% of deaths. Self-inflicted deaths made up 11% of deaths in 2006, and in 2021 made up 32% of deaths.

From 2006 through 2021, approximately 13% of all deaths and 39% of accidental deaths involved vehicles. Alcohol or substance abuse was a factor in 6% of all deaths and 14% of accidental deaths.

Figure 4. U.S. Active-Duty Deaths, 2006-2021, by Cause



Source: DMDC Defense Casualty Analysis System report provided to CRS, April 1, 2022.

Accidental deaths dropped from over 500 per year in the years 2006 through 2008, to under 300 per year in the years 2016, 2018, and 2019. In the most recent full year on record, 2021, there were 301 accidental deaths, or about 30% of the 1,009 total deaths for the year.

Considerations for Congress

Each service component uses the casualty categories listed in **Table 1** to enter deaths into the DMDC system. Casualty data is updated daily, and the categorization of a death may change as more information is received. With the exception of "Incident Type," the categorization of each death is up to the discretion of each service in accordance with DOD policy. "Incident Type" is the only category that has set definitions. DODI 1300.18 defines a "Hostile" and "Non-Hostile" death, the two options for "Incident Type."

Congress may consider requiring clearer definitions for each casualty category to promote more reliable casualty data and greater transparency for reporting military deaths.

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