

## Changing Demographics of Minnesota Veterans

In my research of Veterans news in Minnesota, I found an article published in the Minneapolis Star Tribune about the changing look of our Veterans. Here are some interesting bits of information. In the future, Minnesota Veterans will be younger, more likely to be female and less likely to be white. For example, our MN Vietnam Veterans make up the largest portion of our Veterans but as we get older, our numbers will decrease as we've seen with the WWII Veterans. Our total Veteran population will also go down from 330,000 now to 186,000 by 2036. Although the Twin Cities have the largest number of Veterans they are a small percent of the total population, Hennepin County the state's most populous county, Veterans comprise only 6% of the population. Several rural counties in the northern part of the state have Veteran populations more than 12 percent. As we know from watching MASH, wounded Korean War soldiers had a better chance of surviving than WWII wounded soldiers. Survival rates in Vietnam were better and Iraq and Afghanistan soldiers are much better, although we have more destructive weapons. This means that many of our Veterans have service-connected disability ratings of 70 or higher and will put a strain on our Veterans services. Nearly one in five MN Veterans have a service-connected disability with a rating of 70 percent or higher. Although women make up only 8 percent of Minnesota's Veterans population, more than a third are under age 40. The VA must adjust to this change over the coming years. I believe our VA hospital in Fargo is doing that now. In a recent national survey, only 22 percent of women Veterans rated the VA's support to women Veterans as good or better. Perhaps it is time to change the VA motto "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan".

Last week, while having breakfast, we started a conversation with the table next to us and got this story. The man at the table was a retired Georgia law enforcement officer and Army Veteran. One time, while patrolling a park in his community, he found a young couple having sex by some trees. He asked if they were married to which they said no but were going to get married. He said in Georgia only married couples should be having sex and also told them that as a law enforcement officer, he could marry them on the spot. They said that sounded good. Then, he told them to hold hands on his badge and he did the 'do you take this man, etc.' routine. After he pronounced them husband and wife, he told them they could go back to what they had been doing. They did. He said he has wondered if they are still 'married'. I have found some of the most interesting people here and listened to some great stories.