

SOUND OFF!



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THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

20 APRIL 2012

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

TO DO RIGHT YOU MUST KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT

Recent criminal acts by members of the US Armed Forces, and the recent revelation of some prior acts have caused me to revisit a subject that has disturbed my all my life, especially for the last decade. The acts I speak of are of course the killing of 17 civilians last month in Afghanistan, and the desecration of bodies in 2010 which has just been revealed.

There are two subjects that we are always uncomfortable to talk about. In fact, these two subjects are so touchy that there are those who would call me unpatriotic – perhaps even traitor for bringing them up.

The first is our government's unilateral rejection of prior treaties and international law. The second is the way our troops are trained on the Law of Land Warfare and their personal obligations and specific conduct under that Law.

Our government sets a terrible example when it willfully and openly defies treaties to which we are signatories, and when it defies the common precepts of international law. Such actions tell the world that we don't care what they think of us, and we don't even care about being believed when we make pledges and sign agreements.

On the one hand we set ourselves up to be disbelieved whenever we give our word to other nations. On the other hand we set a horrible example for our troops who are more actively engaged every day in “foreign relations” than those who write the laws and who set the policies. If our government doesn't care, why should they?

It is not that I believe that the troops should be excused who commit acts which by any definition are war crimes. I merely mean that they are neither getting

the training nor seeing the example which should be guiding their conduct.

It is not just that there is an open and willful disregard of treaties. The acts taken by the past several administrations and the last five Congresses—and by both parties—signal a profound change in our approach to the world and our attitude about the conduct of war, the deadliest and most serious act that any nation can undertake.

As much as we wish to avoid the discussion, and as much as we may be privately ashamed by it, US Forces have committed war crimes over the years—crimes which cannot be denied, even though the rage expressed in some of those crimes is almost understandable to all of us who have been in combat.

Our bombing of civilians in World War II, most especially at Dresden and Hiroshima, are clearly defined as war crimes. No, we weren't the first to do it, but we did do it. Also in World War II the summary execution of prisoners in all theaters has been reported over the years. The No Gun Ri massacre during the Korean War and the massacre at My Lai during the Vietnam War are more recent clear examples.

The shameful acts that took place at Abu Ghraib and Bagram prisons during the most recent Iraq War are war crimes, even by our own definition and regardless of our treaty agreements.

It is not just the actions of our troops on the ground that count as crimes. Our government's declaration of “preventive” war as a national policy and the conduct of such a war is a crime in international law. The made-up definition of “unlawful combatants” flies in the face of specific definitions and agreements in the

various Geneva and Hague Treaties, and the treatment of those persons defies both US and international law.

We now operate under a policy that says we can wash our hands of evil deeds by “rendition” of suspected bad guys to some of our more despotic friends who believe that torture is both proper and fun.

Perhaps the accepted guideline here is Matthew 27:24 “*When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.*”

The Military Commissions Act of 2006 is a *de post facto* rewrite of our own War Crimes Act of 1996. That former act included “a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions” as a specific war crime. Apparently we are telling the world, and incidentally our troops and their leaders, that if we don’t like an agreement we will just rewrite it, ignore it, or conveniently redefine what the agreement or law means to us.

Our legislators are too timid to oppose these actions, afraid of being called unpatriotic, even though adherence to the law is supposed to be the supreme patriotic act of both citizens and their representatives.

Our courts are apparently too far removed from the reality of the execution of these conveniently rewritten laws and agreements to even care.

In 2006, during the hearings on the Military Commissions Act I wrote a letter for VUFT to Senator John Warner (R-VA) who called those hearings. The letter presented VUFT’s arguments against the bill. Of course, as is usual, I received no response. The letter is quoted in part below.

...There is grave concern among many veterans of the United States Armed Forces about the re-interpretation by the Bush administration of the Law of Land Warfare and its application to the two wars that they are now conducting. I have been asked by my organization to speak to this issue. As I am not a lawyer I cannot speak to the finer points of the law, domestic or international, and those treaties to which the United States is signatory which govern our behavior in war as individuals and as a nation. I can only speak as a soldier who has fought for his country, and as a spokesman for certain other soldiers who wish to be heard.

My personal experience informs my views, and my personal experience is germane to the issue. I will use that experience as the foundation and background for the general statement of principles that we, as an organization, believe to be essential to the conduct of soldiers and governments, particularly our government, in wartime.

From the time I joined the U. S. Army at the end of the Korean War, until I retired from the Army almost 40 years into the Cold War, the Law of Land Warfare was a preeminent element in my

training, my conduct, and of my professional ethic, and that of all those who served with me.

My first class on the Law of Land Warfare was around Halloween of 1953, in my sixth week of Basic Training at Fort Knox, KY. Every year thereafter, the Law of Land Warfare was on the training schedule. As an enlisted man I attended that training. As a non-commissioned officer and then as a commissioned officer I both attended and conducted that training. When I was commissioned I was issued a copy of FM 27-10, The Law of Land Warfare, as part of my basic library. I keep it to this day.

Instruction in the Law of Land Warfare, and its applicability to me as a soldier and as a leader, was so important to the Army that those classes ranked right up there with marksmanship, physical fitness, and NBC training as essential annual training subjects for all soldiers. Even though a new manual came out in 1956, nothing changed that was significant to our rules.

Hardly any of us were schooled in the law. Lawyers were not available to conduct the training. The arguments given in that instruction covered our conduct and our behavior toward others, both belligerents and non-combatants, in terms that were clear and which did not count on our understanding of the specific legal issues involved.

All that we were expected to know was embodied in three elements:

1. There were both international agreements and U.S. laws that governed our behavior, and every point in all of those laws and treaties applied not just to our government, but to us as individuals; and, the UCMJ was consistent with this rule.
2. We did not need to know the finer points of the laws, but we needed to know the demands that they made on us and to act accordingly, and we were responsible as individuals for that behavior on all counts.
3. When all else failed, we were expected to act with fundamental human decency toward combatants and non-combatants alike, and that any other form of behavior was not only unacceptable but punishable.

So we learned that while our job in the assault was to kill the enemy, that the moment that enemy soldier either laid down his weapon and surrendered, or when we subdued him, we were to protect his person as if he were one of us. We were to treat him decently, provide medical care if required, provide food and shelter, and keep him safe until he was repatriated at the end of hostilities. There were other requirements, but these were the fundamental ones.

As I studied the manual and its incorporated treaty provisions over the years, I learned more in detail. For example, I learned that when I took a prisoner he was at that moment the responsibility of the head of state of my country. That is, he may have been a warrior trying to kill me at one moment, for which my Commander-in-Chief expected me to kill or incapacitate him, but at the next moment I was acting directly for my President and the American people when I protected my enemy’s person as a captive.

I learned that civilians were in general protected the same as belligerents. I also earned the very important provision that was

incorporated in the only change to that manual which enjoined me against “unnecessary killing and devastation”.

I learned that not just I was covered by the laws and treaties, but that all belligerents and enemy non-combatants were covered by them as well. I couldn’t make up rules as I went. With that I learned that the most important provision of those treaties was so important that it was contained in all of the recent ones, and that was Common Article 3 which prohibited not just murder, but torture, humiliation, cruel treatment, and the taking of hostages.

I learned that people didn’t have to be in uniform to be legitimate combatants nor did they have to represent the opposing government. They could take up arms to defend themselves, their communities and their properties, yet they were to be treated equally with the uniformed belligerents, and if captured were also deemed Prisoners of War.

I learned that if there were ever the slightest question as to the status of a prisoner, that prisoner was to be accorded the status of Prisoner of War. The choice was simple – decide in the favor of the prisoner.

I learned that if trials were to take place, those trials had to be in accordance with the United States military and civil judicial system, and that those accused would enjoy all the benefits of that system. That these benefits included the right to counsel, the right to a speedy trial, the right to face the accuser, and the right to access to all evidence.

I learned that if I committed any acts that violated the treaties, the laws of the United States, or the rules promulgated in the manual, I could be charged with a war crime.

Perhaps the most important lesson that I learned was that all of this was not only legal, good and fair for the enemy, but that it was in my best interests as an American soldier. I learned that my good behavior and adherence to these rules would not guarantee me good treatment, but that if I and my fellow soldiers set a pattern of ignoring these rules we would certainly guarantee ourselves dire treatment as captives. Thus, I learned that there were both legal and practical restraints on my actions.

Consistent throughout all of this training was the idea that beyond the treaties, beyond the laws, it was our behavior as Americans that was most important. It was the conscious adherence to what are generally called the rules of common decency, even in war, that set Americans and some others apart from those who pursued war savagely. I learned that above all else, this was expected to be the driving force behind my actions and the lodestar for my conduct, and would guide the demands for proper conduct that I would make on those assigned to my leadership.

At the end, there was no question about how I and my peers and subordinates should behave in combat. There was no question about how those appointed over me would act, and which of my actions they would support or condemn. There was no question about what my government expected of me. There was no question about what my Commander-in-Chief demanded of me. No question.

Now, fifty years on, that training has imbued me with a sense of honorable behavior in battle to such an extent that I can write about it without taking down my dog-eared copy of FM 27-10. I stand appalled at even the suggestion that these rules no longer apply. I swore a lifetime oath to defend the Constitution of the United States. That oath binds me to Article VI and to its clear statement that all of the Geneva and Hague treaties involved in the Law of Land Warfare – some twelve or thirteen of which are delineated in FM 27-10 – are the supreme law of the land.

I believe that the treatment of prisoners under the current administration and at the hands of the US Forces, not only at Guantanamo, but also in other prisons such as Abu Ghraib or the allegedly many “dark” prisons around the world, violates these laws in countless ways. These likely violations begin with the refusal to declare them as Prisoners of War, and continue with denial of the basic benefits of our judicial system, and include degradation, humiliation and torture.

The idea that one can “avoid” Geneva and Hague and U.S. law by keeping these prisoners out of the United States is appalling. The idea that someone – anyone – can suffer “rendition” and be turned over to some government that we embarrassingly call an ally, so that some dungeon master can do those things which we are sworn not to do, brings shame upon all who have sworn the same or a similar oath to the one that I gave to my nation and its laws.

And finally, the idea that my government can jeopardize the lives of my brothers and sisters in arms by ignoring those conventions that we fought so hard to preserve is inexcusable and fills me with rage.

I have a simple understanding of the Constitution of the United States on this issue. In Article I of that Constitution that we all swore to uphold, the legislature is given the exclusive power to make the laws for the government and regulation of the Armed Forces. No legislature can cede that power to the Executive by any act other than by amending the Constitution. Nothing in the President’s role as Commander-in-Chief, as delineated in Article II, gives him that power in war. But, since Article II also gives the Senate the consent power on treaties, it follows that only the Senate should be able to un-make treaties. If this understanding is correct, then FM 27-10 and its rules, which are still on the books, and the treaties upon which it is based, stand as the rule of law for American actions in combat, and in the subsequent occupation. If I am correct, the President and his subordinates in the Executive branch, including the Armed Forces, have no choice other than to obey those rules without question.

...By doing so, our brothers and sister in arms will once again know what their nation expects them to do, and how they should proceed; and they will be assured that their actions are legal, proper, humane, and American. They will understand once again that their right actions are the best defense for them as individuals and for their government in the damnable business of war.

I appreciate this chance to speak directly for one body of concerned military veterans and our supporters. I firmly believe that most veterans would support our position.

While the above letter refers to the Bush administration, the policies discussed here continue, for the most part, today.

Previously I alleged that current training and instruction reflects this change in policy, and that it does so to the detriment of our troops. I use as my example the US Army's Soldier's Creed, which is recited by all soldiers at graduation from Basic Training, and is a subject at promotion boards. (This is not the Code of Conduct, which governs mostly avoiding capture, refusing to surrender, and conduct if captured).

The Soldier's Creed has been around for a long time. The change to this creed in 2003 exemplifies the change in policy and attitude of soldiers and their leaders as a direct result of their training.

The original Creed emphasized honor, pride, and professional and personal responsibility. The current version focuses on the so-called "Warrior's Ethos" and emphasizes fighting and destruction.

While both mention pride in nation and in the Army, the current version drops three critical paragraphs which are the most telling:

"As a soldier, I realize that I am a member of a time-honored profession—that I am doing my share to keep alive the principles of freedom for which my country stands.

No matter what the situation I am in, I will never do anything, for pleasure, profit, or personal safety, which will disgrace my uniform, my unit, or my country.

I will use every means I have, even beyond the line of duty, to restrain my Army comrades from actions disgraceful to themselves and to the uniform."

If these ideas have disappeared from the "Creed", one can safely assume that they have likewise disappeared from the policy. and certainly from the training.

I have included both creeds side-by-side at the end of this issue for your information and comparison. The changes were promulgated when GEN Shinseki was Chief of Staff of the Army.

Given the disturbing reports of acts by our troops over the last decade, let's hope that at least the spirit of the original "Creed" could be returned to their training, along with thorough training in their heavy responsibilities under the Laws of Land Warfare.

Maybe then the ideas embodied in those three missing paragraphs above will once again be fully reflected in the acts of our troops.

Nothing will stop the occasional criminal act by those in the throes of the ultimate violence of war. Lack of proper training and enforcement of the right principles will almost guarantee that those acts will occur too often.

Being a soldier is tough.

Being an American soldier is tougher still, and it should be.

American soldiers have a lot to uphold and to demonstrate that many other nation's soldiers do not.

Their leaders should be training them and setting the example for all to see: they should be punishing those who refuse to act as American soldiers should and must.

Because you must unequivocally know what is right in order to do right.

"The shortest and surest way to live with honor in the world is to be in reality what we would appear to be; all human virtues increase and strengthen themselves by the practice and experience of them."

~ Socrates [Ed.]

PS: Last night I saw an ad for a computer game that featured "American warriors" that declared, "In war you don't do what is right, you do what is necessary." Maybe the training should begin in grade school?

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

Try these two organizations: Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program www.vetsprobono.net/; National Organization of Veterans' Advocates (NOVA) www.vetadvocates.com .

Also, United States Court of appeals for Veterans Claims "Public List of Practitioners" are members of the court's bar <http://www.uscourts.cavc.gov/practitioners/>

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE: STATUS OF OUR CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT

Case Progress to Date:

Date	Action	Days since previous action	Days since start of case
7/23/2007	Suit filed w/Federal District Court	-	0
9/25/2007	Defendant's motion to dismiss	64	64
2/11/2008	VUFT motion for preliminary injunction	139	203
2/25/2008	Preliminary injunction hearing – denied	14	217
4/21/2008	Trial before Judge Conti	56	273
6/25/2008	Judgment unfavorable (based on jurisdiction)	65	338
7/25/2008	Appeal notice filed w/9th Circuit Court of Appeals	30	368
12/10/2008	Appeal brief filed	138	506
12/15/2008	<i>Swords to Plowshares & Vietnam Veterans of America</i> file amicus brief (not accepted by court)	5	511
12/22/2008	<i>Military Spouses for Change & United Spinal Association</i> file amicus brief (not accepted by court)	7	518
3/4/2009	Appeal will not be subject to Mediation	72	590
5/1/2009	VUFT's brief filed	58	648
8/12/2009	Oral arguments before 3-judge panel	103	751
9/14/2009	No agreement on mediation. 9 th Circuit agrees to adjudicate	33	784
2010 No Action			
5/20/2011	The 9 th Circuit Court of Appeals rules in part in our favor, specifically on the Constitutional issues in our claim.	613	1397
5/27/2011	Case Management Conference before the original trial judge, Judge Conti, in Federal District Court in San Francisco	7	1404
7/20/2011	VA has requests a hearing by the full court.	54	1458
8/10/2011	VA appeals to undo everything that has transpired over the last three years; claims veterans have no constitutional right to benefits.	21	1479
11/16/2011	Back to square 2—9 th Circuit panel ruling withdrawn	98	1577
12/13/2011	<i>En banc</i> hearing before 11 judges	27	1604
4/20/2012	<i>Today - waiting</i>	129	1733
1733 days = 4 years, 8 months, 27 days			

We will keep you posted

Here is a link to the legal documents on the lawsuit. www.veteransptsdclassaction.org/

BE A MEMBER If you are getting this newsletter and have not yet joined, please go to www.vuft.org/membership.html and join. Membership is free. The more our numbers grow, the greater voice we have. It shouldn't be that way, but it is, so join us and help us take the fight to Congress and the state legislatures. Please encourage your friends who either are veterans, are related to veterans, or who support veterans' causes to join VUFT, Inc. at www.vuft.org/membership.html

SUPPORTING THE CAUSE If you wish to donate to our work you may do so via PayPal or Visa on our website "Donate" page at www.vuft.org/donate.html. Every little bit helps. We are a 501(c)(3): your donations are deductible on your federal taxes. You can also buy our handsome pins using the same method, or donate \$10 or more and we'll send you one anyway.

The case is moving on and we must support our legal team. Please dig down and help us if you can. Any amount helps.

P L E A S E D O N A T E !

www.vuft.org/donate.html

MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS [SOME EDITED FOR LENGTH]

VA Claims Miraculous Cure

In 2008 after repeatedly demonstrating cognitive and other neurological deficits a patient at the Dublin Georgia VA Medical Center was given a brain MRI for purposes of diagnosing traumatic brain injury from the war in 2003.

Atrophy was detected with other findings. The patient was sent to the VA Brain Trauma Center in Tampa Florida where another MRI was done in early 2010 which also found the atrophy and a cyst. The patient was returned to the VA Medical Center in Dublin with follow-up instructions for MRIs to be conducted each year.

The patient concerned about these findings had another exam done at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville Florida in summer 2010. Mayo performed its own MRI and found atrophy and a change from the earlier VA MRI.

In 2011, the Dublin VA Medical Center did another brain MRI. At that time, the patient was being examined by Social Security Disability, which decided to conduct its own medical exams and make its own medical findings. VA Dublin issued a report to the patient that he had a "normal MRI". Following that determination, Social Security Disability decided the patient was disabled and granted benefits based upon the cognitive and neurological findings. The patient requested clarification from Dublin VA and in February 2012 was told emphatically that he had a normal MRI and he "must have improved".

Before and during this same period the patient was also being examined by the Compensation and Pension section of the VA and underwent at least four exams which found that the patient had TBI -but for some reason would not award him any benefits without another exam.

Brain atrophy is a condition in which the brain is shrinking. Other findings of a cyst and enlarged crevices were made. Somehow, this patient grew additional brain matter, dissolved his own cyst, and no longer had any enlarged crevices. The patient had been told for more than four years there was no cure for neurological deficits and when atrophy was present, the prognosis was not favorable.

The idea medical history has been made is absurd. No announcements will be made but benefits will be denied. The callous lack of concern by the Dublin VA in the face of records from that facility, and two other facilities that included the Mayo Clinic, over the patient's condition points to an overwhelming disregard for the treatment and denial of benefits to veterans.

The beat goes on..... David H. Ward

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

MAKE HAZING A UCMJ CRIME, LAWMAKER URGES

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Apr 17, 2012

A California lawmaker whose nephew killed himself in Afghanistan in 2011 after hours of physical abuse by his fellow Marines asked the House Armed Services Committee on Tuesday to make hazing a specific crime under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Rep. Judy Chu, D-Calif., the aunt of former Marine Lance Cpl. Harry Lew, appeared Tuesday before the armed services committee to ask for specific anti-hazing provisions to be included in the 2013 defense authorization bill that the panel will write within a few weeks. According to a Marine Corps investigation, Lew had fallen asleep on guard duty and subsequently suffered hours of so-called "corrective" discipline that include being beaten, kicked, forced to exercise and having sand poured over his head and into his mouth. He later shot himself.

<More at: <http://www.armytimes.com/news/2012/04/military-make-hazing-ucmj-crime-judy-chu-urges-041712/>>

JAG PUSHES UCMJ TO EMBRACE VETS TREATMENT COURT

Joe Gould - Staff writer - Apr 15, 2012

If the civilian justice system has embraced treatment courts that care for veterans stricken with combat stress and brain injuries instead of punishing them, why can't the military justice system? It can and it should, asserted Maj. Evan Seamone, the chief of military justice at Fort Benning, Ga., in an article published in the most recent issue of the journal Military Law Review. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2012/04/army-jag-pushes-ucmj-embrace-veterans-treatment-court-041512w/>

SENATOR DIVERTS HEARING TO GET ANSWERS ON PTSD CARE

Megan McCloskey - Stars and Stripes - March 21, 2012

WASHINGTON — Sen. Patty Murray interrupted a budget hearing Wednesday to question the Army's top brass about why hundreds of soldiers had mental health diagnoses overturned because of the expense of paying for their medical retirement.

Army Secretary John McHugh and Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno visited Capitol Hill to discuss the military's fiscal needs with the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee. Murray instead steered the discussion in a different direction.

Doctors at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state stripped post-traumatic stress disorder diagnoses from more than 40 percent of soldiers in the medical retirement process since 2007, said Murray, D-Wash.

"The challenges of mental health care and PTSD are real and no one, no one should be denying any servicemember care purely because of a question of cost," she said. <More at: www.stripes.com/news/senator-diverts-hearing-to-get-answers-on-ptsd-care-1.172285>

RETREAT – NEWS

DISABLED SOLDIER BACKLOG PUTS ARMY AT RISK

Military.com|by Michael Hoffman March 26, 2012

The backlog of soldiers too injured to serve is growing so large that it could affect the Army's ability to go to war.

Army leaders plan to reduce the size of the service by 10,000 to 15,000 soldiers each year over the next decade, but that's not counting the 20,500 troops Army doctors have declared unable to serve. Budget cuts, combined with the end of the Iraq war and drawdown in Afghanistan, have forced the Army to cut end strength by 80,000 soldiers. The 20,500 soldiers tabbed to leave the service because of disabilities, however, still remain on the books.

The backlog is caused by failures in a system built to transition those soldiers out. Quite simply, Army doctors classify more soldiers as too injured to serve than the system can separate each year. The number of soldiers in the Integrated Disability Evaluation System has grown by 42 percent just this past year. It's grown from 11,900 soldiers to 20,500 soldiers since 2009.

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/disabled-soldier-backlog-puts-army-at-risk.html

APPARENTLY THE MARINES HAVE A SOLUTION

MARINE CORPS TO OPEN INFANTRY OFFICER COURSE TO WOMEN

Jennifer Hlad - Stars and Stripes - April 20, 2012

WASHINGTON -- The Marine Corps will soon allow women to attend its school for infantry officers, as part of a larger effort to determine how to expand the role of women in the Corps.

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/marine-corps-to-open-officer-infantry-school-to-women.html>

THE NAVY HAS ITS SAME OLD SOLUTION – MORE CARRIERS AND PLANES

NAVY LOOKS FOR NEW JET, ON TOP OF ITS TRILLION-DOLLAR MODEL

Spencer Ackerman – WIRED - April 17, 2012

On Friday, the Navy quietly released a "market survey" asking the big defense contractors for their "candidate[s]" for "strike fighter aircraft" in the decades to come. Which is a little weird, considering the Pentagon is currently spending a trillion dollars on just such an aircraft: the troubled Joint Strike Fighter. <More at: www.wired.com/dangerroom/2012/04/super-hornet-jsf/>

NAVY MEDICINE CO FIRED FOR POOR COMMAND CLIMATE

Erik Slavin - Stars and Stripes - April 12, 2012

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The commanding officer of the Navy's northeastern U.S. health care services has been relieved after a survey found problems with the command climate, a Navy statement said Thursday.

Capt. Marcia "Kim" Lyons was removed from Naval Health Clinic New England on April 6 by Rear Adm. Elaine Wagner, who was Lyons' predecessor at that command. She is at least the sixth Navy commanding officer to be fired this year.

Wagner cited a "loss of confidence in the CO's ability to command" in the statement, a phrase often used following the dismissal of a naval commanding officer. <More at: www.military.com/news/article/navy-medicine-co-fired-for-poor-command-climate.html>

NURSING COMMUNITY PLEDGES SUPPORT FOR TROOPS, FAMILIES

Lisa Daniel - American Forces Press Service - April 11, 2012

First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden today announced a major pledge by the nation's nursing community to better understand the unique health needs of service members, veterans, and their families, and to reach out to provide treatment wherever it is needed. Obama and Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden, announced at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia that 150 state and national nursing organizations and 500 nursing schools, representing the nation's 3 million nurses, signed the pledge as the latest endeavor of their "Joining Forces" campaign to help military families.

<More at: www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=67898>

TWO-THIRDS OF VETS DENIED SPECIAL CONTRACTS BY VA

Kathleen Miller - Bloomberg News - March 24, 2012

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs has rejected almost two-thirds of veterans seeking special contracts, snubbing some of them because they live in community property states or did emergency work in Haiti. The VA says it has turned away about 4,700 of the more than 7,200 companies requesting preferential status as veteran-owned businesses since it began a verification process last year. Veterans say they are baffled by the explanations, including the agency's concerns about laws in California and eight other "community property" states where a spouse might be entitled to half a veteran owner's share in a business.

<More at: http://journalstar.com/news/national/two-thirds-of-vets-denied-special-contracts-by-va/article_28166537-1ba8-511f-a84a-52523a18de4d.html#ixzz1sXlxQRdM>

WORLD WAR II VETERAN STANDS ON CORNER TO MAKE ENDS MEET

KGET News - 4/05/12

Orvel Baggett waves the U.S. flag proudly from his truck parked along Norris and Coffee Roads in northwest Bakersfield. But, he says he's not too proud of what he has to do. "We're out here trying to compensate for what they took away to try and make ends meet," said Baggett, who will be 87 in July.

He says the Department of Veterans Affairs stopped giving him his pension check because he was overpaid, when he overlooked reporting his wife's Social Security income. His wife of 66 years, Dorothy, is illiterate, but applied for Social Security in 1986. About 15 years later, Baggett says he received an overpayment notice from the V.A. saying he owed \$25,000. "Because she got on, I didn't know I was supposed to report what she got," he said. He says his pension checks went from \$320 per month to \$77 until they stopped coming in November 2010.

<More at: www.kget.com/news/local/story/World-War-II-veteran-stands-on-corner-to-make/X0gpw0e3MU6v80AaVudimw.csp>

ANOTHER PART OF THE PROBLEM ~ READ THIS FATHER'S OP-ED WHEN A SON HEADS OFF TO WAR

David Freed - latimes.com Op-Ed - April 1, 2012

... About 1 in 5 current members of Congress is a veteran, but less than 1% of their offspring are. There are some notable exceptions, of course. One of John McCain's sons was a Marine in Iraq. Vice President Joe Biden's son, Bo, put in a stint as an Army lawyer in Baghdad. Those who enlist today, though, are more likely to hail from a hardscrabble strata of society far distant from the halls of power. Politicians can talk all they want about how gut-wrenching it is for them to write letters of condolences, or attend memorial services for the fallen, but they really have no idea what it's like to have a child or spouse die in battle, or to live with the lurking dread that they might. ... <More at: <http://latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-freed-father-son-military>

TO THE COLORS – GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
Every Sunday	1300-1600	Wilshire & San Vicente Blvds. NE Corner, Los Angeles, CA	Save Our Veterans Land	Veterans Revolution	
4/19-4/21		Simms Center Harrisonburg, VA	The Wall That Heals	Harrisonburg Rockingham Chamber of Commerce	
4/21		Kalispell, MT	Resource Fair	Allen Erickson Sr.	406-756-7304
4/25		Crestwood IL	Resource Fair	Tomas Gutierrez	708-371-9800
4/25-4/30		EKU Center for the Arts Richmond, KY	The Wall That Heals	Easteren Kentucky University	
4/27		Saint Cloud, MN	Resource Fair	Scott Peterson	
4/28		Columbus, GA	Resource Fair	A. Harrison	706-593-3393
5/10		Fresno, CA	Resource Fair	John Schuler	559-977-3697
5/10-5/13		AMVETS Dept of Illinois Springfield, IL	The Wall That Heals	AMVETS	
5/12		Tulsa, OK	Resource Fair	Keith Bartsch	918-582-8877
5/18		Raleigh, NC	Resource Fair	John Youker	919-857-9428
5/18		Tucson, AZ	Resource Fair	Mark Jensen	520-792-1450 x5559
5/9/12		San Francisco Women's Building 3543 18th Street San Francisco CA	SHOUT! Art by Women Veterans	Swords to Plowshares	http://www.swords-to-plowshares.org/shout/

We are a non-partisan organization. We will advertise all legitimate veterans' events, regardless of purpose or affiliation.

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

A PUSH TO HELP U.S. VETERANS FIGHT HOMELESSNESS

Pam Fessler – NPR - April 16, 2012

Last year, the number of homeless U.S. veterans on a given night dropped 12 percent from the year before. But tens of thousands were still on the streets, and more could be joining them as troops return from Afghanistan and Iraq. President Obama has vowed to end veterans' homelessness by 2015.

... [there is] an ambitious campaign by the federal government, local agencies and nonprofits to help former servicemen — and a growing number of female veterans — who often are so down and out, they don't know where to turn.

"I believe we can absolutely do this," says Christine Marge of the United Way of Greater Los Angeles, which is overseeing a project to end veterans' and chronic homelessness in the city. Marge is optimistic.

<More at: <http://www.npr.org/2012/04/16/150578330/a-push-to-help-u-s-veterans-fight-homelessness>>

HOMELESSNESS AMONG FEMALE VETERANS

Published: April 16, 2012

The Veterans Affairs Department is in the middle of an ambitious five-year plan to end homelessness among veterans by 2015. It should make sure that this effort protects the vulnerable population of women, whose risks and needs can be far different from those of men. The number of female veterans has soared since 1990, from 4 percent of all veterans to 8 percent today, or about 1.8 million. How many are homeless is unknown, though a report by the Government Accountability Office in December found that the number who had contact with the V.A. rose to 3,328 in 2010 from 1,380 in 2006.

<More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/17/opinion/homelessness-among-female-veterans.html>>

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TWO ARTICLES HAS TRUE NUMBERS???

BLS DATA CONFIRM HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AMONG YOUNG VETS

Federal Daily Staff - Mar 21, 2012

A report on the employment status of veterans in 2011 found a particularly high jobless rate among young male vets who served on active duty since September 2011. The findings were contained in a report released March 20 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

While veterans as a group who have served since September 2011—whom BLS refers to as “Gulf War-era II” vets—had an unemployment rate of 12.1 percent in 2011, young male vets ages 18 to 24 who served during that era had an unemployment rate of 29.1 percent in 2011. Non-vets of the same age group had a 17.6 percent unemployment rate in 2011.

<More at: <http://federaldaily.com/articles/2012/03/21/bls-data-show-high-unemployment-rate-among-young-vets.aspx>>

JOBLESS VETS FIRE BACK

Kyle Stock - April 9, 2012

U.S. employers, spurred by new tax breaks and a fast-improving economy, are beginning to enlist young veterans en masse. In the past year, some 224,000 veterans of the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have fought their way back into the working world, according to federal data released Friday. Most of that job growth came in the past three months, a period in which, for the first time in about four years, the unemployment rate for young veterans was not drastically higher than that of the U.S. at large. In March, 10.2 percent of soldiers and sailors who served in recent wars were out of work, compared with 7.5 percent of all veterans and 8.2 percent of U.S. residents. <More at: www.thedaily.com/page/2012/04/09/040912-biz-vets-1-3>

80% OF WOUNDED VETERANS CITE MENTAL HEALTH WOES

Patricia Kime - Staff writer - Mar 24, 2012

In a survey conducted this year of wounded Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, nearly 80 percent reported having symptoms of a combat-related mental health condition, and roughly half said they had a traumatic brain injury.

Among the 2,300 Wounded Warrior Project members who responded to the survey, 62 percent said they currently have depression — nearly eight times the rate in the general population and more than four times the figure cited in a 2008 Rand Corp. report on military head injuries and mental health conditions. About a third said their conditions have made it difficult to get or hold a job. The conditions also hamper relationships and recovery, respondents said.

<More at: www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2012/03/military-80-percent-of-wounded-vets-have-mental-health-trouble-032412w/>

A MAJOR CONTRIBUTOR TO MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AMONG FEMALE VETERANS

DOD RELEASES ANNUAL SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE AND PREVENTION REPORT

April 13, 2012

The Department of Defense today released the fiscal 2011 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, as required by the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal 2011. To date, this is the eighth report DoD has released.

The report finds that in fiscal 2011, there were a total of 3,192 reports of sexual assault involving service members as either victims or subjects. This represents a one percent increase in reports of sexual assault compared to fiscal 2010.

<More at: www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=15185>

THE PENTAGON IS CAMOUFLAGING THE TRUTH ABOUT RAPE IN THE MILITARY

Nancy Parrish - 04/20/2012

On Friday of last week, the Department of Defense issued its Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military. First conducted in 2004, this report has helped shine a light on the severity and scope of the crisis of rape in the US military. The disturbing statistics that have been reported include the stunning estimate that, in FY 2010, there were 19,000 sexual assaults among Active Duty personnel.

The 2011 report validates our worst fears. The data shows that the military's handling of sexual assaults is getting worse, much worse. Charges, courts-martial and convictions plummeted, but there is absolutely no indication that sex crimes decreased.

But while the report is extremely troubling, of even greater concern is the Pentagon's determined effort to confuse and misinform the public about its own findings. The Pentagon has chosen to emphasize a one minor ripple in the data that could be considered an improvement: the 10% increase in the percentage of sexual assault related charges that resulted in court-martial trials. In reality: Charges have decreased, courts-martial fell and convictions plummeted.

<More at: www.huffingtonpost.com/nancy-parrish/rape-in-the-military_b_1434539.html>

MARINES, NAVY AND DOD SUED AGAIN FOR RAPE OF MILITARY WOMEN

By Ann Wright

The Marine Barracks in Washington, DC is the official residence of the Commandant of the Marine Corps and the home of the Marines who are the ceremonial guard for the President during official US government functions and are the security force for the White House and Camp David. The Marine Band, also located at the Marine Barracks, is known as "The President's Own." The Marine Barracks is the showplace of the Marine Corps with its Silent Drill Team giving weekly military precision performances for the public in the busy summer tourist season.

But, the Marine Barracks has its dark and ugly side. It is also the home of predators and rapists -- officers and enlisted men of the Marine Corps who sexually harass, assault and rape women Marine officers, enlisted women and civilian women who work at the Marine Barracks.

According to information provided at the request of the Senate Armed Services Committee Minority Counsel by the Marine Barracks Washington Legal Adviser from 2009 to 2010 three women Marines and two civilian women reported to the Navy Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) that they had been raped by male Marines. Two of the women Marines held high visibility jobs at the Marine Barracks and were raped by senior officers.

<More at: www.opednews.com/articles/1/Marines-Navy-and-DOD-Sued-by-Ann-Wright-120323-655.html>

RAPE VICTIMS SAY MILITARY LABELS THEM 'CRAZY'

David S. Martin - CNN April 14, 2012

Stephanie Schroeder joined the U.S. Marine Corps not long after 9/11. She was a 21-year-old with an associate's degree when she reported for boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina. "I felt like it was the right thing to do," Schroeder recalls.

A year and a half later, the Marines diagnosed her with a personality disorder and deemed her psychologically unfit for the Corps.

Anna Moore enlisted in the Army after 9/11 and planned to make a career of it. Moore was a Patriot missile battery operator in Germany when she was diagnosed with a personality disorder and dismissed from the Army.

Jenny McClendon was serving as a sonar operator on a Navy destroyer when she received her personality disorder diagnosis.

These women joined different branches of the military but they share a common experience: Each received the psychiatric diagnosis and military discharge after reporting a sexual assault.

<More at: www.cnn.com/2012/04/14/health/military-sexual-assaults-personality-disorder/index.html>

RIGHT STEPS ON MILITARY SEXUAL ASSAULT

April 17, 2012

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta on Monday announced several encouraging steps to fight sexual assault in the military. The most notable is the requirement that complaints be handled by senior officers — colonels or Navy captains — instead of lower-ranking officers who are often ill equipped or reluctant to pursue assault cases. He said special units would be set up in each service branch to interview victims and collect evidence. Recruits would be briefed on sexual-assault policies within 14 days of joining the service. National Guard members and reservists who file complaints would be able to stay on active duty during investigations so their cases are not dropped. Case records will be maintained, the problem will be tracked and commanders will have to regularly assess whether their units are following the rules.

It is easy to be skeptical whenever the military talks about its "zero tolerance" toward sexual crimes. The decades are papered with pledges by Pentagon leaders to end such violence, but somehow it continues. A Defense Department report released Friday showed that reported sexual assaults were up slightly in 2011, to 3,192, from 3,158 in 2010. The Pentagon believes such crimes are vastly underreported and says about 19,000 assaults are committed every year.

<More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/18/opinion/right-steps-on-sexual-assault-in-the-military.html>>

A FOG OF DRUGS AND WAR

Kim Murphy - Los Angeles Times - April 7, 2012

More than 110,000 active-duty Army troops last year took antidepressants, sedatives and other prescription medications. Some see a link to aberrant behavior.

SEATTLE — U.S. Air Force pilot Patrick Burke's day started in the cockpit of a B-1 bomber near the Persian Gulf and proceeded across nine time zones as he ferried the aircraft home to South Dakota.

Every four hours during the 19-hour flight, Burke swallowed a tablet of Dexedrine, the prescribed amphetamine known as "go pills." After landing, he went out for dinner and drinks with a fellow crewman. They were driving back to Ellsworth Air Force Base when Burke began striking his friend in the head. "Jack Bauer told me this was going to happen — you guys are trying to kidnap me!" he yelled, as if he were a character in the TV show "24."

When the woman giving them a lift pulled the car over, Burke leaped on her and wrestled her to the ground. "Me and my platoon are looking for terrorists," he told her before grabbing her keys, driving away and crashing into a guardrail.

<More at: <http://latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-army-medication-20120408.0.1291311.story>>

ARMY: PTSD TREATABLE; SOME DIAGNOSED RETURN TO WAR

JULIE WATSON - Associated Press - March 23, 2012

SAN DIEGO — It is still not known if the soldier accused of killing 17 Afghans was ever diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder - but even if he had been, that alone would not have prevented him from being sent back to war.

The Army diagnosed 76,176 soldiers with PTSD between 2000 and 2011. Of those, 65,236 soldiers were diagnosed at some stage of their deployment. Many returned to the battlefield after mental health providers determined their treatment worked and their symptoms had gone into remission, Army officials and mental health professionals who treat troops say. The Army does not track the exact number in combat diagnosed with PTSD nor those who are in combat and taking medicine for PTSD.

<More at: http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/localnews/2017823516_apusafghanistansuspectpsd7thldwritethru.html>

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE ILLEGALLY DISCHARGED VETERANS FOR HAVING PERSONALITY DISORDER, YALE GROUP FINDS

Mary E. O'Leary - Topics Editor - March 23, 2012

NEW HAVEN — The Department of Defense has illegally discharged hundreds of veterans in the past decade by not following their own protocols when making a diagnosis of personality disorder, which denies them certain medical benefits and carries a stigma that hurts re-entry to civilian life.

That conclusion is based on data collected from the Department of Defense as the result of two Freedom of Information suits filed by the Veterans Services Clinic at Yale Law School on behalf of its clients, Vietnam Veterans of America.

See: VVA Personality Disorder Whitepaper www.scribd.com/doc/86403627/VVA-Personality-Disorder-Whitepaper

<More at: www.ctbulletin.com/articles/2012/03/23/news/doc4f6bc1ba0a66c857872265.txt>

40% OF PTSD DIAGNOSES AT MADIGAN WERE REVERSED

Hal Bernton - Seattle Times staff reporter - March 20, 2012

A Madigan Army Medical Center screening team reversed more than 40 percent of the post-traumatic stress disorder diagnoses of patients under consideration for medical retirement since 2007, according to information released by U.S. Sen. Patty Murray.

The statistics were compiled as part of an ongoing Army Medical Command investigation into the screening team's practices. The team has been suspended from PTSD evaluations, and the Army Medical Command is offering new evaluations to patients whose diagnoses were reversed. <More at: http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/localnews/2017801388_ptsd21.html>

DON'T WORRY! DOD HAS TWO POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR YOU

FIRST ~ YOU CAN PAY MORE FOR WHAT YOU ARE NOT GETTING

PANETTA TIES TRICARE FEE INCREASES TO MAINTAINING KEY PROGRAMS, PERSONNEL

Bob Brewin - 04/16/2012

... Panetta said the 2013 budget is a "zero-sum game" and any changes to it will require cuts in key systems and projects that support the long-term strategy. The budget includes increases in fees for the Defense TRICARE health insurance program ranging from \$35 to \$155 per month for military retirees in an effort to curb spiraling health care costs. Defense Comptroller Robert Hale said in February that these increases, after four years, would boost retiree health care costs to just under \$2,000 a year, compared with the \$4,000 per year federal civilian employees pay. <More at: www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20120416_9609.php>

SECOND, AND IF ALL ELSE FAILS ~ HIGH TECH WILL SET YOU FREE!

DARPA TO TROUBLED SOLDIERS: MEET YOUR NEW SIMULATED THERAPIST

Katie Drummond – WIRED - April 20, 2012

The Pentagon hasn't made much progress in solving the PTSD crisis plaguing this generation of soldiers. Now it's adding new staff members to the therapy teams tasked with spotting the signs of emotional pain and providing therapy to the beleaguered. Only this isn't a typical hiring boost. The new therapists, Danger Room has learned, will be computer-generated "virtual humans" programmed to appear empathetic.

It's the latest in a long series of efforts to assuage soaring rates of depression, anxiety and PTSD that afflict today's troops. Military brass have become increasingly willing to try just about anything, from yoga and reiki to memory-adjustment pills, that holds an iota of promise. They've even funded computerized therapy before: In 2010, for example, the military launched an effort to create an online health portal that'd include video chats with therapists.

But this project, funded by DARPA, the Pentagon's far-out research arm, is way more ambitious. DARPA's research teams are hoping to combine 3-D rendered simulated therapists — think *Sims* characters mixed with ELIZA — with sensitive analysis software that can actually detect psychological symptoms "by analyzing facial expressions, body gestures and speech," Dr. Albert Rizzo, who is leading the project alongside Dr. Louis-Philippe Morency, tells Danger Room.

<More at: www.wired.com/dangerroom/2012/04/darpa-virtual-therapy/>

AND WHICH OF THESE TWO STORIES MAKES SENSE?

VA SEES SHORTFALL OF MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALISTS

Gregg Zoroya, USA TODAY - 4/4/2012

As thousands of additional veterans seek mental health care every month, the Department of Veterans Affairs is short of psychiatrists, with 20% vacancy rates in much of the country served by VA hospitals, according to department data.

In Montana, where veterans wait an average of five weeks to begin counseling, an eight-bed wing of a mental health facility at Fort Harrison has been vacant for nine months because of a lack of psychiatrists, the VA says. The Rocky Mountain VA region needs to fill nearly one of four psychiatrist positions.

The vacancies occur at a time when the number of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder is increasing by about 10,000 every three months, what experts say is the cumulative effect of a decade of war, VA data show.

<More at: www.usatoday.com/news/military/story/2012-04-04/military-veteran-mental-health-psychiatrists/54009974/1>

VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT PLANS TO ADD ABOUT 1,900 MENTAL HEALTH STAFF AS MORE SEEK CARE

Associated Press – April 19, 2012

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs says it's increasing its staff of mental health workers by roughly 1,900.

VA Secretary Eric Shinseki announced the plan Thursday, saying the government must make sure all veterans have adequate access to health care. <More at: www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/veterans-affairs-department-plans-to-add-about-1900-mental-health-workers-as-more-seek-care/2012/04/19/gIQAxkX7ST_story.html>

VA'S DISABILITY CLAIMS BACKLOG PUSHES 900,000

Bob Brewin - 04/19/2012

The Veterans Affairs Department faces a "staggering" backlog of 897,566 disability claims with more than 65 percent pending for more than 125 days, a problem compounded by an error rate of 16 percent, representatives of veterans' services organizations told lawmakers on the House Veterans Affairs Committee on Wednesday. The department has seen a 48 percent increase in claims since 2008. Officials expect the backlog will grow to 1.2 million claims this year and another 50,000 will accrue in 2013 as veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars flood the system, Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki told the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee in March. He vowed to process all claims in fewer than 125 days with a 98 percent accuracy standard by 2015. <More at: www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20120419_7422.php>

EVEN WHEN THEY HAVE THE PEOPLE, THE PEOPLE HAVE TO DO THEIR JOBS. WE'D HATE TO INCONVENIENCE THEM, WOULDN'T WE!

SOCIAL WORKERS FAILED TO ENSURE PROPER CARE FOR DISTRESSED VETERAN

Aaron Glantz - The Bay Citizen - 21 March 2012

Social workers at the Department of Veterans Affairs hospital in Palo Alto made "no attempt" to ensure a mentally ill Iraq war veteran was admitted to the hospital in the days before he killed himself by stepping in front of a train May 2010, according to a report released Wednesday by the VA's Office of the Inspector General in Washington, D.C.

The investigation into the death of William Hamilton, 26, came after The Bay Citizen reported that the 26-year-old was refused entry into the Department of Veterans Affairs hospital psychiatric ward in Palo Alto four days before he died.

Hamilton, who had previously been admitted to the Palo Alto VA's psychiatric ward on nine separate occasions, saw demons and regularly talked to a man he had killed in Iraq, according to his medical records. Three days before he died, Hamilton's father brought him to a local community hospital in Calaveras County which, according to hospital records obtained by The Bay Citizen, tried to transfer him to the three VA hospitals, including the one in Palo Alto. But at 4:39 p.m., a VA social worker wrote in his notebook that the Palo Alto facility "would not accept a transfer of a veteran for admittance this late in the day."

<More at: www.baycitizen.org/veterans/story/report-social-workers-failed-veteran/>

SUICIDES HIGHLIGHT FAILURES OF VETERANS' SUPPORT SYSTEM

Aaron Glantz - March 24, 2012

Francis Guilfoyle, a 55-year-old homeless veteran, drove his 1985 Toyota Camry to the Department of Veterans Affairs campus in Menlo Park early in the morning of Dec. 3, took a stepladder and a rope out of the car, threw the rope over a tree limb and hanged himself. It was an hour before his body was cut down, according to the county coroner's report.

"When I saw him, my heart just sank," said Dennis Robinson, 51, a formerly homeless Army veteran who discovered Mr. Guilfoyle's body. "This is supposed to be a safe place where a vet can get help. Something failed him."

Mr. Guilfoyle's death is one of a series of recent suicides by veterans who live in the jurisdiction of the DVA Palo Alto Health Care System. <More at: www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/us/recent-california-suicides-highlight-failures-of-veterans-support-system.html>

MAYBE THE VA IS JUST WAITING FOR SOME OF THOSE THOUSANDS OF MISSING THERAPISTS ~ YOU THINK?

PAPERWORK BURIES VETERANS' DISABILITY CLAIMS

Aaron Glantz - April 14, 2012

Even after Ian Rodriguez left the Marine Corps in 2006, he still felt like he was in Iraq.

The burly veteran, who played defensive end on the College of San Mateo football team before joining the military, would sometimes wake up in the middle of the night at home in San Bruno and grab his girlfriend, putting both hands around her neck.

"I had no ill will toward her," Mr. Rodriguez, 28, said in an interview, "but while I was asleep I felt like I was still back there, and I acted it out." He said he slept with a .40-caliber Glock pistol under his pillow and drank a bottle of whiskey every night to help him forget the war and fall asleep.

In December 2006, Mr. Rodriguez filed a claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs, arguing that he deserved a monthly disability check and priority mental health care from the agency because of post-traumatic stress disorder. More than five years later, he is still waiting for a final determination on his case.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2012/04/15/us/bay-area-veterans-disability-claims-are-buried-under-paperwork.html>

DON'T FRET, IAN. THE VA IS ON TARGET TO HELP YOU IN THREE MORE YEARS

NEW VA INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE BENEFITS DELIVERY TO VETERANS AND FAMILIES

Press Release: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) –Apr 16, 2012

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced today the national deployment of claims transformation initiatives to 12 regional offices in the remaining months of fiscal year 2012 to improve benefits delivery to Veterans, families and their survivors.

"This is an important milestone in our transformation to achieve the goal we established in 2009 of processing all disability claims within 125 days at a 98 percent accuracy level in 2015," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki.

<More at: www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2299>

VETERANS CRISIS HOTLINE

The hotline for anyone needing immediate help with mental health issues is **800-273-8255**.

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE FRIDAY 20 APRIL 2012

OP'N IRAQI FREEDOM/NEW DAWN (2,721/598 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,408/78
WOUNDED US [4/2/12]	31,921/2,539
OTHER US CASUALTIES [4/2/12]	40,374/2,649
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [4/2/12]	223/12
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED UK	179
KILLED OTHER COALITION	139/1
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/25/09]	≥ 48,874
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [3/21/12]	≥ 115,514–1,455,590
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS[9/20/10]	≥ 400K–1.556M
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M

OP'N ENDURING FREEDOM (3,849 DAYS)

KILLED US	1,943
WOUNDED US [4/2/12]	15,560
OTHER CASUALTIES US [4/2/12]	15,972
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [4/2/12]	77
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	0
KILLED COALITION	1,017
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/07)	1,602
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY[7/4/09]	≥ 11,152
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (9/10/2010)	≥ 8,813
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (2/24/2009)	46,322
AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$802,893,388,251
COST OF AFGHAN WAR TO DATE	\$521,310,918,208

NOTE: SOME NUMBERS DO NOT CHANGE BETWEEN ISSUES BECAUSE UPDATED FIGURES ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME

* This entry has been changed to "Non-mortal casualties" which includes wounded, non-hostile casualties, and diseased where medical air transport was required. ** Includes 280 additional contractor casualties reported in international press but not in US official figures

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF APRIL 14, 2012

This week the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps announced a decrease in activated reservists while the Coast Guard announced an increase. The Navy announced no change. The net collective result is 665 fewer reservists activated than last week. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 52,350; Navy Reserve, 4,763; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 9,221; Marine Corps Reserve, 4,804, and the Coast Guard Reserve, 759. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 71,897, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated may be found on line at www.defense.gov/news/d20120313ngr.pdf.

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

WILL HUNTING HAD IT RIGHT 15 YEARS AGO

<More at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8rQNdBmPek&feature=email>>

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

PRE 2003 VERSION OF U.S. SOLDIER'S CREED

I am an American Soldier.

I am a member of the United States Army – a protector of the greatest nation on earth.

Because I am proud of the uniform I wear, I will always act in ways creditable to the military service and the nation it is sworn to guard.

I am proud of my own organization. I will do all I can to make it the finest unit in the Army.

I will be loyal to those under whom I serve. I will do my full part to carry out orders and instructions given to me or my unit.

As a soldier, I realize that I am a member of a time-honored profession—that I am doing my share to keep alive the principles of freedom for which my country stands.

No matter what the situation I am in, I will never do anything, for pleasure, profit, or personal safety, which will disgrace my uniform, my unit, or my country.

I will use every means I have, even beyond the line of duty, to restrain my Army comrades from actions disgraceful to themselves and to the uniform.

I am proud of my country and its flag.

I will try to make the people of this nation proud of the service I represent, for I am an American Soldier

CURRENT VERSION OF US SOLDIER'S CREED

I am an American Soldier.

I am a Warrior and a member of a team.

I serve the people of the United States, and live the Army Values.

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills.

I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.

I am an expert and I am a professional.

I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy, the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.

I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.

I am an American Soldier.

CALIFORNIA'S FORT ORD TO BECOME NATIONAL MONUMENT

San Jose Mercury News - April 20, 2012

SAN JOSE, Calif. -- Fort Ord, the sweeping former military base north of Monterey, Calif., known for its oceanfront landscape and a history that dates back to horse cavalry soldiers in World War I, will become America's newest national monument. <More at: <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2012/04/fort-ord-california-national-monument-obama.html>>

FRATERNITY PAINTS OVER MURAL FOR FALLEN SOLDIER

The Associated Press - Apr 20, 2012

WEST SPARTA, N.Y. — Officials at an upstate New York college say they suspended a fraternity after its Greek letters were painted over a roadside mural dedicated to a soldier killed in Afghanistan. An administrator at Alfred State College tells The Associated Press Friday that Kappa Sigma Epsilon has been temporarily suspended while the school investigates the matter.

Friends of Army Sgt. Devin Snyder of Cohocton painted her image and an American flag on a large rock alongside Interstate 390 in Livingston County. She died last June during an attack that killed three other soldiers.

College officials say they were told the mural was vandalized earlier this week. The mural is about 25 miles north of Alfred. State police say they are investigating but no other information was immediately available.

www.armytimes.com/news/2012/04/ap-fraternity-paints-over-mural-fallen-soldier-042012/

RYDER LAUNCHES CAREER WEBSITE FOR VETERANS

Press Release: Ryder System, Inc. – 4/17/2012

Military Recruiting Website Helps Veterans Easily Match Their Skills to Open Ryder Jobs

MIAMI--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- Ryder System, Inc. (NYSE:R), a leader in commercial transportation and supply chain management solutions, has launched a new military recruiting website at www.ryder.com/military to help veterans easily match their military skills with open positions at Ryder. The new website is part of Ryder's military recruiting efforts, which includes a commitment to hire 1,000 military veterans by 2013.

At www.ryder.com/military, veterans can access an automated feature that enables them to search for jobs according to their specific Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) or Military Occupation Code (MOC). Once a veteran enters his or her MOS/MOC into Ryder's search engine, it will automatically filter the search to display open positions at Ryder that specifically match that job code. The website also enables veteran applicants to search for jobs by geography, keyword, or job title. Ryder currently has more than 670 job openings across all states in the U.S.

<More at: <http://newsroom.ryder.com/press-release/fleet-management-solutions-products/ryder-launches-career-website-veterans>>

NOTICE

If at any time you cannot open a link in this newsletter to an article or web page that interests you, please let me know at scook@vuft.org; I keep a copy of most of the full articles, or can research an alternative route to the information. [Ed.]

VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: I have been asked what guides my selection of articles. In general, I try to stick with articles that deal exclusively with our target group: serving military, veterans, retirees, and their families. I also favor articles that deal with the effect of Legislative or Executive inaction or bad actions that adversely affect our target group. I try not to pick those articles that have already been beaten to death in the regular press, but rather try to bring the reader articles that he or she might not run across in another medium. While we are non-partisan, I do not believe articles critical of government actions to be partisan as long as they are accurate and fair. Criticism, like dissent, is fair. Finally, I screen hundreds of articles for inclusions and for every article I include, I throw five or six away – good articles, but not as important as the ones selected.

I always appreciate contributions, whether it is opinion in Letter-to-the-Editor form, or articles that the reader believes would be good for our readership. Since I get a chance to vent once in awhile in these newsletters, I will certainly consider Op-Ed copy for inclusion. I always welcome reader comment or complaint. Sandy Cook, Editor <mailto:scook@vuft.org>

If you need to call us, our number is 1.805.530.6417.

The phone is covered by a voice recorder 24 hours a day. We'll get back to you ASAP.