

# Sound Off!



Vol. II, No 8

The Newsletter of VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, Inc.

*"Veterans standing up for each other"*

10 15 December 2006

## First Call - THEME OF THE ISSUE AND/OR CLIPS & QUOTES

### Where the hell are our priorities as a nation?

You probably get pretty tired of my ranting about shared sacrifice, and common obligations. To me there is no more obvious change in this country's attitude toward our brothers and sisters-in-arms than in the newspapers and where they place their emphasis, both in the coverage, and in the placement of news in each issue.

This time of year is particularly indicative because we have had Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans' Day, Thanksgiving, and now Christmas Sales. The mercantile interests of the business community have trumped the interests of those involved in fighting this nation's current wars. Consumption as Patriotism.

Where is the outrage over this obvious misplacement of priorities? I look in the Op-Eds and the Letters to the Editors, but find none.

The public accepts the papers' and the broadcast media's emphasis and priorities. I can only believe that there is no response – no outrage – because the priorities set in the media have become the priorities in the minds of most Americans. Sad!

There was an extraordinary example of this shift in emphasis on 1 December in the *Los Angeles Times*. On the front-page, above-the-fold, in the "Column One" piece – a prime article placement – the Times presented the story of Rudy Kurniawan. Between page 1 and the continuation of the article on page 28 there was a full page on this new public hero. The title of the article was "[Young Wine Fanatic Ups the Ante](#)". In case you have not heard of Rudy Kurniawan, he is a 30 year-old Indonesian who moved to the US, and who's claim to fame is that he spends approximately \$1 million dollars a month buying fine wines, which he then consumes with gusto. He has friends over for dinner and sets out multiple bottles at five or six thousand dollars apiece for their pleasure and awe.

The language of the article was congratulatory if not adulatory. The wonder of the author, Corrie Brown, at this largesse was obvious. Her awe of his 50,000+ bottle collection, and the fact that he had just sold off his surplus for over \$34 million was palpable. She spent paragraphs observing and lamenting that his interest in high-priced booze was driving the market price up for other wealthy collectors, and that some would have to stop collecting.

Rudy has only been at it for 6 years and he doesn't consider himself satisfied yet. Now it isn't all that hard for him since he hasn't worked a day in his life. He has "earned" his money by being the son of an extremely wealthy father. A real cultural hero.

Rudy bridled when the author called him a collector. "Don't call me a collector – I'm a drinker." Shame on her!

Real news? Deep inside the paper there was a half page of President Bush with President Maliki. The article covered the President's comments that when he and his staff had said earlier in the week that Maliki was the wrong guy for Iraq, they really meant that he was the right guy. Also deep inside was another half page on the Iraq commission, and how they were expected to say that there should be a non-scheduled, eventual, gradual pullout of US forces from Iraq. A pretty safe comment, I guess, since someday, at some rate, the forces will pull out, even if it is 60 years from now, as in Europe, or 50 years as in Korea, except that in Iraq they will keep on dying.

While a whole page was devoted to Rudy, his bucks, and his obsession, there was a mere half page on those dying from AIDS in Africa because of ignorance of governments, including our own. It was interesting to compare the pictures from Harare, Zimbabwe of Maria Vidi and Otilia Tasikani, who were dying of AIDS, with the picture several pages earlier of Rudy tasting a bottle of wine out of a \$75,000 dollar case of the stuff, the price of which might have saved Maria and Otilia's lives.

In the entire first section of the paper, the section that handles national and international news, on our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan – nada, niente, nichevo, nothing.

Not a single word on the wars. No account of what was happening to other Americans who were sacrificing for their nation. Nothing about the mass graves found the previous day in Iraq. Nothing about the newly identified Army casualties, Spc Christopher Mason and Sgt Jeanette Dunn. Nothing about Spc Chris Kleinwachter who had died in Ghazni, Afghanistan. Nothing about the Italian troops lowering their flag for the last time in Iraq.

I have a vision. Some day we who bear the brunt of these wars will finally stand up and say to our neighbors who don't even think about what they send us to do, "If you want the good life you have to pay for it – we did." And we will say to the newspapers, "If you want us to buy your rags you have to cover fully the truly important issues in our lives."

Whatever happens, we will continue to protect Rudy. [Ed.]

If ye break faith with us, who die,  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow,  
In Flanders Fields.

## Reveille - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

### **wake up! spread the news!**

MEMBERSHIP IS OPEN, FREE, AND VERY WORTHWHILE! GET YOUR FELLOW VETERANS, AND VETERANS' FAMILY MEMBERS TO JOIN VUFT! WE ARE BEGINNING TO BE HEARD, AND WE NEED YOU TO HELP US GET THE MESSAGE OUT. IF EACH OF US WOULD BRING IN ONE NEW MEMBER EVERY MONTH, WHAT AN IMPACT WE COULD HAVE!

### **check out the website!**

PLEASE CHECK THE WEBSITE AT [WWW.VUFT.ORG](http://WWW.VUFT.ORG).

## Assembly - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

**Annual meeting** The annual meeting was held at the Anaheim Hilton, Anaheim, CA, at 1 PM on Saturday 9 December. Attendance was light (to say the least). A new 11-person board of directors was elected for 2007-8, and they will elect the four officers at their January meeting. Those elected were: Bob Handy, Don Katz, Russ Weed, George Giacoppe, Jim Cook, Harlan Hobgood, Tom Mullens, Thom O'Shaughnessy, Ric Schroeder, Ron Dexter, and Sandy Cook. We had good discussions on the progress to date of the organization, and better ones yet on the possibilities for the future. Some good ideas were presented on how we could pursue both our legislative action and our charitable goals.

The new board will be taking up the Strategic Plan for VUFT, Inc. at their next meeting on 28 January 2007 in Santa Barbara. From that strategic planning session we will develop our Operating Plan for 2007-08 and the initial stages of our Program Plans. We are planning to devote our 10 February issue of **Sound Off!** to laying out those plans for members.

**Be a member** If you are getting this newsletter and have not yet joined, please go to [our website](#) 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.

**Supporting the cause** If you wish to donate to our work you may now do so via PayPal or Visa on [our website](#) "Join" page. 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.

If you wish to volunteer your services to the organization, please contact the Chair at [rhandy@vuft.org](mailto:rhandy@vuft.org) or the Vice Chair at [scook@vuft.org](mailto:scook@vuft.org). Watch for details at [www.vuft.org](http://www.vuft.org)

## Mail call - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS

No letters this issue

## RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

### **So far, so good**

### **Congress passes legislation to extend veterans benefits**

December 07, 2006

Washington, D.C. — This week the House passed H.R. 6342, the Veterans Programs Extension Act of 2006. Once signed into law, this bill will extend several existing Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits provisions.

"Together, we have forged a bipartisan path for veterans' legislation and funding to provide our nation's heroes with much needed health care and benefits," said Subcommittee on Health Chairman Henry Brown (R-S.C.), speaking of the negotiations between House and Senate Committee members.

The legislation contains provisions to authorize VA to provide education benefits under chapter 35 to spouses and dependent children of severely injured servicemembers prior to the member's discharge. Given the long convalescence many of our severely injured servicemembers experience while being retained on active duty, it makes no sense to delay a spouse's ability to get the education and training that may be needed to help support the family. These are servicemembers who will most likely be discharged with permanent and total service-connected disabilities.

<More at: [www.vawatchdog.org/housecvanews/housecvanews12-07-06.htm](http://www.vawatchdog.org/housecvanews/housecvanews12-07-06.htm)>

## **But the real work doesn't get done!**

### **Budget increase for VA health care unlikely in 2007**

Rick Maze - December 12, 2006 - *Staff writer*

The 109th Congress shut down for good without providing any increases in money for Department of Veterans Affairs health care expenses next year — and the likelihood that the new 110th Congress will approve a budget increase before next autumn seems bleak. Despite pleas from major veterans' service organizations that an increase in the VA budget is warranted in time of war, Congress left town without doing anything to boost VA's fiscal 2007 budget covering the period of Oct. 1, 2006, through Sept. 30, 2007.

Lawmakers were able to pass just two of the standard required 13 appropriations bills needed to keep the government running before leaving town for their holiday recess. Instead, they approved a temporary spending measure known as a continuing resolution that allows agencies to keep spending — but only at fiscal 2006 levels until new, permanent funding bills are passed.

There had been talk about including a \$3 billion increase in the VA budget as part of the continuing resolution, but that effort fell flat when Republican congressional leaders were reluctant to make an exception for one agency because that could have opened the floodgates for hundreds of other adjustments, making quick passage of the resolution more difficult.

<More at: <http://www.navytimes.com/story.php?f=1-292925-2418919.php>>

## **in the states it takes even longer to get things changed for vets**

### **Committee backs larger veterans tax break**

The Associated Press – December 12, 2006

CHEYENNE - A proposal to increase the maximum lifetime property tax break for combat veterans from \$800 to \$3,000 has cleared an interim legislative committee. The Joint Revenue Committee unanimously endorsed the proposal Monday. ... The \$800 tax exemption was enacted in 1917. But the amount has never been increased.

<More at: [www.billingsgazette.net/articles/2006/12/12/news/wyoming/28-taxes.txt](http://www.billingsgazette.net/articles/2006/12/12/news/wyoming/28-taxes.txt)>

Of course, to get the same purchasing power for that \$800 in today's dollars you would need \$12,187.21, so the increase is hardly equitable [www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ppowerus/](http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ppowerus/)

## **RETREAT – NEWS**

### **“Discharged and dishonored”**

A special group of articles and video interviews on the McClatchy Washington Bureau Site that is well worth reading, with real stories to back up the data.

<[www.realcities.com/mld/krowashington/news/special\\_packages/veterans](http://www.realcities.com/mld/krowashington/news/special_packages/veterans)>

### **On the one hand ~**

#### **Joint Chiefs Advise Change In War Strategy**

Robin Wright and Ann Scott Tyson - Washington Post Staff Writers - December 14, 2006; A01

Leaders Seek No Major Troop Increase, Urge Shift in Focus to Support of Iraqi Army The nation's top uniformed leaders are recommending that the United States change its main military mission in Iraq from combating insurgents to supporting Iraqi troops and hunting terrorists, said sources familiar with the White House's ongoing Iraq policy review.

President Bush and Vice President Cheney met with the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff yesterday at the Pentagon for more than an hour, and the president engaged his top military advisers on different options. The chiefs made no dramatic proposals but, at a time of intensifying national debate about how to solve the Iraq crisis, offered a pragmatic assessment of what can and cannot be done by the military, the sources said.

The chiefs do not favor adding significant numbers of troops to Iraq, said sources familiar with their thinking, but see strengthening the Iraqi army as pivotal to achieving some degree of stability. They also are pressing for a much greater U.S. effort on economic reconstruction and political reconciliation.

<More at: [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/13/AR2006121301379.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/13/AR2006121301379.html)>

### **But on the other hand ~**

## **McCain: Deploy More Troops to Iraq**

Thomas Wagner - The Associated Press - December 14, 2006

BAGHDAD, [Iraq](#) -- Sen. John McCain said Thursday that America should to deploy 15,000 to 30,000 more troops to Iraq to control its sectarian violence, and give moderate Iraqi politicians the stability they need to take the country in the right direction. McCain made the remarks to reporters in Baghdad, where he and five other members of Congress were meeting with U.S. and Iraqi officials.

"The American people are disappointed and frustrated with the Iraq war, but they want us to succeed if there's any way to do that," McCain, a possible 2008 presidential candidate, said at a news conference at the U.S. Embassy in Iraq's heavily fortified Green Zone.

The Arizona Republican said five to 10 more brigades of U.S. combat soldiers must be sent to Iraq. Brigades vary in size but generally include about 3,000 troops, meaning he was recommending 15,000 to 30,000 additional forces.

<More at: [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/14/AR2006121400285.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/14/AR2006121400285.html)>

## **And on yet another hand ~**

### **Army chief seeks more forces, reserves**

Lolita C. Baldor, Associated Press Writer

As President Bush weighs new strategies for Iraq, the Army's top general warned Thursday that his force "will break" without thousands more active duty troops and greater use of the reserves.

Noting the strain put on the force by operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the global war on terrorism, Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker said he wants to grow his half-million-member Army beyond the 30,000 troops already added in recent years.

Though he didn't give an exact number, he said it would take significant time and commitment by the nation, noting some 6,000 to 7,000 soldiers could be added per year.

Officials also need greater authority to tap into the National Guard and Reserve, long ago set up as a strategic reserve but now needed as an integral part of the nation's deployed forces, Schoomaker told a commission studying possible changes in those two forces. <More at: [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20061214/ap\\_on\\_go\\_ca\\_st\\_pe/us\\_iraq](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20061214/ap_on_go_ca_st_pe/us_iraq)>

## **U.S. military postpones plan to build complex for war-crimes trials at Guantanamo**

The Associated Press - December 10, 2006

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico: The Pentagon will not try to use emergency powers to build a compound to hold war-crimes trials at Guantanamo Bay, according to a member of a Senate panel that oversees funding for military construction projects. The U.S. Defense Department notified Sen. Dianne Feinstein, a California Democrat, that it canceled a contract solicitation to build the new courthouse complex at the isolated base in southeast Cuba because of concerns about the location and funds for the facility, according to a statement from her office.

<More at: [www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/12/10/news/CB\\_GEN\\_Guantanamo\\_War\\_Crimes\\_Compound.php](http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/12/10/news/CB_GEN_Guantanamo_War_Crimes_Compound.php)>

## **America's Secret War**

Joe Piasecki ~ Los Angeles City Beat ~ November 30, 2006

Victims of sexual assault while serving in the military are the unknown casualties of war

At a forum held earlier this month at Pasadena City College, women vets of the U.S. military went public with their own personal stories to raise awareness of the least-acknowledged casualties of the wars in the Middle East: rapes of U.S. servicewomen by their fellow soldiers. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs records obtained by CityBeat show that more than 20 percent of female veterans who used VA health care services nationwide between October 2001 and September 2005 – that's nearly 44,000 women – reported being victims of sexual assault or harassment, sometimes by fellow servicemembers.

<More at: [www.lacitybeat.com/article.php?id=4677&IssueNum=182](http://www.lacitybeat.com/article.php?id=4677&IssueNum=182)>

## **What effect will this have when our citizens are taken captive?**

### **KILLING HABEAS CORPUS**

Stephen Aftergood – Secrecy News

Habeas corpus refers to the right of a person who has been detained by the government to challenge his detention in a court of law. Although the U.S. Constitution does not permit the suspension of habeas corpus except in case of invasion or rebellion, last September Congress did so anyway at the behest of the Bush Administration.

In a startling display of how easy it can be to disable even the most elementary constitutional protections, Congress enacted the [Military Commissions Act of 2006](#) (Public Law No: 109-366), which would deprive suspected enemy combatants held abroad of their ability to seek judicial review of their status.

Proposed limits on habeas corpus were the subject of an intense and contentious hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee recently, the record of which has just been published. See "[Examining Proposals to Limit Guantanamo Detainees' Access to Habeas Corpus Review](#)," Senate Judiciary Committee, September 25:

Some of the more electric moments in the hearing were recounted in The New Yorker this week in a profile of Sen. Arlen Specter, who inexplicably condemned the proposed new restrictions on habeas corpus and then voted in favor of them. See "[Killing Habeas Corpus](#)" by Jeffrey Toobin, The New Yorker, December 4:

"In my view, [the Military Commissions Act] has dishonored our Nation's proud history," said Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT), who introduced [legislation](#) on November 16 that would repeal several of the Act's provisions.

### **FBI says U.S. criminal gangs are using military to spread their reach**

Seth Robson, Stars and Stripes - European edition - December 7, 2006

GRAFENWÖHR, Germany — U.S. criminal gangs have gained a foothold in the U.S. military and are using overseas deployments to spread tentacles around the globe, according to the FBI. FBI gang investigator Jennifer Simon said in an e-mail to Stars and Stripes this week that gang members have been documented on or near U.S. military bases in Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea and Iraq.

"It's no secret that gang members are prevalent in the armed forces, including internationally," Simon said, adding that the FBI is preparing to release a report on gangs in the military.

<More at: <http://stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=41005&archive=true>>

### **Report Casts Military as War Weary**

Associated Press | December 11, 2006

WASHINGTON - Beyond its prescriptions for fixing Iraq, the special commission that studied a new approach to the war also spotlighted less obvious military ills that have deepened as fighting has dragging on.

The military is war-weary, the defense budget is in danger of disarray, and relations between the military brass and their civilian overseers are frayed, the Iraq Study Group said. The bipartisan panel's report poses tough challenges for Robert Gates, who has no previous Pentagon management experience but will become defense secretary on Dec. 18.

... "U.S. military forces, especially our ground forces, have been stretched nearly to the breaking point," the report said. This has made recruiting more difficult and accelerated wear on equipment, it said.

"Many units do not have fully functioning equipment for training when they redeploy to the United States," the study group said. "The American military has little reserve force to call on if it needs ground forces to respond to other crises around the world."

<More at: [www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,120311,00.html](http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,120311,00.html)>

### **Census Counts 100,000 Contractors in Iraq**

Renaë Merle - Washington Post - 05 December 2006

There are about 100,000 government contractors operating in Iraq, not counting subcontractors, a total that is approaching the size of the U.S. military force there, according to the military's first census of the growing population of civilians operating in the battlefield.

The survey finding, which includes Americans, Iraqis and third-party nationals hired by companies operating under U.S. government contracts, is significantly higher and wider in scope than the Pentagon's only previous estimate, which said there were 25,000 security contractors in the country.

It is also 10 times the estimated number of contractors that deployed during the Persian Gulf War in 1991, reflecting the Pentagon's growing post-Cold War reliance on contractors for such jobs as providing security, interrogating prisoners, cooking meals, fixing equipment and constructing bases that were once reserved for soldiers.

<More at: [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/04/AR2006120401311.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/04/AR2006120401311.html)>

## **Women Take on Major Battlefield Roles**

Associated Press | December 04, 2006

CHICAGO - A goodwill mission to deliver kerosene heaters to Iraqi schools erupts into the fiery chaos of a roadside bombing - and Maj. Mary Proffit shields a comrade so he can rescue a critically burned Iraqi soldier.

A convoy outside Baghdad is ambushed by machine-gun wielding Iraqi insurgents - and Specialist Ashley Pullen races down a road to help an injured sergeant.

A Black Hawk helicopter is struck by a rocket-propelled grenade in Iraq - and co-pilot Tammy Duckworth, bloody and severely wounded, struggles to stay conscious until the damaged aircraft is down and her crew is safe.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, women warriors are writing a new chapter in military history, serving by the tens of thousands, fending off enemy fire and taking on - and succeeding in - high-profile roles in the battlefield and the skies as never before.

"The American public is beginning to realize that women are playing an equal part in this war and that they are facing the same risks," says Duckworth, who lost both legs in the 2004 insurgent attack.

More than 155,000 women have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2002, according to the Pentagon, nearly four times the number during the Persian Gulf War. Females now account for 15 percent of the active duty force.

The number of women casualties - 68 dead and more than 430 injured - represents a tiny fraction of the total. Still, by one estimate, the deaths exceed the number of military women who lost their lives in Korea, Vietnam and the Gulf War combined.

<More at: [www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,119906,00.html](http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,119906,00.html)>

## **All service is honorable - why do they think they have to fudge? Legion chief alters line on war service**

Walter V. Robinson - Globe Correspondent - December 3, 2006

When Paul A. Morin , the national commander of the American Legion, sought election to the office in August, he described himself in the lead sentence of his campaign biography as a "Vietnam veteran of the US Army." Since he was elected Aug. 31, the Legion's website has featured the same description.

And when Morin testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee Sept. 20, US Representative Steve Buyer , Republican of Indiana, introduced him as an Army veteran of Vietnam. Morin registered no objection, according to the hearing transcript.

And three months ago, Morin said he hopes that servicemen returning from Iraq will be treated better than those who returned from Vietnam. "When we came home, life was a little different. We do not want to see any veteran ever returning to what we did, so we'll be there to be welcoming them home with open arms," Morin said, according to a transcript of his interview with the Pentagon Channel , the Defense Department's television network.

But the only place Morin ever returned from was Fort Dix, N.J. According to his military records, Morin spent his entire two years of Army service, from 1972 to 1974, at that Army training base . In fact, before he sought the coveted one-year term as national president of the country's largest veterans' organization, Morin was content to be known as a "Vietnam-era" veteran -- a signal to other veterans that he did not serve in Vietnam.

<More at: [www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2006/12/03/legion\\_chief\\_alters\\_line\\_on\\_war\\_service](http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2006/12/03/legion_chief_alters_line_on_war_service)>

## **I guess the truth hurts! Iraq Memorial Stirs Bad Blood in Town**

Michelle Locke - AP

LAFAYETTE, Calif. (Nov. 29) - The hundreds of white wooden crosses planted on a quiet suburban hillside honor the memory of troops killed in Iraq - or, depending on your leanings, exploit personal grief for politics. Jeff Heaton, who along with peace group members started putting up the crosses in early November in relatively conservative Lafayette, sees the effort as a simple tribute.

"It seemed like it would be a touching way to make people aware of the true costs of the war," he said.

But others are offended by the display of more than 400 crosses, on property owned by a friend of Heaton's. It sits opposite a commuter train station and is visible from a heavily traveled highway to San Francisco.

<More at: [www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/11/30/ap/national/mainD8LN8M800.shtml](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/11/30/ap/national/mainD8LN8M800.shtml)>

## To the Color - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
1/28	1000 - 1700	Santa Barbara, CA	VUFT Inc Annual Meeting	<a href="#">Bob Handy</a>	805-962-9082

**Let us know about meetings and gatherings and we will advertise them**

Note: We are a non-partisan organization that does not take a position, as an organization, on this war. We will advertise all legitimate veterans' events, regardless of purpose.

## TATTOO - Current Issues

### **Reserve troops facing job woes**

Barbara Slavin - USA TODAY - 12/8/2006

WASHINGTON — The number of reservists and National Guard members who say they have been reassigned, lost benefits or been fired from civilian jobs after returning from duty has increased by more than 70% over the past six years. The sharp spike in complaints brought to the U.S. Labor Department reflects the extensive use of part-time soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, the largest call up of reserves since the 1950-53 Korean War.

About 500,000 of the 850,000 reservists and National Guard members eligible for duty have been mobilized since late 2001, said Maj. Rob Palmer, spokesman for a Pentagon office that tries to resolve job disputes. Not all have been treated well by their employers when they return home. <More at: [www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-12-07-reserves-job-woes\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-12-07-reserves-job-woes_x.htm)>

### **Excellent article from *the Conservative voice* - click through!** **Troops Pay Hidden Cost Of War**

Diane M. Grassi *December 13, 2006*

The ravages of war are hell and collateral damage that includes loss of life, permanent disability and war-related illness in both military and civilian populations is expected. But too often American soldiers have been stung by the treatment they have received with respect to their healthcare upon returning stateside.

Unanticipated by the United States Department of Defense (DOD), healthcare services provided returning soldiers from the War in Viet Nam and more recently the Gulf War were grossly under-funded, and the criticism that endured thereafter was a lesson thought to be learned for future U.S. military engagements.

... There is no longer a shortage of laws and regulations in place as existed during Viet Nam or during the Gulf War with respect to mandated healthcare screenings for returning soldiers. But a lack of political will by the Department of Veterans Affairs in concert with the DOD added to a lack of oversight by a lethargic U.S. Congress, has made life extremely difficult for soldiers with acute mental health problems or those hoping to avoid them by seeking help.

<More at: [www.theconservativevoice.com/article/21112.html#](http://www.theconservativevoice.com/article/21112.html#)>

### **Vets Skeptical VA Can Cope with Iraq War Wave**

Gigi Stone

Improved Field Care Means Soldiers Who Would Have Died in Past Wars Now Live and Need Ongoing Care Nov. 25, 2006 — - Sgt. Brent Bretz has had 57 operations since he lost both legs in Iraq. Bretz, 24, is getting care at Brook Army Medical in San Antonio, and expects to be discharged soon on 100 percent disability. But he will need still more surgery and is counting on the Veterans Administration to pay for it.

Advances in body armor and battlefield medicine mean soldiers are surviving injuries that would have killed them in past wars. Some will need lifetime care -- which means the government is facing a massive bill. According to [recent research](#) by Columbia University economist Joseph Stiglitz and Harvard economist Linda Bilmes, caring for Iraq's wounded will cost the government \$127 billion.

<More at: [www.abcnews.go.com/WNT/print?id=2678859](http://www.abcnews.go.com/WNT/print?id=2678859)>

## **VA 'Retro Pay' Update**

Tom Philpott | December 01, 2006

'Retro Pay' So Far Reaches 31,000, Averages \$1500

Two months into a year-long review of pay records and disability compensation histories for 140,000 military retirees have produced a total of \$45 million in back pay to 31,000 disabled retirees, say officials in charge. The lump-sum payments average out to about \$1500 apiece. Ten retirees have received more than \$25,000 each, a sign that back payments will vary widely based on individual circumstance. The retroactive payments mostly involve VA dollars withheld because of start-up difficulties with two "concurrent receipt" programs for military retirees: Combat-Related Special Compensation ([CRSC](#)) and Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay ([CRDP](#)).

A retro pay hotline set up by DFAS in September so far has received 24,000 calls. That toll free number is 1-877-327-4457.

<More at: [www.military.com/features/0,15240,119765,00.html](http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,119765,00.html)>

## **Soldiers Say Army Ignores, Punishes Mental Anguish**

Daniel Zwerdling - *All Things Considered* - December 4, 2006 ·

Army studies show that at least 20 percent to 25 percent of the soldiers who have served in Iraq display symptoms of serious mental-health problems, including depression, substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Administration officials say there are extensive programs to heal soldiers both at home and in Iraq.

But an NPR investigation at Colorado's Ft. Carson has found that even those who feel desperate can have trouble getting the help they need. In fact, evidence suggests that officers at Ft. Carson punish soldiers who need help, and even kick them out of the Army.

<More at: [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6576505&sc=emaf](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6576505&sc=emaf)>

## **Report says VA's spending too slow**

Gregg Zoroya - USA TODAY - 12/4/2006

The Department of Veterans Affairs is too slow to spend the money it budgeted to treat the mental health needs of veterans, including those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, according to a Congressional study released Monday.

The VA budgeted \$300 million in fiscal 2005-06 for new mental health initiatives but spent only \$200 million, according to the study by the Government Accountability Office, the watchdog arm of Congress.

The study also found that the VA had little or no way of tracking spending for new mental health initiatives during those two years, and that some of the money it spent might not have gone toward mental health programs.

... VA officials planned to place at least some of the unspent money in a reserve fund to be used in fiscal year 2007, the GAO study says.

"We are taking some time," VA executive Gerald Cross told a House subcommittee Sept. 28. "But we want to make sure it's spent right." <More at: [www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-12-04-va-spending\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-12-04-va-spending_x.htm)>

## **Taps - Passings and War Statistics**

### **Moses Hardy, 113, Veteran of World War I, Dies**

JACKSON, Miss., Dec. 9 (AP) — Moses Hardy, believed to be the second-oldest man in the world and the last black United States veteran of World War I, died Thursday. He was 113. Evelyn Davis, 68, one of Mr. Hardy's eight children, said her father died at a nursing home in Aberdeen. He would have been 114 on Jan. 6.

Robert Young, a senior consultant for gerontology for Guinness World Records, said that research by his group, National Public Radio and others had been unable to locate any other surviving black World War I veterans. Only 10 to 12 American veterans of that war remain, Mr. Young said. Mr. Hardy was sent to France and apparently saw some combat. Census records show that Mr. Hardy's father was born in the 1830s and that both his parents were slaves, Mr. Young said. Mr. Hardy had been No. 6 on Guinness's list of the world's oldest people. Elizabeth Bolden, 116, of Memphis, is believed to be the oldest person, Mr. Young said, while the oldest man on the list is Emiliano Mercado del Toro, 115, of Puerto Rico. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/10/us/10hardy.html>

### **National Guard and Reserve Mobilized as of December 13, 2006**

This week, the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps announced a decrease, while the Coast Guard number remained the same. The net collective result is 1,974 fewer reservists mobilized than last week.



At any given time, services may mobilize some units and individuals while demobilizing others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. Total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 77,099; Navy Reserve, 4,938; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 5,741; Marine Corps Reserve, 5,716; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 363. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel, who have been mobilized, to 93,857, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel, who are currently mobilized, can be found at [www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec2006/d20061213ngr.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec2006/d20061213ngr.pdf).

**OIF/OEF – HACK DATE THURSDAY 14 DECEMBER 2006**

**OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM**

KILLED US	2,938
OTHER CASUALTIES [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 11/4]	≥46,137
KILLED UK	126
KILLED OTHER COALITION	121
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	741
**KILLED CONTRACTORS	656
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 35,860
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 56,040 [ LANCET – 687,713]
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400,000+ [ LANCET - 1,237,883]

**OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM**

KILLED US	356
*OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 9/30]	5,994
KILLED COALITION	219
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	657
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	32,034

*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. To see detailed demographic data on the casualties go to <http://siadapp.dior.whs.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/castop.htm>

\*\* Includes 280 additional contractor casualties reported in international press but not in US official figures

**afterthoughts**

**The difference between friends and military friends:**

Friends: Borrow your stuff for a few days and then give it back.

Military Friends: Borrow your stuff, keep it, and it goes PCS with them.

Friends: Know a few things about you.

Military Friends: Know all about you or have met someone else at another duty station who does.

Friends: Will leave you behind if that's what the crowd is doing.

Military Friends: Cry like babies because they HAVE to leave you.

Friends: Call your parents Mr. and Mrs.

Military Friends: Call your parents Mom and Dad.

Friends: Bail you out of jail and tell you what you did was wrong.

Military Friends: Would be sitting in jail next to you saying, "Man, they made a BIG mistake trying to jump us."

Friends: Have never seen you cry.

Military Friends: Cry with you.

Friends: Will knock on your front door

Military Friends: Walk right in and say, "I'm home."

Friends: Are your friends for a while

Military Friends: Are your friends for life as you move about this country or the world.

Friends: Will ignore this.

Military Friends: Will forward this

## 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](mailto:scook@vuft); I keep a copy of most of the full articles, or can research an alternative route to the information. [Ed.]

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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

## Add-on - fun, travel, adventure [fta]!

### **Military recruitment, beach party-style**

Justin Bergman, Associated Press (ASAP) - November 29, 2006

It certainly looks like a rockin' party.

Tan and lean, six college-aged kids dressed in bikinis and muscle shirts dance on a beach, huge smiles plastered across their faces. The sun is setting and they have their arms wrapped around each other. They don't seem to have a care in the world. It could be an ad for any number of beer or soda companies. But accompanying this photo is a different sort of message: "Freedom Rocks. Nothing rocks a party like the freedom to have it."



The ad is part of a new campaign developed last year by the U.S. Army National Guard to boost recruitment numbers among its target demographic -- college students. With no immediate end in sight to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the demand for new recruits remains high and the country's armed services have had to rely on increasingly inventive recruiting strategies to meet their annual quotas. As part of that effort, the National Guard is trying to present a less stodgy image that would be attractive to young people, particularly at sports venues, said Lt. Col. Mike Jones, head of Army National Guard recruiting.

The "Freedom Rocks" ad was plastered on walls at Yankee Stadium this summer; the Guard is also stepping up its advertising at NASCAR races and football games.

"The National Guard, they are civilian soldiers ... and most of them are in college, not in Iraq," Jones said in a telephone interview from Arlington, Va. "Being a soldier is a young men's and women's game now and we have to make sure that the college market is reached (in our campaigns)."

This specific campaign appears to be working. Jones said the "Freedom Rocks" ad brought in about 6,000 recruits in the last year, about a third of the Guard's total increase. The campaign is running in New York and about 10 other states, he said. But some critics question whether the ad, and others like it, purposely misrepresent the armed forces in order to bring in new recruits.

"There are a whole range of techniques used to blunt what the reality of war is," said Judith Siers-Poisson, associate director of the Center for Media and Democracy, a media and advertising watchdog group.

"I think that to emphasize anything but the fact there's a good chance they'll be sent to Iraq ... is somewhat disingenuous," she said.

"If you can put an overlay of fun and adventure (on the advertising message), tying it to the idea of a party, it's certainly going to help get your message across. It certainly wouldn't be the same if there was a billboard with a flag-draped coffin on it."

Jones sees it differently. He said there is nothing wrong with appealing to the lighter side of young people's lives in order to stress the importance of the freedoms they enjoy.

"We live real lives outside of being a soldier. We go to school, we enjoy life. Why not show that just because you are a soldier, it doesn't give up who you are and your desire to have fun, living life?" he said. "Having fun is part of being a soldier. I wouldn't want someone to depict my life as boring and stoic so people think I don't know how to have a good time."

Some young people seem to be comfortable with the imagery in the poster. Andre Stringer, 24, a student at the College of Staten Island, said he wasn't offended by the depiction of young people partying on the beach.

"It reminded me of the Bud Light ad on the subway," he said. "It made the National Guard look more enticing, more relaxed. It didn't look like you were marching to your death with face-paint on."

Jones said this was the point of the campaign -- to show a different side to the stiff-jawed recruits the National Guard has used in its advertising for years. He said the concept for the "Freedom Rocks" ad came from young soldiers who had just returned from Iraq and had been hired as recruiters.

"We poll our recruiters pretty extensively. They are the ones in the schools, in the communities, talking to kids and parents," he said. "We could spend a lot of money on focus groups, but we really believe if we have a 24-year-old recruiter back from overseas ... that is probably my best source of information about what the market would like to see." Jones said the Guard tries to strike a balance in all of its recruiting materials.

"If we do a serious message, some people would say you need to loosen up; if we do something less serious, people would say you need to tighten up," he said. "We are constantly making sure it's appropriate and tasteful, no matter what we do."

Still, some are uncomfortable with the approach of the recruiting campaign. Beck Feibelman, 33, a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, compared the poster to a cigarette advertisement that doesn't show people actually using the product, just having a good time.

Feibelman agreed with Siers-Poisson that the "Freedom Rocks" ad doesn't give a fair depiction of what life in the Guard could entail. "If you listen to news reports on the (Iraq) war, there doesn't seem to be a lot of dancing on the beach going on," he said. "I think it's irresponsible at best, nefarious at worst."