

SOUND OFF!



VOL. V, NO 9

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

25 DECEMBER 2009

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

HAPPY WHATEVER, I HOPE?

It's hard to come up with an appropriate greeting for all our service members, veterans, and their families and supporters at this holiday season. It is certainly hard to come up with a cheerful one.

Whether it is Hanukah, Christmas, Ramadan, Lohri, Kwanzaa, Festivus – whatever – there just doesn't seem to be any catchy phrase that can make things feel much better for those who are bearing the burden of the current wars, or the burden of wars long fought.

So, with everyone else blaring the “Spirit of the Season” and “Comfort and Joy”, I am going to indulge in a little “Bah Humbug!”

Nothing seems to be getting better, unless these count:

- We are getting out of Iraq – someday soon (we still have 120,000 soldiers there).
- And we are finally getting serious about Afghanistan (we have 100,000 there or will have very soon).
- We are reducing the use of contractor's in military jobs in Iraq (but increasing them in Afghanistan).
- We are making our enlistment goals (by lowering the goal post each year).
- Unemployment has “dropped” to 10% (no jobs for returning veterans).
- Foreclosures are down among the bankers and brokers – they're up for the rest of us (hope your home is there when you get back).

Just today I read a letter from a serving field grade officer who stated (I paraphrase) “There is nothing at all wrong with our Army. We can take care of any and all military tasks, anywhere in the world, all the time.”

Makes you wonder if you want your kids and grandkids to be led by someone who is so out of touch with reality, doesn't it? Ask yourself if today's Army and Marine Corps could take on another 100,000-person deployment right now.

Absolute realism is the first task of military leadership.

I understand his need to defend his service, but the truth is that our military ground forces – Army and Marines – is stretched to the breaking point. While the current deployment scheme is exhausting the active force, the continuing overuse of the Guard and Reserve is destroying the bench.

Nothing in any calculation is including the real cost of supporting returning veterans, some of them for life.

While good laws favoring veterans are on the books – USERRA is an example – no one is enforcing them.

We have to stop and praise those companies like Sears who really go beyond the requirements of USERRA and protect the jobs, pay the differences in salaries, and continue families on medical benefits while their employees are called up in the Guard and Reserve. Sears is not alone in this, but they are better than most. There are still precious few companies who step up.

Almost nothing is improving in the administrative side of the VA even though the medical side is among the finest in the world. All that good care is no good if you can't get into the system. Today's VA epitomizes the real difference between the much-touted “availability” and real “access”.

I have stated in these pages before that I support (reluctantly) the actions that are finally being taken in

Afghanistan. I believe that had we taken today's course in 2002, all of our troops would have been home a long time ago, including many who will never come home again.

There is a lesson to be learned from war, but it is one that we seem to forget every time. Wars cost, and the cost is tallied in much more than money.

How do we place a value on lives and families destroyed? How do we value the hatred we generate when we undertake aggressive and unnecessary wars? How do we put a price on the opportunity costs – the tasks left undone or delayed because we are spending our wealth on war?

Most of all, whatever the cost, why is the burden borne by so few?

Just this week some US Senators decided that in order to get their way on the health care bill they would filibuster the defense authorization bill which was already three months overdue. Does Congress have any idea what message this sends to the troops?

The message I take from it is that the funding of our soldiers is a useful pawn to gain political or ideological advantage in political fights that have nothing to do with the war or with them. The further message is that the plight of our soldiers is nowhere near as important as winning some Congressional skirmish for power.

Shame on them, whatever party they belong to. What part of the burden of today's wars are they bearing personally? Are they serving? Are their sons and daughters or grandsons and granddaughters serving?

Are they paying more taxes? Are they even donating blood?

Of course they are not alone. We have spent almost a trillion dollars on these wars but have your taxes risen? Have you been asked to forego any pleasure – any personal gratification? Are you devoting your time and your money to veterans issues? Have you contacted your Congressperson and demanded that they get things in hand?

No – we are almost as disengaged as the Congress (although not quite – no one could be that disengaged).

I must not be too harsh on everyone. I see in this morning's news that some tycoons are making a real sacrifice. The head of Disney will forego 5% of his annual salary and take home only \$29M this year. That's the way to sacrifice!

The public is so concerned about what is happening to our soldiers that they routinely shell out \$150M to see the latest frat-boy comedy, but can only work up a little over \$12M to see "Hurt Locker", the story of the EOD specialists in Iraq. It's not that they hate violence; they shelled out twice as much to see "Saw IV".

So I'll close with my personal wish – not bound by any religious holiday – that all of our brothers and sisters in Iraq and Afghanistan, and those committed to go under new deployments – come home safely, and very soon.

As for the rest of America, or at least the largest portion of it with special attention to Congress – here's coal in your stocking.

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

Try these two websites: Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program www.vetsprobono.org/index.htm. United States Court of appeals for Veterans Claims "Public List of Practitioners" are members of the court's bar www.vetapp.gov/practitioners/. Also this site for west coasters <http://www.chapman.edu/law/programs/clinics/amvets.asp>.

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

Class Action Suit: On 12 August we appeared before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. An article from the LA Times on 24 August summarizes the results so far < latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/healthcare/la-me-veterans-suit24-2009aug24.0.1423297.story>

.Case Progress to Date:

7/23/2007 Suit filed w/Federal District Court
9/25/2007 Defendant's Motion to Dismiss
2/11/2008 Motion for Preliminary Injunction
2/25/2008 Preliminary Injunction Hearing
4/21/2008 Trial
6/25/2008 Judgment based on jurisdiction

7/25/2008 Appeal notice filed w/9th Circuit Court of Appeals
12/10/2008 Appeal brief filed
12/15/2008 *Swords to Plowshares* and *Vietnam Veterans of America* file amicus briefs
12/22/2008 *Military Spouses for Change* and *United Spinal Association* file amicus briefs
3/4/2009 Appeal will not be subject to Mediation

4/6/2009 Requested an extension to reply to the DVA response to our brief
4/22/09 Extension granted to 1 May 2009
5/1/09 Appellants' Reply Brief filed
6/11/09 Oral Arguments Scheduled for 12 August 2009

8/12/09 Oral arguments
9/14/09 Reply on mediation [changed date]
9/14/09 No agreement on mediation. 9th Circuit accepts the case.
12/25/09 NTR

Here is a link to the legal [documents](#) on the lawsuit.

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 "Donate" 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 bhandy@vuft.org or the Vice Chair at scook@vuft.org. Watch for details at www.vuft.org.

D O N A T E !

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

CBS reporters are investigating the unreasonable and unconscionable delays nearly one million veterans now face obtaining disability benefits from VA.

CBS has scheduled the broadcast for Sunday, January 3, 2010. We encourage you and your friends to watch this important news broadcast.

Dan Fahey, President, Veterans for Common Sense

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

CONGRESS DIRECTS DEFENSE AND VA TO CONSIDER COMMON HEALTH IT SYSTEMS

Bob Brewin - 12/21/09

In a report accompanying the final version of the fiscal 2010 Defense Appropriations bill, lawmakers recommended that the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments develop common medical information technology systems to handle laboratory work, pharmacy orders, patient scheduling and transmission of digital radiology images.

While Defense and VA have taken steps to modernize their health IT systems and address interoperability problems, "it appears that both departments are not sufficiently coordinating their efforts, and that lessons learned are not being used to develop an efficient and cost-effective means for data interoperability and information technology modernization," the [report](#) stated. President Obama signed the Defense spending bill on Monday.

Lawmakers acknowledged that Defense and VA have unique IT system requirements, but noted the departments also have common needs that should result in the development of common technology solutions and architecture.

<More at: http://www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20091221_2703.php

REP. FILNER'S H.R.2254 NEEDS ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS TO SUPPORT VIETNAM VETS

A bill, H.R.2254, introduced by the Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Rep. Bob Filner (D-Calif) needs additional cosponsors to ensure release from the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. The legislation would amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam and include Vietnam veterans who served in Thailand and off the Vietnam shore who may have been exposed to Agent Orange.

Currently, VA requires Vietnam veterans to prove "foot on land" in order to qualify for the presumptions of service-connection for herbicide-exposure related illnesses afforded under current law. This issue has been the subject of much litigation and on May 8, 2008, the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals upheld VA's overly narrow interpretation. Congress clearly did not intend to exclude these veterans from compensation based on arbitrary geographic line drawing by VA.

"We owe it to our veterans to fulfill the promises made to them as a result of their service," said Chairman Filner (D-CA). "If, as a result of service, a veteran was exposed to Agent Orange and it has resulted in failing health, this country has a moral obligation to care for each veteran the way we promised we would. And as a country at war, we must prove that we will be there for all of our veterans, no matter when they serve. The courts have turned their backs on our veterans, but I believe this Congress will not allow our veterans to be cheated of their earned benefits."

H.R. 2254 would amend title 38, United States Code, relating to presumptions of exposure for veterans who served in the vicinity of Vietnam. As introduced, Filner's bill would do away with the VA's rule of "boots on the ground" in Vietnam to receive presumptive status for exposure to Agent Orange, and include the "Blue Water Navy" and airman who served in Thailand and Guam.

Currently 226 Representatives have co-sponsored the bill.

Check <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/D?d111:1.:/temp/~bdYIbK:@@P|/bss/111search.html> to see if your Congressperson is one of them. If not, call him/her and ask, "Why not?"

RETREAT – NEWS

REPORT: OBAMA NOW AIMS TO CLOSE GUANTANAMO BY 2011

Jason Leopold - t r u t h o u t Report - 24 December 2009

President Barack Obama's ambitious plan to shut down the Guantanamo Bay prison facility by 2010 was dealt a major blow when lawmakers refused to earmark funds in a military spending bill Congress approved last week that would have allowed the federal government to purchase a near-empty maximum security prison in Illinois to house some detainees.

As a result, Guantanamo will not be shut down until 2011 at the earliest, according to a [report](#) published Wednesday in the New York Times. Obama had hoped to close the detention center by January 22, 2010 but he acknowledged in November he would miss that deadline, which he set shortly after being sworn in as president. <More at: <http://www.truthout.org/1224092>>

A NEW FIGHT THAT MISSES THE POINT – MG CUCOLO IS RIGHT ON THIS ONE

ARMY GENERAL IN IRAQ ISSUES PREGNANCY BAN

NBC News - Dec . 18, 2009

U.S. personnel in the north could face court-martial, jail for failing orders

The Army general of U.S. forces in Northern Iraq has banned pregnancy among military personnel in his command, NBC News reported on Friday.

Anyone who becomes pregnant or impregnates another servicemember, including married couples assigned to the same unit, could face a court-martial and jail time, according to an order issued by Maj. Gen. Anthony Cucolo.

<More at: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34483943/ns/us_news-military/>

ARMY GENERAL WHO IMPLEMENTED PREGNANCY POLICY RESPONDS [TO CRITICISM]

Jason Leopold, t r u t h o u t | Report - 22 December 2009

The Army general commanding US military personnel in northern Iraq who implemented a controversial policy last month that said female soldiers who become pregnant, and the men who impregnate them, could be court-martialed and sent to prison issued a lengthy response to Truthout explaining his order following the publication of our report on the matter Monday.

In an email, Maj. Gen. Tony Cucolo said he appreciates "the discussion about one aspect of a general order I have applied here in the combat zone of Iraq. The true intent of my directive cannot be easily understood from one or two brief articles, so I would like to clarify my rationale for the directive."

Cucolo added:

In this 22,000 Soldier Task Force, I need every Soldier I've got, especially since we are facing a drawdown of forces during our mission. Anyone who leaves this fight earlier than the expected 12-month deployment creates a burden on their teammates. Anyone who leaves this fight early because they made a personal choice that changed their medical status -- or contributes to doing that to another -- is not in keeping with a key element of our ethos, "I will always place the mission first," or three of our seven core values: loyalty, duty and selfless service. And I believe there should be professional consequences for making that personal choice. <More at: <http://www.truthout.org/topstories/122209j103>>

AND HERE IS WHERE THE POINT IS MISSED – MAYBE EVEN INTENTIONALLY

[From the same article]

On Tuesday, four senators sent a letter to Secretary of the Army John McHugh said the order was "deeply misguided" and demanded that it immediately be rescinded.

"We can think of no greater deterrent to women contemplating a military career than the image of a pregnant woman being severely punished simply for conceiving a child," says the letter, signed by Senators Barbara Boxer, (D-California), Barbara Mikulski, (D-Maryland), Jeanne Shaheen, (D-New Hampshire), and Kirsten Gillibrand, (D-New York).

MY COMMENT

MG Cucolo is not punishing anyone "simply for conceiving a child." That's a crap argument and they know it. He is punishing those who take their oath of service so lightly that they will make a personal choice to violate it by taking themselves out of the battle. This is not really much different from the soldier who wounds himself to be sent home, except that they probably have more fun making the baby than they would have shooting themselves in the leg.

Back off, ladies! Twisting MG Cucolo's actions to serve another agenda is pure sophistry, and you know it.

[Full disclosure – I voted for one of those Senators]

BUT, OF COURSE, THE ARMY FOLDED

MILITARY TO DROP BAN ON SOLDIERS GETTING PREGNANT IN IRAQ

Jeff Schogol - Stars and Stripes - December 24, 2009

The controversial order banning pregnancy among troops serving in northern Iraq will cease to exist on Jan. 1 when forces throughout the country begin operating under a new, unified set of regulations, an Army official said Thursday.

With the transformation from Multi-National Force-Iraq to United States Forces-Iraq, Gen. Ray Odierno, the top U.S. commander in the country, is issuing a comprehensive General Order No. 1, according Lt. Col. Josslyn Aberle, spokeswoman for Odierno.

It will draw from various orders previously in place but leave out the pregnancy ban enacted in November by Maj. Gen. Anthony Cucolo.

The decision to exclude the ban comes less than a week after Stars and Stripes reported on its existence. The policy, which leaves open the possibility of court-martial and jail time for soldiers getting pregnant or impregnating another soldier, drew sharp criticism, with opponents saying it infringed on basic rights of the individual.

<More at: <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=66867>>

STUNNING STATISTICS ABOUT THE WAR EVERY AMERICAN SHOULD KNOW

Jeremy Scahill - Rebel Reports - 18 December 2009

A hearing in Sen. Claire McCaskill's Contract Oversight subcommittee on contracting in Afghanistan has highlighted some important statistics that provide a window into the extent to which the Obama administration has picked up the Bush-era war privatization baton and sprinted with it. Overall, contractors now comprise a whopping 69% of the Department of Defense's total workforce, "the highest ratio of contractors to military personnel in US history." That's not in one war zone—that's the Pentagon in its entirety.

In Afghanistan, the Obama administration blows the Bush administration out of the privatized water. According to a [memo](#) released by McCaskill's staff, "From June 2009 to September 2009, there was a 40% increase in Defense Department contractors in Afghanistan. During the same period, the number of armed private security contractors working for the Defense Department in Afghanistan doubled, increasing from approximately 5,000 to more than 10,000."

At present, there are 104,000 Department of Defense contractors in Afghanistan. According to a report this week from the Congressional Research Service, as a result of the coming surge of 30,000 troops in Afghanistan, there may be up to 56,000 additional contractors deployed. But here is another group of contractors that often goes unmentioned: 3,600 State Department contractors and 14,000 USAID contractors. That means that the current total US force in Afghanistan is approximately 189,000 personnel (68,000 US troops and 121,000 contractors). And remember, that's right now. And that, according to McCaskill, is a conservative estimate. A year from now, we will likely see more than 220,000 US-funded personnel on the ground in Afghanistan. <More at: <http://www.truthout.org/1218098>>

VOTE TO DELAY FUNDING FOR TROOPS -- AS PART OF HEALTH CARE DEBATE?

Eric Kleefeld - December 21, 2009, 3:05PM

Everybody knows the health care debate has become more and more contentious, and dominated by a Republican parliamentary effort to delay the debate. But an under-appreciated aspect of this whole controversy -- exceedingly rare, if not unprecedented -- is the fact that it's even affected *defense spending*, with Senate Republicans having worked to hold that up, too! Late on Thursday night, the Senate voted 63-33 to break a Republican filibuster of the defense appropriations bill. Only three Republicans voted against this delay of military spending: Kay Bailey Hutchison (TX), Olympia Snowe (ME) and Susan Collins (ME). The filibuster was part of a Republican effort to further delay the health care bill.

<More at: <http://tpmdc.talkingpointsmemo.com/2009/12/gop-voted-to-delay-funding-for-troops----as-part-of-health-care-debate.php>>

AFTER SEVEN YEARS THIS IS STILL GOING ON?

LAWMAKERS: SOLDIERS HAVE PROBLEMS WITH COMBAT GEAR

The Associated Press - December 15, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Troops are being sent to war zones without proper training and suitable gear, according to two senior Democratic lawmakers who say they've been told by soldiers about problems ranging from their backpacks to their rifles.

In a Dec. 10 letter to the Pentagon's top leaders, Rep. Ike Skelton, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, and Rep. Solomon Ortiz, who heads the subcommittee on military readiness, said they are "greatly troubled" by what they learned as the Obama White House begins escalating the U.S. presence in Afghanistan.

Adm. Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has not seen the letter yet, according to Air Force Capt. Elizabeth Aptekar, a spokeswoman. "However, we appreciate the concern and the support the representatives have in our men and women in uniform and we will look into this matter," she said.

Soldiers are being issued a rucksack made of plastic that is not comfortable or effective in combat situations, Skelton and Ortiz found during a recent trip to Germany and Italy where they met with members of the 503rd Infantry Regiment and the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team.

Troops carry heavy loads on their backs and the plastic straps cut off circulation to their hands and arms, "making it virtually impossible to fire their weapons," they told Mullen and Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

Skelton and Ortiz said many of the soldiers they talked to are using their own money to buy better packs from commercial suppliers.

The M4 carbine, a shorter, lighter version of the M16 rifle, was also criticized. Skelton and Ortiz said they've had long-standing concerns with the M4. Those worries mounted after a study by a military historian found the rifle failed at critical moments during a July 2008 firefight in Afghanistan that left nine U.S. soldiers dead.

"Even though these weapons routinely rank lower than other military weapons in testing, they are still being issued as the Army's weapon of choice," the letter says. <More at: http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D9CK283G0&show_article=1>

NAVY: INVESTIGATION DROVE SAILOR TO SUICIDE

Virginian-Pilot - December 23, 2009

A Navy investigation of a sailor's suicide in Bahrain in 2007 concluded that she was driven to kill herself by an earlier investigation into allegations of hazing in the dog-handling unit she headed for several months.

Petty Officer 1st Class Jennifer Valdivia had been told she might be disciplined for not reporting the wrongdoing, which included sailors being force-fed dog treats, hog-tied to chairs, locked into a feces-filled kennel and ordered to simulate homosexual oral sex in training videos.

One of her superiors cautioned the officer in charge that more senior personnel needed to be held accountable as well.

Valdivia "felt she was being made a scapegoat," the investigator wrote, adding that "her final act revealed her to be under stress she was not able to bear. ... I believe it is unlikely she would have committed suicide if she had not been under such stress."

... Valdivia's predecessor as kennel master, Chief Petty Officer Michael Toussaint, whom several former members of the unit now blame for masterminding the abuses, received a non-punitive letter, which is not entered into any official record, and was promoted to senior chief.

Three months ago, after details of the abuses became public, the Navy took a new look at the case. As a result, Toussaint received a letter of censure from Navy Secretary Ray Mabus and will be forced into early retirement next month.

<More at: <http://hamptonroads.com/2009/12/navy-investigation-drove-sailor-doghandling-unit-kill-self>>

AFGHANS CELEBRATE BELOVED 'COLONEL BILL'

Regimental Combat Team-7, 1st Marine Division Public Affairs - Sgt. Brian Tuthill - 12.15.2009

NAWA DISTRICT, Helmand Province, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – Five months ago, the Marines and Sailors of 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, arrived in Nawa District to the sounds of gunfire, rockets and mortars.

Today, Nawa is quiet – a place where they can walk through the city center without body armor as children crowd at their feet.

<More at: <http://www.marines.mil/unit/1imf/2ndmeb/Pages/Afghanscelebratebeloved%27ColonelBill%27.aspx>>

CREMATED REMAINS DUMPED IN ARLINGTON LANDFILL

Mark Benjamin - Dec. 11, 2009

Records at Arlington National Cemetery suggest that workers found an urn of cremated remains that had been dumped -- presumably accidentally -- in a dirt landfill, reburied those remains as an unknown soldier, and kept the whole thing quiet.

With the publication of this article, Salon has now disclosed four separate cases in which the cemetery discovered unmarked remains due to burial glitches, mostly poor record-keeping. In a fifth case, the cemetery accidentally buried the remains of one service member on top of another in the same grave. Salon's reporting has led the Army to launch an investigation of record-keeping problems at the cemetery. <More at: <http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2009/12/10/arlinton?source=newsletter>>

VETERANS FIND PEACE WORKING ON SAN DIEGO-AREA FARM

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS - December 18, 2009

VALLEY CENTER, Calif. (AP) -- When Carlos Rivera returned from fighting in Iraq and found work as an electrician, he felt co-workers who knew about his military experience were gawking at him. He went home angry each day.

That's not a problem at his current job working alongside other combat veterans picking avocados, mixing organic fertilizers and gathering basil amid northern San Diego County's undulating ochre hills.

"I'm outdoors, not stuck inside somewhere feeling suffocated," said Rivera, 25, who returned from Iraq in 2007 after four years as a Marine. "There's always someone to talk to, someone there to understand."

Rivera works at Archi's Acres, a 3-acre high-tech organic farm owned by Colin Archipley, who served three tours in Iraq and is trying to help other combat vets shake the trauma of war by turning swords to plowshares.

<More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2009/12/18/us/AP-US-Farm-Scene-Veteran-Farmers.html>>

IN OUR ONGOING COVERAGE OF THE WEST LOS ANGELES VETERANS' CENTER

U.S. DROPS LAWSUIT AGAINST PROTESTING VETERANS

Bob Pool - December 14, 2009

A group of elderly veterans had been hanging the U.S. flag upside down on a federally owned fence outside the Brentwood VA. The 'distress symbol' was a way of protesting commercial uses of VA land.

Federal officials seem to have waved the white flag in their battle with a group of elderly former servicemen who fly the American flag upside down as a "distress symbol" to protest commercial activities at the VA's Brentwood medical center.

The Department of Veterans Affairs last week dropped charges against Robert Rosebrock alleging that he and other former military men desecrated the U.S. flag by hanging it upside down on a fence outside the agency's Wilshire Boulevard property.

The VA requested the dismissal days after the American Civil Liberties Union agreed to help fight the charges.

Rosebrock and others have demonstrated outside the VA grounds for 90 consecutive Sundays to protest the proposed conversion of a chunk of VA land in Brentwood to a public park. <More at: latimes.com/news/local/la-me-flag14-2009dec14.0.333237.story>

ACLU BLOCKS ILLEGAL INTIMIDATION OF VET PROTESTORS

By Gordon Duff STAFF WRITER/Senior Editor

"Zen Garden" Not Housing For Homeless Vets In Fatcat Neighborhood

Beverly Hills multi-millionaire socialite and retired insurance exec Frank Raab wrote the LA Times complaining that the ACLU was defending veterans opposing his "Zen Garden" project meant to take the place of housing for the 20,000 homeless veterans of the Los Angeles area.

The ACLU stepped in against Raab's group and their Veterans Affairs partners when political fixers tried to stop protesting vets. Charges against veterans protesting Raab's project, said to be a "con" meant to keep homeless vets away from the wealthy elite, were dropped when the ACLU announced its support for protesting veterans supported by the American Legion and other groups.

With General Shensiki, head of the Department of Veterans Affairs, calling homelessness among veterans a national disgrace [see related story below], the Raab project to take land designated for veterans housing and build a "contemplative garden" has an odd ring about it. Research has shown that the group working to block the proposed veterans housing project is made up of millionaire residents of Brentwood and Beverly Hills with nary a homeless vet among them.

Please read the rest of Gordon's article at <http://www.veteranstoday.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=9858>

TO THE COLORS - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
1/14/10	1000-1600	Hilton Alexandria Mark Center 5000 Seminary Road Alexandria, VA	Mid-Atlantic Regional Career Even		Register

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

TOMGRAM: WILLIAM ASTORE, GRINDING DOWN THE U.S. ARMY

William Astore - December 15, 2009

Last week, the U.S. Army released its suicide figures for November. Twelve soldiers on active duty were classified as "potential suicides" for the month, bringing the yearly suicide total to 147, 19 more than for all of 2008, and the fifth year in a row the rate has risen. In the same week, a Rand Corporation study was released which found, not surprisingly, "that children in military families were more likely to report anxiety than children in the general population. The researchers also found that the longer a parent had been deployed in the previous three years, the more likely their children were to have difficulties in school and at home." <More at: <http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175178/>>

BACK FROM COMBAT, WOMEN STRUGGLE FOR ACCEPTANCE

Kimberly Hefling - The Associated Press - Salt Lake Tribune:12/14/2009

EDITOR'S NOTE - First in a three-part series.

Washington » Nobody wants to buy them a beer.

Even near military bases, female veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan aren't often offered a drink on the house as a welcome home.

More than 230,000 American women have fought in those recent wars and at least 120 have died doing so, yet the public still doesn't completely understand their contributions on the modern battlefield.

For some, it's a lonely transition as they struggle to find their place.

Aimee Sherrod, an Air Force veteran who did three war tours, said years went by when she didn't tell people she was a veteran. After facing sexual harassment during two tours and mortar attacks in Iraq, the 29-year-old mother of two from Bells, Tenn., was medically discharged in 2005 with post-traumatic stress disorder.

<More at: http://www.sltrib.com/portlet/article/html/fragments/print_article.jsp?articleId=13994488&siteId=297

Part 2 at: http://www.sltrib.com/portlet/article/html/fragments/print_article.jsp?articleId=14000897&siteId=297

Part 3 at: http://www.sltrib.com/portlet/article/html/fragments/print_article.jsp?articleId=14000935&siteId=297>

VA SUMMIT FRAMES PLAN TO END VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) held a historic three-day conference in the nation's capital last week to signal the beginning of a new mission for the agency – to end veteran homelessness in five years.

More than 1,300 VA clinicians and health care specialists, representatives of federal agencies invested in providing support for homeless and low-income veterans, and community- and faith-based service providers represented by the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) assembled to provide input on strategies that will shape the VA's five-year plan.

"My name is Shinseki, and I am here to end veteran homelessness," said VA Secretary Eric Shinseki in his opening address. "Many of you have been working the issue of veteran homelessness for a long time. ... I'm the newcomer here today, so let me reiterate that this is not a summit on homeless veterans – it's a summit to end homelessness among veterans. That's our purpose.

"President Obama and I are personally committed to ending homelessness among veterans within the next five years. I learned long ago that there are never any absolutes in life, and a goal of zero homeless veterans sure sounds like an absolute. But unless we set ambitious targets for ourselves, we would not be giving this our very best efforts. No one who has served this nation as veterans have should ever be living on the streets."

For more on the VA Summit, including NCHV President and CEO John Driscoll's opening address, [click here](#).

WOMEN SOLDIERS FORCED TO RESORT TO BACK-ALLEY ABORTIONS: WHY ARE THEIR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS DENIED?

Kathryn Joyce - Religion Dispatches - December 21, 2009

"You hear these legends of coat-hanger abortions," a 26-year-old former Marine sergeant told me recently, "but there are no coat hangers in Iraq. I looked." Amy (who prefers not to use her real name) was stationed in Fallujah as a military journalist two years ago when she discovered she was pregnant. As a female Marine, a distinct minority in the branch, Amy was fearful of going to her chain of command to explain her situation.

For military women, who lack all rights to medical privacy, facing an unplanned pregnancy is a daunting obstacle. Thanks to anti-abortion forces in Congress, military hospitals are banned from providing abortion services, except in cases of life endangerment, rape, or incest (and for the latter two, only if the patient pays for the service herself). Amy says her options were "like being given a choice between swimming in a pond full of crocodiles or piranhas."

<More at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/144696/>

BETTER BEHAVIOR OR BIGGER THREATS? – WHO KNOWS?

SEX ASSAULT REPORTS PLUMMET AT AIR FORCE ACADEMY

The Associated Press - - December 20, 2009

DENVER — Reports of sexual assaults at the Air Force Academy dropped by two-thirds in the 2008-2009 school year, but it's not clear whether the number of attacks declined or fewer victims came forward, officials said Friday.

Eight assaults were reported in the year that ended in May 2009, compared with 24 the year before, the Defense Department said in its annual report on assaults and harassment at U.S. military academies.

"We're not quite sure we know how to characterize the decline, but we know we want to keep the heat up on our program," said Air Force Col. Gail Colvin, the academy's vice commandant of cadets for culture and climate.

The Pentagon study says the decline could reflect the fact that the number of assaults has decreased or it could indicate that not all assaults were reported for various reasons.

<More at: <http://newsok.com/sex-assault-reports-plummet-at-air-force-academy/article/3426229#ixzz0aRj4yxEc>>

MY ARMY DOCTORS TOLD ME THIS 40 YEARS AGO IN VIETNAM WHEN THEY EVACUATED MY WOUNDED TO OKINAWA AND GUAM RATHER THAN TREATING THEM AT LONG BINH – AND THE ARMY IS JUST FINDING OUT??

DOD BLINKS: BURN PITS TIED TO ILLNESS

Salt Lake Tribune - December 15, 2009

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah -- Backing away from steadfast official denial, the U.S. military's senior health protection official said Monday that some service members might suffer long-term medical problems as a direct result of exposure to smoke and fumes from open-air burn pits scattered throughout Iraq and Afghanistan.

Physician Craig Postlewaite, director of Force Health Protection and Readiness Programs, said that while scientific evidence has yet to prove the link, the personal stories of veterans coming forward to report long-term health problems have convinced him of the connection.

"We feel at this point in time that it's quite plausible -- in fact likely -- that there are a small number of people that have been affected with longer-term health problems," Postlewaite said Monday.

<More at: <http://www.military.com/news/article/dod-blinks-burn-pits-tied-to-illness.html>>

SOLDIERS FORCED TO GO AWOL FOR PTSD CARE

Dahr Jamail – IPS - Dec 11

With a military health care system over-stretched by two ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, more soldiers are deciding to go absent without leave (AWOL) in order to find treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

<More at: <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=49646>

LEJEUNE AND EL TORO: 'A TALE OF TWO BASES'

Robert O'Dowd - Salem-News.com - Dec-14-2009

(SOMERDALE, NJ) - It's no secret that Marines are a band of brothers. It doesn't matter if you were in the Corps yesterday or 40 years ago. Once a Marine; always a Marine.

This news story is about Marine veterans and their dependents that were exposed to toxic chemicals at former Marine Corps Air Station El Toro, California, and Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

These are men and women who served their country honorable, were unknowingly exposed to toxic chemicals and years later developed cancer and other serious diseases.

A skeptic might say: "Sorry to hear about your cancer, but many people get cancer that were not at these bases so what makes you think the disease was caused by something in the military?"

In fact, that is the very attitude our government has taken to deny any service connection to disease and contaminated water at Camp Lejeune and El Toro. Individuals have won VA disability and compensation claims but only after lengthy delays and payment of expensive independent medical evaluations in support of claims. Civil law cases were filed; but no win for the plaintiffs. <More at: http://salem-news.com/articles/december142009/marines_ro.php>

GUAM MAY BE INCLUDED IN AGENT ORANGE BILL

Mar-Vic Cagurangan - Variety News Staff - 30 November 2009

GUAM is likely to be included in a congressional bill that expands the compensation program for veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange and other types of defoliants used by American troops during Vietnam War.

These drums stored in AAFB during the early 1970s allegedly contain Agent Orange and other defoliants used by the American troops to thin jungles. Photo courtesy of Le Roy G. Foster, MSgt, USAF, retired

H.R. 2254, titled "The Agent Orange Equity Act of 2009," has received a bipartisan support in the House of Representatives, with over 200 congressmen having signed up as cosponsors.

"Republicans and Democrats alike have joined together to stand up for Agent Orange veterans," said Rep. Bob Filner, D-CA, author of H.R. 2254, and chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

<More at http://mvquam.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9734:guam-may-be-included-in-agent-orange-bill&catid=1:guam-local-news&Itemid=2

A NEW LIFE NURSING THEIR DAMAGED WARRIORS

Francis X. Clines - Editorial Observer - December 24, 2009

The two soldiers lolled speechless in wheelchairs, severely brain damaged by war, staring out at the home front from a diagnosis of "minimal consciousness." Their young brides fed them through gastric tubes, one of the frequent tasks in the women's brave new careers as veterans' family caretakers.

It is a sweet and bitter fact of modern battlefield medicine that more warriors can survive devastating brain wounds that would have killed them in previous wars.

There are about 2,000 suffering the most severe brain trauma from Iraq and Afghanistan, with perhaps 200 more a year to come, according to an estimate by the Wounded Warrior Project, a charity that helps damaged military families.

Rather than store away these young men and women in nursing homes, more family members — their own lives forever upended — are opting to be trained to nurse and rehabilitate their loved ones at home. These gritty families insist that a home setting is essential to any recovery and hope of a worthwhile lifetime.

"I chose to stay with my man," explained RyAnne Noss, ministering to her husband Scot, a once powerful Army Ranger who was dragged from a helicopter crash in Afghanistan. RyAnne put aside her Ph.D. in chemistry to become Scot's round-the-clock helpmate rather than leave him for visits across years in a convalescent home.

<More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/24/opinion/24thu3.html>>

TAKES MONTHS TO GET STARTED BUT THEY CAN BE STOPPED ON A DIME!

RETROACTIVE STOP-LOSS PAYMENTS TEMPORARILY HALTED

Jeff Schogol - Stars and Stripes Mideast edition - December 24, 2009

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Army and Air Force have temporarily stopped payments to soldiers and airmen who were held under stop-loss between September 2001 and September 2008 because a provision in the recently passed Defense Appropriations Bill makes fewer servicemembers eligible.

The bill makes clear that troops who re-enlisted or extended their contract and collected a bonus while being held under stop-loss do not qualify for the compensation. <More at: <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=66851>

WE MADE A MISTAKE – VETERANS AREN'T SUPPOSED TO HAVE THEIR CARE PAID FOR 'IT'S A ROTTEN DEAL': RENT AT VETERANS HOME TO GO UP BY AS MUCH AS 37 PERCENT

Friday, December 18, 2009

DOVER - Gary Forst moved into the Veterans Home at Union Grove about four years ago. Soon after, Harold Yonker moved in too. The two men, veterans of different wars, have been friends ever since they moved into Gates Hall, one of the assisted living facilities on the Union Grove campus.

It won't be long before Yonker, 87, moves out. At least he hopes to. That's been his plan ever since he and his fellow residents learned in November that the Department of Veterans Affairs will increase their rent by as much as 37 percent.

The rate hike takes effect Jan. 1. That's when the daily rate of \$83 jumps to a little more than \$114 per day, at least for Yonker. That's an increase of nearly \$930 each month. The rates vary for different residents, depending on the level of care they need. Many say they can't afford the increases. <More at <http://vets4politics.blogspot.com/2009/12/its-rotten-deal-rent-at-veterans-home.html>>

NOTE: Union Grove is run by the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

A WARRIOR PASSES IN TEXAS

Bryant Jordan - Military.com - December 24, 2009

Retired Army Col. Robert L. Howard, a Medal of Honor recipient for combat action in Vietnam in 1968 and one of the America's most highly decorated Soldiers, died Dec. 23 in Waco, Texas.

The 70-year-old Howard died in a hospice in Waco, according to a report in the San Antonio Express News today. The paper, quoting a longtime friend of Howard's, retired Sgt. Maj. Benito Guerrero, said Howard had been suffering from pancreatic cancer.

Howard began his Army career as an enlisted man. During one 13-month tour in Vietnam he was nominated for the Medal of Honor three times, but in the first instance the award was downgraded to the Distinguished Service Cross. Several biographies say that downgrade, as well as another -- to the Silver Star -- was to avoid the problem of noting in the Medal of Honor citation specifics of the combat operations, which were covert.

But one nomination did result in the awarding of the MoH. It was presented to him by President Richard Nixon during a White House ceremony in 1971. <More at: <http://www.military.com/news/article/a-warrior-passes-in-texas.html>>

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF DECEMBER 22, 2009

This week, the Air Force and Coast Guard announced an increase in activated reservists, while the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps announced decreases. The net collective result is 620 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 105,885; Navy Reserve, 6,266; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 15,298; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,593; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 779. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 135,821, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated may be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec2009/d20091222ngr.pdf>.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE TUESDAY 24 DECEMBER 2009

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,472 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,371
WOUNDED US [12/05/09]	31,582
OTHER US CASUALTIES [12/05/09]	≥45,416
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [12/05/09]	197
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED UK	179
KILLED OTHER COALITION	139
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/25/09]	≥ 48,874
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [12/25/09]	≥ 103,549 – 1,366,350
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [11/9/08]	≥ 400K – 1.374M
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (3,001 DAYS)

KILLED US	938
WOUNDED US [12/05/09]	4,640
OTHER CASUALTIES US [12/05/09]	9,459
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [12/05/09]	35
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED COALITION	613
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/07)	1,602
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY [7/4/09]	≥ 11,152
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (7/4/2009)	≥ 7,589
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	\$711,683,081,951
COST OF AFGHAN WAR TO DATE	\$234,705,360,474

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 ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

WHAT THOSE WHO ARE "TOO BUSY TO SERVE", OR HAVE "BETTER THINGS TO DO" ARE EARNING WHILE YOU FIGHT THEIR WARS

The following is extracted from an article "10 Greediest People of 2009" by Sam Pizzigati. The full article is available at <http://www.alternet.org/story/144718/>

- 10: Richard Anderson - CEO Delta Airlines - \$25.3M in stock in last 28 months -flies free; doesn't pay \$30 a bag.
- 9: George David/Marie Douglas-David - former CEO United Technologies - divorced - Marie gets **\$53K a week** for "basic expenses".
- 8: Steve Wynn - Las Vegas hotelier/casino operator - \$88.6M dividends in 2009
- 7: Robert Rubin - Sr. strategist Citigroup - \$127M in last several years (Citigroup lost \$65B during his tour)
- 6: Andrew Hall - Commodity trader: Citigroup - \$100m (deferred to next year)
- 5: John Chambers - \$232.7M in last 5 years - big bonus in 2009 despite missing all performance targets
- 4: Rupert Murdoch - CEO News Corp. - \$27.5M (down 14% from 2008)
- 3: Mark Hurd - CEO Hewlett-Packard - \$44M in salary, stock options
- 2: Richard Scott - CEO Columbia/HCA Healthcare - Fired this year with a \$10M severance and \$300M in stock
- 1: Larry Ellison: CEO Oracle - - \$57.5M every quarter in dividends plus he draws a salary

WEB SITE AIMS TO UNCOVER FAKERS IN FATIGUES

Joshua Rhett Miller - December 04, 2009

Military impostors, beware: A Web site has been launched to root out fraudulent veterans and fakers in fatigues.

ReportStolenValor.org aims to expose people who fabricate or embellish military accomplishments by making it easier to report suspected Stolen Valor Act offenders to federal authorities and local media outlets. AMVETS, an organization representing more than 250,000 veterans, unveiled the site Friday.

"As a veteran myself, it's deeply offensive when someone claims to have served in uniform when they have not," said Jay Agg, AMVET's national communication director. "It's just fundamentally wrong and an affront to all veterans."

<More at: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,579336,00.html>>

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

A VIDEO THAT SOME MIGHT FIND UPLIFTING

Watch the video at <http://www.bornagainamerican.org/>

BORN AGAIN AMERICAN

By Keith Carradine

Just a workin' man without a job
It got shipped off to China via Washington, D.C.
And I know I'm nothin' special, there are plenty more like
me
Just the same
I thought I knew the rules of the game
I stood up for this country that I love
I came back from the desert to a wife and kids to feed
I'm not sayin' Uncle Sam should give me what I need
My offer stands
I'll pull my weight you give me half a chance
I went up to a congressman and said to him "you know
Our government is letting people down"
He said he'd need a lot of help to buck the status-quo
I said there was a bunch of us around
I'm a Born Again American, conceived in Liberty
My Bible and the Bill of Rights, my creed's equality
I'm a Born Again American, my country 'tis of me
And everyone who shares the dream from sea to shining
sea
My brother's welding chassis at the plant
He's earning what our granddad did in 1948
While CEOs count bonuses behind the castle gates
How can they see
When all they care about's the do re mi
It's getting where there's nowhere left to turn
Not since the crash of twenty-nine have things been so
unfair
So many of our citizens are living in despair
The time has come
To reaffirm that hope's not just for some

The promise of America's surrendering to greed
The rule is just look out for number one
But brace yourself 'cause some of us have sown a different
seed
A harvest of the spirit has begun
I'm a Born Again American conceived in liberty
My Bible and The Bill Of Rights
My creed's equality
A Born Again American, my country 'tis of me
And everyone who shares the dream from sea to shining
sea
It's clear my country's soul is on the line
She's hungering for something that she lost along the way
The principle the framers called upon us to obey
That in this land
The people's will must have the upper hand
I felt the calling once before and took a sacred vow
And faithful to that vow I have remained
I hear the calling once again, my country needs me now
And to her cause I have been re-ordained
I'm a Born Again American conceived in liberty
My Bible and the Bill Of Rights, all people living free
A Born Again American, my country 'tis of me
And everyone who shares the dream
From sea to shining sea
And everyone who shares the dream
From sea to shining sea
A M E R I C A

NOTICE

Beginning In January 2010 **SOUND OFF!**, the newsletter of Veterans United For Truth, Inc., will be published once a month on the 20th of each month.

~ ~ ~

Sorry to back off a bit, but after 5 years, and as much as I enjoy it, it's getting a little harder to crank this out every 15 days.

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 scCook@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

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.