

SOUND OFF!



VOL. IV, NO 11

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"

25 JANUARY 2009

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

BILLIONS FOR BOMBERS – BUBKES* FOR BENEFITS

The following is from a recent report on National Public Radio (emphasis mine):

“The government offers a huge range of benefits to disabled vets — such as disability payments, job training and subsidies to buy cars and houses. Veterans advocates say **if every vet received all the benefits they're entitled to, they should be able to afford a decent quality of life.** But reports have shown that many vets don't know about all the benefits, so they don't apply for them.

And **the average vet who does apply has to wait at least six months, and sometimes years, to receive them.**

Hundreds of private groups try to fill the gap — from the American Legion, founded after World War I, to newer organizations, such as Soldiers' Angels, Fallen Heroes and Community of Veterans.

Advocates hail the nonprofit groups for donating hundreds of millions of dollars worth of goods and services — from toys and clothes for veterans' children to brand-new houses designed for amputees.”

We at VUFT hail our fellow nonprofits also, but we ask the question, “Why? Why is this necessary?”

There is a concept in Army logistics planning of the “division slice”, which is defined as:

“Div slice = average planning factor used to obtain estimates of logistical requirements. Computed as total personnel in Army/theater/corps/etc, divided by number of active division therein.” – US Army Military History Institute

That concept, were it applied to the totality of military planning, and especially to war making, would demand that the entire cost of all military activity be calculated and set aside in reserve by the Congress at the onset of military action.

Then when a vet walked in with a claim, the funds would be there, the bureaucrat would not be constrained by annual budget fights, and the veteran would get the service, preferably on an immediate assumption of the rightness of his or her claim, but certainly on the merits of the claim and not on the relative cost of granting or denying it.

Nonprofit groups devoted to service members and veterans could then focus their energies on education - to make sure vets know what they deserve. They could work at providing the “extras” – anything that went beyond the fundamental and extensive support already allowed for in the law yet, so far, underfunded. Most importantly they could work at helping veterans to re-integrate into society. Those are all proper roles for voluntary community organizations.

They shouldn't be running bake sales to provide basic benefits that are authorized but being denied by their government for lack of funding.

The calculations necessary to such planning are not unknown. For many decades the Army, for example, published the Staff Officer's Field Manual tables that calculated the components of the “slice”, even down to the expected number and types of casualties for various types and durations of engagements. After eight years in the current era, and 16 years of the Vietnam War, the figures for “asymmetric” war should be derivable.

The logical extension of that planning would include the expected costs for rehabilitation and long-

term care of the broad range of physical and mental casualties that have been experienced in current conflicts, and which can be expected from the record of past conflicts. The numbers should be easily checked and validated from the current waiting lists for DVA services.

Thus, when the nation contemplates war, or is inexorably drawn into war, the total costs could be estimated within a reasonable level of accuracy. The money would be set aside in the proverbial “lockbox”. Then, when the veteran made his or her claim, whether immediate or as delayed symptoms developed, the money would be there to address the claim for as long as was necessary.

There would be no more assertions such as Donald Rumsfeld’s that we can take on a country like Iraq and “it will cost something under \$50B”.

Imagine the Congress facing a vote on going to war – presuming they will once again exercise that Constitutional obligation – and being told: “We intend to send 150,000 troops into battle. The budgeted of deploying those troops, including **ALL** of the long-term costs, is \$100B per annum per every 10,000 troops committed from the onset, plus \$70B per annum after the conflict ceases for the ensuing 30 years, then \$35 B per annum for the next 30 years . A three-year

asymmetric war is proposed, therefore the contemplated lifetime cost is \$3.45 trillion.”

For some of our Congresspersons, the idea of declaring war is so serious as to make it the choice of last resort, as it should be. For others, war is a political game, and they might choose it to advance their political or ideological beliefs. They can do that today without contemplating the true cost.

Now if the nation is under grievous threat, the cost shouldn’t be a factor. But, if we were to embody this concept in law, or better yet in a Constitutional Amendment that forces them when exercising their powers under Article I, Section 8 to consider the total costs, that just might make future Congresses stop and think. That might get their attention, regardless of the rightness of the war.

What a concept! A thoughtful Congress that understands the consequences of its actions.

“Congress is continually appointing fact-finding committees, when what we really need are some fact-facing committees.” Roger Allen

* For those who are “Yiddishly challenged”, **bubkes**, [pron. bup’ -kus], means *the least amount*; literally, *goat droppings*. [Ed.]

REVELLE - 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/

FIRST CHANCE FOR A 2009 TAX DEDUCTION!

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Our appeal to the Circuit court **has begun** and we have to have executive board members attend the court hearings to observe, and probably to testify.

These trips cost money – to date the expenses have largely been borne by the individuals.

We have to begin paying our way as an organization. Please donate whatever you can by going on-line to:

[HTTP://WWW.VUFT.ORG/DONATE.HTML](http://www.vuft.org/donate.html)

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!

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

Class Action Suit: Our advocates are currently working on the appeal to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Case Progress to Date:

7/23/2007 Suit filed w/Federal District Court	7/25/2008 Appeal notice filed w/9 th Circuit Court of Appeals
9/25/2007 Defendant's Motion to Dismiss	12/10/2008 Appeal brief filed
2/11/2008 Motion for Preliminary Injunction	12/15/2008 <i>Swords to Plowshares</i> and <i>Vietnam Veterans of America</i> file amicus briefs
2/25/2008 Preliminary Injunction Hearing	12/22/2008 <i>Military Spouses for Change</i> and <i>United Spinal Association</i> file amicus briefs
4/21/2008 Trial	
6/25/2008 Judgment based on jurisdiction	

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 rhandy@vuft.org or the Vice Chair at scook@vuft.org. Watch for details at www.vuft.org

**DO YOU PASS THIS NEWSLETTER ON TO ANYONE?
IF YOU DO, PLEASE LET US KNOW HOW MANY PEOPLE YOU SEND IT TO
NO NAMES, JUST NUMBERS**

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

NOT A LETTER, BUT A BLOG SUBMISSION THAT UNDERLINES WHY PTSD IS ALTERNATIVELY CALLED "DELAYED STRESS SYNDROME"

WE CANNOT MAKE IT THROUGH THE CONFINES OF OUR MINDS WITHOUT THE HELP OF OTHERS

Friday, January 23, 2009

I am a Gulf War I vet, I felt the same as you when I returned home from combat. For me it was the total sense of feeling alive and being a part of my squad that I missed, although I did not figure this out until after 15 years of insanity.

In the mix, blood pounds through the veins and I received a powerful sense of completeness that I still chase today. The intensiveness of combat will never be matched in the civilian world, all the mundane things we did before seem totally a way to piss us off today. When faced with survival we let all the silly shit slough off of us and become one with the universe.

Our field of vision opens completely to encompass all within our sight, the tiny reflection in the corner of the eye becomes a sharp focus without having to direct attention its way. Time becomes suspended and we know and feel what omnipresence really means. How can anything else ever compare to this experiential endeavor?

I finally received help after 15 years, I could not drink enough alcohol, smoke enough weed, or seek out enough violence to get past the feelings of emptiness. I felt such an utterly and complete loss of self and sense of identity. We were trained to feel invincible, and it may even have seemed that way at times, but we did not get through combat without the help from the soldier next to us. We cannot make it through the confines of our minds without the help of others. We could not do it alone in combat, what makes you think that you can make it alone today?

Posted by Roman General at 1:52 AM

<http://ptsdasoldiersperspective.blogspot.com/2009/01/we-cannot-make-it-through-confines-of.html>

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ADOPTS OVERSIGHT PLAN FOR THE 111TH CONGRESS AND OFFICIALLY NAMES MEMBERS

January 22, 2009

Washington, D.C. – Today, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Bob Filner, led the Committee's organizational meeting for the 111th Congress. Committee rules, membership and the oversight plan for the 111th Congress were adopted.

Members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

DEMOCRATS

Bob Filner, CA, Chairman
Corrine Brown, FL
Vic Snyder, AR
Michael M. Michaud, ME
Stephanie Herseth Sandlin, SD
Harry E. Mitchell, AZ
John J. Hall, NY
Deborah L. Halvorson, IL
Thomas S.P. Perriello, VA
Harry Teague, NM
Ciro D. Rodriguez, TX
Joe Donnelly, IN
Jerry McNerney, CA
Zachary T. Space, OH
Timothy J. Walz, MN
John H. Adler, NJ
Ann Kirkpatrick, AZ
Glenn C. Nye, VA

REPUBLICANS

Steve Buyer, IN, Ranking Member
Cliff Stearns, FL
Jerry Moran, KS
Henry E. Brown, Jr., SC
Jeff Miller, FL
John Boozman, AR
Brian P. Bilbray, CA
Doug Lamborn, CO
Gus M. Bilirakis, FL
Vern Buchanan, FL
David P. Roe

AKAKA REINTRODUCES SWEEPING VETERANS' HEALTH CARE BILL

January 15, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, introduced legislation to improve veterans' health care. The Veterans' Health Care Authorization Act of 2009 is an updated version of a bill introduced in the previous Congress to improve medical personnel incentives and other aspects of veterans' health care.

"VA must have the tools to recruit and retain a qualified health care workforce if the Department is to furnish high quality health care across its system. I urge my colleagues to join my renewed effort to bring these essential improvements to those who have worn the uniform," said Akaka. <More at: http://veterans.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?pageid=12&release_id=11836>

BOB FILNER APPALLED BY LACK OF LEADERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY AT VETERANS

AFFAIRS Imperial Valley News - 15 January 2009

Washington, DC - House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA) released this statement regarding recent operating problems with the electronic medical records system at the Department of Veterans Affairs: "I am disappointed to learn of troubling new revelations from the Department of Veterans Affairs regarding operating problems with the most recent upgrade to the electronic medical records system.

<More at: http://imperialvalleynews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3942&Itemid=1>

MARINE COMMANDANT WANTS HIS TROOPS OUT OF IRAQ

Pamela Hess – AP - 23 January

WASHINGTON (AP) — Iraq is stable enough to allow the roughly 22,000 U.S. Marines there to withdraw, the service's top general said Friday.

"The time is right for Marines in general terms to leave Iraq," said Marine Corps Commandant James Conway.

That war has become largely a nation-building mission rather than the pitched fighting in which the Marine Corps excels, Conway said.

Conway said he wants to see up to 20,000 Marines deployed instead to the building fight in Afghanistan, especially in the south where insurgents and the Taliban and al-Qaida benefit from both a nearby safe haven and booming trade in narcotics.

<More at: www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hwNGWZjUBrbqvOyW8rZO61BpsdAD95T1TE01>

SHINSEKI SWORN IN, VOWS 21ST CENTURY SERVICE TO VETERANS

January 21, 2009

WASHINGTON -- Retired Army Gen. Eric K. Shinseki took the oath of office today as the Nation's seventh Secretary of Veterans Affairs, assuming the leadership of the Department of Veterans Affairs following Tuesday's confirmation by the Senate.

"The overriding challenge I am addressing from my first day in office is to make the Department of Veterans Affairs a 21st century organization focused on the Nation's Veterans as its clients," Shinseki said.

Shinseki plans to develop a 2010 budget within his first 90 days that realizes the vision of President Obama to transform VA into an organization that is people-centric, results-driven and forward-looking. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/printpage.php>

TROOPS LEARN IRAQ TACTICS ARE NOT FOR AFGHANISTAN

Nancy A. Youssef - McClatchy Newspapers - January 18, 2009

Armor too heavy, vehicles too slow for hilly terrain

DELARAM, Afghanistan -- On a sunset patrol in late December, U.S. Marines spotted a Taliban unit trying to steal Afghan police vehicles at a checkpoint. In a flash, the Marines turned to pursue, driving off the main road and toward the gunfire coming from the mountain a half-mile away. But their 6-ton vehicles were no match for the Taliban pickups.

The mine-resistant vehicles and heavily-armored Humvees bucked and swerved as drivers tried to maneuver them across fields that the Taliban vehicles raced across. The Marines, weighted down with 60 pounds of body armor each, struggled to climb up Saradaka Mountain. Once at the top, it was clear to everyone that the Taliban would get away.

Second Lt. Phil Gilreath, 23, of Kingwood, La., called off the mission.

"It would be a ghost chase, and we would run the risk of the vehicles breaking down again," Gilreath said.

The Marines spent the next hour trying to find their way back to the paved road.

<More at: www.freep.com/article/20090118/NEWS07/901180360/1009/NEWS07/Troops+learn+Iraq+tactics+are+not+for+Afghanistan>

BLAIR SAYS ARMY MANUAL TO APPLY TO CIA

Associated Press - January 22, 2009

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama's pick to be the top intelligence officer says the Army Field Manual that outlines legal interrogation techniques will govern CIA questioning.

Retired Adm. Dennis Blair told the Senate Intelligence Committee Thursday that the military field manual also will be reviewed for possible changes. The manual outlines 19 legal techniques and forbids nine.

Blair said it won't be called the Army Field Manual. He said it will be called "the manual for government interrogations."

He said there needs to be a single uniform standard for the treatment of detainees. Under the Bush administration, the CIA was allowed to conduct harsh interrogations that went well beyond the military methods.

www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2009/01/22/national/w070302S82.DTL&feed=rss.news>

ARMY'S DRUG ABUSE POLICY UNDER FIRE

Alan Scher Zagier - The Associated Press - January 22, 2009

Critics say system is likely to punish troops rather than help them.

Fort Leonard Wood -- Spec. Jeremiah Thomson didn't know what was worse: excruciating back pain from a combat explosion in Baghdad or the prescription drug addiction he developed once home. The Army was quick to prescribe Percocet, Vicodin, Oxycontin and similarly powerful painkillers to Thomson and other injured soldiers at Fort Leonard Wood, Thomson testified in a court-martial hearing. He's now serving a three-year sentence for illegally buying prescription drugs -- the sellers included a former commanding officer in Iraq -- and selling the pills to eight other soldiers. As more troops return home with war injuries, the Army is prescribing more pain medication. But a military system that relies on discipline as well as treatment is drawing fire from some prominent critics, including those inside the system.

"It's a terrible problem," said Barbara McDonald, a civilian social worker and Army drug abuse counselor, describing a recent surge in prescription drug abuse and the Army's handling of the problem.

Legal painkiller use by injured troops has increased nearly 70 percent since the start of the Iraq war six years ago, according to Army records. Surveys show that more soldiers are struggling with prescription drug addiction -- and seeking help from Army doctors and counselors. <More at: www.news-leader.com/article/20090122/NEWS01/901220365>

AF REACHES OUT TO FLIGHT-RATED OFFICERS

Jeff Schogol - Stars and Stripes - January 22, 2009

ARLINGTON, Va. -- Faced with a shortfall of about 1,600 flight-rated officers, the Air Force is reaching out to pilots, air battle managers and navigators who have left active duty, service officials said Wednesday. Under a program authorized for this calendar year, retirees and reservists -- most from the Inactive Ready Reserve -- can come back to active duty for up to four years, officials said. The program is also open to current or former members of all services.

"We are not soliciting O-6s; we are primarily expecting majors and lieutenant colonels to come back," said Lt. Col. Dewey Duhadway, chief of rated force policy. <More at: www.military.com/features/0.15240.183501.00.html>

MORE AMERICANS JOINING MILITARY AS JOBS DWINDLE

Lizette Alvarez[NY Times] January 19, 2009

As the number of jobs across the nation dwindles, more Americans are joining the military, lured by a steady paycheck, benefits and training. The last fiscal year was a banner one for the military, with all active-duty and reserve forces meeting or exceeding their recruitment goals for the first time since 2004, the year that violence in Iraq intensified drastically, Pentagon officials said. And the trend seems to be accelerating. The Army exceeded its targets each month for October, November and December -- the first quarter of the new fiscal year -- bringing in 21,443 new soldiers on active duty and in the reserves.

... "When the economy slackens and unemployment rises and jobs become more scarce in civilian society, recruiting is less challenging," said Curtis Gilroy, the director of accession policy for the Department of Defense.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2009/01/19/us/19recruits.html>

CONTRACTORS IMPACT ON MILITARY CULTURE

David Isenberg - Jan. 23, 2009

WASHINGTON, Jan. 23 (UPI) -- If anything about the private military contracting industry is certain, it is that it will continue to grow in the future. And that raises an interesting question: What impact will the continuing and growing dependence on private contractors have on the U.S. military establishment? In 1992 U.S. Air Force officer Charles Dunlap published an article, "The Origins of the American Military Coup of 2012," in the Army journal Parameters. In it he described a future in which a military coup had taken place and Gen. Thomas E.T. Brutus now occupies the White House as permanent military plenipotentiary. Sixteen years later USAF Maj. Bryan Watson has taken up where Dunlap left off. His article "A Look Down the Slippery Slope: Domestic Operations, Outsourcing and the Erosion of Military Culture," published in the spring 2008 issue of Air & Space Power Journal, takes the form of a fictional speech given by a senior Air Force officer. In it he conveys several warnings and personal opinions formed in the wake of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

<More at: www.upi.com/Emerging_Threats/2009/01/23/Contractors_impact_on_military_culture/UPI-16841232747165/>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
1/21	1100-1400	The Radisson Hotel at LAX 6225 West Century Blvd, Los Angeles	Los Angeles Military/Veteran Career Fair		
1/22	1100-1400	Omni San Antonio Hotel 9821 Colonnade Blvd, San Antonio,	San Antonio Military/Veteran Career Fair		
1/27	1100-1400	Holiday Inn Rosslyn at Key Bridge 1900 N Fort Myer Dr., Arlington, VA	Washington DC Military/Veteran Career Fair		
1/29	1000-1600	Morocco Shrine Center 3800 St. John's Bluff Rd. Jacksonville, FL	Southeast Regional Event		register
1/31	1300-1600	Teamster City Auditorium 300 S. Ashland, Chicago, IL	War's Real Impact: Our Voices	Workers' Rights Board	312-738-6161
1/6 - 8		Phoenix AZ	Stand Down	Donna Bleyle	602-305-8585
2/5	1000-1600	Doubletree Hotel Colorado Springs - 1775 East Cheyenne Mountain Blvd. Colorado Springs, CO	Mountain Region Career Event, Colorado Springs		Register
2/10	1100-1400	InfoMart, 1950 N Stemmons Fwy Dallas, TX 75207	Dallas Military/Veteran Career Fair		

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

200,000 WAR VETERANS HOMELESS IN US

2009-01-16

PACIFICA – For six years of war in Iraq, the Bush administration has done absolutely nothing to take care of the hundreds of thousands of wounded veterans coming home, said Aaron Glantz, a journalist who has been covering the stories of US military vets returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

"We've had people brought into the VA, turned away, who have committed suicide after coming back from the war with post-traumatic stress disorder. We've had people redeployed to Iraq, even after they were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. We have 300,000 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans coming home with traumatic brain injury, physical brain damage. We have 300,000 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans who have filed disability claims with the federal government," Glantz told *Democracy Now!* on Thursday.

"In many cases, there is no medical services at all, because remember that many people serving in Iraq and Afghanistan come from rural communities where the VA doesn't even have a hospital," he explained.

"On every night, 200,000 people who have put on the uniform and served this country sleep homeless on the streets," said Glantz. <More at: www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=29803>

INJURED VETS WAIT FOR DISABILITY APPEAL PROCESS

Kevin Maurer – 9 January 2009

WILMINGTON, N.C. (AP) — Wounded troops are still waiting to file new appeals of disability ratings that determine what kind of medical care and benefits they get after federal officials missed their goal for beginning the process. The Department of Defense was already months behind on starting the work of a three-member board that will hear the appeals. The December 2007 act of Congress that created the board mandated it start hearing appeals within 90 days. Though defense officials missed that deadline, they said they planned to start by the end of 2008. That didn't happen either.

"Thousands of wounded troops have gotten inexplicably low disability ratings. An incorrect rating can cost a disabled veteran hundreds of dollars a month," said Vanessa Williamson, the policy director at New York-based Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. "Especially in this economy, this is an enormous burden."

<More at: www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gOyJiNqQ2WjpWztnffW-dkAq_bAD95IH2I81>

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCES EXPEDITED DISABILITY EVALUATION SYSTEM PROCESS FOR COMBAT WOUNDED

January 22, 2009

The Department of Defense announced today, in collaboration with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), a process designed to expedite a service member seriously injured in combat from military to veteran status, by waiving the standard Disability Evaluation System (DES), resulting in receipt of benefits in three to four months, compared to a recovery and standard DES process that would normally take much longer.

“This new policy should allow service members and their families to focus on the essentials of recovery, reintegration, employment and independent living, with the combined assistance from DoD and VA,” said Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Michael L. Dominguez. “The policy supports our belief that there must be a distinction for those who incur devastating disabilities in combat.” <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/09/nf09/nfjan09/nf012309-5.htm>

GAO SAYS VA LOW-BALLING BUDGET ESTIMATES

Associated Press - January 23, 2009

WASHINGTON - Two years after a politically embarrassing \$1 billion shortfall that imperiled veterans health care, the Veterans Affairs Department is still low-balling budget estimates to Congress to keep its spending down, government investigators say. [The report](#) by the Government Accountability Office, set to be released later Friday, highlights the Bush administration's problems in planning for the treatment of veterans that President Barack Obama has pledged to fix. It found the VA's long-term budget plan for the rehabilitation of veterans in nursing homes, hospices and community centers to be flawed, failing to account for tens of thousands of patients and understating costs by millions of dollars.

<More at: www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2009/01/ap_va_funding_012309w/>

TELL ME WHY THIS IS FAIR! TELL ME WHY THIS IS NECESSARY! WE HAVE SCREWED THE PHILIPPINE VETERANS, THE HMONG, OTHER NATIVE AMERICANS, AND EVERYONE ELSE WE SUCKERED IN TO FIGHT FOR US ON THE CHEAP.

ARMY CUTS OFF PAY FOR WWII ALASKA MILITIA VETERANS

Rachel D'oro - Associated Press Writer - Jan 22, 2009

ANCHORAGE, Alaska – The Army has decided to cut off retirement pay for veterans of a largely Native militia formed to guard the territory of Alaska from the threat of Japanese attack during World War II. The change means 26 surviving members of the Alaska Territorial Guard — most in their 80s and long retired — will lose as much as \$557 in monthly retirement pay, a state veterans officer said Thursday. The payments end Feb. 1.

Applications for retirement pay from 37 others have been suspended. <More at: www.miamiherald.com/news/nation/AP/story/868131.html

US TO PAY \$350,000 IN LAWSUIT OVER VETERAN'S SUICIDE

Jonathan Saltzman - Globe Staff - January 15, 2009

The federal government has agreed to pay \$350,000 to settle a federal lawsuit by a Belchertown family that blamed the Northampton VA medical center for the suicide of their son, an Iraq war veteran who hanged himself after he allegedly was denied mental health care while exhibiting signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.

<More at: www.boston.com/news/local/breaking_news/2009/01/us_to_pay_350g.html>

TRICARE FOR LIFE NOT ON CHOPPING BLOCK

James Siscel - Jan 14, 2009

A viral e-mail campaign is unsettling military retirees over 65. Sourcing a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report, these e-mails claim that TRICARE for Life is at risk. These distress warnings are overstated.

The report, on Budget Options, Volume 1: Health Care lists 115 options for reducing federal spending on health care, altering federal healthcare programs, and making substantive changes to the nation's health insurance system. But these are not formal recommendations. The suggestion for TRICARE for Life is only Option 96 on the list. None are formal recommendations. <More at: www.roa.org/site/PageServer?pagename=advocate>

VIOLENT VETERANS, THE BIG PICTURE

Helen Benedict - January 14, 2009

Iraq War veterans seem to be killing and hurting themselves and others more than the veterans of any other war in American history. Only two weeks ago, the New York Times reported nine murders and a rising number of rapes and other violent crimes against women committed by Iraq war veterans at Fort Carson, Colorado. One veteran beat his girlfriend to death. Another raped and murdered a mentally challenged teenage girl.

Some say this rise in veteran violence only reflects the better reporting of crimes and is not a rise at all, but the statistics are too startling for that to be true. Suicide rates are the highest they have ever been in the Army. The number of attempted suicides and self-inflicted injuries among soldiers has jumped six-fold since the Iraq war began and is continuing to rise. The rates of sexual violence against women inside the military are the highest ever seen. Domestic violence among veterans has reached historic frequency. And post-traumatic stress disorder rates appear to be higher among Iraq War veterans than among those who have served in Afghanistan or even, many believe, in Vietnam.

<More at: www.huffingtonpost.com/helen-benedict/violent-veterans-the-big_b_157937.html>

DVA TO EXPAND ENROLLMENT FOR PRIORITY 8 VETERANS

Matthew M. Johnson - CQ TODAY ONLINE NEWS -Jan. 6, 2009.

VA Outlines Plan To Expand Health Services for Middle-Class Vets

House appropriators were buoyed by a Veterans Affairs Department briefing that outlined how fiscal 2009 funding will be used to enroll about 265,000 vets who have been denied VA health services since 2003.

A \$375 million provision was included in the fiscal 2009 VA spending bill measure (PL 110-329) to allow the department to bring into the system more "Priority 8" veterans — those who typically earn more than \$30,000 a year. The funding aims to expand the enrollment of Priority 8 veterans by 10 percent. Priority 8 refers to a subcategory of veterans. Priority 1s have the most need for care and Priority 8s the least. <More at: www.veteranstoday.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=4326>

SUICIDE SPOTLIGHTS TROOPS' MENTAL CARE

Kimberly Hefling - 1/15/09

WASHINGTON (AP) — In 2005, an Army captain in Iraq asked for a mental health evaluation for one of his soldiers, a private first class from North Carolina who was known to put the muzzle of his weapon in his mouth.

The case was assigned to a psychologist who was unlicensed — a common practice in the early years of the war, when the Army rushed mental health counselors to the combat zone even if some weren't certified or fully qualified.

The psychologist reported that a screening indicated the 20-year-old private, Jason Scheuerman, was "capable of claiming mental illness" to manipulate his superiors and did not have a mental disorder. Three weeks later, Scheuerman stepped into a barracks closet and shot himself to death. He had nailed a note to the closet that said, "Maybe finally I can get some peace."

<More at: www.newsday.com/news/health/ny-health-suic0115.0.6606456_story>

VA LOOKS TO HIRE DISABLED VETERANS

Ron Seman - January 14, 2009

Two actions by the Department of Veterans Affairs in recent weeks will assist disabled veterans and put into place another increase in travel reimbursement for veterans who must travel to distant VA facilities.

... Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake said all severely injured veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will be contacted by VA's Veterans Employment Coordination Service to determine their interest in -- and qualifications for -- VA jobs. So far that office has identified 2,300 severely injured veterans of those wars, of whom 600 expressed interest in VA employment. <More at: www.hudsonhubtimes.com/news/article/4504375>

FISCAL CRISIS THREATENS GI BILL PROGRAM

Tom Philpott - January 22, 2009

Fiscal Crisis Wrinkles New GI Bill's 'Yellow Ribbon'

The worldwide financial crisis has hit private colleges hard enough that relatively few are likely to participate in the Post-9/11 GI Bill's "Yellow Ribbon" initiative when it begins this fall, says Keith M. Wilson, director of education service for the Veterans Benefits Administration.

Under the [Yellow Ribbon program](#), private colleges and universities can enter into agreements with the Department of Veterans Affairs to waive up to half of tuition and fees charged above the most costly state-run school. The VA, in turn, will match the waived amount, thereby enhancing school reimbursements and the value of the new GI Bill.

... "Most schools aren't going to want to do a Yellow Ribbon program... because their finances have been hit too hard in the last couple of months," Wilson said in phone interview on draft GI Bill regulations.

That, he added, is his personal opinion from informal talks with some private school officials and not official responses returned to VA. <More at: www.govcentral.com/education/articles/6325-fiscal-crisis-threatens-gi-bill-program>

REPORT CLAIMS OVERSEAS MILITARY VOTERS GETTING SHORT CHANGED

January 08, 2009

Americans serving overseas are getting short-changed on their voting rights according to a new report. The analysis by the Pew Center for the States calculated state-by-state the amount of time it takes for absentee ballots to be requested, sent, returned and tabulated. It found many in the military don't have time to cast their vote and return it by the deadline.

<More at: www.wksr.com/wksr.php?rfc=src/article.html&id=19648>

TESTIMONY SHOWS SCOPE OF MEAL PROBLEMS AT MCCOY

Ryan J. Foley - The Associated Press - Jan 18, 2009

MADISON, Wis. — Food service was so poor at one of the nation's largest military training bases in 2005 and 2006 that meals were not available, bugs were mealtime companions and workers didn't follow basic safety rules, according to testimony recently made public.

The Army blames the state of Wisconsin for mismanaging the multimillion-dollar food service contract at Fort McCoy under a program for blind vendors. A state official who oversaw the contract acknowledged problems but testified that shoddy Army facilities were largely at fault. <More at: http://www.armytimes.com/news/2009/01/ap_mccoy_meals_011809/>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SUNDAY 25 JANUARY 2009

NOTE: STATISTICS FOR WOUNDED ARE GETTING SHAKIER - DoD REVISES NUMBERS – DROPS NON-HOSTILE "OTHER"

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,139 DAYS)		OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,668 DAYS)	
KILLED US	4,223	KILLED US	637
WOUNDED US [1/03/09]	30,934	OTHER CASUALTIES US [1/03/2009]	2,627
OTHER US CASUALTIES [1/03/09]	≥35,470	KILLED COALITION	416
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [1/03/09]	172	WOUNDED US [1/03/09]	7,492
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1	WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007)	1,602
KILLED UK	178	KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED OTHER COALITION	139	KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (7/2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819	WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (7/2004)	32,034
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182	AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	1.75M/4.8M
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/03/09]	≥ 48,874		
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [1/09/09]	≥ 98,560- 658,227		
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [11/9/08]	≥ 400K – 1.374M		
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2. 5M	COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$586,891,693,436

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

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF JANUARY 20, 2009

This week the Army, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard announced a decrease, while the Navy announced an increase. The net collective result is 1,064 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 96,006; Navy Reserve, 6,082; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 15,165; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,572; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 765. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 125,590, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated can be found at www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2009/d20090120ngr.pdf.

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

ABBREVIATED [WITH APOLOGIES] FOR THE COMPLETE LETTER PLEASE GO TO:

<http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,183199,00.html?ESRC=army-a.nl>

FIRST LADY'S MESSAGE TO FAMILIES

Michelle Obama - January 17, 2009

... I particularly cherished my visits with military families all across the country. I met so many strong and inspiring military spouses eager to share their stories, their dreams for the future and the unique challenges they face because of their families' selfless service to our country.

And if there's one thing I learned, it's that when our servicemen and women go to war, their families go with them. I saw how they take care of each other, heard how they fill in whenever the system fails and discovered that the trials they faced always were matched by the hope they shared that better days are still ahead.

The simple 35-word oath my husband will take and the peaceful transfer of power it completes makes it easy to forget that the great fortune of our citizenship isn't free at all. It's a responsibility inherited only because generations of Americans have fought and bled and died for it.

So as I watch Barack take that oath, I'll be thinking especially about those members of our American family who stand guard across the world and the loved ones who await their safe return. Because even as we mark this moment in American history, there still will be empty seats at the dinner table; there still will be spouses struggling to juggle roles and responsibilities; there still will be children who mark the passing of a birthday without Mommy and toddlers who know their father only by a grainy video stream from a far-flung corner of the globe.

My husband and I are deeply grateful for the sacrifices that these families make to protect all American families. And we join them — today and every day — in praying for their loved ones and their safety. They don't ask a lot in return, just a Washington that understands the challenges they face as part of their extraordinary commitment to our country.

My husband understands that commitment, and he will ensure America lives up to its end. As military families join us on Tuesday, in person and in spirit, I want each and every one of them to know that for as long as I have the tremendous honor of being your First Lady, your voices will be heard, you will have an advocate in the White House, and the American promise you preserve always will extend to you, too.

All of us can learn a fundamental lesson from our military families: You don't need to wear a uniform to serve your country. We all have something to contribute to the life of this nation.

Monday is Martin Luther King Jr. Day. And to honor the legacy of a man who believed that everybody could be great because anybody can serve, my family and I will spend the day performing activities in service to others. And we'll ask all Americans to join us in making an ongoing commitment to serve their community and their country, because in this new season of hope, that's the only way we'll begin renewing America's promise for all who reach for it and all who defend it — as one nation and one people.

On Tuesday night, my husband and I will tuck in our daughters like we always do. Their bedrooms will be different, their home unfamiliar. But they will drift off to sleep protected by that same sacrifice that has kept all of our families safe and safeguarded our freedom for generations — the sacrifice of our men and women in uniform and their families.

For that, we could not be more grateful — or more proud.

MILITARY BANS MARINES FROM VISITING TIJUANA

January 23, 2009

An official has barred Marines from visiting Tijuana as the California border town's drug violence soars.

Lt. Gen. Samuel Helland of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force at Camp Pendleton has restricted travel to Mexico for the unit's 44,000 members, USA Today reports.

"The situation in Mexico is now more dangerous than usual," Mike Alvarez, the unit's civilian public information officer, told the paper. "The intent is just to look out for the Marines' safety and well-being."

Last year, 843 people were killed in Tijuana, up dramatically from its 2007 death toll of 337. Many of the murders were execution-style and the bodies were found decapitated, the paper said.

The Marines said the order was first put in place for the Christmas holidays. USA Today said the order was extended indefinitely last week. www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,481925,00.html

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

LEGALLY GET OUT OF YOUR BAD HOME LOAN WITH A FORENSIC LOAN AUDIT

January 21, 2009

Loan Forensic Audits: How To Legally Get Out Of Your Bad Loan

by John P. Allen, General Manager of the Veterans Today Network

Leverage! Remember that buzz word! You see when Veterans look for a mortgage, whether it be a VA Home Loan, FHA, or conventional, they rely on professional advice and the aid of a mortgage broker or lender. The loan process is complicated and most everyone places their trust in the professional that is guiding them through the process.

Unfortunately, many of these professionals placed thousands and thousands of borrowers in loans that they could not afford or in just down right exotic mortgages, that now have become extinct.

Predatory lending is a buzz word that is floating around the blogosphere right now and for good reason. There are thousands and quite possibly maybe a million plus people that have mortgages where the Truth in Lending Act was violated, thus falling under the predatory lending statue. Many can stop foreclosure if they only knew what to look for and how to defend themselves.

LOAN AUDIT DOCUMENT

This report is a very specialized and imperative in identifying if a borrower is a victim of predatory lending. A professional review is made of all loan documents and a thorough investigation for miscalculations are made to determine if the loan terms are accurate, truthful, and met the requirements of the applicable federal statutes. <More at: www.veteranstoday.com/article4508.html>

UNIFORMED SERVICES EMPLOYMENT AND REEMPLOYMENT RIGHTS IN A NUTSHELL

Rod Powers, About.com

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) protects the job rights of individuals who voluntarily or involuntarily leave employment positions to undertake military service. USERRA also prohibits employers from discriminating against past and present members of the uniformed services, and applicants to the uniformed services.

REEMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

You have the right to be reemployed in your civilian job if you leave that job to perform service in the uniformed service and:

- you ensure that your employer receives advance written or verbal notice of your service;
- you have five years or less of cumulative service in the uniformed services while with that particular employer;
- you return to work or apply for reemployment in a timely manner after conclusion of service; and
- you have not been separated from service with a disqualifying discharge or under other than honorable conditions.

If you are eligible to be reemployed, you must be restored to the job and benefits you would have attained if you had not been absent due to military service or, in some cases, a comparable job.

RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM DISCRIMINATION AND RETALIATION

If you:

- are a past or present member of the uniformed service;
- have applied for membership in the uniformed service; or
- are obligated to serve in the uniformed service;

then an employer may not deny you any of the following because of this status:

- initial employment;
- reemployment;
- retention in employment;
- promotion; or
- any benefit of employment.

In addition, an employer may not retaliate against anyone assisting in the enforcement of USERRA rights, including testifying or making a statement in connection with a proceeding under USERRA, even if that person has no service connection.

HEALTH INSURANCE PROTECTION

If you leave your job to perform military service, you have the right to elect to continue your existing employer-based health plan coverage for you and your dependents for up to 24 months while in the military.

Even if you don't elect to continue coverage during your military service, you have the right to be reinstated in your employer's health plan when you are reemployed, generally without any waiting periods or exclusions (e.g., pre-existing condition exclusions) except for service-connected illnesses or injuries.

ENFORCEMENT

The U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) is authorized to investigate and resolve complaints of USERRA violations.

For assistance in filing a complaint, or for any other information on USERRA, contact VETS at 1-866-4-USA-DOL or visit its website at www.dol.gov/vets.

An interactive online USERRA Advisor can be viewed at www.dol.gov/elaws/userra.htm.

If you file a complaint with VETS and VETS is unable to resolve it, you may request that your case be referred to the Department of Justice or the Office of Special Counsel, depending on the employer, for representation.

You may also bypass the VETS process and bring a civil action against an employer for violations of USERRA.

DISABILITYINFO.GOV

DisabilityInfo.gov is a comprehensive online resource designed to provide people with disabilities with quick and easy access to the information they need. With just a few clicks, the site provides access to disability-related information and programs available across the government on numerous subjects, including benefits, civil rights, community life, education, employment, housing, health, technology and transportation.

DisabilityInfo.gov is managed by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), in partnership with [21 other federal agencies](http://www.disabilityinfo.gov/digov-public/public/DisplayPage.do?parentFolderId=156). www.disabilityinfo.gov/digov-public/public/DisplayPage.do?parentFolderId=156

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; 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