

# SOUND OFF!



VOL. III, NO 13

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

*"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"*

25 FEBRUARY 2008

## FIRST CALL - THEME OF THE ISSUE AND/OR CLIPS & QUOTES

### POTEMKIN LIVES!

Prince Grigori Alexandrovich Potemkin-Tavrisheski, Field Marshall under Catherine II (the Great), reportedly built mock villages in the Ukraine to impress the Empress and her retinue, especially the foreign ambassadors who accompanied her. The villages consisted of empty shells with brightly painted façades of residences and shops. When the Imperial party would rest for the night, Prince Potemkin would secretly drive the herds of sheep and cattle grazing around his mock villages to the next mock village so that each would look prosperous.

Emperor Haile Salassie of Ethiopia had mock store and residence fronts built the entire length of the route from the airport to downtown Addis Ababa, behind which were the slums of the city. The mock fronts were just high enough so that the slums could not be seen by President Eisenhower as he passed in his limousine.

Much of East Berlin in the 50s, 60s, and 70s consisted of mock building fronts, some of them many stories high, which were façades for the empty, bombed out shells of pre-war buildings.

And now Prince Potemkin lives again, but this time, on the banks of the Potomac. He has taken up principal residence in the halls of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

We all know that things are not as they seem, and certainly not as they are reported by the VA bureaucracy. Things are not getting better, they are getting worse.

For a complete discussion of this problem please refer to the [testimony before Congress](#) on 14 February 2008 of Gordon Erspamer, our legal partner and chief advocate in the class action lawsuit against the VA. It is well worth your time.

The VA has a [new pamphlet](#) out (February '08) which outlines its strategic goals (5 of them) and then tells how they are performing when it comes to Benefits, Health Care, Memorial Affairs, and "OEF/OIF Initiatives". They have built a new Potemkin Village.

They cite statistic after statistic to show how well they are doing. Great figures, but the problem is that almost every statistic is meaningless. I'll touch on some of the more egregious claims and [comment](#) on why they fail to tell us anything meaningful.

*"In 2007 VA processed nearly 825,000 claims for disability benefits" – nowhere do they mention how many claims were filed.*

*"As of September 2007, 223,564 OEF/OIF veterans filed for disability claims,, 89% received claims decisions, and 11% are waiting for claims decisions." – The "89%" were apparently 200,000 claims, but they pretty obviously could not be 200,00 of those filed in 2007, since the waiting period for initial decisions is currently 196 days according to their own figures. No mention of how many of the decisions were "favorable".*

Service is often reported in terms of dollars budgeted, occasionally of dollars spent, or of programs started; never in the entire pamphlet in terms of services provided on a timely basis to individual recipients.

*"VA instituted a program to screen all patients who served in combat theaters of Afghanistan or Iraq for TBI" – which means if you get past the 196-day delay, AND get a favorable ruling, AND you get admitted as a "patient" , THEN you get screened, i.e., if the program is anything more than a plan and has in fact been implemented, which one cannot ascertain from the pamphlet.*

*"VA has enhanced overall mental health resources by over \$500 million in FY 2007" – a budget statement, not a service statement. How many more beneficiaries were helped? How did this affect waiting times? What was the real need against which this money was programmed? Hard to ascertain, but did the suicide rate get better? Apparently not.*

*"VA led the way in care for traumatic brain injury veterans by developing a mandatory TBI training course for select VA health care professions" Training course, not services; for "select", not ALL.*

I guess we shouldn't be too hard on the VA. After all, the Department of Defense's report on progress in Iraq and Afghanistan suffers from the same problem. To wit:

["False reports from Iraq undermine confidence in government and media"](#)

["Couric Admits Her Rosy Report From Iraq Is Based On 'What The U.S. Military Wants Me To See'"](#)

["Rosy Assessments on Iraq 'Not Related to Reality,' Some Say"](#)

["How the Pentagon planted a false story"](#)

And of course from the administration itself:

["Bush, aides made 935 false statements in run-up to war"](#)

So Potemkin villages abound, and the Prince is vindicated. What he started as a minor flim-flam in the 18<sup>th</sup> century has become a tool of state and weapon of war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And we still don't look behind the façade to see the emptiness and the truth that lurks there.

But against whom are these tools and weapons being used? Could it be us? Or are we just the sheep that the modern princes herd from village to village in an attempt to flummox the world? [Ed.]

## 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 <http://www.vetsprobono.org/index.htm>. United States Court of appeals for Veterans Claims “Public List of Practitioners” are members of the court’s bar <http://www.vetapp.gov/practitioners/>

### WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

Membership is open, free, and very worthwhile! Get your fellow veterans, and veterans’ family members to join vuft! We are beginning to be heard, and we need you to help us get the message out. If each of us would bring in one new member every month, what an impact we could have!

### CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE!

Please check the website at [www.vuft.org](http://www.vuft.org). We have revised it and are regularly adding useful references.

## ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

**THE FIGHT IS ON!** The [law suit](#) that we have filed along with Veterans for Common Sense against the Veterans’ Administration proceeds slowly. There are new [documents](#) on the lawsuit concerning disclosures on our website. There is also a good article on the family of one of the participants at <http://www.startribune.com/local/15895127.html>

**DOES YOUR PERSONAL CASE APPLY TO THIS LITIGATION? YOU CAN GET YOUR CASE EVALUATED [HERE](#).**

**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](mailto:rhandy@vuft.org) or the Vice Chair at [scook@vuft.org](mailto:scook@vuft.org). Watch for details at [www.vuft.org](http://www.vuft.org)

**WE NEED YOUR HELP.** VUFT is a no-fee organization. We must raise money to keep the effort going. Normal expenses have been borne out of the pockets of a very few board members, plus a few small donations over the two plus years of our existence. Although our legal defense in the current case is *pro bono*, we expect to incur expenses in support of the case, to include travel expenses should we need to testify. We also are incurring expenses in our effort to expand to all fifty states. Please consider [donating](#) whatever you can to VUFT ~ all donations are tax deductible to the donor.

## MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS

### FROM ONE OF OUR READERS

One Day = \$720 Million

If you have a moment, check out this video. It is really a nice piece of work that could be used in a lot of places.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wnq6cD5jk1Q>

[And at the end, in your mind’s eye, add 3 Americans and 100 Iraqis not killed, and 30 Americans not wounded, at least six of whom will require care for life. Ed.]

## RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

### **THE GOOD NEWS: ONE OF VUFT'S FRIENDS AND PARTNERS, "SWORDS TO PLOWSHARES", GOT ONE OF THESE \$500,000 GRANTS**

### **THE BAD NEWS: THE NEXT DAY HE ANNOUNCED HUGE CUTS IN EDUCATION FUNDS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES WHICH WILL SERIOUSLY IMPACT THE ABILITY OF VETERANS TO GET HELP IN FURTHERING THEIR EDUCATION**

### **GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES \$6 MILLION IN GRANTS TO HELP CALIFORNIA'S VETERANS FIND NEW JOBS**

2/12/2008 - Continuing his commitment to California's brave servicemen and women, Governor Schwarzenegger [CA] today announced more than \$6 million in grants to help military veterans as they return to the civilian workforce.

<More at: <http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?fact-sheet/8750/>>

### **BUT HERE IS ONE POLITICIAN WHO GETS IT**

### **CONGRESSMAN ALLEN [D - ME-01] ANNOUNCES THE INTRODUCTION OF THE FULL FAITH IN VETERANS ACT OF 2008**

Feb 12, 2008

"The goal of my bill is to improve diagnosis, compensation, and treatment for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD," Representative Allen said. "The largest and most significant change my bill would make is to change the standard of proof for veterans who do not have full military records to verify that the cause of their PTSD occurred during service- known as an in-service stressor. Above all, my bill assures that our nation acknowledges that for our veterans with PTSD their experience in the military forever changed them and left them with scars they will carry throughout their lives."

<More at: <http://tomallen.house.gov/index.cfm?ContentID=923&ParentID=4&SectionID=15&SectionTree=4.15&Ink=b&ItemID=902>>

### **THIS IS REALLY NICE, BUT WOULDN'T IT BE BETTER IF THEY HAD USED THEIR TIME TO PASS CONGRESSMAN ALLEN'S' BILL?**

### **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OFFERS NATIONAL SALUTE TO HOSPITALIZED VETERANS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Washington, D.C. - The U.S. House of Representatives today passed legislation to honor our nation's veterans ...

1. H.R. 4169 - The American Braille Flag Memorial Act, to authorize the placement of an American Braille tactile flag in Arlington National Cemetery honoring blind members of the Armed Forces, veterans, and other Americans
  2. H.Res. 963 - Supporting the goals and ideals of National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans Week
  3. H.Res. 790 - Commending the people of the State of Washington for showing their support for the needs of the State of Washington's veterans and encouraging residents of other States to pursue creative ways to show their own support for veterans
- <More at: <http://veterans.house.gov/news/PRArticle.aspx?NewsID=203>>

For complete access to bills concerning veterans, go to <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/110search.html> and type in the word "veteran"

## RETREAT - NEWS

### **GATES BACKS DELAY IN IRAQ DRAWDOWN**

Robert Burns - AP - 2008-02-11

BAGHDAD (Feb. 11) - Defense Secretary Robert Gates on Monday endorsed, for the first time, the idea of pausing the drawdown of U.S. forces from Iraq this summer.

"A brief period of consolidation and evaluation probably does make sense," Gates told reporters after meeting with Gen. David Petraeus, the top U.S. commander in Iraq. Petraeus has indicated in recent weeks that he wants a "period of evaluation" this summer to assess the impact on Iraq security of reducing the U.S. military presence from 20 brigades to 15 brigades.

Of that five-brigade reduction, only one has departed thus far. The last of the five is to be gone by the end of July.

<More at: <http://news.aol.com/story/ a/gates-backs-delay-in-iraq-drawdown/20080210143509990001>>

## **MORE U.S. TROOPS SEEN IN IRAQ BY SUMMER**

Andrew Gray - REUTERS - February 15, 2008

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States will probably have more troops in Iraq this summer than it did before pouring in forces last year -- even after a planned drawdown, a U.S. general said on Friday.

<More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/news/news-iraq-usa-troops.html>>

## **ARMY BURIED STUDY FAULTING IRAQ PLANNING**

Michael R. Gordon - New York Times - 2008-02-11

Washington - The Army is accustomed to protecting classified information. But when it comes to the planning for the Iraq war, even an unclassified assessment can acquire the status of a state secret. That is what happened to a detailed study of the planning for postwar Iraq prepared for the Army by the RAND Corporation, a federally financed center that conducts research for the military.

After 18 months of research, RAND submitted a report in the summer of 2005 called "Rebuilding Iraq." RAND researchers provided an unclassified version of the report along with a secret one, hoping that its publication would contribute to the public debate on how to prepare for future conflicts. But the study's wide-ranging critique of the White House, the Defense Department and other government agencies was a concern for Army generals, and the Army has sought to keep the report under lock and key.

<More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/11/washington/11army.html>>

## **US MILITARY ACCUSED OF HARBORING FUNDAMENTALISM**

2/14/08

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Since his last combat deployment in Iraq, Jeremy Hall has had a rough time, getting shoved and threatened by his fellow soldiers. The trouble started there when he would not pray in the mess hall.

"A senior ranking staff sergeant told me to leave and sit somewhere else because I refused to pray," Hall, a 23-year-old US army specialist, told AFP.

Later, Hall was confronted by a major for holding an authorized meeting of "atheists and freethinkers" on his base. The officer threatened to discipline him and block his re-enlistment.

"He said: 'You guys are being a problem and problems can be removed,'" Hall said.

<More at: [http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hj\\_WduJSd-7xIcenAGMSPeoCslmQ](http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hj_WduJSd-7xIcenAGMSPeoCslmQ)>

## **ARMY, CORPS: \$7B SHORTEALL IN BUDGET**

Associated Press - February 15, 2008

WASHINGTON - The Army and Marine Corps need nearly \$7 billion more than President Bush requested in next year's budget, a significant shortfall at a time when ground forces are carrying the brunt of combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to budget documents.

Service officials said the president's budget was adequate to meet their objectives. But they added that much more could be done - and faster - to improve the military's ability to fight if more money were provided.

<More at: <http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,162157,00.html>>

## **THE THREE TRILLION DOLLAR WAR**

Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes - From The Times - February 23, 2008

The Bush Administration was wrong about the benefits of the war and it was wrong about the costs of the war. The president and his advisers expected a quick, inexpensive conflict. Instead, we have a war that is costing more than anyone could have imagined.

The cost of direct US military operations - not even including long-term costs such as taking care of wounded veterans - already exceeds the cost of the 12-year war in Vietnam and is more than double the cost of the Korean War.

And, even in the best case scenario, these costs are projected to be almost ten times the cost of the first Gulf War, almost a third more than the cost of the Vietnam War, and twice that of the First World War. The only war in our history which cost more was the Second World War, when 16.3 million U.S. troops fought in a campaign lasting four years, at a total cost (in 2007 dollars, after adjusting for inflation) of about \$5 trillion. With virtually the entire armed forces committed to fighting the Germans and Japanese, the cost per troop (in today's dollars) was less than \$100,000 in 2007 dollars. By contrast, the Iraq war is costing upward of \$400,000 per troop. <More at: [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest\\_contributors/article3419840.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article3419840.ece)>

## **FORT HOOD SOLDIERS BREAKING THE SILENCE IN WAR IN IRAQ**

Chelsea Hover - 2/17/2008

A growing number of active duty soldiers or recent Iraq war veterans are speaking up about the war in Iraq.

And with the number of soldiers speaking up about their experiences in Iraq via online forums, blogs and pamphlets, some vets feel it's their duty to let the American public know the truth.

"The honest truth is that if the American people knew what was going on over there everyday, they would be raising their voices too. They would be saying, 'Hey, bring those guys home,'" Sgt. Selena Coppa said.

Coppa blames lawmakers in Washington for filtering the facts on the war in Iraq. She said there's no real end in sight.

<More at: [http://www.news8austin.com/content/your\\_news/default.asp?ArID=200673](http://www.news8austin.com/content/your_news/default.asp?ArID=200673)>

## **SAILORS AND AIRMEN LEARN THE ARMY WAY AT CAMP ATTERBURY**

Spc. Elizabeth Gorenc - Camp Atterbury Public Affairs - Feb 22, 2008

CAMP ATTERBURY, IN. - Airmen and Sailors from all over the world joined at Camp Atterbury Joint Maneuver Training Center in January to compose Joint Services Training Operations. These reserve and active duty servicemembers from different bases came to CAJMTC to deploy under the same command in lieu of Army orders.

... The combination of Airmen and Sailors are scheduled to be dispersed between different docket, Army bases, and joint commands throughout Iraq and Afghanistan. Instead of fulfilling their qualified individual jobs, they will be filling necessary slots needed within the countries. <More at: <http://campatterbury.org/JSTO.htm>>

## **ARIZONA NATIONAL GUARD RESCUES U.S. SENATORS**

Army Maj. John Bozicevic - Arizona National Guard - Feb 24, 2008

MEHTAR LAM, Afghanistan - When a helicopter carrying three senior U.S. senators was forced to make an emergency landing Feb. 23 due to blizzard conditions in the mountains of Afghanistan, Soldiers of the Arizona National Guard's 1st Battalion, 158th Infantry Regiment, responded to secure the site and evacuate Senators John Kerry (D-Mass.), Joseph Biden (D-Del.) and Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.). The D Company platoon, led by Army 1st Lt. Dennis Chamberlain of Gilbert, Ariz., along with servicemembers of Combined Joint Task Force-82, made the treacherous cross-country journey from Bagram Airfield to their rendezvous in less than an hour after receiving notice of the downed aircraft.

<More at: <http://cjtfa.com/index.php/Command-Information/Arizona-National-Guard-rescues-U.S.-Senators.html>>

## **TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>What</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>Notes</u>
2/15			Stand Down	Susan Marcell	602-379-7132
2/23			Resource Fair	<a href="#">Greg Jacobs</a>	414-902-5729
2/25	1100 - 1400	Holiday Inn San Francisco Golden Gateway 1500 Van Ness Avenue San Francisco, CA	Career Fair		415-441-4000
2/26	1100 - 1400	Fort Bragg Officer's Club Building 1-4930 Armistead St & Totten St Fort Bragg, NC	Career Fair		910-907-2582
3/6	1100 - 1400	Crowne Plaza Hotel Kansas City Downtown 1301 Wyandotte Street Kansas City, MO	Career Fair		816.474.6664
3/14		Yuma, AZ	Stand Down	<a href="#">William J. "Bill" Thornton</a>	928-503-0552
3/16-3/18		National Labor College 10000 New Hampshire Ave. Silver Spring, MD	Winter Soldier II	<a href="#">IVAW</a>	773-276-4189

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

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

## TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

### ARMY TO BOOST PERKS FOR RECRUITS

Bryan Bender - Globe Staff - February 9, 2008

\$15b plan includes mortgage aid, school; Effort is in response to drop in enlistees

WASHINGTON - To relieve the wartime strain on ground troops and meet a mandate to expand the force, the Army plans to offer a series of new and costly incentives, including a home mortgage fund and a military prep school for high school dropouts, to help draw in a shrinking pool of eligible volunteers, according to military officials and federal budget documents.

After lowering its own education standards and accepting a rising number of recruits who would have been considered unfit a few years ago, the Army's initiatives - costing a large part of the \$15 billion it will receive to add more soldiers - underscore the difficulty it faces in signing up enough young men and women to add 65,000 soldiers to its ranks over the next three years. The new push also highlights growing concern that the Iraq war and the need to lower standards in order to meet recruiting quotas may be causing long-term damage to the all-volunteer force.

<More at: [http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2008/02/09/army\\_to\\_boost\\_perks\\_for\\_recruits/](http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2008/02/09/army_to_boost_perks_for_recruits/)>

### WORTH CLICKING THROUGH TO GET THE WHOLE ARTICLE

### DENIAL IN THE CORPS

Kathy Dobie - The Nation - from the February 18, 2008 issue

Marine Lance Cpl. James Jenkins is buried in the same New Jersey cemetery that he used to run through on his way to high school ... It was for heroic actions performed during a fifty-five-hour battle with the Mahdi militia in Najaf that Jenkins was awarded a Bronze Star for valor. The fighting, which began on the city streets in August 2004 and moved into the Wadi al Salam Cemetery, was ferociously personal. Marines and militiamen were often only yards apart, killing one another at close range. When the battle was over, eight Americans and hundreds of militiamen were dead. After that tour, his second in Iraq, Jenkins could barely sleep. When he did, the nightmares were horrible. He was plagued by remorse and depression, unable to be intimate with his fiancée, run ragged by an adrenaline surge he couldn't turn off.

Back at San Diego's Camp Pendleton the following January, Jenkins took to gambling ... Busted for writing bad checks, he was locked up in the Camp Pendleton brig that spring pending court-martial. ... When his command decided to lock him up a third time, James Jenkins ran.... On September 28, 2005, eight months after returning from Iraq, Jenkins found himself cornered in the Oceanside apartment he shared with his fiancée. A deputy sheriff pounded on the front door, while a US Marshal covered the back. ... While the officers waited for his fiancée to open the door, Jenkins shot himself in the right temple.

In the wake of Jenkins's suicide, the Marine Corps attempted to deny death benefits to his mother by claiming he'd died a deserter; but in a report based on that eligibility investigation, Thomas Ferguson, a special agent from the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, described the young man as a "salvageable marine" whose untreated PTSD had led to his suicide.

"LCpl Jenkins was a bona fide war hero," Ferguson wrote. "Unfortunately, it is clear that when he most needed help from the military, the military failed him." James Jenkins is a casualty of the war in Iraq as much as his fellow marines who died in that cemetery in Najaf, abandoned by an organization that has little tolerance for broken marines and is itself under tremendous stress from sustaining multiple deployments. "They didn't do anything," his mother says. "They just kept locking him up."

<More at: <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20080218/dobie>>

### AUSTIN VA RESEARCHER ALLEGES MISMANAGEMENT

Marty Toohey - American-Statesman Staff - February 11, 2008

When the Department of Veterans Affairs announced last year that it was starting a brain injury research program at the University of Texas, Dr. Robert Van Boven predicted that his program would become "the birthplace for new standards of treatment" for wounded troops.

Now, seven months after he was hired, Van Boven said his VA bosses are responsible for "gross mismanagement, waste and possible fraud" concerning the program. Van Boven said program money is being used for research unrelated to brain injuries and that peer reviewers found that the work had no merit. After raising complaints, Van Boven said, his bosses threatened to further cut his research time. <More at: <http://www.statesman.com/news/content/news/stories/local/02/11/0211tbi.html>>

## **LAND WARRIOR NEEDS WORK, SOLDIERS SAY**

Military.com - Christian Lowe - February 13, 2008

CAMP ABLE X-RAY, Iraq --- It was billed as a revolutionary new tool that promised to give Soldiers an added edge in the fight, with a heads-up displayed map, a see-around-corners rifle sight and speed-of-light communications. And on its first deployment to combat, the decades-old Land Warrior system did win over many of its detractors. But as the Soldiers carrying Land Warrior's burdensome boxes and wires on their backs labored into their seventh month of deployment, some are beginning to question whether this version of a system the Army worked so hard to get to the field is worth the price.

"It's like a 17-pound GPS unit," said a Soldier assigned to Alpha Company, 4th Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, the first Army unit to ever deploy to a war zone using Land Warrior. "We don't use half the things it's supposed to be able to do."

<More at: <http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,161855,00.html>>

## **AGENT ORANGE DEFORMING A THIRD GENERATION IN VIETNAM**

Tom Fawthrop - Comment Is Free - February 13, 2008

Long after the last bullet has been fired in a war, unexploded bombs, landmines and toxic chemicals continue to maim and kill civilians. This is particularly true of the Vietnam war. Three decades after US soldiers and diplomats scrambled aboard the last planes out of Saigon in April 1975, the toxins they left behind still poison Vietnam. Relations with the United States have been normalized since the 1990s, but the denial of justice to the victims of Agent Orange remains a major bone of contention.

<More at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/76712/>>

## **GUARD, RESERVE MAKE UP MAJORITY OF VETERAN SUICIDES**

Kimberly Hefling - Associated Press - Feb. 12, 2008

WASHINGTON — National Guard and Reserve troops who have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan make up more than half of veterans who committed suicide after returning home from those wars, according to new government data obtained by The Associated Press. A Department of Veterans Affairs analysis of ongoing research of deaths among veterans of both wars, obtained exclusively by The AP, found that Guard or Reserve members were 53 percent of the veteran suicides from 2001, when the war in Afghanistan began, through the end of 2005. <More at: <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/front/5533700.html>>

## **WEREN'T WE SUPPOSED TO "DO BETTER" ALL ALONG?**

### **ARMY CHIEF: WE'LL DO BETTER WITH INJURED SOLDIERS**

February 13, 2008 – US News

Secretary of the Army Pete Geren today testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that injured soldiers have "experienced poor facilities, leadership challenges, and an entrenched bureaucracy" when seeking medical care. "However, the improvements we will discuss today go well beyond addressing the shortcomings" that were highly publicized in the wake of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center treatment scandal last year, he added.

<More at: <http://www.usnews.com/blogs/news-desk/2008/02/13/army-chief-well-do-better-with-injured-soldiers.html>>

### **PTSD VICTIMS NO LONGER NEED TO PROVE TRAUMA**

Kelly Kennedy - Staff writer - Feb 18, 2008

The Veterans Affairs Department has dumped a policy requiring combat vets to verify in writing that they have witnessed or experienced a traumatic event before filing a claim for post-traumatic stress disorder, said the chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

... In the past, a veteran has had to provide written verification — a statement from a commander or doctor, or testimony from co-workers — that he or she was involved in a traumatic situation in order to receive disability compensation for PTSD from VA. The Defense Department uses the same rules in evaluating PTSD for disability retirement pay.

<More at: [http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2008/02/military\\_ptsdproof\\_080218w/](http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2008/02/military_ptsdproof_080218w/)>

### **ARMY OFFICIAL SLAMS DISABILITY SYSTEM PROJECT**

Kelly Kennedy - Staff writer - Feb 15, 2008

A pilot project intended to speed the process of evaluating and rating service members' disabilities will do little more than turn a bad process into "a fast bad process," the Army's top medical official said Friday.

<More at: [http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/02/military\\_schoomaker\\_vadisability\\_080215w/](http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/02/military_schoomaker_vadisability_080215w/)>

## **RETURNING HOME HOMELESS**

Matt Renner - truthout Report - February 2008

Former Hospital Corpsman Kevin Bartolata spent four years and eight months in the military. When he decided to leave, he found himself alone and with few options. He soon became hopeless and homeless, sleeping in a park in San Francisco. Through sheer persistence and help from veterans organizations, he was able to pull himself out of his desperate situation and find his way.

His story at: [http://www.truthout.org/docs\\_2006/022108R.shtml](http://www.truthout.org/docs_2006/022108R.shtml)>

## **MORE \$22 DRUGS**

On February 13, the Defense Department approved shifting several medications for cardiovascular disorders, enlarged prostate, and immune diseases to the third tier, or \$22 co-pay level.

Chronic heart failure drugs Zebeta, Coreg, Toprol XL, and Lopressor will remain on the formulary at \$3 or \$9 co-pays. Exforge, a combination drug for high blood pressure, will move to the third tier, effective April 16. The co-pay for Norvasc will move in the other direction, dropping from \$22 to \$9.

In addition, a new "prior authorization" requirement on prostate drugs will require beneficiaries to try Uroxatral before Hytrin, Cardura, or Flomax, effective April 16, unless they have had a prescription issued for one of the latter three medications within the last 180 days. This means those three medications will carry a \$22 co-pay unless TRICARE approves the doctor's request that there is a "medical necessity" to take one of them. MOAA and other beneficiary representatives have asked DoD to consider moving Flomax back to a \$9 co-pay.

The drugs Enbrel and Kineret, used to treat various forms of arthritis, psoriasis, Chron's disease, and ulcerative colitis, will move to the third tier effective June 18th. Humira, Raptiva and Amevive remain available for the regular co-pays. The contraceptive Lybrel, and ADHD medication Vyvance will move to the third tier effective April 16.

## **GI BILL FALLING SHORT OF COLLEGE TUITION COSTS**

Charles M. Sennott - Globe Staff - February 10, 2008

Pentagon resists boost in benefits - WASHINGTON - Halsey Bernard made it through a tour in Iraq as a machine gunner. The question for him now is will he make it through the University of Massachusetts.

It isn't a question of academics for the 24-year-old Boston resident. It's about money - and about the obligation of a nation to its fighting men and women. Bernard, who served with the Second Battalion Eighth Marines in Nasariyah, Iraq, in 2003, is one of thousands of veterans who have returned from combat service only to find that their GI Bill college benefits fall far short of actual costs. ... The Pentagon and White House have so far resisted a new GI Bill out of fear that too many will use it - choosing to shed the uniform in favor of school and civilian life.

"The incentive to serve and leave," said Robert Clarke, assistant director of accessions policy at the Department of Defense, may "outweigh the incentive to have them stay."

<More at: [http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2008/02/10/gi\\_bill\\_falling\\_short\\_of\\_college\\_tuition\\_costs/](http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2008/02/10/gi_bill_falling_short_of_college_tuition_costs/)>

## **TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS**

### **FIRST SIOUX TO RECEIVE MEDAL OF HONOR**

Army News Service - Carrie McLeroy - February 23, 2008

WASHINGTON - During the final allied offensive of the Korean War, Master Sgt. Woodrow Wilson Keeble risked his life to save his fellow Soldiers. Almost six decades after his gallant actions and 26 years after his death, Keeble will be the first full-blooded Sioux Indian to receive the Medal of Honor. The White House announced this morning that Keeble will receive the Medal of Honor posthumously in a ceremony scheduled for 2:30 p.m. March 3. <More at: <http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,162632,00.html>>

### **NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF FEBRUARY 20, 2008**

This week, the Army, Navy and Marine Corps announced an increase, while the Air Force and Coast Guard number remained the same. The net collective result is 256 more reservists mobilized than last week. At any given time, services may mobilize some units and individuals while demobilizing others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 73,808; Navy Reserve, 5,225; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 7,128; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,724; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 343. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been mobilized to 95,228, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently mobilized can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/feb2008/d20080220ngr.pdf>



**OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SUNDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2008**

**OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (1,788 DAYS)**

KILLED US	3,972
WOUNDED US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 1/10]	29,080
OTHER US CASUALTIES [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 1/10]	≥30,537
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [LAST DoD UPDATE 1/10]	135
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	4
KILLED UK	174
KILLED OTHER COALITION	133
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE 6/30]	1,001
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 47,555
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 88,991
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400,000+
IRAQ REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL [12/9/27]	2.1M/2.5M

**OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,317 DAYS)**

KILLED US (2/24)	483
*OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 10/2007]	7,720
KILLED COALITION (2/24)	285
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007)	1,472
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (7/2004)	32,034
AFGHAN REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE [2/24]	\$497,424,769,412

*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**

### **TWENTY-NINE PALMS MAN HOPES TO BRING COUNSELING FOR VETERANS TO HIGH DESERT**

JOE VARGO - The Press-Enterprise - February 23, 2008

During intense retreats that combine counseling, massage and Native American rituals, returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are learning to reconnect with their spouses after months of unrelenting combat.

Dubbed the Phoenix Project, the no-cost weeklong retreats unaffiliated with the military have attracted about 500 veterans and their spouses since beginning three years ago.

The program has been hailed by therapists, veterans advocates and returning soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines as a godsend that has helped save dozens of marriages strained by long and repeated deployments.

Now, a Twentynine Palms man is leading efforts to bring the Phoenix Project to the High Desert. The region is home to the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, one of the country's largest Marines bases.

"War presents individuals with rather unusual and unpleasant circumstances they have to deal with," Steven Brown said. "You have to learn how to live with what you've gone through."

Brown, 47, said he got involved in the project to honor his son. Kieran Spence, 23, was a cowboy on a ranch where a Phoenix Project retreat was taking place when he died in an accident in 2006.

Brown has no connection to the military. He runs a magazine dedicated to the High Desert arts community.

His son's best friend was the son of Phoenix Project founder Teresa Goforth, and he was the same age as many of those Iraq veterans who take part in Phoenix Project retreats. Brown said he had to get involved.

Brown invited Goforth to speak to civic groups around Twentynine Palms and organized a fundraiser that was held Feb 16. The program is funded by private donations and grants.

Brown said that even though it will be months or longer before a West Coast retreat can be held, he has fielded a dozen calls from interested service members and their spouses.

Ed. Note – Apparently the Phoenix Project was a pilot program and now falls under the new national organization "United States Welcome Home Foundation" at <http://www.uswelcomehome.org/uswh%20uswhc%20state.html>

<More at: [http://www.pe.com/localnews/riverside/stories/PE\\_News\\_Local\\_D\\_phoenix24.32a4920.html](http://www.pe.com/localnews/riverside/stories/PE_News_Local_D_phoenix24.32a4920.html)>

### **DOESN'T ANYONE FIGHT FOR ANYTHING THAT'S IMPORTANT ANYMORE? NO - WE MUST FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO PUT AN AMERICAN-MADE FLAG ON OUR MERCEDES AND TOYOTAS, AND TO RUN IT UP OUR CHINESE FLAGPOLE!**

#### **BILL BANS FOREIGN-MADE U.S. FLAG SALES**

U-Wire - February 15, 2008

IOWA CITY, Iowa -- Old Glory must remain between sea and shining sea - if she wants to wave in Iowa, at least.

Rep. Ray Zirkelbach, D-Monticello, introduced a bill last week, now in subcommittee, that would make sure of it.

Under the bill, businesses could be fined as much as \$625 for selling U.S. or Iowa flags made in other countries. Business owners or operators could also face up to 30 days in jail for selling a foreign-made flag.

Those flags commemorating U.S. Soldiers missing in action or those characterized as prisoners of war would also be regulated under the proposal.

Zirkelbach, an Iraq war veteran who also chairs the Veterans Affairs Committee, declined to comment on the bill until after it reaches the House floor, but locally, veterans lauded his efforts.

At the American Legion Post 17 in Iowa City, Commander Mike Hull said he understood where Zirkelbach's position.

"You know, we raise our right hand and fight for our country, and I want an American flag draped over me when I go," the veteran said. <More at: <http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0.13319.162158.00.html>>

## ADD-ON ~ NOTES ON STATES AND MILITARY RETIRED PAY

States are prohibited from taxing benefits of U.S. military retirees if they exempt the pensions of state and local government retirees. Most states that impose an income tax exempt at least part of pension income from taxable income. Different types of pension income (private, military, federal civil service, and state or local government) are often treated differently for tax purposes.

States are generally free from federal control in deciding how to tax pensions, but some limits apply. State tax policy cannot discriminate against federal civil service pensions. Ten states exclude all federal, state and local pension income from taxation. These include Alabama, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, New York and Pennsylvania. Among these 10 states, only Kansas taxes any Social Security income, but only to the extent it is subject to federal taxation. These 10 states differ on the taxation of retirement income from private-sector sources. Kansas and Massachusetts do not exclude any private-sector retirement income, but most of the others allow a fairly broad exclusion. In tax year 2008 Kansas residents with an adjusted gross income of less than \$75,000 may exclude Social Security income from state taxes. Pennsylvania allows a full exclusion. Alabama excludes income from defined benefit plans. Hawaii excludes income from contributory plans. Illinois and Mississippi exclude income from qualified retirement plans. Louisiana, Michigan and New York cap the private-sector exclusion at \$6,000, \$34,920 and \$20,000, respectively.

Five states (California, Connecticut, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and Vermont) allow no exemptions or tax credits for pension and other retirement income that is counted in federal adjusted gross income. Most in-state government pensions are taxed the same as out-of-state government pensions. However, Arizona, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, New York, and Oklahoma provide greater tax relief plans than they do for out-of-state government pension plans. The District of Columbia also provides greater tax relief for DC government pensions than for state government pensions.

Three states (New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania) do not allow IRA contributions to be deducted from taxable income. Of the three, only Pennsylvania does not tax IRA earnings of taxpayers age 59 ½ years or older, since earnings are treated like pension income, which is tax exempt.

Some states provide special tax benefits to military retirees. Others simply follow the federal tax rules. The states that do not tax retired military pay are: Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky\*, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi\*, Missouri\*, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina\*, Ohio (tax year 2008), Oregon\*, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming. (\* *With conditions*)

## NOTICE

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

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

I always appreciate contributions, whether it is opinion in Letter-to-the-Editor form, or articles that the reader believes would be good for our readership. Since I get a chance to vent once in awhile in these newsletters, I will certainly consider Op-Ed copy for inclusion. I always welcome reader comment or complaint. [Sandy Cook](#), Editor