

SOUND OFF!



VOL. III, NO 17

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

25 APRIL 2008

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

SOMETIMES CLICHÉS WORK

When we look for the right words to describe the mess that veterans find themselves in, sometimes clichés are all we have; not because we lack imagination, but because they are just right. I want to explore two of them in this issue ~ “When push comes to shove”, and “It’s the luck of the draw.”

“When push comes to shove” = It’s so bad we have to act

We are in our current court case in Federal District Court because millions of veterans and their real supporters have pushed and pushed for over two centuries. By now this quotation is old hat, but Rudyard Kipling got it right when he said, *“For it’s Tommy this, an’ Tommy that, an’ “Chuck him out, the brute!”*, But it’s *“Saviour of ‘is country” when the guns begin to shoot.”*

Throughout our history the Executive and Legislative branches have attempted to reward honorable military service. The problem has always been that the further the conflict receded in history, the less strongly those government bodies pushed for the veteran – veterans have many times had to “push” for themselves. The difference now is that there are those who want to forget, or at the least overlook the nation’s obligation while the conflict still rages.

Through our history veterans have had to “push” – to return to the Congress for relief. The most famous of these “pushes” was the Bonus Army of 1932, a march on the Capitol that was dispersed by Generals Patton and MacArthur.

Lincoln’s 2nd Inaugural contained the phrase *“To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan,”* which became the motto of the Veterans Administration, formed in 1930 to meet veterans’ needs. Unfortunately, over time, the motto has come to mean less and less, and the bureaucratic processes of the VA have become its principal reason for existence.

The appalling performance of the VA in the current conflict is the result of a stultifying administrative paralysis that has overtaken the department. The VA alone is not to blame, however. For years Congress has both ignored its oversight responsibilities, and failed to guarantee VA funding. Thus every year the VA goes hat in hand to Congress, and Congress passes bills with high-sounding titles in “support” of veterans, and then fails to provide sufficient funds to make the programs work, nor sufficient oversight to ensure that the VA is doing its full job well and on time. Our nation, which at one time was disbursing 45% of revenues to Civil War veterans, now calls full service to veterans “too costly” – “not affordable.”

So after centuries of “pushing” it has once again become time for veterans to “shove”. The “push” has been year after year of testimony before Congress with nothing more than piecemeal relief. The “shove” is our current case in Federal Court.

There are those who oppose even the idea of our suing the DVA and the Attorney General. They say that we are deflecting the DVA from its task and using money that could otherwise provide services and other benefits. Those arguments are red herrings. We are not suing for damages: there is no cash settlement being asked for, just performance. The expense of defending against our suit, involving at most two dozen of the DVA’s 235,000 employees, is less than a rounding error in the DVA’s \$90+ billion budget. The money comes from administrative funds, not from those budgeted for care.

We are “shoving” them for the hundreds of thousands of veterans who are languishing either outside of the system or on its fringes, caught in endless paperwork designed to deny service rather than to provide it. We are going to keep on “shoving” them until the problem gets solved.

As one person, the head of a veterans’ service organization said, “Finally someone is doing something more than talking or testifying.”

We agree with Bobby Muller, President, Veterans for America when he says, “If I don’t fight the system, I will die.”

Sadly, the DVA is fighting us with all their might when they ought to be looking on us as their best friends in this endeavor. If we win they can take their loss to Congress and tell them, “Pony up!”

Now we need to consider that other cliché:

“It’s the luck of the draw.” = It’s the result of chance

There have been loud rumbles recently concerning who are really veterans. There are those who hold that we should only be concerned with those who actually experience combat. They would reduce all other service to a job that has already been compensated for, and for which there is no residual obligation on the part of the nation.

There is no question that we no longer have the same kind of citizen’s force that we had when the draft was in effect. Nonetheless, those of our fellow citizens who enlist in the services are veterans, whatever “The luck of the draw.”

Those who enlisted in the summer of 2001 had no more chance of going to war than those who enlisted or were drafted in 1949, or 1963, or who enlisted after 1976. There was no war on the horizon, but they presented themselves for duty in our name. That makes them all

veterans, whether they ever saw combat or not, and whether or not there was even a war on. It's "The luck of the draw."

The servicemember serving in Germany or Florida is just as much a veteran as someone serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. If the military job wasn't there, then there would be no need for them; but the job is there, and that is where the nation needs them. It's "The luck of the draw."

In my book, all that is required is a DD 214. If you have one, you are a veteran, and you are entitled to all the benefits that your honorable

service to the nation have earned you. You need not subject yourself to some *de post facto* interpretation of your service by any other criterion than, "I served." Where, when and how you served was "The luck of the draw."

You are entitled to the best that the nation can offer – now – not when some bureaucrat gets around to it.

Veterans shouldn't have to "push", let alone "shove": and for these hard-earned benefits, no one should ever have to count on "The luck of the draw." [Ed.]

SPECIAL APPEAL

As our litigation and legislative actions expand rapidly, the expenses to VUFT are likewise mounting rapidly. We don't charge dues, as others do. We don't beat you over the head every month, as they mostly do, with mailings demanding that you do your patriotic duty and send them bucks.

What we will do is come to you if and when – and only when – the need is truly there. Well gang, the need is truly there.

We are sending witnesses to court hearings, to give testimony before legislatures (California now, and many other states to come). We provide a website and this newsletter – in hard copy form to those veterans among us who do not have the internet – and we cover the cost of printing and mailing those twice each month. We mail out memberships letters and cards each month and now have sent out nearly 1,000. We attend meetings where our testimony or other contribution can make a difference for veterans, whether it is in education, medical care, in favor of or opposed to legislation of interest, or even in the political arena where we defend veterans issues without taking a partisan stand.

We need your help now to meet these expenses. Please pitch in at <http://www.vuft.org/donate.html> where you can donate by PayPal or Credit Card. Any amount will help.

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

REPORTERS LOOKING FOR SOURCES

AGENT ORANGE

A reporter from the Toronto Globe and Mail is doing an in-depth article on Agent Orange, including a trip to Vietnam to interview Vietnamese victims, but also wants to cover the US vet angle. She would like to interview vets who were:

- a) Part of the original out-of-court settlement with the chemical companies in 1991,
- b) Part of the current lawsuits, and/or
- c) Receiving compensation from the Veterans Administration for AO related illnesses.

If you fit this bill, or know someone who does, please contact me and I will put you in touch with her.

Thanks - Paul Cox - 510-418-3436 - coxschueler@icg.org

MENTAL HEALTH

The Press-Enterprise newspaper in Riverside (CA) is seeking veterans who are receiving, or feel they need to receive, treatment for mental health issues and who are willing to share their experience.

The paper is particularly interested in discovering whether or not the needs of veterans in the Inland Empire area are being met. In light of the current trial underway in San Francisco.

The paper is also interested in speaking with any veteran families who are dealing with, or have had to deal with, the issue of suicide.

Please contact reporter Mark Muckenfuss at 951-368-9595 or mmuckenfuss@pe.com

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!

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. There is a link to legal [documents](#) on the lawsuit on our website.

Our class action lawsuit is getting national attention. Articles on the progress of the lawsuit have appeared here (click to read):

Monterey, CA Herald - [Veterans accuse government of mishandling medical care](#)

OpEd News - [VA Confirms 18 Vets Commit Suicide Everyday](#)

CBS News - [VA Hid Suicide Risk, Internal E-Mails Show](#)

San Francisco Chronicle - [VA stalling on care, judge told at S.F. trial](#)

Los Angeles Times - [Class-action suit against Veterans Affairs opens](#)

New York Times - [In Federal Suit, 2 Views of Veterans' Health Care](#)

The American Lawyer - [MoFo Fights for Wounded Vets in Landmark Benefits Case](#)

AlterNet - [Vets of Bush's Wars Sue the VA: 'More than Half of Wounded Troops Slipping Through the Cracks'](#)

AP - [Democrats seek resignation of top VA mental health official](#)

San Francisco Chronicle - [Attorney leading suit a veteran in battling VA](#)

Pacifica Radio - [The Crisis in Veterans' Health Care](#)

MAYBE – JUST MAYBE, THIS IS A RESULT OF OUR CASE

VA TO CALL IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN VETERANS

Associated Press - April 24, 2008

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Iraq and Afghanistan veterans: Get ready for a phone call.

The Department of Veterans Affairs said Thursday that on May 1 it will start calling 570,000 recent combat veterans to make sure they know what services are available to them. The first calls will go to about 17,000 veterans who were sick or injured while serving in the wars. If they don't have a care manager, the VA says they will be given one.

<More at: http://www.wvec.com/news/topstories/stories/wvec_local_042408_veterans_.96546c48.html?npc>

The trial began 21 April 2008 in Courtroom #1 of the Federal District Court, Northern California District. Try to be there to support veterans and our cause! Court location info is at <http://www.vuft.org/CourtroomInfo.htm>

DOES YOUR PERSONAL CASE APPLY TO THIS LITIGATION? YOU CAN GET YOUR CASE REVIEWED AT

<http://www.veteransptsdclassaction.org/intakeform.html>

Or send an email to [Danny Brome](#) or [Kasey Corbit](#)

Or call Disability Rights Advocates at 510.665.8644

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

WE REALLY 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 are incurring expenses in support of the case, to include travel expenses to attend the hearings and the trial. 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

None this time except for about a hundred that went directly to the case advocates.

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

SRES 501 ~ HONORING THE SACRIFICE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES WHO HAVE BEEN KILLED IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN.

HOUSE PANELS PASS 13 VETERANS' BILLS

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Apr 24, 2008

Thirteen veterans' bills, including landmark legislation updating GI Bill benefits and home loan programs, passed two House subcommittees Wednesday — a display of activity that stands in sharp contrast to the deadlock in the Senate on veterans' legislation. House lawmakers passed seven benefits and five health care bills on a bipartisan basis, a sign that compromise is still possible despite an increasingly bitter and partisan split in the Senate over veterans' legislation.

<More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2008/04/military_veteransbenefits_bills_042308w/>

HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE REVIEWS HISTORIC LEGISLATION TO REFORM THE VA BENEFITS CLAIMS PROCESSING SYSTEM

April 10, 2008

Washington, D.C. - On Thursday, the House Veterans' Affairs Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee, led by Chairman John Hall (D-NY), held a legislative hearing on the "Veterans Disability Claims Modernization Act of 2008." The bill, which has not yet been introduced, would reform the benefits claims processing system at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and would ensure the accurate and timely delivery of compensation to veterans, their families and survivors.

<More at: www.vawatchdog.org/08/hcva08/hcva041008-1.htm>

S-1315 - DISABLED VETERANS INSURANCE IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2007 (INTRODUCED)

Bill would increase life insurance for disabled veterans from \$90,000 to \$200,000.

<Text at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/C?c110:/temp/~c110ANzW71>>

GI BILL REINTRODUCED IN THE HOUSE WITH 54 CO-SPONSORS

David Lerman - April 10, 2008

Virginia Sen. Jim Webb touted growing support Thursday for his G.I. bill that would pay the college tuition of many military veterans who have served since Sept. 11, 2001. <More at: www.dailypress.com/news/dp-now-newgibill.0410.0.5530171.story>

VETERANS' HOUSING PACKAGE PASSES SENATE

April 10, 2008

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee applauded Senate passage of H.R. 3321, with the Dodd-Shelby Housing provisions, and noted that the bill incorporated provisions from Akaka's bill to boost limit on veterans' home loans, as well as other important housing provisions for current and former servicemembers. "We must quickly approve this bill, for veterans and other Americans struggling with the national housing crisis," said Akaka. "I commend Senators Dodd and Shelby for developing a housing bill that helps provide shelter for veterans and servicemembers."

The Economic Stimulus Act of 2008, passed by Congress and signed into law in February, raised loan limits for Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and FHA home loans, but did not include an increase for the VA Home Loan Program.

<More at: www.vawatchdog.org/08/scva08/scva041008-2.htm>

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

RETREAT – NEWS

DOD DATA: MORE FORCED TO STAY IN ARMY

Tom Vanden Brook, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — The Army has accelerated its policy of involuntary extensions of duty to bolster its troop levels, despite Defense Secretary Robert Gates' order last year to limit it, Pentagon records show. Gates directed the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the service secretaries to minimize mandatory tour extensions, known as "stop loss," in January 2007. By May, the number of soldiers affected by the policy had dropped to a three-year low of 8,540.

Since then, the number of soldiers forced to remain in the Army rose 43% to 12,235 in March. The reliance on stop loss has increased as the military has sent more troops to Iraq and extended tours to 15 months to support an escalation in U.S. forces ordered by President Bush. The increase last month was driven by the need to send more National Guard soldiers to Iraq.

<More at: www.usatoday.com/news/military/2008-04-21-stoploss_N.htm>

MOTHER, SON OFF TO IRAQ

Kathy McCabe - Globe Staff - April 20, 2008

SALEM - On his first two missions to Iraq, Gregory Doyle had to leave his parents and brother behind in Gardner. He said he left feeling a "lot of love in my heart" for his family. This deployment will be different: His mother is coming with him. Aileen Iverson-Doyle is being sent to Iraq with her son as part of the 126th Brigade Support Battalion of the Massachusetts National Guard, which received a patriotic sendoff yesterday on Salem Common.

"I'm a little more nervous this time," said Gregory Doyle, a 24-year-old sergeant, shortly after his unit paraded across the wide green before hundreds of cheering family and friends. "Not just because she's my mother. The pressure of having a relative with you just adds to the pressure."

His mother, a master sergeant with 25 years of Guard service, finds their deployment oddly comforting.

"Like any parent, I've worried every time he's gone," said Iverson-Doyle, 52, who was dressed in Army fatigues, just like her youngest son. "But this time, I'll know where he is." <More at: www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2008/04/20/mother_son_off_to_iraq>

ARMY RENEWS CAPTAINS' RETENTION PROGRAM

Stars and Stripes - April 18, 2008

ARLINGTON, Va. -- Hoping to stanch the flow of young officers leaving active-duty ranks, the Army has renewed its offer of bonuses up to \$35,000 to retain its captains. The 2008-09 incentive program became effective April 7. Captains have until Nov. 30 to apply, according to a new message issued by the Army's Human Resources Command. The bonuses remain the same as last year, though the drain on young officers continues.

The cap on the dollars is purely pragmatic, according to Dan Goure, an Army expert and vice president of the Lexington Institute, a defense think tank in Virginia: "There's a limit on what the Army can spend."

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/army-renews-captains-retention-program.html>

IS THIS THE REASON WHY?

US PLANES AND CHOPPERS CROSS PAK BORDER, VIOLATING AIR SPACE AIDING IN BATTLE AGAINST REBEL FORCES:

Muhammad Khurshid - April 24, 2008

US-led NATO forces, Pakistani troops and militants have started exchanging fire in Bajaur Agency, tribal areas situated on Pak-Afghan border. The clashes, which claimed the lives of dozens of people, have created great terror and fear in the areas. This time the coalition against terrorism is in disarray as NATO forces and Pakistani troops also exchanged firing.

<More at: www.opednews.com/articles/genera_muhammad_080424_is_this_the_beginnin.htm>

WHAT THE FAMILY WOULD LET YOU SEE, THE PENTAGON OBSTRUCTS

Dana Milbank - April 24, 2008; A03

Lt. Col. Billy Hall, one of the most senior officers to be killed in the Iraq war, was laid to rest yesterday at Arlington National Cemetery. It's hard to escape the conclusion that the Pentagon doesn't want you to know that. The family of 38-year-old Hall, who leaves behind two young daughters and two stepsons, gave their permission for the media to cover his Arlington burial -- a decision many grieving families make so that the nation will learn about their loved ones' sacrifice. But the military had other ideas, and they arranged the Marine's burial yesterday so that no sound, and few images, would make it into the public domain.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/23/AR2008042303244.html>

VA SECRETARY SAYS REGISTERING VOTERS IN VA FACILITIES IS A "PARTISAN" DISTRACTION.

Steven Rosenfeld - AlterNet

On the same day the Pentagon's commander in Iraq told the Senate that new troop withdrawals could not be considered for months, Secretary of Veterans Affairs James B. Peake told two Democratic senators that his department will not help injured veterans at VA facilities to register to vote before the 2008 election.

"VA remains opposed to becoming a voter registration agency pursuant to the National Voter Registration Act, as this designation would divert substantial resources from our primary mission," Peake said in an April 8th letter to Sens. Diane Feinstein (D-CA) and John Kerry (D-MA). He was referring to a 1993 federal law that allows government agencies to host voter registration efforts.

<More at: www.alternet.org/story/81935/>

AN IRAQ WAR VET'S UNLIKELY SEAT IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Ann Powers - Times Pop Music Critic - April 20, 2008

A bullet in Iraq put Tomas Young in a wheelchair. But with a documentary film and its double-CD music compilation, his story of resolve and redemption has taken wing.

... The "Body of War" film closely depicts Young's indignities and growing resolve after being wounded, and the music compilation he created, a two-disc set featuring artists as varied as Public Enemy, Kimya Dawson and Neil Young, tracks his inner life. But Young's most vivid role is as the embodiment of a war that, Spiro notes, most Americans still view as somewhat abstract -- the new Ron Kovic (of "Born on the Fourth of July" fame), if you will.

<More at: www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/middleeast/la-ca-body20apr20.1.3365619.full.story>

CD available at: www.bodyofwarmusic.com/; Film schedule at: <http://bodyofwar.com/>

MORE PROOF THAT NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED!

VETERANS CHARITY FIRES COMMANDER WHO BLEW WHISTLE ON WASTEFUL SPENDING

Anna Schecter - April 11, 2008

Whistle-blowers who criticized a veterans charity group's lavish spending have been kicked off the charity's board of directors in a move they say was made in retaliation for speaking out to ABC News.

"They were incensed that I would tell the world how their donated money was being wasted," said Henry Cook, national commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH). <More at: <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/Story?id=4635658&page=1>>

GAO: STOLEN U.S. MILITARY GEAR SOLD ON EBAY, CRAIGSLIST

Linda Rosencrance - April 14, 2008 - (Computerworld)

Stolen and sensitive U.S. military equipment, including body armor, night vision goggles, and gear to protect against nuclear or biochemical warfare, are being sold on Craigslist and eBay, a GAO report says.

<More at: <http://computerworld.com/action/article.do?command=viewArticleBasic&articleId=9077698>>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
4/24 - 27		Norton Center for the Arts - Performing Arts Center Danville, Kentucky	The Wall That Heals	Centre College	
4/25		St. Cloud MN	Resource Fair	Nick Johnston	320-255-6320
4/25-26		Prescott, AZ	Resource Fair	Skye Biasetti	928-445-4860 x-5908

5/1		Forks, WA	Resource Fair	John Braasch	
5/1-4		Ironworld Chisholm, Minnesota	The Wall That Heals	Ironworld Development Corporation	
5/2		Jacksonville, FL	Resource Fair	Travis Sims	904-630-3680
5/6		Crowne Plaza Anaheim 12021 Harbor Blvd, Garden Grove, CA	Career Fair		714.867.5555
5/8	1100-1400	Phoenix Marriott 1101 North 44th Street, Phoenix, AZ	Career Fair		602-273-7373
5/9	1100-1400	Crowne Plaza Hotel Tampa East 10221 Princess Palm Avenue, Tampa, FL	Career Fair		813-623-6363
5/12		Minneapolis, MN	Resource Fair	Kara Cornils	651-292-0145
5/10	1100 - 1600	Chase Park Moffett Federal Airfield CA	Welcome Home Event	DVA Palo Alto Healthcare System	(650) 493-5000 x67285
5/22	1800	Marines Meorial Center 609 Sutter St, San Francisco, CA	Salute to Vietnam Veterans	Marines Memorial Association	(415) 673-6672 x 215
6/14	1300-1500	Elks Club, Garden Grove, CA	Flag Day Celebration [Profits to Fisher House]	67th Flag Day Committee	G Giacoppe
6/20-22		Westin Washington DC City Center 1400 M Street, NW, Washington, DC	National Summit on Women's Veterans Issues Town Hall and Expo	DVA Center for Women Veterans	

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 TIMES EDITORIAL: VA OVERHAUL OVERDUE

Congress held a hearing last week on ways to modernize the benefits claims system at the Department of Veterans Affairs, which has a backlog of 600,000 claims and counting.

Nothing unusual about that — and that's the problem. ... Lawmakers must take concrete steps in the 2009 VA budget to deal with this problem. When they do, VA must salute smartly and get it done. On this issue, it's long past time to stop talking and start doing. <More at: www.armytimes.com/community/opinion/army_editorial_va_042108/>

WELL, THIS WILL TAKE CARE OF 5% OF THEM ~ “LUCK OF THE DRAW?”

The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans estimates that on any given night, 200,000 veterans are homeless.

<More at: www.nationalhomeless.org/publications/facts/veterans.pdf>

HUD DEPUTY SECRETARY BERNARDI, VA SECRETARY PEAKE ANNOUNCE HUD AND VA TO PROVIDE PERMANENT HOUSING FOR AN ESTIMATED 10,000 HOMELESS VETS

Department Of Veterans' Affairs Press Release - April 16, 2008

\$75 million program to reduce the number of homeless vets nationwide

NEW YORK – U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary James B. Peake and U.S. Housing and Urban Development Deputy Secretary Roy A. Bernardi today announced \$75 million to provide permanent supportive housing for an estimated 10,000 homeless veterans nationwide. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/08/vap08/vap041608-1.htm>

THE NEXT TWO ARTICLES GIVE A CLEAR EXAMPLE OF HOW THE VA IS “IMPROVING ITS CARE” FOR MENTAL HEALTH PATIENTS.

SUICIDES SHUT VA PSYCHIATRIC WARD

Dallas - April 15, 2008

(CBS/AP) A fourth suicide among mentally ill patients treated at the Dallas VA Medical Center this year has led the hospital to close its psychiatric ward, and investigators from the national Veterans Affairs office are expected to arrive next week to assess safety. This comes on the heels of an exclusive CBS News investigation that revealed 1,758 VA patients killed themselves in 2005. That number rose from 1,403 VA patient suicides in 2001.

Joseph Dalpiaz, director of the VA North Texas Health Care System, ordered the shutdown after a 44-year-old man hanged himself April 4. The hospital stopped admitting patients to its 51-bed psychiatric unit the next day.

Dalpiaz "decided he wanted to ... give us some time to assess the environment of care and make sure things were as safe as possible in our patient unit," said Dr. Catherine Orsak, head of mental health for the VA's North Texas health system.
<More at: www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/04/15/national/main4015944.shtml>

VETERAN RECALLS NIGHTMARISH CONDITIONS IN DALLAS VA MEDICAL CENTER'S PSYCH WARD

Scott Farwell - The Dallas Morning News - April 15, 2008

The voices in Jack Edenburn's head began soon after he returned from Vietnam. They told him to end it all. He ignored them for almost 40 years, until the day he stood at the railroad tracks near his Lancaster home, fantasizing about stepping in front of a train. That's the day he went to Dallas VA Medical Center. And some days, he says, he regrets that decision.

"Imagine hell," he said of his five days in the psychiatric unit, "then think worse."

Patients soiled with feces and soaked in urine wandered aimlessly, screaming, rolling delirious on the floor. One woman, he said, removed ceiling tiles and crawled into the space above the day room.

"I was more traumatized after five days in the VA than I was when I was admitted," said Mr. Edenburn, who works in the mail room of an insurance office. "And remember, I was suicidal when I went there."

<More at: www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/localnews/stories/041608dnmetva.3cf3820.html>

INSTEAD, THE VA WANTS TO SELL OFF ITS VALUABLE PROPERTY TO PAD THE BUDGET

LOCAL SHELTER COULD BE MODEL FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

Evan Lehmann - Eagle Washington Bureau - April 10, 2008

WASHINGTON — A Pittsfield housing project could become a national model for helping homeless veterans, based on testimony to Congress yesterday. Soldier On, a nonprofit group, is in the early stages of developing 39 permanent housing units that would be cooperatively owned by veterans.

"This changes the end of the story for homeless veterans," John F. Downing Jr., the group's president and CEO, told a congressional committee yesterday. "This housing will be sustainable in perpetuity for low-income veterans."

<More at: www.berkshireeagle.com/headlines/ci_8873737>

MORE PROVIDERS ACCEPT TRICARE STANDARD

Air Force Print News - April 09, 2008

FALLS CHURCH, Va. - There's good news for Tricare Standard beneficiaries. More civilian providers are accepting new patients, according to a recently released survey. Yet, Tricare officials acknowledge that increasing the number of providers and types of providers across the nation remains a high priority, especially in remote areas. The findings, part of the Department of Defense Survey of Civilian Physician Acceptance of Tricare Standard, show that in fiscal 2007, almost 93 percent of responding physicians in 53 hospital service areas were aware of the Tricare program, with 84 percent of physicians in those 53 HSAs accepting new Tricare Standard patients. <More at: www.military.com/news/article/air-force-news/more-providers-accept-tricare-standard.html>

VETERANS' WORK PROGRAM RULED TAX-FREE

Payments provided to veterans under the Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) and Incentive Therapy (IT) programs are no longer taxable. Veterans who have paid tax on these benefits from 2004-2006 can claim refunds by filing an amended tax return using IRS Form 1040X. Nearly 19,000 veterans received CWT and 8,500 received IT benefits in 2007.

For more information, visit: <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1441>.

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF APRIL 23, 2008

This week the Army, Air Force and Coast Guard announced an increase, while the Marine Corps and Navy announced a decrease. The net collective result is 570 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 79,049; Navy Reserve, 5,211; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 9,554; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,496; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 347. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been mobilized to 102,657, 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/Apr2008/d20080423nqr.pdf>.

MILITARY RELEASES HIGH CASUALTY FIGURES

April 14, 2008

The Department of Defense has released its latest American military casualty numbers for those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the figures reveal non-fatal casualties that go well beyond the more than 4,000 U.S. troops who have died so far. As of April 5, a total of 36,082 members of the U.S. military have been wounded in action and killed in Iraq, since the beginning of the war in March 2003, and in Afghanistan, where the war there began in October 2001. The 36,082 number breaks down to 4,492 deaths and 31,590 wounded. According to the same DoD "casualty" counts, an additional 38,631 U.S. military personnel have also been removed from the battlefields in Iraq and Afghanistan for "non-hostile-related medical air transports."

<More at: www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/04/14/cbsnews_investigates/main4012249.shtml>

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE FRIDAY 25 APRIL 2008

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (1,863 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,052
WOUNDED US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 4/5]	36,082
OTHER US CASUALTIES [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 4/5]	≥38,631
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [LAST DoD UPDATE 3/1]	145
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	3
KILLED UK	176
KILLED OTHER COALITION	133
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE 6/30]	1,001
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 47,555
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 90,550
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400K – 1.2M
IRAQ REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL [12/9/27]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,392 DAYS)

KILLED US	494
*OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 10/2007]	7,720
KILLED COALITION	305
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007)	1,472
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (7/2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (7/2004)	32,034
AFGHAN REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$514,1186,478,683

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

CHOOSING WAR – A MUST READ!

Read the National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies paper: "Choosing War: The Decision to Invade Iraq and Its Aftermath", by Joseph Collins, COL USA (Ret), Professor of National Security Strategy at the National War College; former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability Operations

Particularly pages 16 – 27 "Errors in Decision-making and Execution"

The report is available at: http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Occasional_Papers/OP5.pdf

GEE! IT MUST BE A REAL WAR AFTER ALL.

CAMPAIGN STARS TO ADORN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ CAMPAIGN MEDALS

April 21, 2008

The Department of Defense announced today that campaign stars are authorized for wear on the Afghanistan Campaign Medal (ACM) and Iraq Campaign Medal (ICM).

The campaign stars recognize a service member's participation in DoD designated campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Service members, who have qualified for the ACM or ICM, may display a bronze campaign star on their medal for each designated campaign phase in which they participated. The stars will be worn on the suspension and campaign ribbon of the campaign medal.

The three campaign phases and associated dates established for the ACM are:

- (1) Liberation of Afghanistan – Sep. 11, 2001 to Nov. 30, 2001.
- (2) Consolidation I – Dec. 1, 2001 to Sep. 30, 2006.
- (3) Consolidation II – Oct. 1, 2006 to a date to be determined.

The four campaign phases and associated dates established for the ICM are:

- (1) Liberation of Iraq – March 19, 2003 to May 1, 2003.
- (2) Transition of Iraq – May 2, 2003 to June 28, 2004.
- (3) Iraqi Governance – June 29, 2004 to Dec. 15, 2005.
- (4) National Resolution – Dec. 16, 2005 to a date to be determined.

SPRING BREAK ~ IT'S DIFFERENT FOR SOME AMERICANS

These are average Americans



These are real Americans



ADD-ON ~ WANT TO BE A POLITICIAN WHEN YOU GET OUT?

NEW RULES FOR MILITARY ON RUNNING FOR OFFICE

Lisa M. Novak - Stars and Stripes - European edition - April 10, 2008

Thinking of throwing your hat in the ring for political office? Military members inspired to do so will want to review a recently revised directive from the Defense Department.

One of the biggest changes is the expansion of restrictions and limitations to include those serving in the National Guard — even when not activated — and Coast Guard members at all times, whether serving under the Defense Department or Homeland Security.

“We’re really looking for the guys that aren’t on active duty. That’s the biggest expansion of this policy,” said Army Col. Shawn Shumake, director of legal policy in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

That’s not the only change in the 15-page document titled “Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces.”

The current directive, which replaces the 2004 version, adds more stringent limitations on campaign activity. It addresses specific issues such as photographs of servicemembers in uniform in campaign literature and Web site content. “Section 4-3 is entirely new. One of the most important things that we’ve done is to give some guidance in this area,” Shumake noted.

For example, if a candidate is photographed in uniform for a campaign ad, a disclaimer must clearly state that information or photos do not carry an endorsement by the Defense Department. The ad also must accurately reflect the candidate’s actual military job.

The changes to the directive are not linked to an increase in the number of troops seeking political office, officials said, but there has been a surge in them since the 2004 directive nevertheless.

The political action committee VET PAC listed 77 candidates with military service running for Congress in 2006. Several now hold office, including U.S. Reps. Patrick Murphy, D-Pa., and Tim Walz, D-Minn.

Those on active duty face big limitations on campaigning for office.

“Those limitations are huge,” Shumake said. “Basically, you can be a candidate or nominee, but you can’t do anything. You cannot, while on active duty, campaign. Some people will turn it over to a spouse or a campaign manager, and they’ve got to do it all. You’ve got to keep out of it. There is no behind-the-scenes game playing. It is an absolute, 100 percent prohibition.”

The restrictions are rooted in the constitutional philosophy of maintaining a clear separation between the branches of government, said Shumake.

“It’s in keeping with a general tightening of the rules to really try to separate the executive function from the legislative function under the concept of separation of powers,” Shumake said.

The new directive can be viewed in its entirety at <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/134410p.pdf>.

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<http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=53960>

AND FINALLY ~ ANOTHER CONGRESSMAN WHO DOESN'T LIKE THE FIRST AMENDMENT TALK ABOUT YOUR “NANNY STATE”!

BILL WOULD BAN ADULT MAGS FROM BASES

Atlanta Journal Constitution - April 25, 2008

Washington - Rep. Paul Broun, R-Ga., has introduced a bill, titled "The Military Honor and Decency Act," to prohibit the sale of "sexually explicit" material at military installations.

"Our troops should not see their honor sullied so that the moguls behind magazines like Playboy and Penthouse can profit," Broun said in a statement. <More at: www.military.com/news/article/bill-would-ban-adult-mags-from-bases.html>

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