

SOUND OFF!



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THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

25 APRIL 2009

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

TORTURE – FOR WARRIORS IT IS A MORAL AND PROFESSIONAL ISSUE NOT JUST A LEGAL ISSUE AND CERTAINLY NOT A POLITICAL ONE

“Enhanced Interrogation Techniques” – “Harsh measures” “Torture” – Which is it? What is it?

So many people are writing about the torture issue that I hesitate to weigh in. Many of them are much more qualified than I to speak to the current situation. I’ll try to limit myself to talking about the subject as it pertains to us – veterans and serving military.

I agree with former President Bush when he says, “America does not torture”; I learned that as man and boy, both at home and in the service of my country. I do not agree, however, that we have not tortured, and I believe that the most recent instances of it happened on his watch.

The talking heads are screaming at each other – “Is!” “Is, not!” when discussing “waterboarding”, “walling”, “sleep deprivation”, “stress positions”, etc.. Limbaugh slaps himself in the face and jokes about torture and harsh interrogation. Hannity offers to be waterboarded himself, but hasn’t really done it yet. Their opposite numbers decry the situation and call their opponents names while producing rhetorical, but not truly practical challenges.

The argument really gets off point when it reduces itself to a discussion of the “effectiveness” of torture. Its “effectiveness” undoubtedly differs among different cultures, and certainly with different individuals. Even if it were effective, that is not the point. The point can only be, should we do it, or should we not? If we reduce the argument to the “effectiveness” of torture, we are truly on the slippery slope of “the ends justify the means”. If you accept that the ends do justify the means, then the government can at any time use any means against you, since they can always claim that they are justified, even if they are the only ones who

know what the “end” is. There is a useful quotation circulating:

“There was general agreement that, in principle interrogations of this kind may be undertaken in cases where charges involve the immediate interests of the state. ... chiefly treason and high treason. Representatives of the Gestapo expressed the opinion that a more rigorous interrogation could also be considered in cases of Jehovah's Witnesses, explosives, and sabotage. ...

” [The Torture Memos: Berlin, 1937 Version](#)

Lawrence O’Donnell of MSNBC hit the nail on the head when [he said](#) that those who believe that torture is effective say so because they know that it would be effective on them. He went on to say, torture is not effective on the committed and that the talking heads are not committed in any way like our soldiers, and incidentally like our enemies. He clarified his point by saying that those of our fellow Americans who never serve, most of whom avoid putting themselves in harm’s way at any cost (he included himself in the definition), are frankly unworthy of commenting on the issue (my interpretation of his words – see the clip).

All these talking heads miss the larger point that you and I know is important to soldiers, and it is a complex one.

First there is the simple pragmatic question, “How can we condemn others for torturing if we also torture.” No one believes that by our not torturing our detainees we will somehow keep our own soldiers from being tortured when they are captured. We do know with certainty, however, that if we torture our enemies will feel no compunctions about doing it themselves, even if they otherwise favor it as a

technique. Their argument will be always – the U.S. does it, so can we.

"The unintended consequence of a US policy that provides for the torture of prisoners is that it could be used by our adversaries as justification for the torture of captured US personnel,"

Joint Personnel Recovery Agency memo to the Bush Administration, 2002.

Nonetheless we must not torture or we lose the moral high ground, as warriors and as a nation. We must not pattern ourselves after those whose actions we abhor.

Second, do we soldiers have a code or do we not? Does that code make us better than our opponents or does it not? Our warrior code (the real one, not the one that takes its lead from video games) tells us that we are deadly in the assault, restrained in the consolidation, and magnanimous in the occupation. That is what soldiers are – that is what we are trained to be – that is our code. It is the restraint and the magnanimity that keeps us from criminal acts and lets us retain our honored position as warriors, not thugs. It establishes our Warrior Morality. We must not let that collapse. There is no place in our code for torture.

Waterboarding is torture. That is not some radical definition by some flaky international feel-good organization. That is U.S. law. We have imprisoned others and even executed them for using that and other torturous techniques on our soldiers and allies, and on civilians. We have court-martialed our own soldiers for committing this heinous act. President Bush, when Governor, did not excuse one of his state's sheriffs who committed waterboarding on domestic prisoners, and Governor Bush let him and his helpmates go to prison.

Our oath as soldiers commits us to upholding the law. We have laws against torture, and waterboarding is torture. Soldiers are committed to not torturing, not the least because it is against the law. We have a Warrior Ethic – we pursue Warrior Morality. Warriors defend the law.

This also means that we, as soldiers under oath, cannot stand by while others commit torture, saying that we aren't doing it ourselves so it's no problem. Soldiers cannot stand idly by while the CIA or contractors torture, either. Ignoring, condoning, and enabling amount to conspiracy in the commitment of this terrible felony.

And what of the "ticking time bomb"? First, in order to invoke the ticking time bomb scenario, and if

you are operating with a warrior's constraint, you would have to know positively that there is critical information to be had, and that this subject is in possession of that information – you would have to be certain of guilt before you questioned the detainee. Not that this would sanction torture, but you have to have some common description of what the "ticking time bomb" really is. It is not enough to say there may be an attack, and this guy may know something about it, therefore I can torture him until he tells me the truth. If you don't know for sure that the event is threatening, and you don't know for sure that this subject has the pertinent information about that uncertain event, how the hell can you know if you get truth or a lie?

But, can we risk the negative outcome? Since when did we Americans become such pansies? When did we start demanding 100% certainty of safety? It wasn't when we colonized this continent. It wasn't when we stood up to the British. It wasn't when we faced the enemy in the World Wars. When was it? Was it when we decided that mandatory service was somehow un-American and we killed the draft? Was it when we decided that we existed for no other reason than individual license, untrammled consumption, and unending profit? When did we start being those people whom Lawrence O'Donnell decried in his piece?

When did we stop being what our history books still teach our children that we are supposed to be – a melting pot of committed little "r" republicans, and little "d" democrats, who would risk together, fight together and succeed together, always holding the moral high ground?

I don't know if what they did to these detainees kept us safe over the last seven and a half years or not, but neither do they. You cannot prove a negative. It is no more certain to say that by torturing these detainees we fended off an attack that surely must have been planned against us (so they aver), than it is to say that eating smelly cheese or abstaining from strong drink protected us from this imaginary threat.

They claim that "enhanced interrogation" prevented the bombing of the LA Library Tower, as quoted by Marc Thiessen in a recent Washington Post editorial. They claim this even though those enhanced techniques were not sanctioned until six months after the plan was uncovered. So yes there were threats, but so far there is not one iota of evidence made public that the torturing of detainees averted any threat. There is also no proof in either direction that other techniques

within the law, as we have always understood it in our lifetimes, would not have been equally as effective.

I can be enough of a practical American to agree that those lower order CIA reps and others who operated within the broad guidelines of the legal memos sanctioning torture should not be charged. Yes, they committed crimes, but they had been assured that what they were doing was not criminal. They will have to live the rest of their lives with the moral reprehensibility of their acts, regardless of the legal cover. All of us must remember that “just following orders” is not a legitimate excuse, but these people were following “legally approved guidelines”, which is something a little different, even if it remains troublesome.

But if they should get off the hook, what about Lynndie England, and Charles Graner? We now know with certainty that their acts were under the same cover as the acts of the CIA agents and the contractors. They were the scapegoats. They went to prison so that others – their cowardly superiors – could hang their sins

around these enlisted persons’ necks and hide behind their conviction as supposed “bad apples”. Nothing excuses what England, Graner and the others did, but Section 1 of the XIVth amendment to the US Constitution demands equal protection. The CIA perps are being protected, why weren’t the military perps protected, and what can be done to restore equity for them? Oh well, that’s too big a question for me to answer, but someone should certainly answer it.

Finally, those who knowingly gave pseudo-legal cover to torture, and those who ordered it to be used deserve to be brought to justice for their crimes, not just against the detainees, but against all of us and what we stand for. If these crimes are not punished, how can we forgive those who acted on their instructions and in response to their warped interpretation of both the U.S. Constitution and our solemn obligations under international treaties? [Ed.]

"We cannot defend freedom abroad by deserting it at home."

Edward R. Murrow

SUGGESTED READING – two resources that used to be the basic texts for all military leaders, corporal to general.

[FM 27-10 The Law of Land Warfare](#) Department of the Army 18 July 1956, especially:

- Chapter 8 “Remedies for Violation of International Law; War Crimes”, Section II “Crimes Under International Law
- Appendix: Index of articles of the 1949 Geneva Convention and the 1907 Hague Convention

[FM 2-22.3 \(FM 34-52\) Intelligence Interrogation](#) Department of the Army September 2006, incorporating FM 34-52, 8 May 1987, especially:

- Chapter 5 “5-50 Interrogation Operations”
- Chapter 8 “8-17 Approach Techniques”
- Appendix A “Geneva Conventions”

The following quotation is highlighted and framed as shown in Chapter 5 of the Interrogation Manual, page 5-26

PROHIBITION AGAINST USE OF FORCE

Acts of violence or intimidation, including physical or mental torture, or exposure to inhumane treatment as a means of or aid to interrogation are expressly prohibited. Acts in violation of these prohibitions may be a violation of US law and regulation and the law of war, including the Geneva Conventions of 1949, and may be criminal acts punishable under the UCMJ and other US law. Moreover, information obtained by the use of these prohibited means is of questionable value. If there is doubt as to the legality of a proposed form of interrogation, the advice of the SJA must be sought before using the method in question.

Limitations on the use of methods identified herein as expressly prohibited should not be confused with psychological ploys, verbal trickery, or other nonviolent or non-coercive subterfuge used by the trained HUMINT collector in the successful interrogation of hesitant or uncooperative sources. Use of torture by US personnel would bring discredit upon the US and its armed forces while undermining domestic and international support for the war effort. It also could place US and allied personnel in enemy hands at a greater risk of abuse by their captors. Conversely, knowing the enemy has abused US and allied POWs does not justify using methods

of interrogation specifically prohibited by law, treaty, agreement, and policy. In conducting intelligence interrogations, the J2/G2/S2 has primary staff responsibility to ensure that these activities are performed in accordance with these laws and regulations. **[*The commander bears the responsibility to ensure that these activities are performed in accordance with applicable law, regulations, and policy. The unit must have an internal SOP for execution of the interrogation mission.]**

The psychological techniques and principles in this manual should neither be confused with, nor construed to be synonymous with, unauthorized techniques such as brainwashing, physical or mental torture, including drugs that may induce lasting or permanent mental alteration or damage. Physical or mental torture and coercion revolve around eliminating the source's free will, and are expressly prohibited by GWS, Article 13; GPW, Articles 13 and 17; and GC, Articles 31 and 32.

Torture is an act committed by a person under the color of law specifically intended to inflict severe physical or mental pain and suffering (other than pain or suffering incidental to lawful sanctions) upon another person within his custody or physical control. (Extracted from Title 18 of the United States Code, Section 2340A).

*Emphasis added for use in this manual.

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/. Also this site for west coasters <http://www.chapman.edu/law/programs/clinics/amvets.asp>.

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: The appeal was filed in December and now the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals has ordered us to an Assessment Conference to determine if the case should be included in the court’s Mediation Program. Our appeal goes on, even though we hope that the new administration will address the focus of our case directly and with vigor.

Case Progress to Date:

7/23/2007 Suit filed w/Federal District Court

9/25/2007 Defendant’s Motion to Dismiss

2/11/2008 Motion for Preliminary Injunction

2/25/2008 Preliminary Injunction Hearing

4/21/2008 Trial

6/25/2008 Judgment based on jurisdiction

7/25/2008 Appeal notice filed w/9th Circuit Court of Appeals

12/10/2008 Appeal brief filed

12/15/2008 *Swords to Plowshares* and *Vietnam Veterans of America* file amicus briefs

12/22/2008 *Military Spouses for Change* and *United Spinal Association* file amicus briefs

3/4/2009 Appeal will not be subject to Mediation

4/6/2009 Requested an extension to reply to the DVA response to our brief

4/22/09 Extension granted to 1 May 2009

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

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

FROM VVAW

My colleague Yasmin Madadi and I are putting together a radio documentary about homeless female veterans in the United States for Free Speech Radio News for their Memorial Day broadcast.

Part of the report will show how various groups are organizing around this issue. ... We are in NYC and would ideally like to do face-to-face interviews. [We are looking to] find voices of female veterans dealing/that have dealt with homelessness and that would be willing and able to talk to us about their experiences.

Thank you in advance for your assistance and time. Please feel free to get in touch with any questions or to discuss further. I am: a member of the press - Tami Woronoff - tamiworonoff@gmail.com - 1-646-270-5250

WORKING WITH THE VA

Below is an example of what I and thousands like us experience everyday with the Veterans Administration.

The VA outsources to a company called QTC Medical Services, who scheduled an appointment on behalf of the VA for me at a doctor's office 50 miles from my home without consulting me & checking date, time, location etc.

I called QTC to reschedule the appointment only to be informed that "QTC's contract with the VA will not allow additional reschedules after the initial appointment, keep in mind they made the initial appointment without consulting me.

I requested a copy of the QTC contract with the VA and was told a copy cannot be provided but I am welcome to call the VA at "1-800-827-1000 press # 1, then # 1 again & then # 3" - Nothing.

I called back and spoke to a Veterans Admin employee who tells me to call 1-805-585-1860. They tell me to call 1-310-478-3711 and ask for Mr Norman Bend. Mr Bend tells me to call 1-310-268-3745, who tells me to call 1-215-823-5800 this is the VA scheduling office for the State of Pennsylvania, they tell me to call 1-800-827-1000. Back To Square One, very pissed off and now looking for an extremist recruiter to recruit me.

Retired General Eric Shineki recently took over as Secretary of the VA and promises to transform the system. The system is beyond transformation, the fraud, waste, and abuse is sickening, the bureaucrats will dig in and resist Shineki at every step & / or wait him out until he's replaced & / or a new administration takes over.

Thanks for listenings, now I remember why I took up cycling. Help others get on the bike, support www.road2recovery.us.com it helps build you up before the VA attempts to break you down. - Hugh McLarnon

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

HVRP REAUTHORIZATION UNANIMOUSLY PASSES HOUSE

On Monday, March 30, 2009, Rep. Bob Filner (D-CA), Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee announced that the House of Representatives considered three bills that would improve benefits and services to veterans. The House unanimously passed all three bills, including H.R. 1171, the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Reauthorization Act of 2009. Introduced by Rep. John Boozman (R-AZ), the bill would reauthorize the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program for fiscal years 2010 through 2014. The bill was amended to authorize an additional \$10 million to provide dedicated services for homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children. Grants would be made available to provide job training, counseling, placement services, and child care services to expedite the reintegration of veterans into the labor force. The bill has been passed on to the Senate. <http://www.nchv.org/docs/April%2009%20newsletter.htm>

NEVADA JOINS THE RANKS

VETERANS' COURT PROPOSAL PASSES

Rachelle Gines - Associated Press Writer - 04/20/2009

CARSON CITY, Nev.—A Nevada Senate panel voted unanimously Monday for an Assembly-approved plan that would set up a specialized court for military veterans charged with nonviolent crimes while struggling to readjust to civilian life.

With the Senate Judiciary Committee approval, AB187 now moves to the full Senate for a final legislative test.

Advocates of AB187, proposed by Assembly Speaker Barbara Buckley, D-Las Vegas, said it would help veterans charged with crimes and who suffer from mental or substance abuse problems stemming from their military service.

RETREAT – NEWS

TAMMY DUCKWORTH CONFIRMED AS VA ASSISTANT SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, issued this statement following the Senate's unanimous confirmation tonight of the nomination of L. Tammy Duckworth to be Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs at the Department of Veterans Affairs:

"I am pleased my colleagues confirmed Major Duckworth unanimously. More than three months after taking office, Secretary Shinseki now has his first confirmed Assistant Secretary. As VA's new public face and intergovernmental liaison, Tammy can begin the long and hard work of improving the Department's reputation and relations across the country. I look forward to working with her," said Akaka.

Prior to being nominated by President Obama, Ms. Duckworth was the Director of the Illinois State Department of Veterans Affairs. A member of the Illinois State National Guard, Ms. Duckworth was deployed to Iraq in 2004, where she was injured when her Black Hawk helicopter was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. She was unanimously approved by the Veterans' Affairs Committee earlier this week. www.vawatchdog.org/09/scva09/scva042209-1.htm

PLAN WOULD DEPLOY GUARD NEAR MEXICO

Mary Beth Sheridan, Spencer S. Hsu and Steve Fainaru - The Washington Post - 25 April 2009

The Pentagon and Homeland Security Department are developing contingency plans to send National Guard troops to the U.S.-Mexican border under a \$350 million initiative that would expand the U.S. military's role in the drug war, according to Obama administration officials.

The circumstances under which the troops could be deployed have not been determined, the officials said. They said the proposal was designed to give President Obama additional flexibility to respond to drug-related violence that has threatened to spill into the United States from Mexico and to curb southbound smuggling of cash and weapons.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/24/AR2009042402222.html>

PENTAGON TAKES BACK VETERAN PAY JOB FROM LOCKHEED, 7:08 PM ET

Jim Wolf Reuters - 04.20.09

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. Defense Department announced Monday it was taking back responsibility for billions of dollars in pay and benefits for veterans, a task handled since 2002 by Lockheed Martin Corp, the Pentagon's No. 1 contractor by sales. A switch to using government workers, prompted by Congress, will save \$22 million to \$25 million over the next 10 years, said Tom LaRock, a spokesman for the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS).

Rep. Dennis Kucinich, an Ohio Democrat who led an investigation and held hearings into the matter, said Lockheed's performance under its contract had been marked by "mishandling, delay, poor quality and exorbitant charges." "This is a great day for veterans and a victory for government oversight," Kucinich said in a statement.

<More at: www.forbes.com/feeds/reuters/2009/04/20/2009-04-20T230824Z_01_N20427680_RTRIDST_0_LOCKHEED-PENTAGON-UPDATE-1.html>

VA'S SHINSEKI ORDERS 'TOP TO BOTTOM' REVIEW FOLLOWING INCIDENT WITH RADIO REPORTER

13 April 2009

The Department of Veterans Affairs tomorrow will begin a "top to bottom" review of last week's incident involving a WAMU radio reporter and staffers at the VA Hospital in Washington. Officials will investigate the actions taken by security guards and

public affairs officer Gloria Hairston, who confiscated reporter David Schultz's flash card from his audio recorder during a town hall meeting at the hospital Tuesday night. <More at: http://voices.washingtonpost.com/federal-eye/2009/04/top_to_bottom_review_at_va_sta.html>

COST OF IRAQ WAR WILL SURPASS VIETNAM'S BY YEAR'S END

Julian E. Barnes - April 11, 2009

The amount of U.S. money spent on the Iraq war will surpass the cost of Vietnam by the end of the year, making it the second most expensive military conflict in American history, behind World War II, according to Pentagon figures provided Friday.

If Congress approves the supplemental funding request submitted this week by the Obama administration, the cost of the war will rise by \$87 billion for 2009, including a previous supplement approved during the Bush administration.

Added to the amount spent through 2008, it would mean the Iraq war will have cost taxpayers a total of about \$694 billion. By comparison, the Vietnam War cost \$686 billion in inflation-adjusted dollars and World War II cost \$4.1 trillion, according to a Congressional Research Service study completed last year.

<More at: www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-iraq-vietnam11-2009apr11.0.738307.story>

PENTAGON CLOSES OFFICE ACCUSED OF ISSUING PROPAGANDA UNDER BUSH

Thom Shanker - April 15, 2009

WASHINGTON — A Pentagon office responsible for coordinating Defense Department information campaigns overseas has been abolished in an effort by the Obama administration to distance itself from past practices that some military officers called propaganda, senior officials said Wednesday.

Military and civilian critics said the office, the Defense Department office for support to public diplomacy, overstepped its mandate during the final years of the Bush administration by trying to organize information operations that violated Pentagon guidelines for accuracy and transparency.

Pentagon officials said the position of deputy assistant secretary of defense for support to public diplomacy had been eliminated, with the staff members reassigned and the office closed. <More at: www.nytimes.com/2009/04/16/us/politics/16policy.html>

INJURED WAR ZONE CONTRACTORS FIGHT TO GET CARE

T. Christian Miller and Doug Smith - April 17, 2009

Reporting from Los Angeles and Washington -- Civilian workers who suffered devastating injuries while supporting the U.S. war effort in Iraq and Afghanistan have come home to a grinding battle for basic medical care, artificial limbs, psychological counseling and other services.

The insurance companies responsible for their treatment under taxpayer-funded policies have routinely denied the most serious medical claims. Those insurers -- primarily American International Group (AIG) -- recorded hundreds of millions of dollars in profits on this business.

The civilian contractors have played an indispensable role in the two conflicts, delivering fuel to frontline troops, guarding U.S. diplomats and translating for soldiers during dangerous raids. More than 1,400 civilian workers have died and 31,000 have been wounded or injured in the two war zones. <More at: www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-contractors17-2009apr17.0.5505250.story>

VETERANS FLOCK TO RURAL STATES

Staff and wire reports - April 15, 2009

With Vietnam War-era veterans hitting retirement, the veteran population of urbanized areas across the country is eroding, even as veteran numbers are growing rapidly in some rural parts of the nation. At the start of this decade, less than a quarter of America's veterans lived in rural areas. Now, even though there are 3.2 million fewer veterans than in 2000, 1.3 million more of them live in rural America, a 20 percent increase, according to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs data. VA demographers say a third of the nation's veterans now are living outside the nation's cities and suburbs. They cannot completely explain the rapid shift. <More at: www.argusleader.com/article/20090415/NEWS/904150330/1001/news>

US LACKS CIVILIANS FOR AFGHAN 'CIVILIAN SURGE'

Pauline Jelinek - 4/23/09

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration is having trouble finding the hundreds of civilians it wants to bolster its troop buildup in Afghanistan, so military reservists might be asked to do many of the jobs.

In announcing its new strategy for the war last month, the administration said it would send several hundred civilians — such as agronomists, economists and legal experts — to work on reconstruction and development issues as part of the military's counterinsurgency campaign.

But there's a lack of quickly available workers with the right skills, and Defense Department press secretary Geoff Morrell said Thursday that the military is trying to find ways to fill the gap. That would likely be with reservists, who often have the necessary skills because of the experience they have in their civilian lives, officials said.

<More at: www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5iqvaFh_eFr-brDq0rMLF1hkop0tgD97OB8201>

POW BENEFIT CLAIMANTS EXCEED RECORDED POWS

Allen G. Breed - Apr 11, 4:49 PM

Prisoners of war suffer in ways most veterans don't, enduring humiliating forced marches, torture or other trauma that may haunt them long afterward. In partial recompense, the government extends them special benefits, from free parking and tax breaks to priority in medical treatment.

Trouble is, some of the much-admired recipients of these benefits apparently don't deserve them.

There are only 21 surviving POWs from the first Gulf War in 1991, the Department of Defense says. Yet the Department of Veterans Affairs is paying disability benefits to 286 service members it says were taken prisoner during that conflict, according to data released by VA to The Associated Press.

A similar discrepancy arises with Vietnam POWs. Only 661 officially recognized prisoners returned from that war alive - and about 100 of those have since died, according to Defense figures. But 966 purported Vietnam POWs are getting disability payments, the VA told AP. <More at: <http://apnews.excite.com/article/20090411/D97GG4SG1.html>>

OTHER INFO ASSOCIATED WITH THE ABOVE STORY

There are less than two million veterans remaining who actually saw combat in Vietnam. The 2000 census reported that there were over 12 million Americans who claimed that they were in combat in Vietnam. [Ed.]

TO THE COLORS - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
4/25		Columbus, GA	Resource Fair	A. Harrison	706-593-3393
4/27	0900-1030 & 1200-1330	Web Seminar	Pain and Mental Health: Making the Connection	Coalition for Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans	Reservation
4/30-5/3		Veteran's Memorial Plaza Apalachicola FL	Wall That Heals	Three Servicemen Statue South, Inc.	
5/2		St. Louis, MO	Stand Down	Larry Helm	314-615-4038
5/7-5/10		Harry Hurst Middle School Destrehan, LA	Wall That Heals	Harry Hurst Middle School	
5/13	1000-1400	Fort Mason Conference Center, Bldg A Marina & Beach St. San Francisco, CA	State of California Job Fair		415-479-7503
7/9	1730	Marines' Memorial Theater, 2nd Floor, 609 Sutter Street, San Francisco	George P. Schulz Lecture Series – GEN David Petraeus	World Affairs Council of Northern California	\$10 members \$25 non-members
7/27-8/2		Galt House Hotel, 140 N Fourth St Louisville, KY 40202	Vietnam Veterans of America Biennial Convention	VVA	

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

VA: 3 PATIENTS HIV-POSITIVE AFTER CLINIC MISTAKES

Bill Poovey - Apr 17 2009

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (AP) - The Department of Veterans Affairs says three patients exposed to contaminated medical equipment have now tested positive for HIV. The VA said Friday initial tests show one patient each from its Murfreesboro, Tenn.; Augusta, Ga.; and Miami medical facilities has the virus that causes AIDS.

<More at: <http://apnews.excite.com/article/20090417/D97KF2083.html>>

GAO: TEMPORARY RETIREMENT TROOPS IN LIMBO

Kelly Kennedy - Staff writer - Apr 16, 2009

A new Government Accountability Office report takes the Defense Department to task for a temporary retirement system designed to allow service members to stabilize before they receive a final disability retirement rating. Over a three-year period, 73 percent left the list — usually three years after they began the process — with a permanent disability rating that was exactly the same as their initial temporary disability rating. But while they're on the list, service members have no idea if, in two years or five years, they will lose their benefits, get more benefits or even be returned to service. Critics say the service members feel like they are in limbo and can't move forward in their lives.

<More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2009/04/military_temporarydisability_041509w/>

VA STAFF MANIPULATION OF INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE REPORTS

James Binns - Chairman, Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans - February 9, 2009

In its 452-page report released in November the Congressionally-mandated Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses concluded that scientific research consistently indicates that Gulf War illness is real, the result of toxic exposures during the 1991 war, and affects at least 175,000 veterans -- one in four of those who served. The report is available from the Committee scientific staff office at the Boston University School of Public Health at rac@bu.edu and online at www.va.gov/rac-gwvi.

The report observes that these health problems have been "denied and trivialized" for seventeen years. This process has included VA staff manipulation of Institute of Medicine (IOM) reports relied upon by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in determining ill veterans' benefits. [Report, pp. 53-55] Because of the stature of the IOM, these reports have also misled researchers, lawmakers, physicians, and the public regarding the health problems of Gulf War veterans. Full report at www.veteranstoday.com/downloads/09binnsmemo.pdf

MILITARY DOCTORS BLAST NEW SYSTEM TO TRACK WOUNDED SOLDIERS IN IRAQ

Bob Brewin - 04/17/09

The top military physician in Iraq blasted the capability and responsiveness of a new system that tracks wounded soldiers who are flown to hospitals in Germany and then to the United States, according to internal e-mails obtained by Nextgov.

The e-mails also revealed an ongoing dispute between medical personnel in the field and program managers with the Military Health System over the new Theater Medical Data Store (TMDS) and the system it replaced, the Joint Patient Tracking Application (JPTA).

In a March 2 e-mail, Army Brig. Gen. William Gamble, command surgeon for the U.S. Central Command, bluntly told Army Col. Claude Hines, program manager for the Defense Health Information Management System at the Military Health System, that "JPTA worked. The alternative does not. Simple. We need to allow JPTA data entry. I know you are doing your absolute. But as I said a year ago, flick the switch. JPTA is better than what we have now."

In his e-mail, Gamble detailed myriad problems with the new TMDS system, including a significant delay between the time clinicians in Iraq upload data onto the network and when it is visible to doctors. The delay is particularly frustrating for clinicians at the Landstuhl Army Medical Center in Germany, which is the first stop for wounded soldiers coming from Iraq as they make their way to U.S. hospitals. He said the minimum time delay to load data into TMDS was three hours and "at times much longer, 48 hours by accounts from [theater] medical providers."

<More at: www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20090417_6955.php?zone=ngtoday>

DESPERATE VETERANS TURN TO SUICIDE

Marney Rich Keenan / The Detroit News Thursday, April 16, 2009

VA blamed for failing to help Iraq, Afghan veterans

On June 11, 2006, at 8:30 p.m., Randen Harvey, a 24-year-old Marine Corps veteran, walked into the emergency room of the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Ann Arbor in such a state of despair he warned he "might jump off the roof or put a hose in his car exhaust."

Four hours later, around 1 a.m., he was found on the roof of the nine-story building. Hospital security had to be called to bring him down.

Three days later, on June 15, the Marine who served two back-to-back combat tours in Iraq surrendered to his demons. He was found sprawled on the tile floor in the bathroom of his father's Farmington Hills home, dead from an overdose of street and prescription drugs.

Several branches of the military are reporting significant spikes in the number of suicides committed by both active-duty troops and veterans returning from duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. Experts are calling the number of military-related suicides sweeping the country an "epidemic." <More at: www.detnews.com/article/20090416/METRO/904160420/1409/METRO>

AS MANY AS 13 SOLDIER SUICIDES IN MARCH

Michelle Tan - Staff writer - Apr 20, 2009

As many as 13 soldiers are believed to have killed themselves in March, bringing the number of reported soldier suicides this year to 56, officials announced April 10. None of the March cases under investigation have been confirmed, but about 90 percent of deaths involved in such investigations typically are ruled to be suicides. The March total marks a decrease in suicides compared with the first two months of the year.

As many as 24 suicides were reported in January, but on March 4 officials removed one case because it was determined that the soldier was no longer on active duty when he died. Of the 23 remaining cases, 14 are confirmed suicides; nine are pending a determination. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2009/04/army_suicide_041909w>

ACCORDING TO THE ARMY, THEY "BECAME LAX" IN ATTENDING TO THE TROOPS. HAD THEY "BECOME LAX" IN ATTENDING TO THEIR WEAPONS SOMEONE WOULD HAVE BEEN COURT-MARTIALED. WHY NOT HERE ALSO?

ARMY ROLLING OUT NEW ANTI-SUICIDE PLAN

Associated Press - April 24, 2009

WASHINGTON -- The Army has approved new guidance to military commanders in an effort to stem the rising toll of Soldier suicides, officials said late Thursday.

The plan includes hiring more mental health workers and tightening the way officials handle drug testing, health screening and a host of other long-standing procedures that in some cases became lax, according to officials, as the Army focused on fighting two wars. <More at: www.military.com/news/article/army-rolling-out-new-antisuicide-plan.html>

DOD FY08 REPORT ON SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MILITARY

The [latest report](#) is available from the DoD Sexual Assault and Response Office.

VA WELCOMING VETS HOME WITH NEW WEB SITE, BLOG

April 20, 2009

WASHINGTON -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched its new "Returning Veterans" Web site -- www.oefoif.va.gov -- to welcome home Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts with a social, Veteran-centric Web site focusing on their needs and questions.

"VA is entering the world of Web 2.0, because that's where this generation of Veterans is already communicating," said Dr. Gerald M. Cross, VA's Principal Deputy Undersecretary for Health. "We're opening our doors to them virtually to let them know what they can expect when they step through our doors in reality."

The Web site will feature videos, Veteran stories, and a blog where Veterans are encouraged to post feedback. The site also will restructure the traditional index-of-benefits format found on other VA pages into question-based, categorized, and easily navigated links by topic. This will allow Veterans to find benefits of interest easily and discover related benefits as they explore.

"We hope our returning Veterans find this site easy and helpful, but also engaging," Dr. Cross said. "As the site grows, we will be linking to Veterans' blogs and highlighting more of their own stories from their own views. We are their VA, so we are eager to provide a forum for Veterans to discuss their lives." www.vawatchdog.org/09/vap09/vap042009-1.htm

TRICARE INCREASES PAYMENTS FOR BENEFICIARIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

April 15, 2009 No. 09-29

Falls Church, Va. -- TRICARE has increased the amount it will pay for certain Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) benefits. ECHO assists eligible family members of active duty sponsors who are diagnosed with moderate or severe mental retardation, a serious physical disability, or an extraordinary physical or psychological condition.

The total TRICARE cost share for training, rehabilitation, special education, and assistive technology devices was increased to \$36,000 per fiscal year. The cap also covers institutional care in private nonprofit, public and state institutions and facilities and, if appropriate, transportation to and from such institutions and facilities. The TRICARE Enhanced Access to Autism Services "Demonstration" is also included.

"This is good news for military families out there with an ECHO-qualified family member," said Army Maj. Gen. Elder Granger, deputy director of TRICARE Management Activity. "This change will help make services more accessible to our deserving special needs beneficiaries." <More at: www.tricare.mil/pressroom/news.aspx?fid=521>

STUDY SAYS WAR CONCUSSIONS OVER-DIAGNOSED

Associated Press - April 16, 2009

ATLANTA - Mild brain injuries - once considered an under-recognized problem in returning military troops - are being over-diagnosed because the government is using soft criteria instead of hard medical evidence, an Army doctor and two other officials contend.

The three are taking aim at Department of Veterans Affairs' rule for treating such veterans and determining disability pay. They want to call many mild cases "concussions" rather than "brain injuries." They say the latter implies an ongoing, incompletely healed problem rather than a temporary one that's in the past.

"I think it's fair to say there's over-diagnosis of concussions going on," said Dr. Charles Hoge, a top Army psychiatrist. He's one of three authors of an article published in Thursday's New England Journal of Medicine.

Some veterans groups applaud efforts to better diagnose traumatic brain injuries, but say it's more likely that the military has been under-treating the problem.

"It stretches credulity to believe that all the people who have suffered traumatic brain injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan are getting the treatment they need. That's a laughable notion," said Jason Forrester, director of policy at Veterans for America, an advocacy group. <More at: www.boston.com/news/health/articles/2009/04/16/army_officials_say_war_concussions_overdiagnosed/>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SATURDAY 25 APRIL 2009

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,229 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,278
WOUNDED US [4/4/09]	31,169
OTHER US CASUALTIES [4/4/09]	≥36,624
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [4/4/09]	181
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED UK	179
KILLED OTHER COALITION	139
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/03/09]	≥ 48,874
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [4/4/09]	≥ 99,976 - 668,051
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [11/9/08]	≥ 400K – 1.374M
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,758 DAYS)

KILLED US	679
WOUNDED US [4/4/09]	2,766
OTHER CASUALTIES US [4/4/2009]	7,775
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [4/4/09]	30
KILLED COALITION	455
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007)	1,602
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (2/24/2009)	≥ 7,373
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (2/24/2009)	46,322
AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$663,289,139,963
COST OF AFGHAN WAR TO DATE	\$186,654,061,284

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 APRIL 21, 2009

This week the Army, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard announced an increase, while the Navy announced a decrease. The net collective result is 4,157 more 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 103,067; Navy Reserve, 6,599; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 14,705; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,624; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 698. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 132,693, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated can be found at <http://http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Apr2009/d20090421ngr.pdf>.

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

ID CARD CHANGE - SECURITY

The Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) is in the first phase of its initiative to eliminate Social Security numbers (SSN) from all ID cards. The printed dependent SSN is being removed from Dependent Identification and Privilege cards (DD Forms 1173 and 1173-1) and replaced with "xxx-xx-xxxx". Eligible Family members will see this change when you renew your ID card. You do not need to renew your ID card right away; you can renew it when it expires. At this point, the sponsor's SSN will remain visible on the card.

The second phase of the initiative, removing SSNs from all cards, will begin at the end of this year. DMDC states that if you are a retiree with an indefinite expiration date on your ID card and wish to replace your card with one without an SSN, the earliest you may do so is January 2010. This change was made to protect the identity information of cardholders.

Those renewing your ID card should bring two forms of identification from the OMB I-9 document list. One must be a federal or state issued photo ID.

You can find the list on page 5 of this document www.uscis.gov/files/form/I-9_IFR_02-02-09.pdf.

You can find an ID card office near you by going to www.dmdc.osd.mil/rst/owa/home

SOLDIERS CALL FOR ARMY TO DROP BERETS

Ashley Rowland - Stars and Stripes - April 18, 2009

SEOUL — They're hot, sweaty and do nothing to keep the sun out of your eyes during a long formation.

Those are just a few of the reasons the Army should stop making soldiers wear wool berets outdoors, a group of delegates said Friday at the 8th Army's annual Army Family Action Plan conference.

"Everyone is affected by the beret," said Sgt. Brad Stuckey, spokesman for a group that studied family-support issues. "This is an issue that your average soldier feels very strongly about."

The group recommended that soldiers be required to wear lighter, cotton-nylon blend patrol caps instead. They block the sun, absorb sweat and are somewhat water resistant, Stuckey said.

Soldiers had a list of complaints about the black beret. Among them:

- It doesn't match the Army Combat Uniform, which has no black in its pattern.
- It has to be shaved, washed and dried on a lampshade or hat stand to hold its shape.
- It can cost nearly twice as much as a patrol cap, and there's no standard way to wear it.

"You have seven people wearing it seven different ways," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jon Butler. He said people have complained about the beret since it became part of the uniform in 2001. "It's been brought up a lot, but it's consistently shot down," he said. "If it's an issue enough to keep being brought up, then there's definitely something behind it."

8th Army commander Lt. Gen. Joseph Fil said at the end of the conference that all of the ideas presented were good ones. "We're going to have to think about the one on the beret," he said. "That's a hard sell."

www.military.com/news/article/soldiers-call-for-army-to-drop-berets.html

THANK YOU TROOPS" – FROM PING

For those Active duty, Active Reserve, and Retired military, Ping golf equipment <http://www.ping.com/> is offering a tremendous discount - individual club rebates of as much as \$30, and up to more than \$200 for a full set. The mail-in rebate forms are available at Ping dealers throughout the country. The offer is good through 15 August 2009.

FM SO THRILLED!!

VA LOGO UPGRADE ON SCHEDULE

Bob Brewin 04/08/09

The Veterans Affairs Department may be eight years behind schedule and \$167 million in the hole on developing a patient scheduling application, but an eagle-eyed reader points out that another initiative seems to be on schedule.

Under the "Coming Soon" section of the [MyHealtheVet Web page](#), VA tells its users, "MyHealtheVet's new logo design will soon be available on our Web site so please stay tuned!"

My reader -- who was one of the Florida VA patients who underwent a colonoscopy with potentially unsterilized equipment -- told me that online access to both the patient scheduling system and his medical records also were once listed as "Coming Soon" items on the page. But they have now disappeared from that section.

It's good to hear that the VA is dealing with important stuff first.

http://whatsbrewin.nextgov.com/2009/04/va_logo_upgrade_on_schedule.php?zone=NGwhatsbrewin

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

VETERANS HOPE TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES THROUGH CONSERVATION CORPS

Hal Bernton - Seattle Times staff reporter – 24 April 2009

COVINGTON — At a subdivision in Southeast King County, nine people wield shovels, picks and machetes to hack down blackberry thickets that have overgrown a tiny wetland.

Hour by hour, they clear more of the brambles, revealing cedar and other native plants that had been enveloped by the thorny bushes.

Every person on this crew is a military veteran, most of whom served in Iraq or Afghanistan. All are hoping to forge new careers through the Veterans Conservation Corps, a state-financed program that helps them tackle two big challenges of civilian life — finding new employment and coping with the psychic battle scars of war.

The focus is on outdoor jobs in forestry, wildlife management and other natural-resource fields that can put the veterans outside, where it's hoped they can tap some of the healing powers of nature. The veterans combine classroom work at community colleges with weekly forays to restore waterways, monitor pollution and tackle other tasks. <More at: http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2009106547_greenvets23m.html>

NEW SEARCH TOOL CREATED FOR INSURANCE REFUNDS

Karen Jowers - Staff writer - Apr 23, 2009

A new [search tool](#) will help current and former service members determine if they are owed some of the \$2.3 million that is still unclaimed as a result of a 2006 multi-state settlement agreement concerning life insurance sales practices to the military.

The tool, launched April 23 by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, allows a simple search by first and last name.

More than 14,000 service members who purchased life insurance products from American Amicable Life Insurance Company of Texas, or its two affiliates — Pioneer American Insurance Company and Pioneer Security Life Insurance Company — are still owed more than \$2.3 million, according to the NAIC. Refund amounts vary according to type of policy and other factors. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2009/04/military_moneysearch_insurance_042309w/>

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

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