

SOUND OFF!



VOL. III, NO 18

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

10 MAY 2008

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

YADA, YADA, YADA ...

If I remember the Seinfeld episode correctly, “Yada, Yada, Yada ...” was used when Elaine or Jerry or George wanted to recount a conversation or an idea, the details of which really weren’t worth discussing, or when they wanted to quote someone who, or something that really wasn’t interesting. Thus, “Yada, Yada, Yada ...”.

Late last month I attended a function, ostensibly to honor women veterans. Women veterans deserved to be honored. In the wars in my adult lifetime many have been killed (VN – 8, Desert Storm – 15, OEF – 13, OIF – 96.) That’s what made me drive several hours to attend the luncheon – they had more than earned it.

Unfortunately, I experienced “Yada, Yada, Yada...” once again, and to the extreme. The speakers were variously a congressperson, a state official, and a local officeholder. It was absolutely *déjà vu* – Seinfeld revisited. As far as the speakers were concerned what they were mouthing were just words, conveniently interspersed with the word “veteran” at an interval undoubtedly calculated by some PR specialist on their staff to be most effective – and mind-numbing.

Some of the sentences didn’t even parse. Most of the comments were little more than a jumble. The basic thought was, “Aren’t I a wonderful important person.” The message was, “You are great, but let me tell you why I am the real hero for doing all this great stuff for you.” “Just check my website or call my office and I’ll tell you even more about what a brave person I am on this (and other) issue(s).” And, “There are jillions of benefits available for you – check my website.” And “If you have any personal problems – well Yada, Yada, Yada ...”

Not one word about the real sacrifice these young women and their predecessors have made except in the most general terms. Not one mention of the deaths and woundings. Not one mention of the destroyed relationships and marriages. Not one mention of the widowers and children that some have left behind. Not one mention of the employers who were denying them reemployment or the shameful performance of the bureaucracies that were denying them benefits.

Most especially, not a single word except praise for all of the benefit-givers. The state official waxed poetic about the joys and beauties of our state’s oldest veterans’ home. It apparently has no problems, neither do the other two in the state – [check this](#). Neither does any other veterans’ facility or office. That’s amazing considering that across the board these hospitals – both military and VA – are being found wanting in seriously gross terms.

The word “veteran” is one of those wonderful political catchwords that has come to serve many purposes – almost none of them related to providing real services to real veterans.

Adding “veteran” to a bill almost surely will get it into the newspaper, even if it never gets enacted. Citing how many bills they have authored or cosponsored for “veterans” makes great political speech fodder for politicians. We have even found in the recent class action lawsuit that the fact that you are established to aid veterans – as in the Department of Veterans Affairs – means that you should be free from criticism, and most especially free from oversight by either Congress of the courts – only praise is permitted, and only praise is patriotic. Of course they don’t have to worry too much about oversight from the Congress anyway – that is no longer in the job description.

A *Thomas* search turns up 435 bills with “veteran” in their title or text for the current session of Congress. Does anyone believe that more than a handful of those will be passed? Does anyone believe that the bills that are passed will address the real problems of veterans? Does anyone doubt that all 435 will be cited in some political speech sometime soon as evidence of a Congressperson’s undying support for “veterans”?

In my home state of California during the last legislative session, veterans bills were routinely passed in committee and then rewritten to serve other purposes completely before they were sent for a floor vote – a wonderful process called “gut and amend”. This lets the original author claim credit for writing a bill in favor of veterans; lets the veterans’ committee take credit for passing it out of committee to the floor of the legislature, and then lets some power broker rewrite it to serve some business purpose that is not even remotely connected to veterans – same bill number; same approvals; different title, purpose, and author. Everyone (except veterans) is happy; everyone (except veterans) gets paid; no one (except veterans) gets screwed.

So remember. Our leaders have given us the example. Whenever you are forced to contemplate the abominable treatment that veterans are getting today, just “Yada, Yada, Yada...”. Whenever you have to pony up to help veterans, just “Yada, Yada, Yada...”.

The only time that this will be a problem is when you have to look into a veteran’s eyes.

“Yada, Yada, Yada...” just doesn’t cut it then, does it?

[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

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 CONTINUES! The [law suit](#) that we have filed along with Veterans for Common Sense against the Veterans’ Administration has reached the end of its trial phase. Here is a link to the legal [documents](#) on the lawsuit. The judge has announced that he will rule by the first week in June. Watch this space for announcements!

VA CHIEF DENIES COVER-UP OF SUICIDE DATA

May 06, 2008 - Associated Press

WASHINGTON - Veterans Affairs Secretary James Peake says data about the number of veterans attempting suicide were not released because of concerns about its accuracy.

E-mails among VA officials were recently disclosed during a trial in San Francisco that suggested some might have been attempting to hide the number of attempted suicides by those under the agency's care. The judge has not yet ruled in the lawsuit filed by two veterans groups. The disclosure of the e-mails prompted two Democratic senators to call for the firing of the VA's head of mental health. <More at: www.military.com/news/article/va-chief-denies-coverup-of-suicide-data.html

More articles available at:

San Francisco Chronicle - <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/04/25/BAS010BH7F.DTL>

McClatchy Newspapers - www.mcclatchydc.com/244/story/34718.html

CBSTV (San Francisco) - <http://cbs5.com/localwire/22.0.html?type=bcn&item=VETERANS-CASE>

Fog City Journal - www.fogcityjournal.com/wordpress/2008/04/30/attorneys-present-final-arguments-in-veterans-neglect-federal-case

American Chronicle - www.americanchronicle.com/articles/59868

New York Times - www.nytimes.com/2008/05/01/us/01vets.html

Inter Press Service News - www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=42212

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

A TELLING LETTER TO OUR PARTNER IN THE CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT, DISABILITY RIGHTS ADVOCATES *(edited for length)*

I am the mother of a 32-year-old, disabled veteran whose battle with schizophrenia (service-connected, 70% rating) has caused two suicide attempts, the last in 2006 resulting in my resignation from public employment to provide full-time daily preventive care management, behavioral intervention, medication monitoring and maintenance, social engagement, along with a structured and least intensive living environment.

On behalf of my son and the thousands of other veterans [for whom]you are seeking justice, I am honored to be able to thank you for your pro-active legal response to the willful mistreatment of mentally and physically ill veterans, the willful distortion of facts and law, and the devastating destruction of military families through the deliberate prolonged processing of compensation claims, all at the hands of the Department of Veterans Affairs (hereinafter referred to as "DVA").

My son's battle with the DVA has been the same as thousands of other veterans, an adversarial process geared toward defeating and further injuring the physically and mentally ill. I have been fortunate, however, that my training as a paralegal and 20+-year legal background has enabled me to research and analyze the rating criteria/law and the medical rating criteria found in the DSM-IV-TR on behalf of my son. Please be advised, however, that oftentimes my son was ambushed by rating decisions that ignored doctor recommendations, "partial" excerpts extracted from medical records and law that were advantageous to the DVA, the deliberate ignoring of entire passages advantageous to the veteran, along with issuance of downright lies in rating decisions.

After filing numerous pleadings/appeals ranging in page length from 16-65 pages each, my son and I were given an ultimatum to accept a 70% rating decision with the stipulation that we would not pursue any further appeals. Given the demands of my son's condition, the average length of appeals, and being worn from the lethal blows from the DVA, we accepted the rating decision. Accordingly, the 65-page Appeal Brief exhibiting a thorough analysis of Title 38 CFR §4 and the DSM-IV-TR was purged from DVA records and returned to me in order for my son's case to go "by, by" as communicated by the representative from the Disabled American Veterans. The DVA preys on veterans unknowledgeable of the law; thus, they can narrowly interpret and misinterpret to the DVA's advantage. Of course, the DVA passionately wanted to get rid of my intervention on my son's behalf.

Linda J. Holmes - Jayess, MS

MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH - REDUCING THE STIGMA OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

CSA SENDS – *(Chief of Staff of the Army) (edited for length):*

... The Army requested and the Secretary of Defense won approval for revision of Question 21 on the National Security Positions Questionnaire (Standard Form 86). The revision now excludes counseling for adjustments from service in a military combat environment, as well as counseling related to marital, family and grief issues. ...

This is good news. Hopefully this decision will serve to lessen Soldier and Army Civilian concerns that psychological or behavioral health counseling may jeopardize their security clearance or adversely impact their career.

This change will allow for issues to be identified and addressed earlier - before psychological stress escalates to a more serious condition that may further impact the individual, units, Families and our overall readiness.

(The following website contains more information about behavioral health: <http://www.behavioralhealth.army.mil>)

Forwarded by VUFT member J. Handy

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

AKAKA INTRODUCES BILL TO CONTINUE OVERSIGHT FOR TROOPS RETURNING FROM COMBAT INTO NEXT ADMINISTRATION

Bill calls for three-year extension for VA/DoD Senior Oversight Committee

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, introduced a bill yesterday to ensure the continuation of the VA/DOD Senior Oversight Committee (SOC), the entity responsible for improving transition from military service to veteran status for severely wounded and injured servicemembers. The SOC was formed in the wake of last year's Walter Reed scandal and is scheduled to be terminated in January 2009.

"The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan will outlast the current Administration. So too should the Defense and Veterans Affairs Departments combined efforts to assist servicemembers returning from war," said Akaka. "I am committed to sustaining this effort as long as our troops are in combat."

<More at: <http://www.vawatchdog.org/08/scva08/scva042908-1.htm>>

THOMPSON AND REHBERG FIGHT FOR VETERANS UNKNOWINGLY EXPOSED TO TOXIC TESTS IN 60S AND 70S

May 1, 2008

WASHINGTON – Today, Congressmen Mike Thompson (D-CA) and Denny Rehberg (R-MT) introduced legislation that would provide healthcare to veterans who were unknowingly subjected to biological and chemical weapons tests conducted in the 1960s and 70s.

The existence of these tests, known as Project 112, including Project SHAD, was denied by the Department of Defense (DoD), despite reports from participating veterans that they were being stricken with unusual diseases. The DoD now acknowledges that the tests took place, but the Veterans Administration (VA) will not provide these veterans with health benefits and compensation for their diseases. The Thompson-Rehberg legislation would require the VA to assume the toxins used in the weapons tests caused injury to the veterans, making them eligible for medical benefits and/or compensation for their conditions.

"For ten years, I've been fighting to get the government to acknowledge that these extremely dangerous tests made some of our brave veterans sick and even caused some of their deaths," said Thompson. "These men risked their lives for their country, and in return, their government treated them like guinea pigs and has for years turned its back on them. This legislation will make sure they don't have to wait any longer for the help they need and deserve."

<More at: <http://mikethompson.house.gov/PRArticle.aspx?NewsID=238>>

SENATE SEEKS ADDITIONAL BOOST TO MILITARY PAY

Stars and Stripes - April 30, 2008

WASHINGTON -- Senate lawmakers on Thursday backed a higher-than-requested 3.9 percent pay raise for all military personnel in their first draft of the fiscal 2009 defense authorization bill. Lawmakers said the 3.9 percent pay raise, 0.5 percent above what defense officials requested, is designed to further close the gap between military and civilian pay. If passed, the pay raise would be the highest for troops since 2004 <More at: <http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,166924,00.html>>

POSSIBLE VETS' BENEFITS UPGRADES

Rick Maze - Staff writer - May 1, 2008

The veterans' committee approved a bipartisan GI Bill improvement package amended, at Buyer's urging, to include provisions that would boost education benefits for National Guard and reserve members mobilized in support of contingency operations.

The bill, HR 5684, would raise active-duty GI Bill benefits to \$1,450 a month, up from the current \$1,101 payment; pay a \$500 monthly stipend for living expenses; give people up to 15 years after leaving active duty to use their benefits, rather than the current 10; and allow up to \$6,000 in GI Bill benefits to be used each year to repay student loans. Buyer's amendment would

modify a current program for active-duty troops, making GI Bill benefits available to reservists based on cumulative rather than consecutive service, and make benefits more generous.

There was no controversy over the amendment, which was adopted by voice vote, but adding reserve benefits to the measure requires the bill to be referred to the House Armed Services Committee, which has jurisdiction over Guard and reserve education benefits. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2008/04/military_veteransbills_delays_043008w/>

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

RETREAT – NEWS

US CONSIDERS RETAKING MILITARY COMMAND OF SOUTHERN AFGHANISTAN

VOA News - 03 May 2008

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates says he is considering the idea of putting U.S. forces in command of NATO troops in southern Afghanistan. Gates said Friday that the United States needs to reexamine its military arrangements in Afghanistan, including whether it makes sense to have two combat commands in one country.

<More at: www.voanews.com/english/2008-05-03-voa7.cfm>

PENTAGON CONSIDERS ADDING FORCES IN AFGHANISTAN

Steven Lee Myers and Thom Shanker - May 3, 2008

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon is considering sending as many as 7,000 more American troops to Afghanistan next year to make up for a shortfall in contributions from NATO allies, senior Bush administration officials said. They said the step would push the number of American forces there to roughly 40,000, the highest level since the war began more than six years ago, and would require at least a modest reduction in troops from Iraq.

The planning began in recent weeks, reflecting a growing resignation to the fact that NATO is unable or unwilling to contribute more troops despite public pledges of an intensified effort in Afghanistan from the presidents and prime ministers who attended an alliance summit meeting in Bucharest, Romania, last month. <More at: www.nytimes.com/2008/05/03/world/asia/03military.html>

U.S. SEEKS CONTRACTORS TO TRAIN IRAQI MILITARY

Walter Pincus - Washington Post Staff Writer -May 4, 2008; A16

U.S. commanders in Iraq are for the first time seeking private contractors to form part of the small military teams that train and live with Iraqi military units across the country, according to a notice for prospective bidders published last week. The solicitation, issued by the Joint Contracting Command in Baghdad, says the individuals that a contractor recruits -- who would include former members of the U.S. Special Forces and ex-Iraqi army officers -- will be trained in the United States with military transition teams (MiTTs) and shipped as a single team to Iraq. The recruits will live on Iraqi military bases "under Iraqi living conditions and participate with MiTT special operations and convoy duties," the solicitation says.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/03/AR2008050301678.html>

MARINES LIVING OUT THE MOTTO: 'FIRST, DO NO HARM'

Louis Hansen - The Virginian-Pilot - May 5, 2008

One by one, young Marines in full battle gear climbed into the turret of a desert Humvee parked on a live-fire range at Fort Pickett. The troops had almost no combat experience -- one in 10 has deployed. An instructor told them to imagine a vehicle was approaching their checkpoint. The Marines had to decide when to reach for a warning flare and when to snap off rounds from their automatic rifles.

... Outrage over the killing of 24 civilians in Haditha in 2005 and recognition that restraint can be crucial when battling insurgents have led the Marines to adjust their tactics in Iraq. They might best be summed up by the motto on the cover of a new Marines war-fighting manual: "First, Do No Harm." <More at: <http://hamptonroads.com/node/463692>>

DOD OFFICIAL DEFENDS FELONY WAIVERS

Bryant Jordan - April 25, 2008

About 20 percent of all recruits in the U.S. military enter the service with either a medical or conduct waiver, a senior Pentagon official said today. Last year the services recruited more than 181,000 new members, more than 36,000 of whom came in on some sort of waiver. About one third of the new recruits were admitted with medical problems and the remainder were waived in despite past criminal activities -- including misdemeanors and some felonies, said Bill Carr, the Pentagon's deputy undersecretary for military personnel policy. <More at: www.military.com/news/article/dod-official-defends-felony-waivers.html>

DESPITE ALERT, FLAWED WIRING STILL KILLS G.I.'S

James Risen - May 4, 2008

WASHINGTON — In October 2004, the United States Army issued an urgent bulletin to commanders across Iraq, warning them of a deadly new threat to American soldiers. Because of flawed electrical work by contractors, the bulletin stated, soldiers at American bases in Iraq had received severe electrical shocks, and some had even been electrocuted. The bulletin, with the headline "The Unexpected Killer," was issued after the horrific deaths of two soldiers who were caught in water — one in a shower, the other in a swimming pool — that was suddenly electrified after poorly grounded wiring short-circuited.

... American electricians who worked for KBR, the Houston-based defense contractor that is responsible for maintaining American bases in Iraq and Afghanistan, said they repeatedly warned company managers and military officials about unsafe electrical work, which was often performed by poorly trained Iraqis and Afghans paid just a few dollars a day.

One electrician warned his KBR bosses in his 2005 letter of resignation that unsafe electrical work was "a disaster waiting to happen." Another said he witnessed an American soldier in Afghanistan receiving a potentially lethal shock. A third provided e-mail messages and other documents showing that he had complained to KBR and the government that logs were created to make it appear that nonexistent electrical safety systems were properly functioning.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2008/05/04/world/middleeast/04electrocute.html>

ARMY WIDENS PROBE AFTER FINDING BAD CONDITIONS AT FORT BRAGG

Robert Burns - AP News - Apr 29, 2008

Army officials said Tuesday they are inspecting every barracks building worldwide to see whether plumbing and other problems revealed at Fort Bragg, N.C., last week are widespread. Brig. Gen. Dennis Rogers, who is responsible for maintaining barracks throughout the Army, told reporters at the Pentagon that most inspections were done last weekend but he had not seen final results. While not providing specifics about problems discovered during the weekend inspections, Rogers indicated some deficiencies were corrected. In cases where extensive repairs are deemed necessary, the soldiers in that housing would be moved elsewhere until the fixes are completed, he added.

Rogers said it was too soon to know whether the Fort Bragg problem was an isolated incident. He acknowledged the revelations from a video shot by the father of an 82nd Airborne Division soldier showing poor conditions such as mold inside the barracks, peeling interior paint and a bathroom drain plugged with sewage.

The soldier's father, Ed Frawley, said he was disgusted by the conditions that greeted his son and the rest of his 82nd Airborne unit that returned on April 7-8 after a 15-month tour of duty in Afghanistan.

<More at: http://talkingpointsmemo.com/news/2008/04/army_widens_probe_after_findin.php>

REAL CLEAR NUMBERS: 101,000 U.S. CASUALTIES A YEAR

Alexander Cockburn – The Nation - 4/29

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have thus far produced 300,000 psychological casualties, 320,000 brain injury casualties, plus 35,000 (probably understated) officially reported "normal" casualties. This adds up to 655,000 US casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan, an average of just under 101,000 Americans killed or wounded every year since the wars began. If the idea of 101,000 casualties for every extra year in Iraq and Afghanistan gets out and infects the voting public, imagine the effect on the currently torpid national debate over leaving in five years versus 15 years! <More at: www.thenation.com/doc/20080512/cockburn>

AMERICA'S CHEMICALLY MODIFIED 21ST CENTURY SOLDIERS

By Clayton Dach, Adbusters. Posted May 3, 2008.

Armed with potent drugs and new technology, a dangerous breed of soldiers are being trained to fight America's future wars.

Amphetamines and the military first met somewhere in the fog of WWII, when axis and allied forces alike were issued speed tablets to head off fatigue on the battlefield. More than 60 years later, the U.S. Air Force still doles out dextro-amphetamine to pilots whose duties do not afford them the luxury of sleep.

... Just as in the health clinics of the nation, the first waypoint in the military effort to redress these foibles is a pharmaceutical one. The catch is, we're really not that great at it. In the case of speed, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency itself notes a few unwanted snags like addiction, anxiety, aggression, paranoia and hallucinations. For side-effects like insomnia, the Air Force issues "no-go" pills like temazepam alongside its "go" pills. <More at: www.alternet.org/stories/84178/>

SHOULDN'T HE HAVE SIGNED UP WITH THE "PATRIOTS"?

WEST POINT GRAD TO SERVE - ON GRIDIRON

Knight Ridder - May 01, 2008

Caleb Campbell will graduate from the U.S. Military Academy on May 31. He will be an officer in the Army on active duty.

If not for a new policy allowing him to play pro football, he would be an air defense artilleryman, a platoon leader in charge of about 32 soldiers, likely headed to Iraq or Kuwait.

Instead, he'll be suiting up to play for the Detroit Lions.

"I find it really as a win-win situation," Campbell said Tuesday in a national media conference call. "I get to pursue a career because of this new policy the Army has implemented, doing something that I love, and that's playing football.

"But if football doesn't work out, I get to do what I came to the academy for in the first place. I get to be an officer, and that's something that I love as well." <More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/30/sports/football/30army.html>>

AND WHAT DID THIS COST YOU AND ME?

The four years of experience at the United States Military Academy at West Point are estimated to be worth \$478,000. Producing leaders for the US Army is a very expensive process. Is the investment worth it? Yes, because these future officers protect all American citizens from endangerment and chaos. Also keep in mind that this annual figure of about \$120,000 includes everything tuition; room & board; military training; intramural activities; travel; accumulated pay of about \$10,000 per year; medical and dental care; uniforms; clothing; books; computers; laundry and haircuts. After graduation, West Point also pays for graduate school <http://www.getintoacademy.com/34/a-west-point-education-is-worth-5-million-dollars>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
5/10		Lancaster, CA	Resource Fair	Steve Baker	661-940-5272
5/10	1100 - 1600	Chase Park Moffett Federal Airfield CA	Welcome Home Event	DVA Palo Alto Healthcare System	(650) 493-5000 x67285
5/12		Holiday Inn Select 2712 Southwest Freeway, Houston, TX	Career Fair		(713)523-8448
5/12		Minneapolis, MN	Resource Fair	Kara Cornils	651-292-0145
5/13	1100-1400	Holiday Inn San Francisco Golden Gateway 1500 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, CA	Resource Fair		415-441-4000
5/14		Las Vegas, NV	Stand Down	Shalimar T. Cabrera	702-366-0456
5/20	1100-1400	Jacksonville Marriott 4670 Salisbury Road, Jacksonville, FL	Career Fair		904-296-2222
5/21		Lansing, MI	Resource Fair	Kate Reed	517-484-4414 x-103
5/21	1000-1700	Sheraton Grand Hotel DFW Airport 4440 W. John Carpenter Freeway, Irving, Texas	Southwest Regional Career Event		
5/21		La Quinta Inn & Suites Secaucus Meadowlands 350 Lighting Way, Secaucus, NJ	Northeast Regional Career Event		
5/22	1800	Marines Memorial Center 609 Sutter St, San Francisco, CA	Salute to Vietnam Veterans	Marines Memorial Association	(415) 673-6672 x 215
5/22	1100-1400	Holiday Inn Rosslyn at Key Bridge 1900 North Fort Myer Bridge, Arlington, VA	Career Fair		703.807.2000
5/23 - 26		Weymouth Elementary Wonder Garden Charlotte, Michigan	The Wall That Heals	Koos Post #2406 Men's Auxiliary to the VFW	
5/25	1200	Minaret Village Mall, Meridian Blvd. Mammoth Lakes, CA	Rally for Our Soldiers	Carolyn Balliet	(760) 924-8712
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

A QUOTATION TO WRITE DOWN AND REMEMBER

"War is an insidious disease that affects a soldier's mind even if his body makes it through the gunfire. It locks toxic memories in the deepest parts of the brain, holding them in chambers beyond conscious thought until they explode with the horrifying suddenness of a hand trust up from the grave." – Al Martinez, Columnist - LA Times - 5 May 2008 – Marine Infantryman, Korean War

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN ACCUSES VA OF CRIMINAL NEGLIGENCE

The Associated Press - May 6, 2008

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The Department of Veterans Affairs' top mental health official said Tuesday he made a poor choice of words when he sent his colleagues an e-mail about suicide data that started out with "Shh!" Dr. Ira Katz, the VA's mental health director, told the House Veterans Affairs Committee that the e-mail was in poor tone -- even though the body contained "appropriate, healthy dialogue" about the data.

"I deeply regret the subject line," Katz said. "It was an error and I apologize for that."

... The committee's chairman, Rep. Bob Filner, D-Calif., accused Katz of being more concerned about how data was interpreted than the health of veterans. He also said Katz -- as well as others involved -- should be fired. He accused the agency of criminal negligence in the handling of data about the number of veterans who have committed suicide, and of having a history of cover-ups. <More at: www.nytimes.com/aponline/washington/AP-Veterans-Care.html>

CONGRESS IS ALSO BLOWN OFF BY THE VA

The Honorable James Peake

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am both frustrated and disappointed to once again ask for the Department's compliance with the document request I submitted following the House Veteran's Affairs Committee's December 12, 2007 hearing entitled "Stopping Suicides: Mental Health Challenges Within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs."

In the four months since making this request, I have yet to receive a single document. ...

Harry E. Mitchell
Member of Congress

<Full letter at: <http://politickeraz.com/evanbrown/1086/mitchell-va-my-patience-end>>

POST-WAR SUICIDES MAY EXCEED COMBAT DEATHS, U.S. SAYS

Avram Goldstein - May 5 – Bloomberg

The number of suicides among veterans of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan may exceed the combat death toll because of inadequate mental health care, the U.S. government's top psychiatric researcher said. Community mental health centers, hobbled by financial limits, haven't provided enough scientifically sound care, especially in rural areas, said Thomas Insel, director of the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, Maryland. He briefed reporters today at the American Psychiatric Association's annual meeting in Washington.

Insel echoed a Rand Corporation study published last month that found about 20 percent of returning U.S. soldiers have post-traumatic stress disorder or depression, and only half of them receive treatment.

The Rand Report is available for download free at: http://rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG720.pdf

<More at: www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601124&sid=a2_71Klo2vig&refer=home>

VETERAN'S DAUGHTER SAID HIS SUICIDE OUTSIDE VA CLINIC WAS A STATEMENT ABOUT VA BENEFITS

Paul Alongi - Staff Writer - May 5, 2008

Harriett Chapman's eyes filled with tears Sunday as she recalled one of the last conversations she had with her 89-year-old father before he fatally shot himself outside a Greenville veterans' clinic last month.

Grover Cleveland Chapman told his family, "No matter what I apply for at the VA, they turn me down," she recalled.

The next day, the World War II veteran took his own life outside the Veterans Outpatient Clinic at 3510 Augusta Road.

<More at: <http://www.greenvilleonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080505/NEWS01/805050314/1001>>

A LONG ARTICLE – WELL WORTH READING

THE WAR WITHIN: POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Mike Fitzgerald - News-Democrat - Apr. 27, 2008

A perfect storm? Never before has the U.S. military fought a prolonged, two-front war overseas with an all-volunteer force. And never before has the U.S. military and Department of Veterans Affairs tried to address the epidemic of mental health problems with so many resources in such a short time. Critics of the VA and Pentagon contend the U.S. military is creating the "perfect storm" for a PTSD epidemic in the way it is waging war in Afghanistan and Iraq through reliance on National Guard units, through 15-month-long tours of duty and through multiple deployments. <More at: www.bnd.com/homepage/story/320847.html>

IT'S NOT JUST THE VA

ARMY HOSPITALS STRUGGLE TO STOP DRUG OVERDOSES

Joseph Shapiro - Morning Edition - May 1, 2008

The last time Susan Nichols brought her husband home from Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, she knew something was very wrong. He couldn't even play with their 6-year-old son and 5-year-old daughter. Instead, he just watched them play basketball with the neighborhood kids.

"He was constantly dizzy, or he just couldn't handle being out because of the pain, or the medication just knocked him out completely and he couldn't even walk," Nichols recalled while sitting on the patio at her home in San Antonio. "And the last day that we all saw him, he could barely stand up straight without leaning against a wall to prop him up."

Two days later, on Jan. 22, Sgt. Robert Nichols was found dead in his room at Brooke Army Medical Center. The autopsy report said he died of an accidental drug intoxication from the pills he had been prescribed by his Army doctors. Some of them, mixed together, made a deadly combination. <More at: www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=90109327>

WARS HARMING MENTAL HEALTH OF SOLDIERS, SPOUSES

Yochi J. Dreazen - April 30, 2008

Problems Present Long, Hidden Toll; Help Often Avoided

WASHINGTON -- The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused heightened stress, depression and sleeplessness among some military personnel and their families, a new report says. The [survey](#) by the American Psychiatric Association, set to be released Wednesday, found that 32% of military members believe their tours in the two war zones had "at least some negative impact" on their mental well-being. Among military spouses, 40% believed their mental health was hurt by their husband's or wife's service overseas. Many members of the military community remain reluctant to request counseling, the report found. Almost 75% of the military personnel felt that seeking help would harm their careers, while 66% of the military spouses worried that looking for assistance for their own issues would harm their loved ones' chances of promotion.

<More at: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120952913163355705.html>>

MORE U.S. TROOPS BATTLE FORECLOSURE

Gregg Zoroya - USA TODAY – 25 April

WASHINGTON — As the home foreclosure crisis sweeps across America, military and financial aid groups say they are hearing from a rising number of troops who say they are falling behind on their mortgage payments and struggling to keep their homes.

<More at: www.usatoday.com/news/military/2008-04-24-foreclosure_N.htm>

U.S. DEPLOYS MORE THAN 43,000 UNFIT FOR COMBAT

Gregg Zoroya - USA TODAY – 7 May

WASHINGTON — More than 43,000 U.S. troops listed as medically unfit for combat in the weeks before their scheduled deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan since 2003 were sent anyway, Pentagon records show.

<More at: www.usatoday.com/news/military/2008-05-07-nondeploy_N.htm>

ONE WEEK AND THE POLITICIANS KILL THIS POLICY – SUPPORT THE TROOPS?

DEPT. OF VETERANS AFFAIRS CHANGES POLICY ON HELPING WOUNDED SOLDIERS REGISTER TO VOTE

Steven Rosenfeld – AlterNet - May 1, 2008

The Department of Veterans Affairs has issued new rules allowing former soldiers living at VA facilities to ask for help with registering to vote and voting. <More at: www.alternet.org/democracy/84050>

VA RETREATS ON VOTER REGISTRATION EFFORTS FOR WOUNDED VETERANS

Steven Rosenfeld – AlterNet - May 8, 2008

The Department of Veterans Affairs has retreated on a recently announced policy to allow voter registration drives at its facilities where veterans' groups and others would assist wounded former soldiers to participate in the 2008 presidential election.

<More at: www.alternet.org/story/84871/>

AN INDICTMENT OF OUR ARMY'S COMPETENCE

Joseph L. Galloway - McClatchy Newspapers - May 01, 2008

The latest outrage is a father's video of a U.S. Army barracks at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, the home of the famed 82nd Airborne Division. It shows the quarters where his soldier son and other soldier sons were sent to live upon their return from combat. Mold and mildew and peeling paint are bad enough, but what about a big barracks bathroom ankle-deep in raw sewage?

<More at: www.mcclatchydc.com/galloway/story/35558.html>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF MAY 7, 2008

This week the Air Force announced an increase, while the Army and the Marine Corps announced a decrease. The Navy and Coast Guard numbers remained the same. The net collective result is 541 fewer 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 78,085; Navy Reserve, 5,014; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 8,503; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,522; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 347. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been mobilized to 100,471, 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/May2008/d20080507nqr.pdf>

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SATURDAY 10 MAY 2008

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

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (1,878 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,073
WOUNDED US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 5/3]	30,004
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	136
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE 6/30]	1,001
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 47,555
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 91,094
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400K – 1.2M
IRAQ REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL [12/9/27]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,407 DAYS)

KILLED US	498
OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 10/2007]	1,994
KILLED COALITION	311
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	\$518,396,628,547

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

THESE WONDERFUL "SUPPORT THE TROOPS" STORIES JUST ROLL ON IN!

COMPANY MAKING MONEY OFF DONATIONS TO VETERANS' CHARITIES

April 30, 2008

ORANGE COUNTY, Fla. -- The familiar white trucks collect used clothes and furniture to sell at thrift stores to benefit veterans in need. But now, former top managers at TSI Incorporated, the company that owns the trucks and the stores, claim veterans are short changed.

Until he was fired, Jake Hall says he managed TSI's Community Thrift stores near Orlando. Hall calls it a cruel irony. He says the company that boasted donations benefited Amvets and Vietnam Veterans of America, then turned around and ordered employees not to give away clothes to needy veterans. <More at: www.wftv.com/news/16080615/detail.html>

SAD DAY FOR BLUE WATER SAILORS

The Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims ("the Veterans Court") set aside the DVA's interpretation as unduly restrictive. Haas v. Nicholson, 20 Vet. App. 257 (2006).

"We hold that the agency's requirement that a claimant have been present within the land borders of Vietnam at some point in the course of his duty constitutes a permissible interpretation of the statute and its implementing regulation, and we therefore reverse the judgment of the Veterans Court."

Read the entire decision: www.ca9c.uscourts.gov/dailylog.html, scroll down to the Haas vs. Peake case.

THREE ON THE GI BILL

VETS SAY THEY FEEL MISLED ABOUT GI BENEFITS

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- Cheated. Baited and switched. That's how veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan say they feel about military recruiters who sold them on how the GI Bill would benefit them. <More at: www.cnn.com/2008/US/04/29/new.gi.rally/index.html>

SOME WAR VETERANS FIND GI BILL FALLS SHORT

Susan Kinzie - The Progressive Review - The Washington Post - May 1, 2008

Decades after the GI Bill transformed American society after World War II, another generation of veterans is returning home - more than 800,000 as of last summer. What they find is quite different from the comprehensive benefits that once covered all the costs of an education, from undergraduate straight through Harvard Law. The current GI benefit covers just half the national average cost for tuition, room and board.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/28/AR2008042802994_pf.html>

VA WARNS OF PROBLEMS WITH GI BILL UPGRADES

Rick Maze - Staff writer - May 8, 2008

The Department of Veterans Affairs seemed to be standing in front of a fast-moving train Wednesday when a top official said VA would need two years of preparation to come up with a payment system for a proposed overhaul of GI Bill education benefits.

The warning flags were waved by Keith Pedigo, VA's associate deputy undersecretary for policy and program management, who said meeting an Aug. 1, 2009, effective date for the benefits increases, under what lawmakers are calling the 21st Century GI Bill of Rights, would be extremely difficult. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2008/05/military_gibill_va_050708w/>

THINGS ARE JUST SO TOUGH FOR THE POOR OLD DVA. WITH 415,000 EMPLOYEES, CONTRACTORS, AND VOLUNTEERS IT JUST CAN'T COPE.

ADD-ON ~ ANOTHER FIRST AMENDMENT PROBLEM – MAYBE IT'S NOT MEANT FOR US?

MILITARY WINKS AT RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

Robyn Blumner –St. Petersburg Times - 05/02/08

Maybe the reason the misperception persists that there are no atheists in foxholes is that nonbelievers must either shut up about their views or be hounded out of the military.

Just ask Army Spc. Jeremy Hall, who is making a splash in the news because of the way his atheism was attacked by superiors and fellow soldiers while he was risking his life in service to his country.

Hall, 23, served two combat tours in Iraq, winning the Combat Action Badge. But he's now stationed at Fort Riley, Kan., having been returned stateside early because the Army couldn't ensure his safety.

There is something deeply amiss when we send soldiers on a mission to engender peaceful coexistence between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, yet our military doesn't seem able to offer religious tolerance to its own.

www.tampabay.com/opinion/columns/article483665.ece>

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