

SOUND OFF!



VOL. II, NO
20

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

10 JUNE 2007

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

LET'S STOP BLAMING THE TROOPS

We don't think that we are blaming them – after all aren't we doing nothing but praising them? Don't our politicians of all stripes praise them almost daily on the floor of an empty House and Senate?

Let's take a step back.

Every day we hear statement after statement that in effect all say, “We can't leave Iraq because we will – [choose one of these, all taken from war supporters' statements in the last six months]

1. Destroy the morale of the troops by calling them losers
2. Tear down the military by declaring that the US has lost the war
3. Dishonor the memory of our soldiers' buddies who were killed fighting this war by leaving without winning, thus we will make all of those losses deaths in vain
4. Encourage the enemy and make our soldiers more vulnerable
5. Render our military forces unbelievable as a future deterrent

And don't forget!

6. Our brave boys and girls are fighting “them” over there so that we don't have to fight “them” over here.

Does everyone over the age of about 45 find these statements reminiscent of another time in our own history?

Let's take them one at a time.

1. No one is calling our troops “losers”. The only “losers” are those who declared or agreed to unilateral war, won that war, and then proceeded to lose the peace. The troops are doing what they are sworn to do. They like “winning”, but increasing numbers of them don't think that there is a “win” left.
2. The military has been “torn down” before and has recovered. Most of them understand that the politicians and bureaucrats will take credit for the “wins” and blame them for the “losses” anyway. Often the politicians are able to describe the same disaster as a win for them and a loss for the military.
3. This one frosts me. The tragic thing is that this statement seems to come most easily from those who have children in the fight. Ask just one soldier if he believes that he should die to honor the memory of his buddy who died last week.

I'll say it, and some won't like it – our kids are dying in vain They will not have died in vain because they pull out. They will not die in vain because the peace is lost. They are dying in vain

because – in the two meanings of that word – they have been and continue to be sent in vain [i.e., *on a fruitless mission*] by an administration, Congress and a Pentagon that, because of their own vanity [*excessive pride*], cowardice, and ignorance cannot admit that they made a monstrous mistake.

4. Again we can ask our soldiers if they think that their foe needs any encouragement. They seem to be pretty much encouraged already to continue the fight. There is nothing that we can say or do here that will make our soldiers more vulnerable than they already are with a fuzzy mission, no plan for disengagement, and a tactical scheme that makes new enemies every day.
5. Even if our forces were run out of Iraq on a rail they would never be looked upon as an unbelievable force in the future. No one is challenging the US militarily. Maybe once someone else wins the economic or the political challenge that we have been ignoring they will challenge us militarily, but instead we concentrate on the non-threat of military engagement, and ignore the real threat of economic and political defeat.
6. Even the Mahdr Army, all 30,000 of them, are not headed for Pittsburgh any time soon. If by this statement someone means that we will be subject to terrorist attacks in the future, I would have to answer, “Of course we will be; we have been under that threat for half a century at least.” I would also ask, what are we doing specifically right now that will lessen that likelihood. We are growing terrorists by the thousands – faster than we can kill them. Many of those we call terrorists are clearly described in current US military literature, not as terrorists, but as asymmetrical warriors. They are also described in treaty language as defenders of their own land and property. How is what we are doing today keeping a terrorist in Indonesia from deciding to blow up the Wal-Mart in Chillicothe. It is time for a “get real” moment, folks.

So, when we pop out these glib comments on why we should stay we are, in effect, saying, “We have to keep killing the troops in order to save the troops.” That's only mildly different from, “We had to destroy the village to save it.”

As for “winning”:

“They don't have to win. All they have to do is not lose”

Marine Capt. Carlos Barela, 35, Albuquerque, NM
Ramadi, Iraq May 2006

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

MEMBERSHIP IS OPEN, FREE, AND VERY WORTHWHILE! GET YOUR FELLOW VETERANS, AND VETERANS' FAMILY MEMBERS TO JOIN VUFT! WE ARE BEGINNING TO BE HEARD, AND WE NEED YOU TO HELP US GET THE MESSAGE OUT. IF EACH OF US WOULD BRING IN ONE NEW MEMBER EVERY MONTH, WHAT AN IMPACT WE COULD HAVE!

CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE!

PLEASE CHECK THE WEBSITE AT WWW.VUFT.ORG.

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

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 "Join" 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

WHATEVER YOUR VIEW OF THE WAR, TAKE A FEW MINUTES WITH THIS VIDEO

Someone sent me this--it's short and worth watching.

Beth Berman

North Carolina VUFT Member

www.youtube.com/v/ervaMPt4Ha0&autoplay=1

JUST ANOTHER STORY FROM ARLINGTON WEST

Memorial Day being over, perhaps we don't need to hear another story about our men and women serving in Iraq. This weekend however, we had an active duty Marine visit the Arlington West display in Santa Barbara at the beach who related her personal experience to me. I thought others would be interested in her story. It is not special, only typical of the Iraq Veterans who come to find the name of a fallen comrade.

A young, very attractive girl, (I guess in her twenties) was introduced to me by her friend, a Viet Nam vet. He asked me to "Take care of her." We immediately bonded even though I was old enough to be her father, I believe because I had served during the Viet Nam era.

She wanted to find a name among the crosses. I found the name and she began to weep uncontrollably. I held her and asked her how she knew this female soldier. She replied that it had been her duty to send her out on patrol the night she was killed. She then asked for another name. I found it. She asked if it could be placed with the other soldier. I replied, "Of course" and asked her how she knew this soldier. She said he was returning from another assignment and stopped to talk to her friend when a suicide bomber detonated his device killing both soldiers. Again she lost all composure. I assured her that it was all right to cry as I had seen many male Marines cry just as hard. She then asked for another name. I found it and brought it to her. The cause of death said "killed in non-combat related incident." I asked her how he died. She replied, "He put a gun to his head and committed suicide." By this time, I could take no more and was in tears myself.

As a nation, we must become more cognizant of the heavy price we are paying for this fiasco in Iraq. It is our duty to question the decisions of our politicians because those who serve cannot.

Before leaving, this young lady informed me that she had just reenlisted for another four years. I told her I did not like that decision but would be proud of her if she were my own daughter. I fear for her as if she is my own daughter.

Rodney Brown, Oldrodbrown@aol.com - 3 June

Veterans for Peace, American Legion, Veterans United for Truth

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

TRYING TO AVOID DISENFRANCHISEMENT OF SERVICEMEMBERS IN THE EVENT OF A RUNOFF ELECTION

The California legislature is considering a bill, [AB 1662](#), to provide each service member with a special runoff ballot which would allow them to state their preference for other candidates in addition to their own should a runoff occur in any office. This would be a good model for all states, especially those where service member ballots are ignored or sent so late that they cannot respond.

SOME FEDERAL BILLS YOU MIGHT WANT MENTION TO YOUR LEGISLATOR

[H.R.657](#) – Title: To amend title 10, United States Code, to provide for forgiveness of certain overpayments of retired pay paid to deceased retired members of the Armed Forces following their death.

Sponsor: [Rep Jones, Walter B., Jr.](#) [NC-3] (introduced 1/24/2007) [Cosponsors](#) (26)

Latest Major Action: 2/1/2007 Referred to House subcommittee. Status: Referred to the Subcommittee on Military Personnel.

[S.648](#) – Title: A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to reduce the eligibility age for receipt of non-regular military service retired pay for members of the Ready Reserve in active federal status or on active duty for significant periods.

Sponsor: [Sen Chambliss, Saxby](#) [GA] (introduced 2/15/2007) [Cosponsors](#) (10) Related Bills: [H.R.1428](#)

Latest Major Action: 2/15/2007 Referred to Senate committee. Status: Read twice and referred to the Committee on Armed Services.

[H.R.1110](#) : To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow Federal civilian and military retirees to pay health insurance premiums on a pretax basis and to allow a deduction for TRICARE supplemental premiums.

Sponsor: [Rep Davis, Tom](#) [VA-11] (introduced 2/16/2007) [Cosponsors](#) (189) Related Bills: [S 773](#)

Latest Major Action: 3/14/2007 Referred to House subcommittee. Status: Referred to the Subcommittee on Military Personnel.

[S.22](#) : - A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to establish a program of educational assistance for members of the Armed Forces who serve in the Armed Forces after September 11, 2001, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: [Sen Webb, Jim](#) [VA] (introduced 1/4/2007) [Cosponsors](#) (14) Committees: Senate Veterans' Affairs

Latest Major Action: 1/4/2007 Referred to Senate committee. Status: Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

AND A COUPLE MORE WORTHY OF SPECIAL ATTENTION

[S.185](#) – Title: A bill to restore habeas corpus for those detained by the United States.

Sponsor: [Sen Specter, Arlen](#) [PA] (introduced 1/4/2007) [Cosponsors](#) (19) Related Bills: [H.R.267](#), [H.R.1189](#), [H.R.1416](#)

Latest Major Action: 5/22/2007 Senate committee/subcommittee actions. Status: Committee on the Judiciary. Hearings held.

[H. Res. 469](#): - Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the Iraqi National Assembly should cancel or postpone its planned two-month recess scheduled to begin in July 2007 and work toward meeting political, social, and military benchmarks.

Sponsor: [Rep. Clifford Stearns \[R-FL\]](#)(no cosponsors)

Last Action: Jun 6, 2007: Referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

RETREAT – NEWS

APPARENTLY EVERYONE IS IN AGREEMENT

BUSH SEES LONG-TERM ROLE FOR TROOPS – They will serve as a deterrent to threats in Iraq, as they have done in South Korea.

Paul Richter - Times Staff Writer - May 31, 2007

WASHINGTON — President Bush would like to see the U.S. military provide long-term stability in Iraq as it has in South Korea, where thousands of American troops have been based for more than half a century, the White House said Wednesday. Tony Snow, the White House press secretary, told reporters that Bush believes U.S. forces eventually will end their combat role in Iraq but will continue to be needed in the country to deter threats and to help handle potential crises, as they have done in South Korea.

<More at: www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/iraq/la-fg-bushiraq31may31.0.6251591.story>

GATES, U.S. GENERAL BACK LONG IRAQ STAY – U.S. Presence Said to Reassure Allies

Ann Scott Tyson - Washington Post Staff Writer - June 1, 2007; A11

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and a senior U.S. commander said yesterday that they favor a protracted U.S. troop presence in Iraq along the lines of the military stabilization force in South Korea. Gates told reporters in Hawaii that he is thinking of "a mutual agreement" with Iraq in which "some force of Americans . . . is present for a protracted period of time, but in ways that are protective of the sovereignty of the host government." Gates said such a long-term U.S. presence would assure allies in the Middle East that the United States will not withdraw from Iraq as it did from Vietnam, "lock, stock and barrel." <More at:

www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/31/AR2007053102430.html>

OR ARE THEY?

WITH ALLIES IN ENEMY RANKS, GIS IN IRAQ ARE NO LONGER TRUE BELIEVERS

By Michael Kamber - The New York Times - May 27, 2007

Staff Sergeant David Safstrom does not regret his previous tours in Iraq, not even a difficult second stint when two comrades were killed while trying to capture insurgents.

"In Mosul, in 2003, it felt like we were making the city a better place," he said. "There was no sectarian violence, Saddam was gone, we were tracking down the bad guys. It felt awesome."

But now on his third deployment in Iraq, he is no longer a believer in the mission. The pivotal moment came, he says, this past February when soldiers killed a man setting a roadside bomb. When they searched the bomber's body, they found identification showing him to be a sergeant in the Iraqi Army.

"I thought, 'What are we doing here? Why are we still here?'" said Safstrom, a member of Delta Company of the 1st Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division. "We're helping guys that are trying to kill us. We help them in the day. They turn around at night and try to kill us." <More at: www.iht.com/articles/2007/05/27/news/delta.php>

COMMANDERS SAY PUSH IN BAGHDAD IS SHORT OF GOAL

David S. Cloud and Damien Cave - June 4, 2007

BAGHDAD, June 3 — Three months after the start of the Baghdad security plan that has added thousands of American and Iraqi troops to the capital, they control fewer than one-third of the city's neighborhoods, far short of the initial goal for the operation, according to some commanders and an internal military assessment.

The American assessment, completed in late May, found that American and Iraqi forces were able to "protect the population" and "maintain physical influence over" only 146 of the 457 Baghdad neighborhoods. In the remaining 311 neighborhoods, troops have either not begun operations aimed at rooting out insurgents or still face "resistance," according to the one-page assessment, which was provided to The New York Times and summarized reports from brigade and battalion commanders in Baghdad. <More at:

www.nytimes.com/2007/06/04/world/middleeast/04surge.html>

REQUEST FOR MORE TROOPS NOT BEING MET

Stars and Stripes - Jeff Schogol - June 09, 2007

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. military is having a hard time filling a request from commanders in Afghanistan for 3,400 troops to train Afghan police, a senior Defense official said. . . . As of May, only 200 U.S. troops had received orders to go to Afghanistan to fill the request. <More at: www.military.com/features/0,15240,138542,00.html>

MANY RETURN TO WAR; MANY NEVER GO

Associated Press - June 04, 2007

WASHINGTON - Even as troops in Iraq and Afghanistan are serving longer and more often - three, four, even five times - roughly half of Americans in uniform have not been sent at all. . . . By this spring, roughly 150,000 active duty Soldiers, 85,000 Sailors, 90,000 Airmen and 65,000 Marines had gone more than once to Iraq, Afghanistan or surrounding countries. About half the total force had not deployed to either conflict, Defense Department figures show. Fifty-three percent of the active duty Air Force and 50 percent of the Navy had not been to the wars, not surprising since the fighting is overwhelmingly on the ground. Still, 45 percent of the Marines and 37 percent of Army forces had never been deployed. <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,137860,00.html>

MARINES FAIL TO GET GEAR TO TROOPS

Associated Press - May 25, 2007

WASHINGTON - The system for delivering badly needed gear to Marines in Iraq has failed to meet many urgent requests for equipment from troops in the field, according to an internal document obtained by The Associated Press. Of more than 100 requests from deployed Marine units between February 2006 and February 2007, less than 10 percent have been fulfilled, the document says. It blamed the bureaucracy and a "risk-averse" approach by acquisition officials.

<More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,137001,00.html>

EQUIPMENT LEVELS WORST EVER, GUARD CHIEF SAYS

James Halpin - The Associated Press - Jun 6, 2007

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — About half of all National Guard equipment is being used in the Middle East, and the Guard's senior uniformed officer said Tuesday that could hurt the organization's overall readiness at home. National Guard units have 53 percent of the equipment they need to handle state emergencies, said Lt. General H. Steven Blum. It falls to 49 percent once Guard equipment needed for war — such as weapons — is factored in, he said.

<More at www.armytimes.com/news/2007/06/ap_guardconference_070606/>

CAN SOMEONE EXPLAIN THIS TO ME? ~ SEE ABOVE!

U.S. RUSHES SUPPLIES TO BEIRUT

Associated Press - May 25, 2007

BEIRUT, Lebanon - Two military transport planes landed at the Beirut airport on Friday, bringing foreign military aid to help the Lebanese army fight Islamic militants, security officials said. The development comes after the United States said it would rush supplies to Beirut. Lebanese officials would not disclose where the military planes came from - whether directly from the United States or from U.S. military depots in the Middle East. <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,137000,00.html>

FEWER HIGH-QUALITY ARMY RECRUITS

Bryan Bender and Kevin Baron - Globe Correspondent - June 1, 2007

WASHINGTON -- The percentage of high-quality recruits entering the Army is the lowest in 10 years, an indication that the force is struggling to attract top-grade enlistees -- and a troubling sign for the Pentagon, which is waging wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and plans to add 90,000 ground troops to its ranks within the next five years.

<More at: www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2007/06/01/fewer_high_quality_army_recruits/>

THREE BROTHERS GO AWOL

Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune - June 06, 2007

CARLTON, MINN. -- Luke Kamunen began to wonder if he'd made a mistake the moment he arrived for basic training. ... His twin brother, Leif, started having doubts within weeks when a drill sergeant indicated they were probably headed to Iraq. Leif said that possibility had been downplayed by the recruiter who signed him up in Duluth. ... On Jan. 2, the twins, age 21, and their brother Leo, 20, went AWOL from the Army. ... Army desertions have risen 35 percent in the past two years, according to Defense Department figures. The number rose from 2,450 in 2004 to 3,301 in 2006.

<More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,138137,00.html>

PROGRESS OF THE CASE IN OUR LAST BULLETIN

MARINES COMPROMISE ON WAR PROTESTER

Dave Helling - The Kansas City Star - Jun. 04, 2007

A Marine panel split the difference Monday, recommending an immediate general discharge under honorable conditions for embattled reservist Adam Kokesh. But the recommendation, which is less severe than the other-than-honorable discharge first recommended in his case, did not satisfy the 25-year-old corporal, who received an honorable discharge from active duty. He said he plans to appeal. <More at: www.kansascity.com/105/story/136424.html>

YET ANOTHER WAY TO SUPPORT THE TROOPS!

NEW SCAM TARGETS MILITARY SPOUSES

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 31, 2007 – The American Red Cross is warning military spouses about a new identity-theft scam that targets family members of deployed troops. The Red Cross was alerted of the scam earlier this month, said Devorah Goldberg of the Red Cross.

The scam involves a person with an American accent calling a military spouse, identifying herself as a representative of the Red Cross, and telling the spouse that her husband was hurt in Iraq and was medically evacuated to Germany. The caller then says that doctors can't start treatment until paperwork is completed, and that to start the paperwork they need the spouse to verify her husband's social security number and date of birth. <More at: www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=46232>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>What</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>Notes</u>
6/8-10		Humboldt County Fairgrounds Ferndale, CA	Stand Down	Kim Hall	707-822-2175
6/13	1100 - 1500	Palace Station Hotel 2411 W. Sahara Ave, Las Vegas, NV	Career Fair		702-367-2411
6/14-17		Savannah, Georgia	Wall That Heals	Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 671	
6/14		Buffalo, NY	Resource Fair	Herb Wittmeyer	716-881-5855 x227
6/15		Worcester, MA	Resource Fair	Joe Boylan	508-791-0956
6/22-23		Kansas City, MO	Resource Fair	Bob Waechter	816-753-1866
6/28	1100 - 1500	Omni San Antonio Hotel 9821 Colonnade Blvd San Antonio, TX	Career Fair		210-691-8888
6/28 - 7/1		Court House area International Falls, MN	Wall That Heals	2007 Falls High School All Class Reunion Committee	
7/11	1100 - 1400	Grand Hyatt San Francisco Hotel 345 Stockton ST. San Francisco, CA	Career Fair		415-398-1234
7/13		San Diego, CA	Stand Down	Darcy Pavich	619-393-2040
7/26-29		Long Branch, NJ	Wall That Heals	City of Long Branch	
7/27		Ventura, CA	Stand Down	Claire Hope	805-987-3118
7/28		Miami, FL	Resource Fair	William Hunt	305-228-2300
8/3-5		Roosevelt University Chicago, IL	VVAW 40yj Anniversary	Hannah Frisch VVAW National Staff	773-276-4189

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

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

IT JUST KEEPS GETTING WORSE ~ EVEN THE JUDGES SAY SO

COURT OF APPEALS FOR VETERANS CLAIMS FACES INCREASED BACKLOG, JUDGE TESTIFIES AT HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

Thursday, May 24, 2007

A federal appeals court judge on Tuesday before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs testified that the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims is averaging 300 appeals per month and facing a growing backlog, *CongressDaily* reports.

Judge William Greene, the court's chief judge, presented statistics to the subcommittee showing that his court is among the busiest of the federal appeals courts. The statistics showed that 2,542 new appeals were filed in the first six months of fiscal year 2007, compared with 3,729 for all of FY 2006. In addition, benefit denials by the Department of Veterans Affairs' Board of Veterans Appeals increased to 18,107 in FY 2006, almost double the number from two years earlier.

<More at: www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?DR_ID=45135>

LONG TOURS EXTEND HEARTACHES FOR MILITARY MOMS

Alison Bowen - Women's eNews - May 30, 2007

U.S. Army Capt. Wendy Bernard, in the middle of a one-year deployment in Iraq, came home for two weeks' leave in the summer of 2004 to find that her year-old daughter, Clark, wouldn't speak to her after six months of separation. ... Women represent 1 in 7 military personnel in Iraq, and 38 percent of active-duty women are mothers.

<More at: www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3183/context/cover/>

BATTLING ON 2 FRONTS, MOTHER CHARGED AS AWOL

Claire Cummings and Raja Mishra - Globe Correspondent and Globe Staff - June 6, 2007

In a rare legal clash pitting a mother against the US military, Specialist Lisa Hayes of the New Hampshire National Guard surrendered yesterday to Army authorities after being charged as a deserter for refusing to fight in Iraq until a custody case involving her 7-year-old daughter was resolved.

The dispute, among the first of its kind in New England, underscores the tremendous strain the Iraq war has placed on the Guard and the nation's all-volunteer military, whose members often leave behind needy families and tumultuous personal lives as their combat tours are repeatedly extended. In February, Hayes received emergency leave from her second deployment to Iraq after an alleged domestic violence incident at her former husband's house, where her daughter, Brystal Knight, was staying. As the resulting custody case moved slowly through the courts, the military ordered her back to Iraq.

Hayes didn't go. <More at: www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2007/06/06/battling_on_2_fronts_mother_charged_as_awol/>

"SOMEONE ... IS GOING TO DO AN ANALYSIS"!!!

NO RECORDS KEPT ON VETERANS' SUICIDES

Associated Press - May 29, 2007

WASHINGTON - In the three months after Marine Maj. John Ruocco returned from Iraq feeling numb and depressed, he couldn't sleep. He had lost weight. He had nightmares. He was distracted and withdrawn from his two young sons. One night, he promised his wife, Kim, that he would get help. The next morning, he was dead. The 40-year-old Cobra helicopter pilot, based at Camp Pendleton, Calif., had hanged himself.

There are others. Army reservist Joshua Omgig. Army Capt. Michael Pelkey. Marines Jonathan Schulze and Jeffrey Lucey. Each came home from tours in Iraq and committed suicide. ... Paul Rieckhoff, executive director and founder of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, says that although suicides among troops returning from the war is a significant problem, the scope is unknown.

"The problem that we face right now is that there's no method to track veterans coming home," said Rieckhoff, who served in Iraq as a platoon leader in the first year of the war. "There's no system. There's no national registry."

More than four years into the war, the government has little information on suicides among Iraq war veterans.

"We don't keep that data," said Karen Fedele, a VA spokeswoman in Washington. "I'm told that somebody here is going to do an analysis, but there just is nothing right now." <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,137318,00.html>

IT'S NOT JUST THE VA ~ ACTIVE DUTY TOO

AT U.S. MILITARY HOSPITALS, 'EVERYBODY IS OVERWORKED'

Gregg Zoroya - USA TODAY - 5 June, 2007

FORT STEWART, Ga. — Winn Army Community Hospital has a baby boom it cannot handle. Mothers and children and strollers pack the pediatrics department, another hassle after long waits for hard-to-get appointments. The problems don't stop there. From gynecology to internal medicine, this hospital on the grounds of Fort Stewart, the biggest Army base in the South, is overwhelmed. Too many patients are demanding too many services from a medical facility with too few doctors and too little space.

Military families complain they can't get in to see a doctor. The hospital's top commander points to a lack of money and staff to meet basic needs. And everyone involved agonizes about whether the problems can be fixed any time soon.

The Army's acting surgeon general says the situation here illustrates the challenge the service faces nationwide in keeping health care promises that were made to soldiers when they enlisted. Months after the problems revealed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center caused a massive shake-up throughout the military's system of care, the service is struggling to find enough doctors and nurses to care for troops and their families. <More at: www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-06-04-military-hospitals_N.htm>

LET'S TAKE A LITTLE MORE OUT OF THEIR POCKETS COLA TO DROP ACROSS EUROPE

Stars and Stripes - Matt Millham - June 01, 2007

A two-point drop in the cost-of-living allowance across most of Europe today could leave troops' pockets anywhere from \$30 to roughly \$150 lighter for the month of June. For troops in Germany, the decrease resulted from new price data that indicated the gap between prices in the U.S. and Germany is decreasing. A 12 percent to 14 percent drop in the allowance, known as COLA, was expected in Germany by U.S. military finance officials. <More at: www.estripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=53912&archive=true>

SO OF COURSE

DOLLAR SLIDES TO THREE-WEEK LOW AGAINST EURO

MarketWatch - Jun 5, 2007

<More at: www.marketwatch.com/news/story/story.aspx?guid=%7B8375E3E6-8D26-4A08-8735-B26B9AC569FF%7D&siteid=rss>

AND SPEND LESS ON THEIR CARE VA CUTS DOWN ON SGT. RYAN'S THERAPY

Paul Brooks - June 08, 2007 - Times Herald-Record

Ellenville [NY] — Veterans Affairs officials — facing a lifetime medical bill that could balloon to \$17 million — cut back yesterday on care for wounded Marine sniper Sgt. Eddie Ryan.

"They will never admit it, but we know it's about the money," said Chris Ryan, a former Marine who has become an outspoken supporter of his son and a critic of bureaucrats. The 23-year-old Marine was hit in the head by two bullets fired from an American tank in 2005.

Last week, five Albany VA officials surprised Angela Ryan, Eddie's mother, with a phone call. They told her they wanted to change Eddie's care by cutting back on the number of therapy visits he gets each week and perhaps sending him someplace besides his home. <More at: www.recordonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070608/NEWS/706080335>

AND TO HELP THE TROOPS A LITTLE BIT MORE HIGHER TRICARE FEES ENDORSED

Tom Philpott - May 25, 2007

The Pentagon-appointed Task Force on the Future of Military Health will endorse higher TRICARE fees, deductibles and co-payments for under-65 retirees and their families in an interim report to be sent to Congress May 31. It also will back other key features of the TRICARE "reform" package first proposed last year by the Department of Defense. These include:

- Raising beneficiary co-payments on prescriptions filled in the TRICARE retail pharmacy network.
- Indexing TRICARE fees and deductibles so that automatic annual adjustments keep them in step with rising healthcare costs.
- Establishing tiers for the new TRICARE fee structure, probably based on rank at retirement, so that retirees with bigger annuities pay more for their health care coverage and retirees with smaller annuities pay less.

<More at: www.military.com/features/0,15240,136837,00.html>

THEN WE CAN PUT A LITTLE MORE HERE CHOOSING A FAST BUCK OVER HELP FOR VETERANS

Steve Lopez May 30, 2007

[Y]ou thought the VA might expand services to accommodate the legions of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with medical and mental maladies? ... That's when [LA] officials learned that a ban on private development of the Wilshire [VA Hospital] site didn't make it into a war-spending bill, at the behest of the Bush administration.

"I think there's an army of developers and their consultants in Washington who see an opportunity to make a lot of money, and this VA and the administration is hell-bent on giving them that opportunity," said Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky.

<More at: www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-lopez30may30,1,1076150.column>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF MAY 23, 2007

This week, the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps announced an increase, while the Navy and Coast Guard had a decrease. The net collective result is 1,985 more reservists mobilized than last week. At any given time, services may mobilize some units and individuals while demobilizing others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. Total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 66,169; Navy Reserve, 5,646; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 6,025; Marine Corps Reserve, 5,414; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 364. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel, who have been mobilized, to 83,618, including both units and individual augmentees. **NOTE: There has been no release of this data since 23 May 2007**

A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel, who are currently mobilized, can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/May2007/d20070523ngr.pdf>.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SATURDAY 9 JUNE 2007

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	3,506
WOUNDED US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 5/19]	25,549
OTHER US CASUALTIES [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 5/19]	≥27,022
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [LAST DoD UPDATE 5/19]	111
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	4
KILLED UK	150
KILLED OTHER COALITION	127
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE 3/31]	678
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 46,529
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 71,203 [LANCET-753,209]
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400,000+ [LANCET- 1,335,776]
IRAQ REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL [5/15]	1.2M/2.15M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US	398
*OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 5/23]	6,213
KILLED COALITION	248
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	744
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	32,034
AFGHAN REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL	1.4M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE [6/9]	\$433,176,924,000

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

WHAT IF OUR MERCENARIES TURN ON US?

Chris Hedges – 6 June 2007

Armed units from the private security firm Blackwater USA opened fire in Baghdad streets twice in two days last week. It triggered a standoff between the security contractors and Iraqi forces, a reminder that the war in Iraq may be remembered mostly in our history books for empowering and building America's first modern mercenary army.

There are an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 armed security contractors working in Iraq, although there are no official figures and some estimates run much higher. Security contractors are not counted as part of the coalition forces. When the number of private mercenary fighters is added to other civilian military "contractors" who carry out logistical support activities such as food preparation, the number rises to about 126,000.

"We got 126,000 contractors over there, some of them making more than the secretary of defense," said House defense appropriations subcommittee Chairman John Murtha (D., Pa.). "How in the hell do you justify that?"

The privatization of war hands an incentive to American corporations, many with tremendous political clout, to keep us mired down in Iraq. But even more disturbing is the steady rise of this modern Praetorian Guard. The Praetorian Guard in ancient Rome was a paramilitary force that defied legal constraints, made violence part of the political discourse, and eventually plunged the Roman Republic into tyranny and despotism. Despotic movements need paramilitary forces that operate outside the law, forces that sow fear among potential opponents, and are capable of physically silencing those branded by their leaders as traitors. And in the wrong hands, a Blackwater could well become that force.

American taxpayers have so far handed a staggering \$4 billion to "armed security" companies in Iraq such as Blackwater, according to House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Rep. Henry Waxman (D., Calif.). Tens of billions more have been paid to companies that provide logistical support. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D., Ill.) of the House Intelligence Committee estimates that 40 cents of every dollar spent on the occupation has gone to war contractors. It is unlikely that any of these corporations will push for an early withdrawal. The profits are too lucrative.

Mercenary forces like Blackwater operate beyond civilian and military law. They are covered by a 2004 edict passed by American occupation authorities in Iraq that immunizes all civilian contractors in Iraq from prosecution.

<More at: www.philly.com/inquirer/opinion/20070603_What_if_our_mercenaries_turn_on_us_.html>

WOMAN'S SIGN MEMORIALIZES THOSE LOST IN IRAQ

Shirley Min - General Assignment Reporter WNCN-TV - May 28, 2007

DURHAM, N.C. -- One Durham woman says she honors veterans who pay the ultimate price everyday, not just on Memorial Day.

The war in Iraq started in 2003 and she started keeping a running tally of soldiers killed in Iraq two years later. NBC17 interviewed Beth Berman last year and today, one year later we once again met with the Durham resident to see how much the number has grown.

Around this time last year the number outside Berman's home in Durham was at 2,464.

"I'm changing it now to 3,454," Berman said.

A year later, the number's up almost a thousand. Berman began her tally in 2005 to remind people about what's going on in Iraq.

"I think it's easy, fairly easy, for people to go about their daily lives and forget that others are making the sacrifice," Berman said.

And the number keeps rising.

"April and the month of may have been unusually high in the casualty numbers," Berman said.

That's why Berman is speaking out against the war with a sign. And for the most part she says she's received mostly positive feedback from neighbors -- even strangers. Berman lives across the street from George Watts Elementary School. Last year, Berman says a teacher came over and hugged her for what she's doing. That teacher had just lost a son in Iraq -- killed by a roadside bomb.

"I didn't think we should go to war there but this sign is a reminder of the cost and it's also to honor those who are paying the price," Berman said.

Berman says she'll keep the sign up until the war in Iraq ends but hopes that time comes before Memorial Day next year.

BETH BERMAN IS A MEMBER OF VUFT, INC.

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

REMEMBER THOSE LEFT BEHIND

Paul Rieckhoff May 28, 2007

Iraq-Afghanistan vets need help on many fronts

Memorial Day is an opportunity to honor all those Americans who have made the ultimate sacrifice in combat.

Today, in ceremonies across the country, people will pay tribute to those who have died serving their country, including the more than 3,800 troops who have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For many, this will be a rare moment for real reflection on the human cost of this war.

Even after four years, the lives of most Americans have gone on unchanged. Fewer than 1 percent have served in Iraq or Afghanistan. But for the families of the fallen, and for the tens of thousands of wounded troops, the sacrifices are never forgotten.

I served for a year in Iraq with the 3/124th Infantry of the Florida National Guard, and had the privilege of leading 38 heroes in combat in Baghdad.

As founder of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, I am honored to know mothers of fallen soldiers who send care packages daily to their sons' fellow troops, and severely wounded Marines who have run marathons in the name of their fallen comrades.

For these brave Americans, every day is Memorial Day. But the rest of Americans can honor these heroes as well.

Learn about the issues facing troops and military families.

Over 11,000 troops have been wounded by roadside bombs. Tens of thousands have sought treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other mental health problems. Many can't afford to pay for college when they return from combat.

Some 15 percent of young Iraq veterans are unemployed. And, perhaps most shockingly, up to 300,000 troops suffer from undiagnosed brain injuries.

Talk to your children about the war. Point to Iraq on a map and explain that U.S. troops are serving there, that there are children living in Baghdad just like your family lives in Palm Bay or Titusville or Cocoa Beach.

Take young ones to a local VA hospital to say thank you to a veteran or deliver a note or homemade card. Teaching the next generation to appreciate and take seriously the sacrifices of men and women in uniform is a tremendous gift to the people currently serving our country.

Find about some of the worthy charities you can help. They include the Fisher House, which houses the families of hospitalized troops, and the Bob Woodruff Family Fund, which supports those with traumatic brain injuries.

Donate your time at hundreds of understaffed veterans' hospitals across the country. Or help disabled veterans transition to civilian life by making sure your company posts its jobs at HireVetsFirst.gov.

There are just a few of the thousands of ways to get involved. But no matter how you can help, please take time to show your support to troops and military families this Memorial Day.

The best possible tribute we can give to those who did not come home from war is to care for the families and fellow troops they left behind.

Rieckhoff, an Iraq combat veteran, is executive director and founder of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and author of "Chasing Ghosts: Failures and Facades in Iraq, a Soldier's Perspective."