

Sound Off!



Vol. II, No 1 The Newsletter of VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, Inc.

“Veterans standing up for each other”

25 august 2006

First Call - THEME OF THE ISSUE AND/OR CLIPS & QUOTES

It's long past time to talk truth

“In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.” - George Orwell

We adopted the name “Veterans United For Truth” 15 months ago out of frustration with the Administration, Congress, the Pentagon, and the press for their consistent toying with the truth, both on matters concerning the current wars, and on the subject of soldiers and veterans and their rights and benefits.

Truth is a funny concept – it apparently is OK to redefine it as the need arises. There is factual truth often available in the numbers of things, or the numbers of actions, or the size of organizations and objects, or even the length of activities. When we say that it has been 1,253 days since the start of the Iraq War and 1,782 days since the start of the Afghanistan War, we can be sure that we are truthful.

The further we get from single-point solid sources, the shakier the numbers become. When we say that as of 8/23 2,618 coalition forces have died in Iraq - a rate of 2.09/day –that equation is dependent upon the truth-telling of the Administration. When we find that often deaths are not counted against the total, we begin to question the truth of the reporting. Wounding data is often shakier yet, so that there is no consistent number of wounded available, and the reported woundings never seem to match the flow-through data of the hospitals. The Pentagon reports 19,511 US wounded or 15.6/day, but if the enumerator is fudged, the total has to be much higher and the wounded and the killing rates are maybe far less than the truth.

The further we get in time from a true statement we don't know when it passes from truth, to half-truth, to a lie. So when we say that we have a “Coalition of the Willing” of 41 nations fighting in Iraq, as was true in the earliest days of the war, yet fail to quantify the subsequent changes, and use the phrase without saying that 17 nations are gone, and four more will leave this year, then we should at least be saying our “Diminishing Coalition of the Willing”, or in some way qualifying our original statement, else we mislead at best, and lie at worst.

If we don't question some allegedly factual statements we never know the truth. The most common of these statements is “I Support the Troops”. It manifests itself in different ways from different groups.

Politicians affirm their support by citing the legislation they have either sponsored or signed on to, yet they never let us know why 95%+ of the supposedly supportive bills never get out of committee. Politicians also never link their voting records to their political rhetoric. They

never have to tell you that their vote for an appropriations bill included voting against amendments that would have supported the troops, before finally voting in favor of the bill itself. They never tell you that the provision they voted for in one house, they freely gave away in conference with the other house. They never tell you if they voted privately by collusion with other members of a committee to not let a veterans' bill or a proposed amendment see the light of day.

Change the underlying base and figures that would be a lie become truth. So, when we “make our numbers” on recruiting, month after month, we shouldn't be surprised to find out later that the goals were quietly reduced. The new call-up of Marine Corps IRR reservists sadly doesn't even trigger the truthful explanation that would correct the previously reported recruiting results.

When the daily US military report of 20 Iraqis being killed and 300 are wounded in a single incident as “relatively little violence”, they don't feel the need to tell us that the truth in that report is that 100 or more Iraqis are killed every day throughout Iraq.

The vast majority of our fellow citizens affirm their “support”. When you bring up the subject of common sacrifice, however, the truth of their sentiment appears. When you ask for more taxes to pay for the care and rehabilitation of the wounded; when you ask for a legitimate and full implementation of the GI Bill for Education; when you ask for them to pay for new clinics and hospitals; when you ask them to pay for beefed-up administrative support from the VA; when you ask them to tell their Representatives to stop earmarking funds for trivial items; our fellow citizens and their Congresspersons show the truth of their “support” when they ignore the requests.

Then there is always the shading or hiding of truth through ignoring it. Here some Administration and Congressional spokespersons and all of the press excel. Things can't be problems if we don't talk about them, can they? If we ignore the pointed questions that demand truthful answers, and never respond, then we aren't lying are we?

There are of course more ways that the truth escapes us. One thing for sure, when someone doesn't respond to an honest question with a truthful answer, then he or she disrespects you as an equal. You are not worthy of a truthful answer. They are so superior to you that the truth isn't even necessary in their reluctant dealings with you.

That just pisses me off as an American and as a human being, and stokes my fires in my continuing search for the truth. Our soldiers and veterans deserve no less. [Ed.]

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. CHECK OUT THE "CANDIDATES" PAGE, WHICH IS OUR EFFORT TO LIST ALL VETERANS RUNNING FOR STATE-WIDE AND FEDERAL OFFICE IN THE U.S.; IT IS BEING UPDATED DAILY. PLEASE HELP US MAKE THIS AS COMPLETE A LIST AS POSSIBLE BY SENDING CANDIDATE INFO TO SCOOK@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

Good question!

Thanks for all you do BUT where is the reporting about new legislation for disabled veterans and cost of living raises to equal the inflation expenses we face?

Justin Purchin

There is no reporting because there is little or no action. Many bills have been written to support these issues but almost none have come out of committee. Many amendments to appropriations bills have been proposed, but they either don't make it out of committee or are voted down on the floor. [Ed.]

Here is a recent headline that exemplifies what they are doing – please don't get too excited.

Congress advocates support for 'Hire a Veteran Week' and commends those caring for our veterans in state veterans homes

H. Con. Res. 125, expressing support for the creation and purpose of "Hire a Veteran Week," and H. Con. Res. 345, honoring the National Association of State Veterans Homes and the 119 state veterans homes providing long-term care to veterans, passed the House

At least one state steps up!

A few months ago, we learned the staggering news that 26.5 million veterans, military personnel and their families were at risk of identity theft because their personal information was stolen from the federal government. Although they don't believe this personal information has been misused, we have no way of knowing for sure.

The brave men and women whose information was stolen deserve added protection from identity thieves who would tarnish their credit and their good names. That's why I pushed through a new law to allow North Carolina military personnel, veterans and their families to freeze their credit for free.

...For more information, please visit my website at www.ncdoj.com

Sincerely - Roy Cooper – Attorney General, North Carolina

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

VA bill clears Senate

Rick Maze August 04, 2006 – Times Staff writer

A veterans' benefits bill that includes the repeal of a Civil War-era ban against veterans hiring attorneys to help with disability claims passed the Senate on August 3rd.

The Veterans' Choice of Representation and Benefits Enhancement Act of 2006 also includes a provision requiring a convicted killer's remains to be removed from Arlington National Cemetery, makes GI Bill benefits available for a wider range of job training courses and requires the federal government to fully pay for veterans residing in state veterans' homes. The biggest change in the bill, S 2694, is repeal of the attorney ban. Under a policy established for Civil War veterans, a lawyer cannot be paid by a veteran for helping with a benefit claim until all administrative appeals are exhausted, a process that can take years.

Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee chairman, said the ban may have made sense at one time to prevent veterans from paying for something they could get for free but times have changed. "Doing away with this outdated law will allow veterans, like all other adults in this nation, to have the assistance of counsel if they so choose," he said in a statement. <More at: www.navytimes.com/story.php?f=1-292925-2001215.php>

Be advised that the DAV has come out against this bill. They believe that veterans will end up losing much of their benefits to lawyers' fees. I understand their concern, but believe that it is not in the claims process but in the appeals process where legal help is needed. Title 38 may be larger than the tax code, and most vets (including me) can't fathom the intricacies of it without legal help. If the vagaries of the code were not used incessantly to deny claims, this bill would probably be unnecessary. [Ed.]

The states are doing more than the federal government

State considers sweetening National Guard deal

Jim Sanders - Contra Costa Times - Jul 31, 2006

SACRAMENTO - Hoping to bolster a sagging California National Guard, lawmakers are considering enticements ranging from college tuition assistance to membership in the state's retirement system.

"We have to find ways to make it more attractive," said Assemblyman Joe Nation, D-San Rafael, who chairs the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee. "California's commitment to members of the National Guard is frankly embarrassing," he said.

With the war in Iraq now in its third year, the California National Guard is struggling with recruitment and retention, down nearly 5,000 troops from authorized levels of 25,000. <More at: www.contracostatimes.com/mld/cctimes/news/15157821.htm>

Does any state do as much as North Carolina?

State to send \$1 million to military bases

August 12, 2006 - Barry Smith - Freedom Raleigh Bureau

RALEIGH — State officials have announced that \$1 million will be going to North Carolina's seven military bases and installations to improve the quality of life for military personnel and their families.

"While the war effort may be subject to debate, the support of our military families is unanimous," Gov. Mike Easley said in a statement. "We are 100 percent committed to protecting our military families while we pray for the swift and safe return of our soldiers."

The money is for developing and expanding community service, morale and recreational programs on military installations. <More at: www.jdnews.com/SiteProcessor.cfm?Template=/GlobalTemplates/Details.cfm&StoryID=44037&Section=News>

RETREAT – NEWS

Army's Readiness Questioned

Associated Press | July 27, 2006

WASHINGTON - Up to two-thirds of the Army's combat brigades are not ready for wartime missions, largely because they are hampered by equipment shortfalls, Democratic lawmakers said Wednesday, citing unclassified documents.

In a letter to President Bush, Rep. Ike Skelton of Missouri, the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, said that "nearly every non-deployed combat brigade in the active Army is reporting that they are not ready" for combat. The figures, he said, represent an unacceptable risk to the nation. At a news conference, other leading Democrats said that those strategic reserve forces are critically short of personnel and equipment.

"They're the units that could be called upon or would be called upon to go to war in North Korea, Iran, or any other country or region," said Rep. John Murtha, D-Pa., a decorated Marine who has called for a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq.

In a statement released late Wednesday, the Army chief of staff, Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker, said much has been asked of the Army during the nearly five years the U.S. has been at war.

... In recent testimony, Schoomaker said that in 2004 it cost \$4 billion to repair or replace war equipment, but now it has reached \$12 billion to \$13 billion. "And in my view, we will continue to see this escalate," he said, adding that the Army is using up equipment at four times the rate for which it was designed. <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,107179,00.html>

ANG – "Don't look to us for help!"

Army Guard units said not combat ready

Lolita C. Baldor - Associated Press - Aug 2, 2006

More than two-thirds of the Army National Guard's 34 brigades are not combat ready, mostly because of equipment shortages that will cost up to \$21 billion to correct, the top National Guard general said Tuesday. Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum spoke to a group of defense reporters after Army officials, analysts and members of Congress disclosed that two-thirds of the active Army's brigades are not ready for war. The budget won't allow the military to complete the personnel training and equipment repairs and replacement that must be done when units return home after deploying to Iraq or Afghanistan, they say.

"I am further behind or in an even more dire situation than the active Army, but we both have the same symptoms, I just have a higher fever," Blum said.

<More at: www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2006/08/01/general_guard_units_not_combat_ready/>

Bragg General: Military Has Wasted Money on Poor Tech

(08/16/06 – Fort Bragg) - The commander of Fort Bragg says the military has wasted billions of dollars on information technology that doesn't do the job.

"The information that we need to fight terrorism is available to us, but it is not available to all the people at the right time in ways that are useful," Lt. Gen. John R. Vines, commanding general of Fort Bragg and the 18th Airborne Corps, said in a speech Tuesday. "We have these massive databases that, in many cases, can't be cross-referenced."

He blamed the inefficiencies on policymakers, private companies and himself. ... Vines said another hindrance is the time it can take to learn computer systems.

"My criteria for automation tools is, if you cannot learn it in 30 minutes, it's the wrong tool," Vines said. "If it does not mimic something that soldiers grew up learning, it is the wrong tool."

<More at: <http://abclocal.go.com/wtvd/story?section=local&id=4467785>>

At a working conference on the design of a new battlefield automated information system for the US Army in 1995 (the system now deployed with the US Army), I gave the capabilities briefing for the system as it had been designed to meet Army standards. After the briefing an Infantry Major asked me when the system would be delivered. I told him that we proposed to field the first systems in 30 months, a lightning-fast deployment under DoD procurement standards. He said to me, "Well, until you can get this thing to me, do you think you could find me a grease pencil for my map board that doesn't break in freezing weather?" So much for "transformation" and "automation of the battlefield". The military user always knows what is right and necessary. [Ed.]

Military service and America's youth

William P. McGowan - Ventura County Reporter - 08-10-2006

Why universal military service could close social gaps ... and protect democracy

To the surprise of no one, the call for a return to universal military service for all of America's youth won instant approval from the audience, a group of mostly white, mostly middle-aged businessmen. What made the message so interesting was that the man delivering it, David Kennedy, is a tenured professor at Stanford University and has admitted resisting military service as a young man.

In 1967, he felt that the draft was only for suckers and other young men not gainfully employed. But now he felt differently. In his audience were a high percentage of military veterans, men who had shared a foxhole and the experience of being citizen soldiers. And the professor believed that they were better Americans because of it. Calls for universal military service are usually heard from the Far Right spectrum of our society, so when a tenured professor at a place that is openly hostile to the military speaks in favor of a compulsory two- or three-year hitch in one of the nation's five services, we as a society should sit up and pay attention. <More at: www.vcreporter.com/article.php?id=3681&IssueNum=84>

If you click through on this article – and you should – you will find the startling figure that only 6% of soldiers have ever seen a college classroom. I questioned the author on this figure and he replied that the editors had truncated his article causing this error. His original said that only 6% of those on a college track in high school opted for military service instead – quite a difference. See how hard it is to get the truth! [Ed.]

Waiting for Reinforcements

Jarrett Murphy - Village Voice (New York City) - Aug 19, 2006

The fighting won't end: Gearing up for another wave of homeless vets

On the first Tuesday in August, Thomas Mullifield, who fought with the Army in Vietnam from 1964 to 1967 and struggled with alcoholism in the 1990s, was engaged in another battle—against the overheated, leaden air filling the residence that he and 149 other vets call home on Commonwealth Avenue in the Bronx. It was the first day of the big heat wave, and Mullifield, with a donation check freshly deposited, was trying to track down air conditioners for the New Era shelter. He found some at a Home Depot in Mount Vernon. Victory.

The rest of the \$62,000 (a gift from the New York State Association of Electrical Contractors and IBEW Local 3) was already earmarked for new furniture. But who knows where the cash would come from for a new paint job on the New Era Veterans residence or for the other projects that Mullifield, who works as veterans services director there, wants to tackle at the 13-year-old shelter? "It's unending," he says. So is demand. The waiting list to get into the facility usual holds 30 to 35 names of men and women (there are eight ladies in the residence now) who served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and periods in between. The logjam is a fact of life, Mullifield knows. <More at: www.villagevoice.com/news/0633.murphy.74181.5.html>

No good military options in Iraq: leading US senators

Aug 6, 2006

There are no good military options for the United States in Iraq, two top US senators said, describing the country as in the midst of a civil war and suggested that Washington convene a high-level diplomatic conference involving regional powers. However Republican Chuck Hagel and Democrat Christopher Dodd, both senior members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, gave few further details on the proposal.

"A cold hard assessment that Iraq is not going to turn out the way we were promised it was and, that's a fact," said Hagel, interviewed on the CBS show "Face the Nation."

"This is a civil war," said Dodd. "I don't believe that US military people can play referee in that kind of situation."

Both Hagel and Dodd referred to testimony in Congress Thursday by General John Abizaid, the top US commander in the Middle East, who said that Iraq could slide into civil war if Iraqis do not take decisive action to stop it.

<More at: http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20060806/pl_afp/usiraqmilitary_060806201057>

Racial extremism out of place in military

Montgomery (AL) Advertiser - Editorial - July 28, 2006

There can be no excuse for not aggressively ferreting out the racial extremists who have entered the American military forces, which stand as one of the nation's finest examples of what equality of opportunity and a deep commitment to unity can produce. We applaud the calls by two members of Alabama's delegation for a zero-tolerance approach by the nation's military leadership.

A recent report by the Southern Poverty Law Center notes a growing presence of extremists, notably neo-Nazis and white supremacists, in the military, individuals whose repugnant views have been ignored or unexamined at least in part due to pressures to meet recruiting goals in the all-volunteer forces. That should concern every American who understands the role of the armed forces in the protection of this nation.

>More at: <http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060726/OPINION01/607250346/1006/ARCHIVES>>

Insurer Settles Charges Over Its Sales to Soldiers

Diana B. Henriques - August 4, 2006

The American Amicable Life Insurance Company has agreed to pay up to \$70 million to settle state and federal complaints that it used deceptive sales practices to sell unsuitable insurance products to thousands of American service members across the country and on bases overseas.

The company will pay \$10 million in cash refunds to 57,000 current and former service members who bought its products after Dec. 31, 1999. The rest of the money represents the potential cost of raising the future value of policies sold to 13,000 other military and 22,000 civilians, although the final price tag will depend on how many of those policies are held to maturity.

The company, which is based in Waco, Tex., also agreed to a five-year ban from sales on any military base, one of the longest suspensions ever imposed in the military insurance market. <More at: www.neilrogers.com/news/articles/2006080618.html>

I guess this next one makes the point that many define "truth" on the fly – the question becomes, "Who do you believe?", which takes it from fact to opinion in one quick step. I prefer fact, don't you? [Ed.]

Vets set sights on Murtha

Sandra K. Reabuck - The Tribune-Democrat - Johnstown, PA – August 3, 2006

— The "Swift Boat" veterans who grabbed national headlines in 2004 when they attacked John Kerry in his failed presidential bid now are turning their sights to Johnstown. Their target is U.S. Rep. John Murtha, a critic of the Iraq war and a de facto spokesman on the subject for the national Democratic Party.

Armed as a new group – Veterans for the Truth – they're bringing their campaign to "Redeploy John Murtha From Congress" to his backyard. They plan to hold a national rally in Johnstown in October "to show their outrage at John Murtha over what he is saying about our troops," state chairman and former Johnstownner Mark Parker said in a release.

<More at: www.tribune-democrat.com/local/local_story_213002118.html?keyword=secondarystory>

Despite the name similarity, this is not us, folks!

To the Color - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Purpose
8/26-28		Compton, CA	Stand Down	Monica Guthrie 310-868-5160	
8/26		Fairbanks, AK	Resource Fair	Nancy Smoyer 907-456-4238	
9/2	4 PM	342 Lincoln Rosemont, CA	Vets Town Hall	Charlie Brown – Vet – Congressional Cand.	Vets Issues
9/8-10		Philadelphia, PA	Stand Down	Edward Speller	
9/9		Boise, ID	Resource Fair	Scott Stevens 208-334-1227	
9/9		Newark, NJ	Resource Fair	973-748-0980	
9/15		Bellevue, KY	Resource Fair	Jola Green 859*572*6226 x6231	
9/15-17		White City, OR	Stand Down	Kathleen Patterson 541-665-4001	
9/15/17		Cumberland, RI	Stand Down	Al Signorelli 401-383-4730	

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 veterans' events, regardless of purpose.

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

Income-Replacement Program Launched

American Forces Press Service | August 07, 2006

WASHINGTON – The Defense Department this month kicked off a program to help prevent activated Reservists and National Guardsmen from facing financial hardships. The Reserve Income Replacement Program will pay eligible National Guard and reserve members mobilized for extended or frequent periods the difference between their monthly civilian pre-mobilization

income and their current total monthly military compensation. ...Program payments are not automatic. Guard and reserve members must apply for the RIRP payments through their service personnel offices.

To qualify for RIRP, servicemembers must: 1) Be serving on active duty in an involuntary status and have completed 18 continuous months of involuntary active duty, or 2) Have completed 24 cumulative months of involuntary active duty within the last 60 months, or 3) Be serving on involuntary active duty for a period of 180 days or more that starts within six months of separation from a previous period on involuntary active duty for at least 180 days.

<More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,108839,00.html>

Veterans' Battle for Benefits Can Take Years

Cory Reiss – [Lakeland, FL] Ledger Washington Bureau - August 13, 2006

WASHINGTON -- One night in April 1945, enemy fighters blasted a gaping hole in the left wing of an American B-29 that had just bombed Tokyo. The bomber, spewing gasoline-fueled flames, sputtered to a small airstrip on the island of Iwo Jima for a violent crash landing. A young Irving Levin, the flight engineer, was thrown into a bulkhead and a heavy object smashed his head.

Levin, now 83 and living in Stuart, was plagued by neurological problems that a doctor diagnosed 40 years later as spinal damage. In 1988, Levin applied for combat-related disability compensation with the Department of Veterans Affairs, claiming he was hurt in the crash. He's still fighting for it.

When he filed the claim 18 years ago, Levin fell down a rabbit hole that has sent thousands of veterans tumbling into a strange legal landscape. The VA denied Levin's claim, and he appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, a special and little-known court. The court sent his case back to the bottom rung of a long ladder at the VA for more consideration -- twice. The case is on its way to the appeals court for a third time. Levin hopes he lives to see a final ruling.

<More at: www.theledger.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060813/NEWS/608130400/1004>

Blistering verdict tells Pepsi to pay reservist

Bill Sloat - The Plain Dealer - Jul 23, 2006

Cincinnati -- A federal judge ordered PepsiAmericas to pay \$84,000 for shorting the pay of an Army reservist from Ohio who enlisted after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and served in Iraq. U.S. District Judge Michael R. Barrett said "Pepsi's actions demonstrate malice, egregious fraud, oppression and insult." Barrett's verdict, made public Friday, included \$50,000 of punitive damages in the financial package and followed a nonjury trial.

The soldier, Kevin Koehler, was a truck driver for the bottling company with a delivery route in Cincinnati. He claimed he was harassed and denied benefits at Pepsi after signing up for military service in early 2002. He said his problems started after being sent for basic training and other duties required by his reserve unit, which spent 12 months in Iraq in 2004.

<More at: www.cleveland.com/news/plaindealer/index.ssf?/base/news/1153557138242390.xml&coll=2>

GAO Report: Military Recruiter Irregularities

Government Accountability Office - Aug 08, 2006

GAO Report Abstract - The viability of the All Volunteer Force depends, in large measure, on the Department of Defense's (DOD) ability to recruit several hundred thousand individuals each year. Since the involvement of U.S. military forces in Iraq in March 2003, several DOD components have been challenged in meeting their recruiting goals. In fiscal year 2005 alone, three of the eight active and reserve components missed their goals. Some recruiters, reportedly, have resorted to overly aggressive tactics, which can adversely affect DOD's ability to recruit and erode public confidence in the recruiting process.

For Full Report, go to: www.gao.gov/docsearch/abstract.php?rptno=GAO-06-825

Center for war-related brain injuries faces budget cut

Gregg Zoroya - USA Today - Aug 10, 2006

Congress appears ready to slash funding for the research and treatment of brain injuries caused by bomb blasts, an injury that military scientists describe as a signature wound of the Iraq war. House and Senate versions of the 2007 Defense appropriation bill contain \$7 million for the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center — half of what the center received last fiscal year.

Proponents of increased funding say they are shocked to see cuts in the treatment of bomb blast injuries in the midst of a war.

<More at: www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-08-08-brain-center_x.htm>

In contrast, there was enough taxpayer money so that both the House and the Senate can spend more than \$550 million for research into the new VH-71 Presidential Helicopter Fleet. [Ed.]

VA's ongoing care for brain-injured veterans falls short

7/24/2006 · Dennis Camired - Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON — They've suffered some of the most devastating survivable injuries in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, but they may not be getting the help they need from the Department of Veterans Affairs. More than 1,000 veterans and their families now share a unique struggle to regain their health after suffering what medicine calls traumatic brain injuries, but what individuals and loved ones find is a complex knot of physical, mental and emotional problems.

Living with the lingering effects of TBI — a blow to the head so severe it disrupts the brain's function — can require a long-term commitment of health care and support, as Sarah Wade has found with her husband. But, she said, "There wasn't any follow-up care." Her husband, Ted, was brain injured and lost his right arm while serving as a sergeant with the Army's 82nd Airborne Division. It was Valentine's Day, 2004, when buried artillery shells detonated under his Humvee near Fallujah. "Their (VA's) way of dealing with it was dumping him in an extended care facility, which is a nice name for a nursing home facility."

<More at: www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-07-24-va-brain-injury_x.htm>

And this from the American Chemical Society's website

[In the Bush Administration's 2007 Budget] The Missile Defense Agency-the "Star Wars" program-would rise to a record level of \$9.3 billion. However, medical research at DOD would be cut substantially from \$21.5 million to just \$8.7 million, and the Chemical & Biological Defense Program would be reduced 9% to \$959 million. <http://pubs.acs.org/cen/government/84/8408gov1.html>

Life after war:

Adrienne Ziegler Staff Writer August 3, 2006

It's been more than six months since about 2,000 Fort Irwin soldiers returned from their year deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. On the surface, daily life at Fort Irwin appears to have resumed as before. Fort Irwin soldiers spend their days training other units for deployment in the harsh Mojave sun. But for some, the memories of a year of war continue to haunt them. Approximately 30 percent of Fort Irwin soldiers who have returned from Iraq are experiencing some symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, said Lt. Col. Valvincent Reyes, the senior social work officer at Fort Irwin's mental health department. Reyes said the symptoms for soldiers vary but usually include nightmares, problems sleeping, anger, anxiety, detachment from the outside world and intrusive thoughts or flashbacks.

"Five different belief systems are impacted in war," he said, citing the ideas of safety, control, a belief in power, self-esteem and trust. "That's changed once they run into IEDs and mortars."

Most soldiers, he said, can never prepare for the amount of physical bodily damage done by an improvised explosive device, or IED. The images of destruction stay with the soldiers long after they leave the war zone. Fort Irwin soldiers are no exception.

<More at: www.desertdispatch.com/2006/115461578930468.html>

Plan for getting back pay to 100,000 retirees is set

Tom Philpott - Special to Stars and Stripes - Pacific edition - August 10, 2006

The departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs have worked out a plan for sharing the cost and the task of delivering about \$500 million in back pay to a total of more than 100,000 military retirees with VA-rated disabilities. The retroactive payments are owed to nearly half of all recipients of Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) and of Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP) since those programs began in 2003 and in 2004, respectively. ... VA and DOD aren't yet ready to announce the date that back payments will be made. Their new estimate on dollars to be distributed is about a half-billion. ... A VA official said retirees will receive a letter explaining the back payments, presumably shortly before the money appears in their accounts. No one should have to apply for the money.

<More at: www.estripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=38308&archive=true>

Sick veterans blame new weapon

Deborah Hastings - Associated Press - August 13, 2006

NEW YORK (AP) -- It takes at least 10 minutes and a large glass of orange juice to wash down all the pills - morphine, methadone, a muscle relaxant, an antidepressant, a stool softener. Viagra for sexual dysfunction. Valium for his nerves. Four hours later, Herbert Reed will swallow another 15 mg of morphine to cut the pain clenching every part of his body. He will do it twice more before the day is done.

Since he left a bombed-out train depot in Iraq, his gums bleed. There is more blood in his urine, and still more in his stool. Bright light hurts his eyes. A tumor has been removed from his thyroid. Rashes erupt everywhere, itching so badly they seem to live inside his skin. Migraines cleave his skull. His joints ache, grating like door hinges in need of oil.

There is something massively wrong with Herbert Reed, though no one is sure what it is. He believes he knows the cause, but he cannot convince anyone caring for him that the military's new favorite weapon has made him terrifyingly sick.

In the sprawling bureaucracy of the Department of Veterans Affairs, he has many caretakers. An internist, a neurologist, a pain-management specialist, a psychologist, an orthopedic surgeon and a dermatologist. He cannot function without his stupefying arsenal of medications, but they exact a high price. <More at: www.smirkingchimp.com/viewtopic.php?topic=67056&forum=17>

Study Says War Altered Iraq Veterans' Reflexes

Thomas H. Maugh II - Times Staff Writer - August 2, 2006

Two months after returning from Iraq, some U.S. Army soldiers displayed subtle signs of confusion, reduced attention span and impaired memory that suggest a slow readjustment to civilian life, according to a study published today. The study also found an increase in reaction speed and a heightened level of tension among the soldiers, said the study's lead author Jennifer J. Vasterling, a psychologist with the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System.

The findings, published in the Journal of the American Medical Assn., are consistent with "an adaptive response to a life-threatening situation," she said. The psychological changes most likely were a result of the soldiers' constant hyper-vigilance in Iraq — a trait that is helpful in battle but counterproductive in civilian life.

<More at: www.latimes.com/news/print/edition/asection/la-sci-warpsych2aug02,1,4200480.story>

Court Expands Agent Orange Coverage for Vietnam War Veterans

Matt Apuzzo - Associated Press - Washington Post - Aug 18, 2006

WASHINGTON -- Veterans who patrolled the waters off Vietnam can claim disability benefits for exposure to Agent Orange under an appeals court ruling that opens the door for thousands of servicemen to seek medical coverage.

The ruling was handed down by the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims in the case of a former sailor who served on an ammunition ship during the Vietnam War but never stepped foot on land. The court's order, issued Wednesday, reverses the Veterans Affairs Department's denial of benefits for Jonathan L. Haas, who blamed his diabetes, nerve damage and loss of eyesight on exposure to Agent Orange.

Haas argued that clouds of the toxic defoliate, which the U.S. sprayed on Vietnamese jungles, drifted out to sea, engulfing his ship and landing on his skin. Veterans officials said that to qualify for coverage, Haas was required to have docked in Vietnam and come ashore. <More at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/18/AR2006081800907.html>>

Justice Department presents web site to explain military rights

Aug. 15, 2006 - United States Marine Corps Press Release # 0816-06-1334

WASHINGTON -- The Department of Justice has launched a Web site to protect service members' rights, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzalez said yesterday. Gonzales, speaking to the Disabled American Veterans annual convention in Chicago, said the Justice Department has made it a priority to enforce civil rights laws for American service members.

"The law recognizes that although we can never thank you enough for your service, we can take away some of the worries that soldiers might face when they are deployed," he said in prepared remarks. "The government promises that service members' jobs will still be theirs when they come home and that they cannot be discriminated against by their employers because of their military service. The U.S. vows that service members will be able to vote and that their vote will be counted. And it promises that service members "will have procedural protections in civil actions, like lawsuits or property re-possession, when serving overseas."

The Justice Department Web site, www.servicemembers.gov, outlines the rights service members have under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act and the Service members Civil Relief Act.

"These basic civil rights are enforced by the Department of Justice, and I can assure you that the department's staff and prosecutors are deeply committed to these enforcement efforts," Gonzales said. "We feel that it is an honor to serve those in uniform in this way. It is our way of saying thank you for your service."

<more at: <http://www.usmc.mil/marinelink/mcn2000.nsf/0/7A960A1B7D818C10852571CC00608B25?opendocument>>

The problem is making it work. Thousands are unable to reclaim their jobs and this article sites just two actions by the DoJ. Remember, the DoJ has 30 months to act on a complaint! Need a paycheck Friday? Don't count on the DoJ! [Ed.]

Military seeks defenses for payday loans

Michael Gardner - Copley News Service - August 24, 2006

SACRAMENTO -- Appealing to the Legislature's wartime patriotism and sympathy for soldiers trapped in a cycle of debt, Torrance Assemblyman Ted Lieu is pushing legislation to protect military families from being preyed upon by payday loan companies that often charge more than 400 percent annual interest.

"The military doesn't often come to the state Capitol to ask for help. They are doing that now in a time of war and I ask that we give them that help," said Lieu, a Democrat and former Air Force attorney who remains on reserve duty.

Those who fall behind in their payments risk losing security clearances and could even be demoted or discharged under military law, according to top-ranking officers joining Lieu at a Capitol news conference Wednesday. The financial woes, exacerbated by aggressive debt collectors, can lead to poor job performance and create rifts at home that sometimes lead to divorce, officers said.

"Right outside our gates they market high-cost loans that trap our young men and women into a cycle of debt," said Rear Adm. Len Hering of San Diego, who commands bases throughout the Southwest. "Caught in these traps, these individuals can no longer do their jobs."

Camp Pendleton Marines don't have far to go before being lured by numerous loan companies offering quick cash, said Marine Maj. Gen. Mike Lehnert.

"They're clustered around every single base like flies on honey," he said.

And don't you love the response?

Mark Thompson of the California Financial Service Providers said the industry is working with the armed forces to resolve some of the issues, but it is adamantly opposed to a proposed 36 percent cap because that revenue wouldn't cover losses when military personnel don't repay loans. "The fees are supported by the risks we take," Thompson said.

<More at: <http://www.dailybreeze.com/news/nationworld/articles/3725186.html>>

and finally - remember this one from last month's news?

Free Credit Monitoring Withdrawn

Associated Press | July 20, 2006

WASHINGTON - Free credit monitoring for veterans whose personal information was stolen has been withdrawn, the Bush administration said Tuesday, because the laptop containing their data has been recovered. In a letter to House Speaker [Dennis Hastert](#), White House budget director Rob Portman said he was canceling his office's request last month for \$160.5 million in additional funding for the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) to provide one year of free monitoring to millions of veterans and active-duty troops. <More at: <http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,106223,00.html>>

Well how about this one from this month?

Student Borrowers' Personal Data Posted

Associated Press - August 24, 2006

Thousands affected by the government's latest security breach can get free credit monitoring.

WASHINGTON — The Education Department said Wednesday that it would arrange for free credit monitoring for as many as 21,000 student loan borrowers after their personal data appeared on its website.

<More at: www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-data24aug24,1,1113277.story>

It must have been the extraordinary personal sacrifice these youngsters and their parents have made to our nation that gets them the special free credit monitoring – you think?

Taps - Passings and War Statistics

Losing both sons to war

July 26, 2006 - Betsy Blaney

Less than two years ago, Roy Velez got the worst news a father could get: His oldest son was dead, killed during combat in Iraq. This week, his pain only deepened with news that his youngest son had died in Afghanistan. Military officials notified the Velez family Tuesday of the death of Army Spc. Andrew Velez, 22. His brother, Army Cpl. Jose A. Velez, 23, died in November 2004 in Fallujah. <More at: www.capitolhillblue.com/content/2006/07/losing_both_son.html>

Two-star general, congressman's wife dies at 57

Suzanne Gamboa – Austin American Statesman

WASHINGTON — Kathryn George Frost, a retired Army major general and wife of former Democratic Rep. Martin Frost of Texas, died Friday after a four-year battle with breast cancer. She was 57. Frost, a two-star general, was the highest-ranking woman in the U.S. Army when she retired last year. <More at: www.statesman.com/news/content/gen/ap/TX_Obit_Frost.html>

Grief and Sacrifice Reach Into the Halls of Congress

David Stout - August 3, 2006

WASHINGTON, Aug. 2 — “We loved him dearly, and we’ll miss him more than words can ever express,” said a man from Montana on Tuesday upon learning that his nephew had been killed in Iraq.

Words like those have been uttered thousands of times in big cities and tiny towns, heard mostly by friends and relatives. But the man from Montana is Senator Max Baucus, so his words attracted more notice.

Cpl. Phillip E. Baucus of the Marine Corps, dead at 28, was “like a son to Senator Baucus,” Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the Democratic leader, said Tuesday on the Senate floor. <More at: www.nytimes.com/2006/08/03/washington/03family.html>

Carl M. Brashear

July 26, 2006

RICHMOND, Va. - Carl M. Brashear, the first black U.S. Navy diver, who was portrayed by Cuba Gooding Jr. in the 2000 film "Men of Honor," died Tuesday. He was 75. Brashear, a native of Sonora, Ky., died at the Naval Medical Center Portsmouth. Brashear retired from the Navy in 1979 after more than 30 years of service. He was the first Navy diver to be restored to full active duty as an amputee, the result of a leg injury he sustained during a salvage operation. <More at: www.wzire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=16997120&BRD=1659&PAG=461&dept_id=8103&rfi=6>

Iwo Jima Photographer Dies

Associated Press | August 21, 2006

SAN FRANCISCO - Photographer Joe Rosenthal, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his immortal image of six World War II servicemen raising an American flag over battle-scarred Iwo Jima, died Sunday. He was 94. Rosenthal died of natural causes at an assisted living facility in the San Francisco suburb of Novato, said his daughter, Anne Rosenthal. <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,110623,00.html?ESRC=eb.nl>

National Guard and Reserve Mobilized as of August 23, 2006

This week, the Navy and Marine Corps announced an increase in the number of reservists on active duty in support of the partial mobilization, while the Army and Air Force number decreased. The Coast Guard number remained the same. The net collective result is 83 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. Total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 91,428; Navy Reserve, 5,876; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 6,992; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,353; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 315. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel, who have been mobilized, to 111,964, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel, who are currently mobilized, can be found at www.defenselink.mil/news/Aug2006/d20060823ngr.pdf.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE THURSDAY 24 AUGUST 2006

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	2,618
*WOUNDED US [EST. NO DoD UPDATE SINCE 8/18]≥	19,511
KILLED UK	115
KILLED OTHER COALITION	115
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	645
KILLED CONTRACTORS	348
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 34,887
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 45,144
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 193,000+

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US	333
WOUNDED/INJURED US	957
KILLED COALITION	166
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	498
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS	32,034

NOTE: SOME NUMBERS DO NOT CHANGE BETWEEN ISSUES BECAUSE UPDATED FIGURES ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME

* Because the US does not report injuries and sicknesses, the total of "injured all causes" is estimated to be >40,000.

To see the demographic data on the casualties go to www.militarycity.com/2000casualties

afterthoughts

a good example of the elusiveness of quantitative truth

Congressional Research Service Data on the Costs of the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (\$billions)

	Fiscal Year					
	2001/02	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total
Iraq	2.5	51.0	77.3	87.3	100.4	318.5
Afghanistan	18.1	17.0	15.1	18.1	19.9	88.2
Noble Eagle	12.0	6.5	3.7	2.1	1.9	26.2
Unable to Allocate		3.9				
Totals	32.6	78.4	96.1	107.5	122.2	439.9

(Source: "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan , and Other Global War on terror Operations Since 9/11," Amy Belasco, CRS Report for Congress, RL33110, p. CRS-4)

In its testimony, CBO reported different numbers: \$433 billion, not \$439.9 billion, for the total cost of the various wars. Of that amount, CBO counted \$290 billion for Iraq , not \$318.5 billion. CBO counted \$142 billion for Afghanistan and Noble Eagle, not \$114.4 billion. CBO also calculated the cost of interest on the national debt based on war costs (\$11 billion through the end of 2006).

GAO had still different numbers, including \$430.1 billion for all costs for the "war on terror".

DOD, the State Department and other Bush administration components said the real cost was \$416.6 billion.

These differences (a range of \$20.3 billion) are over the relatively simple question of how much has been appropriated in public bills by Congress. Worse yet, Congress doesn't seem to know how much it appropriated either!

Does anyone remember congress excoriating the pentagon (rightly) for not knowing how much money they had spent?

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