

SOUND OFF!



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THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"

25 AUGUST 2008

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

WHERE HAVE ALL THE SOLDIERS CITIZENS GONE?

The loneliest job in the world these days has to be that of US Army or Marine infantrymen, and their close ground support comrades. One is hard pressed to find any historical examples of such inattention paid by any nation to the life of its defenders while they suffer and die in battle. It doesn't stop when those of all services come home and need help.

Even during the Vietnam War, citizens were attentive, if disapproving. Today they are disengaged.

"One again a generation of Americans is tempted to live undisturbed, buying tranquility on credit while hearts atrophy, quarantined from any great enthusiasm but private ambition." Bill Moyers

Sadly, even many of our fellow veterans pay little attention to the soldiers themselves, concentrating on the elusive goal of "winning" – without understanding in almost any sense what "winning" as a nation entails. They most often reduce it to the simple concept of "winning" as in a fistfight, or a bar brawl. They hoot and holler with ramped-up nationalistic vigor at the thought of our soldiers "winning", meaning beating the daylights out of "them" – "the other guys".

The picture many of us older, and dare I say more thoughtful veterans and citizens have of the American soldier is as the defender of a bright and clear vision of equality, freedom, democracy, and fairness. We see the soldier more like Gary Cooper in *High Noon* – quiet, reserved, fair, thoughtful, professional, hard to provoke, firm in his convictions, deadly in his execution, then benevolent in his victory.

The view of those who hold the ferocious warrior or even the *berserker* concept of the soldier, is as relentless, quick to anger, violent and bloody in execution, giving no quarter, and holding an eternal

grudge against those who dare challenge him or his nation. The model is Mel Gibson as "Mad" Max in *Beyond Thunderdome*, or worse yet the Lord Humungous from the same film.

Don't get me wrong. This latter view, I am sure, is not how most soldiers view themselves, rather it is how a disengaged and self-pampering public views them, when they bother to think of them at all. Unfortunately it comes close to how some of our fellow veterans view them as well. Just read some of the blogs and the websites if you don't believe me. The blood-lust is palpable, and the language praising our soldiers sounds like an advertisement for a super-violent MA-rated video game. But ~

"It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood, more vengeance, more desolation." William Tecumseh Sherman

So one model is that of maturity, strength, wisdom. The other model is that of the comic book super-hero-turned-slayer.

Those other guys may be right, at least in part. We only need to look at some of today's reality TV to find a metaphor. Take the Spike TV "Ultimate Fighter" cage-fighting series as a fair example.

It's 2003 and two fighters are in the cage. One well-armed but not perfectly; a rested, strong, and fully supported heavyweight faces up against the other, a poorly trained poorly armed lightweight. The battle is over shortly, and the ring attendants slip the noose around the loser's heels and drag him from the arena like a defeated bull at Madrid's *Las Ventas* bullring. His leaders and supporters declare "Victory" but they are wrong.

Let's extend the metaphor and make it more like 2003 – 2008's real battle. We leave the winning fighter in the cage – the gate is locked. We improve his armor from time to time and give him a new weapon or two, but he cannot leave the cage. The cage is brilliantly lighted but the spectator area outside the cage is pitch black. He believes that his fellow citizens are still out there watching and rooting for him.

The lights outside the cage are flashed on for a moment and he sees the truth. His fellow citizens aren't even there anymore. He has new opponents but they are outside the cage armed with sniper rifles and roadside bombs. He can't see them but they can see him only too well. His leaders are only present in order to act or fail to act in a way to ensure that the supply of foes is steadily increased. After all, we need a continuing war to be able to claim war-leadership.

When our soldier asks for help, the handlers occasionally send in another soldier, but he or she too is locked in the bright cage in the dark stadium, and is subject to the same attacks from unseen foes.

When our soldier asks for more help, he is given some money and by pushing it through bars of the cage he is able to buy off a few, but not all of his foes, and the attacks continue with some relief from at least one quarter. When he runs out of money, or his leaders act to ramp up the rage of his foes, the bought-off ones resume their attacks.

The cage is impregnable from his side as it is made of political choices that cannot be retracted. His cage and his way out of it are based on a policy of "winning", but no one can explain that policy to him – no one knows what the hell "winning" means! The key to the cage is hidden in the undefined goal.

The outer lights flash on now and then, briefly, and still there are none of his fellow citizens there to cheer him on, much less to aid him, and certainly not to involve themselves. The seats reserved for them remain empty – reserved, of course, in recognition of their importance, but empty nonetheless..

If he is killed he is sent home but hidden from view. When he is wounded he is replaced, and sent home to find yet another cage.

This time he is outside the cage and the cage door is locked, for inside it are those who make the money, have the power, and hand down the decisions that control his life. They post long lists on the outside of the cage of the benefits available to him, but the

benefits are inside this home cage, and he has to fight to get inside.

He isn't allowed to get any help in getting through this cage wall, while those inside stack up the regulations that reinforce those walls, and they line up the new foes – those who make him fight this new battle once again all alone – those who hand down the arbitrary decisions that govern his life for good, or more often for ill.

These are the keepers of the new cage who talk about "average wait times" and "budget limitations", interspersed with "Support the Troops" and "Honor the Veteran" speeches. They will only listen to him long enough to tell him that the wound he suffered or those horrific dreams he is having are not combat-related unless he can provide proof that he was once in combat, and that that specific time resulted in his problem. Somehow he forgot to take notes.

Deep inside the home cage there is an inner ring of all those of his fellow citizens who were rooting for him in the first few weeks of the conflict, but who disappeared from the audience around the original battle cage. They are surrounded by all of the amenities of the self-indulgent life. They shop at stores with banners hawking their "Veterans Day Sale" and their "Memorial Day Sale". They are surrounded by a soundproof wall that excludes his pleas for help. Their televisions don't have a channel that shows the outside of the cage. The ads for their high-priced goodies and their fanciful vacations appear daily in the paper many pages before the occasional article about the soldier and his comrades.

Our veteran soldier tries to find a copy of the US Constitution – the document and the idea that he had sworn to defend, and which he believed also defended him. To no avail. Those in the inner circle had burnt every last copy back at the beginning to keep them from being uncomfortable on chilly and scary nights.

In the end, the soldier gives up and fades away. He walks away from the cage, looking back over his shoulder to read the inscription over the cage door:

America - Land of the Happy - Home of the Indulgent

No entry to veterans - closed for ~~repairs~~ indifference

[Ed.]

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

Try these two websites: Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program www.vetsprobono.org/index.htm. United States Court of appeals for Veterans Claims “Public List of Practitioners” are members of the court’s bar www.vetapp.gov/practitioners/

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

Membership is open, free, and very worthwhile! Get your fellow veterans, and veterans’ family members to join VUFT! We are beginning to be heard, and we need you to help us get the message out. If each of us would bring in one new member every month, what an impact we could have!

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

Class Action Suit: Our advocates are currently working on the appeal to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Here is a link to the legal [documents](#) on the lawsuit.

BE A MEMBER If you are getting this newsletter and have not yet joined, please go to [our website](#) and join. Membership is free. The more our numbers grow, the greater voice we have. It shouldn’t be that way, but it is, so join us and help us take the fight to Congress and the state legislatures. Please encourage your friends who either are veterans, are related to veterans, or who support veterans’ causes to join VUFT, Inc.

SUPPORTING THE CAUSE If you wish to donate to our work you may now do so via PayPal or Visa on [our website](#) “[Donate](#)” page. Every little bit helps. We are a 501(c)(3): your donations are deductible on your federal taxes. You can also buy our handsome pins using the same method. If you wish to volunteer your services to the organization, please contact the Chair at rhandy@vuft.org or the Vice Chair at scook@vuft.org. Watch for details at www.vuft.org

WE REALLY NEED YOUR HELP

VUFT is a no-fee organization. We must raise money to keep the effort going. Normal expenses have been borne out of the pockets of a very few board members, plus a few small donations over the two plus years of our existence. Although our legal defense in the current case is *pro bono*, we are incurring expenses in support of the case, to include travel expenses to attend the hearings and the trial. We also are incurring expenses in our effort to expand to all fifty states. Please consider [donating](#) whatever you can to VUFT

All donations are tax deductible to the donor.

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

WHY WAS THE DAV (DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS) EXCLUDED FROM WALTER REED? – THEY WERE TELLING THE TRUTH!

[When leaving the service because of wounds or injuries] a **Medical Discharge** should be the goal and probably the reason the DAV was excluded from Walter Reed....they were doing their job and correctly advising the Iraq and Afghanistan vets to **Refuse** honorable discharges and insist instead on medical discharges under honorable conditions. Contrary to misinformation [from other sources], any vet who has served 180 days or more, and [who] cannot be returned to military duties, can be given a medical discharge under honorable conditions and [the vet] will be eligible to get care at **both military hospitals and clinics and VA facilities**. **KEY** to this is that the vet **MUST** be willing to refuse an honorable discharge when offered! The military’s reps will try to get the vet to take the honorable discharge, as a medical discharge could cost the military a lot of money in long term medical care and they [prefer] to transfer the expense to the VA. ~ Lane Anderson

FROM “ARMY ECHOES”

The “My HealtheVet” (MHV) web site is the gateway to veteran health benefits and services. It provides access to: trusted health information, links to Federal and VA benefits and resources, the Personal Health Journal, and online VA prescription refills. In the future, MHV registrants will be able to view appointments, co-pay balances, and key portions of their VA medical records online, and much more! MHV is a powerful tool to help you better understand and manage your health.

To visit the MHV web site, go to:

www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/anonymous.portal?nfpb=true&nfto=false&pageLabel=mhvHome or
www.myhealth.va.gov/ Forwarded by Milton Bell

NOTE: "According to the recent GAO report, the HealthVet program is so far behind that it won't be ready until 2018, six years later than planned. By any standards, it is simply absurd that it would take 10 years to launch such a database, especially when nearly \$600 million has already been spent on HealthVet, and the VA estimates it will spend another \$11 billion before the database is complete."
Editorial in the "Tennessean"

USAA NOW OPEN TO MORE MILITARY FAMILIES

USAA is opening [membership](#) to [an additional 3,000,000 former vets and their families) to include the following:

- Military retirees who served honorably, regardless of when they retired
- Military personnel honorably discharged on or after January 1, 1996
- Widows and widowers of military members killed in action while eligible

After they join, spouses and children of the above may also be eligible to enjoy the benefits of membership. If you know of someone who may be eligible for USAA, please click on [Share USAA](#) and let them know about the benefits of membership.

Forwarded by Ronnie Bowman

MARINES DOING BUSINESS WITH MARINES

The National Marine Corps Business Network is looking for Marines that have left the Corps and started a career in business. We are a network of business owners, sales reps and executives that benefit from networking amongst Marines. If you, or a Marine you know, is interested in developing quality business relations with others who claim the Title, then this is the place for you. - - Join the National Marine Corps Business Network and grow your business - - Expand your opportunities by interacting with fellow Marines with integrity like you

This is more than just a business networking group. Enjoy the camaraderie during our non business related events as well. Find out more by visiting our site at www.NMCBN.com or by calling Mark at (916) 718-8410. *Mark Holm, President*

ONE READER'S OPINION

I'm a firm believer in not only term limits, but I think we should wipe the slate clean and start off with new representation on both sides of the Senate and Congress, because I think they've turned this into a quagmire of crap. And I don't think any of them is going to put their own jobs on the line to bring soldiers home, which I think is, you know, time to happen.

Michael Oreskovic – 100% disabled Iraq War veteran

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

REDUCED RETIREMENT AGE FOR RC SOLDIERS

The National Defense Authorization Act of 2008. [passed in January 2008] made Reserve Component (RC) soldiers eligible for reduced retirement age based on active duty service after the passing of that act. They were not grandfathered to be eligible for all their service since the beginning of current hostilities.

Senator Chambliss, (R-GA) introduced legislation in 2007 to make the eligibility retroactive to 9/11/2001. The services opposed the legislation. The bill has been in committee 18 months since its introduction.

Bill # S.648 Original Sponsor: Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) Cosponsors Total: 21: 10 Republicans 10 Democrats, 1 Independents, 2/15/2007--Introduced. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/C?c110:/temp/-c110RzPcs6>

National Guard and Reserve Retirement Modernization Act - Amends federal law concerning receipt of retired pay for non-regular service to provide that, in the case of a member of the Ready Reserve who serves on active duty after September 11, 2001, in support of a contingency operation or in response to a national emergency, retirement eligibility age shall be reduced below 60 by three months for each aggregate of 90 days during which the member so performs in any fiscal year after such date. Prohibits such retirement eligibility date from being reduced below age 50. Continues age 60 as the minimum eligibility age for DOD-authorized health care for such retirees.

CONGRESS MUST ACT TO RESTORE EARNED BENEFITS TO ALL VIETNAM VETERANS – INCLUDING “BLUE WATER” VETS!

Washington, D.C. – House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Filner (D-CA) held a press conference to announce the introduction of [H.R. 6562](#), the Agent Orange Equity Act of 2008.

"We owe it to our veterans to fulfill the promises made to them as a result of their service," said Chairman Filner. "If, as a result of service, a veteran was exposed to Agent Orange and it has resulted in failing health, this country has a moral obligation to care for each veteran the way we promised we would. And as a country at war, we must prove that we will be there for all of our veterans, no matter when they serve. The courts have turned their backs on our veterans, but I believe this Congress will not allow our veterans to be cheated of their earned benefits."

<More at: <http://veterans.house.gov/news/PRArticle.aspx?NewsID=290>>

CONGRESS PASSES FEINSTEIN-CHAMBLISS-NUNES-COSTA LEGISLATION TO PROTECT BENEFITS OF AMERICA'S MILITARY "SOLE SURVIVORS"

Washington, DC 1 August 2008 –The U.S. Senate today gave final approval to the Hubbard Act, to protect the benefits of America's military "sole survivors," introduced by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.), Representative Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), and Representative Jim Costa (D-Calif.).

The legislation is named in honor of California's Hubbard brothers. Jared and Nathan Hubbard lost their lives serving their country in Iraq. Jason Hubbard was discharged as a sole survivor, but was denied separation benefits when he left the Army early to return to his job as a Fresno County sheriff's deputy.

The legislation will provide sole survivors a number of benefits already offered to other soldiers honorably separating from military service. In addition, sole survivors will not be required to repay any portion of their enlistment bonus; may participate in the Montgomery GI Bill educational program; and may receive separation pay and transitional healthcare coverage.

The bill passed by the House earlier in the week. It now heads to the White House for the President's signature.

CALIFORNIA NATIONAL GUARD LOSING BUDGET BATTLE IN LEGISLATURE

Nancy Vogel - Los Angeles Times Staff Writer - August 20, 2008

Democrats in the state Senate block a \$3.3-million allocation to give educational benefits to Guard members.

SACRAMENTO — While they have been beating back wildfires across the state and fighting wars on two fronts overseas, the citizen soldiers of the California National Guard have also been waging a battle in the Legislature -- and losing. For the second year in a row, state lawmakers have rebuffed the Guard's effort to win state money to help cover the cost of college for its members. State military officials say their only hope now is that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger will prevail upon Democratic legislators to include money for tuition assistance in the budget that is 49 days overdue and more than \$15 billion in the red. California is the only state that gives no educational benefit to National Guard members.

<More at: www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-guard20-2008aug20.0.2924845.story>

ATTEMPT TO STOP GIVE-AWAY OF VETERANS PROPERTY IN LOS ANGELES

The West Los Angeles VA Medical Center was given to the government and the people of the United States by Arcadia Bandini de Baker and John P. Jones. Those two donated the acreage to the federal government in 1888 for a for use in perpetuity as a National Soldiers Home for veterans of the Civil War.. The VA has been giving away bits and pieces over the years and since 2005 has been attempting to sell much of the property off to commercial developers.

On 17 May 2007 Senator Feinstein (D-CA) introduced [S. 1417](#), a bill "to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit a report to Congress providing a master plan for the use of the West Los Angeles Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, California, and for other purposes." The bill was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and no further action has been taken.

STATE MILITARY FUND SITS IDLE

William R. Levesque - Times Staff Writer - July 24, 2008

With patriotic fanfare, state lawmakers set aside \$5-million in 2005 to help families of deployed Florida National Guard and Reserve troops facing financial difficulties. But thus far, just \$606,907 has been paid out to 172 citizen soldiers and their families. In the last year, payments slowed to a trickle with just \$128,000 paid to 32 families in need. No news conference trumpeted what happened on July 1: Lawmakers took back most of the money, reducing the fund to a mere \$400,000.

<More at: www.tampabay.com/news/military/war/article737682.ece>

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

MORE “SUPPORT FOR THE TROOPS”

IRAQ GI AT WAR OVER KIDS ON HOMEFRONT

Neil Graves - August 11, 2008

Like most good dads who are away from home, Jonathan Maldonado tried phoning his daughter on her birthday in June. But hearing his 2-year-old's adoring voice wasn't going to happen.

Not just because the Bronx dad has been in Iraq with the 3rd Armored Cavalry fighting America's enemies since late last year. Rather, he was knee-deep in a quagmire with the Administration for Children Services. Maldonado's problems began with his custody battle with estranged wife Elsa Ruiz, 22, over their two children. ...In August 2007, Ruiz retained custody of the kids because Maldonado - then stationed at Fort Hood, Texas - was designated an absent parent during a Bronx Family Court custody petition.

"They claimed he had no rights to the children because he was not in the picture," said Jackie Lugo, 41, the soldier's mother. The dad's problems worsened when Ruiz eventually yielded control of the kids to an ACS foster parent while he was stationed in Iraq, family sources said. Since then, Maldonado said, an ACS agent told his family that he had "no right to know" where his children were and that the ACS repeatedly ignored his anguished calls from overseas.

<More at: www.nypost.com/seven/08112008/news/regionalnews/iraq_gi_at_war_over_kids_on_homefront_123932.htm>

MILLIONS LOST ON CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

07/28/2008

Millions of dollars were likely wasted on a 900 million dollar army contract to build courthouses, prisons, police and other security facilities in Iraq, an audit released Monday has found.

The audit by the congressionally appointed Special Inspector General for Iraq, Stuart Bowen, found that the contractor, Parsons Delaware Inc., completed only about a third of 53 planned construction projects.

"Although the failure to complete some of the work is understandable because of its complex nature and the unstable security environment in Iraq, millions of dollars in waste are likely associated with incomplete, terminated and abandoned projects under this contract," the audit report said. <More at: <http://www.capitolhillblue.com/cont/node/9923>>

ARE CONTRACTORS IN WAR ZONES ABOVE THE LAW?

Daphne Eviatar - Washington Independent - August 7, 2008

In January of 2008, Staff Sgt. Ryan Maseth, 24, was electrocuted while showering in his Baghdad barracks. His death prompted last week's [congressional report](#) concluding that defense contractor KBR, (until a year ago a subsidiary of the oil services giant Halliburton) [was well aware that the electrical system in Maseth's complex was faulty](#). An accident like this, the report found, was bound to happen. But this report also now raises a larger and thornier question about military defense contractors: can they be held legally liable for their actions -- or inactions? Will anyone be held responsible for Maseth's death?

... the Pentagon inspector general's interim report provided to the House Oversight Committee on July 28 said it "has not found any credible evidence that representatives from KBR were aware of imminent, life-threatening hazards" in Maseth's complex prior to his death. This is despite that fact that the Army itself had issued an [urgent bulletin](#) in 2004 warning soldiers of the threat. <More at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/94022/>>

ENDING 'THE WAR ON TERROR'

Faiz Shakir, Amanda Terkel, Satyam Khanna, Matt Corley, Benjamin Armbruster, Ali Frick, and Ryan Powers - August 1, 2008

The federally-funded RAND Corp. -- a public policy research institute that counsels the Pentagon -- [released a study](#) this week examining "how terrorist groups end" and concluded that the United States can defeat al Qaeda but only if it relies less on the use of military force and more on policing and intelligence. RAND conducted a quantitative analysis of 648 terror groups that existed between 1968 and 2006 and found that "most groups have ended because (1) they joined the political process or (2) local police and intelligence agencies arrested or killed key members. Military force has rarely been the primary reason for the end of terrorist groups." While nearly half of the terror groups analyzed ended as a result of a transition into the political process, for those "that cannot or will not make a transition to nonviolence, policing is likely to be the most effective strategy." The study noted that "[a]fter September 11, 2001, the U.S. strategy against al Qa'ida centered on the use of military force" and

that "U.S. policymakers and key national-security documents referred to operations against al Qa'ida as *the war on terrorism* [emphasis in original]." However, the study added: "The evidence by 2008 suggested that the U.S. strategy was not successful in undermining al Qa'ida's capabilities." <More at: <http://pr.thinkprogress.org/>>

U.S. MARINES ORDERED TO REMAIN IN AFGHANISTAN

David Montero – Christian Science Monitor - August 6, 2008 edition

The US and NATO struggle to maintain troops even as the Taliban reclaim southern and eastern Afghan provinces. With Afghanistan now more dangerous for foreign troops than Iraq, the United States military decided this week to bolster the presence of US Marines in the country.

The move, the latest in a series, comes just three days after five North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) soldiers were killed in a series of roadside bombings in Afghanistan that underscored the Taliban's resurgence in the country's southern and eastern provinces. The increased deployments indicate the US's mounting frustration with NATO for not providing more troops to tackle the Afghan insurgency.

The US Defense Department announced yesterday that it would extend by one month the tour of 1,250 Marines, the second such decision in as many months, according to the Associated Press. The decision to extend the tour of the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment in Afghanistan comes just a month after defense officials told the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit that it would stay an extra month in Afghanistan. <More at: www.csmonitor.com/2008/0805/p99s01-duts.html>

VA GETS 55,000 PLUS SUICIDE CALLS

Pia Malbran - CBSNews.com. - July 28, 2008

More than 55,000 people - including about 22,000 who identified themselves as veterans - have called the Department of Veterans Affairs' suicide hotline during its first year in operation and CBS News has learned that many of the calls, in recent months, have come from the mid to south central part of the country.

According to the VA's own count, during a three month time period between March and May of this year, the regions where the highest number of calls originated include the states of Texas, Tennessee, Illinois and Florida among other surrounding areas. (California and Florida have the nation's largest veteran populations.)

<More at: www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/07/28/cbsnews_investigates/main4300661.shtml>

VIOLATIONS RIFE IN HOSPITAL'S STUDIES ON VETERANS

Audrey Hudson - Washington Times - August 5, 2008

An investigation of research conducted at an Arkansas veterans hospital has uncovered rampant violations in its human experiments program, including missing consent forms, secret HIV testing and failure to report more than 100 deaths of subjects participating in studies. The Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on Tuesday will release its findings in a report on human subject protection violations at the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System in Little Rock. The studies involved thousands of veterans who had volunteered for behavioral and drug experiments.

<More at: www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/aug/05/violations-rife-in-hospitals-studies-on-veterans/>

FATAL MRAP ACCIDENTS PROMPT WARNINGS

Richard Lardner - Associated Press Writer - July 24, 2008

The towering trucks that give U.S. troops the best protection against roadside bombs and enemy bullets also make them vulnerable to routine hazards like sharp turns, rutted roads and rickety bridges. Five deaths caused by rollovers and dozens of other accidents in Iraq and Afghanistan have led U.S. military leaders to warn troops to be smart behind the wheel, according to military documents obtained by The Associated Press and accident reports released under the Freedom of Information Act.

The message is especially relevant in Afghanistan, where a resurgent Taliban has boosted demand for these steel cocoons, known as MRAPs. Due to the country's mountainous terrain and unpaved roads, officials will send nearly 800 more RG-31s, the smallest of several different MRAPs the military now uses. <More at: http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/MRAP_DRIVING_ALERTS?>

MAYBE OUR RETURNING VETS OUGHT TO LIST THEMSELVES AS "MISCELLANEOUS EXPENDITURES"

VA SPENDS BILLIONS ON 'MISCELLANEOUS EXPENDITURES'

Washington, D.C. —The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing today to investigate the findings of a government report on a questionable means of procuring goods and services within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

... The audit revealed that \$9.6 billion, out of total of \$12 billion in purchases, was paid for through the miscellaneous obligations account. GAO concluded that use of the account was excessive and that it reflected serious deficiencies in internal financial control that left VA vulnerable to waste, fraud, and abuse. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/08/hcva08/hcva073108-1.htm>

PREDATOR PILOTS SUFFERING WAR STRESS

Associated Press - August 08, 2008

MARCH AIR RESERVE BASE, Calif. - The Air National Guardsmen who operate Predator drones over Iraq via remote control, launching deadly missile attacks from the safety of Southern California 7,000 miles away, are suffering some of the same psychological stresses as their comrades on the battlefield. Working in air-conditioned trailers, Predator pilots observe the field of battle through a bank of video screens and kill enemy fighters with a few computer keystrokes. Then, after their shifts are over, they get to drive home and sleep in their own beds. But that whiplash transition is taking a toll on some of them mentally, and so is the way the unmanned aircraft's cameras enable them to see people getting killed in high-resolution detail, some officers say. <More at: www.military.com/news/article/predator-pilots-suffering-war-stress.html>

STRAINED BY WAR, U.S. ARMY PROMOTES UNQUALIFIED SOLDIERS

Bill Sasser - Jul. 30, 2008

According to a Salon investigation, the Army is facing a troubling shortage of qualified sergeants, the noncommissioned officers considered to be the backbone of training and combat operations. In fact, a new Army policy intended to boost this critical leadership corps of NCOs has prompted a wave of promotions for apparently unqualified soldiers -- and even jeopardized some combat operations in Iraq.

In essence, an Army policy implemented in 2005 and expanded this year lowered the bar for enlisted soldiers with the rank of E-4 to gain the rank of sergeant, or E-5, by diminishing the vetting process. According to more than a half dozen current and former Army sergeants interviewed by Salon, the policy has produced sergeants who are not ready to lead. In some cases, soldiers were promoted even after being denied advancement by their own unit commanders. While awarding a promotion once required effort on the part of a commander, those interviewed say, the Army's current policy actually requires effort *to prevent* a promotion, and has had negative consequences on the battlefield.

<More at: www.salon.com/news/feature/2008/07/30/sergeants/print.html>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
8/25	1100 - 1400	Omni San Antonio Hotel 9821 Colonnade Blvd San Antonio, TX	San Antonio Military Career Fair		210.691.8888
8/28	1100 - 1400	Crowne Plaza Hotel Tampa East 10221 Princess Palm Avenue Tampa, FL	Tampa Military Career Fair		813-623-6363
8/28		Doubletree Hotel Colorado Springs 1775 E. Cheyenne Mt Blvd. Colorado Springs, CO	Midwest Regional Career Event		Register
8/28		Niagara Falls, NY	Resource Fair	Herbert Wittmeyer	716-881-5855
8/28 – 8/31		Santa Rosa Memorial Park Santa Rosa, CA	Wall That Heals	Sonoma County United Veterans Council	
9/3	1100 - 1400	Phoenix Marriott 1101 North 44th Street Phoenix, AZ	Phoenix Military Career Fair		602-273-7373
9/4	1100 - 1400	Radisson Hotel at LAX 6225 West Century Boulevard Los Angeles, CA	Los Angeles Military Career Fair		310- 670-9000
9/5		Scotts Bluff NE	Resource Fair	Linda Chlecq	605-490-2404
9/5		Philadelphia PA	Stand Down	Ed Speller	267-228-4099
9/5		Des Moines IA	Stand Down	Ellen Mathes	515-699-5680

9/8	1100 - 1400	Embassy Suites Austin - North 5901 North IH-35, Austin, TX	Austin Military Career Fair		512-454-8004
9/10	1100 - 1400	Fort Bragg Officer's Club Armistead St & Totten St Fort Bragg, NC	Fort Bragg Military Career Fair		910-907-2582
9/11 - 9/14		4001 Fort Casper Road Casper, Wyoming	Wall That Heals	Casper Memorial VFW Post 9439	
9/11		Indianapolis IN	Resource Fair	Dr. Charles Haenlein	317-951-0688
9/11	1000 - 1800	Holiday Inn Houston - Airport 15222 John F. Kennedy Blvd Houston TX	Southwest Regional Career Event		Register
9/12		Asheville NC	Resource Fair	Allison Haberfield	828-298-7911
9/12		Fresno CA	Stand Down	Pam Beebe	559-287-3456
9/15-16		DVA Main HQ 810 Vermont Ave NW Washington, DC	VA Hearing - Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illness	DSNurse@aol.com	
9/19	0800 - 1300	Cafeteria, American River College 4700 College Oak Drive Sacramento, CA.	2nd Annual Road Home: From Combat to College	RSVP Cheryl Burkhart	

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

ARMY PROMISES FAMILIES OF THE FALLEN LONGER-TERM HELP, ADMITS MISTAKES

Kimberly Hefling - Associated Press Writer - August 20, 2008

WASHINGTON (AP) _ The Army is mailing out thousands of letters to survivors of soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, asking what it can do to better help them, even years after the deaths of their loved ones. The Army recognizes it's made mistakes in some of its dealings with the families of fallen soldiers, Col. Carl M. Johnson, director of the Army's Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operation Center, said in an interview. And the letter, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press, encourages families to be candid in their comments and suggestions.

About 13,500 letters have been sent this month, and copies are expected to reach about 20,000 survivors of those killed while on active duty with the Army since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks — either in a war zone, in the United States or elsewhere. More at: www.newsday.com/news/politics/wire/sns-ap-families-of-the-fallen_0.3179514.story

HELP OUR VETERANS VOTE

Susan Bysiewicz (Secretary of State for Connecticut) - N.Y. Times - August 11, 2008

Hartford - What is the secretary of Veterans Affairs thinking? On May 5, the department led by James B. Peake issued a directive that bans nonpartisan voter registration drives at federally financed nursing homes, rehabilitation centers and shelters for homeless veterans. As a result, too many of our most patriotic American citizens — our injured and ill military veterans — may not be able to vote this November.

I have witnessed the enforcement of this policy. On June 30, I visited the Veterans Affairs Hospital in West Haven, Conn., to distribute information on the state's new voting machines and to register veterans to vote. I was not allowed inside the hospital. <More at: www.nytimes.com/2008/08/11/opinion/11bysiewicz.html>

A DEFEAT FOR TAXPAYERS IN MILITARY HOUSING

Eric Nalder - Seattle Post-Intelligencer - August 7, 2008

Homes delayed, not built years after well-connected firms land huge contracts

She was a bankrupt pal of several U.S. presidents. His firm had been suspended from government-financed housing projects for repeatedly violating regulations. Together, they and others formed a company that won billion-dollar Defense Department contracts and took ownership of 8,000 military homes. The result was a spectacular failure that has cost taxpayers millions and delayed new home construction and renovation.

In Snohomish County, Washington, land sits empty where 141 Navy homes were scheduled to be finished by the end of September. Projects at Air Force bases in Florida, Georgia, Arkansas and Massachusetts and an Army base in Missouri failed.

Many houses simply weren't built. At Moody Air Force Base in Georgia, only two of 400 new homes were built. Lenders withdrew, costs skyrocketed and some delays are being measured in years. The projects have either been sold to other companies or are being offered for sale. <More at: <http://timesunion.com/ASPStories/Story.asp?StoryID=709857>>

THIS IS ONE OF THOSE LONG ONES THAT IS A MUST READ – PLEASE CLICK THROUGH! THE DEPLETED URANIUM THREAT

Thomas D. Williams - truthout Report - 13 August 2008

"The DoD, the nation's biggest polluter, is now cleaning up 29,500 currently or formerly contaminated sites in every state and territory. California alone has 3,912 contaminated sites on 441 current and former DoD installations. Many of DoD's facilities have already contaminated groundwater sources of drinking water.... The cost to clean up toxic munitions contamination and unexploded ordnance at active and former military installations around the country may reach \$200 billion." - The National Resources Defense Council, April 21, 2004.

"The Defense Department is refusing to comply with orders or sign contracts to clean up 11 hazardous waste sites, including one in Hawaii, and has asked the White House and Justice Department to intervene on its behalf." - The Associated Press, July 1, 2008

While attempting to act as the planet's nuclear watchdogs, the US and the UK have become two of the world's largest, cancer-causing radiated dust and rusty depleted uranium projectile polluters. <More at: www.truthout.org/article/the-depleted-uranium-threat>

WHY SOLDIERS RAPE

Helen Benedict - August 13, 2008

Army Capt. Jennifer Machmer testifies before a congressional caucus that she was assaulted in 2003 in Kuwait by another U.S. soldier. An alarming number of women soldiers are being sexually abused by their comrades-in-arms, both at war and at home. This fact has received a fair amount of attention lately from researchers and the press — and deservedly so.

But the attention always focuses on the women: where they were when assaulted, their relations with the assailant, the effects on their mental health and careers, whether they are being adequately helped, and so on. That discussion, as valuable as it is, misses a fundamental point. To understand military sexual assault, let alone know how to stop it, we must focus on the perpetrators. We need to ask: Why do soldiers rape?

Rape in civilian life is already unacceptably common. One in six women is raped or sexually assaulted in her lifetime, according to the National Institute of Justice, a number so high it should be considered an epidemic. In the military, however, the situation is even worse. Rape is almost twice as frequent as it is among civilians, especially in wartime.

<More at: www.inthesetimes.com/article/3848/why_soldiers_rape/>

FEAR OF BEING DISCHARGED HAS LED TO UNDERREPORTING OF MILITARY SEXUAL ASSAULTS

Jason Flanagan - The Examiner - 2008-08-03

Fears of inaction by their superiors and being discharged from the military have led sexually assaulted service members not to report the crimes committed against them, federal officials said. The Department of Defense and the Coast Guard "have only limited visibility over the incidence of these occurrences," said Brenda Farrell, director of defense capabilities for the U.S. General Accountability Office, in her report issued Thursday to Congress. Farrell's testimony served as a preliminary look at a GAO report expected in late August on sexual assaults at military installations. The GAO found that half of sexually assaulted service members interviewed did not report the assault.

<More at: www.examiner.com/a-1519111~GAO_Fear_of_being_discharged_has_led_to_underreporting_of_military_sexual_assaults.html>

FIRED SOON AFTER MILITARY ASSIGNMENT, RESERVIST SUES BOCA RATON COMPANY

Mike Clary - South Florida Sun-Sentinel - August 9, 2008

Air Force reservist Richard Wright was just two months into what he said was his "dream job" as a consultant for a firm marketing Donald Trump's get-rich techniques when he was called up and sent to Afghanistan. For six weeks in early 2007, Wright served in Kandahar as a master sergeant with the 920th Rescue Squadron, providing intelligence for helicopter

missions. But just a week after returning home to Cooper City from the war, Wright, 41, was fired, allegedly for missing work and for contacting clients to let them know he was home.

<More at: www.sun-sentinel.com/news/local/southflorida/sf-flb-fired0809sbaug09.0.7400159.story>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF AUGUST 20, 2008

This week the Air Force and Navy announced an increase, while the Army and Marine Corps announced a decrease. The Coast Guard number remained unchanged. The net collective result is 710 fewer reservists activated than last week. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 79,902; Navy Reserve, 5,848; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 11,634; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,070; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 740. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 106,194, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated can be found at <http://preview.defenselink.mil/news/Aug2008/d20080820nqr.pdf>.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SUNDAY 24 AUGUST 2008

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

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (1,878 DAYS)		OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,407 DAYS)	
KILLED US	4,146	KILLED US	580
WOUNDED US [8/2/08]	30,490	OTHER CASUALTIES US [10/2007]	1,994
OTHER US CASUALTIES [4/5/08]	≥38,631	KILLED COALITION	363
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [3/1/08]	145	WOUNDED US [8/2/08]	2,309
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1	WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007)	1,472
KILLED UK	176	KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED OTHER COALITION	138	KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (7/2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819	WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (7/2004)	32,034
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [6/30/07]	1,001	AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	1.75M/4.8M
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 47,555		
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 94,560		
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400K – 1.246M		
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M	COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$548,148,772,840

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

* This entry has been changed to “Non-mortal casualties” which includes wounded, non-hostile casualties, and diseased where medical air transport was required. To see detailed demographic data on the casualties go to

<http://siadapp.dior.whs.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/castop.htm>

** Includes 280 additional contractor casualties reported in international press but not in US official figures

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

LOCAL ACTION WORKS!

COLLEGE HELPS VETERANS NAVIGATE LIFE AFTER COMBAT

Cynthia Hubert - August 19, 2008

Day after day, the soldiers march into Catherine Morris's office at Sierra College in Rocklin.

They bring the familiar baggage of student life: Worries about whether they are majoring in the right subjects.

Concerns about juggling work and classes. Questions about how they might improve their English grades.

They also bring Iraq.

Most of the young men and women who visit Morris have done time in combat. Their scars run deep, but are not always visible.

Looking into their eyes from behind her neatly organized desk in the school's campus center, Morris sees more than most. A former Marine who keeps a photograph of her younger self in uniform on a shelf, she runs a year-round program specifically designed for veterans going to school under the GI Bill.

... "Some of these veterans are truly more afraid of going to college than they were of going to Iraq," said Morris, who has served in the Army National Guard and the California Air National Guard as well as the Marines. "They are so overwhelmed, and they feel very isolated."

... "The war is not over for them when they come home," she said. "It's playing over and over in their minds. Society seems oblivious to that."

"One of the most important things we do is give them a place to get together with people who understand their feelings."

<More at: <http://www.sacbee.com/101/story/1167318.html>

HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY THE GOLD STANDARD FOR VETS

Carl Young - For the Times-Standard - 08/14/2008

On Aug. 28, Humboldt State University will make history with a new veteran's program that is sure to become a national model for providing educational opportunities.

The opening ceremonies for Humboldt State University's new Veterans Enrollment and Transitional Services (VETS) program will be from noon to 2 p.m. at the Kate Buchanan Room, and the community is invited to attend. We especially would like to see veterans and their families attending because the program offers them so much valuable assistance. <More at: http://www.times-standard.com/opinion/ci_10199089#

WORLD WAR II VETERAN DIES HOURS AFTER ARMY APOLOGY

Kim Murphy - Los Angeles Times Staff Writer - July 28, 2008

SEATTLE — Samuel Snow, an 83-year-old black World War II veteran who had traveled across the country to receive an apology from the Army for being unfairly convicted on rioting charges, died early Sunday just hours after the ceremony honoring him and 27 of his fellow soldiers. Snow had been admitted to a hospital on the eve of Saturday's ceremony at Ft. Lawton in Seattle. He died hours later -- after his son had read to him the certificate that exonerated him and converted his discharge to an honorable status.

<More at: www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-apology28-2008jul28.0.307169.story>

WHEN THEY START THE NEXT WAR, THEY'D BETTER PLAN THAT THE LAST WIDOWS MAY NEED SUPPORT FOR 143 YEARS AFTER THE END OF THE WAR

CIVIL WAR VETERAN'S WIDOW DIES AT 93

Morning Edition - August 21, 2008 ·

She was not necessarily the oldest living Confederate Army widow, but she lived a distinctive life. Maudie White Hopkins has died at age 93. Back in the Great Depression, she was a teenage housecleaner. She met an 86-year-old man. He said he'd leave her his land if she would marry and care for him. She agreed, which is how, for his final years, she was the companion of a Civil War veteran from Arkansas. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=93823557>

THE BILLS GET BIGGER AND BIGGER!

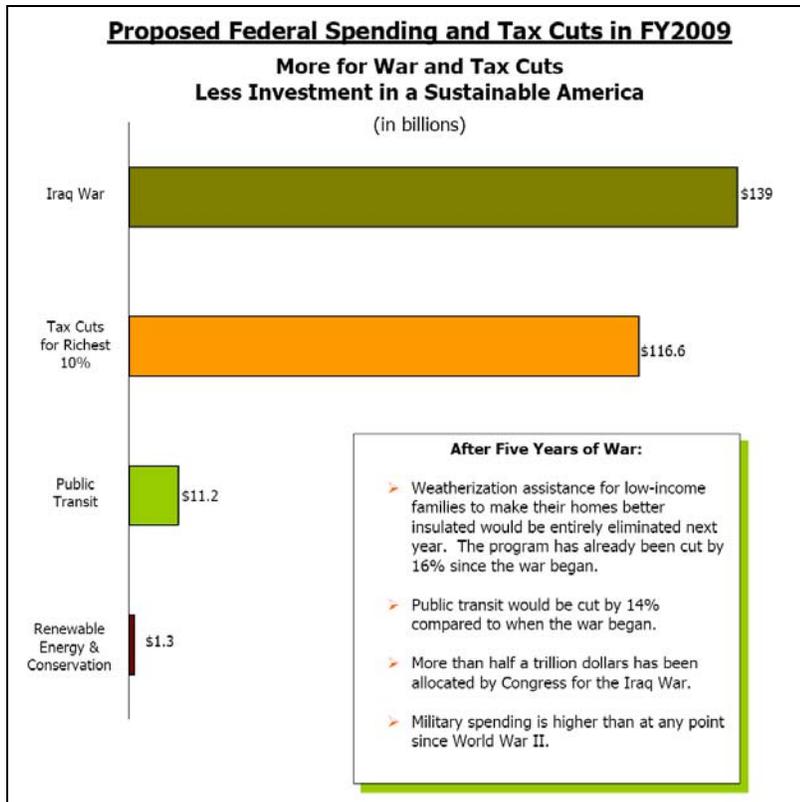
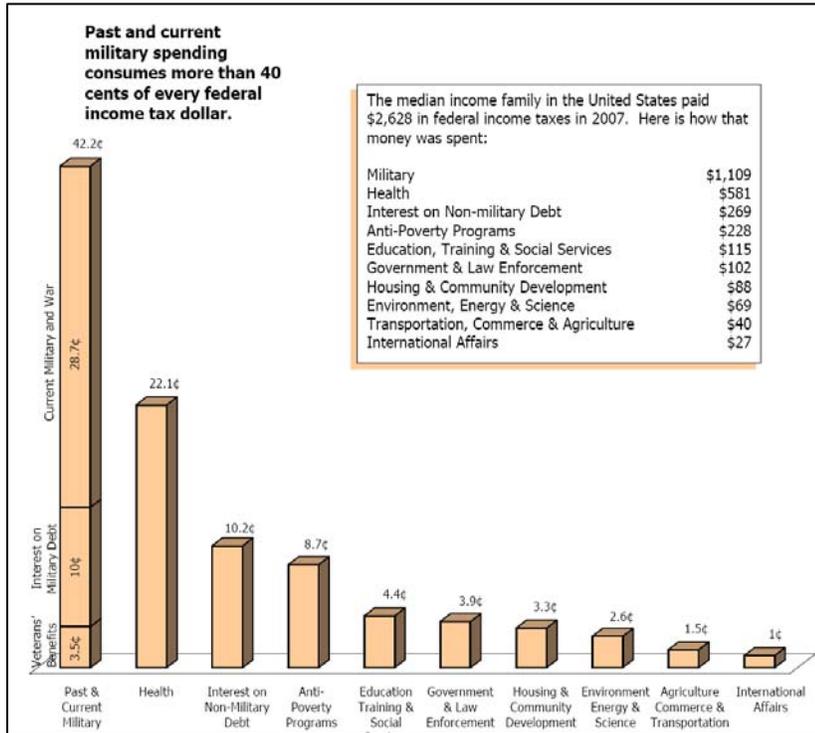
According to the SAR (Selected Acquisition Reports), which reports to Congress on only major acquisitions, not the ordinary stuff, as of 30 June the projected acquisition cost for those programs is \$1.643 TRILLION!

www4.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode10/uscode_sec_10_00002432----000-.html

DISCOVER WHAT THE CANDIDATES SAY ABOUT VETERANS

Senator John McCain's official veteran web page: <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/9cb5d2aa-f237-464e-9cdf-a5ad32771b9f.htm>

Senator Barack Obama's official veteran web page: <http://www.barackobama.com/issues/veterans/>



<http://www.nationalpriorities.org/auxiliary/taxday2008/999.pdf>

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 scCook@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