

SOUND OFF!



VOL. V, NO 2

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

10 SEPTEMBER 2009

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

VETS – YOU OWE YOUR COUNTRY SOMETHING. ~ PAY UP!

Well, that very well may have grabbed your attention and may even have pissed you off.

*“Waddaya mean we owe them? They owe us!
We don’t owe anybody nothin’!”*

Catch your breath, vets! Hang on for a minute! Bear me out and I’ll explain what I mean.

Over the last six weeks or so, veterans have been quoted threatening the President of the United States, advocating secession, seriously calling for the blood of politicians and bureaucrats, praying for national failure, and quoting the ubiquitous “them” and “they say” and “some say” sources (as if those unnamed sources had some special insight) as their justification.

Shame on all of them!

And shame on the politicians, political operatives, and in some cases even pastors who have been feeding this frenzy by speaking to and of veterans as if we were the nation’s idiot children who will believe anything they say. They effectively tell us that we have no choice but to fall in lockstep with their inventions in order to avoid their fantasized outcomes. They attempt to use us for their purposes, not ours.

I know. We all spend most of our time complaining that the legal debt owed to us is either not paid or is so terribly slow in being paid that it might as well not exist. I spend most of my time doing just that. But we owe a debt, and it is a significant one.

We owe the nation and our fellow citizens the leadership skills and the analytic expertise that we have learned in our service to our country. Many of us know that without the experience we had as veterans, for good or ill, we would not be the people we are today. For the good that came out of that experience we should be forever grateful, and we should give

back to our country for the advantage that it gave us over those who never had the experience.

In many of the Native American nations the counselors to the current leadership were the veterans of past conflicts. The wise men were the men who had fought for the nation and had learned leadership skills that those who had not fought never quite grasped. They were honored for those skills, and were given special consideration when the nation contemplated a new action whether it was war or peace. Often their counsel was to keep the peace rather than go to war, for they had learned as young men what the real outcomes of old men’s decisions were.

Their job was to exercise the caution that they had learned, and to contemplate all of the possible outcomes, then to advise on the best course. They also served as the models for the nation, not just of courage, but of wisdom, objectivity, and fairness. They counseled youth on the sanctity of their oaths as members of the nation and as warriors. Not all veterans were automatically respected that way, but the ones who had shown great leadership in previous national endeavors were.

Do you remember who you thought were the great leaders in your military experience? They surely weren’t the DIs who screamed at you in boot or basic. They weren’t the NCOs or officers who threatened you with a boot up your ass. You might have been wary of those yahoos or even afraid of them, but you didn’t respect them as leaders.

The one’s you really respected were the thoughtful, caring, smart, objective NCOs and officers, who treated you with respect and dealt with you as if you were as smart as they were. For those who served in combat, you respected the leaders who would think

through tactical missions, and if they had time would explain the reasons for what you were about to do. Those were the leaders whom you trusted, and you trusted them with your life. You counted on them to consider all of the facts before they committed you to deadly action in which your life and the lives of your companions were at stake; because of that trust you obeyed their orders willingly.

The training that had been ground into you by the yahoos may have caused you to obey orders instantly, but the respect for the facts and for your safety was what marked the real leaders. So when you obeyed instantly, as the yahoos had taught you, you obeyed the good leader because he had gained your trust. You may have obeyed the bad leader as readily, but you always had your reservations, didn't you, and weren't you a little less than trustful?

So why today are so many of our fellow veterans jumping in lock step with the yahoos? Why are they believing nonsense without examining the facts? Why do they defy their former oaths and threaten mayhem? Do they even remember the oath?

I know; they aren't on active duty any more so the oath doesn't apply. Well at least it doesn't apply in a legal sense, but what about us as human beings and as Americans? Did we take that oath and then cast it off as meaningless, or is it that kind of oath that sticks with us individually for a lifetime? Do we not still defend the Constitution – that is the Constitution as written and as interpreted by subsequent laws, not as imagined in the tabloids and on talk TV and radio?

What turned so many veterans into yahoos themselves?

I am not advocating just falling in lock step with whatever the administration or Congress is doing politically. I am advocating demanding of ourselves the same respect for facts, truth, and objectivity that we demanded of our leaders so many years ago. I don't care if you are a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or an anarchist. If you are a veteran you at least ought to try to emulate those character traits that you learned to respect once upon a time.

So if someone says that the medical planning going on in Washington will take away veterans medical benefits, ask the questions that let you know if this is true or is it nonsense. Ask the questions of sources that you can trust, and beware of whom you trust. If you end up believing that these benefits will be harmed by the current proposals, then have at it!

Oppose them with all your might! But for all our sakes, oppose them with facts not rumors. Oppose them with respect for the truth before all else.

Just because someone has the "courage" to object does not mean that they are telling the truth. In fact, when veterans put themselves up as sources and tout their past acts of courage as credentials, beware! Nothing trumps the facts. Nothing beats objectivity. Nothing poisons us and our nation so much as blind adherence to rumor, fantasy, and rage.

"The identification of courage with truth pops up often in history, even in our day ... Unfortunately, this equation enables people to validate questionable ideas by defending them with courage, as if a coward cannot say something that is true or a brave man something that is false."

Destiny Disrupted: Tamim Ansary

So veterans ask yourselves if you are the ones whom the nation will look to as the wise counselors. Are you the ones who will pay your debt to the nation by demanding facts before you decide on issues? Are you the ones who will stand up to your Congressperson, or political leader, or talk show host, or even your pastor and say, "I have examined the facts from reliable sources and considered the various alternatives, and the truth does not seem to be what you say."? Are you the ones who will say, "Your prediction of doom does not follow from the facts."?

Or, are you the ones whom the nation hears shouting down dissent, as if the free speech of all was somehow un-American? Are you the ones who threaten to take guns to Washington DC? Are you the ones who threaten to shed blood in the name of "liberty", when it is others' liberty that you would take?

Nations are formed and governments established because wise people know that we are unable to care for all of our very real and complex needs as a people through our personal efforts alone. No, all governments are not good, and all acts of even good governments are not good. But our job as veterans is to give the wise counsel to our elected and appointed officials so as to make the government better, because it is our government not theirs. It is also our job to keep the lid on paranoia and dementia when it occurs in the public debate, and to call it out for the yahoo behavior that it is. Leaders are needed, not blind followers.

So the debt is there – let's all start paying it!

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

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

Class Action Suit: On 12 August we appeared before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. An article from the LA Times on 24 August summarizes the results so far < latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/healthcare/la-me-veterans-suit24-2009aug24.0,1423297.story>

.Case Progress to Date:

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

9/25/2007 Defendant’s Motion to Dismiss

2/11/2208 Motion for Preliminary Injunction

2/25/2008 Preliminary Injunction Hearing

4/21/2008 Trial

6/25/2008 Judgment based on jurisdiction

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

12/10/2008 Appeal brief filed

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

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

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

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

4/22/09 Extension granted to 1 May 2009

5/1/09 Appellants’ Reply Brief filed

6/11/09 Oral Arguments Scheduled for 12 August 2009

8/12/09 Oral arguments

9/14/09 Reply on mediation [changed date]

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 bhandy@vuft.org or the Vice Chair at scook@vuft.org. Watch for details at www.vuft.org.

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

No letters this issue

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

No action on veterans’ bills – all committees and both houses are fixed on the health care action.

RETREAT – NEWS

WOUNDED TROOPS RECOVER AS US WAR COVERAGE WANES

Michelle Roberts - Associated Press Writer – 10 September 2009

SAN ANTONIO (AP) -- A year after Capt. Sam Brown was set ablaze when a bomb blew up his Humvee in Afghanistan, the 25-year-old West Point graduate endures a steady schedule of painful surgery and stretching to break up knotty burn scars.

He also has another routine: checking a Web site that counts U.S. and coalition troop deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan. For Brown, it’s one more regular reminder that the wars have not ended - something he says many Americans seem to have forgotten.

With the timetable set for withdrawal from Iraq and the fighting in Afghanistan nearing its ninth year, U.S. war coverage has waned, often pushed off the front page by the economy, health care and celebrity deaths. But for severely wounded soldiers - those with huge burn scars and amputated limbs - the wars are no distant memory. Their long and painful recovery battles are a constant reminder. <More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2009/09/10/us/AP-US-War-Wounded.html>>

AMERICAN COMMANDER: US ON THE ROAD OUT OF IRAQ

Chelsea J. Carter - Associated Press Writer - Aug 30, 2009

BAGHDAD – The U.S. military is packing up to leave Iraq in what has been deemed the largest movement of manpower and equipment in modern military history — shipping out more than 1.5 million pieces of equipment from tanks to antennas along with a force the size of a small city.

The massive operation already under way a year ahead of the Aug. 31, 2010 deadline to remove all U.S. combat troops from Iraq shows the U.S. military has picked up the pace of a planned exit from Iraq that could cost billions.

The goal is to withdraw tens of thousands of troops and about 60 percent of equipment out of Iraq by the end of next March, Brig. Gen. Heidi Brown, a deputy commander charged with overseeing the withdrawal, told The Associated Press in one of the first detailed accounts of how the U.S. military plans to leave Iraq. <More at: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/ml_iraq_moving_out>

IRAQ DRAWDOWN MOVES INTO SECOND PHASE AS PLANNERS DISCUSS CHALLENGES

13th Sustainment Command Expeditionary Public Affairs - Aug 26, 2009

BAGHDAD (Aug. 26, 2009) -- As Multi-National Corps - Iraq moves into the second phase of the drawdown of troops and equipment from Iraq, it faces challenges ranging from the withdrawal of roughly 80,000 service members to a connex filled with pink roller skates.

Although MNC-I has just finished phase one of the safe and responsible withdrawal of equipment and personnel in Iraq -- setting the conditions -- it has moved into the second phase of the drawdown without pause, said Lt. Col. Tammie Pettit, the Multi-National Corps - Iraq logistics plans chief at a sustainment conference Aug. 15 on Camp Victory.

<More at: <http://www.army.mil/-news/2009/08/26/26577-iraq-drawdown-moves-into-second-phase-as-planners-discuss-challenges/>>

AMBUSHED MARINES' AID CALL 'REJECTED'

Agence France-Presse - September 10, 2009

NATO-led forces are investigating the death of four Marines in eastern Afghanistan after their commanders reportedly rejected requests for artillery fire in a battle with insurgents, the Pentagon said on Wednesday. Tuesday's incident was "under investigation" and details remained unclear, press secretary Geoff Morrell told a news conference.

A McClatchy newspaper's journalist who witnessed the battle reported that a team of Marine trainers made repeated appeals for air and artillery support after being pinned down by insurgents in the village of Ganjgal in eastern Kunar province.

The U.S. troops had to wait more than an hour for attack helicopters to come to their aid and their appeal for artillery fire was rejected, with commanders citing new rules designed to avoid civilian casualties, the report said.

<More at: <http://www.military.com/news/article/ambushed-marines-aid-call-rejected.html>>

FORCED TO SHRINK, ARMY NATIONAL GUARD GETS PICKIER

Meghan Barr - The Associated Press - Stars and Stripes online edition - September 3, 2009

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Suffer from a bad case of acne? That could disqualify you from joining the Army National Guard. Too many speeding tickets? In today's slimmer, smarter Guard, that could keep you out, too. Under pressure from the Pentagon to trim its ranks, the Guard has been quietly phasing in new restrictions that make it harder to enlist.

"To get in now, you have to be the cream of the crop," said Sgt. 1st Class Brian Clum, a recruiter in Ohio.

Military officials portray the cutbacks as an effort to trim excess from a Guard force that was bloated from years of successful recruiting, especially during the recession. But there are suspicions inside the Guard and out that the reductions are part of an effort to shift the burden of fighting overseas onto the active-duty Army and ease the public outcry over the way that Guard units — part-time soldiers normally called into action during hurricanes and other disasters at home — have been sent on long, repeated combat tours in Iraq. <More at: <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=64555>>

SOLDIERS IN GERMANY TRY OUT MRAPS, BUT LEARN AFGHANISTAN'S TERRAIN OFTEN CALLS FOR FOOT PATROLS

Seth Robson - Stars and Stripes - September 7, 2009

HOHENFELS, Germany — Even with modifications designed to make the Army's Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles more maneuverable, there are still places in Afghanistan the personnel carrier won't be able to go, according to an Army spokesman. Last week, 173rd Airborne Brigade soldiers got to sit in the driver's seat of the first MRAPs fielded in Europe as the unit prepares for a deployment to Afghanistan. However, the gently rolling, pine-covered hills of Germany's Joint Multinational Readiness Center are a world away from the jutting, snow-capped mountains and rugged valleys of Afghanistan. ... Commanders will choose the most heavily armored vehicle they can to protect their troops, but some areas are simply too rugged for the MRAP, Sternberg said.

"You can't take an MRAP the same places you can take a Humvee," he said. "On a hairpin turn road in a valley you are not going to take an MRAP. Predominantly in Afghanistan where most of our (the 173rd's) forces were, they were on foot."

<More at: <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=64617>>

MILITARY EXAMINES BATTLE POLICY OF MOVING WOUNDED WITHIN 1 HOUR

Barbara Starr - CNN Pentagon Correspondent – 6 September 2009

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- The U.S. military in Afghanistan may be rethinking its so-called "golden hour" policy of evacuating wounded troops off the battlefield to major trauma centers within 60 minutes of being injured, an official said Wednesday.

The idea is being pushed by Gen. James Conway, the Marine Corps commandant, who just returned from Afghanistan. He was told by medical personnel there they want more flexibility in the system.

The "golden hour" is the hour immediately following traumatic injury in which medical treatment to prevent irreversible internal damage and optimize the chance of survival is considered most effective.

Conway "did indeed hear from several who suggested that getting a wounded service member to 'the right facility at the right time' may be more critical than meeting the 'golden hour' threshold," said Conway's spokesman, Maj. David Nevers. <More at: <http://www.cnn.com/element/js/2.0/scripts/IEPersistence.html>>

ARMY STUDIES USE OF DOGS FOR PTSD

UPI - September 05, 2009

KANSAS CITY, Mo.- Two U.S. researchers say dogs appear to be helpful to Soldiers and former Soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Craig Love, a research psychologist, and Joan Esnayra, founder of the Psychiatric Service Dog Society, discussed their work Thursday during a conference on military health research in Kansas City, The Kansas City Star reported. They are about to begin a \$300,000 study, funded by the Defense Department, at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington. Love and Esnayra surveyed 39 people with PTSD who were given service dogs and found 82 percent reported a reduction in symptoms. <More at: <http://www.military.com/news/article/army-studies-use-of-dogs-for-ptsd.html>>

CIA HEALTH PROFESSIONALS' ROLE IN TORTURE WORSE THAN PREVIOUSLY KNOWN

Physicians for Human Rights Press Release - August 31, 2009

Cambridge, MA – The extent to which American physicians and psychologists violated human rights and betrayed the ethical standards of their professions by designing, implementing, and legitimizing a worldwide torture program is greater than previously known, according to a report by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR).

<More at: <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/library/news-2009-08-31-pr.html>>

MORE FAMILIES ELIGIBLE FOR FREE, REDUCED MEALS

David Allen - Stars and Stripes - Pacific edition - September 6, 2009

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The poverty levels for families seeking free and reduced price lunches for students attending base schools in Pacific and Europe are about \$1,000 higher this year.

Last year, the maximum income eligibility guideline for a family of four was \$34,450 a year or less for free lunches and \$49,025 annually for reduced price meals. On Friday, the Department of Defense Educational Activity announced the maximums for the same size family are now \$35,841 and \$51,005, respectively.

The rates are for all overseas schools except for Guam, which follows the federal guidelines for the 48 contiguous states.

<More at: <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=64578>>

DID THE DVA DESIGN THIS PROGRAM TOO?

WOUNDED IRAQI SOLDIERS LANGUISH, AWAITING GOVERNMENT HELP

Heath Druzin - Stars and Stripes - Mideast edition - September 8, 2009

BAGHDAD — For two years now, Pfc. Qusay Aziz has risen each morning in the dank confines of a metal shipping container, rolled off a stained, torn mattress, put on his right leg and reported for duty.

He and three other severely injured Iraqi army soldiers live in the container on the edge of an Iraqi National Police base in Baghdad's Khadamiyah district and, like many of their wounded comrades, struggle to pay medical bills and have been repeatedly refused retirement by the Iraqi government.

"I feel very bad, very angry," said Aziz, 31, whose leg was ripped off by a roadside bomb in 2004. "The people who are now in government are there because of the army and what the soldiers sacrificed."

Throughout Iraq, the toll of the war is visible in empty sleeves, jagged scars, pronounced limps. Iraqi soldiers are especially vulnerable, often patrolling without body armor or armored vehicles. <More at: <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=64633>>

FRAUD ALERT! THIS FRAUD ATTEMPT HAS BEEN AROUND FOR SEVERAL YEARS

The Department of Veterans Affairs has reported that the "Patient Care Group" is conducting a scam operation against veterans who receive VA prescriptions. Callers claiming to be representatives of this group tell veterans that their prescriptions are being administered by the company. They then ask for credit card information so that the veterans can continue to receive their medications. VA officials said that the department has made no change to its prescription system, and that veterans should not provide any information to callers from this group.

<http://vets4politics.blogspot.com/2009/09/this-fraud-attempt-has-been-around-for.html>

TO THE COLORS - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
9/10-9/13		Chisago Lakes Area High School Lindstrom,, MN	The Wall that Heals	VFW Chisago Lakes Post 7267	
9/12		Compton, CA	Stand Down	Ivan Mason	310-348-7600
9/12		Billings, MT	Resource Fair	Lori Hartford	406-256-7957
9/12		Warrenton, OR	Resource Fair	Patrick Preston/Phil Hertel	503-325-4821 x-227
9/14		Crystal Lake, IL	Resource Fair	Donna McCafferty	866-338-4968
9/15		Akron, OH	Resource Fair	Laura Williams Dunlop	330-762-7328
9/16		Kalama, WA	Resource Fair	Randy Hahn	360-673-5146
9/17		Boham, TX	Resource Fair	Tammy Wood	214-467-1864
9/18-9/20		Sacramento, CA	Stand Down	Alex Briones	916-646-6004
9/18-9/20		Cumberland, RI	Stand Down	Al Signorelli or Ernest Teixeira	401-383-4730
9/18		Wichita, KS	Resource Fair	Judith A. Epperson	316-651-3684
9/18		Prescott, AZ	Resource Fair	Skye Biasetti	928-200-7692
9/18		Helena, MT	Resource Fair	Sherri Downing	406-443-0580
9/18		Greensboro, NC	Resource Fair	Archie Barrow	336-334-5777
9/18=9/20		White City, OR	Stand Down	Chris Sanders	541-227-4431
9/19		Kettle Falls, WA	Resource Fair	Tonya M. Stinson	509-684-6311
9/19-9/21		Boulder Creek, CA	Stand Down	Kate Severin	650-493-5000 x22581

9/23		International Falls, MN	Resource Fair	Paul Pedersen	218-722-8763
9/23-9/25		Fresno, CA	Stand Down	Charles Hunnicutt	559-454-5436
9/24-9/27		Aviation Heritage Park Bowling Green, Kentucky	The Wall that Heals	Aviation Heritage Park, Inc.	
9/24		Panama City, FL	Resource Fair	Louie Davis	850-615-0091
9/24		Great Falls, MT	Resource Fair	Rodger McConnell	406-727-3939
9/24		Bemidji, MN	Resource Fair	Paul Pedersen	218-722-8763
9/25		Alexandria, LA	Resource Fair	Rena D. Powell, LCSW	318-473-0010 x-2773
9/25		Cherry Hill, NJ	Resource Fair	Patty Richter/Kimberly Wallace	609-530-6949

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS BENEFITS BACKLOG REACHES 905,000

Robert Mitchell - For The Saratogian - September 7, 2009

The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) backlog of pending claims and appeals was more than 905,000 as of July 18, according to VA statistics. That represents an increase of 15 percent from last year.

The VA's backlog includes more than 737,000 unprocessed claims, of which about 20 percent had been pending beyond 180 days. Approximately 173,000 appeals are awaiting a decision.

<More at: <http://www.saratogian.com/articles/2009/09/07/news/doc4aa46b3e996f0510612478.prt>

BACKLOGS GETTING INTO THE SYSTEM AND BACKLOGS IN THE SYSTEM

VETERANS WAIT ON GI CHECKS AFTER BACKLOG

Sep 06, 2009

LEE COUNTY: College has already started, but for many veterans tuition that should have been paid for by the government, is instead coming out of pocket.

The Veterans Affairs Office is assuring vets that GI checks will be delivered after a backlog issue.

The Post 9/11 GI bill promises to bring veterans who have fought on or after September 11, 2001 and have served at least 90 aggregate days on active duty or have been honorably discharged for a service-connected disability and served 30 continuous days after September 10, 2001.

That is, once those benefits are received.

Veteran Jim Davis has received money for his tuition at Florida Gulf Coast University, but as of September 6th he has not received money for his books or housing. Both of which were supposed to be paid for by September 1.

Davis has called the VA office ten times, e-mailed the office five times, and yet he has not received any answers.

"I think veterans deserve better than that, for all the sacrifices we've made." When Davis calls the V.A. to ask about money he should have received by September 1st to attend F.G.C.U.

He gets a response which says that it is temporarily taking longer than usual to process claims.

<More at: <http://www.nbc-2.com/global/story.asp?s=11084682>>

LOOKS LIKE "BACKLOG" IS DVA'S TERM FOR "PROGRESS"

VIETNAM VET HAVING PROBLEMS WITH VETERAN AFFAIRS OFFICE:

Aug 28, 2009 05:50 PM

CORPUS CHRISTI - A Vietnam veteran said doctors in Corpus Christi are refusing to see him because the Department of Veteran Affairs still owe them money.

"This is the first time that I've ever been denied treatment over the VA vouchers not being good. Not being acceptable because they're worthless pieces of paper," Vietnam veteran Tony Hartwell said.

... KRIS 6 News contacted the Veteran Affairs Department and a spokesperson for the Veteran Affairs Office said the number of fee authorizations has increased considerably and as a result have caused a delay in payments to a few local providers. He went on to say they "are working to correct the issue." <More at: <http://www.kristv.com/Global/story.asp?S=11011020&nav=Bsmh>>

ALARMING UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FOR IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS

September 9, 2009

Washington, D.C. –Congressman Steve Buyer has expressed dismay over a government report released last Friday that shows skyrocketing unemployment for recently discharged veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics study shows that unemployment for veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom has ballooned over the past twelve months to 11.3 percent, significantly higher than the overall unemployment rate of 9.7 percent. <More at: <http://republicans.veterans.house.gov/news/PRArticle.aspx?NewsID=1832>>

PROPOSAL TO EASE AID FOR G.I.'S WITH STRESS DISORDER

James Dao - August 26, 2009

Under fire from veterans groups and Congress for its handling of disability claims, the Department of Veterans Affairs is proposing new regulations it says will make it easier for veterans to seek compensation for post-traumatic stress disorder.

The proposal is intended to lower the burden on non-combat veterans who claim they developed PTSD in the service and to speed processing of those claims, which represent a significant portion of the 82,000 disability claims the department receives each month.

... Dennis Cullinan, national legislative director for Veterans of Foreign Wars, called the proposed change "a big plus" for veterans. He cited the example of a truck driver in Iraq who might have experienced repeated roadside bomb attacks but whose military record would not have shown combat duty.

... But some veterans' advocates responded skeptically to the proposed regulation, which now must undergo a 60-day review period.

"Whenever the V.A. touts a proposed compensation rule change that it says will 'make it easier for a Veteran to claim service connection,' red flags go up all over the place," a veterans' advocate, Larry Scott, wrote on his website, www.vawatchdog.org. <More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/26/us/26vets.html>>

HOW MANY MORE WILL DIE AS DoD AND CONGRESS PONDER THE PROBLEM?

DOD ESTABLISHES SUICIDE PREVENTION TASK FORCE

31 August 2009

The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs announced today the names of 14 members who will serve on the Department of Defense Task Force on the Prevention of Suicide by Members of the Armed Forces.

The congressionally directed task force will address trends and causal factors, methods to update prevention and education programs, suicide assessment by occupation, suicide incident investigations, and protective measures for confidential information derived from investigations for the department.

... The task force will present their findings and recommendations to the secretary of defense within twelve months. Following review by the secretary, the task force's report and recommendations will be sent to Congress.

<More at: <http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=12941>

VA SUICIDE-PREVENTION PROGRAM ADDS CHAT SERVICE

VA Public Affairs - Sep 2, 2009

WASHINGTON (Aug. 31, 2009) -- The suicide-prevention campaign of the Department of Veterans Affairs is expanding its outreach to all veterans by piloting an online, one-to-one "chat service" for veterans who prefer reaching out for assistance using the Internet.

Called "Veterans Chat," the new service enables veterans, their families and friends to go online where they can anonymously chat with a trained VA counselor. If a "chatter" is determined to be in a crisis, the counselor can take immediate steps to transfer the person to the VA Suicide Prevention hot line, where further counseling and referral services are provided and crisis intervention steps can be taken. <More at: <http://www.army.mil/news/2009/09/02/26873-va-suicide-prevention-program-adds-chat-service/>>

NO RETIREE COLA

Tom Philpott - August 27, 2009

It was higher oil prices last year that led to the largest annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to federal entitlements since 1982. Good thing, too.

Lowered oil prices since then is almost certain to block any COLA this year for military retirees, federal civilian retirees, social security recipients, survivor benefit annuitants or disabled veterans.

The expected COLA "goose egg" will be the first since Congress began to adjust federal entitlements automatically using inflation rates as tracked by Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). This year the cost of goods and services nationwide has fallen. No inflation means no COLA. What happened? <More at: <http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,199178,00.html>>

WIDOWS' SBP WIN UPHELD –

Tom Philpott - August 27, 2009

A federal appeals court has upheld a lower court's ruling that the Defense Department unlawfully withheld from three military widows -- and probably 400 others -- full survivor benefit payments owed to them since Dec. 16, 2003.

On that date, the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 [Public Law 108-183] became law and restored eligibility for VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) to military surviving spouses who remarry after age 57.

But three widows argued successfully before the U.S. Court of Federal Claims, and now before a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, that the 2003 law did something more:

It exempted this same small group of widows from the onerous dollar-for-dollar reduction in military Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) payments that occurs when a survivor spouse chooses to receive DIC.

<More at: <http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,199178,00.html>>

MARINE HURT BY VACCINE DENIED INJURY BENEFITS

David Goldstein - McClatchy Newspapers - September 3, 2009

WASHINGTON — It wasn't a bullet or roadside bomb that felled Lance Cpl. Josef Lopez three years ago after nine days in Iraq.

It was an injection to his arm before his unit left the United States.

Lopez, then 20, suffered a rare adverse reaction to the smallpox vaccine. While the vaccine isn't mandatory, the military strongly encourages troops to take it. The reaction left Lopez, a Marine from Springfield, Mo., in a coma, unable for a time to breathe on his own and paralyzed for weeks.

Now he can walk, but with a limp. He has to wear a urine bag, has short-term memory loss and must swallow 15 pills daily to control leg spasms and other ailments.

Even though his medical problems wouldn't have occurred if he hadn't been deployed, Lopez doesn't qualify for a special government benefit of up to \$100,000 for troops who suffer traumatic injuries.

The problem? His injuries were caused by the vaccine.

"I could have easily died or not been able to walk because of that," Lopez said. "It destroyed my world. It was pretty traumatic to me."

Officials at the Department of Veterans Affairs, which oversees the benefit program, said they're following what the agency has determined to be Congress' intent. <More at: http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/nationworld/2009796155_vetsmallpox03.html>

NEW BATTLE ERUPTS OVER FUNCTION OF DISABILITY BOARD

Tom Philpott - Special to Stars and Stripes Pacific edition - September 12, 2009

In 2006, the Army gave Iraq war veteran Sgt. Luis Jardon a 10 percent disability rating for chronic left wrist pain and cubital tunnel syndrome of his left elbow. He was found physically unfit and separated with disability severance pay of \$25,495.

Before his discharge, Jardon had presented other complaints to his Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) including hearing loss, difficulty sleeping and diagnoses of anxiety and adjustment disorders. Some were not forwarded to his Physical Evaluation Board (PEB) and some were dismissed by the PEB as irrelevant to a decision regarding fitness to remain in service.

Since his discharge, Jardon has been rated 20 percent, 40 percent and most recently 60 percent disabled by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA found not only carpal tunnel and cubital tunnel syndrome in both lower arms but hearing loss, tinnitus and post-traumatic stress disorder.

An Army rating of 30 percent or more would have qualified Jardon for disability retirement. He would have received a lifetime military annuity, rather than severance pay, and Tricare benefits for himself and his family.

<More at: <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=64706>>

CAMP LEJEUNE RESIDENTS BLAME RARE CANCER CLUSTER ON THE WATER

David Zucchini - Reporting from Tallahassee, Fla.- August 26, 2009

For three decades, dry-cleaning chemicals and industrial solvents laced the water used by local Marines and their families. Mike Partain and at least 19 others developed male breast cancer.

One night in April 2007, as Mike Partain hugged his wife before going to bed, she felt a small lump above his right nipple. A mammogram -- a "man-o-gram," he called it -- led to a diagnosis of male breast cancer. Six days later, the 41-year-old insurance adjuster had a mastectomy.

Partain had no idea men could get breast cancer. But he thinks he knows what caused his: contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune, N.C., where he was born. Over the last two years, Partain has compiled a list of 19 others diagnosed with male breast cancer who once lived on the base.

For three decades -- from the 1950s to the mid-1980s -- the water supply used by hundreds of thousands of Marines and their families was laced with chemicals from an off-base dry-cleaning company and industrial solvents used to clean military equipment.

A 1974 base order required safe disposal of solvents and warned that improper handling could cause drinking water contamination. Yet solvents were dumped or buried near base wells for years.

<More at: latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-military-cancer26-2009aug26.0.6943451.story>

VA CONTINUES GULF WAR RESEARCH, CANCELS CONTRACT WITH UTSW MEDICAL CENTER

August 26, 2009

WASHINGTON – Citing persistent noncompliance and numerous performance deficiencies, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will not exercise the third year of a five-year, \$75 million contract with the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center (UTSWMC) to perform research into Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses (GWVI).

"Research into the illnesses suffered by Gulf War Veterans remains a priority for VA," said Dr. Gerald M. Cross, VA's Acting Under Secretary for Health. "As part of our commitment to this vital effort, we must make certain that our resources are used to support effective and productive research." <More at: <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1753>>

GULF WAR SYNDROME RESEARCHERS BLAME SARIN GAS AND TOXIC EXPOSURES

Lourdes Salvador - August 26, 2009

Toomey and colleagues, researchers at the Boston Veterans Administration Healthcare System, confirmed that Gulf War deployment is associated with subtle declines of motor speed and sustained attention as influenced by exposure to toxicants during deployment. Toomey found that exposure to sarin gas released during the Khamisiyah destruction is correlated with long-term reduced motor speed in veterans that has not resolved after 10 years. Self-reported exposure to these toxicants is also significantly associated with attention deficits.

Ten years after the war, deployed veterans are still in poor health and perform significantly worse on cognitive tests than non-deployed veterans. Gulf War veterans complaints include:

- Poor cognition.
- Slowed motor function.
- Memory Loss
- Chronic Fatigue
- Skin Rash
- Hair Loss
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Gastrointestinal Disorders
- Cardiovascular Changes
- Chemical Sensitivity

<More at: <http://www.americanchronicle.com/articles/view/116167>>

VIETNAM'S DAMAGE, FOUR DECADES LATER

Michael Winerip - Springfield, Mass. - September 6, 2009

On Aug. 26, 1966, Philip Van Cott's Marine unit was ambushed in the jungles of Vietnam, a trip wire went off, a bomb exploded and shrapnel pierced a hole in his right hand. Mr. Van Cott, whose squad was in constant firefights during his five months in the jungle, was helicoptered to safety. He spent seven months in Japanese and American hospitals as the wound healed, completed his two-year tour in the States, then was honorably discharged.

In the years since, he has been married to the same woman, Karen, for nearly four decades, had two sons and a grandson, held several jobs, bought a home, owned a restaurant, spent 20 years with the post office and in 2006 at age 60, retired.

Nowadays, he paints in his studio several times a week, swims and lifts weights, attends 7:30 Mass on Sunday mornings, and travels with his wife. Every other Thursday, for the last 10 years, he has driven to the Veterans Administration Vet Center here where he gets therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder in connection with his Vietnam combat service.

He first went for help after threatening a supervisor at the post office, and nearly losing his job. "I had rages, and I was getting worse," he said. "I was constantly embarrassing my family, screaming and hollering at people."

He got into fistfights at Little League and high school football games. At night, asleep, he'd have nightmares, break into cold sweats, scream and flail at his wife. "It's been going on so long, now she hears me wind up and wakes me before I do it," he said.

When a V.A. psychiatrist diagnosed the disorder, Mr. Van Cott did not believe it — Vietnam was so long ago. They had him join a therapy group for Vietnam veterans. "I figured these guys were doing it to collect a disability check," he said. "It took two to three years before I started realizing what I was doing was crazy."

<More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/fashion/06generationb.html>>

MILITARY WIFE/MOTHER FIGHTS HER OWN SPECIAL BATTLE

Carolyn Davis - Inquirer Staff Writer - Aug. 25, 2009

With her husband in Iraq, Lisa Mathews fights an intense battle coordinating care for three children with serious medical needs.

Any day now, Lisa Mathews' husband will be on American soil after a yearlong tour of duty in Iraq.

When his week of deployment-ending activities at Fort Dix is over, Staff Sgt. Joseph Mathews II, an Army National Guardsman in the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, will walk through the front door of his Northeast Philadelphia rowhouse. He will be back into the daily, chaotic lives of his wife and children.

Only then, when the family is reunited, will Lisa be done with *her* contribution to the military - serving as the lone caretaker of their five children, three of whom have special needs. <More at: http://www.philly.com/philly/living/20090825_Special_struggles.html>

PROPOSED LEAVE RULE WOULD PROVIDE FOR WARRIOR CARE

Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs - Donna Miles - 08.27.2009

WASHINGTON - Defense Department federal employees could receive up to 26 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a military family member injured in the line of duty if an Office of Personnel Management proposal is adopted.

The proposal would allow eligible federal employees to take 26 "administrative work weeks" provided for under the Family and Medical Leave Act to care for a service member wounded in the line of duty, OPM officials explained during a telephone conference call. The provision would extend to families of National Guard members or reservists injured while on active duty, explained Jerry Mikowicz, OPM deputy associate director for pay and leave administration.

<More at: http://www.dvidshub.net/?script=news/news_show.php&id=38017>

AS IF THEY DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH PROBLEMS ALREADY

HOUSING MARKET CRISIS HITS HOME WITH SOLDIERS

Jennifer Clampet (USAG Wiesbaden) - Sep 9, 2009

WIESBADEN, Germany -- Military homeowners are facing tough financial decisions in the current housing market. In the last year three Soldiers have approached U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden Army Community Service financial counselors with questions about how to stay out of bankruptcy in association with their homes back in the United States.

"They can't sell their homes. They can't rent their homes," said ACS financial counselor Mark Daybell referring to the depressed housing markets that some Soldiers have encountered during their permanent change of station moves.

<More at: <http://www.army.mil/news/2009/09/09/27089-housing-market-crisis-hits-home-with-soldiers/>>

SOME TRICARE PREVENTIVE SERVICES ARE NOW FREE

Karen Jowers - Staff writer - Sep 3, 2009

As of Tuesday, certain Tricare beneficiaries no longer have to pay out of pocket for immunizations, mammograms and some other preventive services.

However, the benefit does not apply to all preventive services or to Medicare-eligible beneficiaries.

Also as of Tuesday, beneficiaries can request reimbursement for any of these covered preventive services that they have paid for since Oct. 14. The benefit is retroactive to that date, when it was signed into law.

<More at: http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2009/09/military_tricare_preventive_services_090109w/>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE MONDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 2009

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,367 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,343
WOUNDED US [9/5/09]	31,494
OTHER US CASUALTIES [9/5/09]	≥38,593
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [8/1/09]	191
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED UK	179
KILLED OTHER COALITION	139
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/25/09]	≥ 48,874
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [8/24/09]	≥ 101,388 – 1,339,771
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [11/9/08]	≥ 400K – 1.374M
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,896 DAYS)

KILLED US	822
WOUNDED US [9/5/09]	3,896
OTHER CASUALTIES US [9/5/09]	8,535
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [8/1/09]	33
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED COALITION	553
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION [12/2/07]	1,602
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY [7/4/09]	≥ 11,152
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS [7/4/2009]	≥ 7,589
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS [2/24/2009]	46,322
AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$681,467,542,876
COST OF AFGHAN WAR TO DATE	\$226,497,103,936

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

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

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

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

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF SEPTEMBER 8, 2009

This week the Navy and Coast Guard announced an increase in activated reservists, while the Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps announced a decrease. The net collective result is 271 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 111,710; Navy Reserve, 6,528; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 15,740; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,676; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 646. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 143,300, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated may be found at

<http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep2009/d20090908ngr.pdf>

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

I GUESS THESE “PROFESSIONALS” DON’T HAVE INNOVATION IN THEIR REGULAR JOB DESCRIPTIONS. THEY HAVE TO HAVE EXTRA INCENTIVES TO THINK ABOUT HOW TO DO THEIR JOB BETTER

“INNOVATION COMPETITION” BEGINS AT VETERANS AFFAIRS

September 10, 2009

WASHINGTON – To speed its transformation into a 21st Century organization that is Veteran-centric, results-oriented and forward-looking, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched one of the largest innovation competitions in the agency’s history. The competition solicits ideas from VA employees and co-located Veterans Service Organizations who are on the front lines of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and encourages them to submit entries addressing everything from claims processing times to better process transparency.

“The men and women of VA know that many Veterans are often asked to wait too long for the critical services they have earned while defending our Nation,” Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said. “These employees who grapple with the claims process every day have the first hand knowledge and experience necessary to help us understand inefficiencies and improve the system. We are confident that our team will come forward with many creative and original ways to accelerate processes and better deliver services for our nation’s Veterans.”

The on-line proposal period began on Tuesday, Sept, 8, and will conclude after Veterans Day. Employees from the agency’s 57 regional offices have been encouraged by the Secretary to submit entries via a secure online platform. At the close of the competition, VA administrators from each regional office will select the winning ideas, which will be reviewed by a team chaired by Patrick W. Dunne, the VA Under Secretary for Benefits. The final selections will receive full funding for project development and execution at the Regional Offices submitting the idea.

President Obama announced the innovation competition while speaking to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in August. “We’re going to fund the best ideas and put them into action, all with a simple mission: cut those backlogs, slash those wait times, deliver your benefits sooner,” said Obama.

VA and the White House will share the winning entries with the public after selection.

<http://www.vawatchdog.org/09/vap09/vap091009-2.htm>

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

A NEW SELF-HELP/MUTUAL HELP WEBSITE

MDJunction is a Social Network that serves as a meeting place for people with health challenges, a comfort zone to help and get help. They now have a PTSD support group. <http://www.mdjunction.com/post-traumatic-stress>

VETERANS SUFFERING FROM PTSD CAN VISIT VIRTUAL CHICOMA ISLAND FOR HELP

Bob Brewin - 09/01/09

[View slideshow of veteran visiting Chicoma Lodge in Second Life.](#)

Combat veterans rarely talk about their most searing hidden emotions and thoughts caused by their experiences in battle, a reticence that can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Institute for Creative Technologies at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles is near completing [Coming Home](#), a virtual world in Second Life that its creators hope will help break down the barriers to PTSD treatment, said Jacquelyn Morie, a project leader at ICT.

The institute developed a virtual world that features immersive therapy, which mental health professionals can use to treat Iraq combat veterans suffering from PTSD called [Virtual Iraq](#). The site includes a virtual Iraqi village that veterans can walk through. ICT initially planned to use the village in Second Life, but in a recent [paper](#) that Morie wrote, a veteran told her that he found the Iraqi village "disturbingly realistic, and he did not believe that any veteran should be allowed to explore the village without a therapist at his side."

<More at: http://www.nextgov.com/nextgov/hq_20090901_9444.php>

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

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