

# SOUND OFF!



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THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

*“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”*

10 OCTOBER 2007

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

### WORDS ARE PRECIOUS ~ SOME ARE WORTH DEFENDING

Words keep losing their meaning.

One of my grandmother's favorite descriptors was "gay". By that she meant someone, male or female, who was happy and carefree, light-hearted and friendly. I do not begrudge the GLBT community the use of the word, but I do miss, just a little, my grandmother's felicitous use of the word also.

"Hero" was a word, used universally, and somewhat in awe, to describe valorous action, so remarkably beyond normal human character as to be elevated and admired. I do begrudge the loose application of such a wonderful word to just anyone in uniform.

"Freedom" meant not license, but individual sovereignty in all thought and in all actions except where societal sovereignty superseded, and that only when agreed to in common understanding. I hate the use of "freedom" to mean subordination of others to my country's world view.

"Intelligence" used to mean the unbiased product of the processing of the best information available, coupled with the best understanding of the total environment and the specific problem. It did not mean finding information that proves someone's point.

"Truth" meant simply both "not false" and "complete", as in "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth". Truth did not mean "my extremely heartfelt and/or faith-inspired opinion".

Faced with these and other important words that have slipped away from us, along with their attendant concepts, I want to defend one word in particular, that holds such importance for serving military and veterans. That word is "trust".

Trust is what holds military service together, and it is not a simple concept.

Civilians often cite "camaraderie" as a defining characteristic of those groups of usually underpaid public servants who band together and swear an oath of public duty such as soldiers, firemen, and police. But that is a weak concept for the glue that binds them together. Football teams have camaraderie as do social clubs and others. Camaraderie isn't deep enough a concept to fully embody trust.

"Friendship" is a wonderful concept but it is insufficient to describe soldiers' feeling of trust for each other. They can trust each other without even truly being friends.

Trust is both broad and deep. Trust involves an extraordinary level of confidence that those above you, next to you, and below you will keep foremost in their minds the safety and well-being of the group, which means your safety too.

Trust is an expectation that your superiors will do everything possible to train you well, to equip you with the best that is available, and will never send you into an impossible situation; not because they might fail, but because you might be harmed without reason.

Trust is a belief that when the going gets tough, everyone around you will strive with you to get through it. Trust is a conviction that if the going gets impossible, your leaders will reinforce you to a level where the mission is achievable, or will honestly, and without fear for their personal reputation, declare the situation untenable and will pull you out, perhaps to fight another day.

Trust is a reliance, not on some "system", but on the real people around you every day. In battle that focuses mostly on the people in your fire team, your platoon, your company. It is this trust that lets soldiers obey orders that they might not always understand completely.

Most of all, soldiers have to trust that they will be sent into danger only if it is absolutely necessary. They trust that their leaders will make every effort short of war to avoid war, and that when war comes, they trust that it is truly the only choice. If they come to think otherwise, trust starts to crumble.

Both before and after the battle that reliance expands broadly to include not just your boss's bosses, but everyone responsible including the nation as a whole. After the battle, soldiers who have depended only on the guys close around them transfer that dependence to you and me.

Soldiers trust that the nation and its leaders will prepare them, will share completely in their sacrifice, and will provide whatever it takes to make them whole upon their return to society.

We don't send them enough help, or equip them with the best equipment, then let contracts to commercial firms to put others next to them who are paid a great deal more, get better treatment, get the best of weapons, and who never have to make a moral decision. If soldiers fail we court martial them, fine them, imprison them, and disgrace them for life. If the mercenaries we send in place of real

reinforcements commit the same or worse crimes, we spirit them out of the battle zone – no fault, no foul – and give them a bonus to boot. The inequity causes trust to tremble.

They know that their buddies will never leave them on the battlefield, but they have to trust that we will not leave them on the post-conflict, everyday battlefield. Unfortunately, that is what is happening, and trust is getting very shaky.

If they are hurt in body we patch them up and try to get them back into the battle. If they can't get back in we try to cover up their wounds, hiding them in substandard conditions in out of the way places. We don't even count them as wounded if we can find a way around it. Trust fragments.

If they are killed, we hide them from their nation, and dishonor their families by refusing them the public honors they deserve. Trust disintegrates further.

If they are hurt in mind we try to ignore it; if we can't ignore it we try to deny it; and if we can't do that, we blame them for it. We cut them off without benefits, claiming their deep wounds are the product of a

"preexisting condition", blaming their genetics or their upbringing. Trust shatters.

If they try to re-start their lives, we quibble with them over what they are owed in education and other benefits. We use technicalities to deny them what we have promised them, and excuse ourselves for what we characterize as their failure to prove their case.

When they seek help we tell them "get in line", and we make the line impossibly long. If we have managed to get them to agree with our diagnosis of a "preexisting condition" there is no place in line for them at all. Trust is gone forever.

We have not yet completely lost the meaning of the word "trust".

If you want to know, ask a soldier – but ask him or her very soon.

True trust may not last much longer. [Ed.]

"For it is mutual trust, even more than mutual interest that holds human associations together. Our friends seldom profit us but they make us feel safe."

H. L. Mencken (1880 - 1956)

## REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

### NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

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

### WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

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

### CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE!

Please check the website at [www.vuft.org](http://www.vuft.org). We have revised it and are regularly adding useful references.

### GETTING HELP TO THOSE WHO NEED IT

Many sites provide links to national organizations that help veterans. We believe that the best help comes at the local level. Sometimes this help comes from local chapters of national organizations, but more than likely it is from a group of local citizens, incorporated or loosely organized, who just plain want to help, and are willing to take the time and make the sacrifice to help out. These local organizations are hard to ferret out, but if you have them in your area, you know who they are.

Help us to start cataloging these local and regional groups across the nation. If you know of a group, or are the member of such a group, let us know and we will enter your group into our registry. The registry is open only to groups or agencies who will help veterans and their families without profit. If there are charges, let us know that also so that we can make your entry in the registry complete. The registry will be available to all who access our website.

## ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

**THE FIGHT IS ON!** The [law suit](#) that we have filed along with Veterans for Common Sense against the Veterans' Administration proceeds slowly. There is a [new Q & A on the lawsuit](#) on our website.

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

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

**WE 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 expect to incur expenses in support of the case, to include travel expenses should we need to testify. 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.

**WE HAVE A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY!**

**A MEMBER HAS OFFERED TO MATCH YOUR DONATION, DOLLAR- FOR-DOLLAR, UP TO \$1,000, BETWEEN NOW AND THANKSGIVING.**

**IT'S TIME TO PITCH IN!**

#### **MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS**

While NPR and the New York Times have suddenly become aware of Blackwater, I wrote from Afghanistan with my views (disdain, disgust, concern) nearly two years ago. In spite of the war in Iraq, I believe the unforeseen and enduring legacy of Donald Rumsfeld and George Bush will be the outsourcing of sovereignty to companies who are unaccountable to anyone. At our peril.

These companies, and their employees are accountable to no one. They fight, stand, run or kill for a company, but take the king's gold.

Though the Mercs live to fight another day, the people they recklessly injured and threatened know who they work for. However, their actions create greater risk for those who truly represent the sovereign, who are representatives of the people of the United States of America (our service members) and ultimately to "we the people."

The families of the dead will long remember it was America (the nation), not Blackwater (the company) that recklessly, gleefully and wantonly killed their children. The fathers and brothers of the family may not stand with the insurgents or stand with the Taliban, but they will certainly stand by and watch.

To exact a small measure of revenge for the harm perpetrated by the Mercenaries.

How much blood and treasure has been spent purely to mitigate damage caused by Blackwater? Purely to stem an erosion of our national efforts. Resources that could have improved our position, as opposed to slowing an erosion.

In my tour in Afghanistan, I was never in as much peril as I was in the company of the mercenaries hired by the DoS and other USG agencies. I never once worried about the judgment skills of my fellow soldiers. The Mercs felt they were above the law and the rules on base camps did not apply to them. But it was not a feeling, it was a reality.

While I was required to clear my weapon to enter camps, the Mercs cavalierly walked around - locked, loaded, weapon off safe. Further, they had little concern when placing soldiers in danger outside the camps. This little fact impressed on me when our vehicle was left in the dust by Department of State Mercs after our mixed convoy was ambushed in Wardak.

These hired guns are merely a method to employ people who were once trained and paid by the various government agencies, there is no net gain in people.

All that has happened is a different pot of money is used, creating the illusion of a lighter military footprint. Further I have yet to meet one soldier with a positive opinion of the Mercenaries our present conflicts have come to depend on. Adding to my dismay - this morning NPR reported on Blackwater's work for FEMA in New Orleans after Katrina. Again, with no accountability to the American people.

Why should we care? Why this wicked legacy as opposed to some other? Substituting mercenaries for citizens is ultimately what brought down Rome. The British suffered their greatest defeat in part because of over reliance on Hessian Mercs in the American Revolution.

We must not stand by and wait our turn.

JH – Active Duty Officer

## **RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS**

### **H.R. 327: JOSHUA OMOVIG VETERANS SUICIDE PREVENTION ACT**

To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a comprehensive program designed to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans. 3/21/07 Passed the House 423-0, 10 not voting: 9/27/07 Passed the Senate by unanimous consent

### **MORE HELP FOR VETERAN-OWNED BUSINESSES**

Inc.com - September 26, 2007

Senate lawmakers on Tuesday approved provisions aimed at helping veterans and reservists keep their businesses afloat, during or after deployment. The provisions, passed unanimously as an amendment to the Defense Department authorization bill, will secure greater funding for the Small Business Administration's Office of Veteran Business Development, while allowing the agency to offer loans to veteran entrepreneurs without requiring collateral. <More at: [www.inc.com/news/briefs/200709/0926veterans.html](http://www.inc.com/news/briefs/200709/0926veterans.html)>

### **THE BUREAUCRATS STUCK IT TO THEM**

### **NATIONAL GUARD TROOPS DENIED BENEFITS AFTER LONGEST DEPLOYMENT OF WAR**

Rhonda Erskine - Online Content Producer - 10/3/2007

MINNEAPOLIS, MN (NBC) -- When they came home from Iraq, 2,600 members of the Minnesota National Guard had been deployed longer than any other ground combat unit. The tour lasted 22 months and had been extended as part of President Bush's surge.

1st Lt. Jon Anderson said he never expected to come home to this: A government refusing to pay education benefits he says he should have earned under the GI bill. "It's pretty much a slap in the face," Anderson said. "I think it was a scheme to save money, personally. I think it was a leadership failure by the senior Washington leadership... once again failing the soldiers."

Anderson's orders, and the orders of 1,161 other Minnesota guard members, were written for 729 days. Had they been written for 730 days, just one day more, the soldiers would receive those benefits to pay for school. "Which would be allowing the soldiers an extra \$500 to \$800 a month," Anderson said. <More at: [www.wcsh6.com/news/article.aspx?storyid=71741](http://www.wcsh6.com/news/article.aspx?storyid=71741)>

### **CONGRESS IS TRYING TO FIX IT – BUT IT HAS BEEN SENT TO THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND THAT IS OFTEN A BLACK HOLE**

### **H. R. 3741**

For the relief of certain members of the First Brigade Combat Team of the 34th Infantry Division of the Army National Guard.

### **HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS' COMMITTEE HEARING EXAMINES FUNDING THE VA OF THE FUTURE**

Kristal DeKleer - October 3, 2007

Washington, D.C. – Bob Filner (D-CA), Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, held a hearing on Wednesday to examine alternative options to the current funding process for veterans' health care at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Currently, the Veterans Health Administration is funded by discretionary spending, which is subject to annual Congressional determinations regarding funding levels.

"There is a widespread perception that the current manner in which we fund veterans' health care is broken, and must be fixed," said Chairman Filner. "We cannot debate VA funding in a vacuum – whether the VA is funded by discretionary dollars or by mandatory spending has long-term implications regarding our fiscal ability to fund veterans' health care in the future."

<More at: [www.vawatchdog.org/07/hcva07/hcva100307-2.htm](http://www.vawatchdog.org/07/hcva07/hcva100307-2.htm)>

### **BUT NOT EVERYONE IS ON BOARD**

### **BUYER OPPOSES MOVING VA HEALTH CARE TO MANDATORY FUNDING**

October 3, 2007

Washington, D.C. — The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing today examining the funding process for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care program. Ranking Member Steve Buyer (R-Ind.) expressed stern opposition to replacing the current discretionary process for funding VA health care with an untried mandatory funding program. Buyer's statement indicated that such a conversion would subject VA health care to the Pay-As-You-Go (PAYGO) offset rules and put it in

direct competition with Medicare and Medicaid. He also pointed out that mandatory funding for VA would create a new type of entitlement program, an entitlement program for a large federal department, rather than an individual.

<More at: [www.vawatchdog.org/07/hcva07/hcva100307-1.htm](http://www.vawatchdog.org/07/hcva07/hcva100307-1.htm)>

### **AKAKA COMMENTS ON VETERANS' DISABILITY BENEFITS COMMISSION REPORT**

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, the Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission, which was mandated by Congress, released an in-depth analysis of the benefits and services available to veterans, servicemembers, their survivors, and their families to compensate and provide assistance for the effects of disabilities and deaths attributable to military service.

U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, issued the following statement today:

"The Commission, relying on reports from outside experts and their own extended deliberations, has prepared a thoughtful, comprehensive report. On initial review, it is clear that they recommend some fundamental changes to VA's compensation program. Many of these changes may prove costly. However, as I have stated time and time again, caring for veterans must be viewed as a continuing cost of war. Our country's men and women deserve the best care and support possible from our government. In the days and weeks to come, the Commission's recommendations will be thoroughly analyzed by the Committee on Veterans' Affairs," stated Akaka.

< Executive Summary is on the VUFT website: [www.vuft.org/Reference%20Documents/documents/ExecutiveSummary\\_eV\\_9-27.pdf](http://www.vuft.org/Reference%20Documents/documents/ExecutiveSummary_eV_9-27.pdf)

The full report [562 pp] is available at: [www.vetscommission.org/pdf/eReport\\_prepub\\_9-27.pdf](http://www.vetscommission.org/pdf/eReport_prepub_9-27.pdf)>

### **MEJA EXPANSION AND ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 2007 ~ H.R.2740**

The House passed this bill to hold private security contractors accountable for criminal behavior. Vote - Passed (389-30, 13 Not Voting). On to the Senate.

## **RETREAT – NEWS**

### **HALF OF OVERSEAS BALLOTS NOT COUNTED**

Stars and Stripes - By Leo Shane III - September 25, 2007

WASHINGTON -- Overseas military voters had less than half of their votes counted in last year's congressional elections, according to data released by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission on Monday.

<More at: <http://stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=56561&archive=true>>

### **NEW MILITARY LEADERS QUESTION IRAQ MISSION**

Nancy A. Youssef and Renee Schoof - McClatchy Newspapers - October 4, 2007

WASHINGTON — Four and a half years after the nation's top military leaders saluted and fell in behind President Bush's pre-emptive invasion of Iraq, their replacements are beginning to question the mission and sound alarms about the toll the war is taking on the Army and the Marine Corps. The change at the Pentagon is striking but little-noticed, in part because Defense Secretary Robert Gates, a longtime veteran of the CIA, is quiet where his predecessor Donald H. Rumsfeld was not.

"It's part of a sea change," said Loren Thompson, a military analyst at the Lexington Institute, a national-security research center in Washington. "The ideologues have been replaced by managers who view Iraq not as a cause, but a problem to be solved."

<More at: [www.mcclatchydc.com/227/story/20227.html](http://www.mcclatchydc.com/227/story/20227.html)>

### **FIRST KUWAITI WAS TOO BUSY COUNTING THE \$1.6B IN THEIR TOTAL CONTRACTS (AS OF END 2004) TO KEEP TRACK OF THIS NEW LITTLE \$0.6B ONE**

### **EVEN SPRINKLER SYSTEMS FAIL AT U.S. EMBASSY IN BAGHDAD**

Warren P. Strobel - McClatchy Newspapers Oct. 06, 2007

WASHINGTON — The latest problem with the trouble-plagued new U.S. embassy complex in Iraq is that the sprinkler systems meant to contain a fire do not work, according to officials in Congress and the State Department. The previously undisclosed problem in the \$592 million project was discovered several weeks ago when the fire-safety systems were tested and pipe joints burst, State Department representatives recently informed Congress. The embassy complex, being built by First Kuwaiti General Trade and Contracting Co., has been marred by repeated problems. In May, when kitchen facilities at a guard camp that is part of the embassy complex were tested, the electrical system malfunctioned and wires melted. A subsequent inquiry showed that First Kuwaiti had used counterfeit electrical wiring that did not meet specifications, according to testimony at a congressional hearing in July. <More at: [www.mcclatchydc.com/homepage/story/20277.html](http://www.mcclatchydc.com/homepage/story/20277.html)>

## **DOD LAUNCHES PROBE INTO CONTRACTORS**

Associated Press - September 26, 2007

WASHINGTON - Unhappy with the Pentagon's oversight of its private contractors in Iraq, Defense Secretary Robert Gates has dispatched a fact-finding team to probe further into the problem, officials said Wednesday. The Pentagon also disclosed that for several months it has been developing additional guidance for American commanders and other senior defense officials on how the Uniform Code of Military Justice can be used to discipline contractors. Prior to October 2006 the code did not apply to contractors. <More at: [www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,150608,00.htm](http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,150608,00.htm)>

## **TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>What</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>Notes</u>
10/10		Grand Rapids, MI	Resource Fair	<a href="#">G. Luke Carter</a>	616-588-2200
10/11-14		Shore Acres Park, Chillicothe, IL	Wall that Heals	Vietnam Traveling Memorial Wall Project	
10/12-14		Nashville, TN	Stand Down	Bill Burleigh	615-321-3919
10/13		Pocatello, ID	Resource Fair	Melissa Hartman	208-236-7411
10/13		Redmond, OR	Resource Fair	Anne Philiben	541-318-5713
10/13		Albany, NY	Resource Fair	James Haggerty	518-744-3208
10/16-18		Anderson/Redding, CA	Stand Down	Kevin Marshall	530-225-2194
10/17		Warren, MI	Resource Fair	Norm Wilcox	248-808-0929
10/18-20		Bakersfield, CA	Stand Down	Chuck Bikakis	661-868-7303
10/18		Colorado Springs, CO	Resource Fair	Patricia Frank	719-667-3703
10/18	1100 - 1400	Omni San Antonio Hotel, 9821 Colonnade Blvd, San Antonio, TX	Career Fair		210-691-8888
10/18 - 10/21		South Sioux City Dible Soccer Complex South Sioux City, NB	Wall that Heals	South Sioux City Convention & Visitors Bureau	
10/26		El Paso, TX	Resource Fair	Camille Castillo	915-843-2158
10/26		Lake City, FL	Resource Fair	Thomas Allen	386-755-9026 x3122
10/26		St. Cloud, MN	Resource Fair	Lori Helget	320-656-6101

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

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

## **TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES**

### **SCARS OF WAR RUN DEEP FOR MANY FEMALE VETS**

Gloria Hillard - All Things Considered - October 4, 2007

Female soldiers have been returning from Iraq with not only combat-related trauma, but also with deep emotional wounds known as military sexual trauma. A 2003 survey of women using the Veterans Administration health care system reports that 28 percent experienced at least one sexual assault during military service. And that sexual trauma, combined with combat trauma, makes women far more vulnerable to post-traumatic stress disorder.

At a VA residential program in Menlo Park, Calif., many women have experienced what psychologists call the "double whammy" of combat trauma and sexual assault. ... Dr. Darrah Westrup, director of the Menlo Park program, said that military sexual trauma contributes to the severity of PTSD symptoms, which range from feelings of extreme isolation and self-blame to thoughts of suicide. <More at: [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14921214](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14921214)>

### **AND FOR A RELATED FIVE-PART SERIES ON WOMEN IN COMBAT:**

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14964676>

## **UNDER VA CHIEF, EFFORT TO AID WOUNDED VETS STALLED, EX-EMPLOYEE CHARGES**

Brian Ross and Justin Rood Report:

A proposal to keep seriously wounded vets from falling through the cracks of the bureaucracy was shelved in 2005 when Jim Nicholson took over as the secretary of the Veterans Affairs Department, according to the former VA employee who was responsible for tracking war casualties. As a result, seriously wounded veterans continued to face long delays for health care and benefit payments after being discharged from the military, says former VA project manager Paul Sullivan. The program, called the Contingency Tracking System, had been approved by Nicholson's predecessor but died once Nicholson took over the VA, Sullivan told ABC News. Sullivan said he was told the cost of the system -- less than \$1 million to build and requiring a handful of staff to maintain -- was prohibitive. <More at: [http://blogs.abcnews.com/theblotter/2007/03/under\\_va\\_chief\\_.html](http://blogs.abcnews.com/theblotter/2007/03/under_va_chief_.html)>

## **VETERANS SEE TWO-TIERED HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

Chris Roberts - El Paso Times - 10/06/2007

An internal directive from a high-ranking Veterans Affairs official creates a two-tiered system of veterans health care, putting veterans of the global war on terror at the top and making everyone else -- from World War I to the first Gulf War -- "second-class veterans," according to some veterans advocates.

"I think they're ever pushing us to the side," said former Marine Ron Holmes, an El Paso resident who founded Veterans Advocates. "We are still in need. We still have our problems, and our cases are being handled more slowly."

Vice Admiral Daniel L. Cooper, undersecretary for benefits in the Department of Veterans Affairs -- in a memo obtained by the El Paso Times -- instructs the agency's employees to put Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans at the head of the line when processing claims for medical treatment, vocational rehabilitation, employment and education benefits.

<More at: [www.elpasotimes.com/newupdated/ci\\_7105466](http://www.elpasotimes.com/newupdated/ci_7105466)>

## **EXTENDING TOURS, STRESSING TROOPS**

Sarah Olson - August 29, 2007

Despite a growing body of medical research, the Pentagon is extending tours of duty to their longest levels since World War II, precipitating the first time in history that active-duty soldiers will spend more time in combat than at home

<More at: [www.inthesetimes.com/article/3295/extending\\_tours\\_stressing\\_troops/](http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/3295/extending_tours_stressing_troops/)>

## **THE REAL STORY MAY BE THAT THE ARMY'S ANNUAL RECRUITING GOAL - 80,000/YEAR - HAS NOT CHANGED MUCH SINCE 1997, DESPITE CONDUCTING MULTIPLE WARS, AND THEY STILL STRUGGLE TO MEET IT**

### **RECRUITING GETS TOUGHER FOR ARMY DURING WARTIME**

Dave Montgomery - McClatchy Newspapers - October 4, 2007

"We've been able to meet our goal, but it's a challenge," Army Secretary Pete Geren said in an interview after the ceremony.

<More at: [www.mcclatchydc.com/226/story/20241.html](http://www.mcclatchydc.com/226/story/20241.html)>

### **MANY SOLDIERS GET BOOT FOR 'PRE-EXISTING' MENTAL ILLNESS**

Philip Dine - Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau - 09/30/2007

WASHINGTON — Thousands of U.S. soldiers in Iraq — as many as 10 a day — are being discharged by the military for mental health reasons. But the Pentagon isn't blaming the war. It says the soldiers had "pre-existing" conditions that disqualify them for treatment by the government.

Many soldiers and Marines being discharged on this basis actually suffer from combat-related problems, experts say. But by classifying them as having a condition unrelated to the war, the Defense Department is able to quickly get rid of troops having trouble doing their work while also saving the expense of caring for them. The result appears to be that many actually suffering from combat-related problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injuries don't get the help they need.

<More at: [www.stltoday.com/stltoday/news/stories.nsf/washington/story/B8F5491DEDE1CF2C8625736500190F67?OpenDocument](http://www.stltoday.com/stltoday/news/stories.nsf/washington/story/B8F5491DEDE1CF2C8625736500190F67?OpenDocument)>

### **RESERVE-COMPONENT FAMILIES FACE UNIVERSAL CHALLENGES**

Capt. Steve Alvarez, USA - Special to American Forces Press Service - 2007-09-22

Problems facing reserve-component servicemembers are universal, regardless of which country they come from, international officials here this week learned. Representatives from the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand here to

discuss reserve personnel issues all agreed that the biggest challenges facing reserve-component family programs are communication and overcoming the stigma of receiving support.

... "Getting (reservists and their families) to admit they need help and then plugging them into the help is the challenge," British Brigadier Greg Smith, deputy inspector general for the territorial army of the United Kingdom, told the panel. Spouses who may need support from family programs sometimes incorrectly assume that receiving assistance will hurt their spouse's military career. But beyond that the majority of reserve families do not live on military installations and aren't traditional Army families, Smith added.

"Where they are living, these neighbors aren't having these types of problems," Brig. Gen. David N. Blackledge, commander of the U.S. Army Reserve's 352nd Civil Affairs Command, said.

Not only are Army Reserve families isolated in the uniqueness of their problems in their communities, but they also feel disconnected from the Army, Paula Savage, director of Army Reserve family programs, said.

<More at: [www.emilitary.org/article.php?aid=12231](http://www.emilitary.org/article.php?aid=12231)>

### **ARMY TO URGE MORE TIME AT HOME FOR SOLDIERS**

Ann Scott Tyson - Washington Post Staff Writer - September 26, 2007; Page A15

Army Chief of Staff George W. Casey Jr., who is scheduled to testify today before the House Armed Services Committee, intends to move as quickly as possible to grant soldiers more relief from the war zone, having argued that the troop rotations of 15 months in combat and 12 months at home -- required by the buildup of U.S. forces in Iraq and the conflict in Afghanistan -- are "not sustainable" for the Army. <More at: [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/25/AR2007092502139.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/25/AR2007092502139.html)>

### **SCIENTISTS: BRAIN INJURIES FROM WAR WORSE THAN THOUGHT**

Gregg Zoroya, USA TODAY -- September 27, 2007

Scientists trying to understand traumatic brain injury from bomb blasts are finding the wound more insidious than they once thought. They find that even when there are no outward signs of injury from the blast, cells deep within the brain can be altered, their metabolism changed, causing them to die, says Geoff Ling, an advance-research scientist with the Pentagon.

<More at: [www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2007-09-23-traumatic-brain-injuries\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2007-09-23-traumatic-brain-injuries_N.htm)>

### **EMPLOYER-PAID TRICARE PLANS TO END**

Tom Philpott - September 28, 2007

Phil Peterson, a retired Navy chief petty officer working for a major defense contractor in Greenville, S.C., got word last week that his company's TRICARE supplemental insurance plan, which covers all costs not picked up by Peterson's TRICARE Standard benefit, must end by Jan. 1. Peterson is among tens of thousands of working retirees who will see their health costs rise from a law Congress enacted last year that prohibits companies as well as state and local governments from offering health plans or other incentives to encourage military retirees who work for them to drop employer-provided health plans and use their TRICARE benefits instead. <More at: [www.fra.org/AM/template.cfm?ContentID=5448&template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm](http://www.fra.org/AM/template.cfm?ContentID=5448&template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm)>

### **DOD REPORTS ON MENTAL HEALTH TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS**

September 25, 2007

DoD recently sent Congress a corrective action plan to improve mental health care for service members and their families. The plan addresses findings and recommendations presented to DoD by the Task Force on Mental Health in a June 12, 2007, report. The departments' action plan can be viewed on the health affairs Web site at [www.ha.osd.mil/asd/downloads/MHTF-Report-to-Congress.pdf](http://www.ha.osd.mil/asd/downloads/MHTF-Report-to-Congress.pdf).

### **WOUNDED VETS ALSO SUFFER FINANCIAL WOES**

Jeff Donn and Kimberly Hefling - Sep. 30, 2007

More than in past wars, many wounded troops are coming home alive from the Middle East. That's a triumph for military medicine. But they often return hobbled by prolonged physical and mental injuries from homemade bombs and the unremitting anxiety of fighting a hidden enemy along blurred battle lines. Treatment, recovery and retraining often can't be assured quickly or cheaply.

... The costs often fall on veterans and their families. Ted Wade, of Chapel Hill, N.C., can't drive or keep his memories straight since a bomb tore off an arm, hurt his foot, and wracked his brain in an attack on his Humvee in Iraq. He and his wife have had to lower their living standard and accept house payments from parents.

"I can't work because he can't be up here by himself," says his wife, Sarah. "It's my volunteer work, is what it really comes down to."

Yet federal officials say the cost of this wounded influx isn't hurting the quality of care promised to veterans. At a recent ribbon cutting, the Army's vice chief of staff, Gen. Richard Cody, trumpeted a new rehab center for amputees as "proof that when it comes to making good on such an important promise, there is no bottom line."

<More at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/30/AR2007093000200.html>>

### **VETERANS FACE TOUGH TRANSITION TO COLLEGE**

Bobby Caina Calvin - The Sacramento Bee - September 28, 2007

Cody Conway, a combat Marine in Iraq, envisioned a lifelong career in the military. If not, perhaps a return to civilian life as a mechanic.

Four years ago, the Roseville enlisted man returned from war unexpectedly, his life and future shattered by a noncombat accident outside Baghdad that tore the muscles and tendons from his right arm and shoulder.

... For Conway and thousands of other war veterans, life after Iraq and Afghanistan has meant looking for new vocations and learning new skills as they struggle to put their lives back in order.

By the thousands, they are filling college classrooms across the country -- but few campuses, veterans and their advocates say, are adequately prepared to respond to the surge.

... The college campus has become a new front line as veterans of the country's latest wars battle the bureaucracy at home to get the educational benefits they were promised from the military and confront what some perceive as stigmas of serving in an increasingly unpopular war. <More at: [www.sacbee.com/101/story/403546.html](http://www.sacbee.com/101/story/403546.html)>

### **TOUGH ROAD FOR GI BILL REFORM**

Military.com- Terry Howell - September 25, 2007

Soon after being sworn in, the 110th Congress brought a flurry of proposed GI Bill reforms to both houses of Congress. With a new party in charge and 24 GI Bill-related bills introduced on the floor, the political climate seemed right for real change. As Representative Rick Larsen (D-WA) said in a May press release, "Times have changed, and we owe it to our veterans to keep up."

... However, to date, none of proposed legislation has made it out of committee. It appears the initial spotlight on reform has dimmed and the calls for change have quieted. This lack of activity may indicate that 2007 will turn out to be just another year of missed opportunities.

... Each year members of Congress attempt to show their support for veterans by introducing new GI Bill legislation, but in the end these bills typically die in committee. <More at: [www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,150479,00.html?wh=benefit](http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,150479,00.html?wh=benefit)>

### **RESERVISTS GET NEW BREAK ON STUDENT LOANS**

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Oct 1, 2007

A college education bill signed Thursday by President Bush includes a provision to give mobilized reservists a break when it comes to repaying student loans.

The College Cost Reduction Act, which expands the federal Pell Grant program, includes legislation proposed by Rep. Susan Davis, D-Calif., that allows mobilized National Guard and Reserve members to defer repaying student loans for up to 13 months after they are released from active duty. <More at [www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2007/10/military\\_studentloans\\_reservists\\_071001w/](http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2007/10/military_studentloans_reservists_071001w/)>

### **1 IN 4 GULF WAR VETERANS STILL HAS SERIOUS ILLNESS, PANEL HEARS**

Les Blumenthal - McClatchy Newspapers - September 25, 2007

WASHINGTON — Sixteen years after the Persian Gulf War ended, more than 1 in 4 of those who fought remain seriously ill with medical problems ranging from severe fatigue and joint pain to Lou Gehrig's disease, multiple sclerosis and brain cancer, the chairman of a congressional advisory committee testified Tuesday.

But even as more is learned about what's now called Gulf War Veterans Illness, the Defense Department and the Department of Veterans Affairs remain in virtual denial about its causes and have been slow to offer treatment, said James Binns, the head of the research advisory committee on the disease. <More at: [www.mcclatchydc.com/congress/story/19965.html](http://www.mcclatchydc.com/congress/story/19965.html)>

## TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

### NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF OCTOBER 3, 2007

This week, the Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard announced a decrease, while the Marine Corps announced an increase. The net collective result is 3,996 fewer reservists mobilized than last week. At any given time, services may mobilize some units and individuals while demobilizing others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 70,758; Navy Reserve, 5,727; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 7,831; Marine Corps Reserve, 6,812; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 281. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been mobilized to 91,409, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel, who are currently mobilized, can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Oct2007/d20071003nqr.pdf>

### OIF/OEF – HACK DATE TUESDAY 9 OCTOBER 2007

#### OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	3,818
WOUNDED US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 8/31]	27,767
OTHER US CASUALTIES [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 8/31]	≥28,645
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [LAST DoD UPDATE 8/31]	122
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	4
KILLED UK	170
KILLED OTHER COALITION	131
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE 6/30]	1,001
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 47,419
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 81,556 [LANCET-1,083,070]
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400,000+ [LANCET- 1,414,723]
IRAQ REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL [ 9/15]	2.1M/2. 5M

#### OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US (10/9/2007)	445
*OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 12/2006]	5,862
KILLED COALITION (6/2007)	278
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2006)	1,472
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (7/2004)	32,034
AFGHAN REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE [9/24]	\$458,513,849,752

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

### "THE WAR"

Ken Burns has assembled an historical *tour de force* in his seven-part series on World War II. It is available from PBS at <http://www.shoppbs.org/product/index.jsp?productId=2784344>.

At the end of the seventh episode, veterans – now in their eighties – remind us of the profound change that happens to warriors, manifest even now, sixty-two years after coming home. This change is one that we must understand if we are to help those returning from today's and tomorrow's wars.

Beyond our own experience, we need to hear their words, and learn from them.

#### Quentin Anneson – fighter pilot

"There are casualties in war – they never show up as casualties. They are internal casualties.

We all changed. We went out as a bunch of kids – wars are fought by kids – and we came back. [We] looked maybe the same, but inside we were different.

They thought that we were just odd, I guess. 'What's happened to Quentin? What's wrong?'

And I was wondering, "Nobody knows. Nobody understands. And I am not good enough with words to be able to tell them."

Eugene Sledge - marine

[Sidney Phillips – marine, later a doctor, talks about Eugene, his closest friend] “[Eugene] could not throw off the war. He could not forget it. It seemed to haunt him.”] Eugene’s account:

“As I strolled the streets of Mobile, civilian life seemed so strange. People rushed around in a hurry about seemingly insignificant things. Few seemed to realize how blessed they were to be free and untouched by the horrors of war.

To them a veteran was a veteran. All were the same, whether one man had survived the deadliest combat, or another had pounded a typewriter while in uniform.”

Paul Fussel – infantryman – an advisor on the Burns project

“To forget the war would be not just impossible, it would be immoral. ... It’s something you - - - It never goes away so you just have to endure it the way you endured the war itself.

You can’t wipe out the memories. You can’t wipe out what you felt at that time or what other people felt. It’s part of your whole possession of life, and I suppose it does some good.”

Quentin Anneson again

“The dynamics of war are so absolutely intense. The drama of war is so absolutely emotionally spellbinding, that it is hard for you to go on with a normal life without feeling that something is missing.

Now, I have had a wonderful life. I have a family that is ideal and I have enjoyed my life, but I find that there are times when I am pulled back into the whirlpool. I find that the intensity of the experience is so overwhelming, and almost intimidating, that you can’t quite let go of it.”

## ADD-ON ~

### MAYBE THIS IS WHY THERE IS NO MONEY FOR THE TROOPS? GET REAL!

#### NAVY TO ALTER SWASTIKA-SHAPED BARRACKS

Associated Press | September 27, 2007

CORONADO, Calif. - The Navy will spend as much as \$600,000 to modify a 40-year-old barracks complex that resembles a swastika from the air, a gaffe that went largely unnoticed before satellite images became easily accessible on the Internet. <More at: [www.msnbc.msn.com/id/20996515/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/20996515/)>



### BUT THERE IS MONEY FOR SOME OF THEM - AND YOU THOUGHT THAT THAT \$1,200 REENLISTMENT BONUS YOU GOT BACK IN '68 WAS PRETTY HOT STUFF!

#### \$61,000 BONUSES FOR A FEW, GOOD MARINES

October 08, 2007

Counterintelligence is looking for a few good Marines. Career opportunities and bonuses up to \$61,000 are being offered to Marines who qualify and are accepted in the counterintelligence and human intelligence field.

<More at: [www.military.com/NL\\_MR/1,14852,5029,00.html](http://www.military.com/NL_MR/1,14852,5029,00.html)>

**And the Navy will do them one better** (unless it has to rebuild some building that’s shaped like a Wiccan pentacle)

The Navy is now offering bonuses amounts of up to \$90,000 for EOD technicians, certain nuclear ratings, and special warfare operators. Overall, 184 ratings and Naval Enlisted Classifications (NECs) saw increases in the reenlistment bonuses.

<More at: <http://usmilitary.about.com/od/navybonuses/a/reenlistbonus.htm>>

### I MUST NOT HAVE RECEIVED THE MEMO

When I signed up the only ribbon I had was the National Defense Service Medal. I spot at least ten and perhaps twelve ribbons subordinate to the NDSM on this chest. I haven’t seen this many ribbons since I served in Berlin and got to see the Soviet generals on their dress-up holidays. Are we giving service medals for regular attendance and good dental checkups now? [Ed]



## 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](mailto: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