

SOUND OFF!



VOL. V, NO 4

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

10 OCTOBER 2009

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

VETERANS NEED A TRIBAL COUNCIL

Throughout history – and indeed before recorded history – tribes got stuff done. Like people, related by family or faction, banded together and made things happen.

Today, even though we have reached an “advanced” stage of societal development, tribes still exist, or at least tribalism does, and it can be an effective force.

The most obvious confrontation that developed nations have with tribalism is occurring today in Iraq and Afghanistan. The long-standing tribalism of the family and clan units in those countries make up the “insurgent” forces arrayed against us.

Often these tribal organizations include religion as in the many bloody confrontations among Christians, Muslims, and Jews throughout history.

This form of tribalism manifested itself recently in the Christian Serbian tribe vs. the Muslim Kosovar tribe during the Kosovo conflict in 1998-99. The same tribal influence was present in the Bosnia-Herzegovina War of 1992-95.

Religion also infuses the current tribal battles over land and rights as in the 61 year-old tribal battle between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Tribal organizations are also found within the same religion as in the many flavors of Shia vs. Sunni conflicts. They are found in Christianity as in the long-standing tribal wars between Catholics and Protestants, or Catholics and the Orthodox.

Even within the major denominational divisions there have been the mainstream Protestant tribes vs. the Quakers here in America, for example, and Polish Catholics vs. Ukrainian Catholics.

Tribal organizations even arise within developed societies in their simplest form as in secret societies and even in sports fan clubs.

The one thing that all of these tribes have in common is a strong sense of “Us” and “Them”. “Us” is always good and right and honorable and worthy of praise, while “Them” is always something less – often very much less.

Not everything about tribes and tribalism is negative, however.

As David Ronfeldt says in his interesting [study](#) on tribes for the Rand Corporation, “Tribal life can foster a vibrant sense of social solidarity. It fills people with pride and self-respect. It motivates [groups] to protect, welcome and care for each other ... [and] creates trust and loyalty in which one knows (and must uphold) one’s rights, duties and obligations.”

Sounds a bit like us when we were serving together, doesn’t it?

Ronfeldt goes on to say, “What maintains order in a tribe is not hierarchy and law ... but kinship principles stressing mutual respect, dignity, pride, and honor. “ And, “... an insult to one is seen as an insult to everyone in that lineage. And there are only two ways to restore honor: compensation or revenge.”

Let’s rule out revenge and focus on compensation for an insult.

First of all we must ask (and answer) the question, “Have veterans been insulted?” I think that the answer is a resounding, “Yes!”

If a good definition of “**insult**” is, “*to treat with gross insensitivity, insolence, or contemptuous rudeness,*” then I think that describes accurately how the VA has treated hundreds of thousands of claimants.

How else do we account for nearly a million unanswered claims, and all of the carelessness and callousness in handling those claims.

If another good definition is, “*to affront or demean,*” then the military’s free use of “preexisting condition” to avoid treating or paying thousands for PTSD fits well. The affront to their person and the demeaning of their service can only be called an **insult.**

We know that such insults have occurred because many of us have suffered them. What we lack is the tribal support of and for our fellow veterans to right this wrong – to avenge the insult through full and timely compensation. It’s time that this tribe declared itself.

These tribal definitions affect and include all of us. Each of us belongs to several tribes already – national, political, religious, social, academic, intellectual, sports, hobby, etc. We act like tribe members in each of those arrangements, supporting the cause or the belief, supporting our fellow members, and opposing those who would oppose us.

What we don’t yet belong to is a veterans tribe. We don’t belong because the tribe never comes together.

There are 24 million veterans, and according to Guidestar, the organization that gathers and publicizes information about nonprofit organizations, there are 56,437 veterans charities in the United States. If we all belonged to or supported at least one of them, that would mean an average of 425 veterans per organization.

But we don’t all belong, do we? And those organizations that some of us belong to certainly don’t coordinate with each other – ever.

So we end up with noise instead of a coherent message. We end up competing with each other for membership and contributions, and we never get much done at all.

What we often fail to recognize is that this division among us serves the ruling class well, by which term I mean the legislators in Washington and the states. Because we can never come together as a bloc – a tribe – we don’t have to be attended to.

The banker tribe gets rich because they fight for each other. The insurance companies and the oil companies get rich because they are united in their arguments and their purpose.

Our little personal organization (our clan in tribal language) becomes the most important issue at hand for us – its preservation, its growth, its money, even its

liquor license. None of that advances our tribal cause. This concentration on our own organization(s) allows us to forget the fundamental tribal rule.

It’s the whole tribe that counts – every member!

We tacitly recognize the existence of the whole tribe because we use it to justify our organizations’ existence. “We are here to help veterans. “We donate to veterans.” “We help the serving military by sending them packages.” “We help veterans file claims.” “We help military and veterans families.”

Those veterans and serving military we talk about in justifying our existence are our tribal brothers and sisters, but once we settle into our little organizations, we forget about most of them except for those who are members of our own clan.

If you look at the websites of most veterans organizations, or read their newsletters, they talk mostly about their organization, its chapters, its events, and its membership. You find precious little talk about getting something done for all veterans.

The 51 Congressionally chartered Veterans’ Service Organizations (VSOs) are called to Congress to testify, but when they show up they spend their precious time giving patriotic speeches and bussing the derrires of the legislators. Check the transcripts of those hearings if you doubt me on this. The 116 other recognized (but not chartered) organizations occasionally get to have their say, but not very often.

The VSOs almost universally support anything that Congress says – including all wars – whether they believe in it or not, because to do otherwise would ultimately lose them that few minutes of fame and attention.

Other veterans and their families who show up before Congress – if they can get in – and who do not spend their few minutes thanking the legislators for all they do but who use their precious few minutes to tell the legislators the truth about veterans’ affairs, usually appear once and are never seen there again. (Check the record on this also).

If a substantial number our 24,000,000 veterans belonged to one umbrella group, we would be the largest citizens’ issues bloc in the country.

We have to figure out how to make this work!

So I return to the title of this piece. We need a Veterans’ Tribal Council. We need to harness the energy of many of these veterans groups – at least the ones who have real membership – plus many of the

veterans who never belong and who never speak up, and show Congress that they must listen.

We need to be able to send a few representatives before Congress who can say, “We truly represent a voting bloc of a significant number of veterans, and can influence all 24 million veterans, and we insist that the VA’s nonsense stop. We insist that the military services stop dumping service men and women after their honorable service.

Do you hear us? Solve these problems now!

The nation that was able to step up to a huge threat 68 years ago and solve the horrendous production problems of World War II – producing 4,000 planes a month in 1942 just months after the war started, and 7,000 a month in 1943 – ought to be able to solve the medical and claims paperwork problems of the VA and the military services almost overnight.

Of course it wasn’t the impersonal “Nation” that solved WW II’s problems, people did it – American people with a mission. The people who used the marvelous industrial might of the United States to fight that war became the veterans. When they came home they were honored and promised that their sacrifice would never be forgotten and that the rest of the nation would compensate them for that sacrifice..

They were not insulted and made to feel that they were just a drag on the economy, or a problem to be eliminated, rather they were to be the just recipients of the bounty of a grateful nation.

The veterans of that and subsequent wars are now a nearly silent 8 percent of the nation. They are not the nation’s saviors anymore, they are a problem for legislators, and a big drain on the economy, and would

they please just go away. (If they don’t go away we will slow-roll them until they die and that will solve the problem, won’t it?)

We must speak up, and with one voice.

I must confess that I don’t know how to make this happen, but I believe that out there somewhere there are those who do, and we all need their help.

We need to be able to put a force before the Congress and before state legislatures and tell them to start earning their pay. We need to tell them that the veterans of America – members of the veterans’ tribe – are tired of getting less attention than is afforded those who stay home but who organize and get their pockets filled and their egos satisfied.

The Iroquois Confederacy was one of the models for the first Continental Congress. A group of tribes who established a Council that took care of the needs of all the tribe members was the model for a Congress that was supposed to take care of all of the citizens of all the colonies.

The Iroquois Confederacy didn’t use their time and energy to take care of the chiefs and the wealthy among them – neither should Congress.

If you have any ideas on how we could get a Veterans Tribal Council established and working in an effective manner, let us know or get it started and we will gladly join in.

“Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family: Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.”

Jane Howard ~ US Journalist

[Ed.]

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

Try these two websites: Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program www.vetsprobono.org/index.htm. United States Court of appeals for Veterans Claims “Public List of Practitioners” are members of the court’s bar www.vetapp.gov/practitioners/. Also this site for west coasters <http://www.chapman.edu/law/programs/clinics/amvets.asp>.

ACTION NEEDED!

October 7, 2009

Veterans, particularly wounded war-fighters, need our help in different ways, and one has to do with getting the Veterans Administration the budget it needs.

Last week the Senate didn’t get the VA budget passed- for the 20th time in the last 23 years - and six million veterans who rely on the VA for healthcare really need your help. Call your senators today and tell them to pass the VA budget, so that veterans get the care they deserve. Visit <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/directory/congdir.t> to place your call. It only takes a few minutes.

From Craig Newmark ~ Founder of Craigslist

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

2/11/2008 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]

9/14/09 No agreement on mediation. 9th Circuit accepts the case.

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

OF CORPORATIONS, BASALT BOULDERS, AND OUR VETERANS

by Gordon P. Erspamer*

Gordon P. Erspamer is an attorney who practices veterans' law and is well-known to most readers for his involvement in our class-action lawsuit.

"Does anyone really believe the VA when it says that veterans don't need lawyers because the system is 'nonadversarial?'"

At first glance, the relationship among the three topics in my title may not be readily apparent. My purpose is to address perhaps the cruelest irony in the evolution of law—how it came to pass that corporations possess greater constitutional rights than our veterans.

Everyone seems to be talking about the new pending Supreme Court case about whether corporations have unlimited constitutional rights or whether the exercise of those rights can be limited, such as by spending caps. This is the case (*Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*) involving a hit-piece movie attacking Hillary Clinton.

It seems surprising that corporations have any constitutional rights at all. Doesn't the constitution start with the words "We the People?" Corporations are not only NOT people, but they are all completely inanimate, incorporeal beings that are no more alive than a rock, say a big basalt boulder. And come to think of it, most living things have no constitutional rights either, whether they be insects or mammals or whatever. The only rights they might have are if they are threatened with extinction, like the snail darters and red-legged frogs, and then they might receive some limited protection until their numbers recover because of efforts by non-living entities like EDF or the Sierra Club. And when we talk of the corporation's right of free speech, aren't we really talking about giving those in corporate boardrooms the right to amplify their views using other people's money, their own shareholders? In contrast, the voices of "We the People" veterans are muted by the inability to obtain legal assistance as they appeal to their government to redress grievances.

Yet, at a time when we are talking about giving the basalt boulder's neighbor, that corporate beast, the right to spend indiscriminate amounts of money to further its parochial interests, how can it be that our veterans, who surely are part of "We the People," can be saddled with a statute that forbids them from paying a lawyer any sum out of their own pockets to help them on a VA claim? I can give you the official answer, as explained by no less an authority than former Chief Justice William Rehnquist—the fee restriction is necessary to prevent overreaching by unscrupulous lawyers. (*NARS v. Walters*, 473 U.S. 305 (1985).) But aren't these same lawyers the ones who convinced the Supreme Court that a fictitious being—a corporation—is a person and has constitutional rights? <More at: <http://www.vawatchdog.org/09/nf09/nfsep09/nf092809-1.htm>>

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

CONGRESSIONAL PANEL SPOTLIGHTS WASTE, INAPPROPRIATE USE OF VA RESOURCES

Chairman Bob Filner - House Committee On Veterans' Affairs - September 29, 2009

Washington, D.C. – On Wednesday, September 23, 2009, the House Veterans' Affairs Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, led by Chairman Harry Mitchell (D-AZ), conducted a hearing to review protocols for administering bonuses for employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Subcommittee also reviewed hiring practices at VA, in response to two reports from the VA Inspector General (IG).

Recent reports issued by the IG focused on VA's Office of Information and Technology (OI&T) and Assistant Inspector General for Investigations James J. O'Neill provided testimony on the findings, which included nepotism, misuse of position, prohibited personnel practices, improper funding of academic degrees, and improper administration of awards.

<More at: <http://vets4politics.blogspot.com/2009/09/congressional-panel-spotlights-waste.html>>

HOUSE VOTES TO EXTEND FIRST-TIME HOME BUYER TAX CREDIT FOR SERVICE MEMBERS

Luke Mullins - October 8, 2009

Amid mounting speculation over the future of the \$8,000 first-time home buyer tax credit, Congress moved today to give American service members another 12 months to claim the popular incentive. The House of Representatives voted 416 to 0 to pass the Service Members Home Ownership Tax Act of 2009, which pushes the credit's current November 30 deadline back an additional year for members of the military, Foreign Service, and intelligence corps who served at least three months of qualified overseas duty in 2009.

<More at: <http://www.usnews.com/money/blogs/the-home-front/2009/10/08/house-votes-to-extend-first-time-home-buyer-tax-credit-for-service-members.html>>

BUSINESS AS USUAL!

NEW FISCAL YEAR BEGINS WITH NO NEW VA BUDGET

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Oct 1, 2009

The new fiscal year did not get off to a happy start Thursday for veterans groups as Congress failed for the 20th time in the past 23 years to pass a Veterans Affairs Department budget on time.

<More at: http://www.armytimes.com/news/2009/10/military_va_nobudget_100109w/>

REMEMBER THIS BILL FROM JUST 100 DAYS AGO?

HOUSE PASSES HISTORIC BILL TO SECURE TIMELY FUNDING FOR VETERANS' HEALTH CARE

For Immediate Release - June 24, 2009

Washington, D.C. – On Tuesday, June 23, 2009, the House of Representatives approved H.R. 1016, landmark legislation to secure timely funding for veterans' health care delivered through the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

<More at: <http://veterans.house.gov/news/PRArticle.aspx?NewsID=434>>

UK COMMANDER, AFGHAN WAR CRITIC RESIGNS

Agence France-Presse - September 25, 2009

A senior army commander who led British troops in Afghanistan has quit, an official confirmed late Thursday, after reported clashes with the Prime Minister Gordon Brown's government over the conflict. Major-General Andrew Mackay, a decorated officer who led British troops in southern Afghanistan in 2007 and 2008, has resigned, the Ministry of Defence said.

... Newspapers reported Mackay was extremely critical of the government's treatment of British troops, who have suffered a surge in casualty rates against an increasingly bloody Taliban insurgency.

<More at: <http://www.military.com/news/article/uk-commander-afghan-war-critic-resigns.html>>

U.S. TROOPS CALL AFGHAN REGION 'VIETNAM WITHOUT NAPALM'

Hal Bernton - McClatchy Newspapers - Sep. 30, 2009

JELAWUR, Afghanistan — The men of Bravo Company have a bitter description for the irrigated swath of land along the Arghandab River where 10 members of their battalion have been killed and 30 have been wounded since the beginning of August. "Like Vietnam without the napalm," said Spc. Nicholas Gojekian, 21, of Katy, Texas.

<More at: <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/226/story/76330.html>>

AN AMERICAN STEPS UP – THANKS BOB

TV ICON BOB BARKER GIVES \$3 MILLION TO MILITARY BRAIN INJURIES HOSPITAL

Ari Pinkus - Oct. 7, 2009

Construction on the Facility Can Finish Thanks to the Former Naval Aviator's Donation

Bob Barker, famed TV icon and former host of "The Price Is Right," has given \$3 million to finish funding the construction of a new hospital in Bethesda, Md., to care for the brain injuries of military personnel.

Barker, a naval aviator who served during World War II, contacted the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund last week after learning that it was struggling to come up with the last \$3 million for the new treatment center.

Bill White, president of the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund, got on the phone with Barker. The two spoke for 40 minutes about Barker's service experiences and the difficulty of raising money in a recession, White said. [For more information on the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund click here.](#) Barker, 84, said he was motivated to make the donation because of his naval service and his desire to help people in his retirement. Barker ended his TV career after hosting "The Price is Right" for 35 years as well as "Truth or Consequences," The Rose Parade, and The Miss USA and Miss Universe Pageants. <More at: <http://www.abcnews.go.com/print?id=8764177>>

OUTSOURCERS APPARENTLY WORK ABOUT AS EFFECTIVELY AS BUREAUCRATS – FOR FOUR TIMES THE MONEY

MILLIONS IN CONTRACTS, NO WORK COMPLETED

Mark Benjamin - Sep. 29, 2009 |

A top official at Arlington National Cemetery steered millions of dollars to a handful of contractors operating a series of different companies over the past several years. When the contractors would leave one company and start another, the official would hire them again, yet the work they were hired to do has never been completed. The firms have ostensibly worked since 2003 to computerize burial records at the cemetery, but to date, despite receiving as much as \$5.6 million, they have produced almost nothing in return.

The small group of contractors, all favored by Deputy Superintendent Thurman Higginbotham, includes one currently facing more than a dozen counts of child sex offenses and a company that a cemetery information technology manager felt was so unqualified to handle sensitive private data that the manager resigned in disgust.

<More at: http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2009/09/29/arlington_contracts/>

HIGHEST MILITARY COURT TO HEAR ABU GHRAIB APPEAL

Staff - AP News - Oct 08, 2009

The U.S. military's highest court is scheduled to hear the appeal of a former Army dog handler convicted in the abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

<More at: http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/news/2009/10/highest_military_court_to_hear_abu_ghraib_appeal.php>

HERE WE GO AGAIN!

PROBE TARGETS ARCHIVES' HANDLING OF DATA ON 70 MILLION VETS

Ryan Singel - October 1, 2009 |

The inspector general of the National Archives and Records Administration is investigating a potential data breach affecting tens of millions of records about U.S. military veterans, Wired.com has learned. The issue involves a defective hard drive the agency sent back to its vendor for repair and recycling without first destroying the data.

The hard drive helped power eVetRecs, the system veterans use to request copies of their health records and discharge papers. When the drive failed in November of last year, the agency returned the drive to GMRI, the contractor that sold it to them, for repair. GMRI determined it couldn't be fixed, and ultimately passed it to another firm to be recycled.

<More at: <http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2009/10/probe-targets-archives-handling-of-data-on-70-million-vets/>>

CONGRESS TO KEEP ABUSE PHOTOS HIDDEN

Associated Press - October 10, 2009

WASHINGTON - Congress is set to allow the Pentagon to keep new pictures of foreign detainees abused by their U.S. captors from the public, a move intended to end a legal fight over the photographs' release that has reached the Supreme Court. Federal courts have so far rejected the government's arguments against the release of 21 color photographs showing prisoners in Afghanistan and Iraq being abused by Americans.

The Obama administration believes giving the imminent grant of authority over the release of such pictures to the defense secretary would short-circuit a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union under the Freedom of Information Act. The White House is asking the justices to put off consideration of the case until after a vote on the measure in the House and Senate, as early as next week. The provision is part of a larger homeland security spending bill and would allow the defense secretary to withhold photographs relating to detainees by certifying their release would endanger soldiers or other government workers. <More at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/10/10/congress-to-keep-detainee_n_316324.html>

SWINE FLU CLAIMS FIRST GI

Knight Ridder/Tribune - October 02, 2009

U.S. Department of Defense officials confirmed Thursday that a Fort Jackson, S.C., Soldier who died because of the H1N1 flu virus was the military's first.

... Spec. Christopher Hogg, 23, of Deltona, Fla., died Sept. 10 of pneumonia that was caused by the H1N1 virus, commonly called the swine flu. <More at: http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0_13319_202379_00.html>

THIS REDUCES THE VETERANS HOMELESS POPULATION EACH NIGHT BY EIGHT TENTHS OF ONE PERCENT! BRAVO! THAT TAKES CARE OF THE PROBLEM,. DOESN'T IT?

VA ANNOUNCES \$17 MILLION IN HOMELESS ASSISTANCE GRANTS

Salem-News.com - Oct-06-2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki has announced that 19 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico will share more than \$17 million in grants to community groups to create 1,155 beds for homeless veterans this year. <More at: http://salem-news.com/articles/october062009/va_benefits_10-6-09.php>

SO MUCH FOR TRANSPARENCY

REPORT ON VA FLAWS HERE LEADS TO DISCLOSURE BAN

By Walter F. Roche Jr. - Pittsburgh Tribune-Review - Sep. 30, 2009

Facing congressional scrutiny over a report of poor care given to veterans at a Veterans Administration nursing home in Philadelphia, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has slammed the door on the release of similar reports nationwide.

In a directive dated Friday, VA officials in Washington, D.C., informed local agency officials that inspection reports like the one on the VA nursing home on Civic Center Boulevard are not to be released to the public.

The directive came less than a week after the *Tribune-Review* disclosed details of a 2008 report on the nursing home that concluded the VA "failed to provide a safe and sanitary environment for their residents."

Such reports from the Long Term Care Institute - which the VA hired to inspect its facilities - are considered "protected" documents under the provisions of a federal law designed to promote improved quality, the directive states.

<More at: http://www.philly.com/dailynews/local/20090930_Report_on_VA_flaws_here_leads_to_disclosure_ban.html>

NAVY NAMES SHIP AFTER CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST MEDGAR EVERS

October 09, 2009

The Navy announced today the newest Lewis and Clark-class dry cargo/ammunition ship (T-AKE) would be named USNS Medgar Evers. The announcement was made by Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus during a Jackson State University speaking engagement in Mississippi. <More at: <http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=13036>>

TO THE COLORS - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
10/13-15		Dixon, CA	Stand Down	Patrick Stasio	707.344.3743
10/14		Detroit, MI	Resource Fair	Norman Wilcox	248.808.0929
10/16-18		Nashville, TN	Stand Down	Bill Burleigh	615.321.3919
10/16		Yuma, AZ	Resource Fair	Bill Thornton	928.503.0552
10/16		Knoxville, TN	Resource Fair	Jimmy Campbell	865.546.4813
10/17		Newark, NJ	Resource Fair	Kimberly Wallace/Patty Richter	973.297.3268
10/21		Nashua, NH	Resource Fair	David Richardson	603.882.3616
10/23-25		Tucson, AZ	Stand Down	Mark Pollinger	520.293.1919
10/23		Grass Valley, CA	Resource Fair	Chaplain Dennis Fruzza	530.273.3000

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

PTSD: NEW WAR ON AN OLD FOE

Jamie Reno - Newsweek Web Exclusive – Oct 1, 2009

They are the invisible wounds of war, the battered minds and bruised spirits we have come to recognize as posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. By one estimate, more than 300,000 of the nearly 2 million U.S. servicemen and -women deployed since 9/11 suffer from the often-debilitating condition, with symptoms that include flashbacks and nightmares, emotional numbness, relationship problems, trouble sleeping, sudden anger, and drug and alcohol abuse. The number of cases is expected to climb as the war in Afghanistan continues, and could ultimately exceed 500,000, according to a new study by researchers at Stanford University. Mental-health experts say PTSD is the primary reason suicides in the military are at an all-time high; 256 soldiers took their own lives in 2008, the highest number since that data was first tracked, in 1980.

... the Department of Veterans Affairs has struggled to address this mental-health crisis, and thousands of veterans have suffered as a result. Now, thanks to new leadership and a new openness to collaboration, things appear to be changing at the VA, if slowly. Veterans still often face insufferably long waits for treatment and steep bureaucratic hurdles when filing disability claims. But there is a new sense of urgency under Eric Shinseki, the retired four-star Army general appointed to head the agency by President Obama, to change the culture within the 77-year-old VA. Shinseki has made PTSD a priority, with efforts underway to address concerns from the way claims are processed to the development of new, more effective treatments.

<More at: <http://www.newsweek.com/id/216534>>

MARINES SEE SHARP INCREASE IN SUICIDES

Mark Abramson - Stars and Stripes Mideast edition - October 9, 2009

Recently released figures show Marines are taking their own lives at alarmingly high rates, and deployments appear to be taking a toll. Through September, the Marines have recorded 38 confirmed or suspected suicides in 2009. Should the pace continue through the end of the year, the Marines would be facing a 20 percent increase from 2008 figures. Suicides also rose 27 percent from 2007 to 2008. <More at: <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=65267>>

"TIRED, STRAINED, CONFUSED" -- WHY U.S. TROOPS HAVE HIT THE BREAKING POINT IN AFGHANISTAN

Martin Fletcher - The London Times - October 9, 2009

American soldiers serving in Afghanistan are depressed and deeply disillusioned, according to the chaplains of two US battalions that have spent nine months on the front line in the war against the Taliban.

Many feel that they are risking their lives -- and that colleagues have died -- for a futile mission and an Afghan population that does nothing to help them, the chaplains told The Times in their makeshift chapel on this fortress-like base in a dusty, brown valley southwest of Kabul.

"The many soldiers who come to see us have a sense of futility and anger about being here. They are really in a state of depression and despair and just want to get back to their families," said Captain Jeff Masengale, of the 10th Mountain Division's 2-87 Infantry Battalion.

"They feel they are risking their lives for progress that's hard to discern," said Captain Sam Rico, of the Division's 4-25 Field Artillery Battalion. "They are tired, strained, confused and just want to get through." The chaplains said that they were speaking out because the men could not. <More at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/143173/>>

EXPECT HIGH RATES OF PTSD AMONG IRAQ VETERANS

Rick Nauert PhD - Senior News Editor - September 15, 2009

A team of researchers warns the Veterans Administration to prepare for an unprecedented incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder among Iraq veterans. In "A Dynamic Model for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Among U.S. Troops in Operation Iraqi Freedom," Michael P. Atkinson of the Naval Postgraduate School and Adam Guetz and Lawrence M. Wein of Stanford University predict as many as 35 percent of returning soldiers could have PTSD.

<More at: <http://psychcentral.com/news/2009/09/15/expect-high-rates-of-ptsd-among-iraq-veterans/8365.html>>

TWO EXCELLENT ARTICLES FROM THE LA TIMES – WELL WORTH READING

WAR INJURY LEADS TO ADVANCES AT HOME

Melissa Healy – LA Times - October 5, 2009

The military takes the lead in brain trauma research, giving hope to wounded civilians of a 'silent epidemic.' A world away from the roadside bombs and combat injuries of Iraq and Afghanistan, Americans are suffering the same type of brain injury seen in troops coming home from those war-torn countries. On American roads, at workplaces and on playing fields, more than 11 million have been hurt since the fighting overseas started.

<More at: latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-sci-brain-injury5-2009oct05.0.7255184.story>

TREATING BRAIN INJURIES ON THE SPORTS FIELD AND BATTLEFIELD

Melissa Healy – LA Times - October 5, 2009

With traumatic brain injury rampant among troops overseas, the military is taking a page from sports -- discovering ways to better diagnose and treat it. <More at: latimes.com/features/health/la-he-brain-treatment5-2009oct05.0.3677097.story>

TWEETING TRAUMATIC STRESS: AN ONLINE INITIATIVE FOR PTSD

Katie Drummond - Oct. 7 2009

It's impossible to know how many troops coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan are suffering from PTSD, but estimates suggest that the rates are unprecedented. The number of PTSD diagnoses have "risen steadily" in the past few years, according to Veterans Affairs, and one team of researchers is warning that 35 percent of returning troops will be afflicted. But less than a quarter of vets seek help, meaning that too few are being diagnosed – let alone treated.

The Pentagon is heeding warnings about the crisis, by hiring more mental health staff and funding more suicide-prevention programs. They've even launched a \$50-million-dollar research project to determine the underlying causes of veteran suicide, which reached an all-time high this summer. And, as I reported for Danger Room in August, they're also trying to prevent PTSD before it starts, using pharmaceutical intervention to short-circuit stress reactions.

But pill-popping prevention is a ways off. For now, there's another initiative harnessing 21st century tech to bolster soldier wellness. The program is [Vision 21](#), and its founders are using online social networking to help vets reintegrate into day-to-day life. <More at: <http://trueslant.com/katiedrummond/2009/10/07/vision21-ptsd-traumatic-disorder/>>

ARMY TESTS ANONYMOUS TREATMENT FOR ALCOHOL ABUSE

Teri Weaver - Stars and Stripes Mideast edition - October 10, 2009

TOKYO — For better and sometimes worse, alcohol is a common battle buddy.

Troops use it to celebrate after a long deployment and to self-medicate when the euphoria fades, leaving only stress, emotions and memories.

To combat that abuse, the Army is trying something new: allowing soldiers who have no alcohol-related blemishes on their records to seek treatment for alcohol abuse or addiction with anonymity and without affecting their permanent records.

Under a pilot program in place at three stateside bases, soldiers who qualify can receive counseling without anyone telling their commanders, without any delay to promotions or re-enlistments and without anyone counting their need for help as an automatic step toward a discharge. <More at: <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=65285>>

IN 2008 AFGHANISTAN FIREFIGHT, US WEAPONS FAILED

Richard Lardner - Associated Press Writer - Oct 11, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) -- It was chaos during the early morning assault last year on a remote U.S. outpost in Afghanistan and Staff Sgt. Erich Phillips' M4 carbine had quit firing as militant forces surrounded the base. The machine gun he grabbed after tossing the rifle aside didn't work either.

When the battle in the small village of Wanat ended, nine U.S. soldiers lay dead and 27 more were wounded. A detailed study of the attack by a military historian found that weapons failed repeatedly at a "critical moment" during the firefight on July 13, 2008, putting the outnumbered American troops at risk of being overrun by nearly 200 insurgents.

<More at: http://www.denverpost.com/breakingnews/ci_13538843>

CONDITIONS DOWNRANGE LEAVE TROOPS SUSCEPTIBLE TO KIDNEY STONES

Seth Robbins - Stars and Stripes Mideast edition - October 6, 2009

Walking to the latrines, Spc. Jonathan Grizzard ignored the back pain that had awoken him early.

He was about to start his day as an ambulance driver and cook at Bagram air base in Afghanistan, and this was no time for cramps. But the sharp pain overcame him and he fell to the floor. Lying near the bathroom stalls, he waited for his comrades to find him.

"It felt like having knives stuck into my kidneys," he said. "The pain was so intense I cried."

Grizzard succumbed to a common ailment for servicemembers in Iraq and Afghanistan: kidney stones. A 2008 study, which looked at the benefits of using medication to treat servicemembers with kidney stones, shows a steady increase in military personnel evacuated for stones from both Iraq and Afghanistan between 2004 and 2007.

<More at: <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=65202>>

WARTIME SOLDIER, CONFLICTED MOM

Lizette Alvarez - September 27, 2009

When Specialist Jaymie Holschlag returned home after 12 months in Iraq, a new set of children awaited her.

Her son, Seth, 10, who had moved in with his grandfather, switching towns and schools, was angry and depressed. His grades had plummeted and his weight had ballooned by 60 pounds. Her 4-year-old daughter, Celeste, scarcely knew her. And in Specialist Holschlag's absence, new rules had taken hold — chocolate syrup on waffles, Mountain Dew with dinner. Any hint of a return to the old order met with tirades and tantrums.

Specialist Holschlag, a single mother and a combat medic, had changed profoundly, too. The violence in Ramadi had staked a claim on her patience, her tenderness and her resilience. She snapped at her children routinely, at times harshly.

Last month, on the eve of her second tour in Iraq, Specialist Holschlag decided she could not put her children through another deployment, and she requested a transfer. "They are my kids, and they deserve a mom that is wanting to hug them," she said.

<More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/27/us/27mothers.html>>

SIBLINGS OF TROOPS OFTEN ARE FORGOTTEN MOURNERS

Kimberly Hefling - The Associated Press - Sep 24, 2009

WASHINGTON — The photo tells one story: brothers Chad and Ian Weikel, all smiles, arms around each other on Ian's wedding day. The tattoos now on Chad's forearms tell another — about his anguish over his brother's death in Iraq.

Words like “rage,” “alone” and “fury” are interwoven in the tattoos along with the likeness of Capt. Ian Weikel, a West Point graduate. Chad, 32, says his older brother’s death in 2006 put him on a path that led to divorce and a decision to enlist in the Army Reserves. He recently moved from Colorado Springs, Colo., to Washington for a fresh start after a car crash kept him from starting basic training.

“It got pretty dark after all the services and all the family and friends stopped coming by,” says Weikel. “We were very close. I miss him every day.”

Weikel is one of the wars’ forgotten mourners, the brothers and sisters of those killed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

<More at: http://www.armytimes.com/news/2009/09/ap_military_grieving_siblings_092409/>

THEY CAN DO IT WHEN THEY WANT TO

STUDENT VETS GET PAY -- AND PIZZA

Bob Brewin - 10/02/09

Here's a real "Hooah" for the top leadership at the Veterans Affairs Department, who decided early on Friday to keep all 57 of the department's 57 regional offices open until every veteran waiting in line picked up an emergency GI bill check valued at up to \$3,000.

Based on reports I have received from individual veterans and veterans groups, the Washington D.C. office on 1722 I Street N.W. was nearly overwhelmed by a crowd of 300 vets waiting for payment at about noon on Friday. VA spokeswoman Katie Roberts told me that to speed processing on I street, VA dispatched more computers and staff to handle the crowd. And since it was lunch time, they ordered pizza for one and all, she said.

<More at: http://whatsbrewin.nextgov.com/2009/10/student_vets_get_pay_-_and_pizza.php>

DEFENSE BILL HAS GAINS, LOSSES IN BENEFITS

Tom Philpott - Special to Stars and Stripes Pacific edition - October 10, 2009

The last decision made by House-Senate conferees negotiating final details on a fiscal 2010 defense authorization bill Tuesday was to insert language that will roll back an announced Oct. 1 increase in fees charged to TRICARE Standard beneficiaries for stays in civilian hospitals.

... One new disappointment is that the Democrat-led Congress couldn't find money to support President Barack Obama's call to phase in "concurrent receipt" for disabled retirees who are forced by ailments or injuries to leave service before completing 20 years of service. His plan would have boosted the pay of 103,000 "Chapter 61" retirees at a cost of \$5.4 billion over 10 years.<More at: <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=65276>>

DEFENSE BILL ASKS PENTAGON TO RE-EXAMINE PURPLE HEARTS FOR TBI

Jeff Schogol - Stars and Stripes Mideast edition - October 9, 2009

ARLINGTON, Va. — Congress will ask the Defense Department to review its procedures for awarding the Purple Heart to troops suffering from traumatic brain injury, whom some lawmakers feel are being overlooked by the awards process. Troops suffering from concussions resulting from enemy explosions are eligible for the Purple Heart, but Rep. Bill Pascrell, D-N.J., didn't think the Defense Department was applying this standard to troops with TBI.

<More at: <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=65264>>

MANSFIELD MOM ASKS TO BE BURIED WITH SOLDIER SON

Ron Sanders - Mansfield (WBZ) —

A Mansfield gold star mother, who lost her son, Corey Shea, in Iraq last year asked to eventually be buried next to him. She has new hope after her request was denied by the Veterans Affairs Department.

Existing law allows only the spouse or minor child of U.S. military personnel to be buried with them in a military cemetery.

"He didn't get a chance to get married, have children and he's my son. So that's why I want to be with him," said Denise Anderson, Corey's Mom.

That's why she testified before a congressional committee, urging passage of a bill introduced by Rep. Barney Frank that would allow a parent of a child who gave their life in service to their country to be buried in a national cemetery, with that child, if that veteran has no living spouse or children. <More at: http://wbztv.com/local/corey_shea.soldier.2.1239289.html>

MULTIPLE FACTORS CITED IN VA DEATHS

By Jennifer Hewlett - herald-leader.com - Oct. 11, 2009

Insufficient nurse staffing levels, a lack of communication and planning, and significant gaps in key leadership roles may have contributed to a higher-than-expected mortality rate among patients treated in the intensive care unit at Lexington's Veterans Affairs Medical Center on Cooper Drive, according to a consulting firm. <More at: http://www.kentucky.com/latest_news/story/972883.html>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SUNDAY 11 OCTOBER 2009

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,398 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,349
WOUNDED US [10/11/09]	31,527
OTHER US CASUALTIES [10/3/09]	≥38,917
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 [9/25/09]	≥ 102,071 – 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 (2,927 DAYS)

KILLED US	872
WOUNDED US [10/11/09]	4,198
OTHER CASUALTIES US [10/3/09]	8,743
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [8/1/09]	33
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED COALITION	581
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	\$690,337,991,140
COST OF AFGHAN WAR TO DATE	\$228,906,788,342

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 OCTOBER 6, 2009

This week the Army announced an increase in activated reservists, while the Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard announced a decrease. The net collective result is 303 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 110,971; Navy Reserve, 6,379; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 14,073; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,382; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 649. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 140,454, 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/Oct2009/d20091006ngr.pdf>.

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

FORMER MARINE BECOMES FACE OF NEW VIEQUES BATTLE

By MIKE MELIA (AP) – 10 October 2009

ISABELA, Puerto Rico — The headaches began just after Hermogenes Marrero arrived on Vieques, the small Puerto Rican island where the young U.S. Marine guarded stores of Cold War-era chemical weapons.

The retired sergeant, now 57 and terminally ill with cancer and other ailments, blames exposure to toxins released while he was stationed there from 1970 to 1972. By coming forward to support similar claims by island residents, he has become the public face of a new and bitter battle over Vieques, the Navy bombing range-turned-tourist destination off the U.S. territory's east coast.

"I've been sick since I left Vieques," said the wheelchair-bound Marrero, who now lives in an apartment cramped with life-support equipment in this small town in northwestern Puerto Rico.

Marrero is a key witness in a lawsuit seeking billions of dollars in compensation for illnesses that past and current Vieques residents have linked to the bombing range, where the U.S. and its allies trained for conflicts from Vietnam to Iraq. <More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2009/10/11/world/AP-CB-Puerto-Rico-Vieques.html?ref=global-home>>

CELEBRATING SLAUGHTER: HOW WAR MEMORIALS HELP US FORGET THE HORRORS OF VIOLENCE

Chris Hedges – Truthdig - October 5, 2009

War memorials and museums are temples to the god of war. The hushed voices, the well-tended grass, the flapping of the flags allow us to ignore how and why our young died. They hide the futility and waste of war. They sanitize the savage instruments of death that turn young soldiers and Marines into killers, and small villages in Vietnam or Afghanistan or Iraq into hellish bonfires. There are no images in these memorials of men or women with their guts hanging out of their bellies, screaming pathetically for their mothers. We do not see mangled corpses being shoved in body bags. There are no sights of children burned beyond recognition or moaning in horrible pain. There are no blind and deformed wrecks of human beings limping through life. War, by the time it is collectively remembered, is glorified and heavily censored.

I blame our war memorials and museums, our popular war films and books, for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as much as George W. Bush. They provide the mental images and historical references to justify new conflicts. We equate Saddam Hussein with Adolf Hitler. We see al-Qaida as a representation of Nazi evil. We view ourselves as eternal liberators. These plastic representations of war reconfigure the past in light of the present. War memorials and romantic depictions of war are the social and moral props used to create the psychological conditions to wage new wars.

<More at: http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/20091005_celebrating_slaughter_war_and_collective_amnesia/>

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

THIS IS A WONDERFUL EFFORT, BUT ISN'T IT SAD THAT IT HAS TO HAPPEN?

COLLECTING COATS FOR VETERANS

Judy Masterson - Lake County News-Sun - October 11, 2009

WAUKEGAN, Ill. (AP) - A simple idea will help keep more veterans warm this winter.

Wendi Roberts of Waukegan is putting her contacts with area first responders to work to help collect coats and other cold weather outerwear for struggling veterans and servicemen and women. Roberts, who has been affiliated with the North Lake County EMS System for 34 years, recently read a News-Sun story about a Coats for Vets collection initiated by Zengler's Cleaners in Libertyville [IL].

<More at: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/chi-ap-il-keepingveteranswa.0.767187.story>>

NOTE!!

A new book for our reading list:

Mass Casualties, Michael Anthony

This searing memoir chronicles the iconic experiences that changed one young soldier forever. A seasoned veteran before the age of twenty-one, he faced the truth about the war—and himself—in this shocking and unprecedented eyewitness account.

"The real wounds of this war are going to be the ones that we can't fix, the ones that our medical equipment and training have nothing to do with." Michael Anthony

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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