

SOUND OFF!



VOL. IV, NO 7

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"

25 NOVEMBER 2008

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

WHEN "DOING GOOD" DOESN'T

The West Los Angeles Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) was deeded in perpetuity for the sole purpose of caring for military veterans. This trust was established in 1888 through a gift by two families that held old Spanish grant properties. The many buildings on this property were built over time to care for veterans of the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, WW I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, the current Afghanistan and Iraq wars, and another hundred or so military actions and all peacetime service that has occurred in between.

Because of its location in Brentwood, a generally wealthy community of Los Angeles, the facility occupies some of the most valuable real estate on the West Coast – land that currently sells for \$6M-\$12M an acre. Likewise, because of its location, it has often been the target of developers and investors.

Veterans Park Conservancy

Since 1988 a worthy organization, the Veterans Park Conservancy (VPC) made up of many veterans, veterans relatives, a descendant of one of the grantors, and other citizens residing in Brentwood and Beverly Hills, has raised some serious money for, and supported some worthy causes at the facility. They have also helped in the past to fend off commercial development on the property. Despite the real good that this organization has done over the years, two recent initiatives have raised serious questions and profound doubts on the part of veterans across the country as to the propriety of this organization's current goals.

The first of these questionable acts is a recent campaign to replace a portion of the fence surrounding the 388 acres of the VAMC property. The VPC raised

some money and the DVA pitched in \$1,000,000 of VA construction funds.

The fence faced toward Brentwood properties. The stated goal was, of course, to improve the property for veterans. The actual goal was revealed by two acts: 1) the statement by one of the principals that the new fence would "remove an eyesore" -- thus revealing an aesthetic goal rather than a veterans' benefit goal; and, 2) the inclusion on the fence at the pedestrian gateway (to the future park?) of a sign that absolutely reinforced the understanding of any thinking person that the goal was purely aesthetic.

The sign in question bore the words "Beauty, Honor, Country". This sign denigrated the motto of the US Military Academy -- "***Duty, Honor, Country***", which motto has become the solemn oath and polestar of all serving military and veterans. By substituting the cutesy "Beauty" for the near-sacred word and concept of "Duty" the organization revealed its true concern – once again aesthetic gain for Brentwood, not veterans' benefit. After much protest, the sign has been replaced with the proper quotation.

Sliding down the ol' slippery slope

Now the VPC has signed an agreement with the DVA to set aside 16 acres of the Brentwood campus as a "Veterans Park". Their correspondence and their website talk only about establishing this park as a place of respite for veterans. Deep in the agreement, however, the true purpose is buried, for there it states that this will be a **public** park. The cost-free agreement is for 20 years with a 10 year option for extension.

One wonders what "park" they have been conserving for the 20 years preceding this 15-month

old agreement – perhaps there was a goal sitting there all along?



This property is already quietly slipping away from its sworn purpose to be used solely to benefit veterans. 25 or more of its buildings are already leased out to other agencies, community organizations, and commercial businesses (yellow buildings on the above map). No one would argue with the Red Cross or Salvation Army using the property, recognizing both organizations' involvement in military and veterans' services. There are legitimate questions about Enterprise rent-a-car and other commercial interests.

20+ acres are used by the Brentwood School, a private K-12 Academy, for its athletic facilities. This school, with its annual tuition of \$27,650, is unlikely to have too many veteran's kids enrolled..

This "Veterans Park" initiative plants the seed of a slow-growing *eminent domain* or *adverse possession* claim 30 years hence. When the lease and its extension expire, and should some DVA administrator resists granting a new lease at that time, it's easy to predict the uproar. All of us who either supported or opposed the public use of this private land will be long gone. The cry will come from a new generation who will believe that they are losing an entitlement. "They're taking our Park!" "I grew up in that park -- our family had picnics there!" "You can't take away our Park -- it's not fair!"

Of course those veterans being helped in that facility who cannot, by reason of their physical or mental condition, mix with the general public will be denied use of that park. They too could reasonably say of the current plan, "It's not fair!"

Since they have not been allowed to weigh in, we are proud to stand for them.

Laudable purposes

All of us can understand Brentwood's need for a park. After all, this town of 33,000 souls ought to have open space where its residents can relax. Admittedly some of those souls are veterans, but with the income levels in the community there are not likely to be many vets who need the VAMC's facilities or their services.

Brentwood is not your average town. With a median household income of only 200+% of the national median, and with the income of those residents in their early 30s equal only to the poverty level income of a family of nine, one can understand how deprived they must feel.

That median household income (\$102,308) is, of course, approximately 285% of the median income of all veterans nationwide (\$36,053).

With only 15% of its 17,000 households having children, the need must still arise for those children to have play space. Since they spend more than twice as much as the rest of us on clothing, food, health care, furniture, reading materials, transportation, and utilities, and almost 3 times as much on gifts and education, they are probably a little strapped.

You would think, though, that a town with at least as many people with graduate degrees as there are children could have come up with a better solution.

A modest proposal

We have a proposal for a few legitimate alternatives that Brentwood should consider.

Brentwood should recognize the park that it already has only 1 mile to the west of the veterans property. The eastern end of the Brentwood Country Club is designated on maps as "Brentwood Park". Looking at that area on "Google Earth" reveals that it is apparently part storage yard and part dump so improving it should be nothing but a gain to the community.

While "Brentwood Park" does not seem to offer the full 16 acres, certainly the very small group of good folks who are members of the private Brentwood Country Club would not mind giving up some land and rerouting a couple of holes for this worthy purpose. Considering the scarcity of land in that immediate area, they should be able to demand a sufficiently large price to salve any wounds – at least a hundred million.

If the Brentwood country club is unwilling to give up their land for this noble cause, there are other Brentwood properties that could be considered. There are quite a few properties of five acres or more to the northwest up Mandeville Canyon.

Brentwood could also go in with Pacific Palisades to their West and claim enough land for a park to serve both communities from the Riviera country club which is much larger. It's a private club too, but their membership should willingly release some of their large holdings for the benefit of the community.



On doing good

We believe in the concept of doing good and we believe that doing good has been the VPC’s intent for most of these past 20 years. They have done much good in the past and should be praised for it.

For all of us it is the same, however. No matter how much good we may have done before, each act and each initiative must be evaluated on its own merits. Sometimes doing good, doesn't – it does harm. As the constitutional scholar Lawrence Tribe recently wrote in a different context, "a premise of our system is that good will, altruism and empathy are insufficient safeguards." We think those words apply here – in spades.

The VPC has elicited some strong political support – US Senators, US Representatives, the mayor of Los Angeles, City Councilperson's, and prominent civic leaders. We are confident that all of these politicians and dignitaries looked at the community’s need and agreed that a park was a good idea. (We have the letter to prove it). Such support is clearly understandable as the Brentwood ZIP code contributes 121 times as much money to political causes as the average ZIP in the US (\$5,991,733 vs. \$49,689).

Unfortunately, they seem to have forgotten that the land doesn't belong to the City of Los Angeles, or even to the State of California. The land belongs to the nation, and was given and dedicated solely for the support of veterans. If a handful of local residents and a few politicians are allowed to repurpose this property, such an act would seem to deny due process to the real stakeholders – 24 million veterans. We believe that only the President of the United States and

the full Congress should have a say in how this land is used, and whether or not it can be transferred from its entrusted purpose.

On doing better

Instead of “doing good” for a few, let's do better for everyone. The VPC should explore the alternatives we have provided, and we will support their efforts. We'll even try to help them pay for it, although they will have to wait for the results of our fundraising methods which are pretty slow as they are limited to bake sales and sponsored 5Ks – we have no trust funds.

In time, if the veterans and their 75 million or so family members can raise two or three dollars each they would have enough, perhaps, to satisfy the private owners of one or the other country club or of those multi-acre residential properties..

We really don't need any more memorials or remembrance parks – thanks, but no thanks – our sisters’ and brothers’ needs are much more serious than that.

Maybe we can take back the million dollars that the DVA spent on their lovely fence, and maybe we could keep a million or two of the rest of the money we raise selling cupcakes so that Brentwood can have their park. We can then apply those bucks to a truly private park for veterans and their families.

But first we’d like to use whatever money they leave to us to refurbish some of the 218,000 ft² of vacant buildings at the facility so that we could start to take some of the 20,000+ homeless veterans off the streets of their city. By sheltering as many as possible we could start to identify those veterans wandering homeless in LA who truly need and deserve the physical and mental health care for which this facility and this land was dedicated.

We don’t believe that the VPC and their supporters (or for that matter whomever signed the agreement for the DVA) are greedy or heartless. We just think that they are insensitive and totally oblivious to the consequences of their actions.

Everyone would benefit if we “do better” to "do right", instead of just "doing good". [Ed.]

REVELLE - 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/

NEARLY LAST CHANCE FOR A 2008 TAX DEDUCTION!

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

OUR APPEAL TO THE Circuit court is about to begin and we have to have executive board members attend the court hearings to observe, and probably to testify.

These trips cost money – to date the expenses have largely been borne by the individuals.

We have to begin paying our way as an organization. Please donate whatever you can by going on-line to:

[HTTP://WWW.VUFT.ORG/DONATE.HTML](http://www.vuft.org/donate.html)

THE AMERICAN VETERANS AND SERVICEMEMBERS SURVIVAL GUIDE

November 10, 2008 –

Veterans for America is proud to release The American Veterans and Servicemembers Survival Guide today, one day before Veterans Day to better serve those who have served all of us.

It is free and available for download: <http://www.veteransforamerica.org/survival-guide/survival-guide-download/>.

SECOND REQUEST

BEEN TO THE CALIFORNIA VETERANS HOME AT YOUNTVILLE LATELY??

Do you or anyone you know reside at the California Veterans' Home at Yountville? The State Auditor has reported that the veterans' home has no plan for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Do you know anyone with a disability (mobility, hearing or vision) who has experienced problems with access at this specific veterans' home? Our friends at Disability Rights Advocates (DRA) want to hear from you. DRA is looking for residents or individuals who know of residents who have experienced problems regarding disability access at the California Veterans Home in Yountville. Please contact Zander Carbajal at zcarbajal@dralegal.org or at (510) 665-8644 to speak with someone about this issue. They look forward to your response.

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

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

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

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

Case Progress to Date:

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

9/25/2007 Defendant's Motion to Dismiss

2/11/2208 Motion for Preliminary Injunction

2/25/2008 Preliminary Injunction Hearing

4/21/2008 Trial

6/25/2008 Judgment based on jurisdiction

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

12/10/2008 Appeal brief to be filed (change)

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

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

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

**DO YOU PASS THIS NEWSLETTER ON TO ANYONE?
IF YOU DO, PLEASE [LET US KNOW](#) HOW MANY PEOPLE YOU SEND IT TO
NO NAMES, JUST NUMBERS**

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

Hi I am the daughter of a Vietnam Veteran with PTSD. I am making a documentary about PTSD and veteran recovery. I am using my own story of my father's PTSD recovery and comparing it to that of soldiers that are coming home from the "War on Iraq."

I am looking for both men and women that would be willing to speak on camera about their experience of coming home from the war and how they were received both by their community and their government. In addition, if the soldier has family members dealing with the soldiers recovery that are willing to speak about their experiences - that would be an added bonus.

Thank you for all your help. ~ Rebecca Hamm, Producer/Director, rebecca.hamm@gmail.com, 310-280-6456

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

FILNER ADVOCATES 'DE-BOOT CAMP' FOR GIS

The Washington Post - November 22, 2008

A key House leader is proposing to establish a "de-boot camp," where returning service members would undergo mandatory diagnosis for brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in order to reduce instances of domestic violence and suicide.

Rep. Bob Filner, chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, said Wednesday he will lobby the Obama administration for the de-boot camp and other new initiatives for service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as veterans from the Vietnam era.

"There were more suicides [postwar] by Vietnam veterans than those who died in the war. We cannot make the same mistakes again. Mental illness is an injury that has to be dealt with," Mr. Filner said during an editorial board at The Washington Times. "We all have to understand what they are facing. We all have to understand PTSD."

The California Democrat said he wants the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to reduce a backlog of claims by granting all claims made by Vietnam veterans who say they suffer illnesses from exposure to the defoliant Agent Orange.

<More at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/nov/20/filner-advocates-de-boot-camp-for-returning-gis/>>

ADVOCACY GROUPS PRESS FOR EXPANSION OF COVERAGE UNDER NEW GI BILL

Josh Rogin and Matthew M. Johnson - CQ Staff - Nov. 18, 2008

Less than five months after Congress cleared the largest expansion of veterans' educational benefits since World War II, the Veterans' Affairs committees are working on revisions to the new law, with plans to push those changes early next year.

... Over the longer term, veterans' groups want to "streamline and simplify" the GI bill to remove confusion and place its various parts under one cohesive system.

"We want to move to a consolidation of all the benefits into one simple benefit where everyone gets access to the same types of things," said Patrick Campbell, IAVA's legislative director.

But these groups insist that certain items must be addressed immediately. These include an increase in benefits for veterans who will not attend four-year college institutions full time.

<More at: <http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?docID=news-000002987703&cpage=1>>

RETREAT - NEWS

U.S. EYES "SURGE" OF OVER 20,000 FOR AFGHANISTAN

David Morgan - Nov 22, 2008

CORNWALLIS, Nova Scotia (Reuters) - The Pentagon is considering a plan to send more than 20,000 troops to Afghanistan over the next 12 to 18 months to help safeguard elections and quell rising Taliban violence, officials said on Friday.

U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates said he and top commanders had discussed sending five brigades to Afghanistan, including four brigades of combat ground forces as well as an aviation brigade, which a defence official said would consist mainly of support troops <More at: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUKTRE4AK77320081122>>

THEY BETTER “TAKE SHAPE” PRETTY FAST!

IRAQI ARMY STRUCTURE TAKING SHAPE

Nov. 20, 2008

BAGHDAD, Nov. 20 (UPI) -- Less than half of the new Iraqi army will consist of light infantry divisions, with the majority evolving toward mechanized and armored units, a report says.

Recent purchases, or planned purchases, of mortars, division transfers from the Kurdistan Regional Government and training programs suggest at least 12 of the planned 20 or so divisions in the Iraqi army will be mechanized units, a report from The Long War Journal said Thursday. Meanwhile, the types of armed air reconnaissance vehicles and attack helicopters slated for Iraqi military use point to the development of aviation brigades.

The Iraqi government announced plans earlier this month to purchase more than 500 military aircraft from the United States and France, with the first deliveries expected in 2011. Kurdish lawmakers said they wanted reassurances from the U.S. government that military aircraft sales to the Iraqi government would not be used for combat operations against fellow Iraqis. http://www.upi.com/Emerging_Threats/2008/11/20/iraqi_army_structure_taking_shape/UPI-99831227228530/

OKLAHOMA VETERAN FIGHTING HOSPITAL RELEASE

James S. Tyree – The Oklahoman - November 16, 2008

NORMAN — A former Marine with advancing multiple sclerosis must leave the Oklahoma Veterans Center in Norman by Thanksgiving Day. Mike Simmons, 61, is being discharged Nov. 27, according to a 30-day notice written by Bob Weeks, administrator of the Norman center.

"This action is being taken because we are unable to meet your medical needs at this facility," Weeks stated in the notice.

Simmons' physical condition is indeed worsening, he said, adding that paralysis caused by the multiple sclerosis has spread throughout his body except for his left arm and hand. And Martha Spear, executive director of the state Department of Veterans Affairs, last week denied Simmons' appeal after reviewing information on his medical care.

<More at: <http://newsok.com/veteran-fighting-discharge-from-care-center/article/3322436>>

YOU NEED HELP, BUT YOU HAVE TO MAKE BAIL FIRST

JAILED VETERAN'S BAIL REDUCED

Colby Frazier

A jailed Iraq war veteran facing a string of charges in connection to a Nov. 3 war protest that turned into a three-hour standoff with police had his bail reduced to \$50,000 yesterday by a Superior Court judge.

On condition of being granted reduced bail, Edward Kyle Van Tassel, 28, must enter a treatment facility for veterans in Los Angeles, said Senior Deputy District Attorney Darryl Perlin, the prosecutor.

A custody official at the jail said last night that Van Tassel remained behind bars. His mother, Patty Van Tassel, said she doesn't know when she'll have enough money to post her son's bail. <More at: <http://www.thedailysound.com/News/111408VanTasselBail>>

VA REMOVES LEADERS OF NEW YORK REGIONAL OFFICE

Martin C. Evans – Newsday - November 23, 2008

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has reassigned the director of its New York regional office after finding that employees there misdated hundreds of claims to make it appear they were being processed on time. ... the director and five other top managers were ousted after investigators discovered a pattern of deception in the handling of claims at the regional headquarters <More at: <http://www.newsday.com/news/printedition/longisland/ny-liva22235939106nov23.0.5524668.story>>

NEW FRIENDLY FIRE COVERUP: ARMY SHREDS FILES ON DEAD SOLDIERS

By Mark Benjamin - Nov. 20, 2008

Editor's note: On Oct. 14, 2008, Salon [published an article](#) about the deaths of Army Pfc. Albert Nelson and Pfc. Roger Suarez. The Army attributed their deaths in Iraq in 2006 [to enemy action](#); Salon's investigation, which included [graphic battle video](#) and eyewitness testimony, indicated that their deaths were likely due to friendly fire.

After Salon published Benjamin's Oct. 14 report, the Army ordered soldiers to shred documents about the men. As proof that they were ordered to destroy the paperwork, a soldier [saved some examples and provided them to Salon](#).

Last month, Salon published a story reporting that U.S. Army Pfc. Albert Nelson and Pfc. Roger Suarez were killed by U.S. tank fire in Ramadi, Iraq, in late 2006, in an incident partially captured on video, but that an Army investigation instead blamed their deaths on enemy action. Now Salon has learned that documents relating to the two men were shredded hours after the story was published. Three soldiers at Fort Carson, Colo. — including two who were present in Ramadi during the friendly fire incident, one of them just feet from where Nelson and Suarez died — were ordered to shred two boxes full of documents about Nelson and Suarez. One of the soldiers preserved some of the documents as proof that the shredding occurred and provided them to Salon. All three soldiers, with the assistance of a U.S. senator's office, have since been relocated for their safety. <More at: http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2008/11/20/friendly_fire/print.html>

BLACKWATER BUSTED?

Jeremy Scahill - The Nation - November 17, 2008

After more than five years of rampant violence and misconduct carried out by the massive army of private corporate contractors in Iraq—actions that have gone totally unpunished under any system of law—the US Justice Department appears to be on the verge of handing down the first indictments against armed private forces for crimes committed in Iraq. The reported targets of the "draft" indictments: six Blackwater operatives involved in the September 16, 2007, killing of seventeen Iraqi civilians in Baghdad's Nisour Square. <More at: <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20081201/scahill>>

BLACKWATER LIKELY TO BE FINED MILLIONS IN IRAQ WEAPONS CASE

Warren Strobel - McClatchy Newspapers - Nov. 12, 2008

WASHINGTON — The State Department is preparing to slap a multi-million dollar fine on private military contractor Blackwater USA for shipping hundreds of automatic weapons to Iraq without the necessary permits. Some of the weapons are believed to have ended up on the country's black market, department officials told McClatchy, but no criminal charges have been filed in the case.

The expected fine is the result of a long-running federal investigation into whether employees of the firm shipped weapons hidden in shrink-wrapped pallets from its Moyock, N.C. headquarters to Iraq, where Blackwater is the State Department's largest personal security contractor. Since the arms shipment allegations first became public 14 months ago, Blackwater, which has received \$1.2 billion in federal contracts, according to the Web site fedspending.org, has consistently denied involvement in illicit arms trafficking. <More at: <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/251/story/55790.html>>

MILITARY HAS DATE FOR FIRST EXECUTION SINCE 1961

John Milburn - The Associated Press - November 20, 2008

TOPEKA, Kan. -- A former Army cook convicted of multiple rapes and murders is set to die next month in what would be the U.S. military's first execution in nearly 50 years. The military said Thursday that former North Carolina soldier Ronald A. Gray is to be executed Dec. 10 at the federal prison complex in Terre Haute, Ind.

Gray was arrested in connection with four slayings and eight rapes in the Fayetteville, N.C., area between April 1986 and January 1987, while he was stationed at Fort Bragg. He was convicted of murdering two women.

<More at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/20/AR2008112002409_pf.html>

14 FACE CHARGES IN PLOT TO DEFRAUD VA

Andrew Wolfson - November 21, 2008

Medical records allegedly altered, faked

Former Marine pilot Dean Toth had perfect hearing when tested over the past three years by Southwest Airlines, for which he now flies. But when his disability claim landed at the Department of Veterans Affairs last year, it included a hearing exam showing he was nearly deaf. He collected about \$93,000 in back benefits for that disability and began receiving \$2,500 in monthly payments.

Toth didn't suddenly lose his hearing: Instead, according to a 10-count indictment returned this week, he conspired with his next-door neighbor in Crestwood, Daniel Ryan Parker, a supervisor for Disabled American Veterans, to doctor his medical records and bribe a claims reviewer at the VA.

Toth, who served for a dozen years with the Marines, is one of 11 veterans from all four service branches charged this week in an elaborate plan to defraud the VA of nearly \$1.9 million by submitting altered or counterfeit medical records showing they suffered from illnesses and conditions ranging from lung cancer to frostbite to depression.

... According to court records, Parker, who helped veterans apply for benefits at the DAV, and Jeffrey Allen McGill, who evaluated claims at the VA regional center in Louisville, recruited friends, relatives and acquaintances from several states to file claims. <More at: <http://www.courier-journal.com/article/20081121/NEWS01/811210771>>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
12/4-7		St. Matthew's Catholic Church Rogers, TX	The Wall That Heals	St. Matthew's Knights of Columbus Council 12931	
12/4	1000- 1600	Cobb Galleria Centre Two Galleria Parkway, Atlanta, GA	Southeast Regional Career Event		Register
12/5		Biloxi, MS	Resource Fair	Isreal Jones	228-523-4688
12/6		Omaha, NE	Resource Fair	Joe Heatherly	402-890-3073
12/10	1700	Crest Theater 1031 K St, Sacramento, CA	Viet Nam Film Festival "Dear America" & "We Were Soldiers"	CA VN Vets Memorial	Free Admission
12/11-14		The Middle School 1201 Thompson Street, Decatur, TX	The Wall That Heals	Wise County Veterans Council	
12/11	1000- 1600	Scottish Rite Event Center 1895 Camino del Rio So., San Diego	Western Regional Career Event		Register
12/11	1000- 1600	TBA	Regional Career Event		Register

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

VA EXPANDS PROTECTIONS FOR VETERANS WITH MISSING PAPERWORK

November 17, 2008

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced special procedures for processing claims from veterans, family members, and survivors whose applications for financial benefits from VA may have been mishandled by VA personnel. These special procedures come after an audit by VA's Inspector General found documents waiting to be shredded at some of VA's regional offices that, if disposed of, could have affected the financial benefits awarded to veterans and survivors.

... Veterans and others who are concerned about missing documents and want more information on the special processing procedures may call 1-800-827-1000 for assistance or go to http://www.vba.va.gov/VBA/specialprocedures_qa.asp. They may also send an e-mail inquiry through IRIS@va.gov or visit their local VA regional office. <More at: <http://www.cnn.com/id/27774097/site/14081545>>

DOD RETHINKS 'PERSONALITY DISORDER' SEPARATIONS

Tom Philpott - November 13, 2008

Crackdown Begins On 'Personality Disorder' Separations

Under pressure from Congress and following the Army's lead, the Department of Defense has imposed a more rigorous screening process on the services for separating troubled members due to "personality disorder." The intent is to ensure that, in the future, no members who suffer from wartime stress get tagged with having a pre-existing personality disorder which leaves them ineligible for [service disability compensation](#).

Since the attacks of 9/11, more than 22,600 servicemembers have been discharged for personality disorder. Nearly 3400 of them, or 15 percent, had served in combat or imminent danger zones.

<More at: <http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,179143,00.html>>

MILITARY FAMILIES TO VA: STOP DENYING THAT MILITARY SUICIDES ARE CASUALTIES OF WAR

Nationwide -- Members of Military Families Speak Out are condemning comments by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs suggesting that the dramatic increase in the suicide rate among young veterans is not connected to the war in Iraq. The suicide rate among male veterans under the age of 29 is now twice that of the general population.

In an interview aired Monday November 10th on PBS's NewsHour, Secretary of Veterans Affairs James Peake said that Veterans' suicides are the result of:

"the same kinds of issues that have to do with suicide in the general population. It is issues of failed relationships, senses of hopelessness, transitions in life, that are at the root cause . . . we're not making a direct correlation with combat."

<More at: <http://www.mfso.org/article.php?id=1257>>

GATES: FOLLOW LAW ON PTSD-DISABILITY RATING

Kelly Kennedy - Staff writer - Nov 22, 2008

Defense Secretary Robert Gates has issued a policy stating that the military will follow a new law requiring that service members being medically retired for post-traumatic stress disorder be rated at least 50 percent disabled, a provision of the 2008 Defense Authorization Act.

But the Pentagon is ignoring another provision of the Act that requires a review board to be set up for medical evaluation cases, and has even added some pain to service members who feel they have been wronged: Decisions by the board, whenever it is formed, will not be retroactive. <More at: http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/11/military_PEBboard_112208w/>

HELP IS ON THE WAY

Bob Herbert - Op-Ed Columnist - November 22, 2008

With so much attention understandably focused on the economy and the incoming administration, the struggles being faced by G.I.'s coming home from combat overseas are receding even further from the public's consciousness.

If you're in your late teens or early 20s and your energies have been directed for a year or more toward dodging roadside bombs and ambushes, caring for horribly wounded comrades and, in general, killing before being killed, it can be difficult to readjust to a world of shopping malls, speed limits and polite conversation.

... The advertising campaign, initiated by the advocacy group Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, was designed to increase the number of veterans seeking treatment for their mental health difficulties. Many are embarrassed to speak about their problems or are unaware that help is available, or even that they need help.

... This campaign is titled, "Alone," and focuses on the sense of isolation so many veterans feel when they come home. The television and print ads encourage the veterans to visit a Web site, [CommunityOfVeterans.org](http://www.CommunityOfVeterans.org), as a place where they can share their experiences with other vets. <More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/22/opinion/22herbert.html>>

RECENT VETS HIT HARD BY HOME FORECLOSURES

Nov. 18, 2008 at 9:26 AM

WASHINGTON, Nov. 18 (UPI) -- Injured U.S. veterans of the Iraq War are being particularly hard-hit by the country's economic and home foreclosure crises, experts say. Such veterans are facing a triple-whammy of injury, unemployment and long waiting times for disability claim processing and appear to be especially vulnerable to home foreclosures, veterans' service organization officials told The New York Times Tuesday.

<More at: http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2008/11/18/Recent_vets_hit_hard_by_home_foreclosures/UPI-82921227018389/>

HISTORIC LAWSUIT CHALLENGES DELAYS IN BENEFITS TO VETERANS BY VETERANS AFFAIRS

November 11, 2008

WASHINGTON, -- Two groups representing thousands of American veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) and Veterans of Modern Warfare (VMW), announced that they have filed a lawsuit against the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The lawsuit, which was filed in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, seeks to end the unconscionable delays experienced by veterans when applying for disability benefits. VVA and VMW seek immediate action to prevent further irreparable harm to our nation's veterans.

The lawsuit demands that the VA provide an initial decision on every veteran's claim for disability benefits within 90 days and resolve appeals within 180 days. Additionally, the veterans groups ask that the Court grant further relief in the form of interim

benefits awards in the event that the VA exceeds these minimum standards of constitutionally-guaranteed due process. These interim benefits will provide veterans with a lifeline of support when it is most needed to facilitate reintegration into their lives back home. <More at: <http://www.veteranstoday.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=3958>>

STUDY LINKS HEART DISEASE, AGENT ORANGE TOXIN

Kelly Kennedy - Staff writer - Nov 23, 2008

Scientists studying dioxin exposure in humans — including Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange — have found a correlation between the chemicals and the death rates of heart disease and cardiovascular disease. <More at: http://www.navytimes.com/news/2008/11/military_dioxin_health_112108w/>

GULF WAR ILLNESS IS REAL, NEW FEDERAL REPORT SAYS

Alan Silverleib - CNN

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- An extensive federal report released Monday concludes that roughly one in four of the 697,000 U.S. veterans of the 1990-91 Gulf War suffer from Gulf War illness.

Full report at: http://sph.bu.edu/insider/images/stories/resources/annual_reports/GW%20and%20Health%20of%20GW%20Veterans_RAC-GWVI%20Report_2008.pdf

That illness is a condition now identified as the likely consequence of exposure to toxic chemicals, including pesticides and a drug administered to protect troops against nerve gas.

The 452-page report states that "scientific evidence leaves no question that Gulf War illness is a real condition with real causes and serious consequences for affected veterans."

<More at: http://www.cnn.com/2008/HEALTH/11/17/gulf_war_illness_study/index.html>

FOR DESPERATE VETS, VICTORY, ANGER OVER GULF WAR SYNDROME

Jason Blevins and David Olinger - The Denver Post - 11/19/2008

They were told they were crazy. Statistical anomalies. Whiners. This week — after enduring 17 years of baffling and incurable ailments they blamed on exposure to nasty chemicals and untested anti-nerve-gas agents— veterans of the Persian Gulf War were told they were right. <More at: http://www.denverpost.com/breakingnews/ci_11017787>

MORE U.S. SOLDIERS SEEK SUBSTANCE ABUSE HELP

Gregg Zoroya, USA TODAY

FORT LEONARD WOOD, Mo. — The number of soldiers seeking help for substance abuse has climbed 25% in the past five years, but the Army's counseling program has remained significantly understaffed and struggling to meet the demand, according to Army records. About 13,500 soldiers sought drug counseling this year and 7,200 soldiers were diagnosed with an abuse or dependency issue and enrolled in counseling, <More at: http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2008-11-20-drug-help_N.htm>

MILEAGE REIMBURSEMENT INCREASES FOR ELIGIBLE VETERANS

VA Department of Veterans Affairs - News Release - November 17, 2008

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that eligible veterans will see an increase in the mileage reimbursement they receive for travel to VA facilities for medical care. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake announced today that he will use his authority to raise the mileage reimbursement from the 28.5 cents per mile to 41.5 cents per mile for all eligible veterans. <More at: <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1617>>

REIMBURSEMENT RATE INCREASE GIVES TRICARE MENTAL HEALTH BENEFIT USERS PEACE OF MIND

November 13, 2008 - No. 08-112

FALLS CHURCH, Va. – TRICARE has increased mental health reimbursement rates by 5 percent for 24 mental health services. <More at: <http://www.tricare.mil/Pressroom/News.aspx?fid=477>>

ARMY ADMIRALS, GENERALS: REPEAL 'DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL'

Associated Press - November 17, 2008

ANNAPOLIS, Md. - More than 100 retired generals and admirals called today for repeal of the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy on gays so they can serve openly, according to a statement obtained by The Associated Press.

The move by the military veterans confronts the incoming administration of President-elect Barack Obama with a thorny political and cultural issue that dogged former President Bill Clinton early in his administration.

"As is the case with Great Britain, Israel, and other nations that allow gays and lesbians to serve openly, our service members are professionals who are able to work together effectively despite differences in race, gender, religion, and sexuality," the officers wrote.

While Obama has expressed support for repeal, he said during the presidential campaign that he would not do so on his own — an indication that he would tread carefully to prevent the issue from becoming a drag on his agenda. Obama said he would instead work with military leaders to build consensus on removing the ban on openly gay service members.

<More at: http://www.bostonherald.com/news/us_politics/view.bg?articleid=1133067>

NEW WAVE OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ARISES

McClatchy-Tribune Information Services - November 23, 2008

Fort Leonard Wood - Twelve years after a sex scandal prompted congressional investigations and changes in Army training, Fort Leonard Wood is again dealing with a wave of cases in which drill sergeants have engaged in sexual misconduct with women trainees.

Since February 2007, at least 14 drill sergeants or other trainers have faced courts-martial for having improper relationships with Soldiers undergoing initial-entry training at the sprawling Army post about 130 miles southwest of St. Louis.

<More at: <http://www.military.com/news/article/new-wave-of-sexual-misconduct-arises.html>>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF NOVEMBER 18, 2008

This week the Army, Marine Corps and Air Force announced an increase, while the Navy announced a decrease. The Coast Guard number remained the same. The net collective result is 784 more 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 96,932; Navy Reserve, 5,823; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 10,489; Marine Corps Reserve, 6,949; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 848. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 121,041, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Nov2008/d20081118nqr.pdf>>

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE MONDAY 24 NOVEMBER 2008

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

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,077 DAYS)		OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,606 DAYS)	
KILLED US	4,204	KILLED US	629
WOUNDED US [11/01/0810]	30,774	OTHER CASUALTIES US [10/2007]	1,994
OTHER US CASUALTIES [11/01/08]	≥34,618	KILLED COALITION	385
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [11/24/08]	167	WOUNDED US [11/01/08]	7,293
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1	WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007)	1,602
KILLED UK	176	KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED OTHER COALITION	138	KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (7/2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819	WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (7/2004)	32,034
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182	AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	1.75M/4.8M
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 47,555		
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [11/24/08]	≥ 97,339- 658,227		
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [11/9/08]	≥ 400K – 1.374M		
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2. 5M	COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$573,950,919,846

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

DUNWOODY BECOMES FIRST FEMALE 4-STAR GENERAL

November 14, 2008 - Associated Press

WASHINGTON - Ann E. Dunwoody, after 33 years in the Army, ascended Friday to a peak never before reached by a woman in the U.S. military: four-star general. ... Later Friday, at Fort Belvoir, Virginia - her birthplace - Dunwoody was being sworn in as commander of the Army Materiel Command, responsible for equipping, outfitting and arming all soldiers. Just five months ago, she became the first female deputy commander there.

<More at: <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory?id=6251969>>

DOD ANNOUNCES PROMOTION OF GUARD'S FIRST FOUR STAR

November 17, 2008

The Department of Defense announced today the promotion of Air National Guard Lt. Gen. Craig R. McKinley to the rank of general at a Pentagon ceremony hosted by Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates.

McKinley also assumed duties as chief of the National Guard Bureau, succeeding Army Lt. Gen. H Steven Blum, whom Gates has selected to become the deputy commander of U.S. Northern Command. McKinley, who had previously served as the Director of the Air National Guard, became the first reserve component officer to achieve 4-star rank. Blum will be the first reserve component officer to serve as deputy commander in a combatant command.

<More at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2008/11/mil-081117-dod05.htm>>

WILL "MINI-ME" BE THE PILOT?

US DEVELOPS TINY FLYING ROBOTS

Associated Press - November 22, 2008

DAYTON, Ohio - If only we could be a fly on the wall when our enemies are plotting to attack us. Better yet, what if that fly could record voices, transmit video and even fire tiny weapons? That kind of James Bond-style fantasy is actually on the drawing board. U.S. military engineers are trying to design flying robots disguised as insects that could one day spy on enemies and conduct dangerous missions without risking lives.

"The way we envision it is, there would be a bunch of these sent out in a swarm," said Greg Parker, who helps lead the research project at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton. "If we know there's a possibility of bad guys in a certain building, how do we find out? We think this would fill that void."

In essence, the research seeks to miniaturize the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle drones used in Iraq and Afghanistan for surveillance and reconnaissance. The next generation of drones, called Micro Aerial Vehicles, or MAVs, could be as tiny as bumblebees and capable of flying undetected into buildings, where they could photograph, record, and even attack insurgents and terrorists. <More at: <http://www.military.com/news/article/us-develops-tiny-flying-robots.html>>

IRAQI TROOPS DONATE TO US WILDFIRE VICTIMS

Associated Press - November 21, 2008

BAGHDAD - The U.S. military says a group of Iraqi soldiers has donated \$500 to help California wildfire victims.

Iraqi Col. Abbas Fadhil at the Besmaya range complex south of Baghdad says his troops want to send a message to the American people with the donation that "we are a family."

<More at: <http://www.military.com/news/article/iraqi-troops-donate-to-us-wildfire-victims.html>>

'GLORY' UNIT FROM CIVIL WAR REACTIVATES

Associated Press - November 21, 2008

BOSTON - An all-black Civil War infantry unit honored in the Oscar-winning movie "Glory" with Denzel Washington is making a real-life comeback.

The 54th Massachusetts - praised for a doomed charge in South Carolina in 1863 - will become a ceremonial unit for the state's National Guard. A ceremony is scheduled for later Friday at the Massachusetts Statehouse. As a ceremonial unit, the 54th will conduct military honors at state functions and funeral services for veterans.

<http://www.military.com/news/article/glory-unit-from-civil-war-reactivates.html>

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

WHAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE COMING FOR VETERANS?

The Obama-Biden Plan

As a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Barack Obama has fought to end benefit disparities, bring homeless veterans in off the street, strengthen mental health care, add billions of dollars in additional Department of Veterans Affairs funding, and reform a system that often places barriers between veterans and the benefits they have earned. Obama and Joe Biden will ensure we honor the sacred trust to care for our nation's veterans.

A Sacred Trust

Barack Obama and Joe Biden are committed to creating a 21st Century Department of Veterans' Affairs that provides the care and benefits our nation's veterans deserve. They will:

- **Allow All Veterans Back into the VA:** Reverse the 2003 ban on enrolling modest-income veterans, which has denied care to a million veterans.
- **Strengthen VA Care:** Make the VA a leader of national health care reform so that veterans get the best care possible. Improve care for polytrauma vision impairment, prosthetics, spinal cord injury, aging, and women's health.
- **Combat Homelessness among Our Nation's Veterans:** Establish a national "zero tolerance" policy for veterans falling into homelessness by expanding proven programs and launching innovative services to prevent veterans from falling into homelessness.
- **Fight Employment Discrimination:** Crack down on employers who commit job discrimination against guardsmen and reservists.

Help for Returning Service Members

Obama and Biden will improve the quality of health care for veterans, rebuild the VA's broken benefits system, and combat homelessness among veterans. They will:

- **Ensure a Seamless Transition:** Demand that the military and the VA coordinate to provide a seamless transition from active duty to civilian life.
- **Fully Fund VA Medical Care:** Fully fund the VA so it has all the resources it needs to serve the veterans who need it, when they need it. Establish a world-class VA Planning Division to avoid future budget shortfalls.
- **Fix the Benefits Bureaucracy:** Hire additional claims workers, and improve training and accountability so that VA benefit decisions are rated fairly and consistently. Transform the paper benefit claims process to an electronic one to reduce errors and improve timeliness.

Improved Treatment for Mental Health and TBI

Obama and Biden will improve mental health treatment for troops and veterans suffering from combat-related psychological injuries. They will:

- **Improve Mental Health Treatment:** Recruit more health professionals, improve screening, offer more support to families and make PTSD benefits claims fairer.
- **Improve Care for Traumatic Brain Injury:** Establish standards of care for Traumatic Brain Injury, the signature injury of the Iraq war.
- **Expand Vet Centers:** Expand and strengthen Vet Centers to provide more counseling for vets and their families.

http://change.gov/agenda/veterans_agenda/

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