

SOUND OFF!



VOL. III, NO 8
[#7 NOT PUB'D]

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"

10 DECEMBER 2007

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

"WE CAN'T LEAVE UNTIL WE WIN" ~ PART I

Categorical statements are always dangerous; they invite a variety of responses ranging from disdain to fury, and seldom including agreement. Nonetheless, here is mine for the day:

There is no more important issue for Americans than the Iraq War. Concomitantly, until we fix the Iraq War, we are pretty much unable to fix anything else.

Yes, civil liberties, justice and our entire Constitution are endangered and are desperately important, but it is the Iraq War that is being used as the excuse to neutralize democracy in America.

Yes, the environment and global warming are huge issues with dire potential for all of civilization, but it is the Iraq War that helps perpetuate the old carbon economy.

Yes, health care and poverty are very important for all of us, but it is the Iraq War that is bleeding the economy dry and killing any chance to even discuss, let alone ameliorate those problems.

Other issues such as fair taxes, immigration, education are all important but pale in comparison to the Iraq War.

Unfortunately, and starting with the serving military, many believe that there are only two choices in Iraq – military victory or military defeat. There is no concept of national victory. Our national defeat in Vietnam followed on many years of military victories. Iraq is following the same pattern.

Thus the glory of the undefined victory escapes us while the weight of potential defeat is borne only by the military. Our forces are designed to win battles, and they have – they are likewise destined to lose the national battle. They have not been defeated militarily but, as COL Harry Summers quotes a VNA Colonel in his "On Strategy", the U.S. won every battle in Vietnam but in the end that was "irrelevant". We are once again in danger of making our military successes and our human losses "irrelevant", and if that happens it because of us, not because of our soldiers.

It is we who have failed through our sins both of commission and especially omission. It is we who have given the military an impossible task. It would be fair if the military spoke to all of us in Kipling's words:

"If any question why we died,
Tell them, because our fathers lied."

Many are coming to the clear understanding that victory, as it is presently (un)defined, is unattainable either by the administration or by the opposition. I have to concur. There is no legitimate definition of victory in Iraq that the military alone can win. The administration has defined the problem as a national problem "a democratic and free Iraq", yet have offered only a military solution. *"When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."* (attributed to Bernard Baruch, statesman and adviser to Presidents).

The Congress is complicit in that decision by blindly agreeing. The Congress seems to be arguing about how to win the unwinnable, with stands taken from total war in the Middle East to include Iran and Syria, to leaving by next Thursday. Neither extreme will "win". Neither will lead to "victory" by any definition. Thus if we leave Iraq now or stay forever, given the current policy situation we have a predefined military defeat. That is not accurate, nor is it fair to the military, but it is what we and they are stuck with.

Again quoting Kipling's "Epitaphs of the War", he provides this epitaph for a dead "statesman":

"I could not dig: I dared not rob:
Therefore I lied to please the mob.
Now all my lies are proved untrue
And I must face the men I slew.
What tale shall serve me here among
Mine angry and defrauded young?"

The majority of the serving military reportedly now sees the Republican administration as bumbling war managers and as renegeing on promises, and the Democratic Congress as defeatist. They cannot be blamed for this view. With the burden of success placed squarely and exclusively on the military's shoulders, they will and must fight for "victory", and all who fail them or oppose them in that goal are "defeatists". Given that they have the exclusive responsibility, they can only define "victory" in military terms – conquer all opposition using military force.

True, Civil Affairs actions are going on, and successfully, but military Civil Affairs are most effective at the local level – they are not actions designed to build a "democratic and free nation" alone. Although they have some doctrinal responsibility for the national infrastructure within the AO, their principal role is tactical support to the field commander.

It is our responsibility, directly and through our representatives, to define not only what national victory means, but also what the military component of that victory should be. By limiting the military component to legitimate military missions, the armed forces can be off the hook for the jobs that they cannot or should not attempt to do, and can rightly claim victory for the jobs that they have done well.

Any definition has to be based on where we are now as a nation, and where we want to go. It does no good to try to decide what we should have done or not done; the glass is broken and cannot be unbroken – we can only go forward from here.

It is instructive to remember our own history. General Washington and the Continental Army may have defeated the redcoats on the battlefield, but it was the Congress that negotiated the peace. It was the Congress and President (not General) Washington that established and solidified the institutions that formed our nation.

Unfortunately, in all of this we the public are largely silent. Almost without exception, those who are deciding have no stake in the game other than a personal political one. The deciders – all of them – have nothing at risk except their legislative or bureaucratic incumbency, and their much-loved “legacy”. They risk as little as they can.

Those who are executing their decisions – the serving military – have everything at stake, but little or no participation in the decisions.

Since no one else seems to be willing or able to undertake defining victory in direct and comprehensible terms, in the next issue VUFT

will take a crack at that definition. We are only qualified as interested informed citizens with sufficient military experience to be able to factor in the military component properly. The currently serving military are being denied their voice in this matter, so we can try to stand in for them while exercising the role of a concerned citizenry.

Who knows? We just may find a pretty good answer. Let’s give a try at writing a national mission statement together.

Take a week to think about it, and then [send me your thoughts](#) on how to define “national victory in Iraq” in a way that accomplishes at least four things:

1. Stops the loss of US lives as soon as reasonably possible.
2. Stops the loss of Iraqi lives at the hands of US forces.
3. Ends the occupation by US forces of another sovereign nation – consider the timelines.
4. Leaves Iraq with a chance to stabilize itself through its own efforts - consider required outside financial and organizational help, not limited to the US.

Many of you have shared your thoughts on various aspects of this issue over the last several years. Your input is very important – I expect to hear from you by NLT 20 December.

See you next issue in Part II – maybe we can come up with a real Christmas gift for our troops. [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 <http://www.vetsprobono.org/index.htm>. United States Court of appeals for Veterans Claims “Public List of Practitioners” are members of the court’s bar <http://www.vetapp.gov/practitioners/>

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

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

CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE!

Please check the website at www.vuft.org. We have revised it and are regularly adding useful references.

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

THE FIGHT IS ON! The [law suit](#) that we have filed along with Veterans for Common Sense against the Veterans’ Administration proceeds slowly. There are new [documents](#) on the lawsuit concerning disclosures on our website.

On December 14, 2007, at 10:00 AM, Senior Judge Samuel Conti, U.S. District Court for Northern California, will hear oral arguments about VA’s motion to dismiss the law suit. The Federal court is located at 450 Golden Gate Avenue, Courtroom 1, 17th Floor, San Francisco.

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

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

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS meeting for December has been postponed; the board will be meeting in January. Details in the next issue.

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

MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS

MORE EVIDENCE OF WASHINGTON IGNORING VETERANS [Edited for length - Ed.]

Dear Sandy: Thank you for a great job in keeping us informed through your organization newsletter.

Puerto Rico is a Territory of the U.S. we have been serving in all wars/conflicts, there are approximately 180 thousand veterans in PR. Our VA hospital is over 40 years old, it has severe asbestos problems, it lacks proper fire protection, and among other problems the main building does not meet seismic requirements. They are currently constructing a six floor building that would house all the inpatient part of the hospital. After that is completed the current building will need to be torn down from the 4th floor and up due to the seismic deficiencies.

The VA hospital receives 2,000 veterans a day, in order to get a parking you must get to the hospital between 3:00 to 4:00AM in the morning. The hospital is understaffed; the ER only has 21 beds with only one trauma room. Although PR is only 100 X 35 miles, the [travel time] between the west part of the Island and the VA range between 2 ½ to 3 hours. We have four satellite clinics, however they do not have X-ray, CT scan and the proper equipment to deal with emergencies, it is sad to see people who are transported from the west side just to come in to the ER for a CT scan and if nothing is really wrong, they are shipped back to their home at very late hours of the night or early hours of the morning.

...We do not have a Senator or Legislator in Congress to fight for our rights. We have a Resident Commissioner who represents the Government of Puerto Rico, however he has no vote in any issues. For the last ten years three Resident Commissioners have promised veterans in PR to deal with the problem of our VA Hospital, however, Congress has not moved an inch to approve for a new hospital; they only continue to approve funds to make [repairs] to the old building. With the continuous incoming Iraq and Afghanistan veterans coming in the hospital is so overcrowded that in order to get an appointment for a specialty clinic the waiting list exceeds six months. Although fee basis is widely used, they are more used for 100% service connected veterans.

Your help would greatly be appreciated. God Bless, Awilda Torres

HELP FOR VA CLAIMS

Three things that will help a veteran with a claim are to know the process; to know how to find info about your illness or injury; and to determine how the VA has handled cases like yours in the past.

1. A web site where you can see the C&P Exam the VA uses, and print it out, and can show it to your private doctor.

www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/exams/index.htm

These 57 Disability Examination Worksheets are in use both by the doctors of VHA (Veterans Health Administration) who do the disability examinations and by the rating specialists, hearing officers, and Decision Review Officers of VBA (Veterans Benefits Administration) who do the disability evaluations.

2. A web site you can search, review and print out various pages of regulations, etc about the VA system & claims.

www.warms.vba.va.gov/TOCindex.htm, especially:

[Compensation and Pension - 21](#)

[38 Code of Federal Regulations - REGS](#)

[Book A - General](#)

[Book B - Adjudication](#)

[Book C - Schedule for Rating Disabilities](#)

3. A web site where you can search Veteran Board of Appeals to see how the VA has handled your illness or injury, what they were looking for, and what paragraphs in VA regs apply <http://www.index.va.gov/search/va/bva.html>. Decisions are current through August 31, 2007.

Thanks to "Colonel Dan"

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

SENATORS BYRD AND SANDERS SECURE FUNDS FOR GULF WAR ILLNESS RESEARCH

Nov 9, 2007

Washington, DC - U.S. Senators Robert C. Byrd, D- West Virginia , and Bernie Sanders, I- Vermont , applauded the Senate's passage of a \$10,000,000 investment in research to combat Gulf War Illness. Byrd and Sanders led the effort to include the funding in the Fiscal Year 2008 Department of Defense appropriations legislation, which cleared the Senate on November 8th.

"As recent research has further demonstrated, an alarming number of Gulf War veterans continue to suffer serious ailments as a result of exposure to toxic materials during the Persian Gulf War," said Byrd. "It is our moral responsibility to help those who are suffering as a result of illnesses contracted while serving our nation. We can and must do more to find treatments and cures for these serious ailments." <More at: www.veteransforcommonsense.org/articleid/8783>

HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE EXAMINES VETERANS' BENEFITS DISPARITIES

November 19, 2007

A House veterans affairs subcommittee held a hearing Oct. 16 on how to eliminate inconsistencies in the disability compensation awards to veterans by the Department of Veterans Affairs, particularly those stemming from claims of posttraumatic stress disorder. <More at: http://www.projo.com/news/content/Veterans_column19_11-19-07_H87T9HL_v4.16abc96.html>

COMPENSATION CAN RANGE FROM MORE THAN \$12,000 A YEAR IN NEW MEXICO TO LESS THAN \$8,000 IN OHIO, STUDIES HAVE FOUND. VETERANS FUNDING CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF NATIONAL BUDGETARY WRANGLING

David Doerr - November 19, 2007 – [Waco] Tribune-Herald staff writer

Funding for veterans and U.S. Rep. Chet Edwards are caught in a political tug of war as Congress and the White House battle over priorities. Since taking over the chairmanship this year of the U.S. House subcommittee over veterans spending, Edwards, D-Waco, has played a central role in getting legislation passed that adds \$8.1 billion to the Department of Veterans Affairs budget, the largest increase in the agency's 77-year history. ... Despite Edwards' successes so far this year, Congress has yet to send a final 2008 VA appropriations bill for President Bush to sign into law. The legislation is caught up in a veto showdown involving 10 other appropriations bills Bush has threatened to veto unless they are reduced to meet his \$933 billion discretionary budget request. <More at: www.wacotrib.com/news/content/news/stories/2007/11/19/11192007wacvafundingfight.html>

VA LEGISLATION HELD HOSTAGE

Two bills to improve VA care for wounded warriors appear to have been shelved for the year due to "holds" placed on them by former Ranking Member Senator Craig of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC).

S. 1233, an omnibus veterans' health measure, would direct the VA to develop individualized plans for the treatment and rehabilitation of veterans with traumatic brain injury (TBI), among many other things. S.1315, the Veterans Benefits Enhancement Act, would authorize additional wounded warrior benefits including a new term life insurance program for disabled veterans. Sen. Craig has blocked action on the bill because he opposes funding expanded benefits for Filipino veterans <More at: http://www.moaa.org/quicklist/lac_issues_update/lac_issues_update_071207.htm#issue2>

CAN'T FIND THE \$33M FOR THIS ONE, BUT THEY EASILY FOUND \$28M FOR ABSTINENCE-ONLY SEX EDUCATION, A PROVEN FAILURE

CONGRESS TRIES TO FIX GI BILL FOR RESERVISTS

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Nov 7, 2007

A bipartisan bill to fix a glitch in GI Bill eligibility that has denied thousands of National Guard and reserve members the right to bigger education benefits has run into an unexpected hurdle — a \$33 million price tag. At issue is a fluke in a law intended to make Guard and reserve members eligible for GI Bill payments at active-duty rates if they were mobilized for a minimum of 20 months in support of a contingency operation. Members of a Minnesota National Guard unit discovered in July that after 22 months of duty, including 16 in combat, they were ineligible because of the wording of their mobilization orders. The bill, [HR 3882](http://www.congress.gov/bills/110/hr3882), is aimed at correcting this problem. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2007/11/military_gibill_071107w/>

SO MUCH FOR “NO PERMANENT PRESENCE IN IRAQ”

DECLARATION OF 'ENDURING' PRESENCE

On Monday, President Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki signed a non-binding "Declaration of Principles for a Long-Term Relationship of Cooperation and Friendship" that will set the parameters for negotiating an "enduring" political, economic, cultural, and security relationship between the United States and Iraq. In the agreement, the two heads of state agreed to "extend the mandate of the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter" for one final year, which will give the two countries "another year to negotiate our bilateral arrangement" that will address "issues such as what mission U.S. forces in Iraq will pursue, whether they will establish permanent bases, and what kind of immunity, if any, should be granted to private security contractors."

... The underlying deal of the agreement, according to "two senior officials," is "a long-term troop presence in Iraq and preferential treatment for American investments in return for an American guarantee of long-term security including defense against internal coups." <More at: www.americanprogressaction.org/progressreport/2007/11/pr20071129>

SHORTER IRAQ TOURS STILL A YEAR AWAY

Associated Press - December 05, 2007

WASHINGTON - The No. 2 U.S. commander in Iraq said Dec. 4 that 15-month combat tours are too long for U.S. Soldiers but probably cannot be shortened until late 2008 as troop levels decline. <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,157590,00.html>

ANOTHER ARGUMENT FOR OUTSOURCING?

NEW ARMY CHOPPER FOUND UNSAFE

Associated Press - November 10, 2007

SACRAMENTO, Calif. - The Army is spending \$2.6 billion on hundreds of European-designed helicopters for homeland [security](#) and disaster relief that turn out to have a crucial flaw: They aren't safe to fly on hot days, according to an internal report obtained by The Associated Press. <More at: www.heraldextra.com/content/view/243104/>

DESERTIONS HIGHEST SINCE 2001

William H. McMichael - Staff writer - Nov 18, 2007

In a likely reflection of the continued strain of multiple deployments to a 4½-year war, the number of soldiers deserting the Army skyrocketed during the past fiscal year to its highest level since 2001. All told, 4,698 soldiers were declared deserters, according to Lt. Col. Darryl Darden of the Army's office of the deputy chief of staff for manpower and personnel. That is a 42.3 percent increase over the previous fiscal year, and the highest annual total since fiscal year 2001, when 4,399 troops deserted.

More disturbingly, the pace of Army desertions appears to have increased even during fiscal 2007: 63.6 percent of the year's 4,698 desertions were recorded from April through September, according to Army data.

At the same time, desertions fell in two of the other three services. A total of 1,036 Marines walked away last fiscal year, marking a three-year decline. Navy desertions — 1,129 during the 12 months ending Sept. 30 — fell for the seventh straight year. And a mere 16 airmen left the Air Force for more than 30 days, the time a service member must be absent without leave before being declared a deserter. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2007/11/military_desertions_071115w/>

FEEDING OFF THE PENTAGON

Mark Benjamin - Dec. 04, 2007

In April 2007, William Winkenwerder Jr. retired from his position as assistant secretary for health affairs at the Department of Defense, where he had been in charge of all military healthcare. On June 1, he went to work for a Wisconsin-based private contractor named Logistics Health Inc., which hired him to serve on its board of directors and "advise and counsel LHI on business development," according to a company press release. It was a hire that seems to have paid quick dividends.

On June 13, 2007, the Department of Defense began accepting bids for a contract to give soldiers medical and dental exams before they head off to war. Logistics Health was among the companies bidding on the contract, which was worth hundreds of millions of dollars over four years. Before he left the DOD, in addition to running military healthcare, Winkenwerder had also been in charge of the office that wrote the contract.

On Sept. 25, Logistics Health won the contract despite bidding \$800 million, meaning it was not the low bidder. At least one other company bid \$100 million less.

After objections by competing companies, the contract has now been "stayed," or put on hold, while the Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, evaluates those complaints. <More at: www.salon.com/news/feature/2007/12/04/va_contract/>

MORE THAN HALF OF AFGHANISTAN 'UNDER TALIBAN'

Kim Sengupta -22 November 2007

More than half of Afghanistan is back under Taliban control and the NATO force in the country needs to be doubled in size to cope with the resurgent group, a report by the Senlis Council think-tank says. A study by the group found that the Taliban, enriched by illicit profits from the country's record poppy harvest, had formed de-facto governments in swathes of the southern Pashtun belt.

The Afghan government and its NATO allies strongly deny the Senlis version of what is taking place in the country and say the extent of alleged Taliban control – 54 per cent – is a major exaggeration. In particular, British troops in Helmand have, in recent months, recovered territory lost to the Islamist group.

But senior defence sources say that a lack of frontline combat forces has meant that areas clawed back from the Taliban often cannot be held and have to be retaken after costly and fierce fighting. There is also an acknowledgement that the dangers on the ground have meant that aid efforts are being stymied. <More at: <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/asia/article3182330.ece>>

ASSISTANCE DELAYED = ASSISTANCE DENIED

VET DIED AFTER VA CENTER, JAIL REFUSED HIM

20 Nov 2007

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) A homeless Vietnam veteran whose body was found beneath an Iowa City bridge had been turned away just days before from a Veterans Affairs center and the county jail.

The nearly naked body of Sonny Iovino, 55, was found Nov. 7 under a bridge, and an autopsy showed he died of hypothermia. <More at: <http://wcco.com/iowawire/22.0.html?type=local&state=IA&category=n&filename=IA--HomelessVetDeath.xml#>>

ARMY REITERATES BAN ON WATERBOARDING

Associated Press - November 14, 2007

WASHINGTON - With Congress' approval of a new attorney general who refused to describe waterboarding as torture, the U.S. Army has sent out a message to its leaders repeating that the interrogation technique is prohibited in the military.

The service issued the Nov. 6 message "to eliminate any confusion that may have arisen as a result of recent public discourse on the subject." The U.S. military formally banned waterboarding as an interrogation technique in September 2006. <More at: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21773960/>

NO SHIFT OF MARINES TO AFGHAN WAR

Associated Press - December 06, 2007

WASHINGTON - The top Marine general said Dec. 5 that Defense Secretary Robert Gates has rejected his proposal to shift Marine forces from Iraq to Afghanistan, reflecting in part the Bush administration's concern that recent security gains in Iraq are fragile and reversible.

"After discussion with the secretary and with my colleagues on the Joint Staff, there is a determination that right now the timing is not right to provide additional Marine forces to Afghanistan," Gen. James T. Conway, the Marine Corps commandant, told reporters at the Pentagon. <More at: www.examiner.com/a-1088460-No_Shift_of_Marines_to_Afghan_War.html>

I GUESS THAT THIS IS THE WAY THAT "THE ARMY TAKES CARE OF ITS OWN"

ARMY PAYS WRONGFULLY CONVICTED VET \$725

Associated Press - December 05, 2007

SEATTLE - In 1944, an Italian prisoner of war was found lynched following a night of rioting at Fort Lawton in Seattle. Forty-three black Soldiers were tried in one of the largest courts-martial of World War II. Of those, 28 were found guilty of rioting and sentenced to as many as 25 years in prison.

In late October, the Army's Board of Corrections of Military Records ruled the trial was "fundamentally unfair and improper." It said the Soldiers should be given honorable discharges and compensated. About a week ago, one of the men, Samuel Snow, got a check.

For \$725.

The Army said that was the amount he would have been paid between the time he was convicted and the time he was released from prison about 15 months later. The compensation, says Rep. Jim McDermott, is far less than Snow deserves+. The amount - based on Snow's wages at the time of \$50 a month - was not adjusted for inflation or to reflect any interest for the 63 years the Army withheld the money. ... Army spokesman, Maj. Nathan Banks, said the amount was in keeping with regulations.

<More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,157597,00.html>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>What</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>Notes</u>
12/6 – 12/9		The Dixie Center, St. George, UT	Wall That Heals	VVA Southern Utah Chapter #961	
12/25		Los Angeles	Resource Fair	Doris Nickelson	310-518-1855

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

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

VA DISABILITY CLAIMS BACKLOG GETS LONGER

Aaron Glantz - November 28, 2007

Wounded veterans are being forced to wait longer for a disability check, according to new data from the Department of Veterans Affairs information obtained by McClatchy Newspapers. According to McClatchy, veterans must wait an average of 183 days for a claim to be decided - up from 177 days a year before. <More at: <http://warcomeshome.org/content/va-disability-claims-backlog-gets-longer>>

INCREASED DEPRESSION AMONG IRAQ VETS

Associated Press - November 14, 2007

CHICAGO - The euphoria of a Soldier's homecoming from Iraq often gives way to depression, stress and trouble dealing with family members during the first months home, a new Pentagon study finds. And the adjustment struggle was more profound for National Guard troops and reservists than it was for active-duty soldiers.

About 42 percent of the Guard and reserves, compared to 20 percent of active-duty troops, were identified as needing mental health treatment in two screenings. The first testing was immediately upon return from Iraq and the second six months later.

Problems showed up more often on the second screening. From the time they returned, there was a fourfold increase in interpersonal problems, for example, likely driven by family conflicts as the returning soldiers adjusted to home life. Almost a third of the more than 88,000 returning troops in the study had signs of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, conflicts in relationships or other problems after six months. That compared to about 17 percent when the troops first got home, according to the report that appears in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association.

<More at: http://health.yahoo.com/news/ap/iraq_mental_health.htm>

A CBS NEWS INVESTIGATION UNCOVERS A SUICIDE RATE FOR VETERANS TWICE THAT OF OTHER AMERICANS

CBS News - 13 November 2007

New York - They are the casualties of wars you don't often hear about - soldiers who die of self-inflicted wounds. Little is known about the true scope of suicides among those who have served in the military. But a five-month CBS News investigation discovered data that shows a startling rate of suicide, what some call a hidden epidemic.... little information exists about how widespread suicides are among these who have served in the military. There have been some studies, but no one has ever counted the numbers nationwide. "Nobody wants to tally it up in the form of a government total," said Mike Bowman, parent of an Army reservist dead by his own hand.

Why do the families think that is? "Because they don't want the true numbers of casualties to really be known," said Kevin Lucey, parent of a Marine reservist also dead by his own hand.

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., is a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee. "If you're just looking at the overall number of veterans themselves who've committed suicide, we have not been able to get the numbers," Murray said.

CBS News' investigative unit wanted the numbers, so it submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to the Department of Defense asking for the numbers of suicides among all service members for the past 12 years. Four months later, they sent CBS News a document, showing that between 1995 and 2007, there were almost 2,200 suicides. That's 188 last year alone. But these numbers included only "active duty" soldiers.

CBS News went to the Department of Veterans Affairs, where Dr. Ira Katz is head of mental health. "There is no epidemic in suicide in the VA, but suicide is a major problem," he said. Why hasn't the VA done a national study seeking national data on how many veterans have committed suicide in this country? "That research is ongoing," he said.

So CBS News did an investigation - asking all 50 states for their suicide data, based on death records, for veterans and non-veterans, dating back to 1995. Forty-five states sent what turned out to be a mountain of information. And what it revealed was stunning. In 2005, for example, in just those 45 states, there were at least 6,256 suicides among those who served in the armed forces. That's 120 each week, in just one year. <More at: www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/11/13/cbsnews_investigates/main3496471.shtml

RELATED STORY

HELP AND RESOURCES: VETERAN SUICIDE

Laura Strickler - CBS News - 13 November 2007

FYI: warning signs and where those at risk can get help.< www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/11/13/fyi/main3495640.shtml

ARMY DISMISSALS FOR MENTAL HEALTH, MISCONDUCT RISE

Daniel Zwerdling

All Things Considered, November 15, 2007 · New Pentagon figures released to NPR show that since the United States invaded Iraq, officers have kicked out far more troops for having behavior issues that are potentially linked to post-traumatic stress disorder than they did before the war.... an Army chart, which NPR recently received, shows that since the United States invaded Iraq:

- Commanders have discharged almost 20 percent more soldiers for "misconduct" than they did in the same period before the war;
- Commanders have discharged more than twice as many soldiers for "drug abuse" (a subset of the "misconduct" category);
- Commanders have discharged almost 40 percent more soldiers for "personality disorder."

In all, the Army has kicked out more than 28,000 soldiers since the war in Iraq began on the grounds of personality disorder and misconduct. <More at: www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16330374>

20,000 VETS' BRAIN INJURIES NOT LISTED IN PENTAGON

Gregg Zoroya - USA TODAY

At least 20,000 U.S. troops who were not classified as wounded during combat in Iraq and Afghanistan have been found with signs of brain injuries, according to military and veterans records compiled by USA TODAY.

The data, provided by the Army, Navy and Department of Veterans Affairs, show that about five times as many troops sustained brain trauma as the 4,471 officially listed by the Pentagon through Sept. 30. These cases also are not reflected in the Pentagon's official tally of wounded, which stands at 30,327. The number of brain-injury cases were tabulated from records kept by the VA and four military bases that house units that have served multiple combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

<More at: www.usatoday.com/news/military/2007-11-22-braininjuries_N.htm>

THE SOLDIER AND THE STUDENT

Aaron Glantz - November 27, 2007]

"Join the military and go to college." That's what the recruiters say.

But the deal that today's servicemen and servicewomen get is a far cry from what their fathers and grandfathers got. When President Franklin Roosevelt signed the GI Bill into law in the waning days of World War II, he saw it as part of his New Deal program. The law, officially called the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, promised returning veterans that the government would pay the full cost of tuition and books at any public or private college or job-training program. It also provided unemployment insurance and loans to buy homes and start businesses. By contrast, the current Montgomery GI Bill, passed in 1984, asks active duty members to accept a pay reduction of \$100 per month through twelve months of military service. When they return to school, they

receive \$1,100 monthly for a maximum of three years of education benefits. It's an amount that doesn't come close to covering the cost of a modern college education, but it does help some veterans--if they can get through the red tape.

<More at: <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20071210/glantz>>

A LEARNING DISABILITY

Dan Ephron - NEWSWEEK - Nov 26, 2007 Issue

Bucknell University student Matt Schelberg finds that his GI Bill does not cover college costs while his grandfather, Charles Schelberg had his education completely taken care of

... Matthew Schelberg enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserves in 2001 and took part in the invasion of [Iraq](#) two years later. He spent six months south of Baghdad and returned for a second tour in Haditha that ended earlier this year. Like his grandfather, Schelberg went from an overseas deployment to a college classroom. But as he studies at Bucknell University, the debt piles up. Schelberg's GI Bill, a scaled-down version of the original, pays less than one tenth of his university and housing fees, which come to \$46,000 a year. By graduation, he expects to have taken out \$60,000 in student loans. <More at: www.newsweek.com/id/70996>

VETERANS MAKE NEGLIGIBLE GAINS IN FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT, STUDY SAYS

STEPHEN LOSEY - November 15, 2007

The federal government reported only slight increases in the number of veterans it employs. Nearly 458,000 veterans — or 25.4 percent of the federal work force — worked for the government in fiscal 2006, according to a new report by the Office of Personnel Management. That was an increase of about 1,700 veterans — or a 0.2 percentage point increase — over the previous year. No data exists for 2007. <More at: <http://federaltimes.com/index.php?S=3187714>>

FAMILY FIGHTS VA FOR PULLING CHAPLAIN'S BENEFITS

Esme Murphy - November 13, 2007

(WCCO) Twin Cities Army Chaplain Father Tim Vakoc was critically wounded by a roadside bomb in Iraq three years ago. The Veterans Administration has pulled his benefits for speech and physical therapy. VA doctors have told the family that Vakoc was not making enough progress to qualify for the benefit. <More at: <http://wcco.com/local/benefits.pulled.va.2.567068.html>>

AWOL SOLDIER SEEKING TREATMENT ARRESTED

Associated Press - November 15, 2007

SYRACUSE, N.Y. - A Soldier who served two combat tours in Iraq was arrested Nov. 14 for leaving the Army without permission more than a year ago to seek treatment for post traumatic stress disorder.

At a news conference hours before his arrest, Sgt. Brad Gaskins said he left the base in August 2006 because the Army wasn't providing effective treatment after he was diagnosed with PTSD and severe depression. "They just don't have the resources to handle it, but that's not my fault," Gaskins said. <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,156277,00.html>

TORTURE UNDERMINES AMERICA'S HONOR

Bob Smith - Times-Picayune, New Orleans - November 10, 2007

On Sunday we honor our military veterans, as we should. But the day has been marred by the our government's policy to allow torture of enemy prisoners -- a policy that is disgracing our nation. ... Knowing we will not torture our prisoners can save American lives when the enemy chooses not to fight to the death but instead surrenders, as many Germans did in World War II. They chose to be captured by us rather than by the Soviets, who were known for their hideous tortures.

<More at: www.nola.com/news/t-p/otheropinions/index.ssf?/base/news-0/119488920357940.xml&coll=1>

Bob Smith is a retired Command Sergeant Major with the U.S. Army Special Forces Green Beret. He served three tours in Vietnam and is currently a veterans advocate living in New Orleans.

A PRIMER ON THE LAW OF TORTURE

Anthony Piel – truthout Op-Ed - 15 November 2007

... a succession of current and former attorneys general, legal counsels, secretaries of defense, judicial appointees, CIA agents, legislators and others seem to be having difficulty figuring out what constitutes torture or other cruel and inhuman treatment as a matter of law. For example, does "waterboarding" constitute torture? Perhaps they could do with a primer on the subject.

What does the law actually say? According to the 1984 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment: "The term 'torture' means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining information or a confession ... inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or

acquiescence of a public official or any other person acting in an official capacity ... No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political stability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture." Could any statement of law be clearer? <More at: www.truthout.org/docs_2006/111507A.shtml>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED, AS OF DECEMBER 5, 2007

This week the Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard announced a decrease, while the Army and Navy announced an increase. The net collective result is 77 more reservists mobilized than last week. At any given time, services may mobilize some units and individuals while demobilizing others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 71,711; Navy Reserve, 5,551; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 6,427; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,277; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 351. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been mobilized to 91,317, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel, who are currently mobilized, can be found at www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec2007/d20071205ngr.pdf.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SUNDAY 9 DECEMBER 2007

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	3,886
WOUNDED US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 10/1]	28,451
OTHER US CASUALTIES [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 10/1]	≥29,584
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [LAST DoD UPDATE 10/1]	130
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	4
KILLED UK	173
KILLED OTHER COALITION	133
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE 6/30]	1,001
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 47,555
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 85,072 [LANCET-1,129,698]
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400,000+ [LANCET- 1,414,723]
IRAQ REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL [9/15]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US (10/24/2007)	469
*OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 10/2007]	7,720
KILLED COALITION (6/2007)	278
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (11/3/2007)	1,472
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (7/2004)	32,034
AFGHAN REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE [12/9]	\$475,643,069,248

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

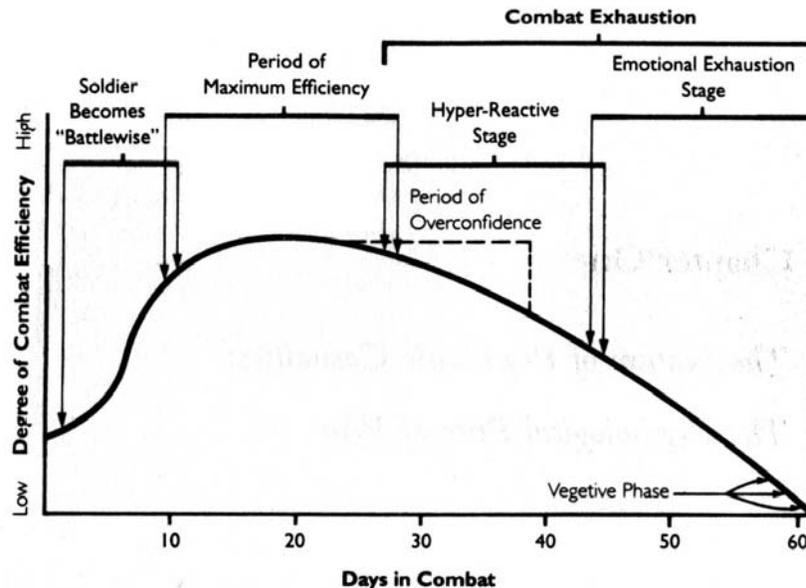
* This entry has been changed to "Non-mortal casualties" which includes wounded, non-hostile casualties, and diseased where medical air transport was required. To see detailed demographic data on the casualties go to <http://siadapp.dior.whs.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/castop.htm>

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

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

WE'VE KNOWN ABOUT IT ALL ALONG

Prolonged combat without relief seriously increases the risk to soldiers. We have known it since World War I, studied and reported on it after World War II (see 1946 figure below), proved it in Vietnam, and now have forgotten it again.



The Relation of Stress and the Development of Combat Exhaustion to the Combat Efficiency of the Average Soldier

Source: Swank and Marchand, 1946

ADD-ON ~ USERRA RULES OF THUMB

ACCORDING TO A LAW FIRM THAT SPECIALIZES IN EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS CASES:

The only instances in which you can deny reemployment to a returning service member are listed below.

1. Circumstances of the company/business operations have so changed as to make it impossible or unreasonable to reemploy the returning vet.
2. Helping the vet to become qualified for reemployment would pose an undue hardship. However, you must first attempt reasonable efforts, such as training, to help the person become qualified.
3. The employee worked in a temporary position and did not have a reasonable expectation of continued employment indefinitely or for a significant period.
4. The reemployment documentation doesn't pass muster (e.g., leave exceeded five years; employee was dishonorably discharged).

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