

# SOUND OFF!



VOL. III, NO 10

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

**"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"**

10 JANUARY 2008

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

### A GUEST EDITORIAL FROM ONE OF OUR MEMBERS

#### THE POLITICS OF WAR

Carissa Picard – 7 January 2008

On January 3, 2008, military blogger Major Andrew Olmsted was killed (<http://www.rockymountainnews.com/news/2008/jan/04/rocky-blogger-andrew-olmsted-killed-iraq/>) in Iraq. Andrew wrote a blog ([http://andrewolmsted.com/archives/2008/01/final\\_post.html](http://andrewolmsted.com/archives/2008/01/final_post.html)) to be published in the event of his death. While Americans were losing interest in Iraq (<http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSN0460764020080105>), Andrew was trying to find the right words to express the peace he had made with the possibility of his death there. Like many who have written about Andrew Olmsted's remarkable final words (<http://www.vetvoice.com/showDiary.do?diaryId=338>), I did not have the honor of knowing Andrew personally but wish now that I had. Andrew's blog is replete with self-deprecating humor, which I immediately find endearing. Andrew is also very clear about his reason for being in Iraq—which transcends the politics of war:

"Soldiers cannot have the option of opting out of missions because they don't agree with them: that violates the social contract. The duly-elected American government decided to go to war in Iraq. (Even if you maintain President Bush was not properly elected, Congress voted for war as well.) . . .

Whether or not this mission was a good one, my participation in it was an affirmation of something I consider quite necessary to society. So if nothing else, I gave my life for a pretty important principle; I can (if you'll pardon the pun) live with that."

At the same time, he writes that he hopes his death can be a reminder to others about the true costs of war—the costs that Americans, academics, and politicians tend to overlook when calculating the pros and cons of military engagements. The trouble, of course, is that there are no figures for these costs, no *meaningful* measurements. I believe that numbers alone are insufficient. The value of a human life,

and the value of Andrew's life, cannot be properly expressed by a number, any number.

At the end of his blog, Andrew worries about the suffering his wife will endure and wishes he had been a better husband. It is official. I adore Major Andrew Olmsted. A man I never met and never will. Which brings me to another soldier I posthumously adore: Specialist Justin Rollins.

Justin was part of the 82nd Airborne Division when his team found a litter of motherless puppies ([http://www.armytimes.com/news/2007/05/ap\\_puppy\\_love\\_070512w/](http://www.armytimes.com/news/2007/05/ap_puppy_love_070512w/)). They rescued the puppies and brought them back to their camp. Justin had his picture taken that night holding one of the puppies—a glimpse of the human heart beating beneath all that army-issued gear. The following day, Justin was killed by a roadside bomb.

My husband asks me why I do things like this: cut Justin's photo out of the paper and put it on our refrigerator, print out Andrew's final blog. I do it because I have to. I do it because I don't want to reduce a human life to a single digit. I do it because it isn't about what we are losing when a solider dies, it is about who we have lost.

I just wish every other American was doing it too. If they were, maybe Iraq would still be the number one issue on voters' minds in November and I would have less people to adore after they have died.

"War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself."

John Stuart Mill

*Carissa Picard is the creator and President of [Military Spouses for Change](#) (MSC), a non-partisan, non-profit membership organization that seeks to promote and protect the rights, interests, and needs of service members, veterans, and military families by educating the public and empowering military spouses. She is also on the Government Affairs Committee for the non-partisan, political advocacy organization, [Veterans and Military Families for Progress](#). Ms. Picard currently lives in Ft. Hood, Texas, with her two young sons and her husband, an Army Blackhawk pilot.*

Reprinted with permission – Thanks Carissa

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

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

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

### **WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!**

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

### **CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE!**

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

## **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.

### **JUST IN! AS WE GO TO PRESS**

The judge in our case against the VA has agreed to accept the case! We win round one– VA, DoD, and DoJ lose!

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

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

**THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS** will be meeting on 26 January 2008 at the chair’s home in Santa Barbara, CA – 1100 - 1530.

**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**

### **READ CAPT. ADAM SNYDER'S LAST E-MAIL HOME**

This Dec. 1 e-mail was the last correspondence Capt. Adam Snyder sent to family and friends before he died Dec. 5. In the e-mail, Snyder expresses his feelings about the U.S. government's handling of the war in Iraq. The e-mail was one of many messages Snyder often sent to keep his family and friends updated on the war.

Things are going pretty well here. We actually find ourselves bored some days, because enemy activity has been low. This is a good thing, thought not much fun. It seems the new policies of reconciliation, working with local Iraqi leaders and empowering them to tackle the problems, is really paying off. The bottom line is that a victory is in site [sic]. Unfortunately, victory is two-fold. One, the nation must be secure from external enemies: foreign fighters from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, etc. This is the part we are doing well at. The second part is creating a self-sufficient Iraqi government. This is the part we seem to be failing quite exceptionally at. At every level of government, corruption is at a heinous level. I'm not sure what the answer is, but it will take a strong leader with an iron fist to stamp out this mess. The U.S. often forces the Iraqis to treat problems with a western mindset. Example, your Oil Ministry is corrupt. The Iraqi answer may be to execute the Oil Minister and his key allies, while imprisoning the rest. We do not allow that, and instead force the Iraqis government to move key officials, and issue them stern warnings, which does nothing.

One thing we must admit: Saddam ran a pretty tight ship. Things might not have been ultra-efficient, but things got done. The majority of the problems in Iraq now are our's the U.S. government's fault. It is utterly ridiculous to see so many Senators and Representatives on the national news condemning the leaders of Iraq for their ineptitude. Where they really should point that figure is at themselves and their colleagues. I would be curious to see the results of a basic quiz given to Congress. Name Iraq and all of its neighbors. Explain the difference between Sunni and Shia. Explain the formation of the nation of Iraq. Explain how Al Qaeda came to power.

I imagine these gentlemen would not attack Iraq with such zeal if the American public knew how little Congress knew about the matters they decide on. Yes, I am talking way above my pay grade, but the absurdity of our upper echelons of government is to an intolerable level, and I feel it is my job as an American citizen and a leader of its soldiers to educate the population, whose rights I purportedly protect. The approach of the election brings an opportunity to make change, both good and bad. Republican or Democrat, I don't care. It just takes an educated, experienced, moral person, who can be honest with themselves and their constituents. I know, I ask the impossible. I think it is appalling how few men of Congress, especially the Presidential candidates, have any military service, especially when the Iraq War and the War on Terror is the biggest focal point.

I'll get off my soapbox.

You all continue to be very supportive and I thank you. We've gotten good supply of power tools, food, hygiene products, and letters. My soldiers are quite amazed!

Attached are some lighter pictures. We started playin gdodgeball on Wednesday nights and we have some ridiculous outfits. Also, my buddy, CPT Mike Sykes and I, took a couple of pictures for our Chjristmas cards we'll be sending out soon.

God bless. ~ Adam

### **AGENT ORANGE RELATED**

A newly unclassified report "Corona Harvest: Defoliation Operations in Southeast Asia" may be of interest to those who are concerned about the Agent Orange continuing problem It is available on line at

<http://www.2ndbattalion94thartillery.com/Chas/CoronaHarvestReport.pdf>

Norm Cegelnik

### **RUMOR CONTROL: THERE IS NO JAN. 17 DEADLINE TO REGISTER FOR VA BENEFITS**

Disregard any email or blog post that tells vets they must register or re-register at the VA by Jan. 17.

Maybe I'm just getting grumpy in my old age...but sometimes I wish we had "The Stupid Police" who could round up those who shouldn't be allowed near a computer keyboard.

We have a perfect example of this. Appearing on blogs and in emails is a dire warning to veterans to sign up for VA benefits before Jan. 17, 2008...or else. Disregard this information if it comes your way! There is no deadline!

This is a perfect example of someone taking old information, adding there own two cents...and coming up with complete garbage.

It appears they found out that on Jan. 17, 2003 (note 2003), the VA cut off enrollment to Priority Group 8 veterans. These are vets with no service-connected conditions and whose income is above a certain threshold. That enrollment ban is still in effect.

So, some idiot added 2 + 2 and came up with 5! They must have got dates confused...and assumed this was going to happen in 2008. Not so! There is no 2008 deadline because this deed is already done.

Again...if you see this information...please disregard it as false... and try to get out the correct message to veterans.

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

### **FILNER INTRODUCES LEGISLATIVE PACKAGE TO HELP VETERANS SURVIVE THE SUBPRIME MORTGAGE CRISIS**

December 19, 2007 - Kristal DeKleer (202) 225-9756

Washington, D.C. – House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA) today introduced a pair of bills to address the needs of veterans during the ongoing subprime mortgage market crisis.

"I am very pleased to offer these important pieces of legislation," said Chairman Filner. "The current VA home loan program is irrelevant because fees for the loans are too high and equity requirements are overly restrictive. As a result, veterans are forced to turn to the commercial mortgage market, which is risky and volatile. Loan products in this market offer non-traditional features that have recently lead to the rise in delinquency and foreclosures in the subprime market among the veteran population."

H.R. 4884, The Veteran Home Loan Guaranty Improvement Act of 2008, will make home loans more accessible to veterans by easing restrictions on the home loan guaranty programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The bill eliminates the equity requirements for refinancing in response to the declining home values which prohibit many veterans from qualifying for the benefit. The bill also reduces the VA guaranteed home loan funding fees to one percent and eliminates the funding fees for veterans seeking to refinance a home loan, among other things.

H.R. 4883 will prohibit foreclosure of property owned by a servicemember for one year following a period of military service.

"For many of our returning servicemembers and veterans, the stress of what they have gone through in war is still prevalent when they return home," continued Chairman Filner. "Unfortunately, for many of these heroes, subprime loans are the only option when they do not have the best credit score, and more often than not, their low credit score is a direct result of their service to our country. These bills protect veterans from predatory lending, increase opportunities for homeownership and protect veterans from foreclosure for a whole year after their military service. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the new year to address the negative impact the recent subprime foreclosures have had on our veterans and servicemembers."

<http://www.wawatchdog.org/07/hcva07/hcva121907-3.htm>

### **KAUAI GIVES VETERANS, DEPLOYED TROOPS TAX BREAK**

Associated Press - December 31st, 2007

LIHUE, Hawaii (AP) \_ The Kauai County Council unanimously passed a bill awarding veterans a one-time real property tax credit of up to 1,500 dollars. The bill also creates a future tax exemption for deployed military personnel.

Councilman Mel Rapozo says the measure is a way for the county to say thank you to local veterans deployed to combat or hazardous duty zones prior to the 2008 tax year. <More at: <http://www.kpua.net/news.php?id=13542>>

### **BUSH VETO'S 2008 MILITARY PAY RAISE ACT**

Rod Powers, About.com - Dec 31 2007

In a surprise move, the President has vetoed HR 1585, the 2008 Defense Authorization Act. This means that U.S. Military personnel will not receive the 3.5 percent raise in military pay authorized by the act on January 1. Instead, troops will receive a raise of 3.0 percent, which is an automatic adjustment for inflation required by previous law.

At issue is a single provision of the bill, Section 1083, which would allow Iraqi assets in the United States to be frozen.

In a statement, White House Deputy Press Secretary Scott Stanzel said, "The President intends to veto H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 ("NDAA"). One provision in the bill - section 1083 - would significantly amend current law (the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act) in ways that would imperil Iraqi assets held in the United States, including reconstruction and central bank funds.

... Also at issue are millions of dollars in enlistment, reenlistment and other bonuses. The current authority for the services to pay such bonuses expires on December 31. <More at: <http://usmilitary.about.com/od/militarypay/a/veto.htm>>

### **PETRAEUS SEES GRADUAL DRAWDOWN OF TROOPS IN 2008**

Jamie Gumbrecht - McClatchy Newspapers - December 30, 2007

BAGHDAD — Nearly five years into the war in Iraq, the top commanding general here said Saturday that security gains and a gradual hand-off to Iraqis will allow a drawdown of U.S. forces in 2008. But the security improvements that brought violence down to 2005 levels are fragile and reversible, Gen. David Petraeus said during a press briefing. They depend on a complicated equation

of troop concentrations, citizen security forces, cooperation from Iraq's neighboring countries and relative quiet from militias such as the Shiite Mahdi Army. <More at: <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/homepage/story/23918.html>>

## **\$5B IN PAKISTAN AID WASTED, DIVERTED**

Agence France-Presse - December 24, 2007

More than five billion dollars in US aid to Pakistan has often never reached the military units it was intended for to fight Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and was instead diverted to other programs, the New York Times reported.

Much of the money meant to reimburse frontline Pakistani units was channeled to weapons systems aimed at India and to pay inflated Pakistani reimbursement claims for fuel, ammunition and other costs, unnamed US government and military officials told the daily. <More at: [http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0\\_13319\\_15883\\_00.html](http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0_13319_15883_00.html)>

## **RETREAT – NEWS**

### **IRAQ DEATHS SURGED AND ALSO FELL IN 2007**

Tina Susman - Los Angeles Times Staff Writer - January 1, 2008

For civilians and U.S. troops, the year was the deadliest of the war. But the figures last month continued a steep decline.

BAGHDAD — December emerged as possibly the safest month for U.S. forces in Iraq since the 2003 invasion and the least deadly for Iraqi civilians in the last 12 months, but overall 2007 was the bloodiest year of the war, according to figures released Monday.

The Iraqi Ministry of Health said 481 civilians died nationwide last month in war-related violence such as bombings, mortar attacks and sectarian slayings. It said 16,232 civilians died last year. The 2006 death toll was 12,320.

... On the military front, 21 U.S. personnel died in Iraq during December, according to Department of Defense figures released by the independent website [icasualties.org](http://icasualties.org), making the average daily death tally last month the lowest since the start of the war. It was possible the military could report additional deaths for the month in coming days, but the casualty number was striking when compared with the December 2006 total of 112.

During 2007, at least 899 American troops deployed to the Iraq theater died, according to the website, the highest annual toll since the American-led invasion in March 2003. <More at> <http://www.latimes.com/news/la-fq-iraq1jan01,1,7087971.story>>

### **U.S.-LED WARS COSTING \$15B PER MONTH**

UPI - December 27, 2007

WASHINGTON -- Official estimates of the cost of the U.S.-led efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq place the total military spending at nearly \$15 billion a month. <More at: <http://www.newsdaily.com/TopNews/UPI-1-20071227-09241300-bc-us-warcosts.xml>>

### **LET'S NOT DISRUPT "BUSINESS" – HEAVEN FORFEND!**

#### **'THE WAR NO LONGER SELLS,' SAYS A MEDIA CONSULTANT**

January 2, 2008 - 4:17am

As America heads into a Presidential election year where Iraq is a central issue, mainstream media outlets plan massive cutbacks in war coverage and reductions in resources and personnel dedicated to reporting on the conflict.

Sources within both broadcast and print media organizations tell Capitol Hill Blue the Iraq war is now a "back burner" to primary election coverage and no longer worth the massive expenditures for coverage of the past three years.

"Americans are war weary," says one media consultant. "The war doesn't sell and this is a business."

An analysis of news coverage by the three broadcast news networks and the three primary cable news networks show Iraq war coverage now comprises less than five percent of nightly newscasts, compared to 16 percent just one year ago. On New Years Day, the war was not even mentioned on two of the three primetime evening newscasts.

<More at: <http://www.capitolhillblue.com/cont/node/4122>>

### **WE MUSTN'T BE "UNFAIR" – TAXPAYERS "SACRIFICE" TOO MUCH ALREADY!**

#### **TASK FORCE: MILITARY BENEFITS "UNFAIR TO TAXPAYERS"**

The DoD Task Force on the Future of Military Health Care released its final report on December 20, and the results were pretty much as expected. [See "**AFTERTHOUGHTS**"]

The report said the relatively low health fees paid by military retirees vs. the growing cost of military health benefits are "out of step with overall trends in the U.S. health care system" and "unfair to the U.S. taxpayer."

The task force, co-chaired by Gen. John D.W. Corley, USAF, Commander of Air Combat Command, and economist Dr. Gail Wilensky, recommended retiree fee increases that were patterned generally after those recommended by the Department of Defense for the past two years. <More at: [http://www.moaa.org/quicklist/lac\\_issues\\_update/lac\\_issues\\_update\\_122107.htm](http://www.moaa.org/quicklist/lac_issues_update/lac_issues_update_122107.htm)>

## **NAVY JAG RESIGNS OVER TORTURE ISSUE**

Knight Ridder - December 27, 2007

"It was with sadness that I signed my name this grey morning to a letter resigning my commission in the U.S. Navy," wrote Gig Harbor, Wash., resident and attorney-at-law Andrew Williams in a letter to The Peninsula Gateway last week. "There was a time when I served with pride ... Sadly, no more."

Williams' sadness stems from the recent CIA videotape scandal in which tapes showing secret interrogations of two Al Qaeda operatives were destroyed. The tapes may have contained evidence that the U.S. government used a type of torture known as waterboarding to obtain information from suspected terrorists.

Torture, including water-boarding, is prohibited under the treaties of the Geneva Convention.

It was in the much-publicized interview two weeks ago between Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) and Brig. Gen. Thomas Hartmann, who is the chief legal adviser at the Pentagon's Office of Military Commissions, that led Williams to resign. In the interview, Graham asked Hartmann how the uniformed legal community should respond if the Iranian government used waterboarding to torture a U.S. soldier into disclosing when the next U.S. military operation would occur.

Hartmann responded: "I am not prepared to answer that question."

For Williams, a former naval Lieutenant Commander and member of the Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAG), this answer went against "every training I had as an attorney" and as a member of the military.

<More at: <http://chicago.indymedia.org/newswire/display/80768/index.php>>

## **FATHER BLAMES MILITARY FOR SON'S SUICIDE**

*Day to Day*, January 8, 2008 .

When Chris Scheuerman found out his son had died in Iraq, he says, he knew something was amiss.

"I believe we found out on Aug. 1, which is the worst day of my life," he says. "I was coming home from dinner and a minivan pulled up to the house and from the minivan came an officer and a chaplain and I knew, right then, why they were there. I knew that my son was dead."

Scheuerman is no stranger to military operations. He's a retired master sergeant and trains soldiers at Fort Bragg in North Carolina.

"Eventually, that evening, they said it was from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. At that point I asked them, 'How could that be?'" Scheuerman says.

Because the Army was reluctant to provide details, it would take Scheuerman the good part of two years to answer that question. Only after filing numerous Freedom of Information Act requests and appealing to a local member of Congress for help, was he able to fit the puzzle pieces together, he says. <More at: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=17929487>>

## **TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS**

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
1/23/08	1100- 1400	Holiday Inn Southgate (Detroit - South) 17201 Northline Road Southgate, MI	Career Fair		734.283.4400
2/16/08	1300	Vandenberg AFB, CA Pacific Coast Club	Luncheon Honoring Art Hicks Tuskegee Airman	VUFT, Inc. Bob Handy, Chair	805-962-9082 805-455-5259
2/17/08		Phoenix, AZ	Stand down	Susan Marcell	602-379-7132
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

### **BUSH VETO A BLOW TO "WOUNDED WARRIOR"**

Maya Schenwar and Matt Renner - truthout - 03 January 2008

The Bush administration's veto of a broad-ranging defense policy bill Monday night will delay a long list of benefits for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

... Normally, a veto in any form is frustrating for Congressional leaders. But, according to Veterans' Rights advocates, this action could result in misery and even death for veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. At a time when veteran suicides are skyrocketing, delaying the passage of the authorization bill is "unconscionable," according to Paul Sullivan, executive director of Veterans for Common Sense, a nonpartisan veterans' advocacy organization.

"Americans are outraged that our wounded, injured and ill veterans are waiting months or longer while the politicians dither about," Sullivan said, continuing, "Don't they know our veterans are dying while they fail to do their jobs?"

Twenty percent of the 224,000 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans who have filed a disability claim with the VA are still waiting for an answer, according to VA data. <More at: [http://www.truthout.org/docs\\_2006/010308R.shtml](http://www.truthout.org/docs_2006/010308R.shtml)>

### **BUSH WILL RELEASE BILLIONS IN 'CONTINGENCY' FUNDS FOR VETERANS**

Jan. 9, 2008

President Bush plans to approve \$3.7 billion in "contingency" funding for veterans' programs by the end of the week, ending speculation over whether the White House would block release of the funding. The omnibus fiscal 2008 spending bill, a \$555 billion measure that funds 14 of the 15 Cabinet-level departments and several independent agencies, included \$3.7 billion in "contingency" emergency spending for the Veterans Affairs Department.

<More at: <http://public.cq.com/docs/cqm/day110-000002653377.htm>>

### **ARMY HEALTH CARE SHORT ON DOCTORS**

Laura Ungar - GANNETT NEWS SERVICE - January 3, 2008

Turnover rates hurting care of U.S. troops

Injured in a roadside blast in Iraq, Sgt. Gerald Cassidy was assigned to a new medical unit at Ft. Knox, Ky., devoted to healing the wounds of war. But instead of getting better, the brain-injured soldier from Westfield, Ind., was found dead in his barracks Sept. 21. Preliminary reports show he may have been unconscious for days and dead for hours before someone checked on him.

Sen. Evan Bayh, an Indiana Democrat, linked his death in part to inadequate staffing at the unit. Only about half of the positions in the unit were filled when Cassidy died. The Army is investigating the death and its cause, and three people have lost their jobs. Jonathan Swain, Bayh's spokesman, said Cassidy's family won't talk to the news media as the military continues to investigate his death.

"By all indications, the enemy could not kill him, but our own government did," Bayh told the Senate Armed Services Committee. "Not intentionally, to be sure, but the end result apparently was the same."

<More at: <http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080103/NEWS07/801030437/1009>>

### **LONG, SCARY ARTICLE ~ WORTH CLICKING THROUGH**

### **PENTAGON, BIG PHARMA: DRUG TROOPS TO NUMB THEM TO HORRORS OF WAR**

Penny Coleman – AlterNet - January 10, 2008

In June, the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health acknowledged "daunting and growing" psychological problems among our troops: Nearly 40 percent of soldiers, a third of Marines and half of National Guard members are presenting with serious mental health issues. They also reported "fundamental weaknesses" in the U.S. military's approach to psychological health. That report was followed in August by the Army Suicide Event Report (ASER), which reported that 2006 saw the highest rate of military suicides in 26 years. And last month, CBS News reported that, based on its own extensive research, over 6,250 American veterans took their own lives in 2005 alone -- that works out to a little more than 17 suicides every day.

<More at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/72956/>>

## **SUSPECTED ARMY SUICIDES SET RECORD**

Gregg Zoroya - USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — A record number of soldiers — 109 — have killed themselves this year, according to Army statistics showing confirmed or suspected suicides. The deaths occur as soldiers serve longer combat deployments and the Army spends \$100 million on support programs.

"Soldiers, families and equipment are stretched and stressed," Gen. George Casey, Army chief of staff, told Congress last month.

... A total of 109 suicides this year would equal a rate of 18.4 per 100,000, the highest since the Army started counting in 1980. The civilian suicide rate was 11 per 100,000 in 2004, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<More at: <http://an.tacoda.net/an/slft.htm?siteid=14096&dt>

## **MILITARY DIVORCE ON RISE**

Matthew D. LaPlante - The Salt Lake Tribune - 12/23/2007

Rate highest for female troops, enlisted personnel

... About one in every five married service members has filed for divorce since September 2001, a period of time during which military divorce has trended upward, even as researchers say that divorce nationwide is slowly decreasing.

... More than 27,000 service members filed for divorce in 2004 - a 44 percent increase over 2001.

The 2004 spike was startling to those who monitor the well-being of U.S. troops. "That's when we really started paying attention to divorce rates as an indicator of the overall health of the Army," said Peter Frederich, the family ministries officer at the Army's Chief of Chaplains Office. While the data showed increases in divorce in nearly all segments of the military that year, the spike was led by a threefold rise in the number of Army officers... whose marriages had come to an end. <More at: [http://www.sltrib.com/ci\\_7791109](http://www.sltrib.com/ci_7791109)

## **A ROCKY ROAD FROM COMBAT TO COLLEGE**

Mary Beth Marklein - USA Today - Monday Dec 31, 2007 13:15:57 EST

STARKVILLE, Miss. — By the time he completed his four-year stint in the military three summers ago, Frank Wills had gotten used to taking orders, carrying a rifle and taking pictures of the dead as a combat photographer. He knew how to be a Marine. He hadn't a clue how a Marine becomes a college student.

Neither, it seemed, did anyone else on campus. Advisers at one school Wills attended gave him incorrect information. Officials at a second offered no help at all. Often, he says, he felt like "the new kid who didn't fit in."

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill, helped turn a college education into a right of middle-class America. It covered the cost for millions of World War II veterans as compensation for having disrupted their lives to serve. Today, with tuition climbing and a college degree increasingly seen as the ticket to economic security, the promise of money for education is no less important to service members. The Defense Department says 95 percent of soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen sign up for the GI Bill when they enlist.

For many, like Wills, 28, it is the reason they join. Yet his experience and those of other recent veterans suggest that in many cases, the road from combat to college can be riddled with potholes. <More at: [http://www.navytimes.com/news/2007/12/gns\\_gibill\\_071227/](http://www.navytimes.com/news/2007/12/gns_gibill_071227/)

## **GI BILL PAY FOR ON-JOB TRAINING DROPS BY \$100**

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Jan 4, 2008

GI Bill payments for on-the-job and apprenticeship training have dropped by more than \$100 a month because Congress failed to extend a two-year-old pilot program that provided higher rates. Effective Jan. 1, the maximum payment for on-the-job training for those who served at least three years of active duty is \$825 for the first six months of training, \$605.55 for the second six months and \$385.35 for any remaining training. Since Oct. 1, the rates had been \$935.85 for the first six months, \$715.65 for the second six months and \$494.45 for the remainder. <More at: [http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/01/military\\_gibill\\_paymentsdrop\\_080104w/](http://www.armytimes.com/news/2008/01/military_gibill_paymentsdrop_080104w/)

## **TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS**

### **NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF JANUARY 9, 2008**

This week the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps announced an increase, while the Coast Guard number remained unchanged. The net collective result is 2,421 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 72,343;

Navy Reserve, 5,039; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 6,281; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,684; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 326. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been mobilized to 92,673, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel, who are currently mobilized, can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2008/d20080109ngr.pdf>.

### OIF/OEF - HACK DATE SUNDAY 10 JANUARY 2008

#### OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	3,921
WOUNDED US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE <b>12/10</b> ]	28,661
OTHER US CASUALTIES [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE <b>12/10</b> ]	≥30,185
DIED OF SELF-INFILCTED WOUNDS [LAST DoD UPDATE <b>12/10</b> ]	132
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	4
KILLED UK	174
KILLED OTHER COALITION	133
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE <b>6/30</b> ]	1,001
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 47,555
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 87,834 [ <i>LANCET</i> –1,165,204]
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400,000+ [ <i>LANCET</i> - 1,414,723]
IRAQ REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL [ <b>9/15</b> ]	2.1M/2.5M

#### OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US ( <b>10/24/2007</b> )	478
*OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE <b>10/2007</b> ]	7,720
KILLED COALITION ( <b>6/2007</b> )	278
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION ( <b>12/2/2007</b> )	1,472
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS ( <b>7/2004</b> )	32,034
AFGHAN REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE [ <b>1/10</b> ]	\$484,587,484,992

*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

Some examples of the recommendations of the DoD Task Force on the Future of Military Health Care

#### Proposed Enrollment Fees for TRICARE Prime (Family)

	If Annual Retired Pay is:		
	Under \$20,000	\$20,000 to \$39,999	\$40,000 and above
Year	Annual Deductible Prime Fee would set at:		
2008	\$570	\$640	\$780
2009	\$680	\$830	\$1,110
2010	\$790	\$1,010	\$1,430
2011	\$900	\$1,190	\$1,750

*Note: Current Prime Enrollment fee for a family is \$460. Individual beneficiary rate is \$230. Under new fee structure, individual rate would stay at half the family rate. Actual fees beyond 2008 would be higher due to annual indexing.*

#### Proposed Enrollment Fees for TRICARE Standard (Family)

	If Annual Retired Pay is:		
	Under \$20,000	\$20,000 to \$39,999	\$40,000 and above
Year	Annual Standard Fee would set at:		
2008	\$30	\$30	\$30
2009	\$60	\$60	\$60
2010	\$90	\$90	\$90
2011	\$120	\$120	\$120

*Note: TRICARE Standard users currently pay no enrollment fee. Proposed annual fees after 2008 would be higher than shown due to annual indexing.*

**Proposed Pharmacy Co-payment Structure**

	CURRENT		TASK FORCE PLAN	
	Retail Network	Mail	Retail Network	Mail
	(30 Days)	(90 Days)	(30 Days)	(90 Days)
Tier 1: Preferred	\$3	\$3	\$15	\$0
Tier 2: Other	\$9	\$9	\$25	\$15
Tier 3: Non-formulary	\$22	\$22	\$45	\$45

**Retired Officer (Under Age 65) Family of Three**

TRICARE Prime*	Current	Proposed
Enrollment Fee	\$460	\$2,090***
Doctor Visit Copays	\$60	\$125
Rx Cost Shares**	\$288	\$960
<i>Yearly Cost</i>	<i>\$808</i>	<i>\$3,175</i>

TRICARE Standard*	Current	Proposed
Enrollment Fee	\$0	\$120
Deductible	\$300	\$1,150***
Rx Cost Shares**	\$288	\$960
<i>Yearly Cost</i>	<i>\$588</i>	<i>\$2,230</i>

\* Fully phased-in proposal; assumes 5 doctor visits per year.  
 \*\*Assumes 2 generic and 2 brand name prescriptions per month purchased at a network retail pharmacy.  
 \*\*\*Includes annual military medical inflation adjustment as recommended by the Task Force.

**Retired Officer (Over Age 65) and Spouse**

TRICARE For Life*	Current	Proposed	*Assumes lowest tier Medicare Part B premium for 2008. **2 generic and 3 brand name prescriptions per month purchased at a network retail pharmacy
Medicare Part B	\$2,314	\$2,314	
Enrollment Fee	\$0	\$240	
Rx Cost Shares**	\$396	\$1,260	
<i>Yearly Cost</i>	<i>\$2,710</i>	<i>\$3,814</i>	

**Proposed Pharmacy Co-payment Structure**

	CURRENT		TASK FORCE PLAN	
	Retail Network	Mail	Retail Network	Mail
	(30 Days)	(90 Days)	(30 Days)	(90 Days)
Tier 1: Preferred	\$3	\$3	\$15	\$0
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Enrollment Fee	\$460	\$2,090***
Doctor Visit Copays	\$60	\$125
Rx Cost Shares**	\$288	\$960
<i>Yearly Cost</i>	<i>\$808</i>	<i>\$3,175</i>

## **ADD-ON ~ VA SPECIAL PROGRAM INFORMATION**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE VETERANS' AID AND ATTENDANCE SPECIAL PENSION**

**Tax deduction is possible.**

The Veterans' Administration offers a Special Pension with Aid and Attendance (A&A) benefit that is largely unknown. This Special Pension (part of the VA Improved Pension program) allows for Veterans and surviving spouses who require the regular attendance of another person to assist in eating, bathing, dressing, undressing or taking care of the needs of nature to receive additional monetary benefits.

It also includes individuals who are blind or a patient in a nursing home because of mental or physical incapacity. Assisted care in an assisted living facility also qualifies. This most important benefit is overlooked by many families with Veterans or surviving spouses who need additional monies to help care for ailing parents or loved ones.

This is a "pension benefit" and is not dependent upon service-related injuries for compensation. Most Veterans who are in need of assistance qualify for this pension. Aid and Attendance can help pay for care in the home, nursing home or assisted living facility. A Veteran is eligible for up to \$1,519 per month, while a surviving spouse is eligible for up to \$976 per month.

A couple is eligible for up to \$1,801 per month\*. The Aid and Attendance Benefit is considered to be the third tier of a VA program called Improved Pension. The other two tiers are Basic and Housebound. Each tier has its own level of benefits and qualifications.

... we urge you to read an important document prepared by the American Veterans Institute that clearly explains the Improved Pension program, its levels of benefits and the qualifications for each.

If you or your loved one does not qualify for Aid and Attendance, you may want to check to see if you qualify for another level of the Pension. [\\*\\*Click Here for the Improved Pension Beginner's Guide\\*\\*...](#)

<More at: <http://www.veteranaid.org/>>

## **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 [scook@vuft.org](mailto:scook@vuft.org); 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](mailto:Sandy.Cook@vuft.org), Editor