

SOUND OFF!



VOL. V, NO 11

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

20 FEBRUARY 2010

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

THE SMELL OF MENDACITY

I was recently re-reading a book from our reading list: *Dereliction of Duty*, by then-Major H. R. McMaster*, published in 1997. The subtitle tells the tale – “Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam.”

* *The book was McMaster’s PhD thesis at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. McMaster was promoted to Brigadier General in 2009.*

As with the first reading, I really got worked up over the lies that were promulgated to justify the expansion of the Vietnam War, and about the politics that ruled Lyndon Johnson’s decisions about the war. My anger drove me to re-read Bernard Fall’s *Street Without Joy*, the story of the French defeat and the US’s initial involvement, and then Neal Sheehan’s *A Bright Shining Lie*, the story of John Paul Vann.

By the time I was finished I was bordering on apoplexy. Nothing was new – I had read all about it before – but the re-reading brought my blood to a boil once again.

This time, however, I had a new point of reference. If I merely replaced the word “Vietnam” with “Iraq” or “Afghanistan”, and the words “jungle and swamp” with “desert and mountains”, and “Viet Minh” and “Viet Cong” with “Taliban” and “Al Qaida”, all of the lies leading up to and during Vietnam could have served the current conflicts pretty well.

Why is it that the truth is never enough? What is it that infects our political and military leadership when they reach high office that compels them to mendacity and hypocrisy?

Why do they hold the American people and particularly the serving military in such contempt that they cannot tell us the truth? Mendacity!

Why do they say they will do one thing when they know that they mean to do something altogether different or more often nothing at all? Hypocrisy!

“Hypocrisy can afford to be magnificent in its promises, for never intending to go beyond promise, it costs nothing.”~ Edmund Burke

How can we retain faith in such a system, and in such “leaders”?

If we cannot trust them to tell us the truth about the war, how can we trust them on any other issue?

If we cannot trust them to do what they say about the military and their families and those veterans who served before, how can we trust them to deal fairly with all citizens on any issue?

The Constitution doesn’t say “We the People and Them the Leaders”, as if “the People” were somehow a lackey class subservient to a separate leadership class.

That’s pretty much what we believe the American Revolution was fought over, isn’t it? No one should have the right or the power to lie to us, to lead us astray, or to use us to serve their private need for power, wealth or position.

The leaders are not there by right of birth or wealth. They are supposed to be there because we chose them to represent us, not to represent their personal position or their future employment.

Please don’t misunderstand! I am not referring to any one party or faction. They all do it. They will tell us what they want us to know, whether or not it is true, regardless of their party.

For every “Tonkin Gulf”, there is a “WMD”. For every “Light at the End of the Tunnel”, there is a “Mission Accomplished.”

One side screams that black is white: the other side screams that white is black. (There are no shades of gray). The result is that we know that they both are lying to some extent so we turn off.

We give up demanding that they tell us the truth. We stop demanding that they perform. We have come to know that we cannot make a difference so we just retire from the fray.

And that is just what they want.

Both sides shout that they will take care of veterans. One side says they can only do it by doing A, B, and C. The other side says that A, B, and C will fail so they will do X, Y, and Z. Neither does much of anything but they don't have to because they already got your vote.

“There are three signs of a hypocrite: when he speaks he speaks lies, when he makes a promise he breaks it, and when he is trusted he betrays his trust.” ~Muhammad

Eight years and four months into the Afghan War, and one month shy of seven years into the Iraq War and hundreds of thousands of veterans are waiting for DVA decisions. Tens of thousands of serving military are going back for fourth – fifth – even sixth tours without relief.

Families are taking up the slack where the services and the DVA have failed, and those agencies are making their budgets on not providing service either to veterans or to the families that are providing home care for profoundly injured and mentally damaged returnees.

Why should veterans get all of those extra services they were promised? Everybody's hurting. Aren't veterans just another “interest group”? Hardly!

Recently, after promising all sorts of things to veterans in order to get their votes – almost every one of them did it – our Congress can't come up with \$55M to provide real help to families who are taking care of wounded veterans. Senate bill S 1963 which would provide those funds has sat in the House Veterans Affairs Committee for three months and as yet is not scheduled for a hearing.

All that in the same month Congress fought to kill healthcare reform for all Americans unless it included hundreds of millions of dollars of safety nets and breaks for commercial insurance companies, and they bent over backwards to send hundreds of millions to Haiti.

Don't misunderstand. I am glad that we are helping out in Haiti. That is what a world leader ought to do.

But national leaders incur an obligation when they take that oath. That obligation is to be truthful; to work at all times for the betterment of all of the American people and of the United States in the world; and to take care of those who give extra for our nation's goals and policies.

Military and veterans and their families do give extra – they may be the only ones left who do. They may be the only ones who still believe that a nation is founded in its people, and that the people have the right to make demands on their leadership or to replace them. [No I am not a “Tea-partier” – I believe that change comes through the ballot box; I don't hate “big government”; nor do I regret paying my taxes.]

The military may be the only ones who retain a true American sense of community with all Americans because they step forward to defend them every day. As we fight or have fought for their safety, we should be fighting today for their rights and their freedoms.

The oath that our military and political leaders take has come to mean, apparently, that they are bound only to those who pay for their campaigns, or who have the power over their promotions. They can tell us anything that either promotes or protects their well-being and their future possibilities. As Neal Sheehan reports, “We were [forced] to come to grips with a constant disparity between our perception of reality and higher authority's version of it.”

Your Representative represents about 650,000 people. How come a lobbyist representing that newly identified corporate “person” from some other state, and certainly from some other district, can get your representative to return his or her phone calls, and can easily get face time with your representative, and you can't get anything from him or her but a computer-generated response?

Is that representation? Well I guess it is, of a sort, but it certainly doesn't seem to be listed in my copy of the Constitution.

They all support the policies that injure and kill our fighting men and women, they just don't support the aftermath. It's too expensive and apparently inconvenient.

But that doesn't stop them from promising the world, does it? Hypocrisy! Mendacity!

Well it stinks. I wonder if it will ever change? We cannot go back - it has almost always been this way.

We must go forward. Why can't 24 million veterans work together to start to put things right?

If we were a "voting bloc" things would change. If we could work together and tell ourselves and others the truth – not the truth as we believe it to be ideologically, but the truth that is borne out in facts and experience – we could change our world, and by doing so benefit not only veterans but also all Americans.

Pardon me for my naiveté but I will not give up on change for the better. I will not give up on trying to make those whom we have served to serve us instead of serving themselves.

I saw a newborn the other day and I thought that when I was that age – several months – someone my age – 75 – had been born in the first year of the American Civil War.

I have lived through or have known others who have lived through 150 years of our history, most of it marked by wars. They suffered from the same hypocrisy and heard the same lies that today's soldiers are hearing.

It is well past time to end the hypocrisy and the mendacity.

It poisons the soul of the nation.

Big Daddy: *Didn't you notice the powerful and obnoxious odor of mendacity?
What's that smell in this room?
Didn't you notice it, Brick?
Didn't you notice the powerful and obnoxious odor of mendacity?*

Brick: *Yes, sir, I think I did.*

Big Daddy: *Ain't nothing more powerful than the odor of mendacity.
What about you, Sister Woman?
Didn't you notice an unpleasant smell of mendacity in this room?*

Maggie: *I don't even know what that is.*

Big Daddy: *You can smell it. It smells like death.*

Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

[Ed.]

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

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

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

Class Action Suit: On 12 August we appeared before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. An article from the LA Times on 24 August summarizes the results so far < latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/healthcare/la-me-veterans-suit24-2009aug24.0.1423297.story>

.Case Progress to Date:

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

9/25/2007 Defendant's Motion to Dismiss

2/11/2208 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 filed

12/15/2008 *Swords to Plowshares* and *Vietnam Veterans of America* file amicus briefs

12/22/2008 *Military Spouses for Change* and *United Spinal Association* file amicus briefs

3/4/2009 Appeal will not be subject to Mediation

4/6/2009 Requested an extension to reply to the DVA response to our brief

4/22/09 Extension granted to 1 May 2009

5/1/09 Appellants' Reply Brief filed

6/11/09 Oral Arguments Scheduled for 12 August 2009

8/12/09 Oral arguments

9/14/09 Reply on mediation [changed date]

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

2/20/10 NTR [The courts move veeerrrry slowly]

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

OUR LAWSUIT LIES QUIETLY IN THE 9TH CIRCUIT, BUT OUR LAWYERS HAVE ANOTHER VICTORY AND BEGIN YET ANOTHER CRUSADE ! CONGRATS!

MORRISON & FOERSTER SECURES VICTORY FOR TROOPS EXPOSED TO CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS TESTING IN CASE AGAINST THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

January 22, 2010

SAN FRANCISCO (January 20, 2010) – Morrison & Foerster yesterday won the right to proceed with a case against the CIA, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Army, filed on behalf of veterans rights organizations Vietnam Veterans of America and Swords to Plowshares, along with six veterans with multiple diseases and ailments, tied to a secret testing program in which U.S. military personnel were deliberately exposed to chemical and biological weapons and other toxins without informed consent. Plaintiffs seek declaratory and injunctive relief that would free them from their secrecy oaths and grant them healthcare that they were promised.

On January 19, 2010, Judge Claudia Wilken of the U.S. District Court, Northern District of California, issued an order that overruled the government's main arguments to dismiss the case, which were based upon lack of jurisdiction, failure to state a claim for relief, statute of limitations, sovereign immunity, and standing. <More at: <http://mofo.com/news/pressreleases/16406.html>>

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

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

D O N A T E !

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

None this issue

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE APPROVES BILLS AIMED AT MILITARY EXPOSURES, HOMELESSNESS AND HEALTH CARE

January 28, 2010

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, chaired by Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), approved comprehensive legislation to respond to potential environmental hazard exposures on military installations, expand efforts to reduce veteran homelessness, and strengthen VA health care. Chairman Akaka's military exposure legislation would provide care for individuals exposed to environmental hazards at Camp Lejeune and Atsugi Naval Air Facility, and set up a national response for other potential military installation exposures.

<More at: http://veterans.senate.gov/press-releases.cfm?action=release.display&release_id=4342b877-88ab-4b83-970b-9879c94bc7a4>

VETERAN BILL WOULD AUTHORIZE \$50M IN FUNDING OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

11 February 2010

Last Thursday, U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), a senior member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, announced that her legislation that focuses specifically on helping homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children has passed through the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee by voice vote.

<More at: http://blog.seattletpi.com/militarywire/archives/192945.asp?from=blog_last3

OBAMA SIGNS EMERGENCY TREATMENT EXPANSION LAW

The White House announced that President Obama signed into law H.R. 1377 on Feb. 1, 2010. This law expands veteran eligibility for reimbursement by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for emergency treatment furnished in a non-department facility, and for other purposes.

VA VOWS TO IMPROVE TRACKING OF MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA CARE FOLLOWING INSPECTOR GENERAL FINDINGS

Report requested by Akaka finds insufficient monitoring of whether veterans are charged for care that should be free
February 4, 2010

WASHINGTON, D.C. – An Inspector General investigation requested by Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI) found that the Department of Veterans Affairs is unable to sufficiently monitor whether veterans are being wrongly charged for care related to military sexual trauma. The VA Inspector General report is available here: [LINK](#).

<More at: www.vawatchdog.org/10/scva10/scva020410-1.htm>

RETREAT – NEWS

U.S. MILITARY FAULTS LEADERS IN ATTACK ON BASE

Rod Nordland - February 6, 2010

KABUL, Afghanistan — The United States military issued its long-awaited report Friday on how insurgents managed to overrun an American combat outpost in eastern Afghanistan in October and kill eight soldiers in the worst single ground attack in the last year and a half.

The report's findings are damning. Combat Outpost Keating in Nuristan Province had "no tactical or strategic value," the report said. It was overdue to be closed, and measures to protect it were lax, even though it had been attacked 47 times in the preceding five months. Intelligence reports of a major attack went unheeded.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2010/02/06/world/asia/06afghan.html>

BUT IT'S THE RULES THAT MAKE US DIFFERENT – AND BETTER

TROOPS: STRICT WAR RULES SLOW AFGHAN OFFENSIVE

Alfred de Montesquiou and Deb Riechmann - Associated Press Writers – 15 February 2010

MARJAH, Afghanistan (AP) -- Some American and Afghan troops say they're fighting the latest offensive in Afghanistan with a handicap - strict rules that routinely force them to hold their fire.

Although details of the new guidelines are classified to keep insurgents from reading them, U.S. troops say the Taliban are keenly aware of the restrictions.

"I understand the reason behind it, but it's so hard to fight a war like this," said Lance Cpl. Travis Anderson, 20, of Altoona, Iowa. "They're using our rules of engagement against us," he said, adding that his platoon had repeatedly seen men drop their guns into ditches and walk away to blend in with civilians. <More at: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/35409150/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/>

GEN. PETRAEUS SAYS WAR IN AFGHANISTAN WILL GET 'TOUGHER BEFORE IT GETS EASIER'

Chris Brennan, - Stars and Stripes online edition - February 13, 2010

For David Petraeus, complicated missions such as fighting a counterinsurgency war or developing strife-torn nations start with three core principles: First, get the "big idea" clear in your head; next, communicate how that will be put into action; and, finally, get to work. Petraeus, the Army general who has led the country's Central Command since October 2008, says the war in Afghanistan has reached the third stage.

Speaking yesterday to the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia, Petraeus said the military now has the infrastructure and personnel in Afghanistan to turn the tide against the Taliban and al Qaeda. He compared the surge of troops approved by President Obama in December for that mission to a 2007 surge for Iraq approved by President Bush.

The violence intensified in Iraq with the surge before that country started to stabilize, he said.

"It is hard and it is hard every day," Petraeus said of the effort in Afghanistan, "and it's going to be tougher before it gets easier." <More at:

www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=68009&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+starsandstripes%2Fgeneral+%28Stars+and+Stripes%29>

GERMAN CABINET OKAYS AFGHAN TROOP BOOST

Associated Press - February 09, 2010

BERLIN - Germany's Cabinet has formally approved plans to increase the country's troop contingent in Afghanistan by up to 850 troops. Government spokesman Christoph Steegmans said Tuesday that the mandate under which German soldiers serve in Afghanistan will be raised to allow a maximum 5,350 to serve there - up from the current 4,500.

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/german-cabinet-okays-afghan-troop-boost.html>

ARMY OFFERS PAY TO EXTEND WAR TOURS

Dan Blottenberger - Stars and Stripes European edition -- January 30, 2010

BAMBERG, Germany — The U.S. Army is offering soldiers in certain jobs up to \$500 extra a month if they are willing to stay in Iraq and Afghanistan beyond their 12-month deployments.

The incentive pay voluntary extensions program offers \$300 a month to soldiers who agree to serve up to three additional months, and \$500 a month to those who are willing to extend for more than three months, according to an Army Human Resources Command message. <More at:

www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=67630&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+starsandstripes%2Fgeneral+%28Stars+and+Stripes%29>

DEFENSE REVIEW FORESEES LONG-TERM ROLE FOR NATIONAL GUARD

Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill - National Guard Bureau - Feb 4, 2010

ARLINGTON, Va. (Feb. 1, 2010) -- A National Guard that has been vital to national defense for the past eight years will remain an operational force, according to the Department of Defense's 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review released today.

"Preventing and deterring conflict will likely necessitate the continued use of some elements of the Reserve Component ... in an operational capacity well into the future," the QDR states.

<More at: www.army.mil/news/2010/02/04/33957-defense-review-foresees-long-term-role-for-national-guard/>

WHY DID THEY PICK THE NAME OF THE BATTLE FOR FALUJAH IN 2004? DUMB!

US REBRANDS MILITARY CAMPAIGN IN IRAQ

The US military operation in Iraq is to be renamed Operation New Dawn later this year, according to a Defense Department memo. The change, set to take place in September, aims to reflect the reduced role of US troops as their numbers in Iraq fall to around 50,000. <More at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8524475.stm>>

ARMY WARNED ABOUT JIHADIST THREAT IN '08

Bill Gertz February 9, 2010

Almost two years before the deadly Fort Hood shooting by a radicalized Muslim officer, the U.S. Army was explicitly warned that jihadism — Islamic holy war — was a serious problem and threat to personnel in the U.S., according to participants at a major Army-sponsored conference. The annual Army anti-terrorism conference in Florida in February 2008 included presentations on the threat by counterterrorism specialists Patrick Poole, Army Lt. Col. Joseph Myers and Terri Wonder.

<More at: www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/feb/09/army-warned-about-jihadist-threat-in-08/>

SURVEY OF MILITARY FINDS MORE ACCEPTANCE OF GAYS

William H. McMichael and Brendan McGarry Feb. 14, 2010

In the most comprehensive survey yet on service members' attitudes about gays in the military, slightly more than 3,000 Military Times readers contacted randomly by e-mail and through flyers placed in random newsstand copies late last fall offer a clear glimpse of attitudes and experiences in today's military.

The majority of troops are generally happy with the current policy -- but opposition to a change is dropping steadily.

The percentage of respondents who oppose repealing the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy fell to just 51%, a decline of 12 percentage points since 2003. The percentage favoring repeal, meanwhile, rose during the same period by 6 points, to 30% among active-duty readers of Army Times, Air Force Times, Navy Times and Marine Corps Times.

<More at: www.freep.com/article/20100214/NEWS07/2140475/1001/NEWS/Survey-of-military-finds-more-acceptance-of-gays>

NEW COALITION VOWS FIGHT ON “DON’T ASK, DON’T TELL” REPEAL

Leo Shane III - Stars and Stripes Online Edition - February 18, 2010

WASHINGTON — A coalition of conservative organizations promised Thursday to fight Pentagon leaders' efforts to overturn the military's "don't ask, don't tell" law, arguing that such a change will hurt military morale and readiness.

The group, which includes Focus on the Family and the American Conservative Union, said they will urge lawmakers not to allow "social experimentation" in the ranks while the military is waging two wars overseas, unless advocates can prove that openly gay troops will significantly improve force capabilities. <More at: www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=68139&source=rss

TO THE COLORS - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
2/25-28		Recreation Center Mesquite, NV	The Wall That Heals	VVA	
2/25	1000-1600	Renaissance Denver Hotel 3801 Quebec Street Denver, Colorado 80207	Mountain Regional Career Event		Register
3-4-7		Stramler Park Bakersfield, California	The Wall That Heals	The Veterans of Kern County, Inc.	
3/8		Algonquin IL	Resource Fair	Donna McCafferty	866-338-4968
3/8		Portland, OR	Resource Fair	Jennifer Wilcox/Melissa Bensink	503-226-7387
3/11	1000-1600	Virginia Beach Convention Center 1000 19th St Virginia Beach, VA	Mid-Atlantic Regional Career Event		Register
3/12		Charlotte NC	Resource Fair	Joseph Rapley	704-336-6702
3/18-21		Elmer Thomas Park Lawton, Oklahoma	The Wall That Heals	VVA Chapter 751	
3/20		Cocoa, FL	Resource Fair	John Carroll/Ernest Duncklee	321-637-3788

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

PROMISES, PROMISES: WAR WIDOWS' FUTILE FIGHT

The Associated Press - New York Times - February 10, 2010

WASHINGTON (AP) -- For a decade, war widows in matching yellow suit jackets and hats quietly and persistently have knocked on Capitol Hill doors seeking an end to the "widows' tax," a government policy that deprives them of benefits from their husbands' military service.

They are always warmly received, but that's where the hospitality ends. Despite pledges of help from scores of federal officials -- including President Barack Obama and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi -- their long quest remains unfulfilled.

Every year since 2005, the Senate has voted to eliminate the policy that denies widows the ability to collect both a military survivor's benefit and the full annuity bought when their military husbands were alive. But in each of those years, the fix was dropped when House and Senate negotiators wrote the final bill in private.

<More at: www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/02/10/ap/politics/main6192871.shtm>

GOOD NEWS BUT IT DOESN'T ADDRESS THE PROBLEM ABOVE

OBAMA FLOATS NEW CONCURRENT RECEIPT PLAN

William H. McMichael - Staff writer - Feb 1, 2010

As part of his fiscal 2011 budget request, President Obama again is asking to expand the number of disabled military retirees who are eligible for concurrent receipt of full veterans disability benefits and military retired pay.

The proposal, outlined in an Office of Management and Budget document, would make all "medically retired" service members eligible for concurrent receipt by 2015. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2010/02/military_concurrent_receipt_2011_budget_020110w/>

BILLIONS ALLOCATED FOR VETS' PROGRAMS

Mike Fitzgerald - News-Democrat - Feb. 01, 2010

More than 130,000 military veterans are living on America's streets at any given time -- or roughly one third of the nation's homeless population, according to the most recent U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs survey.

Many other veterans are considered near homeless or at risk because of poverty, lack of family support and dismal living conditions, such as in cheap hotels. Peter Dougherty, director of the VA's homeless veterans program, answered some questions about the problem of homeless veterans. <More at: www.bnd.com/news/local/story/1112727.html>

U.S. WAR VETERANS FIGHT DEPORTATION

La Opinión News Report - Pilar Marrero - Jan 24, 2010

Not even the most decorated and honorable military service can protect U.S. war veterans from ruthless immigration laws, which consider a long list of non-violent crimes as grounds for deportation.

More and more cases have come to light of veterans who, after serving in this country's Armed Forces and armed conflicts, get in trouble with the law when they come home and end up in deportation proceedings. According to activists, hundreds of veterans – perhaps even thousands – have already been deported. There are no official figures because all deportations are counted backlog of applications. <More at: http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=9ec68371b5ac3300f605166580ddd467>

BENEFIT UPGRADE FOR MILITARY VETERANS WITH PTSD

Tom Philpott - January 30, 2010

More than 4,300 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans who were diagnosed while still in service as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, but got low military disability ratings, have won an agreement to upgrade them retroactively to 50 percent.

The higher rating will represent an important win for this group of veterans mentally scarred by war. It will mean, from date of discharge, eligibility for disability retirement and access to Tricare, the military's triple health insurance option, for the veterans, spouses and dependent children. Any out-of-pocket medical costs since discharge also could be paid retroactively, and these soon-to-be-designated disabled retirees will gain access to discounted shopping and recreational services on base.

<More at: www.heraldnet.com/article/20100130/BIZ/701309959/1005/biz>

THIS ARTICLE IS ABOUT THE PROBLEM THAT S 1963 IS SUPPOSED TO ADDRESS, AND WHICH THE HOUSE CAN'T SEEM TO GET AROUND TO.

CAREGIVING STRAINS FAMILIES OF VETERANS WITH SEVERE INJURIES

Mary Brophy Marcus - USA TODAY 27 January 2010

Kevin Kammerdiener's mother, Leslie, takes care of his every need, which would be fine if he were in preschool.

The thing is, "Kamm" is 21. He suffered a traumatic brain injury, shattered bones and burns on 25% of his body in Afghanistan in May 2008, which left him in a wheelchair, unable to speak and in chronic pain.

Leslie moved from Pennsylvania to her son's home in Riverview, Fla., to care for him after he spent months at a military hospital in San Antonio.

Now Leslie Kammerdiener, 44, spends her days making sure Kevin eats well, is clean and comfortable, and is not in pain.

... "I'm lucky if I get two to four hours of sleep at one time," Kammerdiener says.

... Kammerdiener is among thousands of unpaid caregivers — parents, spouses, siblings and war buddies — helping veterans injured in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars get through each day.

<More at: www.usatoday.com/news/health/2010-01-27-veteranscaregivers27_CV_N.htm>

COMBAT INJURIES NOT THE LEADING REASON US SOLDIERS ARE EVACUATED

MARIA CHENG - AP Medical Writer - January 21, 2010

LONDON (AP) — American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan were more likely to be medically evacuated for health problems such as a bad back than for combat injuries, a new study says. Researchers also found psychiatric disorders rose during the period studied — 2004 to 2007 — despite an increased focus on treating mental health problems. The research was published Friday in the British medical journal, Lancet.

Muscular problems	24%.	Psychiatric disorders	9 %
Combat wounds	14%	Spinal pain	7%
Neurological disorders	10%		

The remaining 36 percent of the medically evacuated service members fell into many separate categories, including gastrointestinal problems, infectious or respiratory diseases, chest or abdominal pain, congenital anomalies, benign tumors, pregnancy, and hormonal disorders.

The study was paid for by the John P Murtha Neuroscience and Pain Institute and the U.S. Army.

<More at: www.chicagotribune.com/health/sns-ap-eu-med-afghanistan-iraq-injuries.0.7788917.story>

VETERANS SPEAK OUT AGAINST BURN PITS

David Zucchini - February 18, 2010

The noxious smoke plumes that wafted over the military base in Balad, Iraq, alarmed Lt. Col. Michelle Franco. The stench from a huge burn pit clung to her clothing, skin and hair.

"I remember thinking: This doesn't look good, smell good or taste good," Franco said recently. "I knew it couldn't be good for anybody."

She wheezed and coughed constantly. When Franco returned to the U.S., she was diagnosed with reactive airway dysfunction syndrome. She is no longer able to serve as an Air Force nurse.

Other returning veterans have reported leukemia, lymphoma, congestive heart problems, neurological conditions, bronchitis, skin rashes and sleep disorders -- all of which they attribute to burn pits on dozens of U.S. bases in Afghanistan and Iraq. <More at: <http://latimes.com/news/nation-and-world/la-na-burn-pits18-2010feb18.0.1455676.story>>

REPORT ON VIRGINIA VA CENTER FINDS PROBLEMS

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Jan 20, 2010

A new report from the Veterans Affairs Department inspector general will help fuel complaints about an error-filled disability claims process in need of a complete overhaul.

Investigators looking at claims processing at the VA regional office in Roanoke, Va., found that 25 percent of the case files they closely studied had serious mistakes. Some veterans were denied benefits they deserved, and disability compensation was given to others who were not eligible. Many errors involved Vietnam veterans with disability claims related to exposure to the defoliant Agent Orange.

In one case, a veteran was underpaid \$21,857 because the claims staff did not properly consider a physician's opinion that coronary artery disease was a complication of service-connected diabetes. In another, a veteran was overpaid \$15,640 for a diabetes-related amputation below the knee that he said was related to exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam. His claims folder contained no evidence that he had served in Vietnam, the IG report says.

<More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2010/01/military_vaclaims_mistakes_012010w/>

A SEPARATE PEACE

Dahlia Lithwick – NEWSWEEK – From the issue dated Feb 22, 2010

Why veterans deserve special courts.

The problem is hardly a new one, but we need only watch *The Hurt Locker* to refresh our collective memory: veterans return from war, having seen and survived unspeakable things, then try to adjust to civilian life with inadequate resources and support. Depending on the study you read, between 20 and 50 percent of veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars suffer from posttraumatic stress and other mental disorders—and half don't seek mental-health care. Those who do don't always receive the kind of care they need. The results of these systemic failures are increased instances of rape, assault, addiction, and other criminal acts that tangle up veterans in the criminal courts. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that veterans account for 10 percent of the people with criminal records. <More at: www.newsweek.com/id/233415>

ALSO SEE THESE RECENT ARTICLES ON THE SUBJECT

JUDGE SUGGESTS MORE SENTENCING OPTIONS FOR WAR VETERANS

Felisa Cardona - *The Denver Post* - 12/11/2009 <More at: www.denverpost.com/news/ci_13973575#ixzz0ZVDuKLP2>

JUSTICES SAY CAPITAL CASES MUST WEIGH WAR TRAUMA

Adam Liptak - *New York Times* - December 1, 2009 <More at: www.nytimes.com/2009/12/01/us/01penalty.html>

NEW GLOUCO PROGRAM WILL HELP VETERANS IN TROUBLE

Darran Simon - *Inquirer Staff Writer* - Jan. 29, 2010 <More at: www.philly.com/philly/news/local/83010077.html>

NEVADA SOLDIER WITH PTSD PRESCRIBED 14 DRUGS BEFORE POLICE SHOOTOUT

Tim King Salem-News.com Feb-11-2010

"We can offer jail diversion programs to drug addicts - but we can't offer jail diversion programs to Veterans who are first time offenders" - Sue Lamoureux, wife of decorated Combat Vet <More at: www.salem-news.com/articles/february112010/lamoureux_ptsd_tk.php>

PURPLE HEARTS ON DEATH ROW: WAR DAMAGED VETS SHOULD NOT BE EXECUTED BY THE STATE

Karl R. Keys and Bill Pelke – AlterNet - December 4, 2009 <More at: www.alternet.org/story/144370/>

ALSO THIS FROM VVA ON THEIR “VETERANS INCARCERATED” PROGRAM VETERANS INCARCERATED WHITE PAPER

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) has long sought to do work to improve the condition of Vietnam veterans and their families, including veterans who are incarcerated. VVA's underlying philosophy for doing outreach and providing services to veterans incarcerated is that many reach this status due to circumstances which may be directly attributable to or exacerbated by their military service. It may seem like a semantic distinction, but VVA refers to this population as "Veterans Incarcerated," not as "incarcerated veterans" precisely because these men and women were veterans first. The large majority of these men and women served our country honorably, and were subsequently imprisoned for separate actions after their discharge from the military. <More at: <http://www.vva.org/Committees/VetsIncarcerated/VeteransIncarceratedWhitePaper.html>>

CAMP LEJEUNE'S EX-RESIDENTS, MANY ILL, ONLY NOW LEARNING OF TOXIC WATER

Barbara Barrett - McClatchy Newspapers - February 14, 2010

WASHINGTON — Paul Akers was in his oncologist's office last summer when his adult daughter handed him a magazine.

He saw a half-page ad from the Marine Corps, alerting former residents of Camp Lejeune, N.C., that if they lived on the base between 1957 and 1987, they might have been exposed to contaminated water.

Akers thought about his mother, the wife of a Marine, who died in 1960. He remembered his little sister, whom he called Penny. She died of cancer in June at 61. She'd been diagnosed last spring, when she went in to be tested as a bone marrow match for her ailing brother. She was dead within a month. Akers thought, too, of his own struggle, undergoing chemotherapy for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

"You can see why I'm angry at the military," Akers told McClatchy Newspapers.

Akers, 64, lived on base for years as a young child, building forts among the pine trees and splashing in a plastic kiddie pool with his little sister, cooling off in the sweltering Carolina summers. The water, it turned out, was poisonous.

Although that was discovered a quarter-century ago, neither Akers nor his sister had known that residents of Camp Lejeune drank contaminated well water for decades. The Marines have registered thousands of people across the country who say they've been plagued by illnesses related to the toxic water, but the Department of the Navy, which includes the Marine Corps, still refuses to pay for a \$1.6 million study into the deaths of former residents of Camp Lejeune.

<More at: <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/226/story/84454.html>>

DEFENSE DEPT. PROBES MARINE MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Kevin Maurer - Associated Press Writer – 6 February 2010

WILMINGTON, N.C. (AP) -- The Defense Department will investigate complaints of substandard mental health care for Marines at Camp Lejeune, according to a North Carolina congressman Thursday who had asked for the probe amid reports of retaliation against a whistleblower.

Public questions about the quality of mental health care provided by a private contractor at the base were raised last year by the September firing of Dr. Kernan Manion, a brain trauma specialist who had complained to commanders about poor facilities, inadequate care programs and weak security.

Rep. Walter Jones, a Republican whose district includes Camp Lejeune, asked Defense Secretary Robert Gates for a probe of the mental health care issue after Salon.com, which first reported Manion's firing, last week reported on documents it obtained that showed officials had changed Manion's job performance evaluations from good to bad after his complaints.

<More at: http://ap.stripes.com/dynamic/stories/U/US_MARINES_MENTAL_HEALTH>

NEW IAVA REPORT REVEALS RED TAPE FACING VETERANS IN THE MILITARY AND VA HEALTH CARE AND DISABILITY SYSTEMS

NEW YORK, Feb. 5 /PRNewswire - USNewswire

Today, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the nation's first and largest non-partisan, nonprofit organization representing veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, released a [revealing new report](#) highlighting the countless bureaucratic roadblocks, lengthy waits for care, and complicated disability systems facing wounded veterans. The report presents a clear snapshot of the huge obstacles facing our nation's troops and veterans as they navigate the complicated and confusing military and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care and disability systems.

<More at: www.veteransresources.org/2010/02/new-iava-report-reveals-red-tape-facing-veterans-in-the-military-and-va-health-care-and-disability-systems/>

VA TO BEGIN RECOVERY OF POST-9/11 GI BILL ADVANCE PAYMENTS

January 23, 2010

WASHINGTON –The Department of Veterans Affairs is beginning the process of recovering advance payments made available during the fall 2009 semester to Veterans and servicemembers who applied for education benefits.

"The advance payments were a huge success and helped thousands of student Veterans during the first days of the historic Post-9/11 GI Bill focus on studies and not their finances," said Keith Wilson, Director of Education Services at VA. "Now, we can get to the business of closing the books on advance payments and focus on supporting Veterans for the spring semester."

VA will begin sending out notification letters this week explaining the repayment process.

<More at: www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1845>

NATION'S LEADING INSURER OF SOLDIERS, USAA, CRITICIZES PROP 17; VOTEVETS.ORG ANNOUNCE OPPOSITION

Santa Monica, Calif. - Feb. 18 - /PRNewswire-USNewswire/

Two of the country's largest organizations representing the interests of American servicemembers have spoken out against Proposition 17. The California ballot initiative sponsored by Mercury Insurance would allow auto insurance companies to surcharge millions of drivers in California, including military personnel who did not buy insurance while living on base – even if they did not own a car.

USAA, the national auto insurance company that was formed in 1922 by 12 army officers who insured each other to provide access to insurance for military personnel, says it cannot support Prop 17 on the California ballot because of the impact it will have on active duty service members. VoteVets.org, which signed the ballot argument against Prop 17, represents 100,000 vets and military families.

... Government reports published last week reveal that Prop 17 sponsor Mercury Insurance has discriminated against military personnel, including an internal policy of marking members of the military with a "U" (Unacceptable).

... "It is an outrage that an insurance company would discriminate against those of us who honorably serve our country. VoteVets.org rejects this vile way of doing business and echoes Consumer Watchdog's call to Admiral Mullen asking that the military investigate and act upon nationwide discrimination against servicemen and women by Mercury Insurance."

<More at: www.veteransresources.org/2010/02/nations-leading-insurer-of-soldiers-usaa-criticizes-prop-17-votevets-org-announce-opposition/>

DON'T FIX IT ON THE FLY! STOP IT AND TO HELL WITH THE SPOUSES UNTIL (MAYBE) YOU CAN FIGURE OUT HOW YOU SCREWED IT UP TO START WITH!

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT TEMPORARILY HALTS SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Elaine Wilson - American Forces Press Service - Feb 19, 2010

WASHINGTON (Feb. 18, 2010) -- The Defense Department has temporarily halted a popular employment assistance program for military spouses while it conducts a "top-to-bottom" review of its services, officials said today.

The My Spouse Career Advancement Account program, also known as MyCAA, offers military spouses opportunities to pursue portable careers in high-demand, high-growth occupations such as education and health care.

"We recognize that the military lifestyle calls for portable careers, and that military spouses need access to education and training for careers that are portable and high-growth nationally," said Tommy T. Thomas, deputy under secretary of defense for the Pentagon's office of military community and family policy. "This short-term break will allow us to better assess the program to ensure we are achieving that goal."

<More at: www.army.mil/news/2010/02/19/34691-defense-department-temporarily-halts-spouse-employment-program/>

EUCOM PENS 'BILL OF RIGHTS' FOR MENTAL HEALTH PATIENTS

Mark Abramson - Stars and Stripes European edition - February 9, 2010

STUTT GART, Germany — A plan that calls for combining mental health care clinics and primary care clinics to reduce the stigma of seeking help for psychological problems has been approved by U.S. European Command's top leaders.

Provisions in the U.S. European Command Bill of Rights for Behavioral Health Care include allowing people to adjust work schedules to seek behavioral health services, to receive mental health screenings and treatment without automatically affecting a security clearance and to have some degree of confidentiality.

The rights would apply to all servicemembers, civilians, family members and retirees in Europe, officials said. <More at: www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=67889&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+starsandstripes%2Fgeneral+%28Stars+and+Stripes%29>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF FEBRUARY 16, 2010

This week all five services announced a decrease in activated reservists. The net collective result is 1,049 fewer reservists activated than last week. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 110,935; Navy Reserve, 6,627; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 16,729; Marine Corps Reserve, 6,403; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 774. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 141,468, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all personnel who are currently activated may be found at <http://www.defense.gov/news/Feb2010/d20100216nqr.pdf>

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SATURDAY 20 FEBRUARY 2010

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,529 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,376
WOUNDED US [2/6/10]	31,651
OTHER US CASUALTIES [2/6/10]	≥47,224
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [2/6/10]	202
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED UK	179
KILLED OTHER COALITION	139
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/25/09]	≥ 48,874
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [2/20/10]	≥ 104,103 – 1,366,350
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [1/20/10]	≥ 400K – 1.432M
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (3,058 DAYS)

KILLED US	999
WOUNDED US [2/6/10]	4,949
OTHER CASUALTIES US [2/6/10]	10,954
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [2/6/10]	35
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED COALITION	657
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/07)	1,602
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY [7/4/09]	≥ 11,152
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (7/4/2009)	≥ 7,589
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (2/24/2009)	46,322
AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$707,999,156,083
COST OF AFGHAN WAR TO DATE	\$254,927,745,532

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

ANOTHER OUTSTANDING BIT FROM THE DEFENSE PROCUREMENT SYSTEM COMBINED PAY, PERSONNEL SYSTEM DUMPED AS 'A DISASTER'

Tom Philpott - February 18, 2010

After spending \$1 billion and 12 years of effort, Defense officials have pulled the plug on a hapless plan to bring the four military branches under a single, modern payroll and personnel records system.

"This program has been a disaster," Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, told the Senate Armed Services Committee earlier this month. He said he applauded the decision to kill what proponents said would be the largest, fully-integrated human resource system in the world. <More at: www.military.com/features/0,15240,210873,00.html>

VA TIGHTENS RULES FOR VETERANS CONTRACTING PROGRAM

Robert Brodsky - February 9, 2010

The Veterans Affairs Department has set strict guidelines for bidding on contracts set-aside for veteran-owned small businesses. Entrepreneurs will be allowed only one company at a time in the contracting program and must work full time in the business, according to a final rule published on Monday in the *Federal Register*.

<More at: www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0210/020910rb1.htm>

OPERATION BLANKET: SEARS HAS HOMELESS VETERANS 'COVERED'

Gary Puleo - February 7, 2010

UPPER MERION — On any given night, there are 131,000 homeless military veterans in our country.

"That's an astonishing number, isn't it?" said Duane Miskulin, National Commander of AMVETS (American Veterans), one of the longest-running veterans service organizations.

"Veterans make up 23 percent of our homeless population, and I don't think many people realize that."

With some of the most brutally frigid temperatures yet to be faced at the end of winter, Operation Blanket couldn't have come at a better time.

Sears' nationwide drive to collect gently used blankets for homeless veterans has been gathering generous support from customers at the King of Prussia store since it kicked off there a week ago, noted store manager Mike Lees.

"We've had some people even buy new blankets and put them in the box," he said.

<More at: www.timesherald.com/articles/2010/02/07/news/doc4b6e1d2fdaf77588940615.txt>

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT TO YIELD BETTER BENEFITS FOR THOUSANDS OF VETERANS SUFFERING FROM PTSD AND THEIR FAMILIES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE January 25, 2010

Veterans must opt-in by July 24 for disability rating upgrade and expedited review of benefits, NVLSP and Morgan Lewis available to counsel veterans on their rights as class members

WASHINGTON—Following an order issued by the judge overseeing *Sabo v. United States*, legal notices are being mailed this week to more than 4,300 veterans who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom and were diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

The court's notice invites them to join a class action lawsuit filed in December 2008 in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims by signing and submitting an "opt-in" form no later than July 24, 2010. Submitting this form will allow these veterans to take advantage of a negotiated resolution that guarantees an upgrade in the veteran's disability rating ... Veterans who do not receive the legal notice, but who believe they may qualify as a class member in *Sabo vs. United States*, should go to www.ptsdlawsuit.com to obtain information about their rights in the lawsuit.

<More at: http://www.lawyerservingwarriors.com/news_releases-10-0125.html>

NOTICE

If at any time you cannot open a link in this newsletter to an article or web page that interests you, please let me know at scCook@vuft; I keep a copy of most of the full articles, or can research an alternative route to the information. [Ed.]

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EDITOR'S NOTE: I have been asked what guides my selection of articles. In general, I try to stick with articles that deal exclusively with our target group: serving military, veterans, retirees, and their families. I also favor articles that deal with the effect of Legislative or Executive inaction or bad actions that adversely affect our target group. I try not to pick those articles that have already been beaten to death in the regular press, but rather try to bring the reader articles that he or she might not run across in another medium. While we are non-partisan, I do not believe articles critical of government actions to be partisan as long as they are accurate and fair. Criticism, like dissent, is fair. Finally, I screen hundreds of articles for inclusions and for every article I include, I throw five or six away – good articles, but not as important as the ones selected.

I always appreciate contributions, whether it is opinion in Letter-to-the-Editor form, or articles that the reader believes would be good for our readership. Since I get a chance to vent once in awhile in these newsletters, I will certainly consider Op-Ed copy for inclusion. I always welcome reader comment or complaint. [Sandy Cook](#), Editor

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