

# SOUND OFF!



VOL. III, NO 14

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

*“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”*

10 MARCH 2008

**IN 10 DAYS -IT WILL BE FIVE YEARS & \$500+ BILLION IN IRAQ!  
SO MUCH FOR THAT SHORT, \$80B WAR!**

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

### VETERANS ARE PEOPLE, NOT STATISTICS!

On Monday 3 March 2008, at 0930, in US District Court for the Northern District of California, Senior Judge Samuel Conti convened the week-long hearing on the VUFT/VCS class action lawsuit to obtain an injunction mandating mental health services in accordance with the law from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

Bob Handy, the Chair of VUFT, and I were there. I could only stay the first day, but Bob remained there through much of the proceedings. I am no journalist so I'll try to give you my impressions rather than a reporter's account of the proceedings that day. VCS was represented by their Executive Director, Paul Sullivan.

Morris and Foerster LLP (MoFo), our *pro bono* legal counsel, had a huge team led by Gordon Erspamer. The government took this case so seriously that they had Paul J. Hutter, General Counsel for the VA at the table, along with several other lawyers including at least one from the Department of Justice (DoJ).

The proceedings were covered by ABC (SFO Ch7), NPR, local PBS, Fresno PBS, the SFO Chronicle, the SFO Examiner, and others.

Only two witnesses were called the first day by our side: Dr. Arthur Blank, an expert on PTSD who served as a psychiatrist in the US Army in Vietnam *circa* 1965, has been a lead psychiatrist at the VA for many years through 1997, was a principal author of the American Psychiatric Association's definition of PTSD, and is now at George Washington University and in private practice, still specializing in veterans with PTSD. The gist of Dr. Blank's testimony is that there is only one answer when an acutely distressed veteran presents him or herself for treatment – immediate treatment.

Dr. Gerald M. Cross, Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health. Dr Cross is the number two man in the VHA. Dr Cross is a Family Care physician who was the former deputy for Patient Care Services within the VA. He was not hostile, but he was defensive of the VA.

One overall first impression – the VA is scared. Second and corollary impression – the VA doesn't think about the patients except to mention them during their PR campaigns.

While I didn't get to see the defendants examine their own witnesses, I did get to see them cross-examine ours and got to hear many objections from their lawyers.

While our lawyers and Dr. Blank focused on patient care, and immediate care in the event of acute distress or “suicidality” (is that even a word?), the VA side, including Dr. Cross focused on “budget”, “programs”, “staffing”, etc.

Our lawyers attempted to question Dr. Blank on his knowledge of VA procedures, recognizing that he had been away from there for a decade. The VA piled objection after objection on this line of questioning because, they said, Dr. Blank could not possibly know current policy and procedures. Of course, they failed to mention that when our side requested in disclosure copies of current procedures and policies they refused to supply them. So the end result is that the VA says “You can't possibly know what we do, and we are not going to let you know what we do – so there!” Nonetheless, Dr. Blank's testimony was compelling.

They objected to the use of a CBS report, a congressional report and even reports from their own Inspector General (IG). Apparently the DVA IG isn't on their “reliable employee” access list.

If the question was, “Do patients in distress with a stated suicidal urge, or with previous history of suicide attempts get to see a psychiatrist or counselor within 24 hours?”, the answer was, “We have hired more counselors.” If the question was “If a patient presents him or herself at a Vet Centers with symptoms of acute mental distress are they referred immediately to a mental health counselor, psychologist or psychiatrist?”, the answer was “We have increased our budget for training Vet Center personnel.”

It was apparent from Dr. Cross's testimony that the scheduling clerk at a Vet Center was the initial screener for veterans' complaints. The IG had reported that the schedulers across the system were failing to get patients scheduled for an appointment within 30 days.

Dr. Cross's answer was that the VHA was convinced that the problem was in the data record not in the performance; that is, the

veteran “probably refused to accept an appointment” within the 30 days and the scheduler forgot to note that refusal. In other words, *We do it right, but the veterans are obstinate and our GS-4 schedulers don't keep very good records.* Of course, when he started talking about improved statistics, he cited the same schedulers' records as the basis for that alleged trend.

I guess, the DVA has records that serve two purposes: First they are so inaccurate that outsiders can't rely on them, but they are so accurate that insiders depend on them to evaluate their own performance. Boy, isn't that convenient?!

The VA counts a lot on group therapy whereas Dr. Blank pointed out that group therapy is counter-indicated in 70+% of all cases.

The VA, to show its deep concern, sends the police after distressed PTSD patients who fail to make their appointments, a practice that Dr. Blank pointed out would likely lead to many suicides when the patient is faced by armed authority.

Despite the fact that most of these patients need immediate and continuing treatment, the VA cites its “improvement” over time in

reducing waiting times – they do not even acknowledge the immediacy of the need.

If I had to characterize the entire proceeding it would be: Us vs. Them ~ People vs. Policy ~ Performance vs. Procedures ~ and essentially Veterans vs. The System

Our side defends the veteran – their side defends the system.

During the last break of the day someone (I think a reporter) asked me why I believed that veterans ought to get this very expensive immediate support.

My answer was, “Because they go when you will not, to face dangers you are afraid to face, and for your reasons not theirs. How can we not reward them completely for doing what most of the rest of us believe is critically important, except just not important enough for us to do ourselves. How else can we repay them for doing what we seem to be afraid to do?”

I have no idea if he understood at all. [Ed.]

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

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

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

### WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

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

## 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 is a link to legal [documents](#) on the lawsuit on our website. There is also a good article on the family of one of the participants at <http://www.startribune.com/local/15895127.html>

**DOES YOUR PERSONAL CASE APPLY TO THIS LITIGATION? YOU CAN GET YOUR CASE EVALUATED [HERE](#).**

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

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

**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

Hi Friends, [S]eems like only Veterans For Common Sense and Veterans For Truth are really going to bat for the returning vets. Shouldn't VFW, AL, VVA and DAV be involved directly? Did I miss something, if so please send me the lawsuit that VFW, DAV and VVA are involved in.

*R. Lane Anderson, Lifetime Member VVA, VFW, DAV and VFP*

Military veterans who served in combat since November 11, 1998, including veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, now are eligible for five years of free medical care through Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities. This measure increases the previous two-year limit and applies to most conditions, VA said in a February 26 statement. The new provision, part of the National Defense Authorization Act recently signed by President Bush, applies to care in a VA hospital, outpatient clinic or nursing home. It also extends VA dental benefits, previously limited to 90 days after discharge for most veterans, to 180 days. The five-year deadline has no effect on veterans with medical conditions related to their military service; vets may apply at any time after their discharge for medical care for service-connected health problems. The five-year window also is open to activated reservists and members of the National Guard if they served in a theater of combat operations, VA said. "By their service and their sacrifice, America's newest combat veterans have earned this special eligibility period for VA's world-class health care," said VA Secretary James Peake. To see more, go to: <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1454>.

*SGM Troy Falardeau, Public Affairs SGM, U.S. Army Reserve Command*

President George W. Bush

You are reportedly planning to veto the intelligence authorization bill because it contains a provision forcing the CIA to adhere to the Army field manual with respect to interrogation techniques and the treatment of detainees.

Please, in the name of the Republic, do not do so!

The use of torture, authorized or unauthorized, in this conflict has shamed me and millions of other veterans.

This is not what Americans do!

It is a heinous and self-defeating practice, the use of which endangers our own soldiers.

Whether it is in defense of our national reputation or in pursuit of your Christian beliefs, approve this provision and stop using torture, for now and for all time.

Sanford Cook - LTC USA (Ret)

## RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

### A G.I. BILL FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

In 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the "Servicemen's Readjustment Act" -- the original G.I. Bill -- which ultimately allowed more than eight million combat veterans returning from the battlefields of World War II to receive full college tuition, low-cost mortgages, and living costs. Because of this bill, these veterans served as "the engine of opportunity in the postwar years." Unfortunately, the program FDR signed into law has since been scaled back, and with college tuition and fees across the country skyrocketing, G.I. Bill benefits today fall far short of actual costs. In fact, "the most a veteran can receive is approximately \$9,600 a year for four years," which "covers only 60-70% of the average cost of four years at a public college or university, or less than two years at a typical private college." Thus, after surviving combat in Iraq or Afghanistan, returning veterans are having difficulty surviving the financial burdens of higher education. ... The new version of the bill "would be available to all members of the military who have served on active duty since September 11, 2001." <More at [progress@americanprogressaction.org](mailto:progress@americanprogressaction.org)>

### FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT EXTENDED FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

AUSA 1 March 2008

A provision of the FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) will alter the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) to assist military family members who need to take unpaid leave to care for an injured Servicemember. The new law, which took effect when the bill was signed on January 28, 2008, allows the spouses, children, parents or other next of kin who are providing care for an injured Servicemember to take as many as 26 weeks of unpaid leave in a twelve month period. More information about the FMLA as it pertains to military families is available from the Department of Labor's website: [www.dol.gov/esa/whd/fmla/NDAA\\_fmla.htm](http://www.dol.gov/esa/whd/fmla/NDAA_fmla.htm)  
<More of this article at: [www.ausa.org/webint/DeptFamilyPrograms.nsf/byid/LLOG-7CEJQT](http://www.ausa.org/webint/DeptFamilyPrograms.nsf/byid/LLOG-7CEJQT)>

## **INCREASE SPENDING FOR HEALTH RESEARCH, VETERANS' CARE**

07 Mar 2008

The House Budget Committee on Thursday voted 22-16 to pass a \$3 trillion fiscal year 2009 budget resolution that would increase spending for medical research, health care for veterans and other domestic programs by more than the inflation rate and would not address the "exploding growth" of entitlement programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid, the AP/Houston Chronicle reports.

<More at: <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/99777.php>>

## **SENATOR PROPOSES LAW TO PAY FOR GUARD AND RESERVE TRAVEL**

Senator Ben Nelson (D-NE) recently introduced legislation (S 2623) to allow the Secretary of Defense to use Department of Defense (DoD) funds to pay for travel if a Reserve member is placed on leave because of training suspensions or staffing issues.

<More at: <http://bennelson.senate.gov/news/details.cfm?id=292854&&>>

For complete access to bills concerning veterans, go to <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/110search.html> and type in the word "veteran"

## **RETREAT – NEWS**

### **A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT TO IRAQ?**

Agence France Press - March 4, 2008

A top lawmaker voiced fears Tuesday that US President George Bush's administration was negotiating deals with Iraq that would amount to an open-ended commitment to stage US combat missions there. Administration officials say formal US-Iraqi negotiations will begin later this month on a legal framework aimed at keeping security policy options open for both countries beyond 2008, when the UN mandate for US forces ends. <More at [www.capitolhillblue.com/cont/node/4744](http://www.capitolhillblue.com/cont/node/4744)>

### **MARINE CORPS UNIT DEPLOYS TO IRAQ FOR A RECORD FIFTH TOUR**

02/27/2008

...It is not uncommon for Marine Corps units, in particular, to serve two, three, or even four deployments to Iraq. But yesterday, something unique happened. The 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment (3/4) based at Twenty-nine Palms, California, reportedly became the first Marine Corps unit to be deployed to Iraq a record five times. <More at: <http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/node/8277>>

### **MORE TROOPS FOR IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN, DEFENSE DEPARTMENT SAYS**

David Montero

The Defense Department says February 26, 2008 it needs more troops to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan. But an Army general warns that troops already in the fight are under too much strain. The warning comes as violence in Afghanistan – unlike Iraq, where violence is down - is expected to increase. The Defense Department announced that by July 2008, it will have more troops on the ground in Iraq than when the "surge was announced last January, while troop levels in Afghanistan will be at their highest since 2001. <More at: [www.csmonitor.com/2008/0227/p99s04-duts.html](http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0227/p99s04-duts.html)>

### **DOD: RECRUITMENT DECLINING**

Stars and Stripes - March 08, 2008

A senior Defense official says U.S. military recruitment is declining despite studies suggesting the armed forces are more diverse and educated than ever, The Washington Times reported Friday. <More at: [www.leatherneck.com/forums/showthread.php?t=62118](http://www.leatherneck.com/forums/showthread.php?t=62118)>

### **BUSH CLAIMS SOLE POWER OVER IRAQ WAR**

Associated Press - March 06, 2008

WASHINGTON - The administration can keep troops in Iraq into next year even after the current U.N. mandate governing operations there expires and without Congress' permission, a senior State Department official told a Democratic lawmaker on March 5. In a letter to Rep. Gary Ackerman, D-N.Y., David Satterfield said military operations can continue "beyond the end of this year under the laws passed by Congress and the president's authority as commander in chief." Satterfield's statement reaffirms the administration's position that it does not need international or congressional approval to conduct military operations around the world, particularly when going after terrorists. <More at: [www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,163435,00.html](http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,163435,00.html)>

## ARMY MAKES USE OF NEW MANUAL

Stars and Stripes - Lisa Burgess - March 01, 2008

ARLINGTON, Va. - The Army's new operations manual makes the mission of stabilizing war-torn nations just as important as the business of invading them, a change that may not find immediate acceptance within the ranks, one of its authors said.

<More at: [www.military.com/features/0,15240,163128,00.html](http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,163128,00.html)>

## BUSH EXPLAINS VETO OF WATERBOARDING BILL

Jennifer Loven - Mar 8

WASHINGTON (AP) - President Bush said Saturday he vetoed legislation that would ban the CIA from using harsh interrogation methods such as waterboarding to break suspected terrorists because it would end practices that have prevented attacks.

"The bill Congress sent me would take away one of the most valuable tools in the war on terror," Bush said in his weekly radio address taped for broadcast Saturday. "So today I vetoed it," Bush said. The bill provides guidelines for intelligence activities for the year and includes the interrogation requirement. It passed the House in December and the Senate last month.

"This is no time for Congress to abandon practices that have a proven track record of keeping America safe," the president said.

<More at: <http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5hNORmRm4JahUoi8tBw8CvviqygD8V9BH28K>>

## **THIS MAY BE WHY THE GOVERNMENT CAN'T AFFORD VETS BENEFITS**

### TOP IRAQ CONTRACTOR SKIRTS US TAXES OFFSHORE

Farah Stockman, Globe Staff - March 6, 2008

CAYMAN ISLANDS - Kellogg Brown & Root, the nation's top Iraq war contractor and until last year a subsidiary of Halliburton Corp., has avoided paying hundreds of millions of dollars in federal Medicare and Social Security taxes by hiring workers through shell companies based in this tropical tax haven.

More than 21,000 people working for KBR in Iraq - including about 10,500 Americans - are listed as employees of two companies that exist in a computer file on the fourth floor of a building on a palm-studded boulevard here in the Caribbean. Neither company has an office or phone number in the Cayman Islands.

The Defense Department has known since at least 2004 that KBR was avoiding taxes by declaring its American workers as employees of Cayman Islands shell companies, and officials said the move allowed KBR to perform the work more cheaply, saving Defense dollars. But the use of the loophole results in a significantly greater loss of revenue to the government as a whole, particularly to the Social Security and Medicare trust funds.

<More at: [www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2008/03/06/top\\_iraq\\_contractor\\_skirts\\_us\\_taxes\\_offshore/](http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2008/03/06/top_iraq_contractor_skirts_us_taxes_offshore/)>

### THRIVING TALIBAN DRUGS SHOW AFGHAN WOES

ANNE GEARAN - Feb 29 WASHINGTON (AP)— The Taliban have built a huge and profitable drug operation in Afghanistan while provincial governors look the other way, the latest grim sign of backsliding in a country America has spent six years and billions of dollars trying to salvage.

A U.S. report Friday on drugs - it said Afghanistan now produces 93 percent of the world's opium poppy - comes hand in hand with the resurgence of Taliban militants despite American anti-insurgent efforts. Also on the rise: terrorist violence such as roadside bombs, suicide bombings, and attacks on police. The problems have worsened rather than diminished under the watch of the U.S.-backed government in Kabul and the relatively small number of American forces stationed in the nation while larger numbers are deployed to Iraq. <More at: [http://ap.whiznews.com/dynamic/stories/G/GRIM\\_AFGHANISTAN?SITE=WHIZ](http://ap.whiznews.com/dynamic/stories/G/GRIM_AFGHANISTAN?SITE=WHIZ)>

## **TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>What</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>Notes</u>
3/6	1100 - 1400	Crowne Plaza Hotel Kansas City Downtown 1301 Wyandotte Street, Kansas City, MO	Career Fair		816.474.6664
3/13	1000 - 1700	Scottish Rite Events Center 1895 Camino del Rio South, San Diego. CA	Western Regional Career Expo	<a href="http://www.militarystars.com/job_seekers_register.htm">http://www.militarystars.com/job_seekers_register.htm</a>	
3/14		Yuma, AZ	Stand Down	<a href="#">William J. "Bill" Thornton</a>	928-503-0552
3/16-3/18		National Labor College 10000 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring, MD	Winter Soldier II	<a href="#">IVAW</a>	773-276-4189
3/17	1100 -	Embassy Suites Austin - North	Career Fair		512-454-8004

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	1400	5901 North IH-35, Austin, TX			
3/17	1100 - 1400	Marriott St. Louis I-70 at Lambert Airport 10700 Pear Tree Lane, St. Louis, MO 63134	Career Fair		314.423.9700
3/19		Hattiesburg, MI	Resource Fair	<a href="#">Andrea Robinson</a>	601-545-2925
3/20		Holiday Inn Los Angeles-Intl Airport 9901 La Cienega Blvd, Los Angeles, CA	Career Fair		310-649-5151
3/24		Ramada Woodlawn - Conference Center 212 W. Woodlawn Road, Charlotte, NC	Career Fair		704.525.8350
3/27		Sheraton North (Airport) 15700 John F. Kennedy Blvd., Houston, TX	Southwest Regional Career Expo	<a href="http://www.militarystars.com/job_seekers_register.htm">www.militarystars.com/job_seekers_register.htm</a>	
3/27		Raleigh, NC	Resource Fair	Carson Dean	919-508-0718
3/27-30		<i>Ironworld Chisolm, Minnesota</i>	The Wall That Heals	Iron world Development Corp	
3/28		Atlanta Marriott Northwest 200 Interstate North Parkway, Atlanta, GA	Career Fair		770-952-7900
3/31-4/1		Algonquin, IL	Resource Fair	<a href="#">Kathy Chwedyk</a>	866-338-4968
3/31		Holiday Inn Chicago- Mart Plaza 350 North Orleans. Chicago, IL	Career Fair		312-836-5000

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

### **REPEATED IRAQ DEPLOYMENTS RAISE MENTAL HEALTH RISKS FOR SOLDIERS**

Peter Spiegel - Los Angeles Times Staff Writer - March 7, 2008

WASHINGTON — More than a quarter of higher-ranking enlisted soldiers showed signs of mental health problems after being sent to war zones for the third or fourth time, a sharp increase over those on their first or second deployments, according to a military study issued Thursday. ... The report showed that 27.2% of noncommissioned officers -- the sergeants responsible for leading troops in combat -- reported mental health problems during their third or fourth tours. That was up from 18.5% of those on their second tour and 11.9% of those on their first tour. Mental health problems include signs of depression, anxiety and stress disorders. The report showed a sharp decline in morale for those on their third and fourth tours -- with 15.6% saying they had "very high morale," down from 27.1% for NCOs on their first deployment -- as well as a significant increase in problems doing their jobs. <More at: [www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-mental7mar07.1.3105811.story](http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-mental7mar07.1.3105811.story)>

### **AFTER THE WAR, A NEW BATTLE TO BECOME CITIZENS**

Fernanda Santos - February 24, 2008

Despite a 2002 promise from President Bush to put citizenship applications for immigrant members of the military on a fast track, some are finding themselves waiting months, or even years, because of bureaucratic backlogs. One, Sgt. Kendell K. Frederick of the Army, who had tried three times to file for citizenship, was killed by a roadside bomb in Iraq as he returned from submitting fingerprints for his application.

... "I've pretty much given up on finding out where my paperwork is, what's gone wrong, what happened to it," said Abdoool Habibullah, 27, a Guyanese immigrant who first applied for citizenship in 2005 upon returning from a tour in Iraq and was honorably discharged from the Marines as a sergeant. "If what I've done for this country isn't enough for me to be a citizen, then I don't know what is." <More at: [www.nytimes.com/2008/02/24/us/24vets.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/24/us/24vets.html)>

### **CARE FOR INJURED VETS RAISES QUESTIONS**

Bradley Brooks - Mar 6

BAGHDAD (AP) - The number of wounded soldiers has become a hallmark of the nearly 5-year-old Iraq war, pointing to both the use of roadside bombs as the extremists' weapon of choice and advances in battlefield medicine to save lives. About 15 soldiers are wounded for every fatality, compared with 2.6 per death in Vietnam and 2.8 in Korea. But with those saved soldiers comes a financial price - one veterans groups and others claim the government is unwilling to pay. Those critics also say that the tens of thousands of soldiers wounded in Iraq are part of a political numbers game, one they say undermines the medical system meant to

care for them. The most frequently cited figure is the 29,320 soldiers wounded in action in Iraq as of Thursday. But there have been 31,325 others treated for non-combat injuries and illness as of March 1.

"The Pentagon keeps two sets of books," said Linda Bilmes, a professor at Harvard and an expert on budgeting and public finance whose newly published book, "The Three Trillion Dollar War," was co-authored with Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz. "It is important to understand the full number of casualties because the U.S. government is responsible for paying disability compensation and medical care for all our troops, regardless of how they were injured," Bilmes said.

<More at: <http://apnews.excite.com/article/20080306/D8V83JFG1.html>>

### **VA CHANGES POLICY ON PTSD DIAGNOSIS**

The Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs has directed the VA regional offices to end the requirement that veterans diagnosed with PTSD while on active duty provide additional evidence of exposure to specific stressors during their service in order to establish their diagnosis of PTSD. Instead, the VA will immediately schedule examinations for such veterans in order to determine the severity of their PTSD for VA compensation purposes.

<More at: [http://akaka.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.Home&month=2&year=2008&release\\_id=2016](http://akaka.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.Home&month=2&year=2008&release_id=2016)>

### **VA TO TRAIN MORE PSYCHOLOGISTS**

March 4, 2008

WASHINGTON – To meet increased needs for mental health services for veterans, especially those returning from the Global War on Terror, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is expanding its training programs for psychologists.

"Not all the wounds of war are visible," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "VA is committed to ensuring veterans receive world-class care for mental health services. This initiative meets our short-term needs, but it will also guarantee we have a pool of well-trained psychologists in the future." <More at: [www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1462](http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1462)>

### **VA OFFICIAL: MORE THAN 60,000 IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN VETS DIAGNOSED WITH PTSD**

Jason Leopold – March 6, 2008

Attorneys for two veterans advocacy organizations are hoping to convince a judge that a lawsuit filed against the Department for Veterans Affairs last year and several government officials associated with the VA should receive class-action status. In their lawsuit, Veterans for Common Sense and Veterans United for Truth, which represent about 12,000 veterans combined, claim Iraq and Afghanistan war vets are dying while waiting for the VA to treat PTSD and work through a backlog of at least half-a-million disability claims. The groups want a federal court judge to issue a preliminary injunction to force the VA to immediately treat veterans who show signs of PTSD and are at risk of suicide.

On Tuesday, the second day of testimony before U.S. District Court Judge Samuel Conti, Dr. Gerald Cross, the undersecretary for health at the Veterans Health Administration, made a startling admission during cross-examination by the plaintiffs' attorneys that would appear to contradict the agency's position. Cross admitted that veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan were not only entitled to free healthcare, "there is no co-pay," he said.

Perhaps most startling, however, was testimony by Cross stating that of the 300,000 veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars treated at VA hospitals, nearly half--about 120,000--were diagnosed with a serious mental condition. Sixty-eight thousand of those treated were diagnosed with PTSD. <More at: [http://onlinejournal.com/artman/publish/article\\_3034.shtml](http://onlinejournal.com/artman/publish/article_3034.shtml)>

### **MORE PSYCHIATRISTS NEEDED ON WARFRONTS**

Associated Press | March 07, 2008

WASHINGTON - U.S. troops on the battlefield found it harder to get the mental health care they needed last year, when violence rose in Afghanistan and new tactics pushed Soldiers in Iraq farther from their operating bases. A report the Army released March 6 recommends sending civilian psychiatrists to the warfront, supplementing members of the uniformed mental health corps. Surveying a force strained by its seventh year of war, officials found that more than one in four Soldiers on repeat tours of duty screened positive for anxiety, depression and other mental health problems.

<More at: <http://hamptonroads.com/2008/03/army-psychiatrists-needed-warfronts>>

### **US TROOPS LOSING HEARING**

Chelsea J. Carter - Associated Press Writer

SAN DIEGO (AP) -- Soldiers and Marines caught in roadside bombings and firefights in Iraq and Afghanistan are coming home in epidemic numbers with permanent hearing loss and ringing in their ears, prompting the military to redouble its efforts to protect the troops from noise. Hearing damage is the No. 1 disability in the war on terror, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, and

some experts say the true toll could take decades to become clear. Nearly 70,000 of the more than 1.3 million troops who have served in the two war zones are collecting disability for tinnitus, a potentially debilitating ringing in the ears, and more than 58,000 are on disability for hearing loss, the VA said. <More at: [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/C/COMBAT\\_HEARING\\_LOSS](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/C/COMBAT_HEARING_LOSS)>

### **BATTLE-SCARRED BY BULLETS, BENEFITS**

Alec Luhn - March 4, 2008

Juniors Joe Dillenburg and Zach Jones both began attending the University of Wisconsin after serving in the U.S. Army. While Dillenburg fought in Iraq and Jones served in Afghanistan, they both have dealt with physical and mental health problems resulting from their deployments. But Dillenburg receives well over twice as much veterans' aid money as Jones — \$1,763 compared to \$660 each month. Despite his prior service in the Army and tours in Bosnia and Afghanistan, Jones isn't eligible for the higher amount of federal education funding Dillenburg receives through the Montgomery GI Bill for Active Duty veterans, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The hang-up is due to Jones' stint at the U.S. Military Academy, which interrupted the bill's requirement of three years of continuous active duty.

"I identify that they've got me on a technicality," Jones said. "But it's against the intent and overall purpose of the GI Bill, and the VA likes to use bureaucratic technicalities to deny veterans benefits."

UW's estimated cost of attendance for Wisconsin residents during the 2007-08 school year was \$18,010, which averages out to \$2,118 per month between September and mid-May. <More at: [http://badgerherald.com/news/2008/03/04/battleScarred\\_by\\_bul.php](http://badgerherald.com/news/2008/03/04/battleScarred_by_bul.php)>

### **ONE WEEK OF WAR SPENDING**

Dina Rasor - February 29, 2008

Senator Jim Webb has reintroduced an updated version of what he has dubbed "21st Century GI Bill" framed on the wildly successful GI Bill from World War II. With this war dragging on for six and one half years and our troops involuntarily serving tour after tour, it is the least we can do for them. There are many other issues that we need to address to help our returning troops but this is a broad based program that will give a hand to all the troops who have served since 9/11.

Webb is co-sponsoring this bill with Senator Hagel and Senator Lautenberg and yesterday they got the important support of moderate Republican John Warner. His support will hopefully give cover for other Republicans to vote for this measure. For any of those who claim that it is too expensive, consider this: The estimated yearly cost for this program is \$2 billion -- equivalent to one week of spending on this war. <More at: [www.huffingtonpost.com/dina-rasor/it-is-the-least-we-can-do\\_b\\_89157.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dina-rasor/it-is-the-least-we-can-do_b_89157.html)>

### **FIGHTING FOR A NEW GI BILL – SEE THE IAVA VIDEO**

[https://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/436/t/4261/shop/custom.jsp?donate\\_page\\_KEY=3378](https://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/436/t/4261/shop/custom.jsp?donate_page_KEY=3378)

### **WEBB'S GI BILL TAGGED AS THREAT TO VOLUNTEER FORCE**

Tom Philpott - March 06, 2008

Defense officials are alarmed by the very real prospect that Congress this year will enact the robust GI Bill education plan designed by Sen. Jim Webb (D-Va.). One Defense official, who declined to be named, described the bill as a "retention killer" for the all-volunteer military. Webb reintroduced his bill, the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act ([S. 22](#)), last week with changes that attracted strong bipartisan support, including the endorsement of Sen. John Warner (Va.), former chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

"I'm just going to go full bore on this thing," Warner told Military Update in a phone interview.

That's a worrisome vow for Defense officials who believe enhanced post-service education benefits, particularly if enacted while troops face multiple deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, could trigger an exodus severe enough to put the viability of the volunteer military at risk. <More at: [www.fra.org/AM/template.cfm?ContentID=6094&template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm](http://www.fra.org/AM/template.cfm?ContentID=6094&template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm)>

### **VA LOANS OMITTED FROM STIMULUS PACKAGE**

Ken Harney – Columnist - 3/7/2008

WASHINGTON -- Oooops! When Congress and the White House put together the recent bipartisan \$150 billion economic stimulus package, they raised the maximum mortgage limits in high-cost areas for Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and the Federal Housing Administration. But lawmakers neglected to include a similar increase for the government's primary home purchase program for veterans -- VA-backed loans. While the limits of the other three programs now extend to \$729,500 in the highest-cost areas -- at least through Dec. 31 -- VA loans remain capped at \$417,000. <More at: [www.dailyherald.com/story/?id=147883&src=118](http://www.dailyherald.com/story/?id=147883&src=118)>



## RAPED AND SILENCED IN THE BARRACKS

Jessica Pupovac - In These Times - March 3, 2008

When military sexual assault survivors call Susan Avila-Smith, she advises them to keep their mouths shut while she works on getting them home. "It breaks my heart to do that," she says, "but I want to get them out alive and that's my main goal."

Since she left the Army in 1995, Avila-Smith estimates that she has helped about 1,200 rape survivors separate from the U.S. Armed Forces and claim their Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits. As founder of Women Organizing Women, an online support group for survivors of military sexual trauma (MST), Avila-Smith has heard it all. But lately, she's been more sensitive than usual.

<More at: [www.alternet.org/story/78507/](http://www.alternet.org/story/78507/)>

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

### NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF MARCH 5, 2008

This week, the Army and Marine Corps announced a decrease, while the Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard announced an increase. The net collective result is 287 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 74,573; Navy Reserve, 5,617; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 7,009; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,758; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 344. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been mobilized to 96,301, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently mobilized can be found at [www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2008/d20080305nqr.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2008/d20080305nqr.pdf)

### OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SATURDAY 9 MARCH 2008

#### OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (1,788 DAYS)

KILLED US	3,975
WOUNDED US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 3/1]	29,320
OTHER US CASUALTIES [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 3/1]	≥31,325
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [LAST DoD UPDATE 3/1]	145
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	4
KILLED UK	175
KILLED OTHER COALITION	133
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE 6/30]	1,001
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 47,555
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 89,110
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400,000+
IRAQ REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL [12/9/27]	2.1M/2.5M

#### OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,317 DAYS)

KILLED US (2/24)	485
*OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 10/2007]	7,720
KILLED COALITION (2/24)	289
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007)	1,472
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (7/2004)	32,034
AFGHAN REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE [2/24]	\$500,800,038,876

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

### TAX REBATE REQUIRES FILING

February 22, 2008

Non-taxpaying veterans who are banking on receiving a rebate from the economic stimulus bill President George W. Bush recently signed must file a 2007 tax return in order to see the additional money. Although select individuals who have no tax liability do not typically file returns, the new law allows for those who earned at least \$3,000 of qualifying income in 2007 from Social Security, veterans' disability compensation, pension or survivor's benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs to be eligible for a payment of \$300 if single or \$600 if filing a joint return.

Recipients of qualifying income benefits can file for their rebate by reporting their 2007 benefits on Line 14a of Form 1040A or Line 20a of Form 1040. <More at: [www.xksandiego.com/cms/newsletter.php?newsletter=Veterans&area=display\\_record&arid=3229](http://www.xksandiego.com/cms/newsletter.php?newsletter=Veterans&area=display_record&arid=3229)>

### 6 THINGS TO DO TO QUALIFY FOR A STIMULUS PAYMENT

Military.com

- 1) File Your 2007 Income Tax Return
- 2.) File Early.
- 3.) E-file
- 4.) Zero Income, Zero Tax and Zero Payment...Make Sure You File
- 5.) Watch Out for Your Two IRS Notices one explaining the stimulus payment program and one confirming eligibility
- 6.) Vets Must File the Right Form (see above)

[www.military.com/Finance/content/0.15356.162400.00.html?ESRC=family.nl](http://www.military.com/Finance/content/0.15356.162400.00.html?ESRC=family.nl)

### A SPECIAL BOND BETWEEN SOLDIERS IN IRAQ

Tina Susman - Los Angeles Times Staff Writer - February 25, 2008

*Some dog handlers have asked to be buried with their four-legged partners -- who may outrank them -- if they are killed together.*

Minari Village, Iraq - Staff Sgt. Iron quakes with fear at the sound of explosions. He brawls with other soldiers. He whines when he doesn't get his way and slows others down when he stops to relieve himself during patrols through hostile territory.

But nobody complains, because when it's time to enter a building that might be rigged to explode, or cross a pasture that could conceal a minefield, Iron is at the front of the line, making sure it's safe for those who follow.

If it's not, Iron will bear the brunt of the blast, along with his best friend, Sgt. Joshua T. Rose, who ranks one level below him. It's an honor Iron enjoys for the dangerous job he does. It also ensures that charges could be filed against Rose in the unlikely event he ever mistreated Iron -- an 80-pound German shepherd.

Rose and Iron are one of about 200 canine teams deployed in Iraq, where the bond between soldiers and their dogs is so deep that some handlers have asked to be buried with their canine partners if they are killed together.

On frigid winter nights in the Iraqi desert, Rose shares his cot and sometimes his sleeping bag with Iron to keep him warm. In the scorching summer heat, he makes sure Iron has enough water before taking his own share. If the heat is too much for Iron, who has a thick coat of glossy black fur, Rose lets him rest, no matter what the platoon leader might want.

Whenever he goes on a mission, Rose tucks a copy of an ode to police and military dogs into his front pocket. It reads in part: *"Trust in me, my friend, for I am your comrade. I will protect you with my last breath. When all others have left you and the loneliness of the night closes in, I will be at your side."*

"These dogs are like our children. I'm closer to my dog than I am to anyone other than my wife," said Staff Sgt. Charles W. Graves, the kennel master at Forward Operating Base Kalsu, about 20 miles southeast of Baghdad.

<More at: [www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-dogs25feb25.0.7187394.story](http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-dogs25feb25.0.7187394.story)>

## ADD-ON ~ BENEFITS

### **DO YOU QUALIFY FOR VETERAN'S BENEFITS?**

Rod Powers - Your Guide to US Military.

What is a "veteran?" One would think that would be an easy question to answer. In the millions of laws passed over two centuries by Congress, you would think that at least one of them would define the term "military veteran."

Most dictionaries define "veteran" as (1) A person who has served in the armed forces, or (2) An old soldier who has seen long service.

Using the dictionary definition, one would be a military veteran with just one day of military service, even with a dishonorable discharge.

In actuality, there is no standardized legal definition of "military veteran" in the United States. Whether or not one is considered a "veteran" by the federal government depends entirely upon which veteran program or benefit one is applying for.

<More at: <http://usmilitary.about.com/od/benefits/a/vetbenefits.htm>>

Complete article contains information on:

- Veteran's Preference for Federal Jobs
- Home Loan Guarantee
- Burial in a VA National Cemetery
- Military Funeral Honors
- Active Duty Montgomery GI Bill.
- Service-Disabled VA Life Insurance
- VA Disability Compensation
- VA Disability Pension
- VA Vocational Rehabilitation
- VA Medical Care

## 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](mailto:scook@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