

SOUND OFF!



VOL. II, NO 15

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"

25 MARCH 2007

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

HUMAN LOSS AND "HUMANITY" LOSS ~ THEY BOTH COUNT

As many of you know, our organization has been hesitant to take a stand on the current war, as that stand might be interpreted as political, and we are non-partisan. It is past time that we do so, however, but, in consonance with our charter, what we strive for is the truth. We must look at what is happening and, to the extent possible, make a truthful judgment about it. That is not political. That is responsible, and that is American.

Recently I was asked to talk to a local group about the human cost of war. I'd like to share that discussion with you in this issue.

When first asked, the temptation was to stand up and say, "The total human cost is incalculable" and then sit down. That five seconds would have been more time spent on the subject than most Americans spend on it each week. The statement would also have been true, but would have sacrificed an opportunity to contemplate the overwhelming impact of the current war.

There are the quantitative costs in dollars and lives. Those are the easy costs to understand – those figures are limited only by the accuracy or the truth of the reporting.

But there are also qualitative losses – losses to us and the world of large parts of our history, our present condition, and our possible future. These tangible and intangible losses are imaginable, but they are not yet calculable. These are the "humanity" costs of war, and may, in the end, be the most serious. In short, what is the total cost to the individuals fighting the war, to the government that has sent them, to the citizenry who supports them, and to the rest of the world outside the conflict?

Both the loss of life and the loss of the tangible and intangible benefits of our history and our society are truly veterans' issues in that they reflect not just the fight, but what we fight for.

We need to talk about all of these costs, both "human" and "humanity", because Congress isn't. Instead, they and the administration have cut critical social budgets right and left but have been careful to fund the Sparta, NC Teapot Museum, the Waterfree Urinal Conservation Initiative, and the Blue Springs, MO campaign to fight "Goth" culture.

The numbers remain important. These are the best figures that I can find of those killed and wounded – priceless lives, whether they are Americans, Iraqis, or Afghans:

Americans/Coalition – 66,000; Iraqis – 1 ½ million; Afghans – ¾ million; Journalists – 300; Contractors – 2,600.

As Bob Woodruff, the recently returned and sorely wounded reporter has told us, as of 6 February officially there were 23,417 wounded. Actually – those who have left DoD care and are in the care of VA = 200,000 – almost 34,000 PTSD; over 73,000 injuries; over 21,000 infections and parasitic Disease; and, almost 68,000 "undefined" illnesses.

Also officially as of 28 February there were 1,835 Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) cases. Better sources estimate "closed head injuries" as at least 10% of the 1.5M who have served, or 150,000.

The number of contractors killed is 280 higher than the official number, and has been confirmed by their employers. There is an added tragedy in the number of correspondents who have lost their lives, some at the hands of our forces, and some murdered at the hands of the opposition.

Using a "best-guess", and "so-far" estimate, we and our partners have spent half a trillion dollars in Iraq. Including at least 21 billion dollars that has just "disappeared". We know that there has been more money spent than we can account for, and that the government is spending hidden – "off-the-books" – money.

In any event, and using rough numbers, had we given the head of each Iraqi family \$100,000 contingent on their overthrowing Saddam Hussein, they would have a thriving economy, a still cohesive nation, the dead would be alive, AND WE WOULD HAVE SPENT EXACTLY THE SAME AMOUNT.

There are massive hidden costs, as well.

Although the VA knew in 2003 that hundreds of thousands of soldiers would be deployed to Iraq, no medical or claims-processing staff was added to handle the inevitable influx of wounded soldiers. That staff now has to be found. Thousands of wounded vets have been forced to wait years to receive rehabilitation and mental-health counseling. The VA has a backlog of at least 400,000 disability claims, and with budgets strained, officials have been turning many down. The number of soldiers approved for permanent disability payments fell by two-thirds from 2001 to 2005 in real numbers, even though the number of seriously injured soldiers soared with the Iraq war. Many of those claims will be revisited.

In 2005 the hospital commander of Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany reported that 8%-10% of soldiers from the war treated there, had "psychiatric or behavioral health issues", and so far there is no provision to cover those ultimate costs which may not surface for years.

The Army and the Marine Corps are worn out. Their equipment has been ground up by the desert conditions and 72% of army brigades have served multiple tours of duty, some as many as four tours. 84,000

National Guard and Reserves have done multiple tours. Combat stress casualties increase 50% among those on their second or subsequent tour. Two thirds of the active Army regiments are rated "not ready", and 90% of the Army National Guard units are likewise "not ready".

Enlistment figures can only be maintained by lowering quotas and soliciting enlistments from sub-standard recruits ~ felons and those with a low IQ. While US unemployment is reported at 4.5%, the unemployment rate for veterans in the 20-24 year age range is over 15%. Is it any wonder that the re-enlistment quotas are being made every quarter? There are no jobs!

In Iraq and Afghanistan mortality rates are up and life expectancy is down. There is no way to know for sure but the estimate of refugees who have left Iraq and Afghanistan are 1.4 million and 2 million, respectively. Internally displaced refugees number at least twice as many, particularly since ethnic and doctrinal cleansing have escalated in Iraq, even if we call it "sectarian violence".

There is one specific hidden cost that will return to haunt us, just as Agent Orange and Gulf War Syndrome are now raising the cost of previous wars, even though to date the department of Defense is denying the effects of Depleted Uranium (DU).

DU is a serious internal hazard. Inhalation, ingestion, and wound contamination pose significant and unacceptable health risks due to direct cell damage from alpha and beta particle and gamma ray emissions. Spent penetrators, DU fragments, and contaminated shrapnel can not be touched or picked up without protection. DU is 99.8% by mass U-238, which is made from the by-product of the uranium enrichment process. The United States munitions industry produces the DU munitions in many calibers and for many weapons types. Each time those weapons are fired DU is deposited across the battlefield. For example, one 10-second burst of the GAU-12 Gatling Gun on an AC-130 aircraft deposits 132 lbs of U-238 across a wide area.

In addition, DU weapons have contributed to pollution of Iraq's land and water, with inevitable spillover effects in other countries. The heavily polluted Tigris River, for example, flows through Iraq, Iran and Kuwait. DU poisoning is producing deformed babies not only in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also in the United States in the families of veterans of this war and of the Gulf War before it.

We have over 800 bases and stations in other countries, and are building more. We are building four "super bases" in Iraq, as well as "Fortress Baghdad", the billion dollar embassy in the Green Zone of Baghdad which is scheduled to have a staff of 5,000. We are funding "cooperative security locations" – secret prisons to the plain-language addicted. And then there are those "black" operations and installations which are hinted at around the globe.

The greatest hidden cost, both now and in the future, may well be the cost of welfare to include homelessness, although with homelessness we begin to approach those other costs that go beyond dollars and cents. We know that almost 10% of the 22.5 million current veterans are homeless. The reasons for homelessness among veterans vary, matching the broad range of reasons among the general homeless population. The Veterans Administration cites their own figures of soldiers enrolled in their programs to say that homelessness is not as bad from this war as it used to be in previous wars such as Vietnam. Of course the figures they are using don't include the 400,000-person backlog, so they might be just a tad suspicious.

One contributing cause to homelessness and to PTSD among veterans is that the Uniformed Services Employment and

Reemployment Act (USERRA) of 1995 is being circumvented regularly and many veterans are not getting their jobs back. Using small-print provisions in the law, many employers are refusing to give back jobs because re-hiring the veteran will "endanger the viability of the business". Ignoring the provisions of many equal opportunity laws and labor regulations, hiring officials are setting aside and ignoring applications for new hires of those who retain a Guard or Reserve obligation. The result of this "Support the Troops" activity by business is that many veterans are losing their homes and their cars and are ending up on the street. At least 1,000 veterans from this war are believed to be on the street already, perhaps more.

Beyond the "Human" cost of war is the broader "Humanity" cost of war. Those costs, tangible or intangible, that affect our way of life, our relationships with each other, and our place in the world.

We are losing the strongest elements of our history.

- Our American republic is being replaced by a moneyed aristocracy.
- The doctrine of separation of powers is being replaced by a "unitary executive" that brooks no checks or balances.
- The fundamental doctrine of *habeas corpus* is being replaced by "secret rendition".
- The Constitutional provision that treaties are the law of the land is being replaced by the view that they are "quaint".
- Thus, the Geneva and Hague conventions are now being replaced with "enhanced interrogation techniques".
- The United Nations which we started and which we need is being replaced by a policy of "full spectrum dominance".
- Civilian control of an apolitical military is being replaced by militaristic civilian leadership of a politicized military
- Defense as a foreign policy imperative is being replaced by preventive war
- Shared sacrifice has been replaced by shared greed and shared entertainment
- Space neutrality is being replaced by armed space weapons

These are frightening losses, nor do I believe that the list is in any way complete. Mischief is afoot and more losses occur almost every day. Our founders believed that sovereignty rested with the people, and that a representative democracy was the practical way to exercise that sovereignty. They believed that the sovereign people's representatives were first in the hierarchy of Government, thus their position in Article I. They knew that the representatives would need someone to run the place day-by-day, but not a king, thus the President with defined powers in Article II. And, they knew that no one could be trusted who did not have to submit his actions to review, and that the people needed protection from the powerful, thus the independent courts in Article III. They left us a clear message – let each part keep watch over the other parts – oversight, as we would call it today – and it has all but disappeared..

The three things our founders spent the most time cautioning each other on were that: treaties honored were the key to the new nation's place in the world; massively inherited wealth would lead to a new aristocracy; and, a standing Army would present the temptation to use it.

What can I say about Geneva, Hague and the use of torture? It appalls me as an American and as a soldier that torture is not only permitted, but in some circles it is lauded. This is a monumental loss for America from which we may never recover.

We built the United Nations, then we undermined it, and now we excoriate it. What we forget is that we need it.

In my experience we have had the least "militaristic" military in the developed world. "Militarism" in a republic most often comes from the

power-mad civilian controllers, and they use the military to implement it. It is usually not the generals who want war, but the politicians.

George Marshall, general and statesman, taught us that in a republic there was a "military ethic", and that was, "A hatred of war and an avoidance of politics". That view may be lost.

Surprising to some, "preemptive war" is a well-established principle in international law. Had the Polish Cavalry charged across the German border on 31 August 1939, they would have been conducting preemptive war in the face of an overwhelming and looming threat – a threat that manifested itself on 1 September when the Germans invaded. What is illegal is "preventive war". Preventive war is the product of a policy best expressed by the Romans after their defeat by the Carthaginians early in the second Punic War, when they announced that no nation or tribe would ever be allowed to compete with Rome for supremacy. Because of that policy, the universal hatred of all people for Rome eventually brought it down. Our current government, unwilling to study history, has adopted the same policy for the United States. Calling "preventive war" "preemptive war" doesn't change its nature any more than my calling you a genius or an idiot makes you one. The fact remains that "preventive war" is illegal.

Sadly, the idea of shared sacrifice has disappeared. We now believe that just thinking about the war, or ranting about it, or grieving over it is somehow sharing. I won't remark on yellow ribbons other than to say that I never knew that patriotism and brotherhood sold for \$2.95.

We are losing the present.

Nothing works better in recruiting opposition, particularly in the Middle East, than kicking down front doors and shaming the head of the family. It is almost as good at recruiting as the second best thing that we do which is to kill the innocent and call it "collateral damage". We have destabilized the Middle East.

We have lost a sense of fiscal responsibility to our nation and to each other. We have a rigged economy based on the defense industry and foreign borrowing, that favors those who live on unearned income over those who work for a living.

We are losing a free and independent press. We are losing our right to privacy. We are equal before the courts only if we can afford high-ticket representation.

The opportunity costs are staggering. Public education, infrastructure repair, environmental conservation, research in alternative fuels, medical research, libraries, aid to the poor and indigent, and on, and on. Other present losses include 60,000 new military divorces, thousands of lost jobs and businesses, and increased industrial and political corruption.

We are losing the meaning of fundamental concepts such as truth, justice, democracy. In fact, it is our hypocrisy that taints the message of democracy.

The possible losses for the future are almost too frightening and too sad to contemplate.

The loss of manufacturing capability has weakened us strategically. The good "surge" of industrial output that let us win World War II could not be generated today. We would have to conquer or at least negotiate with other countries to regain the manufacturing capability that we have given away.

We are in danger of establishing for all time a government of authoritarian rule, with its associated destruction of civil rights.

Along with that may well go our academic and religious freedoms, and freedom to travel.

We can expect increased world and national poverty as "corporatism" (Mussolini's term for fascism) takes over.

Global warming approaches the tipping point from which mankind may not recover, and because of which world health may crash as tropical diseases invade temperate zones.

We are destroying trust among nations, and engendering international contempt for the rule of law. We are embarking on a period of permanent war – a *bellum Americanum* – with its accompanying perpetual arms race.

The dollar is sliding, and the international debt is climbing and we are headed for a financial meltdown.

It is hard to admit that I may well be leaving a world to my eleven grandchildren that is worse than the world my father gave me.

The remaining question of course is: did these young Americans in Iraq die in vain? Knowing that I will be attacked by some for saying it, yet I must say that the answer is "YES!"

Those who defend this war would have us believe that they only die in vain if we fail to send more to die after them, and if we do not achieve "Victory" – in whatever definition of "Victory" is in favor today. The President said in a White House news release in October of last year that, "[r]etreating from Iraq would dishonor the men and women who have given their lives in that country, and mean their sacrifice has been in vain." I say rather that they can only die in vain if they are SENT in vain. Our history and even our political rhetoric supports that definition. And for those serving in Iraq, they have been sent in vain. Because of that, I believe that we can only honor those who have died by not letting their comrades also die. I am confident that that is what those who have died would want.

We have been warned.

"...There is no nation on earth powerful enough to accomplish our overthrow. ... Our destruction, should it come at all, will be from another quarter. From the inattention of the people to the concerns of their government, from their carelessness and negligence..."

Daniel Webster: June 1, 1837

"As nightfall does not come at once, neither does oppression. In both instances, there's a twilight where everything remains seemingly unchanged, and it is in such twilight that we all must be aware of change in the air, however slight, lest we become victims of the darkness."

Justice William O. Douglas

Last week in *The Guardian* Rebecca Solnit gave us all something to ponder. Ask yourself where you sit on this simple scale.

"There is resistance. But if it were enough, the crimes would have stopped, the war would have ended. When it does and they do, some **will have been heroes**, some **will have been honorable but moderate**, in times that did not call for moderation, and some **will have consented, through inaction**, to crimes against humanity."

Rebecca Solnit: 03/14/07

If you are not yet a hero, begin working on it today. [Ed.]

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

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

CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE!

PLEASE CHECK THE WEBSITE AT WWW.VUFT.ORG.

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

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

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

MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS

ANOTHER KIND OF HERO

Hello everyone, [soon] I will be on my way across this big USA. Starting at Santa Monica Pier the start of Route 66 on April 4th, 2007, just after the LA traffic dies down. Not sure what that time that will be, but I would like to get at least half way to Victorville in the High Desert. They will have a send off party at the Route 66 Museum when I get to Victorville. The Museum is on Hwy. 18, 1-1/2 block's past 7th St., I think it's north go towards the 15 Fry.

I should get there Friday, AM, if everything goes right. I would love to see my friends there or [at the] Santa Monica Pier. If you can make it please do. But if you cant make it please track me on the Journey To The Wall at www.journeytothewall.com

Thank you all from my heart, and God Bless our men and women in the service and please bless the MDA and all who have it.

Ken Rhodes - rhodesklr@aol.com

Ken Rhodes, a Vietnam Vet and father of two children with different types of neuromuscular diseases, is cycling across the country to raise money and awareness for Vets and the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Departing from LA on April 4th 2007 the day he was wounded in Vietnam, Ken will arrive at the Vietnam War Memorial Wall in Washington DC on his 70th birthday July 19th. He thought this would be a great opportunity to raise money and awareness for two important causes that are dear to him the Vets and the MDA. He served in Vietnam in two separate tours. Please give your support by donating to the two charities or by directly supporting the ride on his website. Ken's bike will also have a GPS installed on his bike that will allow you to track his progress 24/7. He is currently training riding up to 50 miles a day and hitting the gym 3 times a week with the assistance of a trainer.

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORTS THREE BILLS TO THE HOUSE

March 15, 2007

Washington, D.C. – Today, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee led by Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA), reported out three bills: the Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act, the Dr. James Allen Veteran Vision Equity Act, and the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2007.

1. [H.R. 327](#) – to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a comprehensive program designed to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans. [The U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed H.R. 327, the Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act, by a vote of 423 to 0. Ed.]
2. [H.R. 797](#) – to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve compensation benefits for veterans in certain cases of impairment of vision involving both eyes, and for other purposes.

3. [H.R. 1284](#) – to increase, effective as of December 1, 2007, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans.

"This committee has a tremendous opportunity to make sure that this Congress keeps the promises that have been made to our veterans," said Chairman Filner. "Caring for veterans is an ongoing cost of war and the measures passed today will have an impact on our veterans and their dependents." <http://www.vawatchdog.org/07/hcva07/hcva031507-1.htm>

BIPARTISAN BILL WOULD INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF LOANS AVAILABLE FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

March 15, 2007

(Washington, DC) Small businesses which employ members of the National Guard and Reserve could benefit under legislation introduced Thursday by three U.S. Senators. ... The "Veterans Small Business Opportunity Act of 2007" would increase the amount of loans available to eligible small businesses when an essential employee is called-up to active duty. The bill is sponsored by U.S. Senator Snowe (R-Maine), and co-sponsored by Sens. Craig (R-Idaho) and Pryor (D-Arkansas). The legislation would allow the U.S. Small Business Administration to raise the current maximum military reservist loan amount from \$1.5 million to \$2 million – a \$500,000 increase. It would also allow the SBA, by direct loan or through banks, to offer unsecured loans of up to \$25,000 – a substantial increase from the current \$5,000 limit. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/07/scva07/scva031507-2.htm>

THE FUNDING BILL – WHICH THE PRESIDENT INTENDS TO VETO

[H.R.1591](#) U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Health, and Iraq Accountability Act, 2007 Passed by a vote of 218 to 212.

This is an excerpt of the bill Section TITLE I--SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR, Subsection titled GENERAL PROVISIONS – THIS TITLE

SEC. 1907. CONGRESSIONAL PLEDGE TO FULLY SUPPORT MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES IN HARM'S WAY.

(a) FINDINGS- Congress makes the following findings:

(1) On September 14, 2001, both the Senate and the House of Representatives passed S.J. Res. 23 of the 107th Congress, which became Public Law 107-40 and authorized the use of military force in Afghanistan.

(2) On October 10, 2002, the House of Representatives passed H.J. Res. 114 of the 107th Congress, which authorized the use of military force in Iraq.

(3) After passage by the Senate, H.J. Res. 114 became Public Law 107-243, the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002.

(4) Members of the United States Armed Forces have served honorably in their mission to fight terrorism and protect the greater security of the United States.

(5) These members of the Armed Forces and their families have made many sacrifices, in many cases the ultimate sacrifice, to protect the security of the United States and the freedom Americans hold dear.

(6) Congress and the American people are forever grateful to the members of the Armed Forces for the service they have provided to the United States.

(b) FAITHFUL SUPPORT OF CONGRESS- Congress will fully support the needs of members of the Armed Forces who the Commander in Chief has deployed in harm's way in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, and their families.

SEC. 1908. SENSE OF THE CONGRESS REGARDING PRESIDENT AS COMMANDER IN CHIEF AND CONGRESSIONAL POWER TO DECLARE WAR.

(a) It is the sense of Congress that Congress acknowledges the President as the Commander in Chief, and that role is granted solely to the President by article II, section 2, of the United States Constitution.

(b) It is further the sense of Congress that Congress has the power solely to declare war under article I, section 8, clause 11, of the United States Constitution.

SEC. 1909. SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING CONDUCT OF IRAQ WAR BY COMMANDERS.

It is the sense of Congress that, because the commanders of the United States Armed Forces in Iraq have the training, experience, and first-hand knowledge of the situation on the ground--

(1) the commanders should be allowed to conduct the war and manage the movements of the troops; and

(2) Congress should remain focused on executing its oversight role.

FINE TESTIMONY FROM A VERY GOOD SPOKESMAN

On 8 March 2007 John Rowan, National President, Vietnam Veterans of America, testified before the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs. His testimony can be seen at <http://veterans.house.gov/hearings/schedule110/mar07/03-08-07b/JohnRowan.shtml>

RETREAT – NEWS

IRAQ BUILDUP GROWING IN SCOPE

Associated Press - March 09, 2007

WASHINGTON - President Bush's troop buildup in Baghdad apparently will be bigger and more costly - and perhaps last longer - than it seemed when he unveiled the plan in January as the centerpiece of a new Iraq strategy.

U.S. officials say it's too early to tell whether the troop reinforcements will succeed in containing the sectarian and insurgent violence, but it looks as though the Pentagon is preparing for an expanded commitment - assuming that by summer there are solid signs that the extra effort is yielding significant results. <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,128058,00.html>

PETRAEUS REQUESTS MORE TROOPS FOR IRAQ

Associated Press | March 16, 2007

BOSTON - The commander of U.S. forces in Iraq has asked for an additional 2,500 to 3,000 troops to be sent to Iraq as part of the Bush administration's military buildup to crack down on rising sectarian violence and insurgents, The Boston Globe reported.

Gen. David Petraeus wants another Army combat aviation unit - which would be the sixth Army brigade involved in the buildup - deployed to support the more than 26,000 Soldiers already on their way to Iraq under the plan opposed by many Democrats in Congress, the Globe said in a report posted on its Web site Thursday night. The report quoted unidentified senior Pentagon officials. <More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/16/AR2007031600002.html>

PENTAGON STRUGGLES TO FIND FRESH TROOPS

Associated Press - March 10, 2007

WASHINGTON - Military leaders are struggling to choose Army units to stay in Iraq and Afghanistan longer or go there earlier than planned, but five years of war have made fresh troops harder to find. Faced with a military buildup in Iraq that could drag into next year, Pentagon officials are trying to identify enough units to keep up to 20 brigade combat teams in Iraq. A brigade usually has about 3,500 troops. The likely result will be extending the deployments of brigades scheduled to come home at the end of the summer, and sending others earlier than scheduled. <More at: <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory?id=2940434&CMP>>

THE ARMY IS ORDERING INJURED TROOPS TO GO TO IRAQ

Mark Benjamin

As the military scrambles to pour more soldiers into Iraq, a unit of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division at Fort Benning, Ga., is deploying troops with serious injuries and other medical problems, including GIs who doctors have said are medically unfit for battle. Some are too injured to wear their body armor, according to medical records.

<More at: www.salon.com/news/2007/03/11/fort_benning/index_np.html>

US TROOPS IN IRAQ WANT OUT

Bryan Pearson - Mar 19

For US troops from 9th Cavalry Regiment bumping around the dangerous streets of Baghdad in Humvees after dark on Monday, news that their deployment in Iraq could be extended fell like a hammer blow. Their commanders had cautioned that their second one-year tour due to end in October could be prolonged while US President George W. Bush later warned troops it was too soon to "pack up and go home." The expletives during the four-hour night patrol turned the air in the Humvee, already thick with cigarette smoke, a dark shade of blue.

"We just want to get out of here as soon as possible," said one vehicle commander in one of his few printable comments.

"It's because the Iraqi army is so scared that we have to come here to die," he added, asking not to be named.

<More at: http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20070320/ts_alt_afp/iraqanniversaryus>

A DESPERATE ARMY IS SCRAPING THE BOTTOM

Joseph L. Galloway Mar. 14, 2007 - McClatchy Newspapers

An Army already stretched painfully thin is now being asked to find the additional 25,000-plus troops to man President Bush's escalation in Iraq and, it's now obvious, prepare for additional combat rotations next year.

All the easy sweeping up of manpower already has been done. All the obvious moves to rob Peter to pay Paul have been carried out just to keep this unending war going. Now comes the hardest part: Units that are completing their second or third yearlong combat tours are being extended for another four or six months. Other units, now home for their promised 12 months with their families, are being told they will go back to combat sooner than that.

Army National Guard units that'd already served the maximum time on active duty, in combat, are being told that the rules have changed, and they're again being called back for Iraq service.

<More at: www.realcities.com/mld/kwashington/news/special_packages/galloway/16903393.htm>

MOM DONATES LAPTOPS TO WOUNDED SOLDIERS

Mary Clare Jalonick - Mar 24

WASHINGTON (AP) - Laura Brown, a mother with a son who fought in the Iraq war, is trying to improve conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center - one laptop computer at a time. ... Since its fundraising effort began in November 2005, Brown's organization has donated 27 computers to military hospitals around the country - 24 of them to Walter Reed.

<More at: <http://apnews.excite.com/article/20070324/D8O2FJP00.html>>

<Donate at: www.laptopsforthewounded.com>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
3/25-?		Pascagoula MS	Rebuild the Gulf	Veterans for Peace	314-725-6005
3/27	1100 - 0500	Ft. Bragg Officers' Club Ft. Bragg, NC	Career Fair		910-907-2582
3/31		Los Angeles	Homeless Vets Resource Fair	Doris Nickelson	310-518-1855
4/12	1100 - 1500	Renaissance Dallas Richardson Hotel 900 East Lookout Dr. Richardson, TX	Career Fair		972-367-2000
4/16	1100 - 1500	Crowne Plaza Austin 6121 N IH 35 Austin - Fort Hood, TX	Career Fair		512-323-5466
4/21		St. Louis MO	Resource Fair	Kathryn Sturgeon	314-615-7623

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

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

VA NOT DOING ENOUGH TO HELP VETERANS FROM IRAQ

Hope Yen, AP

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The Veterans Affairs' system for handling disability claims is strained to its limit, and the Bush administration's current efforts to relieve backlogs won't be enough to serve veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, investigators said Tuesday.

In testimony to a House panel, the Government Accountability Office and Harvard professor Linda Bilmes detailed their study into the VA's claims system in light of growing demands created by wars. They found a system on the verge of crisis due to backlogs, cumbersome paperwork and ballooning costs.

<More at: www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2007/03/13/investigators_va_not_doing_enough_to_help_veterans_from_iraq/>

SUCKERED AGAIN: ABANDONMENT OF VETS IS A MILITARY TRADITION

Ted Rall - 03/14/07

NEW YORK -- Americans were dismayed to learn that soldiers wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq -- "fallen heroes," as network news calls them -- were being warehoused in Building 18, a rat- and roach-infested satellite of the Army's Walter Reed Medical Center. Disbelief turned to disgust with the disclosure that injured veterans are going bankrupt and losing their homes because the Veterans Administration (V.A.) holds up their benefit checks for years on end. Surely the men and women who fight for our country deserve better. How could such a wholesale betrayal be tolerated by a nation where "support our troops" magnets account for 20 percent-plus of total auto body surface area? The surprise is that anyone is surprised. Every generation of warriors has marched off to war based on the pledge that they would be taken care of no matter what. America has broken that promise every time. Abandoning men who lose their limbs and sanity in battle is a tradition that goes back to America's first war. <More at: www.informationclearinghouse.info/article17305.htm>

THE WALTER REED SITUATION IS NOT NEW

Dave Rosso - Eureka Times-Standard - 03/09/2007

The news about the conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center has shocked the nation. But the news is also sounding very familiar, which makes it all the more distressing. On Oct. 20, 2003, more than three years ago and only seven months into the Iraq War, Mark Benjamin, United Press International investigations editor, reported: "The Army said Monday it is sending doctors to Fort Stewart, Ga., to help hundreds of sick and injured soldiers, including Iraq veterans, who say they are waiting weeks and months for proper medical help." <More at: www.times-standard.com/opinion/ci_5397616>

DOD CHANGES RESERVE GI BILL POLICY

Military.com | March 14, 2007

Last month Military.com reported that some citizen Soldiers were being misled about their GI Bill benefits. At the time, the Pentagon was telling National Guard and Reserve members that they would lose eligibility for continued GI Bill benefits once they stopped drilling - a policy that differed from the Department of Veteran's Affairs interpretation of the eligibility laws. ... Through discussions with VA officials, National Association of Veterans Program Administrators president Jack Mordente discovered that REAP recipients are eligible to revert back to the original Reserve GI Bill - known as MGIB-SR - upon discharge from paid drill status. This allows such troops to use their MGIB-SR entitlement for the number of months they were activated, plus four additional months. Mordente also found that multiple periods of activation could be added together to increase the extension. <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,128537,00.html>

VETERANS FIGHT THE WAR WITHIN

Jeremy Manier and Judith Graham - Tribune staff reporters - March 13, 2007

The physical risks of war may end when a soldier leaves the battlefield, but new research indicates the mental toll of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is continuing to build, creating a psychological health crisis with no end in sight. Some experts believe the rate of post-traumatic stress disorder, the most common mental health problem among veterans, may even begin to exceed that seen among those who fought in Vietnam. Among the reasons: Many soldiers are enduring multiple tours of duty and more are surviving severe wounds. <More at: www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0703130170mar13,1,2642076.story>

DISPARITY SEEN IN DISABILITY PAY AMONG SERVICES, RANKS

By Kelly Kennedy, Military Times[USA Today]

WASHINGTON — The Army and Marine Corps, bearing the brunt of the burden in Iraq and Afghanistan, tend to give their wounded troops lower disability ratings than the Navy and Air Force, according to Defense Department data. The result: Soldiers and Marines receive an average of several hundred dollars per month less in disability retired pay than sailors and airmen. Break those numbers down a different way and the system shows another inequity: All services tend to grant officers disability ratings of 50% or higher at a significantly greater rate than enlisted members. Critics say those figures support their contention that the Army, in particular, purposely tries to hold down costs by giving low ratings to enlisted soldiers who far outnumber officers going through the lengthy, convoluted system. <More at: www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-03-10-disability-pay_N.htm>

A CHAPLAIN'S POINT OF VIEW - INTERESTING

WALTER REED: THE REAL STORY

03/16/2007 by military cop

Can't be quiet any longer. The rest of the story!

I have had enough and am going to give my perspective on the news about Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Please understand that I am speaking for myself and I am responsible for my thoughts alone. The news media and politicians are making it sound like Walter Reed is a terrible place and the staff here has been abusing our brave wounded soldiers; what a bunch of bull!

I am completing my 24th year of service in the Army next month so you decide for yourself if I have the experience to write about this topic. I have been the senior clinical chaplain at Walter Reed for four years and will leave to go back to the infantry this summer. <More at: www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1801897/posts>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

DECORATED AMERICAN INDIAN VETERAN DIES

Associated Press | March 12, 2007

Hartford, Conn. - Billy Walkabout, a native Cherokee whose actions in Vietnam made him among most decorated Soldiers of the war, died March 7, his stepdaughter said Sunday. He was 57. Walkabout received the Distinguished Service Cross, Purple Heart, five Silver Stars and five Bronze Stars. He was believed to be the most decorated Native American Soldier of the Vietnam War, according to U.S. Department of Defense reports. <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,128257,00.html>

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF MARCH 21, 2007

This week, the Navy announced an increase, while the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps had a decrease. The Coast Guard number remained the same. The net collective result is 1,034 fewer 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. Total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 63,211; Navy Reserve, 6,188; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 5,117; Marine Corps Reserve, 5,556; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 301. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel, who have been mobilized, to 80,373, 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/Mar2007/d20070321ngr.pdf>

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SATURDAY 24 MARCH 2007

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	3,236
WOUNDED US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 2/3]	23,417
OTHER CASUALTIES [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 2/3]	≥32,544
KILLED UK	134
KILLED OTHER COALITION	124
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	768
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE 3/7]	669
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 46,321
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 64,246 [LANCET-720,461]
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400,000+[LANCET- 1,296,830]

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US	373
*OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 12/2]	5,994
KILLED COALITION	170
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	669
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	32,034

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

WAR AND LIQUOR A PERILOUS MIX FOR U.S. TROOPS

Paul von Zielbauer - NY Times - March 13, 2007

In May 2004, Specialist Justin J. Lillis got drunk on what he called "hajji juice," a clear Iraqi moonshine smuggled onto an Army base in Balad, Iraq, by civilian contractors, and began taking potshots with his M-16 service rifle.

"He shot up some contractor's rental car," said Phil Cave, a lawyer for Specialist Lillis, 24. "He hopped in a Humvee, drove around and shot up some more things. He shot into a housing area" and at soldiers guarding the base entrance.

Six months later, at an Army base near Baghdad, after a night of drinking an illegal stash of whiskey and gin, Specialist Chris Rolan of the Third Brigade, Third Infantry Division, pulled his 9mm service pistol on another soldier and shot him dead. And in March 2006, in perhaps the most gruesome crime committed by American troops in Iraq, a group of 101st Airborne Division

soldiers stationed in Mahmudiya raped a 14-year-old Iraqi girl and killed her and her family after drinking several cans of locally made whiskey supplied by Iraqi Army soldiers, military prosecutors said.

Alcohol, strictly forbidden by the American military in Iraq and Afghanistan, is involved in a growing number of crimes committed by troops deployed to those countries. Alcohol- and drug-related charges were involved in more than a third of all Army criminal prosecutions of soldiers in the two war zones — 240 of the 665 cases resulting in convictions, according to records obtained by The New York Times through a Freedom of Information Act request.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2007/03/13/world/middleeast/13alcohol.html?_r=1&hp&oref=slogin

[A GOOD EXAMPLE OF WHY YOU NEED TO CHECK OUT CHARITIES BEFORE YOU GIVE – CHECK ESTABLISHED CHARITIES AT CHARITY NAVIGATOR OR GIVE.ORG](#)

[AND DON'T FORGET VUFT IS A CHARITY ALSO – ALTHOUGH NOT YET LISTED ON THESE TWO WEBSITES](#)

WIS. VETERANS GROUP GETS ONLY 14 CENTS FOR EACH DOLLAR RAISED

Associated Press - Mar. 16, 2007

MILWAUKEE - A Wisconsin veterans charity is among the most inefficient in the nation in its fundraising, receiving only 14 cents for each dollar its donors gave. The Wisconsin Paralyzed Veterans of America hired a Michigan-based telemarketing service last year that raised about \$812,500 for the West Allis-based charity. But the group received only \$114,000, paying the rest to Insight Teleservices Inc. of Southfield, Mich., the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported.

<More at: www.twincities.com/mld/twincities/news/breaking_news/16918056.htm>

HOW'S YOUR FACILITY DOING?

The VA has produced a detailed report on conditions in facilities around the country titled, "National Roll Up of Environment of Care Reports". Find it at: www.vawatchdog.org/07/nf07/nfMAR07/MARFILES/VA%20Enviro%20of%20Care%20Report.pdf

ADDITIONAL INFO ON THIS ISSUE'S EDITORIAL

1. In my editorial I used the *Lancet* figures from October 2006 for Iraqi deaths, which the administration has dismissed as "fanciful". The methodology used has been confirmed, however, by no less an authority than the Bloomberg School of Public Health of Johns Hopkins University, working in conjunction with the Center for International Studies of MIT, and the School of Medicine of Al Mustansiriyah University in Baghdad. For those interested in the detail, their report is [here](#).

2. The founders made it clear what they saw to be the danger of any single individual being able to take us to war. Our Congress has abrogated their responsibility under Article I, particularly in this portion of Section 8.

"To declare War, grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water;

To raise and support Armies, but no Appropriation of Money to that Use shall be for a longer Term than two Years;

To provide and maintain a Navy;

To make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces;

To provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions;"

In the Athenian democracy when the Athenian Senate met and voted for war, the Senators went home, grabbed their armor and their sons, and marched off to fight. I propose an amendment to Article I that makes it incumbent on our representatives to take full responsibility, to include sending their own children and the children of their contributors and constituents to war when the threat is great. It might make them think a bit before they vote for war, and it makes it impossible for them to shirk their duty.

"To declare War **only when all other methods have failed**, grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water, **which power may not be delegated to the Executive**;

To raise and support Armies, **which at the declaration of War shall mandatorily include a draft of all males and females between the ages of 18 and 32, without exception and with no alternative assignment in the Militia, which is defined as the National Guard of the various States**, but no Appropriation of Money to that Use shall be for a longer Term than two Years;

To provide and maintain a Navy;

To make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces;

To provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union **within the borders of the Union**, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions;"

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; 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

ADD-ON ~ A QUICK PRIMER ON USERRA

From a poster titled “Your Rights Under USERRA”, and published by the Department of Labor, Department of Justice, and ESGR (Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve)

REEMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

You have the right to be reemployed in your civilian job if you leave that job to perform service in the uniformed service and:

- you ensure that your employer receives advance written or verbal notice of your service;
- you have five years or less of cumulative service in the uniformed services while with that particular employer;
- you return to work or apply for reemployment in a timely manner after conclusion of service; and
- you have not been separated from service with a disqualifying discharge or under other than honorable conditions.

If you are eligible to be reemployed, you must be restored to the job and benefits you would have attained if you had not been absent due to military service or, in some cases, a comparable job.

RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM DISCRIMINATION AND RETALIATION

If you:

- are a past or present member of the uniformed service;
- have applied for membership in the uniformed service; or
- are obligated to serve in the uniformed service;

then an employer may not deny you:

- initial employment;
- reemployment;
- retention in employment;
- promotion; or
- any benefit of employment

because of this status.

In addition, an employer may not retaliate against anyone assisting in the enforcement of USERRA rights, including testifying or making a statement in connection with a proceeding under USERRA, even if that person has no service connection.

HEALTH INSURANCE PROTECTION

If you leave your job to perform military service, you have the right to elect to continue your existing employer-based health plan coverage for you and your dependents for up to 24 months while in the military.

Even if you don't elect to continue coverage during your military service, you have the right to be reinstated in your employer's health plan when you are reemployed, generally without any waiting periods or exclusions (e.g., pre-existing condition exclusions) except for service-connected illnesses or injuries.

ENFORCEMENT

The U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) is authorized to investigate and resolve complaints of USERRA violations.

For assistance in filing a complaint, or for any other information on USERRA, contact VETS at 1-866-4-USA-DOL or visit its website at <http://www.dol.gov/vets>. An interactive online USERRA Advisor can be viewed at <http://www.dol.gov/elaws/userra.htm>.

If you file a complaint with VETS and VETS is unable to resolve it, you may request that your case be referred to the Department of Justice for representation.

You may also bypass the VETS process and bring a civil action against an employer for violations of USERRA.