

SOUND OFF!



VOL. III, NO 15

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

25 MARCH 2008

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

WHAT'S A MILLION OR TWO AMONG FRIENDS?!

Looking back from the fifth anniversary of the Iraq War (OIF) and the 6 ½ year anniversary of the Afghan War (OEF), some numbers from immediate and past history help define our current position.

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 210 | Days Gulf War – Shield & Storm |
| 488 | KIA OEF |
| 584 | Days WW I (US) |
| 1,098 | Days Korean War |
| 1,364 | Days WW II (US) |
| 1,597 | Days WW I (All) |
| 1,832 | Days in Iraq |
| 1,898 | WIA OEF |
| 2,192 | Days WW II (All) |
| 2,361 | Days in Afghanistan |
| 3,927 | Days in Vietnam |
| 4,000 | KIA OIF |
| 5,070 | Tons opium – Taliban 2000 |
| 9,040 | Tons opium – US/NATO 2007 |
| 12,100 | Afghanis Killed |
| 29,320 | WIA OIF |
| 32,100 | Afghanis wounded |
| 89,760 | Minimum Iraqis Killed |
| 1,191,216 | Worst Case Iraqis Killed |
| 1,630,000 | Bbl/day Iraqi oil output 2007 |
| 2,107,000 | Afghan refugees |
| 2,500,000 | Bbl/day Iraqi oil output 2002 |
| 3,500,000 | Iraqi refugees |
| \$90.3B | Cost Gulf War |
| \$139.8B | Cost OEF (to date) |
| \$226.2B | Cost WW I |
| \$398.7B | Cost Korean War |
| \$505.3B | Cost OIF (to date) |
| \$557.3B | Cost Vietnam War |
| \$805.1B | Estimated cost GWOT thru FY 2008 |
| \$1.49T | Projected full cost OIF military ops only |
| \$3.437T | Cost WW II |

NOTE: All costs US DOD only in 2008 dollars

Only the Vietnam War was longer than the current GWOT.

Only WW II cost more - we had 12 times as many under arms.

Physical casualties are down compared to other wars, but psychological casualties may be up.

Oil production in Iraq is down, and opium production in Afghanistan is up.

So why are these numbers important? Maybe just because we tend to forget the past when we concentrate on the present, and we then tend to ignore the present if we have no sound basis for comparison.

With the real numbers we can make some good comparisons. We can decide in the gross if things are going well in the fine; we can also decide if those who are managing this conflict are any good in comparison to those who handled the previous conflicts.

For example, we can ask why does it take longer to subdue a country of 27.5 million people in a land (Iraq) about twice the size of Idaho, with only about 40,000 part time, under-trained, and under-equipped soldiers opposing us? We can see that it took us only 75% of that time to subdue three major axis powers with millions of soldiers and the best and most modern equipment and training of its time, in a multi-theater conflict across the face of the globe.

Why will this war cost us at least a third of what WW II cost for military operations?

Why are more civilians killed in our Theaters of Operations than opposing fighters?

What have we done to the structure of these countries to make the bad stuff (opium) do better, and the good stuff (oil) do worse?

The figures don't give the answers but at least they give us part of the framework for the questions – these and many more.

In the last issue I railed against the statistical approach to current wars and argued for the people approach. These numbers are facts not statistics. Let's couch our answers in people terms. It is the only way to make even a little sense out of all of this.

*“To save your world you asked this man to die;
Would this man, could he see you now, ask why?”*

W. H. Auden

“Epitaph for an Unknown Soldier”

[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>

The trial will begin 21 April 2008 in Courtroom #1 of the Federal District Court, Northern California District. Try to be there to support veterans and our cause! Court location info is at <http://www.vuft.org/CourtroomInfo.htm>

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 or the Vice Chair at scook@vuft.org. Watch for details at www.vuft.org

WE REALLY 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 are incurring expenses in support of the case, to include travel expenses to attend the hearings and the trial. 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

Friends,

Those who have put service to our nation above all else deserve our respect, our thanks and our assurance that the doors to the future will be open to them. We must demand that education, job training, healthcare, and housing be readily available to these heroes. As you well know, California is at a critical juncture, and the investments we make now in educating our people are key to our collective success in the years to come. Those returning to California from service in Iraq and Afghanistan have much to give our state, and our state has much to gain from educating them.

[Please go to my] [op-ed](#) from the San Diego Union Tribune that I think you might find of interest. I look forward to working with you to build a stronger and more prosperous California.

John Garamendi, Lieutenant Governor, State of California

I wanted to contact you and inform you of a little-known fact that veterans of National Guard service are not considered veterans by the state of Maine. I went to my town office to see about getting my veteran plates and was told that my service was not recognized as veteran status.

Now this came as a shock and made me somewhat mad as I endured basic training as everyone did, and served my time on call for the rest of my enlistment. I was hoping that you might be able to find out more information about this and see what people think about this. I would think that all the soldiers overseas right now as National Guard members might be interested in this little-known fact. Thank you for your time.

Jeff Holt - Benton, ME

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

AKAKA INTRODUCES BILL ALLOWING VETERANS TO CHALLENGE VA DISABILITY RATING SCHEDULE

March 10, 2008

Legislation expands legal rights for veterans seeking compensation for service-connected disabilities

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, introduced legislation today to expand legal recourse for veterans seeking compensation for service-connected disabilities.

The [Veterans' Rating Schedule Review Act](#) would expand the jurisdiction of the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) to allow for review of cases challenging the Department of Veterans Affairs rating schedule, the tool VA uses to determine the degree of a veterans' service-connected disability. Under current law, veterans cannot bring a case challenging the Rating Schedule to the CAVC. The legislation Senator Akaka introduced would remedy this by allowing the court to consider whether the Rating Schedule violates provisions in Chapter 11 of Title 38 of the US Code, the body of law which covers veterans' compensation for service-connected disability or death

"I expect VA to comply with all laws passed by Congress in developing and revising the Rating Schedule. However, our nation's veterans deserve a forum where they can challenge the Rating Schedule when they believe that a statute passed by Congress to provide compensation for the service-disabled is being violated" said Senator Akaka. www.vawatchdog.org/08/scva08/scva031008-1.htm

BUYER INTRODUCES VETERANS MORTGAGE STIMULUS CLARIFICATION ACT OF 2008

March 10, 2008

Washington, DC — Today, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Ranking Member Steve Buyer (R-Ind.), introduced [a bill](#) to include mortgages guaranteed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in the economic stimulus package signed into law by the President on February 13, 2008.

Congressman Buyer and Congressman Michael Michaud (D-Maine) had previously sent a letter to House leadership on January 28, 2008 recommending that leadership include the VA Loan Guaranty program in the Stimulus Bill. Noting that VA's loan program was not included in the bill to move the economy forward, Buyer stated, "Unfortunately, in the rush to compile the economic stimulus package, the Veterans' Loan Guaranty program was not included..."<More at: www.vawatchdog.org/08/hcva08/hcva031008-1.htm>

OFFER VA CARE TO MORE VETS, LAWMAKERS URGE

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Mar 18, 2008

If the Veterans Affairs Department won't open its health care system to all veterans, Democrats on the House and Senate veterans' affairs committees are urging the relaxation of eligibility rules to allow some moderate-income veterans with no service-connected medical needs to still receive care.

In a letter to VA Secretary Dr. James Peake, Democrats from the two committees said the current \$28,430 cap on income for veterans without service-connected medical conditions to receive care is overly restrictive. Peake could change the income limit under his own authority, but such a move would have budget implications. VA is not prepared to pay for additional patients, and some lawmakers worry it does not even have enough money to properly care for those already eligible.

<More at: www.navytimes.com/news/2008/03/military_veterancare_eligibility_031708w/>

“PERSONALITY” DISCHARGE LIMIT IN DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

John Miterko, Chair, VVA Government Affairs Committee, With VVA Government Affairs Staff

The lead sponsor of the Fair Mental Health Evaluation for Returning Veterans Act, freshman Rep. Phil Hare (D-Ill.), praised the inclusion of Sen. Barack Obama's (D-Ill.) language limiting “personality disorder” discharges in the Defense Authorization Act conference report. By the time you read this, this bill is expected to have been signed into law.

“Thousands of psychologically wounded combat veterans are being denied benefits through a process that is downright scandalous,” Hare charged.

More than 22,000 servicemen and women from all branches of the military, although most notably the Army, have been discharged with so-called personality disorders since 2001. It seems obvious that this is yet another way to screw veterans: Declare that they are afflicted with a pre-existing personality disorder, bribe them with a few thousand dollars, and muster them out of the service. It's only later that these veterans realize that they've made a pact with the devil.

What the DoD has never bothered to explain is this: If all these men and women have pre-existing personality disorders, why were they permitted to enlist in the first place? <More at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c110:S.1817:>>

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

RETREAT – NEWS

U.S. DEATH TOLL IN IRAQ HITS 4,000 PLUS 488 MORE IN AFGHANISTAN

The Associated Press - March. 24, 2008

BAGHDAD - The overall U.S. death toll in Iraq rose to 4,000 after four soldiers were killed in a roadside bombing in Baghdad, a grim milestone that is likely to fuel calls for the withdrawal of American forces as the war enters its sixth year.

The White House said it was “a sober moment.” President Bush received a lengthy update on the war and aides said he was likely to embrace recommendations for a pause in troop withdrawals beyond those already scheduled.

... The four soldiers with Multi-National Division — Baghdad were on a patrol when their vehicle was struck at about 10 p.m. Sunday in southern Baghdad, the U.S. military said. Another soldier was wounded in the attack — less than a week after the fifth anniversary of the conflict. <More at: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23771735>

PENTAGON DIVIDED ON IRAQ STRATEGY

Julian E. Barnes - Los Angeles Times Staff Writer - March 20, 2008

WASHINGTON — By many important measures, the U.S. military has reason to feel better about Iraq. Violence has declined, casualties are down, the president is touting the current strategy and the public's anguish has ebbed.

But inside the Pentagon, turmoil over the war has increased. Top levels of the military leadership remain divided over war strategy and the pace of troop cuts. Tension has risen along with concern over the strain of unending cycles of deployments.

In one camp are the ground commanders, including Gen. David H. Petraeus, who have pushed to keep a large troop presence in Iraq, worried that withdrawing too quickly will allow violence to flare. In the other are the military service chiefs who fear that long tours and high troop levels will drive away mid-level service members, leaving the Army and Marine Corps hollowed out and weakened. <More at: www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-na-milassess20mar20.0.1671025.full.story>

SOVEREIGNS OF ALL THEY'RE ASSIGNED, CAPTAINS HAVE MANY MISSIONS TO OVERSEE

Michael Kamber - March 21, 2008

JISR DIALA, Iraq — During the war in Iraq, young Army and Marine captains have become American viceroys, officers with large sectors to run and near-autonomy to do it. In military parlance, they are the “ground-owners.” In practice, they are power brokers.

“They give us a chunk of land and say, ‘Fix it,’ ” said Capt. Rich Thompson, 36, who controls an area east of Baghdad.

The Iraqis have learned that these captains, many still in their 20s, can call down devastating American firepower one day and approve multimillion-dollar projects the next. Some have become celebrities in their sectors, men whose names are known even to children. Many in the military believe that these captains are the linchpins in the American strategy for success in Iraq, but as the war continues into its sixth year the military has been losing them in large numbers — at a time when it says it needs thousands more. <More at: www.nytimes.com/2008/03/21/world/middleeast/21captain.html?>

THE ARMY'S MANPOWER SQUEEZE

March 23, 2008

The service is being held together by lowered standards and bonuses. But for how much longer?

Everyone knows the U.S. Army is overstretched by the simultaneous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The dirty little secret is that nobody knows how much longer it can keep it up before its fighting capability declines. A year? Probably, with lowered recruiting standards and big bonuses. Three years? No one in Washington will answer that question. But recent indicators are making some tough generals queasy.

... The following "metrics" -- data the military collects to assess its strength -- were compiled from open sources by the nonpartisan Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments.

In 2006, the percentage of Army recruits who were high school graduates (82%) was the lowest since 1981, and their scores on the military's aptitude test were the worst since 1985. The number of "moral waivers" issued to those with criminal records more than tripled since 1996, to 8,500 in 2006. Worse, the number of recruits with felony convictions was up 30% in 2006 compared with 2005. And the Army apparently stooped to social promotion: 94% of recruits graduated from basic training in 2006, compared with 82% in 2005.

Keeping the all-volunteer Army at full strength in wartime hasn't been cheap, either. The cost per troop soared to \$120,000 in 2006 from \$75,000 in 2001. And to keep reenlistments up, the Army had to pay retention bonuses of \$735 million in 2006, up more than eightfold from the \$85 million paid in 2003. Even so, officer shortages are a problem, and at the rank of <http://www.tinyurl.com/369jse>, the backbone of the command structure, the Army is at 60% strength in Iraq. Moreover, for the last year it hasn't had the 3,200 troops needed to fill a brigade designated as militarily "required" for Afghanistan. <More at: www.latimes.com/news/printedition/suncommentary/la-ed-army23mar23.1.6831083.story>

One captain's story, "I Love It But I Have to Leave It", at www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/14/AR2008031403390.html

LAKE JACKSON TEEN AWARDED SILVER STAR FOR GALLANTRY IN AFGHANISTAN

Renée C. Lee - March 9, 2008

Dodging insurgent gunfire, a 19-year-old Lake Jackson soldier used her body to shield five injured comrades after a roadside bomb struck her convoy in Afghanistan last spring. That act of bravery has earned her the Silver Star.

Army Spc. Monica Lin Brown is only the second woman since World War II to receive the medal, one of the nation's highest military awards given for gallantry in combat. <More at: www.chron.com/dispatch/story.mpl/front/5605409.html>

ANOTHER COMMUNITY "SUPPORTS THE TROOPS"!

GROUP HOUSING FOR VETS RAISES CONCERNS

Scott Lindlaw - 3/19/08

GUERNEVILLE, Calif. (AP) - Merry Lane, a cul-de-sac shaded by redwoods in Sonoma County wine country, would seem a pleasant place to recover from the psychic wounds of war. Nadia McCaffrey's dream is to set up a group home there for veterans plagued by post-traumatic stress disorder. But she is running into stiff resistance from the neighbors. They not only object to the brand-new structure itself, which looks like a four-story apartment house wedged amid their cabins, they are also worried that deranged veterans will move in.

At a community meeting in December, "one person was concerned that even firecrackers would set these people off," said Andrew Eckers, 54, who lives across the street.

McCaffrey, whose son was killed in Iraq in 2004, said she has tried to reassure the neighbors, but "they are afraid of it because they don't want to understand it."

Projects similar to McCaffrey's have cropped up in other communities across the country, with some also raising concerns from neighbors, in part because of the many news accounts of traumatized veterans committing suicide or murder.

<More at: <http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory?id=4482249>>

WINTER SOLDIER MARCHES AGAIN

Amy Goodman Mar 19, 2008

Last weekend, in the lead-up to the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, a remarkable gathering occurred just outside Washington, D.C., called Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan, Eyewitness Accounts of the Occupations. Hundreds of veterans of

these two wars, along with active-duty soldiers, came together to offer testimony about the horrors of war, including atrocities they witnessed or committed themselves.

The name, Winter Soldier, comes from a similar event in 1971, when hundreds of Vietnam veterans gathered in Detroit, and is derived from the opening line of Thomas Paine’s pamphlet, “The Crisis,” published in 1776:

“These are the times that try men’s souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.”

This Winter Soldier was organized by the group Iraq Veterans Against the War. Kelly Dougherty, an Iraq veteran from the Colorado Army National Guard and IVAW’s executive director, opened the proceedings, saying: “The voices of veterans and service members, as well as civilians on the ground, need to be heard by the American people, and by the people of the world, and also by other people in the military and other veterans so they can find their voice to tell their story, because each of our individual stories is crucially important and needs to be heard if people are to understand the reality and the true human cost of war and occupation.”

<More at: www.truthdig.com/report/item/20080319_winter_soldier_marches_again/>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

| Date | Time | Where | What | Who | Notes |
|----------|-------------------|---|--|---|--------------|
| 3/27 | | Sheraton North (Airport) 15700 John F. Kennedy Blvd., Houston, TX | Southwest Regional Career Expo | www.militarystars.com/job_seekers_register.htm | |
| 3/27 | | Raleigh, NC | Resource Fair | Carson Dean | 919-508-0718 |
| 3/27-30 | | Ironworld Chisolm, Minnesota | 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 | Kathy Chwedyk | 866-338-4968 |
| 3/31 | | Holiday Inn Chicago- Mart Plaza 350 North Orleans. Chicago, IL | Career Fair | | 312-836-5000 |
| 4/3-4/6 | | Bemidji Visitors and Convention Bureau Bemidji Minnesota | The Wall That Heals | Ralph Gracie Post #14 The American Legion | |
| 4/5 | | Columbus, GA | Resource Fair | Alyce Harrison | 706-593-3393 |
| 4/7 | 1100 - 1400 | Radisson Hotel Boston 200 Stuart St, Boston, MA | Career Fair | | 617-482-1800 |
| 4/10 | 1100 - 1700 | DoubleTree Atlanta NW/Marietta 2055 South Park Place, Atlanta, GA | Southeast Regional Career Expo | http://www.militarystars.com/job_seekers_register.htm | |
| 4/19 | 1100 - Closing | Rick Fairless' Stokers Dallas 9304 Henry Hines Blvd., Dallas TX | Benefit Event for Warriors and their Families | | |

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

WAR’S LEGACY: ITS HUMAN TOLL

Philip Dine - ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH - Mar. 16 2008

WASHINGTON --As the Iraq war ends its fifth year, a dominant legacy of the conflict has turned out to be the human toll on those who have fought it. The nature and sheer extent of American casualties — officially in the tens of thousands, but hundreds of thousands have sought medical help — has caught the U.S. government off guard. From wounded soldiers who faced dilapidated conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center to troops whose mental problems have been overlooked, Iraq veterans have paid the price.

"The government was not ready for the casualties to come home," says Brad Trower, a Marine Corps veteran who was injured twice in his tour in Iraq. <More at: www.stltoday.com/stltoday/news/stories.nsf/washington/story/D1E160CA22951CC08625740D000D1FBA?>

PESTICIDES, NERVE-GAS PILLS TIED TO GULF WAR ILLNESS (UPDATED)

Rob Waters - March 10 (Bloomberg)

A pill given to U.S. soldiers to help protect them against nerve gas, and pesticides sprayed in the air and used to treat their clothes, may have triggered the cluster of symptoms known as Gulf War illness, a study found.

<More at: www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601124&sid=ahNEhgssqjkm&refer=home>

DEPLETED URANIUM IN IRAQ CAUSE SOARING CANCER RATES AMONG U.S. COALITION MILITARY PERSONNEL AND CIVILIANS ALIKE

Iraqi doctors believe that depleted uranium is responsible for a significant increase in cancer and birth defects in the region. Many researchers outside Iraq, and several U.S. veterans organizations, agree. Depleted Uranium (DU) has also resulted in Gulf War Syndrome, that has plagued hundreds of thousands of Gulf War veterans.

<More at: www.agoracosmopolitan.com/home/Frontpage/2008/03/21/02285.html>

UNSAFE WATER MAY HAVE SICKENED TROOPS IN IRAQ

Larry Margasak - The Associated Press - Mar 10, 2008

WASHINGTON — Dozens of U.S. troops in Iraq fell sick at bases using “unmonitored and potentially unsafe” water supplied by the military and a contractor once owned by Vice President Dick Cheney’s former company, the Pentagon’s internal watchdog says. A report obtained by The Associated Press said soldiers experienced skin abscesses, cellulitis, skin infections, diarrhea and other illnesses after using discolored, smelly water for personal hygiene and laundry at five U.S. military sites in Iraq.

The Pentagon’s inspector general found water quality problems between March 2004 and February 2006 at three sites run by contractor KBR Inc., and between January 2004 and December 2006 at two military-operated locations. It was impossible to link the dirty water definitively to all the illnesses, according to the report. But it said KBR’s water quality “was not maintained in accordance with field water sanitary standards” and the military-run sites “were not performing all required quality control tests.” “Therefore, water suppliers exposed U.S. forces to unmonitored and potentially unsafe water,” the report said.

<More at: www.airforcetimes.com/news/2008/03/ap_contaminatedwater_030908/>

“NOW SEE, SON, WE’RE GONNA GIVE Y’ALL THESE HERE BENEFITS AND THEN PRETEND THAT YOUR JOB IS JUST LIKE ANYONE ELSE’S. THAT’S OUR DEFINITION OF ‘EQUAL SACRIFICE’ – Y’HEAR?”

QRMC: COUNT RETIREMENT, HEALTH CARE IN COMPENSATION STANDARD

MOAA Legislative Update

The 10th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (QRMC) issued the first volume of its expected two-volume report this week, asserting that military members are well-paid versus their civilian counterparts and proposing a new measure to compare military and civilian compensation.

... The QRMC report recommends adopting a new "Military Annual Compensation" (MAC) standard that also would include state income tax and Social Security/Medicare tax savings on the tax-free allowances, plus the added value due to military health care and retirement benefits. <More at: www.moaa.org/lac/lac_issues/lac_issues_update/lac_issues_update_080314.htm>

WHY AREN'T MILITARY VETS GOING TO COLLEGE?

Marla Jo Fisher - The Orange County Register - March 10, 2008

Why aren't more former GI Joes going to college? That's the question being asked these days in California, where state officials estimate only 14,000 veterans are using their Montgomery GI Bill benefits to go to college. Although nearly all new recruits sign up for the bill and pay \$1,200 from their paychecks toward their future benefits, only a fraction of them ultimately receive degrees, according to state and national figures. The gap is so striking that state officials have launched a program, Troops to College, to encourage active-duty military and veterans to use their benefits to improve their education. The 23 California State University campuses have been told to become more veteran-friendly, create veterans support groups and forge closer ties to local military installations.

"People will welcome us back, but they don't really know what we've been through," said Joseph Chang, 33, who started a veterans discussion group at Cal State Fullerton last fall.

Chang, who recalled living under constant mortar fire in Iraq, said the shock of returning from combat to everyday life, plus the isolation and anonymity of a big campus, can make adjusting to college life difficult for veterans. He's been trying to persuade

university officials to open a veteran service center but said state budget cuts mean he probably won't be able to raise the \$30,000 needed.

"We have about 300 veterans at Cal State Fullerton, and we are trying our best to make a community where they feel comfortable talking about their experiences," Chang said. "They just want to talk to somebody who's been there and done that."

<More at: www.ocregister.com/news/veterans-college-state-1995807-people-military>

FAMILIES OF WOUNDED VETS TELL SENATORS ABOUT TROUBLES WITH VA

Barbara Barrett - McClatchy Newspapers - March 11, 2008

... The isolation of military families has become a common story in Congress, where lawmakers still are trying to understand how they can help veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Laws and rules have been passed to get counseling to troops in war zones, to expand research into traumatic brain injury and to ease the bureaucratic transition from the Department of Defense to the Department of Veteran Affairs.

"I represent thousands of wives, family members, mothers," Jackie McMichael told the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs. "There are thousands who need this."

... Seeking help, Jackie McMichael called the local veterans center and doctors at the VA Medical Center. They refused to talk about her husband, citing confidentiality.

Her testimony came as the committee gathers information to develop legislation to help returning veterans. Senators were moved.

"It's so overwhelming to listen to you," said Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash. "This is a reminder that we're still not where we need to be."

Sen. Richard Burr of North Carolina, the top Republican on the committee, called the problems with mental health intervention "unconscionable." "My assessment is the VA doesn't see the human face behind the patients they're treating," Burr said.

<More at: www.mcclatchydc.com/homepage/story/30043.html>

APPARENTLY THEY DO THIS TO PROVE THAT THEY ARE DOING ALL THEY CAN

VA LEAVES PASCO VIETNAM VETERANS GROUP FEELING ABANDONED

William R. Levesque - Time Staff Writer - March 11, 2008

In New Port Richey, 11 Vietnam veterans met weekly for three years to help each other cope. They bonded, helping each other live with the war's aftereffects and struggles of everyday life. But in a scene that some veteran advocates say is being played out across the nation, a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs counselor abruptly broke up the group in November, leaving the men stunned. Members say they were told by the counselor that the VA was simply overwhelmed with the ever-increasing numbers of veterans needing care for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. <More at: www.sptimes.com/2008/03/11/Pasco/VA_leaves_Pasco_Vietn.shtml>

MENTAL HEALTH CARE HIT AND MISS, TROOPS SAY

Kelly Kennedy - Staff writer - Mar 17, 2008

Service members told Congress on Friday that mental health care for post-traumatic stress disorder is good — if they can get it. In one case, a suicidal soldier asked for help and got it. In another, a soldier deployed to Iraq asked for help, and when he didn't get it, he killed himself. While military surgeons general told the House Armed Services personnel subcommittee about new programs designed to provide a safety net to catch troops with mental disorders, they also talked about issues that still must be addressed — recruiting and retaining mental health providers, ensuring leaders understand suicide, and finding proper treatment for PTSD.

<More at: http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2008/03/military_mentalhealth_031408w/>

SUICIDES SEEN AMONG VETS TREATED BY VA

Washington - CBS - March 20, 2008

There's new information about the risk of suicide for those who have served in the military. Last November, CBS News broke the story of the overwhelming number of veteran suicides nationwide. Now, Chief Investigative Correspondent Armen Keteyian has discovered veterans who get help from the VA are also at risk.

"When you go through war, you're going to change permanently and totally for the rest of your life," said veteran Harold Pendergrass.

Pendergrass knows firsthand the hidden wounds of war. He served two tours in Vietnam. "I carried a suicide note in my pocket for years," he said. At 57, the former Army soldier has tried to take his own life three times, constantly wrestling with thoughts of killing

himself. "I sat around numerous times with a .44 in my mouth," he said. "But for some reason, I just couldn't pull the trigger. I don't know why."

Now, CBS News has obtained never-before seen patient data from the Department of Veterans Affairs, detailing the growing number of suicide attempts among vets recently treated by the VA. The data reveals a marked overall increase - from 462 attempts in 2000 to 790 in 2007. "This is highly statistically significant," said Dr. Bruce Levin, head of the biostatistics department at Columbia University. Levin is one of three experts who analyzed the data for CBS News.

<More at: http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/03/20/cbsnews_investigates/main3956210.shtml>

WATERBOARDING VICTIM GETS VA DISABILITY FOR PTSD

George Werneth - Newhouse News Service - Thursday, March 20, 2008

MOBILE - The Department of Veterans Affairs has reversed earlier rulings and granted a disability claim by a veteran who says he suffered long-term emotional problems after being waterboarded during a Navy survival course in April 1975.

The Board of Veterans Appeals in Washington, D.C., ruled in favor of Arthur McCants III, 60, of Eight Mile following a series of stories in the Press-Register about McCants' case.

<More at: www.al.com/birminghamnews/stories/index.ssf?/base/news/1206000953173910.xml&coll=2&thispage=1>

IT'S NOT JUST THE VA

DOD DELAYED BRAIN INJURY SCANS

By Gregg Zoroya, USA TODAY

For more than two years, the Pentagon delayed screening troops returning from Iraq for mild brain injuries because officials feared veterans would blame vague ailments on the little-understood wound caused by exposure to bomb blasts, says the military's director of medical assessments. Air Force Col. Kenneth Cox said in an interview that the Pentagon wanted to avoid another controversy such as the so-called Gulf War syndrome. About 10,000 veterans blamed medical conditions from cancer to eczema on their service.

... In a January 2006 report, scientists at the federal Defense and Veteran Brain Injury Center urged that troops be screened for TBI "immediately." The Pentagon will soon require that troops be checked as they come home, according to Cox. Cox says research shows screening is the most appropriate step.

An Army mental health report last month indicated that 11% of 2,195 soldiers surveyed in Iraq and Afghanistan show signs of mild brain injury, but fewer than half were identified and evaluated in the field.

<More at: www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2008-03-17-tbi_N.htm>

SO THE ANSWER TO ALL THIS IS TO "COOK THE BOOKS"!

MILITARY HEALTH BUDGET AGAIN HIT BY BOGUS "SAVINGS"

Tom Philpott - March 20, 2008

Administration officials again have saddled Congress with an underfunded military health care budget by projecting \$1.2 billion in savings they know will not be realized, say critics on Capitol Hill. Part of the false savings, for a third straight year, is tied to the unlikely scenario that Congress will enact administration plans to raise TRICARE fees, co-payments and deductibles for military retirees. Key lawmakers have vowed anew not to allow this.

But what irritates lawmakers more is that, even if they did embrace the higher fees recommended by the Department of Defense's Task Force on the Future of Military Health Care, and penciled into Bush's fiscal 2009 defense budget, the actual savings realized wouldn't come close to matching the number that the administration projects.

Most of the \$1.2 billion in assumed savings swing on a the notion that if fees, co-pays and deductibles are raised for retirees, tens of thousands of current and future users of TRICARE will drop the military benefit and switch to alternative health insurance offered by second-career employers. <More at: www.military.com/features/0,15240,164397,00.html >

IF ALL THE BILLIONAIRES WOULD CHIP IN, THE VA AND DOD WOULDN'T HAVE TO DO SQUAT

HOME DEPOT CO-FOUNDER OPENS WALLET TO VETS' PLIGHT

Steve Visser - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution - 03/11/08

In a move meant to help injured soldiers and send Washington a message, Atlanta businessman Bernie Marcus stepped up Monday to help veterans get top-flight medical care. But he warned there was a limit to his generosity. Marcus got involved in January after he heard of a soldier who was treated at the Shepherd Center and was improving, but faced the loss of funding.

"It angered me," said Marcus, a co-founder of Home Depot and now a billionaire philanthropist. "It is disgraceful and it is not something that we should have to tolerate in this country."

Marcus offered to underwrite the costs — care, transportation and housing — of any wounded soldier, sailor or Marine whom the Shepherd Center, a renowned Atlanta clinic for brain and spinal injuries, approved for treatment.

<More at: www.ajc.com/metro/content/business/stories/2008/03/10/shepherd_0311.html>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF MARCH 19, 2008

This week, the Army, Navy and Marine Corps announced a decrease, while the Air Force announced an increase. The Coast Guard number remained the same. The net collective result is 131 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. The total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 74,156; Navy Reserve, 5,510; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 7,299; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,648; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 344. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been mobilized to 95,957, 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/d20080319ngr.pdf.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE MONDAY 24 MARCH 2008

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (1,831 DAYS)

| | |
|---|------------|
| KILLED US | 4,000 |
| 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 | 1,819 |
| **KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE 6/30] | 1,001 |
| KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY | ≥ 47,555 |
| KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS | ≥ 89,867 |
| WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS | ≥ 400,000+ |
| IRAQ REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL [129/27] | 2.1M/2.5M |

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,360 DAYS)

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| KILLED US (3/24) | 488 |
| *OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 10/2007] | 7,720 |
| KILLED COALITION | 296 |
| WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007) | 1,472 |
| KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY | ≥ 8,619 |
| KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (7/2004) | ≥ 3,525 |
| WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (7/2004) | 32,034 |
| AFGHAN REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL | 1.75M/4.8M |
| COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE | \$505,285,863,489 |

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

YOU CAN MAKE IT ~ IF YOU LIVE AT HOME WITH YOUR FOLKS

MONTGOMERY GI BILL – HOW GOOD IS IT?

The Montgomery GI Bill now pays out \$39,636 if you take full advantage of it, and if you are not disqualified for some obscure reason. The original GI Bill paid for the works. What does the current MGB cover? After subtracting out scholarships and tax breaks, the net cost of an academic year is:

| | 2006 | 2007 | Increase in \$ | Increase in % |
|---|----------|----------|----------------|---------------|
| Community college (living and eating at home) | \$2,347 | \$2,511 | \$164 | 7.0% |
| In-state public university | \$11,412 | \$11,879 | \$467 | 4.1% |
| Private university | \$23,777 | \$24,756 | \$979 | 4.1% |

At least one third of college students get no scholarships to defray their costs and pay the full sticker prices

| | 2006 | 2007 | Increase in \$ | Increase in % |
|---|----------|----------|----------------|---------------|
| Community college (living and eating at home) | \$4,319 | \$4,552 | \$233 | 5.4% |
| In-state public university | \$14,618 | \$15,488 | \$870 | 6.0% |
| Private university | \$32,024 | \$34,063 | \$2,039 | 6.4% |

<More at: <http://www.usnews.com/articles/business/paying-for-college/2007/10/23/college-tuition-prices-continue-to-rise.html>>

ADD-ON ~ SAVE THE ECONOMY!

WHEN WILL YOU GET YOUR “STIMULUS” CHECK?

Payments will be mailed based on the last two digits of individual Social Security Numbers. The schedule for direct deposit is those with numbers ending between 00 and 20 should receive their deposits by May 2; those whose numbers end in 21 to 75 should have their deposits by May 9; and those with numbers ending in 76 to 99 should receive their deposits by May 16.

The schedule for paper checks is as follows. The checks should be on the mail on the following dates, based on the last two digits of the Social Security Number:

| | |
|------------------|------------------|
| 00-09 - May 16. | 52-63 - June 20. |
| 10-18 - May 23. | 64-75 - June 27. |
| 19-25 - May 30. | 76-87 - July 4. |
| 26-38 - June 6. | 88-99 - July 11. |
| 39-51 - June 13. | |

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