

SOUND OFF!



VOL. IV, NO 15

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

25 MARCH 2009

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

WHERE IS CARNAC THE MAGNIFICENT WHEN WE NEED HIM?

Over the past several months I have spoken to various organizations about the plight of returning veterans. At each event up to half of the questions have always been in the category of, “How did we get into this mess?”, and “Who’s to blame?” The questions inevitably lead to a diversionary discussion on 9/11, the invasion of Iraq, the choices made by the last administration, and world peace. Veterans issues often get lost.

Apparently even those who should be most concerned about veterans are more interested in hashing over the past. They are obviously uncomfortable facing veterans problems in the present, and won’t touch the future.

We don’t need any more discussion about the past. We need for the American public to face up to what the present really is, and what the possibilities for the future really are.

Unless you are a quantum physicist, the arrow of time always points in the same direction. We all are spending too much time trying to look back down the arrow – dwelling on the past instead of dealing with the present and working toward the future.

Not that it is not important to discover how we got here and why, but let’s leave that to a few people who worry about those things, and get on with the business of the country today, and with the return of our soldiers as soon as possible.

Johnny Carson's character, Carnac the Magnificent, knew all the answers: he only had to search for the questions. Briefly we should pretend that we are Carnac.



So what answers do we know?

- A1. Afghanistan and Iraq are each a mess, and are each a different kind of mess.
- A2. We must make Iraq and Afghanistan as safe for Iraqis and Afghans as we can, and leave them as self-reliant as possible.
- A3. We should repair any damage we have done to property and processes.
- A4. We must bring the troops home as soon as possible, and with honor.
- A5. We have the duty as a nation to take care of those who have been injured in body, mind, or spirit.
- A6. Our obligation to those who have fought is our premier obligation as a nation.
- A7. We must re-join the family of nations as a respected and respectful partner.

If those are the answers, then what are the questions? Let’s try these, matched to the answers above:

- Q1. Where are we now?
- Q2. Where are we going with our time arrow - what constitutes victory?

- Q3. What will it cost in money and time?
 Q4. How many are going and for how long?
 Q5. How do we fix the DVA, and how do we get the American people involved?
 Q6. What is the first responsibility of the nation?
 Q7. What can we do to undo the damage to our reputation as a nation?

Note that none of the questions are of the variety,

Unlike Carnac the Magnificent, we have to satisfy ourselves how we get from the questions to the answers – our arrow of time still points forward.

The mess in Iraq and Afghanistan is part of the larger mess in the economy, the environment, health care, homelessness, etc. Why should it have a priority? Not just because we caused it; we humans caused all of the mess, and the US is a major perpetrator. No, it must be the priority because there people are dying – ours and theirs – and they are dying as a result of our actions. The killing has to cease.

As to what constitutes victory, that question has not had a satisfactory answer for seven years. I'm willing to take a crack at it, with my rationale being that unbeknownst to most Americans, the American part of the surge has worked. It has worked precisely because we got back to basics, and re-learned some of the lessons we forgot after Vietnam.

Saving the people is the answer, because if you save the people – the ordinary people that is – the bad guys lose. They lose their recruiting base, they lose their support, and they ultimately lose the battle. The job isn't done, but we are doing all that we can to change from a kick-the-snot-out-of-them approach to a make-them-safe approach, and it is working. [I recommend Thomas Ricks' *The Gamble*, and David Kilcullen's *The Accidental Guerilla* for a discourse on why it has worked.]

Of course the part of the surge that has worked is the part that we control; the part that the Iraqis control is still a mess but we can no longer let others define our involvement. We'll do

our job well, and if they cannot, then we can still leave knowing that we have tried to set things aright. Their internal politics cannot dictate our foreign policy.

The cost in time is unknown, but with an understanding of the meaning of victory we can begin to predict. 2011 seems to be the target for Iraq, and I expect we'll have a target for Afghanistan fairly soon, although it will probably be far longer as there is more that has been left undone there. The cost in money is unknown mostly because no one wants to face it. No one would face the real cost, including long term care of our returning veterans, when times were good. Now that economic times are terrible everyone is afraid to touch it. But if we are to have open and transparent government, the American people deserve to know what this all will cost – the full price, not some magic, smoky, “acceptable” number.

The number of troops to do the job should be calculable as well as the number of other non-military workers – it is about time that the job got shared. The number to do the job at any one time, times the expected duration, let us know how many new veterans we will be making, and let us estimate how many will need help when they come home.

The other day the President said (paraphrased) “I never would have thought that Iraq would NOT be my principal problem when I took office.” Well, sir, many of us think that Iraq is still your principal problem, no matter how bad the economy is. People are dying over there, and we are seen as the cause by several billions. People will still be murdered when we leave, but it won't be laid at our feet any more. Where human life is at stake, no problem should be more important.

The only way to get the American people involved in fixing the DVA is for the President to make it one of his top three or four priorities. It is inexorably linked to our foreign policy and our military involvement, and it is not a trivial problem. It cannot be relegated to being just another agency clean-up. The war is important and the treatment of our warriors is likewise

important. The real shame is that we, as a people, are not more ashamed.

If we continue the impressive approach taken in Iraq in the Petraeus era – working full time to make the people safe and to disengage them from the insurgents – and extend that approach more completely to Afghanistan, we will begin to repair our reputation in the world. If we pay to repair the physical damage that we have done, we will take another step in that direction.

If we establish a clear statement of our foreign policy that we will not choose war as a principal instrument, but relegate it to its proper place as a last resort and only when it is brought to us, then we can be well on our way.

Of course other things need to be fixed – the economy and the environment loom out there as directly and adversely affecting our reputation, but nothing will do more right now than abjuring the use of war as an instrument of foreign policy.

Oh yes, and taking care of our own ranks right up there.

"I do not believe war the most certain means of enforcing principles. Those peaceable coercions which are in the power of every nation, if undertaken in concert and in time of peace, are more likely to produce the desired effect."

Thomas Jefferson to R. Livingston, 1801.

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

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

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!

STANFORD PILOT PROGRAM FOR AT-HOME CAREGIVERS OF VETERANS SEEKS PARTICIPANTS

Mar. 11, 2009

STANFORD, Calif. — Researchers at the Stanford University School of Medicine are recruiting participants for a pilot program aimed at improving at-home care-giving for U.S. veterans. The study will assess the effectiveness of an online workshop that provides training to at-home caregivers of veterans who suffer from traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. Veterans who are caring for people with these disorders are also eligible.

The six-week-long workshop, called "Building Better Caregivers," will train informal caregivers, such as family members and friends, how to not only provide better care, but also to manage their own emotions, stress and physical health. The interactive online workshop will also provide a forum in which small groups of caregivers can share personal experiences and insights on solving problems, handling difficult emotions and celebrating milestones. Each week, participants will be asked to log on at least three times and spend two hours on lessons and homework. <More at: <http://mednews.stanford.edu>>

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

Class Action Suit: The appeal was filed in December and now the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals has ordered us to an Assessment Conference to determine if the case should be included in the court's Mediation Program. Our appeal goes on, even though we hope that the new administration will address the focus of our case directly and with vigor.

Case Progress to Date:

7/23/2007 Suit filed w/Federal District Court
9/25/2007 Defendant's Motion to Dismiss
2/11/2008 Motion for Preliminary Injunction
2/25/2008 Preliminary Injunction Hearing
4/21/2008 Trial
6/25/2008 Judgment based on jurisdiction

7/25/2008 Appeal notice filed w/9th Circuit Court of Appeals
12/10/2008 Appeal brief filed
12/15/2008 *Swords to Plowshares* and *Vietnam Veterans of America* file amicus briefs
12/22/2008 *Military Spouses for Change* and *United Spinal Association* file amicus briefs
3/4/2009 Appeal will not be subject to Mediation

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

ANOTHER LAWSUIT

On 25 March we are joining the Washington Legal Foundation in filing a Friend of the Court Brief in the United States Supreme Court *Iraq v. Beatty* and *Iraq v. Simon*. During the first Gulf War, a number of American civilians and military personnel were captured and tortured by the regime of Saddam Hussein. Some of these individuals now wish to bring suit against the government of Iraq for injuries they sustained through torture and captivity. A 1996 federal law empowers Americans to sue any foreign government who at the time sponsored terrorism. Before the Supreme Court in these cases is the question of whether that ability to sue should continue to exist.

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

DO YOU PASS THIS NEWSLETTER ON TO ANYONE?
IF YOU DO. PLEASE LET US KNOW HOW MANY PEOPLE YOU SEND IT TO
NO NAMES, JUST NUMBERS

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

{Excerpt}

Last year we passed the [GI Bill for the 21st Century](#), the greatest investment in veterans' education benefits since World War II. This legislation, endorsed by groups ranging from the American Legion to the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, fully restores four-year college scholarships for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

We also passed legislation to give troops adequate time at home to reduce the strain on them and their families when serving multiple tours of duty. Additionally, we passed the Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act, which requires the Veterans Administration to develop and carry out a comprehensive program designed to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans. Congress also increased appropriations for mental health screening and care to help with this effort.

Last month, President Obama enacted the [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act \(H.R.1\)](#). This legislation takes [several steps](#) to increase support for our troops returning from war. It provides \$555 million for assistance to military homeowners, including wounded warriors and surviving spouses, hurt by the housing crisis. It includes approximately \$700 million for one-time \$250 payments to each eligible Veteran and survivor; these payments will be sent out beginning in June 2009. The bill also increases job opportunities by providing a tax credit to businesses for hiring veterans.

Additionally, ongoing deficiencies at aging military and VA hospitals are addressed with \$1.3 billion for renovation projects. And \$150 million is provided to increase the VA claims processing staff so the backlog of claims can be addressed. The recovery package also provides \$100 million for warrior transition complexes to provide services to wounded warriors returning from combat and their families. As a mother and former school nurse, I'm also pleased \$240 million was provided to expand child-care options for military families by building child development centers on military bases across the country.

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These facilities will make it easier for military spouses to hold down jobs if they desire and will provide job opportunities for caregivers.

As a supporter of women in the military, I believe our women veterans deserve a specific focus of their own. Earlier this month, the Congressional Women's Caucus joined the Secretary of the Army to discuss steps that can be taken to develop more female Army leaders, and to address the intolerable issue of sexual assault in the Armed Forces. We must continue to encourage young women to serve and ensure these dedicated soldiers work in an environment free from discrimination.

Congresswoman Lois Capps, CA-23

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

FILNER RELEASES VIEWS ON VA BUDGET REQUEST

13 March

House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA) released the following statement upon submitting the Committee's Views and Estimates letter to the House Budget Committee:

"The Administration's preliminary budget request for the Department of Veterans Affairs calls for a total budget of \$113 billion, a \$15 billion increase above 2009 levels. The request includes \$52.5 billion in discretionary funding – an increase of \$4.9 billion from 2009, or 10.3 percent. The bulk of discretionary spending goes to VA medical care. This budget proposal marks the first time any President has submitted a budget that exceeds the recommendations of the Independent Budget.

<More at: www.vawatchdog.org/09/hcva09/hcva031309-1.htm>

TELL YOUR CONGRESSMAN TO SUPPORT & PASS THIS BILL

Co-sponsor H.R. 1428

" To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide wartime disability compensation for certain veterans with Parkinson's disease."

H.R. 1428, "To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide wartime disability compensation for certain veterans with Parkinson's disease" is sponsored by Rep. Bob Filner (CA), Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. This bill directs the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs to provide presumption of service connection for Parkinson's disease for certain Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam.

RETREAT – NEWS

ALLIES 'OUT OF TROOPS' IN AFGHAN SOUTH

Ann Scott Tyson - Washington Post Staff Writer - March 21, 2009; A09

The military commander responsible for southern Afghanistan said yesterday that he is "out of troops" to provide security across the troubled region and that he expects a significant increase in violence this year as U.S. reinforcements arrive to push into insurgent-held territory. Dutch Maj. Gen. Mart de Kruif, who commands 23,000 NATO troops, said his forces control about 60 percent of the populated areas in southern Afghanistan.

"There are absolutely pockets where we don't have control . . . and that is one of the reasons we need these additional boots on the ground," he said. "We are not stopped by the insurgency, but we just run out of troops," he said in a video conference with Pentagon reporters. <More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/20/AR2009032003434_pf.html>

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS LIST STIMULUS ACT PROJECTS

Jim Garamone - American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 20, 2009 – Defense Department officials today announced 3,000 projects that the economic stimulus legislation signed last month will fund. A complete list of the projects is available at www.defenselink.mil/recovery and at www.recovery.gov. Defense officials will continue to use those Web sites to post future announcements. The two biggest projects are hospitals at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and Fort Hood, Texas, Defense officials said.

<More at: www.defenselink.mil/recovery/plans_reports/2009/march/ARRA_DoD_Expenditure_Plans.pdf>

\$500 STOP-LOSS PAY WILL BEGIN APRIL 1

Jeff Schogol - Stars and Stripes - Mideast edition - March 20, 2009

ARLINGTON, Va. -- Soldiers currently stop-lossed can expect an extra \$500 on April 1, a top Army official said late Wednesday. Additionally, soldiers who have been stop-lossed at any time since Oct. 1 can expect to get compensated for those months by June, said Lt. Gen. Michael Rochelle, Army deputy chief of staff for personnel.

"For the month of March, you can expect that [payment] on the first of April," Rochelle said. "Anything prior to March, you will expect that in May or June, in a lump sum." <More at: www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=61452>

AGENCIES TO DIRECT STIMULUS FUNDS TO VETERAN-OWNED SMALL BUSINESSES

Robert Brodsky - March 12, 2009

Federal officials pledged Thursday that stimulus funds will reach veteran-owned small businesses, which have been hard hit by the economic downturn. Representatives from five agencies testified before the House Small Business Subcommittee on Contracting and Technology that they have strategies for making sure 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act money flows to veteran-owned small businesses.

The Defense Department, which received \$7.4 billion in stimulus funds, is setting aside millions in contracts through its Small Business Technology Transfer and Small Business Innovation Research programs.

<More at: www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=42253&dcn=todaysnews>

ARMY TO REVIEW FORT BRAGG'S PUNISHMENT FOR WOUNDED

Kevin Maurer - Associated Press Writer – Mar 11, 2009

FORT BRAGG, N.C. – The general in charge of the Army's more than 9,000 wounded soldiers said Wednesday he is ordering a review of how the ones at Fort Bragg are being punished for minor violations. Brig. Gen. Gary Cheek said he is asking the Army Surgeon General to look at all discipline that has been taken against soldiers in the base's Warrior Transition unit to make sure each case was fair.

Cheek's comments come a day after The Associated Press reported that soldiers in the unit are being disciplined three times as often as those assigned to the base's main tenant, the 82nd Airborne Division. The AP also found that discipline rates vary widely across the Warrior Transition system; some units punish their soldiers even more frequently than the one at Fort Bragg, while others are far more lenient. <More at: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090311/ap_on_re_us/wounded_warriors>

YET ANOTHER HOLD-OVER FROM VIET NAM

PENTAGON KNOWINGLY EXPOSED U.S. SOLDIERS TO TOXIC WASTE: LEAKED MEMO

Huffington Post - Stuart Whatley - March 10, 2009

The Pentagon allegedly endangered U.S. soldiers by implementing and covering-up dangerously toxic waste-incineration practices at Balad Airbase in Iraq during years past, as revealed in a [leaked Air Force memo \[PDF\]](#). Raw Story, which first reported the leak, writes this:

The document, written by an environmental engineering flight commander in December of 2006 and posted on Wikileaks on Tuesday, details the risks posed to US troops in Iraq by burning garbage at a US airbase. It enumerates myriad risks posed by the practice and identifies various carcinogens released by incinerating waste in open-air pits.

... According to the document, a US Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventative Medicine investigator said Balad's burn pit was "the worst environmental site I have ever personally visited," including "10 years working... clean-up for the Army."

Last December, Army Times reported on the rise of symptoms among soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan who had suffered direct exposure to burn pits: <More at: www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/10/pentagon-knowingly-expose_n_173493.html>

OBAMA'S VETERANS BUDGET HITS HISTORIC HIGH

Tom Risen - March 11, 2009

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki achieved a historical first Tuesday by introducing an executive budget for the VA, which offers \$1.2 billion more money than requested by the Independent Budget of veterans support organizations.

Speaking before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Shinseki received praise for the Obama Administration's proposal to increase the VA's budget from \$98 billion this fiscal year to \$113 billion for 2010. It is the largest one-year increase ever made by a president for the VA. <More at: www.scoop44.com/2009/03/11/veterans-affairs-budget-hits-historic-high/>

END OF THE ROAD FOR [VIETNAMESE] AGENT ORANGE VICTIMS?

Helen Clark

HANOI - Where can Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange get justice? Probably nowhere, after the United States Supreme Court refused to hear, this month, a final appeal by Vietnamese plaintiffs against chemical giants Dow and Monsanto.

Soon after the Mar. 2 decision on the case, that began in 2004, was announced local newspapers declared that rights had been "trampled" upon, and foreign ministry spokesman Le Dung said the nation was disgusted. Two weeks later, the issue remains in the news and in the minds of frustrated Vietnamese citizens.

The legal battle is likely over. Vietnamese plaintiffs cannot appeal again, despite promises of help from the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), a non-governmental organization (NGO) dealing with rights issues.

U.S. courts have ruled that no link has been established between Agent Orange's active ingredient, the highly toxic dioxin, and the birth defects claimed. Both victims and the Vietnamese government claim otherwise. Moreover, under U.S. law these companies cannot be sued as they were acting under government orders. <More at: <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=46112>>

REMEMBER THAT IT USED TO BE CALLED "DELAYED STRESS SYNDROME"

MOTHER: WAR VETERAN SHOT BY DEPUTIES HAD STRESS, ALCOHOL, MONEY WOES

C. Ron Allen - South Florida Sun-Sentinel - March 14, 2009

Dallas Adkins Jr., the Kings Point resident whom deputies shot last week after he pointed a rifle at them, is an Air Force veteran who struggled since he returned from Vietnam, his mother said Friday. After returning home, he worked as a mechanic for 20 years at Coors Brewing Co., in Golden, Colo., until he retired. He also worked at a chemical company and retired from the Golden Volunteer Fire Department in 1999 after 10 years, said his mother and friends. But he struggled with post-traumatic stress and alcoholism, and moved to Florida to get his life together, they said.

"Roger was disgusted at life. His life was in shambles," Velma Jean "V.J." Adkins said. "He was lonely down here — no friends or family. He is not used to living alone."

Dallas Adkins, 59, remains in critical but stable condition at Delray Medical Center, said his mother, who arrived from Boise, Idaho, the day after the March 3 shooting. Four bullets struck him in the torso, his mother said. She has little hope her son will ever return to a normal life.

"I think they made him an invalid," she said. "I think he is going to need medical attention for the rest of his life. He is just too shot up."

Palm Beach County Sheriff's Sgt. Celso Otero and Deputy Phil Hernandez III went to Adkins' apartment after neighbors called to say he was threatening suicide. When they arrived, Adkins opened his door and pointed his rifle at them, authorities said. They ordered him to drop the rifle and fired seven shots. One ricocheted and struck a deputy's safety shield, authorities said.

Investigators initially said Adkins fired his weapon, but they announced Thursday that only the deputies had fired.

<More at: <http://sun-sentinel.com/news/local/palmbeach/sf-fipadkins0314pnmar14.0.6651633.story>>

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? HE WAS JUST TRYING TO SIMPLIFY THE PAPERWORK SO HE CLAIMED HIS HEART AS THE MIDDLE GROUND BETWEEN HIS THROAT AND HIS PENIS

VETERAN CONVICTED OF FILING FALSE CLAIMS

Associated Press - February 27, 2009

A Bakersfield veteran has been convicted of altering medical records to collect more benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. A federal jury found 55-year-old Roger Remy guilty Thursday of three counts of submitting false claims to the VA. Remy left the military in 1973.

Prosecutors say he made a tonsillectomy and circumcision look like a heart attack in 2002 to collect an extra \$200,000 in benefits. He might have gotten away with it had he not asked to make the benefits retroactive to 1974. The military got the originals and saw that changes had been made.

Remy faces 30 years in prison and a \$1.5 million fine. <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=c/a/2009/02/27/BA671661AD.DTL>

TO THE COLORS - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
3/25-26		Las Vegas, NV	Resource Fair	Shalimar T. Cabrera	702-366-0456 x-226
3/26		Raleigh, NC		Frank Lawrence	919-508-0718
4/2-4/5		Ralph Sampson Park/Simms Education Center, Harrisonburg, VA	The Wall That Heals	Ladies Auxiliary VFW Post 9660	
4/6	1100-1400	Crowne Plaza Houston – River Oaks 2712 Southwest Freeway, Houston, TX	Houston Career Fair		
4/16	0800-1600	Veterans Business Outreach Center 7270 East Southgate Drive, Suite 1 Sacramento, CA	Summit on the Mental Health & Wellness of Veterans and Their Families	Swords to Plowshares	

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

REPORT TARGETS ARMY POLICY ON COMBAT FITNESS

By Gregg Zoroya, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — The Army's process for determining a soldier's fitness for combat is so confusing that it increases the chance of sending ailing troops to war, an Army inspector general's report obtained by USA TODAY says.

There are at least 15 "inadequate, unsynchronized or conflicting" policies governing fitness, which "increases the likelihood that soldiers who do not meet medical deployability requirements may be deployed in violation of one or more policies," the report concludes. <More at: www.usatoday.com/news/military/2009-03-22-army-report_N.htm>

FISCAL YEAR 2008 DOD SEXUAL ASSAULT REPORT RELEASED

March 17, 2009

Today the Department of Defense released the "Fiscal 2008 Report on Sexual Assault in the Military." The report on sexual assault, prepared by the Sexual Assault Prevention Office (SAPRO), provides Congress with an overview of the Sexual Assault Prevent and Response Program and data on alleged sexual assaults involving members of the armed forces.

In fiscal 2008, the department received a total of 2,908 reports of sexual assault involving service members, representing an eight percent increase from fiscal 2007. There were 753 restricted reports filed in fiscal 2008. The restricted reporting option allows a military member to obtain care confidentially without initiating an investigation. This year 110 victims converted their report from restricted to unrestricted. The full report is available at: www.sapr.mil.

Table 2: Unrestricted Reports of Sexual Assault Involving Service Members as the Victim and/or Subject by Type of Offense

Type of Sexual Assault Offense	Total Unrestricted Reports in FY08	Number of Service Member Victims	Number of Non-Service Member Victims
Rape	924	588	336
Aggravated Sexual Assault	498	347	151
Nonconsensual Sodomy	126	95	31
Indecent Assault	59	47	12
Aggravated Sexual Contact	68	49	19
Abusive Sexual Contact	142	117	25
Wrongful Sexual Contact	442	347	95
Attempts to Commit Offenses	6	4	2
Total Unrestricted Reports in FY08	2,265	1,594	671

THE GREAT SHAME

Bob Herbert - Op-Ed Columnist - March 21, 2009

I had a conversation several weeks ago with a former Army officer, a woman, who had been attacked in her bed a few years ago by a superior officer, a man, who was intent on raping her. The woman fought the man off with a fury. When she tried to press charges against him, she was told that she should let the matter drop because she hadn't been hurt. When she persisted, battalion officials threatened to bring charges against her.

"They were talking about charging me with assault," she said, her voice still tinged with anger and a sense of disbelief. "I'm no longer in the Army," she added dryly.

Tia Christopher, a 27-year-old woman who lives in California and works with victims of sexual assault in the military, told me about the time that she was raped when she was in the Navy. She was attacked by another sailor who had come into her room in the barracks.

"He was very rough," she said. "The girls next door heard my head hitting the wall, and he made quite a mess. When he left, he told me that he'd pray for me and that he still thought I was pretty."

Ms. Christopher left the Navy. As she put it: "My military career ended. My assailant's didn't."

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2009/03/21/opinion/21herbert.html>

I GUESS 30 YEARS FOR AGENT ORANGE VICTIMS ISN'T SO BAD AFTER ALL

'ATOMIC VETERANS' SLOWLY GAIN RECOGNITION

David Clouston - Salina Journal - 3/22/09

The check stub and a notification letter rest in a file stuffed with Salinan James Trepoy's military paperwork. The sum -- a whopping \$75,000 -- initially made Trepoy afraid to cash the check. Then he kept all the money in the bank for a time, fearing someone had a mistake and he would get a call to send it back. The letter accompanying the check looked official enough, bearing letterhead from the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Division, in Washington, D.C.

"This is to inform you that your claim for compensation under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Program has been approved," the letter read.

Trepoy, 88, is among an estimated group of more than 200,000 former soldiers who were witnesses to above-ground and undersea atomic tests conducted between 1945 and 1963. Nicknamed "atomic veterans," the soldiers were part of the testing because various governments wanted to see if troops could operate on battlefields contaminated by radiation from nuclear bombs. <More at: www.saljournal.com/news/story/Salina-atomic-vet-story-031809>

GULF WAR ILLNESSES DEBATE RAGES ON FOR 18 YEARS: NO END IN SIGHT FOR THE SICK – [it is really worthwhile to click through and read this long article]

Thomas D. Williams - t r u t h o u t | Report - 19 March 2009

Barack Obama is now the fourth president facing the scientific and bureaucratic conundrum around the US-created ongoing wartime hazards producing disastrous health complications for soldiers and civilians. Eighteen years after the six-week first Gulf War, maladies still haunt thousands of US and allied service members as well as estimated hundreds of thousands of Iraqi, Kuwaiti and Afghan civilians. A myriad of scientists and government officials insist it is bewildering to pinpoint whether countless chemical and radiological hazards either killed or sickened hundreds of thousands of US service members, allied soldiers and Iraqi, Kuwaiti and Afghan civilians. Federal health officials have not only denied monetary and health assistance to thousands of veterans, whose illnesses they say cannot be linked to US created wartime hazards, but they have mostly failed to assist the Iraqi, Kuwaiti and Afghan civilian health system. <More at: www.truthout.org/031909A>

ABNORMAL BRAIN RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC CHEMICALS DISPLAYED IN GULF WAR VETERANS

24 Mar 2009

A new study by UT Southwestern Medical Center researchers is the first to pinpoint damage inside the brains of veterans suffering from Gulf War syndrome - a finding that links the illness to chemical exposures and may lead to diagnostic tests and treatments. <More at: <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/143369.php>>

INSURANCE CHANGE FOR VETERANS IS SCRAPPED

Robert Pear - March 19, 2009

WASHINGTON — Under withering criticism from veterans and Congress, President Obama on Wednesday abandoned a proposal that would have required veterans to use their private health insurance to pay for the treatment of combat-related injuries.

David K. Rehbein, national commander of the American Legion, said the president had indicated at a meeting on Monday that he “intended to move forward” with the proposal, which could have saved the government more than \$500 million a year.

But on Wednesday, the White House press secretary, Robert Gibbs, said Mr. Obama had scrapped the idea. “The president has instructed that its consideration be dropped,” Mr. Gibbs said.

The press secretary said Mr. Obama had heeded the concerns of veterans’ organizations that feared the proposal could make it more difficult for some of their members to obtain care. <More at: www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/us/politics/19vets.html>

MAYBE THIS IS ONE OF THE REASONS WHY

“THAT CAN’T BE RIGHT”

Jon Stewart of Comedy Central’s “The Daily Show” takes on the administration on the veterans private insurance issue.

www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoid=220571&title=That-Can%27t-Be-Right---Veterans%27-Health-Insurance

IT NEVER WOULD HAVE FLOWN ANYWAY

BILLING OUR HEROES: IT’S DOA!

Statement from Bob Filner, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs:

“The Obama Administration’s proposal to charge ‘third-party’ insurance companies for service-connected medical treatment will not be taken up by the Veterans’ Affairs Committee. Our budget cannot be balanced on the backs (or legs, or kidneys, or hearts) of our nation’s combat-wounded heroes. We believe we can achieve the Administration’s budget request (the first in history to actually exceed the recommendation of the veterans’ Independent Budget) in other ways.”

www.vawatchdog.org/09/hcva09/hcva031709-2.htm

DOD AND VA LET VETERANS WITH EYE INJURIES DOWN

March 17, 2009

Vision Center of Excellence Stalled – Veterans Suffer as a Result

On Tuesday, March 17, 2009, the House Veterans’ Affairs Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, led by Chairman Harry Mitchell (D-AZ), conducted a hearing to evaluate the progress the Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have made on the Vision Center of Excellence (VCE) and how it has affected veterans in need of vision care. The Subcommittee assessed the efforts of the agencies as they work to ensure a seamless continuum of care for service members and veterans who have suffered eye injuries.

The Vision Center of Excellence was created through the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008 (NDAA). The NDAA mandated that “[t]he Secretary of Defense shall establish within the [DOD] a center of excellence in the prevention, diagnosis, mitigation, treatment, and rehabilitation of military eye injuries...” The VCE is still in the planning phase and minimal execution has occurred. Today, thirteen months after the enactment of the NDAA, there is no physical structure identified, no computer hardware, and no support staff. The two individuals identified to coordinate this center, Colonel Donald Gagliano and Dr. Claude Cowan, are the only employees. DOD states that \$3 million has been allocated to create this center, however minimal money has been spent to create the VCE. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/09/hcva09/hcva031709-3.htm>

VETERANS AFFAIRS: A BROKEN SYSTEM

Times-Standard - 03/13/2009

The VA’s own lawyers claimed that Congress, after a careful study, have determined that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is a “broken system,” and that disabled veterans must live with it. They also say that the VA shouldn’t be held accountable for its failures.

Yet the VA repeatedly made statements that it has all the resources it needs to do its job. Congress has given them a larger budget for the past few years, yet they claimed in a recent court action that the adverse consequences of a court order that forces them do their job is distressing at best. <More at: www.times-standard.com/othervoices/ci_11903952>

DEFENSE, VA TO LAUNCH SHARED E-RECORD SYSTEM

Bob Brewin - 03/11/2009

The Veterans Affairs and Defense departments have started work on a uniform registration system that will enroll all service members in the VA upon entry into the military, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki said at a House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing this week.

Shinseki said the system will rely on a single electronic record shared by both departments to handle delivery of benefits and medical care. The collaborative effort, launched with the support of Defense Secretary Robert Gates, is designed to simplify the transition of military personnel to civilian status and ensure the availability of medical data to support the care of patients shared by VA and Defense.

At the hearing, Shinseki conceded that he "has not made much headway" in whittling down VA's claims backlog. In a [report](#) last July, the committee estimated the number of disability compensation claims at nearly 630,000, with almost a quarter of these pending for longer than six months. In its 2009 budget request, VA estimated it would have a backlog of 872,000 claims this year. But the committee has concluded that the number could exceed 1 million, due to veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq leaving active duty. Shinseki said that for now he is taking a "brute force" approach to the backlog by hiring more claims examiners to speed processing. Two hundred have been hired since the start of the year, for a total of 11,300 examiners.

<More at: www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20090311_6489.php>

THE BUZZ THAT VETERANS HEAR

Tom Wilkinson - Washington Post Staff Writer - March 10, 2009; HE01

Capt. Nathan Green remembers the alarm sounding that day last April in Baghdad's Green Zone. He remembers running, and then the loud explosion of the rocket hitting 30 feet behind him. He was knocked unconscious, suffered a traumatic brain injury and now hears the high-pitched whine and static buzz of an AM radio. All the time.

Except there is no AM radio. Green, 32, an Air Force weather officer for nine years, has tinnitus, or ringing in the ears.

There is no cure, though there is ongoing research to find one. Relief most often comes through various methods of "managing" the condition.

... Tinnitus has drawn increased attention lately because the Department of Veterans Affairs counted about 400,000 veterans affected by the condition through 2006 and reported in 2008 that just over 93,000 returning Iraq veterans were affected.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/09/AR2009030902266.html>

'STOP-LOSS' WILL ALL BUT END BY 2011, GATES SAYS

Thom Shanker - March 19, 2009

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said Wednesday that, over two years, he would all but eliminate an unpopular practice that has prevented tens of thousands of active-duty soldiers and reservists from leaving military service on time if they were scheduled to deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan.

More than 13,000 soldiers remain unable to exit the military under the policy, known as stop-loss, which was put in effect after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and then expanded in 2004 as the Army struggled to sustain two large war efforts.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/washington/19gates.html>

FORMER RESERVIST WINS \$1 MILLION FROM EMPLOYER

Ariana Green - March 21, 2009

In a case centering on a little-frequented corner of the employment rights of troops returning to civilian life, a federal judge has ruled that Wells Fargo must reinstate a former reservist to his job as a financial adviser and pay him at least \$1 million.

The ruling is important, employment rights lawyers said, in its affirming that commission-based employees who return to their jobs after service must be compensated on the basis of what they were earning when they left, even if that requires the employer initially to pay a salary instead of commissions.

The award, issued Thursday by Judge Janet Bond Arterton of the Federal District Court in New Haven, is the largest ever decreed in that narrow sector of law, said Samuel F. Wright, a lawyer specializing in the employment rights of returning troops.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2009/03/21/us/21broker.html>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE TUESDAY 24 MARCH 2009

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,182 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,260
WOUNDED US [2/28/09]	31,102
OTHER US CASUALTIES [2/28/09]	≥36,106
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [2/28/09]	177
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED UK	179
KILLED OTHER COALITION	139
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/03/09]	≥ 48,874
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [3/9/09]	≥ 99,679 - 668,051
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [11/9/08]	≥ 400K – 1.374M
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,711 DAYS)

KILLED US	671
WOUNDED US [2/28/09]	2,713
OTHER CASUALTIES US [2/28/2009]	7,639
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [2/28/09]	29
KILLED COALITION	448
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007)	1,602
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (2/24/2009)	≥ 7,373
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (2/24/2009)	46,322
AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$607,611,475,704

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

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF MARCH 17, 2009

This week the Army and Navy announced an increase, while the Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard announced a decrease. The net collective result is 2,099 more reservists activated than last week. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 96,645; Navy Reserve, 6,547; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 14,822; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,263; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 665. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 125,942, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated can be found at www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2009/d20090317nqr.pdf.

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

AFGHANISTAN: A PRESCRIPTION FOR SUSTAINABLE SECURITY

Center for American Progress/ThinkProgress Blog – March 24, 2009

As the war in Afghanistan rages on into its eighth year, American and coalition forces face increasingly dangerous and unstable conditions. 2008 was the deadliest year for American and coalition forces, with nearly 300 soldiers killed in combat. Seventy-four troops have already been killed in 2009. Last month, President Obama approved an increase of 17,000 troops to be sent to Afghanistan by next summer. "This increase is necessary to stabilize a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, which has not received the strategic attention, direction and resources it urgently requires," he said. Today, the Center for American Progress (CAP) released a new [report, Sustainable Security in Afghanistan](#), calling for a significant increase in funding, manpower, and attention to the embattled country. "Two paramount national security interests of the United States are to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a safe haven for terrorists and to ensure the deteriorating security situation there does not envelop the surrounding region in a broader power struggle," the report's authors -- Lawrence Korb, Caroline Wadhams, Colin Cookman, and Sean Duggan -- write. "Doing so will require a prolonged U.S. engagement using all elements of U.S. national power -- diplomatic, economic, and military -- in a sustained effort that could last as long as another 10 years." <More at: <http://pr.thinkprogress.org/>>

A MEMORIAL THAT COUNTS

10 years ago, a Canadian musician, Terry Kelly, responded to a story about a man who, with his daughter present, failed to observe the requested two minutes of silence in a Canadian grocery store,. Kelly wrote a song, and it was captured in a video that I play every once in awhile to remind myself not only what it means to really memorialize those who have given everything, but also to keep myself aware that not everyone feels as I do.

Please watch Terry's video, "A Pittance of Time" at www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kX_3y3u5Uo.

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

AN OPEN LETTER TO VETERANS FROM SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ERIC K. SHINSEKI

March 13, 2009

WASHINGTON – Following is an open letter to Veterans from Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki:

"My name is Ric Shinseki, and I am a Veteran. For me, serving as Secretary of Veterans Affairs is a noble calling. It provides me the opportunity to give back to those who served with and for me during my 38 years in uniform and those on whose shoulders we all stood as we grew up in the profession of arms.

"The Department of Veterans Affairs has a solemn responsibility to all of you, today and in the future, as more Veterans join our ranks and enroll to secure the benefits and services they have earned. I am fully committed to fulfilling President Obama's vision for transforming our department so that it will be well-positioned to perform this duty even better during the 21st Century. We welcome the assistance and advice of our Veterans Service Organizations, other government departments and agencies, Congress, and all VA stakeholders as we move forward, ethically and transparently, so that Veterans and citizens can understand our efforts.

"Creating that vision for transforming the VA into a 21st Century organization requires a comprehensive review of our department. We approach that review understanding that Veterans are central to everything VA does. We know that results count, that the department will be measured by what we do, not what we promise, and that our best days as an organization supporting Veterans are ahead of us. We will fulfill President Lincoln's charge to care for ". . . him, who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan . . ." by redesigning and reengineering ourselves for the future.

"Transforming any institution is supremely challenging; I know this from my own experience in leading large, proud, complex, and high-performing organizations through change. But the best organizations must be prepared to meet the challenging times, evolving technology and, most importantly, evolving needs of clients. Historically, organizations that are unwilling or unable to change soon find themselves irrelevant. You and your needs are not irrelevant.

"Veterans are our clients, and delivering the highest quality care and services in a timely, consistent and fair manner is a VA responsibility. I take that responsibility seriously and have charged all of the department's employees for their best efforts and support every day to meet our obligations to you. Our path forward is challenging, but the President and Congress support us. They have asked us to do this well—for you. Veterans are our sole reason for existence and our number one priority—bar none. I look forward to working together with all VA employees to transform our department into an organization that reflects the change and commitment our country expects and our Veterans deserve.

"Thank you, and God bless our military, our Veterans, and our Nation."

Signed: Eric K. Shinseki

U.S. VETERAN COMPENSATION PROGRAMS

A web site dedicated to helping U.S. veterans discover benefits they have earned.

Complete details about service-connected compensation issues, and important updates as they occur. Also, services that help veterans and their families. <http://www.veteranprograms.com/>

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