

SOUND OFF!



VOL. V, NO 15

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

20 JUNE 2010

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

A NEW LEXICON FOR VETERANS

The fight over veterans’ benefits goes on, even while some are arguing that the current failed system already costs too much. Recent articles, particularly one by AP reporter Alan Breed claims the system is too easily “gamed” and benefits are being given too freely. And, if you think the VA is “getting better”, read <http://www.pebforum.com/content/national-shame-va-plays-shell-game-veterans-benefits-54/>

“Veterans Benefits” is a great-sounding term; but what do the words really mean—not us, but to others.

Before we get to that meaning, let’s take a look at what has happened to our language recently. Words, the meaning of which you thought you knew, have slipped away and acquired new meanings.

Let’s start with the ones that just got taken over by someone else.

My grandmother’s favorite descriptor was that one of her friends was *gay*, meaning merry and joyful. Can’t use that one that one anymore. No big deal, and I don’t begrudge today’s gays their label, but my grandmother would be confused.

Friend always had a special meaning for me, but now that it is the label for anyone you connect with on “Facebook” or “Twitter”, I guess that it doesn’t mean that you are particularly close.

Deluxe always meant better quality but Wendy’s “Deluxe BBQ Bacon Cheeseburger” contains ¼ the calories and ½ the fat of your daily recommended dose – hardly high quality fare.

Mature used to define full adulthood, mentally and physically. Now mindless shoot-‘em-up video games

are “Mature” – who is their audience? I’m afraid it is those who will never mature.

It gets worse – much worse!

Bonus, which was always a reward for exceptional performance, is now the just due of anyone who shows up for work at a major corporation or financial house, regardless of performance. It may even get larger as the performance deteriorates – I am not sure.

Regulation now apparently means looking over the shoulder of a contractor and writing down what he tells you he is doing. It also means writing rules which have no practical meaning in evaluating the task at hand.

Freedom has lost its meaning. We are told daily that around the world we are “Fighting for Freedom”, but whose freedom, and freedom from what? Nobody we have been “fighting to free” seems much freer today than they were 8, or 10, or even 50 years ago. And as for my freedom, it hasn’t been significantly threatened by outsiders in over half a century – so where’s the fight?

Patriotism, which is supposed to mean loyalty to a nation and a way of life, has been re-defined as blind adherence to the acts of our nation regardless of their worth. Anything less is deemed unpatriotic. In my book, that loyalty has always included a willingness to try to correct your nation’s mistakes by speaking out against its errors—but apparently that’s no longer allowed. So I am not sure exactly what *patriotism* means anymore unless it is now a synonym for *jingoism*, or *xenophobia*, which have clearly retained their meaning.

Corporation, instead of meaning a business which has individual liabilities and powers under accepted

law, now means “person”, which used to mean an individual human being with specific rights, duties and responsibilities. This one throws me for a loop.

Ever since Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission I guess corporations can be drafted; can donate blood; can pay taxes at the same rate I do to the same government that I do, on everything that they earn, as I do; can vote (I don’t know if they get one vote or can cast multiple votes *en bloc* equal to their employment lists); can obey all laws whether or not they agree with them and whether or not they cause them to lose money.

Oh—wait a minute! I am confusing what their obligations are with what yours and mine are, aren’t I? We must do all of those things—they are not required to do any of them. However they can move their money to the Cayman Islands to avoid taxes; can pay themselves bonuses and write it off as an “expense”; can gamble with someone else’s money and get us to pay for their losses; can use stockholders’ money to support political issues without getting their approval.

I can’t do any of those things. I’ll continue to search for a definition of *person* that covers all of these various differences yet makes sense to all of us, but I don’t think that I will be able to find one.

By the way, Citizens United will be glad to sell you a baseball cap commemorating President Bush’s declaration on 2 May 03 that the mission was accomplished. There were 172 coalition casualties by that date in Iraq—now there are 4,723. I guess that the phrase *mission accomplished* also has acquired a meaning that none of us understand. Whatever that meaning now is, *mission accomplished* continues to cost one hell of a lot of lives, ours and others.

There are other changes that, are easy to recognize:

Defense now means “Offense”

Free trade now means “freebooting”

Capitalism means “laissez-fare”—total freedom of action regardless of the consequences

History and *tradition* mean “whatever happened in the past without the bad stuff.”

We return to deciphering the present-day meaning of *Veterans’ Benefits*.

None of us should be surprised that neither of the words retain their original meaning—almost nothing else seems to either.

Many veterans are being asked to prove their *veteran* status, even though they present a DD214. Some VBA claims offices are requiring that the

DD214 be an “original”, even though most other agencies allow for certified copies. It is not enough that you have proven yourself by your service—please prove it to a bureaucrat who never served. And the VA wants to make it tougher to prove!

As for *benefits*—even though Congress has passed the laws setting up the various benefits programs, and even though they have funded those benefits, although reluctantly in the past, that isn’t enough. You have to provide proof to some bureaucrat that your condition deserves the benefit. Often your medical records are not sufficient proof. Even if the records are sufficient, they are handled so carelessly that over and over again we hear of records being lost. (Try to recover the complete record once the VA has lost it).

Most tellingly, the benefit, in order to be useful, has to be provided when it is needed. When the VBA prides itself on only taking 176 days to answer a claim, remember that is statistically the truth, but it means that to get at that number at least half of the claimants waited longer – much longer.

If the required benefit, when granted, will provide income, it is highly likely that the veteran who is claiming the disability and its related income is desperately in need of that income NOW, not 176 days or much more from now.

Benefits, like justice, when delayed are benefits denied.

So maybe we have the new meaning for *Veterans’ Benefits* after all. Try this on for size:

Veterans’ Benefits:

Those funds or services that can be grubbed out of a bureaucracy that is fully funded but which prides itself on giving away as little as possible.

To qualify, each veteran must take on the 220,000 employees of that bureaucracy single-handed, without any opportunity for legal assistance until he or she is denied the benefit.

To further qualify, each veteran must prove what has already been proven by the circumstances of his or her service, and must hope that the proof is not destroyed or lost in the process.

The system’s main criterion is that the veteran almost never get what he or she requires: and if he or she gets something, it never is timely nor commensurate with the level of sacrifice or disability.

That may not be complete but it seems to come pretty close. [Ed.]

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

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

A CHANCE TO HELP FOR THOSE OF YOU IN MINNESOTA

VETERANS COURT IS SEEKING MENTORS

Mark Brunswick - Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune - June 18, 2010

When the Hennepin County veterans court opens its doors next month, it will need a group of mentors to walk its first offenders through the process.

The court, which will be the first of its kind in the state, came about after defense lawyers, judges, probation officials and other court personnel became concerned that the number of military veterans appearing in courtrooms were not being served. Many were showing up with post-traumatic stress disorder, homelessness, and alcohol and drug problems that were clearly related to their military service.

With the state's largest veterans' population, Hennepin County will serve as a pilot for the project, which is expected to begin July 12. ... Anyone interested can contact Williams at 651-603-2027 or at missyw@mcil-mn.org. The first mentor training program is from 10 a.m.-noon June 30.

<More at: www.startribune.com/local/west/96698909.html?elr=KArks:DCIUHc3E7_V_nDaycUiD3aPc:Yyc:aULPQL7PQLanchO7DiUr>

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

Class Action Suit: On 12 August we appeared before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. An article from the LA Times on 24 August summarizes the results so far < <http://latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/healthcare/la-me-veterans-suit4-2009aug24,0,1423297.story>>

.Case Progress to Date:

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

9/25/2007 Defendant's Motion to Dismiss

2/11/2208 Motion for Preliminary Injunction

2/25/2008 Preliminary Injunction Hearing

4/21/2008 Trial

6/25/2008 Judgment based on jurisdiction

7/25/2008 Appeal notice filed w/9th Circuit Court of Appeals

12/10/2008 Appeal brief filed

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

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

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

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

4/22/09 Extension granted to 1 May 2009

5/1/09 Appellants' Reply Brief filed

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

8/12/09 Oral arguments

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

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

6/20/10 NTR [The courts move veerrrry slowly] There is a rumor that we may yet be heard this session

Here is a link to the legal documents on the lawsuit. www.veteransptsdclassaction.org/

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. at www.vuft.org/membership.html

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 at www.vuft.org/donate.html. 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.

D O N A T E!

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

I would like to attend this group [*San Diego veterans seminar*], but the people at the VA that are there are only public relations people who try to cover-up VA Claims Corruption and Abuse!!! I just received my seventh (7) BVA-VA Remand two weeks ago. Everyone at the VA are covering-up records trashed, thrown-out, missing, etc. Top VA officer executives call me and make excuses for all of this corruption. WHEN I SEE FEDERAL LAWENFORCEMENT OFFICERS ARRESTING VA PERSONNEL IN THE THOUSANDS FOR CORRUPTION AND RACKATEERING, THEN AND ONLY THEN, I MAY BELIEVE THAT THE VA IS GOING TO HELP VETERANS!!!!!!! - Stephen Sliss Jr

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

FILNER: CONGRESS NOT DONE WITH GI BILL

Military.com - Bryant Jordan May 28, 2010

Improvements to the Post-9/11 GI Bill; an end -- at long last -- to the "disabled veterans' tax" known as concurrent receipt; and expanded services to rural, homeless and other vets.

These are things veterans can expect to see -- some in just months, others over the next year or two -- as Congress moves to improve programs and services to the nation's vets, Rep. Bob Filner, D-Calif., chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, told Military.com recently in an exclusive interview. <More at: www.military.com/news/article/filner-congress-not-done-with-gi-bill.html>

SHINSEKI'S PROPOSED LEGISLATION COULD NEGATIVELY IMPACT MANY VETERANS

Larry Scott - VA Watchdog dot Org

"Getting rid of the primary basis of appeals and running off the lawyers will surely allow VA to get rid of all those pesky claims on remand."

On May 26, 2010, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki wrote a letter to Congressional leaders urging them to consider his draft legislation titled "Veterans Benefit Programs Improvement Act of 2010."

The entire 42-page document is available at www.vawatchdog.org/10/nf10/nfmay10/may10files/SecyLegislation.pdf for viewing or download.

While there are some excellent ideas in the proposed legislation, we must raise a red flag! Analysis (below) is provided by an attorney who practices veterans' law.

Two biggies affecting legal representation of veterans in the Secretary's proposed legislation.

- 1) They do away with reasons and bases for Board decisions - only "plausible" basis required. Translation, almost no Board decision could/would be overturnable at the Veterans Court.
- 2) They change the EAJA prevailing party definition to be limited to cases where the claim ultimately results in a monetary benefit. Translation, even if we have to pay we won't have to do it for years or decades. Not to mention that if the claimant dies and no award is ever made, VA will save both the benefit payment and the legal fee.

<More at: www.vawatchdog.org/10/nf10/nfmay10/nf052810-5.htm>

VA SLOW TO IMPLEMENT IG RECOMMENDATIONS

June 9, 2010

Washington, D.C. - On Wednesday, June 9, 2010, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA) conducted a hearing to evaluate and examine the progress made by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in complying with VA's Office of Inspector General's (OIG) recommendations. The OIG's target date for VA implementation of OIG recommendations on how to improve in a specific area is within one year of publication of the report. Currently, there are a total of 115 open reports with 694 open recommendations. Most of the open recommendations are tracking the target date; however, 16 reports containing 45 recommendations are over one year old.

... "The fact that many overdue recommendations were implemented in the 72 hours prior to this hearing shows that VA needs an improved system of accountability. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/10/hcva10/hcva060910-3.htm>

SENATE PANEL DENIES IED GROUP \$400 MILLION EMERGENCY FUNDING

Bob Brewin 05/21/2010 - Dawn Lim/Nextgov.com

The Senate Appropriations Committee denied a \$400 million emergency request from the Defense Department group that disarms improvised mines, a move that effectively turns off the funding spigot for neutralizing what is still the largest source of casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan. <More at: www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20100521_7217.php>

MILITARY SPENDING ROSE TO \$1.53 TRILLION IN 2009

Christopher Hinton - MarketWatch Pulse - June 18, 2010

NEW YORK -- World governments ramped up their military spending in 2009 despite a financial crisis and the looming threat of recession, according to a Friday report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. For 2009, military spending rose 6% in real terms to \$1.53 trillion, and is 49% above spending in 2000, the research firm said.

<More at: www.foxbusiness.com/story/markets/industries/technology/military-spending-rose--trillion>

ENLISTMENT RULES CHANGE AFTER FAKER CASE

Associated Press - May 28, 2010

DALLAS -- The Army is instituting a new procedure for checking the backgrounds of enlistees who claim to have a military record after a report that a reservist apparently faked a background as a Marine to enter the service.

Recruiters can no longer simply accept discharge papers as proof of service, Douglas Smith, public information officer for the Army recruiting command, told The Associated Press on Thursday. They now must also seek to verify the documents through a military database, he said. The directive follows an AP story last Friday detailing how a Texas man apparently tricked the Army into allowing him to enter a reserve unit as a noncommissioned officer earlier this year.

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/enlistment-rules-change-after-faker-case.html>

AMERICA'S 'CASUALTY GAP'

Douglas L. Kriner and Francis X. Shen – LA Times – May 28, 2010

Since Sept. 11, 2001, more than 5,000 Americans have lost their lives in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq ... In honoring their service, we should not overlook a very real though hidden aspect of war: the socioeconomic inequality in who makes the ultimate sacrifice in defense of the nation.

Over the last six years, we have studied this inequality by collecting and analyzing data on the hometowns of more than 400,000 members of the armed forces who died in World War II, Korea, Vietnam and Iraq. By integrating these records with census data, we demonstrate unambiguously that, beginning with the Korean War, disadvantaged communities have suffered a disproportionate share of the nation's wartime casualties, while richer communities have been more insulated from the costs of war. Furthermore, the data suggest that this "casualty gap" between rich and poor communities has reached its widest proportions in the ongoing conflict in Iraq. <More at: www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-0528-shen-warcosts-20100528.0.7023778.story>

DOD INVESTIGATING NINE CASES OF "TERRORISM-RELATED ACTS" BY US MILITARY AND CONTRACTORS?

Jeremy Scahill - May 27, 2010

Buried within the new Department of Defense Inspector General's report, "Contingency Contracting: A Framework for Reform," is the eye-opening revelation that the Defense Criminal Investigative Service has nine open investigations into alleged "Terrorism-Related Acts" by "U.S. contractor personnel, U.S. Military, Government personnel." No other details are provided. DCIS is the criminal investigative agency working for the DoD's Inspector General. The full Inspector General's report can be downloaded at www.dodig.mil/audit/reports/fy10/10-059.pdf.

<More at: www.thenation.com/blog/dod-investigating-nine-cases-terrorism-related-acts-us-military-and-contractors

TROUBLED VETS 'ICED,' BOOTED FROM US

Bryant Jordan - Military.com - May 26, 2010

A former Marine and Gulf War veteran may soon be boarding a flight to Jamaica -- the ticket cost picked up by the U.S. government. But Rohan Coombs, who came to the U.S. from Jamaica as a child, is not looking forward to the return trip. He's being deported.

Coombs is not alone. By some estimates, 3,000 to 4,000 veterans are awaiting deportation, and the deportations have been going on since a 1996 law made it easier for the U.S. to boot out foreign nationals, including legal permanent residents – "green-card" holders – who served in the military if they commit crimes. Collectively, they've been dubbed "Banished Veterans" by those who say that vets – even those who have committed crimes – deserve better than to be booted from the country they served.

Rep. Bob Filner, D-Calif., chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, called the 1996 legislation "a terrible law that has very un-American consequences." He said the law is particularly unfair when it comes to veterans who arrived in the U.S. as children, who grow up not knowing any language but English and knowing only the U.S. as home.

"It seems to me they should not have the threat of deportation," Filner said. "I would say give them citizenship based on the fact they served in our armed forces. It seems a commonsense thing to me."

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/troubled-vets-iced-booted-from-us-.html>

ATTORNEYS GENERAL SUPPORT FATHER OF FALLEN MARINE AGAINST WESTBORO BAPTIST CHURCH

Jeff Schogol - May 27, 2010

Forty-five states attorneys general have signed a "friend of the court" brief in support of the father of a fallen Marine who is taking his case against a radical church that picketed his son's funeral to the Supreme Court.

The Westboro Baptist Church, made up primarily of founder Fred Phelps and his family, picketed the funeral of Lance Cpl. Matthew A. Snyder in 2006 because they believe U.S. troop deaths are God's revenge for tolerating homosexuals. Church members held signs that read "God hates you," "You're in hell," and "Semper Fi fags."

Snyder's father Al sued the church, but an appeals court ruled against him earlier this year and ordered him to pay the church \$16,000 in court fees. The case is expected to go before the Supreme Court this fall.

<More at: www.stripes.com/blogs/stripes-central/stripes-central-1.8040/attorneys-general-support-father-of-fallen-marine-against-westboro-baptist-church-1.104578>

PHOTO OF VETERAN'S TOMBSTONE IN ARLINGTON CEMETERY CREEK STARTLES SON

Christian Davenport - Washington Post Staff Writer - June 18, 2010

It was around lunchtime Thursday when Mike McLaughlin settled into a chair in his family room and opened the newspaper. There, on the front page, was a photograph of a burial marker lying in a stream at Arlington National Cemetery and an article that led to a sudden realization.

"This is my father's tombstone," he called out to his wife.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/17/AR2010061705838.html>



ARMY: BODIES MISIDENTIFIED AT ARLINGTON CEMETERY

Anne Flaherty and Pauline Jelinek - The Associated Press - June 10, 2010

WASHINGTON -- The Army says at least 200 remains in Arlington National Cemetery may have been misidentified or misplaced, casting a shadow over what has been called America's "sacred ground." Defense officials said Thursday that the Army has forced out the cemetery's two civilian leaders and appointed a new chief.

The Army says it plans a more thorough investigation of the questioned grave sites under the new management.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/10/AR2010061002249_pf.html>

SACRED GROUND

Staff Editorial - News Observer, Raleigh NC - Jun 19, 2010

If there is a more moving, more meaningful place in the United States than Arlington National Cemetery, it's hard to think of it. Some 330,000 people are buried there, veterans of past wars and in some cases, family members. So it's no wonder that John McHugh, secretary of the Army, forced out the two top officials at Arlington after reports that there were questions about 211 gravesites and some unmarked graves. There also were burial sites with the wrong headstones.

McHugh offered no explanations and no hesitations. The apparent carelessness in the handling of these sites would not happen again, he said: "That all ends today."

It's all he needed to say, although a report carried in The News & Observer said he apparently had plenty more to say to John Metzler, the cemetery superintendent, who is retiring under pressure along with his deputy, Thurman Higgenbotham. The formal reprimand of Metzler was described as "brutal." <More at: www.newsobserver.com/2010/06/19/540488/sacred-ground.html>

VETERAN ORDERED TO REMOVE FLAG FROM OUTSIDE HOME

Hillsborough, N.H. - May 21, 2010

An 88-year-old Navy Veteran, Joe LeVangie, is upset after he and his neighbors were admonished for flying the American Flag. It is "against company policy" and flying one flag at the entrance to the apartment complex was sufficient, in the eyes of the management company, E.J.L.

"Why should it be sufficient?" he said. "Is the one in Concord sufficient for the state of New Hampshire?" LeVangie, a WWII Veteran, flies the flag "In respect for all the troops serving overseas now and for those who never came back," he said.

Management told them their flags had to come down and the flagpole brackets were removed by maintenance and their flags rolled up against the wall. <More at: www.gather.com/viewArticle.action?articleId=281474978249931>

DOES ANYONE REMEMBER SOMEONE GETTING PAID WHILE IN AWOL STATUS?

ARMY 'LOST CONTROL' OF COLONEL, STILL PAID \$400,000

Chuck Neubauer - May 24, 2010

The U.S. Army sent \$400,000 in military paychecks to Lt. Col. Stephen D. McConnell for more than three years despite the fact that neither the Army nor his wife knew where he was much of the time or what he was doing to earn his pay. In June 2009, less than a month after the Army first started asking questions about his whereabouts and a few days after it suggested to his wife that he turn himself in, Col. McConnell killed himself. Three weeks later, a criminal investigation began to determine whether he defrauded the government by receiving military pay and benefits to which he was not entitled..

<More at: www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/may/24/army-lost-control-of-colonel-still-paid-400000/>

I GUESS THAT AWOL FOR AN EM IS DIFFERENT THAN AWOL FOR A COLONEL

PTSD SOLDIER PUNISHED BY ARMY

Dahr Jamail - t r u t h o u t Report - 04 June 2010

Iraq war veteran Eric Jasinski, after seeking treatment for his post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), is being punished by the Army. Jasinski turned himself in to the Army late last year, after having gone absent without leave (AWOL) in order to seek help for his PTSD. Help, he told Truthout, he was not receiving from the Army, even after requesting assistance on multiple occasions. He was court-martialed and jailed for 25 days for having gone AWOL, during which time he was escorted in shackles to therapy sessions for his PTSD. After being released from prison, he was informed that he would be given an other-than-honorable discharge, which means he is likely ineligible for full PTSD treatment from the Veterans' Administration (VA) after he leaves the service. <More at: www.truthout.org/ptsd-soldier-punished-army60048>

JUST ONE MORE GREAT AMERICAN!

ACCOUNTANT EMBEZZLES VETERAN MONEY

Kevin Killeen – Reporting KMOX News- 04 June 2010

ST. LOUIS (KMOX) -- An accountant for the veterans commission is charged with stealing tens-of-thousands of dollars that was supposed to be helping veterans. <More at: www.kmox.com/Accountant-embezzles-veteran-money/7395756>

TO THE COLORS - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
6/19		Bozeman MT	Resource Fair	George Morales lindageorgemor@gmail.com	406-580-8253
6/25		Shrewsbury, MA	Resource Fair	Joe Boylan mailto:joeboylan@veteransinc.org	508-791-3273 x-105
7/1-7/4		Cabool Football Field Cabool, MO	The Wall That Heals	Cabool R-IV Schools	
7/8-7/11		Southern Iowa Fairgrounds Oskaloosa, IA	The Wall That Heals	Drost Equipment, Inc.	
7/15-7/18		Brickyard Fields LeRoy IL	The Wall That Heals	City of LeRoy	
7/16		San Diego, CA	Stand Down	Darcy Lovgren Pavich mailto:darcy.pavich@vwsd.net	619-497-0142

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

VBA SETS GOALS, LACKS PLAN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE June 15, 2010

Washington, D.C. – On June 15, 2010, John Hall (D-NY), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, conducted a hearing to examine the state of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

In 2009, VA received more than 1,000,000 claims for disability benefits, representing a 14 percent increase in workload from 2008. Currently VA is receiving more than 97,000 new disability claims per month. As of June 5, 2010, there are 546,387 claims pending from veterans seeking compensation and pension disability benefits, with 195,891 (36%) pending longer than 125 days. Including appeals, VA's total claims-related inventory exceeds 1 million, which is the figure most stakeholders use when referring to the claims "backlog".

VBA projects a 16% increase in new disability claims in 2010 and 12% increase in 2011. Approximately 200,000 veterans are expected to file claims for three presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange exposure and potentially 100,000 for Gulf War associated illnesses and regulatory changes. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/10/hcva10/hcva061510-2.htm>

BATTLEFIELD OF RED TAPE

David Zucchini - Los Angeles Times - May 31, 2010

Back home, veterans are fighting bureaucracy to get benefits. The VA admits it has to be more efficient. An agency overhaul aims to eliminate a huge backlog of disability claims by 2015 and move to an electronic data system.

John Lamie survived six roadside bombings in Iraq, only to have the Department of Veterans Affairs refuse to accept three months' worth of medical tests he underwent for jaw and shoulder wounds — tests performed by VA-approved doctors at VA facilities.

Casey Elder, who says she suffers migraines and memory loss from a roadside bomb in Iraq, has been told by the VA that the bombing did not cause those problems — despite a VA doctor's diagnosis that she suffered a traumatic brain injury.

After Clay Hunt was shot through the wrist by a sniper in Iraq, the VA misplaced his disability paperwork for four months. Then he was required to visit a series of doctors to verify the extent of his wounds.

<More at: www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-vets-20100601.0.4326641.story>

VA SECRETARY HOPES TO ELIMINATE VETERANS HOMELESSNESS IN FIVE YEARS

Brian Albrecht - June 05, 2010

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, in Cleveland on Friday, says he hopes to eliminate homelessness among veterans within the next five years.

Speaking at the Wade Park campus of the Louis Stokes Cleveland Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Eric Shinseki said homeless veterans are one of his top three priorities, along with improving veterans' access to benefits and services, and reducing the backlog of veterans benefit claims. The VA estimates there are some 107,000 homeless vets nationally. <More at: http://blog.cleveland.com/metro/2010/06/va_secretary_hopes_to_eliminat.html>

NO WONDER IT'S SO TOUGH FOR VETS TO GET A FAVORABLE JUDGMENT ~ THOSE WHO SHOULD KNOW THESE THINGS DON'T SEEM TO KNOW AT ALL

CHIEF JUSTICE 'STARTLED' BY GOVERNMENT ERRORS IN VETERANS CASES

Marcia Coyle - 02-24-2010

When he was in private practice at Hogan & Hartson, Chief Justice John Roberts Jr. did not handle veterans' benefits claims. So, he understandably found "startling" information with which lawyers for veterans are only too familiar: In litigating with veterans, the government more often than not takes a position that is substantially unjustified.

In oral arguments Monday in *Astrue v. Rattliff*, an attorney fee case under the Equal Access to Justice Act, James Leach of Rapid City, S.D., told the Court that 42 percent of Social Security cases result in an EAJA attorney fee award.

"If it's 42 percent, that's quite a high number of cases in which the government's position is found substantially -- not substantially justified as well as legally erroneous," Leach said. "In veterans cases, it's even worse."

<More at: www.vawatchdog.org/10/vap10/vap050510-1.htm>

BUT NOT ALL COURTS ARE THE SAME

VETERANS COURT WINNING CASES

Karen Heller – Philadelphia Inquirer - Columnist May. 26, 2010

Today is Veterans Day at the Criminal Justice Center. So is every Wednesday, when it's time for Veterans Court, the Hon. and U.S. Army Reserve Capt. Patrick F. Dugan presiding.

Established in March by state Supreme Court Justices Ronald D. Castille and Seamus P. McCaffery, both decorated veterans, the court is one of three in the state, and almost 20 nationwide, exclusively handling veterans' misdemeanor cases.

It's already a success, a "problem-solving" court, like drug court and mental health court, designed to expedite assistance and avoid costly legal delays and jail time. Defendants range from age 20 (Iraq) to 80 (Korea), but the cases are remarkably sad and similar - virtually all male, charged with driving under the influence, disorderly conduct, possession, spousal abuse.

<More at: www.philly.com/inquirer/columnists/karen_heller/20100526_Karen_Heller_Veterans_Court_winning_cases.html#ixzz0pjZ1N1MG>

WEBB: DELAY AO CLAIMS, STOP BIGGER RAISES

Tom Philpott

Sen. Jim Webb (D-Va.), chief architect of the pricey Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefit for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan war era, could become a new champion, for taxpayers, against what he perceives as excess spending on military pay and on a new wave of Agent Orange claims.

Webb, a former Navy secretary and decorated Vietnam War veteran, risked the anger of thousands of veterans from that war when he won Senate approval last week of an amendment to block, at least temporarily, the Department of Veterans Affairs from paying new disability claims on three prominent diseases presumed linked to wartime herbicide exposure.

<More at: www.military.com/features/0.15240.215720.00.html>

MEANWHILE, MILLIONAIRES PAY 15% ON CAPITAL GAINS – MUST BE FAIR??!

CRITICAL DECISIONS OVERWHELM THOSE WHO LOSE SPOUSES TO WAR

David Zucchino - Los Angeles Times - May 30, 2010 - Reporting from Ft. Bragg, N.C.

Burial, personal effects, taxes, insurance, probate, Social Security — all at the worst time, during the 'widow fog.'

Just after Wesley Bauguess' husband, Larry, an Army major, was killed in action in Pakistan in May 2007, she had to make immediate decisions, including what to do about her husband's survivor benefits.

In shock and consumed by grief, Bauguess waded through confusing technical details before deciding to receive benefits in the names of her two daughters, then 6 and 4.

Later, she discovered that **her daughters have to file tax returns on the benefits — at a potential tax rate of 36%**. They were snared by the "kiddie tax," a provision passed by Congress in 1986 to prevent wealthy parents from sheltering assets in their children's names. <More at: www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-survivors-20100530.0.2551467.story>

SUICIDE RIVALS THE BATTLEFIELD IN TOLL ON U.S. MILITARY

Jamie Tarabay - 6/17/10

Nearly as many American troops at home and abroad have committed suicide this year as have been killed in combat in Afghanistan. Alarmed at the growing rate of soldiers taking their own lives, the Army has begun investigating its mental health and suicide prevention programs. <More at: www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=127860466>

MILITARY FAILS ON BRAIN-TEST FOLLOW-UPS

Gregg Zoroya - USA TODAY - 6/14/10

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has failed to comply with a congressional directive to give all troops tests before and after they serve in combat to measure their thinking abilities and uncover possible brain injuries, military records show.

More than 562,000 tests of troops taken before they deployed have not been re-administered on their return by military health officials, the records show. That means the Pentagon could be missing thousands of cases of brain injury, says Rep. Bill Pascrell, D-N.J., who helped write the 2008 order. <More at: http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2010-06-14-braintest_N.htm>

MILITARY STILL FAILING TO DIAGNOSE, TREAT BRAIN INJURIES

T. Christian Miller and Daniel Zwerdling - June 8, 2010

The military medical system is failing to diagnose brain injuries in troops who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, many of whom receive little or no treatment for lingering health problems, an investigation by NPR and ProPublica has found.

So-called mild traumatic brain injury has been called one of the wars' signature wounds. Shock waves from roadside bombs can ripple through soldiers' brains, causing damage that sometimes leaves no visible scars but may cause lasting mental and physical harm.

Officially, military figures say about 115,000 troops have suffered mild traumatic brain injuries since the wars began. But top Army officials acknowledged in interviews that those statistics likely understate the true toll. Tens of thousands of troops with such wounds have gone uncounted, according to unpublished military research obtained by NPR and ProPublica.

<More at: www.propublica.org/feature/brain-injuries-remain-undiagnosed-in-thousands-of-soldiers>

ARMY RESPONDS TO NPR-PROPUBLICA BRAIN INJURY INVESTIGATION

T. Christian Miller, ProPublica and Daniel Zwerdling 6/9/10

In an interview on NPR's *Talk of The Nation* on Wednesday, Gen. Peter Chiarelli, the vice chief of staff to the Army, defended the military's treatment of troops that suffered mild traumatic brain injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"We are taking this extremely seriously," Chiarelli said, responding to the findings of an NPR and ProPublica investigation which found the military is failing to diagnose soldiers with so-called mild traumatic brain injuries. "There's no reason for us not to try to diagnose it." <More at: www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=127596798>

BRAIN-INJURED VETERANS FIGHT TO GET HELP

Barbara Barrett - McClatchy Newspapers - May 23, 2010

WASHINGTON - Improvised bombs rattled former Army Spc. Adam Pittman a dozen times in his three tours in Iraq, most severely when his Bradley fighting vehicle ran over one hidden in the dirt in 2005. Now, part of Pittman's brain has gone dormant, and on most days he can't think straight. He leaves the room and forgets what he was searching for. He gets migraines so piercing that his right eye sometimes curls away from his left. Anger comes easily, inspiring rages that sometimes have his wife terrified for herself and their 3-year-old daughter.

Although Pittman, who lives in Lillington, N.C., left the military in July 2008 complaining of headaches and memory loss, it took nearly a year for him to get a brain scan and another five months to start getting temporary disability benefits.

"They were blowing me off," Pittman, 30, said of the Department of Veterans Affairs. "I feel like things that have to happen, they're dragging their feet on." <More at: <http://fayobserver.com/articles/2010/05/23/1001149>>

MILITARY TRIES ACUPUNCTURE TO TREAT TROOPS FOR PTSD

Mary Ann Roser - American-Statesman Staff - June 19, 2010

Tony Bailes of Austin was in the Army in 2003 when he injured his back in Iraq and tried everything his doctor recommended. Nothing helped. Then, the pain specialist prescribed acupuncture, and two weeks later, "my back pain was gone," he said.

A combat medic, Bailes returned to Iraq for a second tour in 2005 and came home in 2006 with a different kind of pain: emotional anguish, nightmares and insomnia. He was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, but antidepressants made him feel worse, he said. Again, he turned to acupuncture — and recovered, he said. Now he's studying the more than 2,000-year-old Chinese practice of using hair-thin needles for healing and planning to make it his life's work.

Acupuncture is endorsed by many Western medicine practitioners as a treatment for physical pain, and now the therapy — along with other Eastern practices, including yoga, meditation and tai chi — is slowly making inroads in Western medicine as a treatment for mental pain. The military is leading the pack. <More at: <http://www.statesman.com/news/local/military-tries-acupuncture-to-treat-troops-for-ptsd-757786.html>>

SURVIVORS OF MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA CONTINUE TO FACE UPHILL BATTLE IN MILITARY, AT VA

May 20, 2010

Washington, D.C. – On May 20, 2010, John Hall (D-NY), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, and Michael Michaud (D-ME), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Health, conducted a hearing to evaluate military sexual trauma (MST) issues. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) refers to MST as the experiences of sexual

harassment and/or sexual assault that occurred while a veteran was in the military. The hearing focused on ways in which the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), Veterans Health Administration (VHA), and the Department of Defense (DoD) can better address the needs of veterans impacted by MST and identify ways to better prevent, treat and properly compensate them.

... According to a 1995 DoD study of sexual victimization among active duty service members, acts of sexual harassment were reported by 78% of women service members and 38% of military men. Another study found that rates of sexual assault and verbal sexual harassment were higher during wartime than peacetime in their sample study population. One study found that 23% of female users of the VA health care system reported having experienced sexual assault while in the military. More recently, VHA reported that as of October 20, 2009, of the 5,340,754 patients seeking outpatient care at VHA facilities in FY 2009, 1.2% (65,264) of patients reported MST-related conditions. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/10/hcva10/hcva052010-2.htm>

AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY EXPLAINED

Indiana PA Gazette - June 6, 2010 1:19 AM EDT

VA established the Agent Orange Registry www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/registry.asp to track the special health concerns of veterans who may have been exposed to Agent Orange during their military service.

The Agent Orange Registry Health Exam is:

- Cost-free for veterans, with no requirement for a co-payment.
- Comprehensive examination, including exposure wand medical histories, laboratory tests and physical exam.
- Results discussed by a VA health professional with veteran, both in a personal face-to-face consultation and a follow-up letter.
- No requirement to enroll in VA health care system to receive registry exam.

Agent Orange Registry exam is not a claim for VA benefits; nor is it required to receive VA health care benefits or disability compensation. <More at: www.indianagazette.com/articles/2010/06/19/a_news/10044470.txt>

NEW VA BENEFITS CLAIM FORM: JUST 6 PAGES

Kelly Kennedy - Staff writer - Jun 9, 2010

After years of complaints from veterans about having to fill out a 26-page-long benefits claims form for the Veterans Affairs Department, the Office of Management and Budget has approved VA's new six-page form.

... VA spokesman Steve Westerfeld confirmed in a voicemail that VA had shortened VA Form 21-526, as well as creating a new "express claim" form, or 21-526EZ, which is six pages long and requires that the veteran provide his own medical and military records, rather than waiting for VA to gather them.

The EZ form comes as a result of a pilot program mandated by the Veterans' Benefit Improvement Act of 2008. That pilot program will now be expanded to include everyone, according to VA's May Compensation & Pension Service Bulletin

The VA Form 21-526 is available at www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/vba-21-526-are.pdf and the Form 21-526EZ is available at www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-526EZ-ARE.pdf. Both forms can be either printed or completed online.

<More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2010/06/military_benefits_shortform_060910w/>

VETERANS TRAVEL FARTHER FOR SURGERY WITH NEW POLICY

Jessica Jones 6/17/10

A new rating system now restricts the types of surgery performed at certain Veterans Affairs facilities in five states. The new policy will prompt some veterans to travel farther to reach other VA facilities or civilian hospitals for more complex surgeries. The policy comes after investigations found that surgical mistakes had caused nine deaths in the department's Marion, Ill., hospital a few years ago.

Under the new policy, the VA's 112 hospitals are now ranked according to whether they are able to perform standard, intermediate or complex surgical operations. The VA hospital in Fayetteville, N.C., is one of five facilities restricted to standard surgery only. <More at: www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=127880116&ft=1&f=1003>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

JOHN FINN DIES AT 100; OLDEST SURVIVING MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT

Tony Perry - Los Angeles Times - May 28, 2010 - Reporting from San Diego

Retired Navy officer John Finn, who received the Medal of Honor for his bravery during the Japanese attack on military installations in Hawaii that plunged the United States into World War II, died Thursday at the Veterans Home of California in Chula Vista. At 100, Finn was the oldest surviving recipient of the nation's highest medal for valor and the only recipient still alive among those who received the medal for actions during the attack of Dec. 7, 1941.

<More at: <http://www.latimes.com/news/obituaries/la-me-john-finn-20100528.0.5720051.story>

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF JUNE 15, 2010

This week the Army, Marine Corps and Air Force and Coast Guard announced a decrease in activated reservists, while the Navy announced an increase. The net collective result is 1,847 fewer reservists activated than last week. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 92,730; Navy Reserve, 6,261; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 17,309; Marine Corps Reserve, 6,125; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 822. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 123,247, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated is on line at <http://www.defense.gov/news/d20100615ngr.pdf>.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SUNDAY 20 JUNE 2010

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,650 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,407
WOUNDED US [6/5/10]	31,844
OTHER US CASUALTIES [6/5/10]	39,612
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [6/5/10]	208
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED UK	179
KILLED OTHER COALITION	139
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/25/09] ≥	48,874
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [5/20/10] ≥	105,553 – 1,366,350
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [1/20/10] ≥	400K–1.432M
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (3,179 DAYS)

KILLED US	1124
WOUNDED US [6/5/10]	6,232
OTHER CASUALTIES US [6/5/10]	10,009
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [6/5/10]	40
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED COALITION	718
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION [12/2/07]	1,602
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY [7/4/09] ≥	11,152
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS [4/9/2010] ≥	8,453
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	\$729,227,817,108
COST OF AFGHAN WAR TO DATE	\$278,707,759,983

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. ** Includes 280 additional contractor casualties reported in international press but not in US official figures

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

TRY OUR READING LIST ~ YOU WILL ENJOY IT

We have added a great new book to our reading list. *War*, by Sebastian Junger. Junger is the best-selling author of *The Perfect Storm*. Junger spent over a year with an Army company in Afghanistan. A terrific and realistic account.

WHAT DID YOU SAY WE WERE FIGHTING FOR??

AFFLUENT AFGHANS MAKE THEIR HOMES IN OPULENT 'POPPY PALACES'

Karin Brulliard - June 6, 2010; A01

KABUL -- For rent on Street 6 in the neighborhood of Sherpur: a four-story, 11-bedroom dwelling of pink granite and lime marble, complete with massage showers, a rooftop fountain and, in the basement, an Asian-themed nightclub. Price: \$12,000 a month. It's a relative bargain in this district favored by former warlords and bureaucrats -- Kabul's version of Beverly Hills. There's a war on, but carnival-colored mansions are mushrooming alongside cratered streets and sewage streams. Vast outdoor chandeliers, heated indoor pools and acres of mirrored, skyscraper glass windows abound.

The grandiose houses, derided here as narco-itecture, have become the most obvious symbols of Afghanistan's corruption, which ranks among the world's worst and is fueled both by an enormous influx of U.S. dollars and by the opium trade. They have paralleled a building boom sweeping this and other Afghan cities, fed by the donor money that has helped distort an economy of haves and have-nots.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/05/AR2010060502872_pf.html>

THOUGHT THIS ONLY HAPPENED IN OUR "OLD ARMY"

COLONEL'S WIFE ACCUSED OF HARASSING SOLDIERS

Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer - June 11, 2010

The commander of Fort Bragg has barred the wife of an 82nd Airborne Division colonel from nearly all interaction with her husband's brigade and the unit's families after an investigation found her influence "detrimental to the morale and well-being of both." Sworn statements from the investigation, ordered in January by Lt. Gen. Frank Helmick, accuse Col. Brian Drinkwine's wife, Leslie Drinkwine, of using her husband's position as leverage to repeatedly harass and threaten Soldiers and their families. The statements say the harassment and threats began almost as soon as Col. Drinkwine took command of the 4th Brigade Combat Team in 2008.

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/colonels-wife-accused-of-harassing-soldiers.html>

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

THEY MUST HAVE PROCESSED THIS ONE THROUGH THE VA

PURPLE HEART AWARDED TO FAMILY OF WWI VETERAN

Gus Gnorski - FOX6 Reporter - June 3, 2010

Purple heart awarded after 90 years after war-time injury

WITI-TV, WHITEFISH BAY - The purple heart medal is awarded to the family of veteran Marshall Bautz who served the 32nd division in France during World War I. The injury occurred over 90 years ago, but that has not stopped the Bautz family from tracking down evidence about the wound. It took two decades to unleash a hand-written record from the Milwaukee County courthouse. <More at: www.fox6now.com/news/witi-100603-purple-heart.0.6765045.story>

10 THINGS WE MUST REMEMBER ON MEMORIAL DAY

AND EVERY OTHER DAY

Nora Eisenberg - AlterNet - May 29, 2010 - <http://www.alternet.org/story/147042/>

DEADLINE TO OPT-IN TO PTSD LAWSUIT FAST APPROACHING

Iraq and Afghanistan veterans diagnosed with PTSD resulting in a discharge from active duty between 2002 and 2008 have until July 24, 2010 to file their paperwork and opt-in to the class action lawsuit filed by the National Veterans Legal Services Program. Qualifying veterans stand to receive additional benefits but time is running out for thousands of veterans who qualify for help through the lawsuit, and some could miss out on this opportunity to get their benefits improved and upgraded. More information about the lawsuit is available at www.ptsdlawsuit.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 <mailto:scook@vuft.org>

If you need to call us, our number is 1.805.530.6417.

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