

SOUND OFF!



VOL. II, NO 16 THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.
"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"

10 APRIL 2007

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

USERRA ~ THE "SOMETIMES" LAW

The third greatest sacrifice in the current "Global War on Terror", after the sacrifice of life or limb, is the sacrifice of those Reservists and Guard members who put their jobs and their livelihood in jeopardy when they respond to the call.

In 1994 Congress passed, and President Clinton signed, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). The law's stated purpose is:

- "(1) to encourage noncareer service in the uniformed services by eliminating or minimizing the disadvantages to civilian careers and employment which can result from such service;
- (2) to minimize the disruption to the lives of persons performing service in the uniformed services as well as to their employers, their fellow employees, and their communities, by providing for the prompt reemployment of such persons upon their completion of such service; and
- (3) to prohibit discrimination against persons because of their service in the uniformed services."

USERRA prohibits an employer from denying any benefit of employment on the basis of an individual's membership, application for membership, performance of service, application for service, or obligation for service in the uniformed services. USERRA also protects the right of veterans, reservists, National Guard members, and certain other members of the uniformed services to reclaim their civilian employment after being absent due to military service or training.

The American Bar Association's [website](#) describes the essential conditions of the act:

- A. Employee must have held a civilian job.
- B. Employee must have given prior notice of military service to civilian employer.
- C. Employee's period of military service cannot exceed five years [there are exceptions].
- D. Employee's service must have been under "honorable conditions" - that is, no punitive discharge, no OTH (Other than Honorable) discharge, and no DFR (Dropped from Rolls).
- E. Employee must report back or apply for reemployment in a timely manner.

If the employee meets the five reemployment prerequisites, the employee is entitled to seven basic entitlements:

1. prompt reinstatement; If the employee was gone 30 (or fewer) days, the employee must be reinstated immediately; if gone 31 (or more) days, the reinstatement should take place within a matter of days.
2. status; may object to the proffered reemployment position if it does not have the same status as previous employment
3. accrued seniority; returns to the "escalator" as if he or she had never left the employer's service
4. health insurance coverage; Immediately upon return to the civilian job, the employee (and his/her family) must be reinstated in the employer's health plan. The employer may not impose any waiting period or preexisting condition exclusions, except for service-connected injuries as determined by the Department of Veterans Affairs.
5. training, retraining, or other accommodations; employer must take "reasonable efforts" to requalify the employee for his/her job.
6. special protection from discharge (except for cause).
7. other non-seniority benefits; ESOP, low cost life insurance, Christmas bonus, holiday pay, etc.

These requirements apply to all employers both public (federal, state, & local) and private. Unlike many other federal laws, there is no "small company" exception.

USERRA is not a replacement for the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act (SSCRA) of 1940, or its successor the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) of 2003. While those statutes protect the servicemember from a variety of financial ills when on active duty, they do not deal with employment. USERRA addresses the specific problem of employment and reemployment of those who serve in the reserve forces and who are called up in a national emergency.

Sadly, the evidence is mounting that USERRA is honored more in the breach than in the practice.

The active federal offices in implementing USERRA are the [Department of Labor's Veteran's Employment and Training Service \(VETS\)](#), and the industry/government office [Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve \(ESGR\)](#), a volunteer group of employer representatives and legal "ombudsmen".

The office of final appeal is the Department of Justice, the website for which states that, "A servicemember who seeks the Department of Justice's assistance must first file a complaint with the Department of Labor (DOL). DOL will investigate the complaint, determine whether it has merit and attempt to voluntarily resolve meritorious complaints. If DOL cannot resolve a USERRA complaint, the person filing the complaint has the right to have DOL forward his or her complaint to the Department of Justice for review. The DOJ is responsible for enforcing the provisions of the USERRA against state and local government employers and private employers. If the Department of Justice takes your case, it will serve as your attorney if you work for a private employer or a local government. If you work for a state government, the Department of Justice may bring a lawsuit in the name of the United States.

Two paragraphs later it states, "In order to have your USERRA case reviewed by the Attorney General, you must first file a complaint with the Department of Labor. DOL will investigate the complaint and may attempt to voluntarily resolve the complaint. If DOL cannot resolve the complaint, upon the complainant's request, DOL will forward to the complaint to the Department of Justice. The Department of Justice then reviews the case to determine whether representation is appropriate. (Not stated there is that if you hire counsel to assist you, the DOJ won't touch your case.)

If you can get the DOJ to take your case they give it to the Office of Special Counsel, one of the smallest bureaus in the DOJ, and they have 30 months to resolve the issue.

According to Maximillian Potter in his article titled "Nobody's Hero" in a [recent issue](#) of *5280 – Denver's Mile High Magazine*, "... up to 14% of reservists returning from active duty have had trouble reclaiming their jobs. Among all of the yellow ribbons and patriotic lip service, they've been demoted or even handed a pink slip and told they've been downsized, restructured, or whatever-ed out of their livelihood." The entire article is well worth reading as it shows how the ESGR ignores veterans even more than the DOL and the DOJ.

Imagine that you are corporal "X", or airman "Y" and you have just returned from a tour in Iraq. You notified your employer that you were in the Guard or Reserve, you notified him of your call-up, and you reported for duty which was scheduled for 7 months but eventually became 18 months. Now you want your job back, your accrued vacation, your benefits, and any promotion or pay raise you might have received had you been there. After all, that's what the law says, doesn't it? You followed the law, why can't he or she?

Employers have many ways to game the system. They might claim that they have reorganized and your job no longer exists. They might give you a job with comparable pay but without the status or the promotion opportunities of your previous job. They might just ignore you. They can just send a fax to DOL and tell them that restoring your job would hurt the company and then turn their back on you.

You need a paycheck this Friday so that your family can have food and shelter, and so that your car isn't repossessed. If the employer says no, your request for remedy could take up to three years or more to wend its way through the DOL/DOJ maze without any guarantee that the end result will be in your favor. Meanwhile, welcome to MacDonalds which has stated its "Support the Troops" goal of its "Marines for Life" program, that it "aims to match the salaries Marines had in the service to their new careers in entry-level middle management at the corporation". So the procedure is – take a job – deploy at half the salary you were making – come home to no job – get a new job with MacDonalds at the half-pay level. Wow! What a career opportunity!

Going to the ESGR for help is fraught with its own hazards. As with most employer/employee offices it is the employer who comes first in the equation. While some of the 600-800 *pro bono* ombudsmen have done a very good job, horror stories abound. Potter describes ESGR as, "... a bureaucratic mess, mired in incompetence, undermined by conflict of interest, and accountable to no one." 72% of veterans with job questions don't even bother contacting ESGR, according to DOD.

Potter's article concentrates on the [Colorado State Committee](#) of ESGR where the chair will soon be replaced by one of the ombudsmen – a corporate labor lawyer who gives seminars to business on how to beat USERRA. The article is well worth reading as it shows how the ESGR ignores veterans even more than the DOL and the DOJ. The problem is nation-wide.

Secrecy seems to be the watchword in veterans' affairs. ESGR is apparently not subject to FOIA, and recently ordered its ombudsmen to destroy all of their case-related correspondence. DOL and DOJ files are closed to review "to protect personal privacy." One suspects it is probably the "personal privacy" of the bureaucrats that is at stake.

USERRA is also supposed to protect the servicemember from prejudice in hiring. We have heard many stories of fully qualified veterans who have been asked in employment interviews if they belonged to the Guard or the Reserves, and then have watched the change in attitude when they respond affirmatively. They consistently end up being the "second-best qualified" for the position. Admittedly these are anecdotal reports, but the consistency in so many instances across the country lends credence to the accounts.

Although there has been a reported recent drop in joblessness among veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, it remains at more than double the rate for the same civilian age group. The Bureau of Labor Statistics admits that the sample group is too small for accurate analysis thus they don't really stand behind the reported drop. The number has stood at nearly 16% for the last two years.

None of this deals with those who lose personal businesses: there is currently no relief for them. None of this deals with recognizing the more subtle sacrifice attendant on taking oneself out of the promotion stream in a company. None of this deals with the cascading losses that occur when unemployment or underemployment rule one's financial life for years to come. None of this deals with the toll on the families of veterans and on marriages.

So what do we do?

We could start by raising holy hell with Congress. Many of us lament Congress' giving up on its oversight role, but we usually concentrate on the big items like energy, intelligence, the environment. Tell your Congresspersons that you want action! Tell them that you are ashamed of the way we are treating our veterans and that you will hold them accountable for timely solutions.

We can tell our fellow members of traditional veterans' organizations that there are issues more important than flag burning, and causes more important than Memorial Day parades. Tell the chartered organizations that we will be more impressed if they go to Congress and demand action, than if they just get their names in the Congressional Record as having had a nice day with some committee. Tell them that we veterans' supporters are organized and we vote!

We can reach out in our own communities to educate employers and to defend our brothers and sisters who are returning to the community.

"As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

VETERANS MUST ACT QUICKLY TO SUBMIT CONCERNS TO VA PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE

March 18, 2007

Forty-five days. That's all the time veterans have to share their concerns with the [Interagency Task Force on Returning Global War on Terror](#). Created in the wake of the recent Walter Reed scandal, President Bush directed VA Secretary Jim Nicholson to seek out gaps in health care services returning veterans receive. Ideas and recommendations may be submitted via email at TFHeroes@va.gov

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

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

CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE!

PLEASE CHECK THE WEBSITE AT WWW.VUFT.ORG.

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

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

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

MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT

EXCERPT: "I am 70 years old and I spent the first half of my life fighting for this government to keep it free. I am now spending the last half of my life fighting our government for the benefits they promised me for my service. Our leadership in Washington keeps changing the rules of fairness when dealing with our fighting forces. If we happen to have a war, they can't do enough for us and will offer us the family jewels if we will just go out and face death and keep them free. On the other hand, if our country is not being threatened they have very little need for us. We are forgotten. That's the way it has always been in America and will continue to be that way until we make our Washington leadership understand the needs of the broken soldiers once we have served their purpose. ~ From: C. E.

ANOTHER KIND OF HERO

Ken Rhodes is cycling his way across the USA to call attention and raise money for veterans and for Muscular Dystrophy. He started at Santa Monica Pier April 4th. Track him on the Journey To The Wall at www.journeytothewall.com.

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

SENATE VOTES TO BOOST RETIREE PAY, GI BILL

Rick Maze - Staff writer – Navy Times - Mar 27, 2007

The Senate agreed Friday to eliminate offsets in military retired and survivor payments, to spend more money on services for low-vision and blinded veterans, and to increase GI Bill education benefits in a series of votes to set budget priorities.

Senators also voted to make low-interest loans available to veterans and to extend until 2012 the option for mobilized National Guard and reserve members to use pre-tax retirement savings without penalty if they need the money for living expenses.

None of the votes is binding. They came as the Senate amended and passed its version of the 2008 concurrent budget resolution, which sets spending and revenue goals to be followed as Congress approves specific agency budgets and tax-related legislation. For lawmakers pushing for benefits increases, such as the GI Bill improvements proposed by Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va., it helps if the

budget resolution sets aside money for their plan, but a mention in the budget resolution does not guarantee passage.
<More at: www.navytimes.com/news/2007/03/military_retirement_paybenefits_070326w/>

H.R. 1538: WOUNDED WARRIOR ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2007

To amend title 10, United States Code, to improve the management of medical care, personnel actions, and quality of life issues for members of the Armed Forces who are receiving medical care in an outpatient status, and for other purposes. This bill has been passed in the House. The bill now goes on to be voted on in the Senate. Sponsor: Rep. Ike Skelton [D-MO] ~ cosponsors (28). [View Full Text of Bill](#) ~ [View CBO Cost Report](#)

RETREAT – NEWS

REMEMBER THE INDUSTRIAL “SURGE” THAT HELPED WIN WORLD WAR II? GENERAL SAYS U.S. ARMY HAS LOST 130 HELICOPTERS IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

The Associated Press – March 23, 2007

WASHINGTON: The U.S. Army has lost 130 helicopters in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, about a third to shoot-downs, its aviation director said Friday. He complained that industry is not replacing them fast enough.

"While the military may be on a war footing, our nation's industry is not on a war footing," said Brig. Gen. Stephen Mundt.

He said it takes 24 months to get replacement aircraft built and delivered and that replacements for the early losses are just now arriving.

"The U.S. is not at war, the military is at war," he told a group of Defense Department reporters, also complaining about the timing of how money flows from the government to pay for the purchases. "Industry, you have got to get to the point of where you're producing ... faster." <More at: www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/03/23/america/NA-GEN-US-Army-Helicopters.php>

NATIONAL GUARD ILL-EQUIPPED AT HOME, COMMANDER SAYS

Adam Schreck - Times Staff Writer - March 28, 2007

WASHINGTON — The head of the National Guard warned Tuesday that units nationwide have less than half the equipment they need to deal with natural disasters, terrorist attacks and other threats at home.

Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum told members of the House armed services subcommittee on readiness that guardsmen being deployed to Iraq and other foreign hot spots are adequately equipped but that Army National Guard units stateside have, on average, just 40% of their required equipment on hand.

... Blum said it would cost taxpayers an additional \$40 billion to bring Guard forces up to "an acceptable level of operational readiness." <More at: www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-guard28mar28,1,7908287.story>

THE FOLLOWING STORIES MAKE ONE WONDER WHAT “TIME” REALLY MEANS, AS IN “TROOP SURGE TIMELINE”

U.S. TO KEEP TROOP LEVELS THROUGH FALL

Jim Krane, Associated Press Writer - Mar 28, 2007

U.S. commanders in Iraq won't know until at least autumn when they can begin to bring troop levels back down, the chief spokesman told the Associated Press on Wednesday.

The overall U.S. commander, Gen. David Petraeus, will want to sustain the momentum that has been gained in the Baghdad security offensive by keeping five added Army combat brigades in place, Maj. Gen. William C. Caldwell said.

"I think it'll be fall before General Petraeus can make a decision on whether he wants to bring down his force level," Caldwell said in an interview in Dubai.

Only two of the five Army brigades are fully active in Baghdad, but a third, from the 82nd Airborne Division, is moving in now. Caldwell said all five won't be in place until June. A pair of additional Marine battalions are reinforcing operations in western Anbar province. <More at: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20070328/ap_on_re_mi_ea/iraq_caldwell_interview>

TROOP SURGE TIMELINE EXTENDED

JEROME BERNARD03 April 2007

Some 30,000 additional US troops sent as reinforcements to Iraq will remain in the war-torn country until at least the end of August, a US Defense Department spokesman said Monday.

The Pentagon has decided to deploy 7,000 troops to replace units on their way out of Iraq, a move that will allow the reinforcements to remain in Iraq until that time, spokesman Bryan Whitman said.

"I am announcing right now additional major units that are scheduled to deploy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom," Whitman said, specifying that that corresponded to 7,000 troops.

"The level of effort that the United States military is maintaining in Iraq is a build-up to 20 combat brigades.

"These combat brigades with these additional troop rotations ... will permit the surge to continue at that level through ... August 2007." <More at: www.capitolhillblue.com/cm/content/view/981/171/>

STRETCHED ARMY SPEEDS TROOPS BACK TO IRAQ

Associated Press | April 03, 2007

WASHINGTON - For just the second time since the war began, the Army is sending large units back to Iraq without giving them at least one year of rest at home between deployments, officials said Monday. The move signaled just how stretched the U.S. fighting force has become.

A combat brigade from New York and a Texas headquarters unit will return to Iraq this summer in order to maintain through August the military build-up President Bush announced earlier this year.

<More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,130866,00.html>

DOD ANNOUNCES FORCE ADJUSTMENTS

IMMEDIATE RELEASE - No. 364-07 - April 02, 2007

The Department of Defense announced today additional major units scheduled to deploy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The announcement involves one corps headquarters, two division headquarters and one brigade combat team consisting of approximately 7,000 personnel. Specific decisions made by the secretary of defense include:

- XVIII Airborne Corps Headquarters, Fort Bragg, N.C.
- 1st Armored Division Headquarters, Wiesbaden, Germany
- 4th Infantry Division Headquarters, Fort Hood, Texas
- 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, Fort Drum, N.Y.

Additionally, the Department announced that the 25th Infantry Division headquarters will have its tour extended by approximately 45 days.

GUARD BRIGADES TO RECEIVE ALERT FOR IRAQ DEPLOYMENT

Jim Garamone - American Forces Press Service - April 6, 2007

About 13,000 National Guardsmen will be alerted for possible deployment to Iraq in fiscal 2008, a senior defense official said on background today.

Four National Guard brigade combat teams are likely to be alerted in the near future, the official said. If the decision is made to mobilize and deploy them, they would not leave until December 2007 at the earliest.

National Guard officials said that alerting a unit does not necessarily mean mobilization and deployment. "We want to give our soldiers all the advance notice we can so they can prepare their families, their friends and their employers for their possible deployment," the official said. <More at: www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=32718>

MARINES TO ALERT 1,800 INDIVIDUAL READY RESERVISTS FOR REACTIVATION

John J. Kruzel - American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 26, 2007 – Over the next week, 1,800 Individual Ready Reserve Marines will receive notice from the Marine Corps that they are needed in Iraq, an official announced today.

Marine Lt. Col. Jeff Riehl, Marine Corps Manpower and Reserve Affairs spokesman, told reporters at the Pentagon today that Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates approved the notification March 23, and the letters are being mailed today.

<More at: www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=32588>

NATIONAL GUARD TROOPS HEADED BACK TO IRAQ

Lolita C. Baldor 06 April 2007

Several National Guard brigades are expected to be notified soon that they could be sent to Iraq around the first of next year, according to a senior Defense Department official. If their assignment to Iraq is ultimately approved by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, it would be the first time full Guard combat brigades were sent back to Iraq for a second tour. <More at:

www.capitolhillblue.com/cm/content/view/1161/171/>

AS FOR THOSE OTHER PESKY PEOPLE LIVING OVER THERE IRAQI REFUGEE SITUATION NEARING "HUMANITARIAN CRISIS"

John E. Carey - March 28, 2007

U.N. Predicting Humanitarian Crisis of Iraqi refugees; largest Middle East migration since 1948....

Because during the first years of the war in Iraq, the U.S. concentrated on returning Iraqi refugees home rather than providing them food, assistance and relocation, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees now says the refugee situation in Iraq and surrounding nations is approaching a "humanitarian crisis."

Emergency camps to host Iraqis fleeing their country could be built if the numbers of Iraqi refugees increase beyond the point where neighboring nations can cope, the U.N. refugee agency said Monday. Already about two million Iraqis are living under difficult conditions in Syria, Jordan and other countries in the region, and as many as two million may be displaced from their homes inside Iraq, said Radhouane Nouicer the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees' director for the Middle East and North Africa said. <More at: www.opednews.com/articles/opedne_john_car_070327_iraqi_refugee_situat.htm>

VETERANS DIRECTOR IN ARIZONA STEPS DOWN AFTER VIOLATIONS

Paul Giblin and Randal C. Archibold - New York Times - March 28, 2007

PHOENIX, March 27 - The director of the Arizona Department of Veterans Services resigned Tuesday, days after the public disclosure of health and safety violations at a nursing home for veterans.

The violations included patients left in soiled undergarments and covered in bodily fluids leaking from medical devices.

... Gov. Janet Napolitano relieved the director of the department, Patrick Chorprenning, of his duties associated with the home on Monday, and he resigned on Tuesday, saying that "in light of what has taken place in the press, I feel it is in your best interest that I resign." <More at: http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/a/randal_c_archibold/index.html>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
4/12	1100 - 1500	Renaissance Dallas Richardson Hotel 900 East Lookout Dr. Richardson, TX	Career Fair		972-367-2000
4/12 - 15		N.G. Armory Jasper, Indiana	The Wall that Heals Replica VN Wall	VVMF Dubois County Committee	
4/16	1100 - 1500	Crowne Plaza Austin 6121 N IH 35 Austin - Fort Hood, TX	Career Fair		512-323-5466
4/19 - 22		Jackson County Courthouse Ripley, West Virginia	The Wall that Heals Replica VN Wall	City of Ripley	
4/21		St. Louis MO	Resource Fair	Kathryn Sturgeon	314-615-7623
4/24	1100 - 1500	Cobb Galleria Centre Two Galleria Parkway Atlanta, GA	Career Fair		770.955.8000
4/27		St. Cloud, MN	Resource Fair	Lori Helget	320-656-6101
5/2		Marriott San Diego 333 West Harbor Drive San Diego, CA	Career Fair		619-234-1500
5/5-6		Memphis, TN	Resource Fair	Ovul Ince	901-523-8990

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

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

THEY'RE ALL PROBABLY SLACKERS ANYWAY, SO LET'S MAKE IT TOUGHER FOR THEM TO GET BENEFITS

VA TIGHTENS STANDARDS FOR INDIVIDUAL UNEMPLOYABILITY CLAIMS –

Jim Strickland and Larry Scott.

"...This was to be the first shot in a new round of VA cuts, but the furor of the past few weeks has put the agency on the defensive."

In May of 2006, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a harsh report criticizing the way that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was handling the award of the benefits usually known as 100% Individual Unemployability (IU).

The GAO testified that VA should, "Improve its management of IU benefits by strengthening criteria, guidance and procedures". In other words, the IU benefit costs too much and VA must tighten it up. You can read that entire GAO report by clicking here www.gao.gov/new.items/d06309.pdf <Much more at: www.vawatchdog.org/07/nf07/nfMAR07/nf032607-1.htm>

NEW, YOUNG WOUNDED VETS SAY VA IS UNPREPARED

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Mar 28, 2007

Two wounded combat veterans and the mother of a third told a Senate committee Tuesday that the Department of Veterans Affairs seems ill-equipped to care for both older veterans and the new wave of younger vets coming out of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Army National Guard Maj. Tammy Duckworth, who lost both legs in Iraq when her helicopter was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade, told the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee that the VA does a lot of things well, like care for spinal cord injuries and rehabilitation for the blind, but its prosthetics programs are not state-of-the-art and seem more geared toward older veterans concerned about a little walking and driving — not young, mobile veterans ready to climb mountains or run marathons.

Now the head of the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs, Duckworth said the VA is "simply not ready" for these younger veterans and it is "too late" in the wars for the agency to catch up because the gaps in the knowledge of VA workers is too wide. She proposed that all new amputees be treated either at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington or in the private sector. <More at: www.navytimes.com/news/2007/03/military_wounded_vets_070327w/>

HOW SPECIALIST TOWN LOST HIS BENEFITS

Joshua Kors - The Nation magazine - April 9, 2007 issue

Jon Town has spent the last few years fighting two battles, one against his body, the other against the US Army. Both began in October 2004 in Ramadi, Iraq. He was standing in the doorway of his battalion's headquarters when a 107-millimeter rocket struck two feet above his head. The impact punched a piano-sized hole in the concrete facade, sparked a huge fireball and tossed the 25-year-old Army specialist to the floor, where he lay blacked out among the rubble.

"The next thing I remember is waking up on the ground." Men from his unit had gathered around his body and were screaming his name. "They started shaking me. But I was numb all over," he says. "And it's weird because... because for a few minutes you feel like you're not really there. I could see them, but I couldn't hear them. I couldn't hear anything. I started shaking because I thought I was dead."

Eventually the rocket shrapnel was removed from Town's neck and his ears stopped leaking blood. But his hearing never really recovered, and in many ways, neither has his life. A soldier honored twelve times during his seven years in uniform, Town has spent the last three struggling with deafness, memory failure and depression. By September 2006 he and the Army agreed he was no longer combat-ready.

But instead of sending Town to a medical board and discharging him because of his injuries, doctors at Fort Carson, Colorado, did something strange: They claimed Town's wounds were actually caused by a "personality disorder." Town was then booted from the Army and told that under a personality disorder discharge, he would never receive disability or medical benefits.

<More at: www.thenation.com/doc/20070409/kors>

DISUSE OF SYSTEM IS CITED IN GAPS IN SOLDIERS' CARE

By Ian Urbina and Ron Nixon - NY Times - March 30, 2007

WASHINGTON, March 29 — Lapses in using a digital medical record system for tracking wounded soldiers have led to medical mistakes and delays in care, and have kept thousands of injured troops from getting benefits, according to former defense and military medical officials. The Defense Department's inability to get all hospitals to use the system has routinely forced thousands of wounded soldiers to endure long waits for treatment, the officials said, and exposed others to needless testing.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2007/03/30/washington/30medical.html>

VA STUDY FINDS TIME WAITING FOR HEALTH CARE LINKED TO MORTALITY

A new study in the latest issue of Health Services Research is the first to measure a relationship between waiting for healthcare and mortality rates - especially in the elderly.

Waiting times throughout the US healthcare system have been increasing. The study found that while waiting less than thirty-one days does not have a detectable effect on mortality, waiting beyond that increases the mortality risk. It also shows that keeping waiting times for elderly patients under thirty-one days improves health outcomes.

"Patients who used medical facilities with average waits of thirty-one days or more were 20% more likely to die in a six month follow-up period compared to those using facilities with shorter waits," says author Julia Prentice.

<More at: www.medicalnewstoday.com/medicalnews.php?newsid=66686>

ARMY FIELDS NEW BODY ARMOR DESIGN

Military.com | Christian Lowe | April 03, 2007

The Army is set to field a new body armor vest that the service says is lighter and offers more protection from bullets and shrapnel than the current design.

The new "Improved Outer Tactical Vest" is the first major redesign of Army body armor since the service began fielding the "Interceptor" Outer Tactical Vest in the late 1990s. The new armor incorporates many potentially life-saving features offered on more modern vests, including a quick release system, integrated side ballistic plate carriers and access points for medics.

The change comes after years of controversy over a shortage of body armor for troops in Iraq and revelations that both the Army and Marine Corps hastily fielded vests from production lots that had not passed ballistic quality assurance tests.

<More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,130937,00.html>

I GUESS THE OLD GARAND GAS PISTON WAS A PRETTY GOOD IDEA AFTER ALL ARMY WON'T FIELD RIFLE DEEMED SUPERIOR TO M4

Military.com | Christian Lowe | April 06, 2007

It's a debate that's gone on for years - and now it's finally coming to a head.

The compact [M4 carbine](#) - a shortened version of the [M16](#) - that is now standard issue for most Army troops, some Marines and other specialized units is facing increased criticism because of its tendency to malfunction with even the minutest exposure to the elements. Some ground communities, including special operations forces, have begun to sideline the M4 in favor of newer, gas-piston operated variants such as the Heckler & Koch-manufactured 416 and the FNH-built Special Operations Forces Combat Assault Rifle, or SCAR <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,131317,00.html>

MOST AMERICANS UNTOUCHED BY WAR

Rick Montgomery - *McClatchy Newspapers* - March 25, 2007

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Since the start of the Iraq war four years ago, Americans have bought more than 110 million cellphones and spent \$35 billion on HDTV sets.

They have moved into 5 million new homes, bought about 60 million new cars and trucks and watched the Dow Jones industrial average climb from 8,200 to 12,000 and beyond.

Despite bloodshed from a conflict lasting longer than U.S. participation in World War II, life for most Americans has clicked along without personal loss or even higher federal taxes to cover the fighting in Iraq.

... Two months after the March 2003 invasion, 63 percent of Americans reported they were "closely following" events there. That figure fell to 47 percent in 2004 and 37 percent last summer. In 2006, almost twice as many Americans were closely following gasoline prices than were glued to news from Iraq, Pew's "News Interest Index" showed.

Further polling last year suggested "almost three-quarters of Americans feel either less emotionally involved in the war or no more emotionally involved than they've felt in the past," Pew managing editor Carroll Doherty said.
 <More at: http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/nationworld/2003635013_iraqhome25.html>

PENTAGON CHANGES PROTOCOL FOR RETURNING THE WAR DEAD

Bill Poovey - Associated Press Writer – April 7, 2007

In an about-face by the U.S. government four years into the war in Iraq, America's fallen troops are being brought back to their families aboard charter jets instead of ordinary commercial flights, and the caskets are being met by honor guards in white gloves instead of baggage handlers with forklifts.

That change - which took effect quietly in January and applies to members of the U.S. military killed in Afghanistan, too - came after a campaign waged by a father who was aghast to learn that his son's body was going to be unloaded like so much luggage.

John Holley said an airline executive told him that was the "most expeditious" way to get the body home.

<More at: www.starnewsonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070407/NEWS/704070328/0/news01>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

WHEN I WAS A YOUNG TROOP THERE WERE WWI VETS STILL ON ACTIVE DUTY! CHARLOTTE L. WINTERS, 109; U.S.' LAST FEMALE VETERAN OF WWI

Frederick N. Rasmussen - Baltimore Sun - March 30, 2007

Charlotte L. Winters, the nation's oldest female military veteran, died in her sleep Tuesday at a care facility in Boonsboro, Md. She was 109. <More at: www.latimes.com/news/obituaries/la-me-winters30mar30,0,1056845.story>

LAST WWI NAVY VET DIES

Associated Press | April 02, 2007

CHARLOTTE HALL, Maryland - Lloyd Brown, the last known U.S. Navy veteran to fight in World War I, has died. He was 105.

<More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,130817,00.html>

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF APRIL 4, 2007

This week, the Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard announced an increase, while the Army and Marine Corps had a decrease. The net collective result is 62 more reservists mobilized than last week.

At any given time, services may mobilize some units and individuals while demobilizing others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. Total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 62,785; Navy Reserve, 6,319; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 5,009; Marine Corps Reserve, 5,542; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 303. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel, who have been mobilized, to 79,958, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel, who are currently mobilized, can be found at www.defenselink.mil/news/Apr2007/d20070404ngr.pdf.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE MONDAY 09 APRIL 2007

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	3,287
WOUNDED US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 2/3]	24,314
OTHER CASUALTIES [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 2/3]	≥26,188
KILLED UK	140
KILLED OTHER COALITION	124
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	768
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE 3/31]	673
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 46,422
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 67,015 [LANCET-720,461]
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400,000+[LANCET- 1,296,830]

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US	377
*OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 12/2]	6,334
KILLED COALITION	177
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	669
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	32,034

NOTE: SOME NUMBERS DO NOT CHANGE BETWEEN ISSUES BECAUSE UPDATED FIGURES ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME

* This entry has been changed to "Non-mortal casualties" which includes wounded, non-hostile casualties, and diseased where medical air transport was required. To see detailed demographic data on the casualties go to <http://siadapp.dior.whs.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/castop.htm>

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

AFTERTHOUGHTS

OUR NATIONAL DEBT

Bob Herbert - Op-Ed Columnist - April 2, 2007

WASHINGTON The actor Gary Sinise, who was talented enough to play both Harry Truman and George Wallace convincingly, has for many years been the prototype of the person who believes that supporting American troops requires more than simply waving the flag or plastering a bumper sticker on your S.U.V.

Quiet and unassuming in an era when entertainers seem more desperate than ever to draw any kind of attention to themselves (think of Tom Cruise using Oprah's sofa as a trampoline), Mr. Sinise has been quietly entertaining the troops, supporting veterans organizations, recruiting veterans for theatrical projects and doing whatever else he could think of over the past quarter century to help the men and women who have served in the armed forces.

(Believe it or not, the low-keyed Mr. Sinise can rock. He plays bass in the Lt. Dan Band, a group named after a movie character, Lt. Dan Taylor, a disabled Vietnam veteran played by Mr. Sinise in "Forrest Gump.")

Mr. Sinise's latest campaign is to bring severely wounded American veterans out of the shadows and into the forefront of the nation's consciousness to help ensure that they get the care and the level of honor and respect that they deserve. He is the national spokesman for a project called the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, which will be the nation's first public tribute to the legions of men and women who are living with, and often still suffering from, wounds that they sustained while fighting in the nation's wars.

It's interesting that an actor is one of the leaders of a campaign that will evoke the terrible hardships and real sacrifices of war as opposed to the glorified, sanitized rough and tumble that so often passes for warfare in Hollywood and on TV.

... Whether a particular war is popular or not, wise or not, should have no bearing on how the country treats those who volunteer to serve in the armed forces, are ordered into combat and then come home wounded.

The memorial will be a reminder of their continuing sacrifice, and a reminder as well of how unconscionable it is when politicians and bureaucrats cut corners on the care we give to veterans.

... "We honor our fallen, those who have given their lives," said Mr. Sinise. "But what about the ones who have sacrificed an arm or a leg, or their entire body to burns? Or the ones who can't see anymore? Or can't hear anymore? They go through their lives constantly reminded of what they have sacrificed for their country. We need to let them know that the nation is grateful for their sacrifice."

<More at: <http://select.nytimes.com/2007/04/02/opinion/02herbert.html?8ty=&emc=ty&pagewanted=print>

NEW ARMY UNIFORM DOESN'T MEASURE UP

In an article on Military.com by Eric Coulsen complaining about the quality of the new Army field uniform, he notes that the Army has already approved using reverse leather boots.

He says, "...adoption of the rough-out boot is sensible from the maintenance and appearance standpoint. Soldiers coming out of the field are not going to be immediately gigged for having unshined boots, and while an old Army tradition may have gone by the wayside, no one really misses shining boots - particularly in the field."

I can only ask, did any of you get issued brown, reverse-leather, tanker's boots back during the Korean War? I did, and despite the fact that they had a texture like the bottom of a gravel pit, we were expected to burn off the rough part with lighter fluid, and spit-polish the surface until it smoothed out and glistened.

Wonder what makes Coulter think that the modern Army won't demand the same, particularly when they get back in garrison? After all, idle hands are the devil's playground.

NOTICE

If at any time you cannot open a link in this newsletter to an article or web page that interests you, please let me know at scook@vuft; I keep a copy of most of the full articles, or can research an alternative route to the information. [Ed.]

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EDITOR'S NOTE: I have been asked what guides my selection of articles. In general, I try to stick with articles that deal exclusively with our target group: serving military, veterans, retirees, and their families. I also favor articles that deal with the effect of Legislative or Executive inaction or bad actions that adversely affect our target group. I try not to pick those articles that have already been beaten to death in the regular press, but rather try to bring the reader articles that he or she might not run across in another medium. While we are non-partisan, I do not believe articles critical of government actions to be partisan as long as they are accurate and fair. Criticism, like dissent, is fair. Finally, I screen hundreds of articles for inclusions and for every article I include, I throw five or six away – good articles, but not as important as the ones selected.

I always appreciate contributions, whether it is opinion in Letter-to-the-Editor form, or articles that the reader believes would be good for our readership. Since I get a chance to vent once in awhile in these newsletters, I will certainly consider Op-Ed copy for inclusion. I always welcome reader comment or complaint. [Sandy Cook](#), Editor

ADD-ON ~ SOME CARTOONS FOR YOUR AMUSEMENT!!!!

