

SOUND OFF!



VOL. III, NO 16

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

10 APRIL 2008

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

NOTES FROM THE FRONT

VUFT, INC. IN THE PRESS

Your organization has been getting some press lately. Some of it we cooperated with, and some came to us quite unexpectedly.

On Wednesday, 26 March an article appeared in the Santa Maria (CA) *Sun*, titled [Searching for Truth](#). The article by free-lance journalist John McReynolds, tells the story of who we are and what we are trying to do. It is available at

<http://www.santamariasun.com/index.php?p=showarticle&id=3556>. On 3 April the same article appeared in the San Luis Obispo (CA) *New Times* and is available at:

<http://www.newtimeslo.com/index.php?p=showarticle&id=3249>. A shorter version appeared the same day in the Santa Barbara (CA) *Independent* and is available at

<http://www.independent.com/news/2008/apr/03/veterans-united-truth-war/>. The cover story in the *Independent* on Saturday cited VUFT's action in getting legislation before the California Legislature and is titled [Carpinteria's "Hot Dog Man" Gets Big Boost](#); Billy Connell, the "Hot Dog Man" and a member of VUFT is shown wearing his VUFT lapel pin. The story is at

<http://www.independent.com/news/2008/apr/05/carpinterias-hot-dog-man-gets-big-boost/>.

The Navy Times carries a story on our lawsuit, although it fails to mention us:

http://www.navytimes.com/news/2008/04/military_veteransaffairs_lawsuit_040208w/

Unexpectedly we find our class action lawsuit against the Veterans Administration mentioned prominently in Joseph Stiglitz' and Linda Bilmes' new hot-selling book *The Three Trillion Dollar War*, on p.84. The book is available on line [here](#) and [here](#) and at all bookstores. So our fame is not just limited to California. In fact, as discussed below, before this is over our fame may be fairly widespread.

THE CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT

The lawsuit filed by Veterans for Commonsense and VUFT is going to trial 21 April 2008 in Federal District Court, Northern California District. There is a special website covering this case which archives all of the documentation, news stories, important links, and other pertinent documents at <http://www.veteransptsdclassaction.org/index.html>. The filing is at <http://www.veteransptsdclassaction.org/pdf/courtfiled/veteranscomplaint.pdf>

Here is a brief review of the charges as prepared by your editor in layman's terms; **it has not been vetted by the lawyers and is not intended to state any legal precepts in relation to the case – any errors and any conclusions are your editor's alone:**

Veterans for Common Sense et al. v. Nicholson et al., No. C 07 3758, U.S.D.C. (N.D. Cal. 2007), seeks to force the VA to follow the law and provide timely medical care and disability benefits for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder ("PTSD"). We at VUFT believe that this case is the first among many, and that it concentrates on the most pressing current problem – PTSD – but does not exclude all others as the current procedures apply to them. This is a performance suit not a suit for monetary damages.

The lawsuit focuses on the VA's failure to implement the law, particularly laws pertaining to mental health and PTSD. The suit claims that the VA has failed to implement the clearly stated will and intent of the US Congress, and that this situation has been going on since long before the current conflicts. Further the case claims that the constitutional rights of veterans have been denied and that the Department of Justice has not protected those rights.

The lawsuit challenges many VA policies, some of which are: the restrictions on veterans procedural rights, denial of discovery to support claims, denial of subpoena power for veterans against VA employees; the lack of expedited procedures particularly in the case of potential suicide; the absence of any class action procedure; the inability of the sole appeal venue – the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) – to grant relief; the lack of any judicial authority at the CAVC to enforce its decisions; the prohibition of attorney's fees until after a claim has been denied.

Specific defendants in the case are: DVA; Secretary of the DVA; Chairman of the Board of Veterans Appeals; Under Secretary of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA); DVA's Director of the Compensation and Pension Service; Undersecretary for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA); Veterans Service Center Manager for the Oakland Regional Office of the VBA; Chief Judge of the CAVC; and the Attorney General of the United States.

So far the DVA has lost on several important points. The first is their bald request to dismiss. The second is their claim that the court had no standing to review their case. The third is their claim that VUFT and VCS had no standing to sue. The fourth is that the DVA is not required to provide any care beyond what it is budget allows.

As the judge, Senior Judge Samuel Conti has said (paraphrase), "Whichever way this case comes out, I know that it is going to be appealed and will probably end up in the Supreme Court."

If you have not yet included your story, you can fill out the "Veteran Intake Information Form" at <http://www.veteransptsdclassaction.org/intakeform.html>

The trial will take place at the Federal Building 450 Golden Gate Ave.,

San Francisco, CA 94102 at 9 AM on 21 April. We encourage any

interested parties, particularly veterans and their families, and most especially VUFT members and supporters to help fill the courtroom on that day and every day that the trial continues. The world needs to see that veterans hang in there together, and that we support not just ourselves but the Constitution of the United States and the laws passed thereunder. [Ed.]

SPECIAL APPEAL

As our litigation and legislative actions expand rapidly, the expenses to VUFT are likewise mounting rapidly. We don't charge dues, as others do. We don't beat you over the head every month, as they mostly do, with mailings demanding that you do your patriotic duty and send them bucks.

What we will do is come to you if and when – and only when – the need is truly there. Well gang, the need is truly there.

We are sending witnesses to court hearings, to give testimony before legislatures (California now, and many other states to come). We provide a website and this newsletter – in hard copy form to those veterans among us who do not have the internet – and we cover the cost of printing and mailing those twice each month. We mail out memberships letters and cards each month and now have sent out nearly 1,000. We attend meetings where our testimony or other contribution can make a difference for veterans, whether it is in education, medical care, in favor of or opposed to legislation of interest, or even in the political arena where we defend veterans issues without taking a partisan stand.

We need your help now to meet these expenses. Please pitch in at <http://www.vuft.org/donate.html> where you can donate by PayPal or Credit Card. Any amount will help.

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

Try these two websites: Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program <http://www.vetsprobono.org/index.htm>. United States Court of appeals for Veterans Claims "Public List of Practitioners" are members of the court's bar <http://www.vetapp.gov/practitioners/>

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

Membership is open, free, and very worthwhile! Get your fellow veterans, and veterans' family members to join vuft! We are beginning to be heard, and we need you to help us get the message out. If each of us would bring in one new member every month, what an impact we could have!

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

THE FIGHT IS ON! The [law suit](#) that we have filed along with Veterans for Common Sense against the Veterans' Administration proceeds slowly. There is a link to legal [documents](#) on the lawsuit on our website.

See the review above in "FIRST CALL"

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

DOES YOUR PERSONAL CASE APPLY TO THIS LITIGATION? YOU CAN GET YOUR CASE EVALUATED AT
<http://www.veteransptsdclassaction.org/intakeform.html>

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

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

WE REALLY NEED YOUR HELP

VUFT is a no-fee organization. We must raise money to keep the effort going. Normal expenses have been borne out of the pockets of a very few board members, plus a few small donations over the two plus years of our existence. Although our legal defense in the current case is *pro bono*, we are incurring expenses in support of the case, to include travel expenses to attend the hearings and the trial. We also are incurring expenses in our effort to expand to all fifty states. Please consider [donating](#) whatever you can to VUFT ~

All donations are tax deductible to the donor.

MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS

If any veteran would like a FREE copy of the DVD Beyond Treason <http://www.beyondtreason.com> , Joyce Riley has set aside 10,000 copies to give away FREE of charge to veterans. If you would like to receive your free DVD, she is asking to verify that you are a veteran by sending anything such as a copy of discharge papers, VFW card, American Legion Card, VA Card, DD214 or copy of your Military ID.....whichever you prefer....be sure to black out any info you think is too sensitive to send such as social security number etc. She is only interested in making sure that veterans are getting the free copies..

BEYOND TREASON: UNMASKING SECRET MILITARY PROJECTS:

Chemical & Biological Exposures; Radioactive Poisoning; Mind Control Projects; Experimental Vaccines; Gulf War Illness; Depleted Uranium (DU)

Be sure to include your name and CURRENT address!!

Send to:
AGWVA
FREE DVD
P.O. Box 85
Versailles, MO 65084
Fax to: 1-573-378-5998
e-mail to: GMR@msn.com

Regards,

Gary Robinson - USAF Retired - Webmaster for <http://www.gulfwarvets.com>

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

AKAKA INTRODUCES BILL REQUIRING VA-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO REACH RURAL, MINORITY, AND UNDERSERVED VETERANS

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, introduced S. 2796 earlier this week, to establish partnerships between the Department of Veterans Affairs and community organizations to connect with underserved veterans. In selecting the community organizations that would partner with VA, priority would be given to those reaching out to rural veterans, minority veterans, and other underserved populations.

"While VA helps countless veterans every day, too many remain out of reach, particularly rural and minority veterans. My bill would help VA do more for these veterans who may feel the system is out of touch," said Akaka.

<More at: www.vawatchdog.org/08/scva08/scva040408-2.htm>

AKAKA INTRODUCES VETERANS COMPENSATION EQUITY BILL

April 7, 2008

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, introduced legislation to provide a minimum compensation level for veterans whose service-connected injuries require continuous medication or adaptive devices, such as hearing aids.

"Today, veterans who suffer a service-connected injury that requires continual medication or adaptive devices, like hearing aids, may not receive any disability compensation payments. It is important that all of these veterans be compensated in a fair and equitable manner. Veterans with similar disabilities should receive similar benefits," said Akaka.

The Veterans' Compensation Equity Act of 2008 would ensure a minimum 10 percent disability rating for all veterans whose service-connected disability requires continuous treatment. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/08/nf08/nfAPR08/nf040808-11.htm>

MORE DENTAL COVERAGE SOUGHT FOR VETS

March 28, 2008 - News-Sun Staff Report

Veterans with service-connected disabilities would get expanded dental coverage under bipartisan legislation introduced by U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park.

The "Make Our Veterans Smile Act" (House Resolution 5595) was co-introduced by Kirk and fellow Navy Reserve intelligence officer U.S. Rep. Chris Carney, D-Pa. <More at: www.suburbanchicagonews.com/newssun/news/865372.5_1_WA28_KIRKBILL_S1.article>

TIME FOR A 21ST CENTURY G.I. BILL

Sen. Jon Tester

... the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, will provide returning veterans who want to go to college the costs of tuition, room and board and a monthly stipend of \$1,000. This bipartisan legislation is designed to modernize the current G.I. Bill consistent with the original G.I. Bill enacted after World War II, which empowered an entire generation of returning soldiers through college aid and sparked America's 20th century economic boom.

<More at: www.flatheadbeacon.com/articles/article/time_for_a_21st_century_gi_bill/2826/>

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

RETREAT – NEWS

ATTACKS ON U.S. FORCES SOARED AT END OF MARCH

Sudarsan Raghavan - Washington Post Foreign Service - April 2, 2008; A12

BAGHDAD, April 1 -- Attacks against U.S. troops and Iraqi security forces soared across Baghdad in the last week of March to the highest levels since the deployment of additional U.S. troops here reached full strength last June, according to U.S. military data and analysis. The sharp spike in attacks, in response to an ill-prepared Iraqi government offensive in the southern city of Basra last week, underscores the fragility of the U.S. military's hard-won security gains in Iraq and how easily those gains can be erased.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/01/AR2008040103165.html>

MORE THAN 1,000 IN IRAQ'S FORCES QUIT BASRA FIGHT

Stephen Farrell and James Glanz - April 4, 2008

BAGHDAD — More than 1,000 Iraqi soldiers and policemen either refused to fight or simply abandoned their posts during the inconclusive assault against Shiite militias in Basra last week, a senior Iraqi government official said Thursday. Iraqi military officials said the group included dozens of officers, including at least two senior field commanders in the battle. The desertions in the heat of a major battle cast fresh doubt on the effectiveness of the American-trained Iraqi security forces. The White House has conditioned further withdrawals of American troops on the readiness of the Iraqi military and police.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2008/04/04/world/middleeast/04iraq.html>

US PLANNING OPEN-ENDED MILITARY COMMITMENT IN IRAQ: REPORT

Agence France Press - Apr 7, 2008

A draft agreement between the United States and Iraq shows that the two countries are including a provision for an open-ended American military commitment to the war-torn country, The Guardian reported Tuesday. Citing a copy of the draft strategic framework agreement dated March 7 that it obtained, the newspaper said that the document is designed to replace the current United Nations mandate, which expires at the end of the year.

According to The Guardian, the agreement allows the United States to "conduct military operations in Iraq and to detain individuals when necessary for imperative reasons of security" without including a time limit. It also does not put any limits on the number of American forces allowed in Iraq, the weapons they can use, the legal status of US troops in Iraq or the powers they hold over Iraqi citizens. <More at: http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20080408/pl_afp/usiraqmilitarydiplomacyplan_080408003628>

PETRAEUS CALLS FOR TROOP WITHDRAWAL HALT

Anne Flaherty - Apr 8, 2008

WASHINGTON (AP) - The U.S. general commanding the Iraq war called for an open-ended suspension of troop withdrawals this summer, reflecting concern about a recent flare-up in violence and leaving open the possibility that few, if any, additional troops will be brought home before President Bush leaves office in January. Gen. David Petraeus told a Senate hearing Tuesday that he recommends a 45-day "period of consolidation and evaluation" once the extra combat forces that Bush ordered to Iraq last year have completed their pullout in July. He said the past year's progress is "fragile and reversible," and he did not commit to any additional troop withdrawals beyond July. <More at: <http://apnews.excite.com/article/20080408/D8VTT6T80.html>>

ARMY WORRIED BY RISING STRESS OF RETURN TOURS

Thom Shanker April 6, 2008

WASHINGTON — Army leaders are expressing increased alarm about the mental health of soldiers who would be sent back to the front again and again under plans that call for troop numbers to be sustained at high levels in Iraq for this year and beyond. Among combat troops sent to Iraq for the third or fourth time, more than one in four show signs of anxiety, depression or acute stress, according to an official Army survey of soldiers' mental health.

... Among the 513,000 active-duty soldiers who have served in Iraq since the invasion of 2003, more than 197,000 have deployed more than once, and more than 53,000 have deployed three or more times, according to a separate set of statistics provided this week by Army personnel officers. The percentage of troops sent back to Iraq for repeat deployments would have to increase in the months ahead.

The Army study of mental health showed that 27 percent of noncommissioned officers — a critically important group — on their third or fourth tour exhibited symptoms commonly referred to as post-traumatic stress disorders. That figure is far higher than the roughly 12 percent who exhibit those symptoms after one tour and the 18.5 percent who develop the disorders after a second deployment. <More at: www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/washington/06military.html>

HEAVY TROOP DEPLOYMENTS ARE CALLED MAJOR RISK

Ann Scott Tyson - Washington Post Staff Writer - April 2, 2008; A04

Senior Army and Marine Corps leaders said yesterday that the increase of more than 30,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan has put unsustainable levels of stress on U.S. ground forces and has put their readiness to fight other conflicts at the lowest level in years. In a stark assessment a week before Gen. David H. Petraeus, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, is to testify on the war's progress, Gen. Richard A. Cody, the Army's vice chief of staff, said that the heavy deployments are inflicting "incredible stress" on soldiers and families and that they pose "a significant risk" to the nation's all-volunteer military.

"When the five-brigade surge went in . . . that took all the stroke out of the shock absorbers for the United States Army," Cody testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee's readiness panel. He said that even if five brigades are pulled out of Iraq by July, as planned, it would take some time before the Army could return to 12-month tours for soldiers.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/01/AR2008040102444.html>

GENERAL WILLIAM ODOM TELLS SENATE RAPID WITHDRAWAL IS ONLY SOLUTION

Excerpt from testimony before the senate foreign relations committee on Iraq By William E. Odom, LTG, USA, Ret. - 2 April 2008

The only sensible strategy is to withdraw rapidly but in good order. Only that step can break the paralysis now gripping US strategy in the region. The next step is to choose a new aim, regional stability, not a meaningless victory in Iraq. And progress toward that goal requires revising our policy toward Iran. If the president merely renounced his threat of regime change by force, that could prompt Iran to lessen its support to Taliban groups in Afghanistan. Iran detests the Taliban and supports them only because they will kill more Americans in Afghanistan as retaliation in event of a US attack on Iran. Iran's policy toward Iraq would also have to change radically as we withdraw. It cannot want instability there. Iraqi Shiites are Arabs, and they know that Persians look down on them. Cooperation between them has its limits. <More at: www.afterdowningstreet.org/node/32419>

THE VOLUNTEER ARMY: WHO FIGHTS AND WHY?

Michael Massing - New York Review of Books - Volume 55, Number 5 --April 3, 2008

An interesting review of some recent books by vets and a survey of those who have joined. Some quotes:

"Buzzell had a long rap sheet and a history of drug use, but, with his recruiter's help, he made it through the application process, and before long he was off to boot camp."

"... without a doubt it's a great way—leaving aside the whole prospect of getting maimed or killed—to better your career prospects."

"I had no money, I had dreams of getting formal training as a welder, I needed to get my teeth fixed, and I wanted to have my kidney stone removed," <More at: www.nybooks.com/articles/21201>

ARMY CONDUCT WAIVERS DOUBLE

Stars and Stripes - April 08, 2008

The percentage of recruits requiring a waiver to join the Army because of a criminal record or other misconduct has more than doubled since 2004 to one for every eight new soldiers, USA Today reported Monday.

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/army-conduct-waivers-double.html>

FINALLY THERE IS A TEST CASE, ALTHOUGH IT IS AGAINST AN IRAQI CONTRACTOR, NOT AN AMERICAN

U.S. CHARGES CONTRACTOR AT IRAQI POST IN STABBING

Michael R. Gordon - April 5, 2008

BAGHDAD — The American military has charged a contractor with assault in a case that may emerge as a major test of the military's legal jurisdiction over civilians who accompany the armed forces into the field, military officials and legal experts said Friday. The charge was made under expanded authority that the United States Congress provided the military to crack down on contractor abuses. It is the first time since 1968 that a contractor has been charged under military law.

While the exact scope of the new authority has yet to be tested in court, experts said there might be some circumstances in which it could be interpreted to apply to security contractors, like those supplied by Blackwater.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2008/04/05/world/middleeast/05trial.html>

NO MATTER HOW HARD THE JOB GETS, THE DVA KEEPS WORKING TO SUPPORT THE TROOPS

INVESTIGATORS REVIEW VA CREDIT CHARGES

Hope Yen Apr 6, 2008

WASHINGTON (AP) - Veterans Affairs employees last year racked up hundreds of thousands of dollars in government credit-card bills at casino and luxury hotels, movie theaters and high-end retailers such as Sharper Image and Franklin Covey - and government auditors are investigating, citing past spending abuses. <More at: <http://apnews.excite.com/article/20080406/D8VSDMH81.html>>

THIS ONE DEFIES COMMENT!

COUPLE ACCUSED OF KILLING TODDLER WHILE PARENTS SERVED OVERSEAS

Alicia A. Caldwell - Associated Press Writer Apr. 08, 2008

EL PASO, Texas -- A Fort Bliss soldier and his wife were arrested Tuesday on charges of killing a 2-year-old girl in their care while her military parents served overseas.

Staff Sgt. Nakia Dawkins, 32, and his 29-year-old wife, Shawntrell Dawkins, were booked into the El Paso County jail on charges of capital murder and abuse of a child. Both are being held without bail. ... Dawkins and his wife, described by police as guardians, are accused of killing the girl and seriously injuring her 4-year-old brother.

... Investigators were working with the military Tuesday to reach the children's parents - their mother is believed to be stationed in Germany and their father in Iraq. <More at: www.star-telegram.com/448/story/568283.html>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
4/10	1100 -1700	DoubleTree Atlanta NW/Marietta 2055 South Park Place, Atlanta, GA	Southeast Regional Career Expo	www.militarystars.com/job_seekers_register.htm	
4/14	1100-1400	Crowne Plaza Denver 1450 Glenarm Place, Denver, CO	Career Fair		303-573-1450
4/17	1100-1400	Hilton Huntington 598 Broadhollow Road, Melville, NY	Career Fair		631.845.1000
4/17 - 20		The Main Quad USC-U Spartanburg, South Carolina	The Wall That Heals	University of South Carolina - Upstate	
4/18	1100-1400	Pensacola Civic Center 201 E. Gregory St, Pensacola, FL	Career Fair		(850) 432-0800
4/19	1100 - Closing	Rick Fairless' Stokers Dallas 9304 Henry Hines Blvd., Dallas TX	Benefit Event for Warriors and their Families		
4/21	1100-1400	Holiday Inn - Raleigh-Brownstone Downtown 1707 Hillsborough St, Raleigh, NC	Career Fair		919-828-0811
4/23	1000-1700	Embassy Suites LA - International Airport/South 1440 E. Imperial Ave, El Segundo, CA	Western Regional Career Expo	www.militarystars.com/job_seekers_register.htm	
4/24	1000-1700	Hilton Baltimore BWI Airport 1739 West Nursery Road, Balt. (Linthicum), MD	Mid-Atlantic Regional Career Expo	www.militarystars.com/job_seekers_register.htm	
4/24 - 27		Norton Center for the Arts - Performing Arts Center Danville, Kentucky	The Wall That Heals	Centre College	
4/25		St. Cloud MN	Resource Fair	Nick Johnston	320-255-6320
4/25-26		Prescott, AZ	Resource Fair	Skye Biasetti	928-445-4860 x-5908

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

FOR IRAQ VETS AND THEIR FAMILIES, TRAUMA CAN BE CONTAGIOUS

Stacy Bannerman - Foreign Policy in Focus - March 25, 2008

An excerpt from testimony before a House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health hearing held February 28, 2008, regarding the Iraq War's mental health impacts of Iraq War on the families of Guard/Reserve veterans.

I am the author of [When the War Came Home: The Inside Story of Reservists and the Families They Leave Behind](#). I am currently separated from my husband, a National Guard soldier who served one year in Iraq in 2004-05. Just as we are beginning to find our way back together, we are starting the countdown for a possible second deployment. Two of my cousins by marriage have also served in Iraq, one with the MN Guard, a deployment that lasted 22 months, longer than any other ground combat unit. My other cousin, active duty, was killed in action.

My family members have spent more time fighting one war -- the war in Iraq -- than my grandfather and uncles did in WWII and Korea, combined. When the home front costs and burdens fall repeatedly on the same shoulders, the anticipatory grief and trauma -- secondary, intergenerational and betrayal -- is exponential and increasingly acute. Nowhere is that more obvious than in Guard and Reserve households. <More at: www.alternet.org/waroniraq/80467/>

RETURNING VETERANS FACE MOUNTING JOBLESSNESS AND LOW WAGES

Alex Lantier - 29 March 2008

On March 25, the *Wall Street Journal* published a brief summary of a US Veterans Affairs Department study on discharged veterans' employment and wage prospects. The report, not yet publicly released and largely blacked out in the broader US media, paints a devastating picture of surging unemployment and low wages for returning veterans.

It found that the percentage of veterans not in the labor force—due to unemployment, having returned to school for further training, or having given up looking for work—had more than doubled between 2000 and 2005, jumping from 10 to 23 percent. Veterans aged 20-24 had an unemployment rate of 12 percent, 50 percent larger than the overall US unemployment rate for adults aged 20-24, which stands at 8 percent. <More at: www.wsj.org/articles/2008/mar2008/vets-m29.shtml>

VETERANS FIGHTING FOR THEIR JOBS CAN GET LOST IN PAPERWORK

Evan Lehmann - Eagle Washington Bureau - April 08

WASHINGTON — Robert Traut works on Alaska's Kodiak Island, known for big bears and a remoteness that can be reached only by airplane or ferry from his home and family 300 miles away. And that's a positive development.

Traut has the frustrating distinction of having the nation's longest unsettled case against an employer who refused to rehire a veteran returning from active-duty service, as the law requires. He filed his complaint seven years ago. And then it languished, lost in a maze of bureaucracy, government missteps and piles of paperwork weighing more than a loaded military rifle.

"It's just exasperating to not really see the end," Traut said last week from the island. "It's rough, you know. I'm hanging in there, trying to get this settled."

Receiving his civilian job with the Coast Guard in 2005 was a compromise, coming nearly five years after the federal government refused to rehire him at a hospital near his home in Palmer, Alaska, following his service in the Air National Guard. He sees his family about once every two months. <More at: www.berkshireeagle.com/ci_8848044>

SHALALA: VETERANS BENEFITS SYSTEM IS BROKEN

Juliana Hanson MARCH 26, 2008:

Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars won't get proper health care until the U.S. government updates and simplifies the bureaucracy strangling benefits and outpatient care.

This is the conclusion of Donna Shalala, former secretary of the U.S. Department Health and Human Services during the Clinton administration. President George W. Bush commissioned Shalala, Bob Dole and several other experts to evaluate the care of wounded veterans after the *Washington Post* exposed dire conditions at Walter Reed Hospital: deteriorating, rat- and roach-infested housing for family members, neglectful staff, and a mind-numbing bureaucracy.

<More at: www.indyweek.com/qvrobase/Content?oid=217249>

WIDOW SAYS 'I FEEL MORE AT PEACE NOW'

Wendy Isom - March 31, 2008

Almost 20 years after his death, the Department of Veterans Affairs has recognized that an area Army veteran had a valid claim to service-related disability benefits.

"I wish he could've been alive to have it," said Virginia Grimes, the widow of veteran Andrew Grimes. She will receive a service-connected death benefit compensation in light of this recognition.

Her husband, a Gibson County native, fought in Vietnam and Cambodia and had began filing paperwork with the Veterans Administration in 1987 to get benefits after he became ill. He died at age 40 on Dec. 5, 1988.

<More at: www.jacksonsun.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080331/NEWS01/803310308/1002>

SOME VETS OF THE IRAQ WAR GOING BLIND

Bea Karnes - Palo Alto, California - March 28

Soldiers coming back from the war in Iraq are being treated for many combat-related injuries, but doctors at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Palo Alto, California have found something they haven't seen before. Soldiers, with no obvious signs of trauma, are going blind. <More at: www.koaa.com/aaaa_top_stories/x408981175>

FORT CARSON SOLDIER DIED OF DRUG OVERDOSE

Erin Emery - The Denver Post - 04/08/2008

Staff Sgt. Chad Barrett had been sent on a third tour of duty in Iraq despite a brain injury and stress disorder.

COLORADO SPRINGS — A Fort Carson soldier who was sent back to Iraq after a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury died of a drug overdose, his widow said Monday. Shelby Barrett, the wife of Staff Sgt. Chad Barrett, 35, said a Fort Carson casualty assistance officer notified her that her husband's death was "self-inflicted."

... Chad Barrett had been undergoing a medical evaluation board for post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury suffered during two previous tours. He had a permanent profile — meaning he did not meet retention standards — but he asked Fort Carson to halt the medical board process so he could deploy.

"There is no way in hell he should have been deployed. The Army saw him as just another set of boots on the ground," said Shelby Barrett, who lives in Fountain. "From the second tour on, he changed 180 degrees. Three deployments is two too many. The Army took my husband from me. The Army destroyed my husband." <More at: www.denverpost.com/news/ci_8845166>

VA ANNOUNCES SGLI AND VGLI PREMIUM REDUCTIONS

April 7, 2008

WASHINGTON – Veterans and military personnel with life insurance policies managed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will see a reduction in their premiums, thanks to improved investment earnings and a reduction in non-combat claims. The premium cuts affect military personnel covered by Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) and veterans covered by the Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI). <More at: www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1486>

WILL THIS BE ANOTHER EXCUSE FOR A "PRE-EXISTING CONDITION" DIAGNOSIS?

GENE MAY HELP EXPLAIN STRESS DISORDER

Associated Press | March 19, 2008

CHICAGO - Groundbreaking research suggests genes help explain why some people can recover from a traumatic event while others suffer post-traumatic stress disorder. Though preliminary, the study provides insight into a condition expected to strike increasing numbers of military veterans returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, one health expert said. Researchers found that specific variations in a stress-related gene appeared to be influenced by trauma at a young age - in this case child abuse. That interaction strongly increased the chances for adult survivors of abuse to develop signs of PTSD.

<More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,164303,00.html>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF APRIL 9, 2008

This week, the Army, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard announced an increase, while the Marine Corps announced a decrease. The net collective result is 3,172 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. The total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 77,928; Navy Reserve, 5,519; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 9,488; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,576; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 345. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been mobilized to 101,856, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently mobilized can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Apr2008/d20080409ngr.pdf>.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE THURSDAY 10 APRIL 2008

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (1,848 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,032
WOUNDED US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 3/1]	29,320
OTHER US CASUALTIES [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 3/1]	≥31,325
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [LAST DoD UPDATE 3/1]	145
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	3
KILLED UK	176
KILLED OTHER COALITION	133
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE 6/30]	1,001
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 47,555
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 90,251
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400K – 1.2M
IRAQ REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL [12/9/27]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,377 DAYS)

KILLED US	492
*OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 10/2007]	7,720
KILLED COALITION	300
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007)	1,472
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (7/2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (7/2004)	32,034
AFGHAN REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$510,001,756,894

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

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

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

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

INTERACTIVE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

There is a "Virtual Vietnam Wall" at <http://go.footnote.com/thewall>

NOTE: Footnote is a subscription service with certain free features – the virtual wall is free.

THIS SURELY WOULD HAVE MADE MY WAR MUCH EASIER!

MARRIED TROOPS CAN LIVE TOGETHER IN IRAQ

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS April 1, 2008

BAGHDAD (AP) -- When American soldiers get off duty in Iraq, the men usually return to their quarters, the women to theirs. But Staff Sgt. Marvin Frazier gets to go back to a small trailer with two pushed-together single beds that he shares with his wife.

In a historic but little-noticed change in policy, the Army is allowing scores of husband-and-wife soldiers to live and sleep together in the war zone -- a move aimed at preserving marriages, boosting morale and perhaps bolstering re-enlistment rates at a time when the military is struggling to fill its ranks five years into the fighting.

"It makes a lot of things easier," said Frazier, 33, a helicopter maintenance supervisor in the 3rd Infantry Division. "It really adds a lot of stress, being separated. Now you can sit face-to-face and try to work out things and comfort each other."

Long-standing Army rules barred soldiers of the opposite sex from sharing sleeping quarters in war zones. Even married troops lived only in all-male or all-female quarters and had no private living space. But in May 2006, Army commanders in Iraq, with little fanfare, decided that it is in the military's interest to promote wedded bliss. In other words: What God has joined together, let no manual put asunder.

"It's better for the soldiers, which means overall it's better for the Army," said Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Thornton of the 3rd Infantry.

Military analysts said this is the first war in which the Army even gave the idea any serious consideration -- a reflection not only of the large number of couples sent to war this time, but also of the way the fighting has dragged on and strained marriages with repeated 12- and 15-month tours of duty. <More at: www.nytimes.com/aponline/us/AP-Combat-Marriages.html>

A POEM OF REMEMBRANCE

They carried P-38 can openers and heat tabs, watches and dog tags, insect repellent, gum, cigarettes, Zippo lighters, salt tablets, compress bandages, ponchos, Kool-Aid, two or three canteens of water, iodine tablets, sterno, LRRP- rations, and C-rations stuffed in socks.

They carried standard fatigues, jungle fatigues, jungle boots, bush hats, flak jackets and steel pots.

They carried the M-16 trip flares and Claymore mines, M-60 machine guns, the M-79 grenade launcher, M-14's, CAR-15's, Stoners, Swedish K's, 66 mm LAWS, shotguns, .45 caliber pistols, silencers, the sound of bullets, rockets, and choppers, and sometimes the sound of silence.

They carried C-4 plastic explosives, an assortment of hand grenades, PRC-25 radios with 25 foot whip antennas and their heavy batteries, knives and machetes. Some carried napalm, CBU's and large bombs; some risked their lives to rescue others. Some escaped the fear, but dealt with the death and damage. Some made very hard decisions, and some just tried to survive.

They carried malaria, dysentery, ringworms and leaches.

They carried the land itself as it hardened on their boots. They carried stationery, pencils, and pictures of their loved ones - real and imagined.

They carried love for people in the real world and love for one another.

And sometimes they disguised that love: "Don't mean nothin'!" They carried memories for the most part, they carried themselves with poise and a kind of dignity. Now and then, there were times when panic set in, and people squealed or wanted to, but couldn't; when they twitched and made moaning sounds and covered their heads and said "Dear God" and hugged the earth and fired their weapons blindly and cringed and begged for the noise to stop and went wild and made stupid promises to themselves and God and their parents, hoping not to die.

They carried the traditions of the United States military, and memories and images of those who served before them. They carried grief, terror longing and their reputations.

They carried the soldier's greatest fear: the embarrassment of dishonor.

They crawled into tunnels, walked point, and advanced under fire, so as not to die of embarrassment.

They were afraid of dying, but too afraid to show it. They carried the emotional baggage of men and women who might die at any moment.

They carried the weight of the world.

And they carried each other.

Author
Tim O'Brien

NEW BENEFITS HANDBOOK UPDATES FOR VETERANS AND DEPENDENTS

March 28, 2008

WASHINGTON -- A new edition of the popular handbook Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) updates the rates for certain federal payments and outlines a variety of programs and benefits for American veterans. Most of the nation's 24 million veterans qualify for some VA benefits, which range from health care to burial in a national cemetery. In addition to describing benefits provided by VA, the 2008 edition of the 153-page booklet provides an overview of programs and services for veterans provided by other federal agencies.

Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents includes resources to help veterans access their benefits, with a listing of toll-free phone numbers, Internet addresses and a directory of VA facilities throughout the country. The handbook can be downloaded free from VA's Web site at www.va.gov/OPA/vadocs/current_benefits.asp.

The handbook is one of the top selling consumer publications of the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO). GPO accepts credit card orders for the publication at 866-512-1800 (toll-free) for a cost of \$5 each to U.S. addresses, or \$67 for bulk orders of 25 copies. It can be ordered by mail from the GPO at Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 979050, St. Louis, MO 63197-9000 (stock #051-000-00233-4) or on line at www.bookstore.gpo.gov.

In addition to health-care and burial benefits, veterans may be eligible for programs providing home loan guaranties, educational assistance, training and vocational rehabilitation, income assistance pensions, life insurance and compensation for service-connected illnesses or disabilities. In some cases, survivors of veterans may also be entitled to benefits. The handbook describes programs for veterans with specific service experiences, such as prisoners of war or those concerned about environmental exposures in Vietnam or in the Gulf War, as well as special benefits for veterans with severe disabilities.

NEW GI BILL

Senator Webb has produced an informational packet on S22, "The Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act" which is available at <http://webb.senate.gov/pdf/Packet31351.pdf>. This chart is from that packet.

SENATE WORLD WAR II VETERANS AND THE G.I. BILL

SENATOR	Educational Institution & Degree Funded by the G.I. Bill	2006-07 Cost of Annual IN STATE tuition, fees, books & room and board (On Campus)	2006-07 tuition, fees, books & room and board CURRENTLY covered under Montgomery G.I. Bill
Akaka	University of Hawaii, 1952 Undergraduate Degree	\$14,456	\$6,000* (41.5%)
Inouye (cosponsor)	University of Hawaii, 1950 Undergraduate Degree	\$14,456	\$6,000 (41.5%)
	George Washington Law School Juris Doctor Degree	\$48,460	\$6,000 (12.4%)
Lautenberg (lead cosponsor)	Columbia, 1949 Undergraduate Degree	\$46,874	\$6,000 (12.8%)
Stevens	UCLA, 1947 Undergraduate Degree	\$22,773	\$6,000 (26.3%)
	Harvard Law School, 1950 Juris Doctor Degree	\$54,066	\$6,000 (11.1%)
Warner (lead cosponsor)	Washington & Lee, 1949 Undergraduate Degree	\$42,327	\$6,000 (14.2%)
	University of Virginia Law School, 1953 Juris Doctor Degree	\$44,800	\$6,000 (13.4%)
Webb (sponsor)	Naval Academy, 1968 Undergraduate Degree	Federally Funded	Federally Funded
	Georgetown Law School, 1975 Juris Doctor Degree	\$51,530	\$6,000 (11.6%)
Hagel (lead cosponsor)	University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1971 Undergraduate Degree	\$15,230	\$6,000 (39.4%)

*According to the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the average annual MGIB payment in FY '07 was \$6,000. The maximum annual benefit under the current MGIB payment is \$9,675.

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