

SOUND OFF!



VOL. IV, NO 16

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

10 APRIL 2009

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

OF HEROES AND COWARDS

True heroes, like perfect diamonds, are rare. I, for one, get tired of non-participants continually referring to every soldier as a “hero”. It cheapens the term, and embarrasses the soldiers – they know better..

That is not to say that we don’t need more heroes. We always do, but we need them in many more endeavors other than war.

The obvious places are in the ranks of first responders, where there are normally at least as many true heroes as there are in military uniform. There are also heroes in the giving professions such as those doctors and nurses who give of their time and energy and knowledge in many organizations such as Doctors Without Borders and the International Red Cross, often in places of great danger, and without any real hope of reward.

Some less obvious homes for heroes are in the silent background of legislation and litigation when true heroes take on the mighty for the good of the ignored and the dismissed, which usually means for the good of us all.

Heroes such as these – true heroes – are what makes life so rewarding for many of us without our even having to turn a hand. They do it for us – every day. They set an example for us which most of us cannot hope to equal it, but we can marvel at the capability of the truly heroic human soul.

Why, then, are there so many cowards? How do we happen to raise up so many who will never risk their personal comfort, position, or hope for power? Why do we make them the heads of corporations, banks, and other institutions. Why do we lionize them for their selfishness and their “successes” as they often rob us blind, while we ignore those who truly strive for us every day?

Why do we allow them to present themselves as heroes?

Why do we elect so damn many of them to public office?

The party out of power can never get anything done because they are afraid to lose – cowards quit; heroes lose and lose again but keep on fighting.

The party in power can never get anything done because the other party blocks their self-labeled “heroic” efforts.

The real reasons for both conditions and both parties are usually [pick as many as apply to your legislator] a) their contributors won’t like the results; b) they are afraid that their constituents won’t re-elect them; c) they are committed to some ideology that pre-selects their vote; d) they just want to laze around in the backwaters of power, get the perks, and not be disturbed; e) they’d rather do nothing than expose their incompetence; f) they really don’t care about now – it’s the revolving-door job

they are going to get next that must be protected.

Our current crop have become a class of cowards, with a very few notable exceptions on both sides. More than that, they have become almost a separate ruling class. Every time one of them starts a declaration with “The American people want/need/demand/...” I cringe. What do they know about all of us? All they know is that we are a source of votes and of tax money that funds their perks, and pays for the pork they feed to their districts to ensure the next round of contributions and their guaranteed reelection.

It’s not just politicians. Why do we hire so many cowards as public servants?

As a prime example, the Department of Veterans Affairs has just let two senior executives go who failed over nine years to implement a computerized scheduling system for veterans’ appointments, while spending \$167M. Incompetence, yes, but cowardice also. If they couldn’t do the job with the resources they had or the contract they were stuck with, they should have stood up and said so. Instead they wallowed in their cowardice and incompetence, hoping never to be discovered (at least until retirement).

What’s the effect of all of this on the people we care about; serving military, veterans and their families?

The politicians and the bureaucrats know that if we had universal health care, as most other developed nations do, we could eliminate the DVA’s backlog for normal medical services almost overnight. If we had universal health care we would make our industries and our industrial communities more competitive for both the goods we sell and the jobs we all, including veterans, seek. But in the face of the health insurance and pharmaceutical industry’s deep well of contributions, these cowards are unable to see a solution. They cannot cough up enough

courage to take on that wealthy bunch of contributors.

The politicians and the bureaucrats know that there is only so much money to fund the Armed Forces, although that number is obscenely large in the face of the amount spent in the rest of the world. Because there are nonetheless limitations on what is available, they know that the money for defense must be spent wisely, and on those items that address the real threat to those who are in action or who may be called upon to fight. Yet they are unable to muster the courage to face the hard choices, preferring to continue expensive programs because of their immediate effect on their reelection possibilities (think F-22), rather than choosing the hard road that would lead to the programs and systems that the troops really need.

Our legislative cowards claim that it is only because of the jobs that they continue to support what, in the case of the F-22s, may be the largest and most expensive fleet of hangar queens ever built. But the same money could provide jobs in many more places – teachers, construction workers, planners, engineers, transportation workers. It’s not jobs – its cowardice – an unwillingness to make the hard choices. [*See what’s happening as we speak.*](#)

The politicians and the bureaucrats know that when they send someone into battle, or merely enlist that person for the possibility of future battle, they make a commitment to that woman or man that is far different from the normal employment contract. That difference costs money – perhaps for a lifetime – but they do not have the courage to calculate the full cost of an individual’s service, and especially the full and true cost of wars in their decisions. Instead they hide from that responsibility and muddle along, stripping our national treasure in what they hope is small enough increments that no one notices. They consistently underfund veterans services and the personal and family services for the serving military. They hide when the subject of inadequate

funding and unconscionable delays come up, all the time trumpeting their “support of the troops”. (Can’t we find another expression? That one is slimed with hypocrisy.)

So let’s limit the set of those we call heroes to those who have the courage to do their jobs without thought of personal gain, who serve all of us probably far better than we deserve, who face real personal or professional danger and conquer it, and who do not even demand of us that we recognize their heroism, only demanding that we honor their service.

And let’s call out the cowards for who they are. Let’s get right with the heroes of the past and the hopes of the future by pegging these cowards publicly, demanding that they step up

to their job, which is to serve us and not them.

Remind them that there are 24 million veterans out here and we vote, as do our families.

Tell them to fight for what is right, not what is convenient and comfortable, and if they lose, step up and fight again! If they are not willing, tell them that we veterans will find someone who is.

"Any coward can fight a battle when he's sure of winning, but give me the man who has pluck to fight when he's sure of losing. That's my way, sir; and there are many victories worse than a defeat."

George Eliot novelist., 1819-1880

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

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

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

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

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

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

Case Progress to Date:

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

9/25/2007 Defendant’s Motion to Dismiss

2/11/2008 Motion for Preliminary Injunction

2/25/2008 Preliminary Injunction Hearing

4/21/2008 Trial

6/25/2008 Judgment based on jurisdiction

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

12/10/2008 Appeal brief filed

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is with sadness that we announce the death of one of the honored members of our Advisory Board. The Hon. Jerome (Jerry) Waldie died 3 April at the age of 84. Jerry served in the Army in World War II, and returned to study law at UC Berkeley. Jerry was a fighter all of his life, and was the epitome of the deliberative and honest legislator both in the California Assembly and the U.S. Congress. He was known for his ability to work both sides of the aisle to get what was proper accomplished. He was honored by Democrats and Republicans alike. Jerry was best known for filing the obstruction of justice charge in the US House of Representatives that led to Richard Nixon's resignation. After he returned to his home in Contra Costa county he spent much of his remaining years as a lawyer fighting for farm-workers' rights

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

[From the VVAW website]

My name is Meredith Sacks. I am working on a project for my History of the Vietnam War class and I was wondering if you could help me. My topic is the draft and the men involved. I need to interview at least two people who were drafted and could share their experience with me. If you have any members who would be willing to talk to me on video, that would be wonderful. If you have any questions, you can reach me on this number, (415) 710-1958, or at my email. Thank you for your time and help.

Sincerely - Meredith Sacks - popculturequeen@comcast.net

[Shared with us as an example of the "great service" the VA is providing]

Good Afternoon Gentleman

I will keep this short as I am totally lost for words.

I have now completed and submitted VA Form 21-674 twice to your office Veterans Service Office, 1701 Pacific Ave., Suite 110, Oxnard, CA 93033 in person and have been assisted by Mr Hall, who in my presence contacted whoever processes these forms by phone and that person assured us both he had my VA Form 21-674 and it would be processed late January 2009.

Yesterday I received the attached letter from the VA, what's going on, please advise ?

[Editor's note: The DVA letter said, in short: We asked you for your form a month ago. Where is it? Since you didn't provide it by the prescribed date you now will have to submit a new claim and start all over again]

I cannot afford to be running back & forth to your office this is jeopardizing my employment.

Regards - Hugh P Mc Larnon

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

SENATE OKS NATIONAL SERVICE EXPANSION BILL

UPI - March 27, 2009

WASHINGTON, March 27 (UPI) -- The U.S. Senate passed a bill that would expand national community service, creating new groups of volunteers for education, energy, healthcare and veterans.

Senators voted 78-20 to pass the measure, named the Sen. Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act to honor the Massachusetts Democrat and a key architect of the legislation, The New York Times (NYSE:NYT) reported Friday.

<More at: www.upi.com/Top_News/2009/03/27/Senate-OKs-national-service-expansion-bill/UPI-86491238163213/>

BILL SEEKS TO PROTECT GUN OWNERSHIP FOR VETS

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Mar 24, 2009

Sens. Richard Burr, R-N.C., and Jim Webb, D-Va., have joined forces to try to prevent veterans from losing the right to own a gun if a fiduciary is appointed to handle their finances.

Burr and Webb, both members of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, are trying to carve out a loophole for veterans in the Federal Gun Control Act that prohibits the sale of firearms to people who are, in the words of the law, "adjudicated as a mental defective."

According to Burr, the names of about 116,000 veterans have been turned over to the FBI since 1999 because the Veterans Affairs Department assigned a fiduciary to manage their benefits. That is not the same thing as being a danger to themselves or others, Burr said in a statement included in Monday's Congressional Record when he introduced a bill, S 669, to prevent the VA from reporting the names of veteran to the FBI. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2009/03/military_veterans_gunownership_032409p/>

HOUSE ADVANCES IMPORTANT VETERANS BILLS

Imperial Valley News - 30 March 2009

Washington, DC - Bob Filner (D-CA), Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, announced that the House of Representatives considered three bills that would improve benefits and services to veterans provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The House unanimously passed all three bills.

H.R. 1377, as amended – To expand veteran eligibility for reimbursement by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for emergency treatment furnished in a non-Department facility, and for other purposes (Introduced by Chairman Filner)

... H.R. 1171, as amended – Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Reauthorization Act of 2009 (Introduced by Representative Boozman)

This bill would reauthorize the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program for fiscal years 2010 through 2014. The bill was amended to authorize an additional \$10 million to provide dedicated services for homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children.

... H.R. 1513 – Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2009 (Introduced by Representative Kirkpatrick)

This bill would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase the rates of basic compensation for disabled veterans and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation to their survivors and dependents, along with other benefits, in order to keep pace with the rising cost-of-living. <More at: http://imperialvalleynews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4958&Itemid=2>

HOUSE VOTES MORE WIDOWS' PAY

Tom Philpott - April 02, 2009

The House has approved increases in a special monthly allowance paid to 54,000 military widows who have seen their survivor benefits cut or stopped because they also receive compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs for their spouses' service-related deaths. <More at: www.military.com/features/0,15240,188081,00.html>

ADVANCE FUNDING LEGISLATION GAINS MOMENTUM WITH ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT

April 9, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, praised President Barack Obama for his remarks today committing to [advance funding for veterans' health care](#) and noted his support for the development of joint records between the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense

<More at: www.vawatchdog.org/09/scva09/scva040909-1.htm>

FILNER REINTRODUCES BILL TO HELP VIETNAM VETERANS SUFFERING FROM PARKINSON'S DISEASE

March 23, 2009

Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Bob Filner reintroduced a bill that would grant service connection for Parkinson's disease for Vietnam veterans. H.R. 1428 would establish a presumption of service-connection for Parkinson's disease due to exposure to Agent Orange for Vietnam veterans afflicted with this degenerative and incurable condition.

<More at: www.vawatchdog.org/09/hcva09/hcva032309-1.htm>

EVERY STATE SHOULD HAVE THIS! GREAT JOB MARYLAND!

WEBSITE HELPS CONNECT VETERANS TO BEHAVIORAL SERVICES

March 31, 2009 - MARYLAND

Maryland has launched a [web site](#) that connects veterans with behavioral health services, the first state in the U.S. to do so. ... The portal is a one-stop-shop, bringing together information that veterans and their families can access 24/7. From a service directory to a social networking link, the site covers all the bases and lawmakers say it's about time they made this type of improvement. <More at: www.news8.net/news/stories/0309/609055.html>

RETREAT – NEWS

VIETNAM VET UNVEILS NEW PROJECT TO HONOR THE FALLEN

Linda D. Kozaryn - March 26, 2009

WASHINGTON (American Forces Press Service) – Thirty years ago, an infantry corporal named Jan Scruggs boldly set out to build a national memorial. Since then, as a result of his determination, millions of people have found comfort and closure at the Vietnam Memorial known as The Wall.

Today, Scruggs unveiled a glimpse of his next project -- The Education Center at the Wall. He displayed a replica of the new exhibit to be housed in an underground visitor and education center on the National Mall here near the Lincoln and Vietnam memorials. <More at: www.army.com/news/item/4977>

EIGHT YEARS IN THE MAKING, VA PATIENT SCHEDULING SYSTEM FOUNDERS

Bob Brewin - 04/02/09

Veterans Affairs Department Secretary Eric Shinseki launched a review of the department's information technology programs on March 23, focusing on the \$167 million patient scheduling program, which has failed to deliver a usable system after eight years in development, NextGov has learned. <More at: www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20090402_3490.php>

WHEN YOU ARE DOING YOUR PROPER JOB, YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AFRAID. THIS NEXT ONE IS DVA COWARDICE AT ITS BEST!

DAVID SCHULTZ, DC REPORTER, HARASSED BY VETERAN AFFAIRS OFFICIAL

A troubling story has emerged this week regarding what many are calling unprovoked harassment and robbery of WAMU 88.5's David Schultz, an NPR-affiliate reporter, by a federal official at a Veterans Affairs Medical Center forum. The official -- an internal communications specialist named Gloria Hairston -- is said to have interrupted Schultz's interview with a veteran about the inadequacies of VA medical treatment. Hairston demanded that Schultz cease the interview and turn over all of his recording equipment. When Schultz refused, Hairston sicced armed police on him.

"She said I wouldn't be allowed to leave," Schultz tells WTOP.

At first he refused. But after being surrounded by armed police officers who stood between him and the exit, he looked for a compromise. "I became worried that I was going to get arrested," Schultz says.

Schultz convinced Hairston that all she really needed to confiscate was the memory card to his recorder, rather than all of his equipment. While this was going on, many of the veterans from the meeting had come out to watch the confrontation.

One of those veterans, an amputee in a wheelchair, approached Schultz and asked him for his phone number.

"I started to give it to him and then the woman {Hairston} became irate, she said you can't give him your phone number. You have to give me all of your equipment or I'm going to get ugly. She used the phrase 'get ugly,'" Schultz says.

<More at: www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/10/reporter-david-schultz-ha_n_185654.html>

ANYTIME YOU CANNOT TAKE CRITICISM, YOU ARE A COWARD. IF YOU USE THE FORCE OF YOUR OFFICE TO INTIMIDATE OTHERS, YOU ARE DOUBLY A COWARD.

FAMED GITMO LAWYER FACING SIX MONTHS IN PRISON FOR WRITING LETTER TO OBAMA DETAILING TORTURE OF CLIENT

Comment Is Free - April 2, 2009

Lawyers for Binyam Mohamed face the incredible prospect of a six-month jail sentence in America after writing a letter to President Obama detailing their client's allegations of torture by U.S. agents.

The privilege review team -- officials from the U.S. Department of Defense who monitor and censor communication between Guantánamo prisoners and their lawyers -- have previously been accused of using their powers to suppress evidence of the abuse and mistreatment of detainees. Clive Stafford Smith, director of legal charity Reprieve, and his colleague Ahmed Ghappour have been summoned to appear before a Washington court on May 11 after a complaint was made by the privilege review team. <More at: www.alternet.org/story/134847/>

VA ANNOUNCES RECOVERY SPENDING

April 2, 2009

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will spend more than \$1.4 billion as part of President Obama's economic recovery plan to improve services to America's Veterans. VA's Internet site – www.va.gov/recovery – provides current information about VA's work to deliver its portion of Recovery Act funds into the economy to benefit Veterans.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) enables the VA to improve medical facilities and national cemeteries, provide grants to assist states in acquiring or constructing state nursing homes and extended care facilities, and to modify or alter existing facilities to care for Veterans. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/09/vap09/vap040209-1.htm>

MILITARY WEIGHING ITS USE OF CONTRACTORS

Dana Hedgpeth - Washington Post Staff Writer - March 19, 2009; D07

A top Pentagon budget official told a congressional panel yesterday that the military is reexamining how it uses contractors and how it spends money on large, costly weapons programs.

Testifying before the House Budget Committee, Robert F. Hale, undersecretary of defense-comptroller and chief financial officer at the Pentagon, noted that more jobs that had been done by government employees over the last decade are now outsourced to contractors.

"We need to look at how many contractors we are using and are there cost-effective ways we could do that in-house," Hale said.

President Obama has said he favors cutting back on the use of contractors. He also has called for cutting down on the number of no-bid deals. <More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/18/AR2009031801167.html>

FINALLY!

BURR TO SUPPORT IRAQ VET FOR POST AT VETERANS AFFAIRS

Rob Christensen - Staff Writer

Republican Sen. Richard Burr of North Carolina has agreed to allow the nomination of injured Iraq veteran Tammy Duckworth go forward for a top post in the Veterans Affairs administration.

"I will support her," Burr told a group of editors and reporters at The News & Observer on Wednesday.

Burr, the ranking Republican on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, last week held up the nomination of Duckworth because he had questions about a confidential financial questionnaire she had filled out.

The move angered some veterans groups because Duckworth is a National Guard major who lost both of her legs when the helicopter she was piloting was attacked in Iraq. <More at: www.newsobserver.com/politics/story/1478024.html>

VA FUNERAL HOME ACCUSED OF ATROCIOUS CONDITIONS

Apr 5, 2009

WASHINGTON (AP) - A funeral home that helps handle veterans awaiting burial at Arlington National Cemetery left corpses in an unrefrigerated garage, hallways and on makeshift gurneys, according to a former embalmer who has given his photographs and notes to authorities, The Washington Post reported Sunday.

"It was disturbing and disrespectful and unethical," said Steven Napper, a retired Maryland trooper who worked at the funeral home for nine months. "I never could have imagined what I saw there or the things we were asked to do."

Napper said he saw as many as 200 corpses not properly cared for while working at National Funeral Home in Falls Church, Va., from May until he quit in February. National Funeral Home also embalms and stores bodies for four other funeral homes in the D.C. region that are all part of Houston-based Service Corporation International, the world's largest funeral services conglomerate. <More at: www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2009/04/05/va_funeral_home_accused_of_atrocious_conditions/>

SHODDY WIRING 'EVERYWHERE' ON IRAQ BASES, ARMY INSPECTOR SAYS

Abbie Boudreau and Scott Bronstein - CNN Special Investigations Unit – 27 March 2009

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- Thousands of buildings at U.S. bases in Iraq and Afghanistan have such poorly installed wiring that American troops face life-threatening risks, a top inspector for the Army says.

"It was horrible -- some of the worst electrical work I've ever seen," said Jim Childs, a master electrician and the top civilian expert in an Army safety survey. Childs told CNN that "with the buildings the way they are, we're playing Russian roulette."

... Of the nearly 30,000 buildings the Army's "Task Force Safe" has examined so far, Childs said more than half "failed miserably." And 8,527 had such serious problems that inspectors gave them a "flash" warning, meaning repairs had to be completed in four hours or the facility evacuated. He said the majority of those buildings were wired by contractor KBR, based in Houston, Texas. <More at: www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/03/26/military.electrocutions>

TO THE COLORS - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
4/16	0800-1600	Veterans Business Outreach Center 7270 East Southgate Drive, Suite 1 Sacramento, CA	Summit on the Mental Health & Wellness of Veterans and Their Families	Swords to Plowshares	
4/16	1000-1600	Four Points by Sheraton BWI Airport 7032 Elm Road, Baltimore, MD	Mid-Atlantic Regional Career Event	Military Stars Career Expo	Register
4/16-4/19		Post 372 Field Cherry Hill, New Jersey	Wall That Heals	Cherry Hill American Legion Post 372	
4/17-18		Jacksonville, FL	Resource Fair	Travis Sims	904-630-3680
4/21	1100-1400	Univ. Phoenix - Reston Campus 11730 Plaza America Dr. Reston, VA	Reston Career Fair		Register
4/23		Houston Airport Marriott at George Bush Intercontinental 18700 John F. Kennedy Blvd Houston, TX	Gulf Coast Regional Career Event	Military Stars Career Expo	Register
4/25		Columbus, GA	Resource Fair	A. Harrison	706-593-3393
7/9	1730	Marines' Memorial Theater, 2nd Floor, 609 Sutter Street, San Francisco	George P. Schulz Lecture Series – GEN David Petraeus	World Affairs Council of Northern California	\$10 members \$25 non-members

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

KERRY URGES PROBE OF UNSANITARY CONDITIONS AT VA

Foon Rhee, deputy national political editor March 25, 2009

Senator John F. Kerry this afternoon urged the inspector general at the Department of Veterans Affairs to investigate sanitation standards at VA hospitals, following reports this week that facilities in Florida and Tennessee rinsed, but did not disinfect equipment used in colonoscopies.

As many as 9,000 patients may have had invasive procedures with contaminated equipment, potentially exposing them to infectious diseases including hepatitis. <More at: www.boston.com/news/politics/politicalintelligence/2009/03/kerry_urges_pro.html>

VETERANS ADVISED TO TEST FOR HIV AFTER CONTAMINATED COLONOSCOPIES

March 25, 2009

Officials said Monday that more than 3000 veterans could have possibly been exposed to Hepatitis and HIV after improperly sterilized colonoscopy exams at a Veteran's Affairs clinic in Miami.

According to the Associated Press, VA officials believe that the chances of anyone being infected are minimal but encouraged the recipients to take precautionary measures to be certain. "They are being proactive, and we are glad. We want them to get tested," said Miami VA spokeswoman, Susan Warren. This is the second round of health scares that have occurred due to contaminated endoscope equipment within a year. <More at: http://livesteez.com/news/news_detail/1766>

VETERAN POSITIVE FOR HIV AFTER VA MISTAKE

The Associated Press Apr. 06, 2009

A U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs patient has tested positive for HIV since being treated with equipment that exposed thousands of patients to other patients' body fluids.

The VA on Monday did not return telephone and e-mail messages seeking comment about the location of the medical facility where the patient was treated before testing positive for the virus that causes AIDS.

Five veterans have also tested positive for hepatitis B and 11 for hepatitis C since being exposed to equipment mistakes while getting colonoscopies at VA medical facilities at Murfreesboro, Tenn., and Miami and getting treatment at an ear, nose and throat clinic at Augusta, Ga.

The VA said in an e-mail statement Friday that tests don't link patients' infections with procedures they underwent.

www.miamiherald.com/news/florida/AP/story/986956.html

VETS' HOMELESSNESS, MENTAL PROBLEMS EXPECTED TO LAST DECADES

Robert Burns - *THE ASSOCIATED PRESS* - 10 April 2009

NEW YORK — Homelessness, family strains and psychological problems among returning veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars will persist in the United States for generations to come, the top U.S. military officer said Thursday.

"This is not a 10-year problem. It is a 50- or 60- or 70-year problem," Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told an audience of the Hudson Union Society, a group that promotes non-partisan debate.

Mullen said he was particularly disturbed by the emergence of homelessness as a problem among war veterans.

"I have started to meet with, in veterans hospitals, homeless veterans" of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, he said. "And they are every bit as homeless and every bit as tragic as any homeless vet we've ever had. We as a country should not allow that to happen."

At a White House news conference last week, President Obama said some of the funding increases in his proposed budget for veterans affairs are directed at alleviating the problem of homelessness among veterans, which he said is a bigger problem, proportionally, than is homelessness in the rest of the American population.

<More at: www.azstarnet.com/sn/mailstory-clickthru/287210.php>

PBS VIDEO

"Coming Home": update on last year's story of Chuck Luther and "preexisting mental illness". www.pbs.org/now/shows/514/index.html

ARMY VET BILLED \$3,000 FOR WAR WOUNDS

Wayne Drash - CNN - 26 March 2009

Erik Roberts, an Army sergeant who was wounded in Iraq, underwent his 13th surgery recently to save his right leg from amputation. Imagine his shock when he got a bill for \$3,000 for his treatment.

"I just thought it was bull---- that I'm getting billed for being wounded in Iraq doing my job. I always put the mission first, and now that I was wounded in Iraq, they're sending me bills," he said.

"I put my life on the line and I was wounded in combat, and I came back and they're not going to take care of my medical bills?"

It's a level of outrage shared by his mother, as well as the doctor who performed the surgery.

"It's hard to understand why we're not taking care of guys like Erik whose injuries are clearly related to their service. They deserve the best care of anybody," said Dr. William Obremskey, an Air Force veteran and surgeon at Vanderbilt Orthopaedics in Nashville, Tennessee.

"For him to be responsible for \$3,000, I think, is a little ridiculous or is uncalled for, particularly in this situation."

His mother, Robin Roberts, put it more succinctly: "Why should any soldier pay one penny of a medical bill from injuries that occurred while they were fighting in a war? That's what really frustrates me."

The Department of Veterans Affairs has now decided to pay his bill, but only after prodding from a U.S. senator who got involved after CNN brought it to his attention. <More at: www.cnn.com/2009/US/03/26/wounded_warrior/index.html>

COWARDS ALL!

"I AM UNDER A LOT OF PRESSURE TO NOT DIAGNOSE PTSD"

Michael de Yoanna and Mark Benjamin – Salon - Apr. 08 - 10, 2009

A secret recording reveals the Army may be pushing its medical staff not to diagnose post-traumatic stress disorder. The Army and Senate have ignored the implications.

Editor's note: Last June, during a medical appointment, a patient named "Sgt. X" recorded an Army psychologist at Fort Carson, Colo., saying that he was under pressure not to diagnose combat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.

... For more than a year [Sgt. X] has been seeking treatment at Fort Carson for a brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder, the signature injuries of the Iraq war. Sgt. X is also suffering through the Army's confusing disability payment system, handled by something called a medical evaluation board. The process of negotiating the system has been made harder by his war-damaged memory. Sgt. X's wife has to go with him to doctor's appointments so he'll remember what the doctor tells him.

... But what Sgt. X wants to tell a reporter about is one doctor's appointment at Fort Carson that his wife did not witness. When she couldn't accompany him to an appointment with psychologist Douglas McNinch last June, Sgt. X tucked a recording device into his pocket and set it on voice-activation so it would capture what the doctor said. Sgt. X had no idea that the little machine in his pocket was about to capture recorded evidence of something wounded soldiers and their advocates have long suspected -- that the military does not want Iraq veterans to be diagnosed with PTSD, a condition that obligates the military to provide expensive, intensive long-term care, including the possibility of lifetime disability payments.

... after the Army became aware of the tape, the Senate Armed Services Committee declined to investigate its implications, despite prodding from a senator who is not on the committee. The Army then conducted its own internal investigation -- and cleared itself of any wrongdoing.

<More at: www.salon.com/news/special/coming_home/2009/04/08/tape/print.html, www.salon.com/news/special/coming_home/2009/04/09/ptsd/index.html, and www.salon.com/news/feature/2009/04/10/ptsd/index.html>

[Editor's Note: The mainstream broadcast press didn't touch this until Rachel Maddow exposed it on MSNBC]

UNOPENED CLAIMS LETTERS HIDDEN AT VA OFFICES

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Mar 4, 2009

A new report about Veterans Affairs Department employees squirreling away tens of thousands of unopened letters related to benefits claims is sparking fresh concerns that veterans and their survivors are being cheated out of money.

VA officials acknowledge further credibility problems based on a new report of a previously undisclosed 2007 incident in which workers at a Detroit regional office turned in 16,000 pieces of unprocessed mail and 717 documents turned up in New York in December during amnesty periods in which workers were promised no one would be penalized.

"Veterans have lost trust in VA," Michael Walcoff, VA's under secretary for benefits, said at a hearing Tuesday. "That loss of trust is understandable, and winning back that trust will not be easy."

Unprocessed and unopened mail was just one problem in VA claims processing mentioned by Belinda Finn, VA's assistant inspector general for auditing, in testimony before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. Auditors also found that the dates recorded for receiving claims, which in many cases determine the effective date for benefits payments, are wrong in many cases because of intentional and unintentional errors, Finn said.

<More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2009/03/military_veteransaffairs_unopenedmail_030309w/>

VA CLAIMS -- DENY UNTIL THEY DIE?

Paul Muschick - Of The Morning Call - April 9, 2009

The dead get faster service than the living these days at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The VA took six months to grant World War II veteran Robert Dietrich of Bethlehem a disability pension. But even after that, it wouldn't pay right away, and Dietrich died before getting a cent.

The VA quickly acknowledged his passing, though, paying his life insurance proceeds in a month.

"If this is what these guys fighting today have to look forward to, oh my God," said his daughter, Monica Dietrich of Bethlehem.

The VA has long been criticized for delays in processing pensions and other benefits. Some veterans refer to the bureaucracy as "deny, deny, until they die."

... Monica Dietrich applied for a pension for him in February 2008. They got a foreboding form letter within a week acknowledging the claim.

"It is our sincere desire to decide your case promptly," the VA service center in Philadelphia wrote. "However, as we have a great number of claims, action on yours may be delayed."

The letter said the VA would contact the family if it needed more information, "so there is no need to contact us."

What it meant was: Things are going to slow down from here. Don't bother us. We'll get to you when we get to you.

Her father had a mental competency exam in July. In August 2008, a \$1,842 monthly pension was approved, retroactive to March. But the check wasn't in the mail.

Robert Dietrich failed the competency exam because of his poor health, which included dementia. Because the VA won't honor civilian powers of attorney, it wouldn't pay his daughter on his behalf. Instead, the VA planned to appoint a fiduciary -- a stranger -- to handle his money.

Dietrich died in November at age 87. The fiduciary called three days later to start working on his case.

<More at: www.mcall.com/news/local/all-b1_5dog0409.6819171apr09.0.7580342.full.story>

SOLDIERS' BRAIN SCANS SHOW PTS

Scientists using imaging scans on soldiers have identified brain patterns that signal post-traumatic stress, a finding they said Friday might ultimately help diagnose the disorder sooner. The scans of 42 U.S. soldiers who had served in Iraq or Afghanistan in the recent past showed that, compared with healthy veterans, those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder had marked differences in some brain activity. The study was presented at the World Psychiatric Assn. Congress in Italy. www.latimes.com/features/health/la-sci-briefs4-2009apr04.0.163380.story?page=2

THEY MUST HAVE RUN OUT OF FELONS AND CATEGORY IV RECRUITS

MEDICALLY UNFIT BEING DEPLOYED?

Tony Lombardo - Staff writer - Apr 1, 2009

Conflicting policies, inaccurate records, and uninformed commanders and medical providers all could play a role in the Army's deployment of soldiers medically unfit to serve, according to an Army inspector general's report.

<More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2009/03/army_medical_deployment_033109w/>

MAYBE THEY SHOULD WAIT FOR SOME LAID-OFF BROKERS

DOWNTURN DRIVES MILITARY ROLLS UP

Christian Davenport - Washington Post Staff Writer - November 29, 2008; B01

Some of the largest investment firms on Wall Street are gone. The country's auto industry is on the verge of collapse. Banks are shedding jobs. But in these doom-and-gloom times, there is someone who's hiring: your local military recruiter.

The economic downturn and rising unemployment rate are making the military a more attractive option, Pentagon officials say. In some cases, the peace of mind that comes with good benefits and a regular paycheck is overcoming concerns about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which any new enlistee is likely to join.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/28/AR2008112802653_pf.html>

CHECKS ON THE WAY FOR VETERANS

Michael Lamendola - March 28, 2009

CAPITAL REGION — Starting in June, Uncle Sam will give eligible veterans and their survivors a one-time payment of \$250 to help them through the recession, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., announced on Friday.

The payment will be automatically mailed to them or deposited directly into their bank accounts, according to Bethany Lesser of Gillibrand's office. "It should just appear. They don't have to do anything," she said.

The money comes from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

To be eligible for the payment, a veteran or survivor must have received compensation, pension, dependency and indemnity compensation or spina bifida benefits between November 2008 and January 2009. Also, beneficiaries must reside within the United States or Puerto Rico, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa or the U.S. Virgin Islands. <More at:

www.dailygazette.com/news/2009/mar/28/0328_veterancash/>

STUDY LINKS GULF WAR EXPOSURES, BRAIN CHANGES

Kelly Kennedy - Staff writer - Apr 1, 2009

A new study of veterans of the 1991 Gulf War suggests that exposure to neurotoxins such as anti-nerve agent pills, insect repellent and Sarin caused neurological changes to the brain.

However, brain imaging shows those changes appear to differ depending on what and how much each person was exposed to. The changes also correspond to different sets of symptoms.

Researchers at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Southern Methodist University, and the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Dallas performed digital brain scans on 21 chronically ill Gulf War veterans from the same Naval Reserve construction battalion, all of whom had symptoms of "Gulf War syndrome."

<More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2009/04/military_gulf_war_brain_changes_040109w/>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE FRIDAY 10 APRIL 2009

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,213 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,271
WOUNDED US [4/4/09]	31,169
OTHER US CASUALTIES [4/4/09]	≥36,624
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [4/4/09]	181
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED UK	179
KILLED OTHER COALITION	139
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/03/09]	≥ 48,874
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [4/4/09]	≥ 99,774 - 668,051
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [11/9/08]	≥ 400K – 1.374M
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,742 DAYS)

KILLED US	677
WOUNDED US [4/4/09]	2,766
OTHER CASUALTIES US [4/4/2009]	7,775
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [4/4/09]	30
KILLED COALITION	452
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007)	1,602
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (2/24/2009)	≥ 7,373
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (2/24/2009)	46,322
AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	1.75M/4.8M

COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE \$612,553,788,856

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

* This entry has been changed to "Non-mortal casualties" which includes wounded, non-hostile casualties, and diseased where medical air transport was required. To see detailed demographic data on the casualties go to

<http://siadapp.dior.whs.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/castop.htm>

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

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF APRIL 7, 2009

This week the Army and Navy announced an increase, while the Air Force and Marine Corps announced a decrease. The Coast Guard number remained unchanged. The net collective result is 243 more reservists activated than last week. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 99,329; Navy Reserve, 6,737; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 14,201; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,482; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 666. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 128,415, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2009/d20090407nqr.pdf>.

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

This is from Dan Cedusky, Champaign IL "Colonel Dan" colonel-dan@sbcglobal.net::

<http://www.angelfire.com/il2/VeteranIssues/>

Many cases take much longer.. the HAAS case goes back to Feb 2004 Haas v Nicholson [subsequently Haas v. Peake subsequently Haas v. Shinsekij] case involves offshore sailor's claim for herbicide exposure. I have been following this case which shows how long it takes to get NOTHING done. And of course, The court will remand it back to BVA or

VARO, and it will start all over, deny, appeal, remand, deny, etc etc The Case started at VARO in 1998 Below is just while it was at the Court of Veteran Appeals <http://www.vetapp.gov/>

9/10/2007 Notice of Appeal (MCCRAB) (MCCRAB)
9/10/2007 FILED:US Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims' Filing Fee - \$50.00 (Not Assigned)
9/17/2007 Notice of Docketing for BVA's decision w/in 30 days; DR w/in 60 days (GASKIA)
9/18/2007 Copy of BVA Decision (MCCRAB) (M - 9/18/2007) (AMANSARAY)
10/23/2007 Appearance of attorney for Appellee (M - 10/23/2007) (HAYESR)
10/23/2007 Mot of appellee to ext time to file DR by 12/31/07 (M - 10/23/2007) (HAYESR)
10/25/2007 Clerk's ord granting Appellee's 10/23/07 Mot until 12/31/07 (HAYESR) (HAYESR)
1/2/2008 Designation of Record (MCCRAB) (M - 1/2/2008) (HAYESR)
1/7/2008 Notice to Counter-Designate Record within 35 days (HAYESR)
2/8/2008 Pro Bono's Mot for stay of proceedings until 3/27/08 (H - 2/8/2008) (HAYESR)
2/11/2008 Clerk's ord granting Pro Bono's 2/8/08 Mot until 3/27/08 (HAYESR) (HAYESR)
3/25/2008 Pro Bono's Mot for stay of proceedings until 4/28/08 (H - 3/25/2008) (HAYESR)
3/27/2008 Clerk's ord granting Pro Bono's 3/25/08 Mot until 4/28/08 (HAYESR) (HAYESR)
4/10/2008 Appearance of attorney for Appellant, w/o charge (M - 4/10/2008) (HAYESR)
4/15/2008 Ord the stay is lifted; w/in 35 days, Appellant file the CDR or a statement accepting the record as it has been designated by the Appellee (RH) (HAYESR)
4/18/2008 Mot of appellant's counsel to withdraw (M - 4/18/2008) (HAYESR)
4/25/2008 Ord Appellant's Mot is granted; Appellant is treated as self-represented until a qualified rep enter an appearance; proceedings are stayed 30 days to permit substitution of counsel (CPS) (HAYESR)

5/22/2008 Pro Bono's Mot for stay of proceedings until 6/26/08 (H - 5/22/2008) (HAYESR)
5/23/2008 Clerk's ord granting Pro Bono's 5/22/08 Mot until 6/26/08 (HAYESR) (HAYESR)
6/4/2008 Appearance of attorney for Appellant (M - 6/4/2008) (HAYESR)
6/4/2008 Fee Agreement (M - 6/4/2008) (HAYESR)
6/5/2008 ORD that the stay is lifted; appellant file a counter designation of record or a statement accepting the record as designated by the Appellee within 30 days after the date of this order. (RH) (HAYESR)
7/7/2008 Statement in lieu of Counter Designation of Record (M - 7/7/2008) (HAYESR)
7/17/2008 Mot of appellee to ext time to file record by 9/18/08 (M - 7/17/2008) (HAYESR)
7/21/2008 Clerk's ord granting Appellee's 7/17/08 Mot until 9/18/08 (HAYESR) (HAYESR)
9/18/2008 Record on Appeal (M - 9/18/2008) (MEYERK)
9/25/2008 Notice to File Brief within 60 days (MEYERK)
09/25/2008 Notice to File Brief within 60 days (MEYERK)
10/15/2008 ORDERED that the Court will initiate a telephonic briefing conference on November 18, 2008, at 3:00 PM (ET).
10/16/2008 Rule 33 Certificate of Service
11/18/2008 Appearance of co-counsel for appellant
11/19/2008 Conference held
11/19/2008 ORDERED that the appellant's brief is due within 30 days after the date of this order.
12/17/2008 Appellant's Brief
12/31/2008 Appearance of Attorney(s) OGC-ICM0 for party(s) Appellee James B Peake, M.D., as non-attorney
02/09/2009 Mot of Appellee to extend time to file appellee brief. Requested date 04/03/2009 at 11:59 pm.
02/09/2009 Clerk's stamp ord granting appellee's motion to extend time to file appellee's brief until 4/3/2009

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

YOU CAN GET COLLEGE CREDIT FOR SOME OF YOUR MILITARY EXPERIENCES, MOS'S, AND SCHOOLS.

A list of colleges and Universities by State is at this web site: www.soc.aascu.org/pubfiles/socmisc/UNIV_COLL.pdf

FINAL RULES – POST 9/11 GI BILL

The full final rules for the GI Bill are at <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/pdf/E9-7052.pdf>

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 scCook@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

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

The phone is covered by a voice recorder 24 hours a day. We'll get back to you ASAP.