

SOUND OFF!



VOL. V, NO 16

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

20 JULY 2010

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

IS ANYBODY THERE? DOES ANYBODY CARE?

It seems that every day we are reminded of these questions of General Washington to the Continental Congress from the musical “1776” –

“Is anybody there? Does anybody care?”

God and the Devil know we try to help, as do many other groups around the country, but no one can blame the veteran, especially the veterans of today’s conflicts, for asking the very same questions. No one can deny them the right to ask that question and to demand meaningful answers.

The answers they get are seldom meaningful. Most often the responses fit one of three descriptors:

Temporizing—“We’ll get back to you on that”, or, “We are establishing a commission/work group/task force/etc.”; or, “Studies are underway.” Those suffering from Agent Orange, Gulf War Syndrome, and Depleted Uranium are familiar with all of these.

Antagonism—“You have to prove to us that you are not cheating.”; or, “We are doing the right thing, but you are ungrateful and don’t recognize it.”; or “You knew what you signed up for, so what do you expect now?”; or, “We didn’t do this to you, you must have lied on your enlistment about your preexisting condition.” All PTSD and TBI sufferers know each of these answers only too well.

Hypocrisy—“We support the troops (only not as much as they need); or, “Freedom isn’t free! (but you can’t expect us to pay for it); or, “Remember the killed and wounded! (we had a parade what more do you want?)”. These answers come from all levels—Congress, the VA, DoL, DoJ, the chartered Veterans organizations, state legislatures, and local federal, state, and county veterans service offices.

In response to our last bulletin a member asked, “Are we [meaning VUFT] doing anything? Do we have a lobbyist group? What are we doing for the individual veteran? Those with a problem? Those that need help? What are we doing?” (the full letter is below). These questions deserve an answer.

Our organization is doing what it can with the very limited resources we have. We decided at the start that there were already so many organizations established that purported to give direct support to veterans that we would just get in the way in that arena. We looked for other ways to help and decided that there was a need for legislation at the state and federal level to correct some of the inequities we saw in the treatment of veterans, serving military, and their families. We declared to the IRS that we would be lobbying to forego tax trouble later.

As we got further into our research on legislative needs we found that the critical need is holding legislators’ and administrators’ feet to the fire on legislation and programs that exist but which are being implemented poorly, and sometimes not at all.

Our first legislative attempt was successful up to a point. Since so many of our members are from California, we proposed legislation to have that state step in where the feds were failing in so many ways on the activation of National Guard and Reserves. The feds were failing on training, equipping and servicing those who were activated, often sending them out with little or no training, with older or faulty equipment. They were failing to pay them on a timely basis. They were treating them as second-class citizens when they returned wounded.

The legislation got mucked up in the legislature, but it essentially kept the sense of what we asked for: it passed without a dissenting vote, but it was vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger as being redundant to other programs. Since other programs didn't address these issues we were unable to get a clear answer on how they were redundant, but nonetheless, it taught us quite a few lessons.

The legislation was meant to provide a template for other states to follow, but we were unable to gin up sufficient interest among our members to try the same thing or something similar in their states.

We had hoped to establish a legislative research arm of the organization that would compare veterans' benefits and services among the states and come up with a unified recommended legislative statute for all of the states—we again were unable to get up enough interested members to do that.

We were concerned that we could not engender support for these efforts, and needed to know why. What we found was that many of our members were members because they needed help, not because they can provide help—and that's OK.

We found that if we wanted to do these sorts of things, we would need paid staff yet we knew that the competition for money was vicious and we did not feel that we had a chance against the big boys in raising money—that has proved to be the case. [You may have noticed we don't collect dues and we have seldom asked all of you for donations.]

Of course if the big boys were doing their job, we wouldn't be needed. Instead they spend most of their energies on being seen (and photographed) before congressional committees where they are given the sweetsop of time in front of the committee, and then their recommendations, if they make any, are generally ignored—courteously to be true—but nonetheless ignored. Those are the congressionally chartered organizations who are failing; what kind of chance would we have?

Well we got our chance in our second targeted area—performance against established law, mandated and funded programs, and clearly identified and defined needs of veterans and serving military.

Legislation was always our preference—litigation was a last resort. We didn't even know if we could ever raise enough cash to pursue litigation, but we lucked out.

In 2007 we were invited to join in a class action lawsuit against the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We were not interested in suing the VA for money—Congress wasn't giving them enough anyway. What we were interested in, however, was suing the VA for performance, particularly in the area of PTSD treatment. We joined the lawsuit as the first of two plaintiffs, the other being Veterans for Common Sense.

Pro bono legal services to the tune of millions of dollars have been provided by Morrison & Foerster, LLP (MoFo) and Disability Rights Advocates (DRA) to whom we all should be eternally grateful.

The lawsuit is titled "*Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief under United States Constitution and Rehabilitation Act*"; it was filed in July of . It is conventionally referred to as "*Veterans for Common Sense et al v. Shinseki*" where our identification is hidden in the "et al". This happens simply because VCS is alphabetically ahead of VUFT and the courts like the shortest title possible—go figure.

You can read the detailed purposes of the case at <http://www.veteransptsdclassaction.org/cfd.html>.

The case was heard in March of 2008: in June of 2008 the judge issued his ruling. He found that he did not have the authority at the District Court level to compel the VA to perform. Interestingly, in his ruling he went into detail supporting most of our arguments.

We appealed the case to the 9th Federal Circuit Court of Appeals in July of 2008. A three-judge panel heard our arguments in August, 2008 and ultimately cleared the case for hearing before the full court. We wait for that hearing, which should occur this year.

If our appeal is unsuccessful, we intend to go to the US Supreme Court.

Beyond this action, we publish this monthly newsletter which tries to live up to our name, i.e., we try to ferret out the truth of veterans' issues, or at least present to you our readers the official position and any conflicting positions or counterarguments that we can find, so that you can be more fully informed.

Why be more informed? So that you too can take action on your own or through this or another veterans organization. You can only take competent and effective action if you can get through the **Temporizing, Antagonism, and Hypocrisy** of Congress and the various Executive Branches concerned with veterans' issues—Veterans Affairs, Labor, Justice, and Defense.

So this is our response about what we are doing. We have no paid employees or officers. The money we raise (and we do need some) is used to fund

correspondence, postage, the publishing of briefing and information materials, expenses for our board members who support the legal team at the various court hearings, and maintenance of our website. Most of the money we have raised so far has come out of the pockets of your board members.

We cannot provide services to individual veterans, so if that is where your donations are headed we can suggest a few charities.

We are satisfied that we have found our niche. We are doing something through our class action law suit that almost no one is doing, which is to take on the VA directly in the name of all veterans, instead of each veteran having to take on the 250,000 employees of the VA as unrepresented individuals.

“It is the poor and desperate who fight our wars. The impoverished, often without legal rights, do the dirty work for the bloated, self-absorbed oligarchy and its compliant middle-class managers. Curtis White ... argues that most Americans are aware of the brutality and injustice used to maintain the excesses of their consumer society and empire. He suspects they

do not care. They don’t want to see what is done in their name. They do not want to look at the rows of flag-draped coffins or the horribly maimed bodies and faces of veterans who return home or the hundreds of thousands we have killed in Iraq. It is too upsetting. ...Most prefer to be entertained.”

Chris Hedges 2008

We care—we believe that you care too, and we hope that we are doing what you would have us do. If you want to help us in the fight to make the various executive departments and agencies do their job for veterans for a change, then we would really appreciate your contributions. <http://www.vuft.org/donate.html>.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

NOTE: The articles cited in this issue emphasize the points made here about veterans’ need for help, and the VA’s performance, temporizing, antagonism, and hypocrisy, [Ed.]

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

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

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

Class Action Suit: On 12 August we appeared before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. An article from the LA Times on 24 August summarizes the results so far < <http://latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/healthcare/la-me-veterans-suit24-2009aug24,0,1423297.story>>

.Case Progress to Date:

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

9/25/2007 Defendant’s Motion to Dismiss

2/11/2208 Motion for Preliminary Injunction

2/25/2008 Preliminary Injunction Hearing

4/21/2008 Trial

6/25/2008 Judgment based on jurisdiction

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

12/10/2008 Appeal brief filed

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

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

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

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

4/22/09 Extension granted to 1 May 2009

5/1/09 Appellants’ Reply Brief filed

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

8/12/09 Oral arguments

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

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

7/20/10 NTR [The courts move veeerrrry slowly] There is a rumor that we may yet be heard this session

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

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

SUPPORTING THE CAUSE If you wish to donate to our work you may now do so via PayPal or Visa on our website "Donate" page at www.vuft.org/donate.html. Every little bit helps. We are a 501(c)(3): your donations are deductible on your federal taxes. You can also buy our handsome pins using the same method.

P L E A S E D O N A T E !

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

Sirs,

I wonder is there news to be shared? This is the only letter I ever get. Are we doing anything? Do we have a lobbyist group? What are we doing for the individual veteran? Those with a problem? Those that need help? What are we doing?

Sincerely, Claude Conn - U.S. Coast Guard 1961-1970 - Vietnam 1968-1968

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

FILNER CHALLENGES VA LEADERSHIP AT HEARING

July 15, 2010

Washington, D.C. – House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA) released the following statement following a Congressional hearing to examine an incident involving reusable dental equipment and veteran patient safety at the John Cochran VA Medical Center in St. Louis, Missouri:

... "I remain concerned with VA's lack of transparency. When mistakes are made, honesty and truthfulness are the only way to begin to rebuild trust with the public. Success is measured by veteran service, not bureaucratic preservation. "I challenge the leaders at the John Cochran VA Medical Center, and the leaders at VA Medical Centers around the country, to step up their game. The time is now – to ensure safety procedures are in place, to establish strong employee training programs, to continue to strengthen their national oversight structure, to improve their veteran notification process, to provide timely information to veterans, and to prove to our veterans that these problems are not systemic of the VA medical system.

<More at: www.vawatchdog.org/10/hcva10/hcva071510-1.htm>

BUYER BILL WOULD PROVIDE FAMILY-LIKE ENVIRONMENT, PERSONAL FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE TO VETERANS REQUIRING LONG TERM CARE

July 1, 2010

Washington, D.C. — Yesterday, House Committee on Veterans Affairs Ranking Member Steve Buyer introduced legislation to authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to contract with adult foster homes for the provision of long-term care to veterans who are unable to live independently.

VA has helped place more than 600 veterans in adult foster homes since 2002. However, because VA is not authorized to provide assisted living benefits, these veterans have had to pay for adult foster homes out of their own pockets. H.R. 5641 would alleviate this burden by allowing VA to cover the cost of adult foster care for veterans who are eligible for VA paid nursing home care. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/10/hcva10/hcva070110-3.htm>

HOUSES PASSES BILL TO ASSIST PARENTS OF DECEASED SERVICEMEMBERS

July 1, 2010

Washington, D.C. – This week, the House of Representative approved four veteran related measures, including legislation to provide parents of deceased servicemembers, commonly referred to as Gold Star Parents, expanded access to state veterans' homes.

<More at: www.vawatchdog.org/10/hcva10/hcva070110-2.htm>

MURRAY'S HOMELESS WOMEN VETERANS BILL BLOCKED BY SENATE REPUBLICANS

June 29, 2010

(Washington, D.C.) – Today, U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) spoke on the Senate floor to request immediate passage of the Homeless Women Veterans and Homeless Veterans With Children Act. The bill was introduced in June of 2009 and passed the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on January 28, 2010 with strong bi-partisan support. Republican Senator Mitch McConnell objected to the legislation on the Senate floor on behalf of Senator Tom Coburn, preventing it from passing.

<More at: www.veteransforcommonsense.org/index.php/whats-new/1790-patty-murray>

LAWMAKERS CALL FOR VA OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL TO BETTER SERVE VETERANS

Washington, D.C. – On Wednesday, June 30, 2010, Chairman [Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations] Harry Mitchell (D-AZ) conducted a hearing to evaluate the Office of General Counsel (OGC) at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The hearing marks the first Congressional oversight hearing on the OGC in more than three decades.

... Chairman Mitchell [said], "We have heard concerns that the OGC has repeatedly used time extensions from the court in order to keep pace with their workload, increasing legal fees for those opposing the VA."

... Bob Filner (D-CA), Chair of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, said, "It is not surprising that some veterans see the VA as an adversary. When those involved in legal matters with the VA suspect that VA lawyers are protecting the taxpayer rather than seeking justice, we need to fully evaluate the mission of the office"

<More at: <http://coalitionforveterans.org/2010/07/lawmakers-call-for-va-office-of-general-counsel-to-better-serve-veterans/>>

SENATE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO IMPROVE VETERANS' DISABILITY CLAIMS PROCESSING

Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Daniel K. Akaka (D-Hawaii) introduced legislation yesterday, June 22, to make much-needed improvements to VA's disability claims processing. VA provides disability compensation to approximately 3.1 million veterans across the nation.

<More at: <http://coalitionforveterans.org/2010/06/senate-veterans-affairs-committee-chairman-introduces-legislation-to-improve-veterans-disability-claims-processing/>>

RETREAT – NEWS

RECORDS SHOW DOUBTS ON '64 VIETNAM CRISIS

Elisabeth Bumiller - New York Times - July 14, 2010

WASHINGTON — In an echo of the debates over the discredited intelligence that helped make the case for the war in Iraq, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday released more than 1,100 pages of previously classified Vietnam-era transcripts that show senators of the time sharply questioning whether they had been deceived by the White House and the Pentagon over the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident.

"If this country has been misled, if this committee, this Congress, has been misled by pretext into a war in which thousands of young men have died, and many more thousands have been crippled for life, and out of which their country has lost prestige, moral position in the world, the consequences are very great," Senator Albert Gore Sr. of Tennessee, the father of the future vice president, said in March 1968 in a closed session of the Foreign Relations Committee. Transcripts: <http://tinyurl.com/347hpse>

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2010/07/15/world/asia/15vietnam.html>

UN ANNOUNCES AGENT ORANGE CLEAN-UP FOR VIETNAM

Mail & Guardian - HANOI, VIETNAM - Jun 28 2010

The United Nations announced a \$5-million project on Monday to clean up wartime contamination in Vietnam caused by Agent Orange sprayed by the United States military, but said much more money was needed. The project by the UN development agency will focus on contamination at the airport in Bien Hoa, The UN's resident coordinator said it was the worst-affected site. <More at: www.mg.co.za/article/2010-06-28-un-announces-agent-orange-cleanup-for-vietnam>

FROM SWORDS TO PLOWSHARES: INTRODUCING MILITARY VETERANS TO FARMING

Mary MacVean - Los Angeles Times - July 8, 2010

After Colin Archipley and his wife sold their tiny Venice house and bought 2 acres of land in Escondido in 2005, he started caring for the 200 avocado trees on the land just because they were there. That turned out to be a catalyst for a new life for the Iraq war veteran.

After leaving the Marines in 2006, Archipley, 29, had a vision of replicating the teamwork and proficiency of his military colleagues. He found that business: Archi's Acres now grows herbs and greens — and avocados — on 6 acres, some of which he owns and some of which he rents, selling at farmers markets and to Whole Foods and other retailers. Archipley and his wife, Karen, have also started Veterans Sustainable Agriculture Training, an organization geared particularly to service-disabled, combat-experienced post- 9/11 veterans.

<More at: <http://latimes.com/news/custom/topofthetimes/features/la-fo-veterans-farming-20100708.0.6031491.story>>

VETERAN'S MEMORIAL DEDICATED ON COEUR D'ALENE RESERVATION

PLUMMER, Idaho – “This memorial is dedicated to the Coeur d’Alene tribal warriors. It’s a celebration of their sacrifice and to show they fought for freedom and our way of life for our homeland. The deceased people whose names are inscribed on the stones have defended the treaties and the constitution. It is my hope that all people will come to this memorial and reflect on the gifts of liberty and freedom bestowed upon them by those that stood together against tyranny, against evil.” Ernie Stensgar, vice chairman of the Coeur d’Alene tribal council.

<More at: www.indiancountrytoday.com/national/northwest/96595149.html>

UNLIKELY TUTOR GIVES ADVICE TO MILITARY

Elisabeth Bumiller - New York Times - July 18, 2010

WASHINGTON — In the frantic last hours of General Stanley A. McChrystal’s command in Afghanistan, when the world wondered what was racing through his mind, he reached out to an unlikely corner of his life: the author of the book “Three Cups of Tea,” Greg Mortenson.

“Will move through this and if I’m not involved in the years ahead, will take tremendous comfort in knowing people like you are helping Afghans build a future,” McChrystal wrote to Mortenson in an e-mail message, as he traveled from Kabul to Washington. ... The e-mail message was in response to a note of support from Mortenson. It reflected his broad and deepening relationship with the US military, whose leaders have increasingly turned to Mortenson, once a shaggy mountaineer, to help translate the theory of counterinsurgency into tribal realities on the ground.

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2010/07/18/world/asia/18tea.html>

JUDGE RULES STOLEN VALOR ACT ILLEGAL

Associated Press July 17, 2010

DENVER -- A law that makes it illegal to lie about being a war hero is unconstitutional because it violates free speech, a federal judge ruled Friday. ... U.S. District Judge Robert Blackburn dismissed the case and said the law is unconstitutional, ruling the government did not show it has a compelling reason to restrict that type of statement.

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/judge-rules-stolen-valor-act-illegal-.html>

LOST KOREAN WAR BATTALION AWAITS US MIA DECISION

By CHARLES J. HANLEY (AP) – 16 hours ago

SEOUL, South Korea -- Trapped by two Chinese divisions, troops of the 8th U.S. Cavalry Regiment were left to die in far northern Korea, abandoned by the U.S. command in a Korean War episode viewed as one of the most troubling in American military history. Sixty years later, those fallen Soldiers, the lost battalion of Unsan, are stranded anew. North Korea is offering fresh clues to their remains. American teams are ready to re-enter the north to dig for them. But for five years, the U.S. government has refused to work with North Korea to recover the men of Unsan and others among more than 8,000 U.S. missing in action from the 1950-53 war. Now, under pressure from MIA family groups, the Obama administration is said to be moving slowly to reverse the Bush administration’s suspension of the joint recovery program, a step taken in 2005 as the North Korean nuclear crisis dragged on. <More at: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/38298713/ns/world_news-asiapacific/>

TO THE COLORS - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
7/26		Hempstead, NY	Resource Fair	Michael Kilbride michael.kilbride@hhsnassaucountyny.us	516.227.8731
7/29		Embassy Suites Hotel Nashville - Airport 10 Century Boulevard Nashville, TN	Career Expo		Register
7/30-8/1		Ventura, CA	Stand Down	Clair Hope	805.987.3118
8/7-13		Broken Spoke Campground Sturgis, SD	The Wall That Heals	Harley-Davidson and Rolling Thunder	
8/12		Sheraton Crystal City Hotel 1800 Jefferson Davis Highway Arlington, Virginia	Career Expo		Register
8/21		Pittsburgh, PA	Resource Fair	Robert Rosswog rosswogr@vlpwpa.org	412.481.8200 x217
8/25-29		Holiday Inn by the Bay Portland, ME	Veterans for Peace 25 th Anniv. Convention	http://www.vfpnationalconvention.org/	
8/26		Hilton DFW Executive Lakes Conference Ctr Austin Ranch 1800 Hiwy 26 East Grapevine, TX	Career Expo		Register
8/26-28		Marysville, CA	Stand Down	Michael Nichols nichols.mikea@sbcglobal.net	530.749.1036
8/27-28		Boston, MA	Resource Fair	George Mathieson gmathieson@voamass.org	617.390.0228
8/27		Duluth, MN	Resource Fair	Paul Pedersen ppedersen@mac-v.org	218.722.8763
8/28		Springfield, OR	Resource Fair	David Stone dstone@orsdf.org	541.954.4931
9/2-5		40700 Romeo Plank Rd Clinton Township, MI	The Wall That Heals	Charter Township of Clinton	
9/9-12		Leo Jr/Sr High School Leo, IN	The Wall That Heals	Leo Jr/Sr High School	
9/9		Indianapolis, IN	Resource Fair	Cynthia Thomas cthomas@hvaf.org	317.951.0688
9/10-11		Prescott, AZ	Resource Fair	Barbara Mikkelsen bmikkelsen@usvetsinc.org	928.717.7581
9/11		Camp Rilea, OR	Resource Fair	Patrick Preston clatcvsograntworks@charter.net	503.325.4821 x247
9/14-15		Glendive, MT	Resource Fair	Shannon Kadmas skadmas@mt.gov	406-377-3314 x205
9/14		Akron, OH	Resource Fair	Laura Williams Dunlop williams.ld@hotmail.com	330.762.7328
9/15		Longview, WA	Resource Fair	Helen Reid helen_hert@yahoo.com	360.224.9634
9/16		TBD - Tampa FL	Career Expo		Register
9/17		Wichita, KS	Resource Fair	Judy Epperson judy.epperson@va.gov	316.685.2221
9/17		Kokomo, IN	Resource Fair	Lisa Chiavola lchiavola@dwd.in.gov	765.459.0571 x3019
9/17-19		Sacramento, CA	Stand Down	Barbara Ross ross4834@comcast.net	916.646.6004
9/17-19		Roseburg, OR	Stand Down	Rick Freund hyey619@charter.net	541.643.0254
9/18		Titusville, FL	Resource Fair	John Carroll delbert.duncklee@va.gov	321.637.3788
9/18		Miami, FL	Resource Fair	Cheryl Smart cheryl.smart@va.gov	305.541.5864
9/18		Salem, OR	Resource Fair	Wayne Crowder wayjacrowder@yahoo.com	503.363.4238
9/22		Dothan, AL	Resource Fair	Earl C. Jones, Jr. earlcarterjr@hotmail.com	334.596.1413

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

THE SYSTEM MOVES EVER SO SLOWLY BUT CHANGES HAVE HAPPENED ~ NEW INFO ON THE VETS SET OF POISONS

Agent Orange

Draft evaluation sheets are available for three new diseases added to the AO List.

Ischemic Heart Disease: www.naus.org/news/documents/AO_Heart_WorksheetPrelim.doc

Leukemia: www.naus.org/news/documents/AO_Leukemia_WorksheetPrelim.doc

Parkinson's Disease: www.naus.org/news/documents/AO_Parkinsons_WorksheetPrelim.doc

The Fleet Reserve Association has an expanded list of those vessels that operated in and around Vietnam that are considered exposed to AO. www.fra.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=News&CONTENTID=10575&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm

Depleted Uranium

Dept. of Veterans Affairs' "Evaluation Protocol for Gulf War and Iraqi Freedom Veterans with Potential Exposure to Depleted Uranium (DU)" handbook includes OIF in addition to Gulf War www1.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1158

VA HOSPITAL MAY HAVE INFECTED 1,800 VETERANS WITH HIV

CNN Wire Staff - July 1, 2010

(CNN) -- A Missouri VA hospital is under fire because it may have exposed more than 1,800 veterans to life-threatening diseases such as hepatitis and HIV. John Cochran VA Medical Center in St. Louis has recently mailed letters to 1,812 veterans telling them they could contract hepatitis B, hepatitis C and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) after visiting the medical center for dental work. <More at: www.cnn.com/2010/US/06/30/va.hospital.hiv/index.html>

AFTER ALL, THEY'RE ONLY U.S. VETERANS

Opelousas, LA Daily World - July 18, 2010

Representative Russ Carnahan, who represents St. Louis, recently asked the White House, the Veterans Administration and the House Committee on Veterans Affairs to look into the possibility that potentially deadly viruses were transmitted through equipment used at the John Cochran Division of the St. Louis Veterans Affairs Medical Center from February 2009 to March 2010. <More at: www.dailyworld.com/article/20100718/OPINION/7180306/After-all-they-re-only-U-S-veterans>

CAMP LEJEUNE WATER CONTAMINATION

The Department of the Navy has initiated a mail campaign to notify Veterans stationed at Camp LeJeune Marine Corps Base in North Carolina of the presence of toxic chemicals in the drinking water between 1957 and 1987. The letter invites service members and their families stationed there during this time period to participate in a registry of who may have consumed contaminated drinking. <More at: www4.va.gov/healtheligibility/Library/pubs/CampLejeuneWaterContamination/CampLejeuneWaterContamination.pdf>

AS OF THIS MORNING – NO RULE

FEDERAL COURT ORDERS VA SECRETARY TO PUBLISH NEW AGENT ORANGE PRESUMPTIVES RULE

Larry Scott - VA Watchdog dot Org

United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit orders Shinseki to publish new rule by noon on Monday, July 19, 2010, or explain why not. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/10/nf10/nfjul10/nf071710-1.htm>

HOW MANY YEARS WILL IT TAKE FOR THE VA TO RECOGNIZE THIS ONE?

SAND FLIES INFECT U.S. FORCES WITH PARASITE THAT LEAVES THEM WITH 'BAGHDAD BOIL'

Eric Athas - June 22, 2010

Mason Alsaleh was sound asleep when he was attacked at a U.S. Army outpost in northwest Iraq. What happened that August night last year left the 48-year-old interpreter disfigured and unable to sleep, his mind muddled with paranoia, his

temper short. But Alsaleh's injuries -- including what look today like third-degree burns on his neck and arm -- weren't caused by gunfire or an explosion. His enemy that night was a tiny insect that injected a flesh-eating parasite into his skin.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/21/AR2010062104103.html

USERRA IS WHERE WE BEGAN OUR FIGHT – WITH LITTLE SUCCESS

RETURNING TROOPS FACE NEW FIGHT FOR OLD JOBS

Kathryn Watson - July 4, 2010

Federal law easy for employers to ignore

As the Iraq and Afghanistan wars persist, some employers are becoming increasingly resistant to rehire service members who return from active duty as federal law requires, legal analysts say.

<More at: www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/jul/1/returning-troops-face-new-fight-for-jobs/

NEVADA ARMY RESERVIST FILES ON USERRA

PR Newswire June 17, 2009

Justice Department Files Lawsuit Against Nevada to Enforce Employment Rights of U.S. Army Reservist

WASHINGTON -- The Justice Department today filed a lawsuit against the state of Nevada and its Office of the State Controller alleging it violated the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA) by refusing to promptly reemploy Arthur Ingram when he returned from active military duty and then by firing him after he filed a USERRA complaint. The suit was filed in U.S. District Court in Reno, NV.

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/nevada-army-reservist-files-on-userra.html

USERRA CASE HEADS FOR SUPREME COURT

Bryant Jordan - Military.com - July 15, 2010

It's the nation's promise to those who serve in the reserves and National Guard: In return for deploying overseas to serve their country, the companies they left behind will have the same jobs available when they get back. And, oh yeah -- it's the law.

But according to one expert, there may be up to 8,000 alleged violations of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act reported, investigated, mediated or fought in the courts each year.

Now a USERRA case involving a reservist who claims he was fired because of his military service is slated to be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court. Army Reserve Sgt. Vincent Staub sued his former employer, Proctor Hospital of Peoria, Ill., in 2004 after being fired from his job. He claims he was let go after fellow employees, bitter or resentful over his taking time off for military service, conspired to damage his job performance. Staub won in district court in Illinois but had the verdict overturned by the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals in March 2009.

"If the [appeals court decision] is upheld, it's going to make it difficult for Guard and Reserve members to win [firing] cases, or denial of initial employment or denial of promotion cases," said retired Navy Capt. Samuel L. Wright, director of the Reserve Officers Association's Servicemember's Law Center. <More at: www.military.com/news/article/userra-case-heads-for-supreme-court.html>

JOB CORPS AND VETS LAUNCH VETERAN EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

All expenses paid – including housing, job placement and transition support

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)'s Employment and Training Administration and the Veterans' Employment and Training Service have announced a demonstration project to assist eligible veterans who have recently left the military in gaining enhanced skills to compete in the civilian workplace. <More at: www.nchv.org/news_article.cfm?id=755

PTSD AND TBI ARE THE HEART OF OUR CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT

THE NEW RULES ON PTSD DON'T PLEASE EVERYONE

Many veterans advocates say that while the rule is a major improvement, it does not go far enough in lowering obstacles to veterans seeking health care or disability compensation for P.T.S.D. At issue is a provision saying that a final determination on whether a veteran's disorder is tied to service — instead of, say, a car crash — can be made only by a physician or psychologist working for the

PTSD CLAIMS: MAKING THE PROCESS EASIER FOR OUR VETERANS

Tammy Duckworth - The White House Blog - July 12, 2010

... From this point forward, VA will not require corroboration of a PTSD stressor related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity if a VA psychiatrist or psychologist confirms that the stressful experience recalled by a Veteran adequately supports a diagnosis of PTSD and the Veteran's symptoms are related to the claimed stressor. This means that if a Veteran was in a certain place at a certain time—and they present to us with diagnosable symptoms, then we'll presume those symptoms were caused by their experience in combat. <More at: www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/07/12/ptsd-claims-making-process-easier-our-veterans>

VA Fact Sheet available at: www.va.gov/PTSD_QA.pdf

IN CASE YOU ARE SKEPTICAL!!

[Department of Veterans Affairs. Advocates have urged the department to allow private clinicians to make those determinations as well. Department officials say the provision is intended to ensure consistency in examinations. They assert that mental health clinicians affiliated with the department are likely to have greater experience with P.T.S.D. and be better able not only to detect it but also weed out "malingerers."]

In a news conference announcing the new rule on Monday, Dr. Robert A. Petzel, the department's under secretary for health, said the department rejected requests to allow private clinicians to make final diagnoses because, "We've got 20,000 professionals who are excellent in handling this." The assertion that federal clinicians "would create barriers doesn't ring true to me," Dr. Petzel added. "Our people are very desirous to get these benefits to the people that deserve them."

<More at: www.nytimes.com/2010/07/13/us/13vets.html>

IT'S OBVIOUS THAT TIMELINESS IS THEIR GOAL, ISN'T IT!

A SOLDIER'S 65-YEAR FIGHT WITH THE VA

William R. Levesque - St. Petersburg Bay Times - 7/2/10

A WWII vet's fight for benefits has outlasted 11 presidents and isn't over.

It was 1945 when Tampa native Marty Redding Jr. first asked the Veterans Administration for a pension and treatment for the psychological trauma he suffered fighting in World War II. He was 20 years old.

On Sunday, Redding will celebrate his 85th birthday - and he's still seeking benefits. "Kind of hard to believe, isn't it?" he says.

<More at: www.tampabay.com/news/military/veterans/a-soldiers-65-year-fight-with-the-va/1106583>

NEW HOPES FOR WOMEN VETERANS MAKING CLAIMS FOR PTSD BENEFITS

WTKR-TV3 - 9:23 PM EDT - July 14, 2010

NORFOLK - Veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders could finally get access to benefits. Christine Brooks is a Navy veteran who says she suffers from PTSD, including painful headaches that make it hard to sleep.

She's been trying to receive PTSD health benefits from the VA since the 1990s but her claims keep getting denied because she didn't have direct combat experience when she was on active duty in the 1960s.

Christine is trying to keep faith in the Department of Veterans Affairs, but her patience is running low. "It's frustrating. You get aggravated which I don't need because of my heart. You even get anxiety attacks," she says.

Christine says she consistently receives letters every few months telling her that they are still processing her application for compensation. The latest is dated July 7th. <More at: www.wtkr.com/news/wtkr-ptsd-benefits-women.0.698059.story>

A LIFE SHATTERED: FOR IRAQ VETERAN WITH PTSD, HELP NEVER CAME

Corinne Reilly - The Virginian-Pilot - July 12, 2010

[This excellent 4-part series is well worth reading in its entirety Ed.]

<http://hamptonroads.com/2010/07/iraq-veteran-posttraumatic-stress-help-never-came>
<http://hamptonroads.com/2010/07/life-shattered-part-2-sick-soldier-help-never-came>
<http://hamptonroads.com/2010/07/life-shattered-part-3-treatment-protocols-do-exist>
<http://hamptonroads.com/2010/07/life-shattered-part-4-searching-strength>

MILITARY RECKONS WITH THE MENTAL WOUNDS OF WAR

Greg Jaffe - Washington Post Staff Writer - July 18, 2010

"...we can't do this anymore," said Gen. James F. Amos, [Ass't. Commandant of the Marine Corps and Commandant selectee] referring to the military's slow response to treating PTSD and traumatic brain injury.

"PTSD is not a figment of someone's imagination," Gen. Peter Chiarelli [Vice Chief of Staff of the Army]

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/nation/mental-wounds/TBI-1.html

WHEN YOU DON'T TAKE CARE OF THE PROBLEM, GUESS WHAT HAPPENS?

THE ARMY'S SUICIDE EPIDEMIC: A CONCISE GUIDE

The Week - July 19, 2010, at 2:24 PM

June was the worst month for U.S. Army suicides since Vietnam, the Defense Department says, with 32 soldiers taking their own lives (slightly more than one a day), bringing the six-month total to 145 suicides. This puts 2010's numbers on track to beat 2009 figures, when 245 soldiers ended their lives. What's going on — and why now?

<More at: <http://theweek.com/article/index/205147/the-armys-suicide-epidemic-a-concise-guide>

MOTHER OF N.J. VETERAN WHO KILLED HIMSELF TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESS

Rohan Mascarenhas - The Star-Ledger - July 14, 2010

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Linda Bean went to Washington today on a mission.

Nearly two years ago, her son, Army Sgt. Coleman Bean, committed suicide after serving two tours in Iraq. As she grieved, Bean heard from her son's former comrades, many of them describing situations they were dealing with, ones similar to those her 25-year-old son could not endure. Recalling her family's experience — the delayed appointments at the Department of Veterans Affairs, the "daunting" website she could not navigate — she worried about their futures. <More at: www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2010/07/nj_mother_of_veteran_who_kille.html>

ARMY RELEASES NEW VIDEO TO COMBAT SUICIDES

Alexandra Hemmerly-Brown - Jul 17, 2010

The Army encourages Soldiers to reach out, talk and listen when they need help, and a new suicide-prevention training video titled "Shoulder to Shoulder" also emphasizes this. Video at: www.army.mil/media/amp/?bctid=114827147001

<More at: www.army.mil/news/2010/07/17/42436-army-releases-new-video-to-combat-suicides/

MAYBE THE PROBLEM HAS BEEN THAT THE CLAIMS ADJUDICATORS HAVE BEEN TAKING AN OVERLY ENTHUSIASTIC AND PERSONAL PART IN THIS STUDY???

STUDY: ECSTASY TREATS PTSD

Bryant Jordan - Military.com - July 16, 2010

The drug Ecstasy shows positive results in the majority of patients when used to treat post-traumatic stress disorder, according to a report coming out Monday in the Journal of Psychopharmacology.

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/study-ecstasy-treats-ptsd.html>

LEAKED INTERNAL MEMO SHOWS HOW VA SYSTEMATICALLY SCREWS OVER WOUNDED VETS TO MAINTAIN PERFORMANCE GRADES

Nora Eisenberg – AlterNet - June 30, 2010

The Veterans Health Administration systematically delays and denies sick veterans medical care and masks it with bogus documentation. That's what the VA Inspector General and a number of veterans' advocates have been claiming since the

early days of the Iraq War, when soldiers returning from Operation Enduring Freedom began flooding VA facilities. Now an internal department memo, posted Wednesday on a watchdog Web site, confirms these charges.

The April 26 memo from William Schoenhard, Deputy Undersecretary for Health Operations and Management, alerts supervisors overseeing scheduling in the nation's largest health care system that he has learned of unacceptable practices. VA facilities have adopted what he calls "gaming strategies" in order to "improve scores on various access measures" by diminishing patient access to treatment. <More at: www.alternet.org/story/147388/>

If you really want to get pissed off, the entire memo is here ~ www.vawatchdog.org/10/nf10/nfjun10/jun10files/gamingthesysystem.pdf

COURT REJECTS VETS' DISABILITY CLAIMS UNFAIRLY, LOUISIANA ADVOCATE SAYS

Bruce Alpert - Times-Picayune - July 06, 2010

A Louisiana veterans advocate Tuesday accused the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims of rejecting many valid disability claims.

"Veterans are not being treated fairly," said Paul Labbe, who heads the Louisiana Veterans Advocacy Group of Lake Charles.

Labbe said he also fears that a civil rights lawsuit alleging improper treatment by a doctor at the VA Alexandria Medical Center in Pineville will be thrown out if a federal judge accepts the arguments of Veterans Affairs lawyers.

A filing by government lawyers argues that the suit doesn't meet the criteria for a civil rights case and shouldn't be allowed to continue to trial.

Members of Congress have been looking at the issue of rejected disability claims after Assistant U.S. Solicitor General Anthony Yang admitted during a Supreme Court hearing in February that between 50 percent and 60 percent of veterans disability cases are mishandled by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Chief Justice John Roberts was surprised by the admission.

"Well, that's really startling, isn't it?" Roberts said. "In litigating with veterans, the government more often than not takes a position that is substantially unjustified?" <More at: www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2010/07/court_rejects_veterans_appeals.html>

IT'S NOT JUST THE VA ~ DOD GETS IN THERE TOO

"FIT BUT UNSUITABLE": SHAMELESS AND SHAMEFUL

By Col. Steve Strobridge, USAF-Ret. 2010/07

Children's sayings about "sticks and stones" notwithstanding, words can be powerful and extremely hurtful — especially in the hands of bureaucrats who manage to twist them in self-contradictory ways.

One would think that when a physical evaluation board (PEB) examines a servicemember's medical condition and deems him or her "fit for duty," the meaning of that term would be self-evident. Wrong.

One also would think that, several years in the wake of media exposure of grievous treatment of wounded warriors and low-balled disability ratings that resulted in separation of severely injured servicemembers with no retirement or medical benefits, that wouldn't be happening anymore. Wrong. <More at: www.moaa.org/lac/lac_asiseeit/lac_asiseeit_2010/lac_asiseeit_100709.htm>

CONCERNS GROW AS MORE VETERANS END UP ON THE STREET

LINDSAY WISE - Houston Chronicle - July 19, 2010

Jacobi Montgomery wound up sleeping on the sidewalk outside a bus station in Beaumont less than six months after being discharged from the Army. The 28-year-old Iraq war veteran's sole possessions consisted of the white and blue striped pajamas he wore, a pair of ratty white tennis shoes on his feet, and a wooden cane he'd been issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs following knee and shoulder surgery.

"I had family telling me it was my fault I was homeless, but who would choose to be homeless?" Montgomery said.

"Sometimes I feel like the battle I had with my family and the military was worse than Iraq. Because you come home thinking you'll be welcomed with open arms and you get shunned ... It's like a kick in the face."

<More at: www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/7114134.html>

YOUNG VETERANS BECOME NEW FACE OF THE HOMELESS

Jeanette Steele - Union-Tribune Staff Writer - July 16, 2010

Charles Worley stood in the smoking area, looking at the uniformed Marine volunteers walking around Stand Down for the Homeless. That used to be him, with the confident stride, bulked-up muscles and full stomach. Instead, this Marine veteran who served two years in Iraq is a Stand Down client. Two years after being discharged, Worley is homeless.

"I've been couch-bouncing. I've actually been outdoors for the past three or four days," said the 31-year-old whose defense industry job lost funding, then unemployment ran out. He missed the deadline for college summer classes, so the G.I. Bill doesn't help him right now. <More at: www.signonsandiego.com/news/2010/jul/16/young-veterans-become-new-face-homeless>

THE POLITICIANS TAKE A BIG BOW ~

At this rate (\$20M for 80 vets), we ought to be able to house all the homeless vets in LA for about \$5 Billion, and for \$60 Billion I guess we could get all U.S. homeless vets off the street.

Of course, this is taking place on the same property where the same politicians are enthusiastically giving away millions in building and land to the Brentwood private school, a dog park, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, and a local private theater group, not to mention a public park where veterans, especially the homeless, will seldom be welcome.

VA COMMITS \$20 MILLION TO CONVERT WEST L.A. BUILDING INTO THERAPEUTIC HOMELESS FACILITY

Martha Groves - Los Angeles Times - June 29, 2010

Secured after a long-term effort, the commitment marks a milestone in the county's efforts to aid chronically homeless veterans, public officials say.

The federal Department of Veterans Affairs has approved \$20 million in funding to convert a little-used building at the West Los Angeles VA campus into therapeutic housing for chronically homeless veterans — a plan that has been years in the making. The action was jointly announced Monday by U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), U.S. Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Beverly Hills) and Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky. <More at: www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-homeless-vets-20100629,0.754255.story>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE TUESDAY 20 JULY 2010

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,680 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,412
WOUNDED US [7/3/10]	31,882
OTHER US CASUALTIES [7/3/10]	39,944
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [7/3/10]	209
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED UK	179
KILLED OTHER COALITION	139
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/25/09]	≥ 48,874
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [7/20/10]	≥ 105,855 – 1,366,350
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [1/20/10]	≥ 400K–1.432M
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (3,209 DAYS)

KILLED US	1191
WOUNDED US [7/3/10]	6,773
OTHER CASUALTIES US [7/3/10]	10,352
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [7/3/10]	40
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED COALITION	757
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/07)	1,602
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY [7/4/09]	≥ 11,152
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (6/7/2010)	≥ 8,669
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	\$734,548,113,235
COST OF AFGHAN WAR TO DATE	\$284,667,473,375

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

* This entry has been changed to "Non-mortal casualties" which includes wounded, non-hostile casualties, and diseased where medical air transport was required. ** Includes 280 additional contractor casualties reported in international press but not in US official figures

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF JULY 13, 2010

This week the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard announced a decrease in activated reservists, while the Navy announced no change. The net collective result is 1,818 fewer reservists activated than last week. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 90,144; Navy Reserve, 6,354; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 16,457; Marine Corps Reserve, 4,917; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 787. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 118,659, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated may be found on line at <http://www.defense.gov/news/d20100713ngr.pdf>.

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

DON'T SERVE IN THE ARMED FORCES ~ SERVE AS A JUDGE OF THE US COURT OF APPEALS FOR VETERANS CLAIMS.

IT SEEMS YOU CAN GET A BETTER RETIREMENT, HEALTH BENEFITS, AND SURVIVOR BENEFITS DENYING VETERANS CLAIMS THEN YOU CAN SERVING IN THE ARMED FORCES.

NOTE 8. FEDERAL EMPLOYEE AND VETERANS' BENEFITS

The Court's Judicial Retirement Fund (The Fund) was established by public law 38 U.S.C. 7296-7298 in August 1989 to provide a retirement benefit to all judges of the Court who (1) retire on an optional basis after meeting minimum age and service requirements, (2) are not reappointed, or (3) retire as a result of disability. As such, the Court's retirement fund is a defined benefits pension plan with a calendar year as its fiscal year.

Pension Benefits. A judge of the Court, who is not reappointed, is eligible to retire if he has served 15 years. Those who leave with less than 15 years of service receive only a return of employee contributions, with the exception of two sitting judges who have 13 year terms. The benefit, payable for life, is equal to the salary of the judge just prior to the retirement. This amount increases each year by the amount an active judge's pay is increased if the retired judge has elected to be recall-eligible.

<See all of this great program at: http://www.uscourts.cavc.gov/documents/US_Court_of_Appeals_for_Veterans_Claims_Final_PAR_FY09.pdf

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH

MILITARY BENEFITS TARGET IN COST-CUTTING TALKS

Rick Maze - Staff writer - Jul 6, 2010

From the left, right and center of the political spectrum, talk about drastically cutting military personnel costs is on the rise. The \$549 billion defense budget makes for a juicy target, and the \$197 billion of that budget that goes to personnel costs is being attacked from all sides — even the Defense Department itself — as excessive in a time of economic malaise and belt-tightening.

The list of programs under attack includes pay raises, retired pay, health care benefits, commissaries and exchanges, and even the size of the force. <More at: http://www.armytimes.com/news/2010/07/army_benefits_070210w/>

VETERAN'S ELECTRICITY CUT DESPITE PAYING BILL

Cristina Rendon - KRGV Rio Grande Valley, TX - 6/21

Gerry Flores is an Army veteran, who's moved into the home about three months ago. He's on a number of medications, which require refrigeration. Flores paid his bill, but he didn't realize it was late. A Magic Valley Electric Co-Op spokesperson explained the pay station Flores went to failed to deliver his payment to them on time.

The delay wasn't Flores's fault. But he was left to deal with the consequences.

"All my food is going to spoil, so I'm going to have to penny pinch to get some more food," he tells us. He adds, "The thing is with my health. I need at least the fan. That's all I got. Last night, I hardly got any sleep."

The Magic Valley Electric Co-Op spokesperson says workers would be on their way to re-connect sometime today. We're told the company waived the regular \$150 reconnection fee for Flores.

<http://www.krgv.com/news/local/story/Veterans-Electricity-Cut-Despite-Paying-Bill/X3vxCil38EGZBzfDFddS5w.csp>

TRY OUR READING LIST ~ YOU WILL ENJOY IT

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

soon as Col. Drinkwine took command of the 4th Brigade Combat Team in 2008.

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

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

VETERANS' MEDALLION AVAILABLE FOR ORDER

June 29, 2010

New Option for Marking Veterans' Graves in Private Cemeteries

WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki announced today that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is offering bronze medallions to attach to existing, privately purchased headstones or markers, signifying a deceased's status as a Veteran.

"For Veterans not buried in a national or state Veterans cemetery, or those without a government grave marker, VA is pleased to offer this option that highlights their service and sacrifices for our country," said Secretary Shinseki.

The new item can be furnished instead of a traditional government headstone or marker for Veterans whose death occurred on or after Nov. 1, 1990, and whose grave in a private cemetery is marked with a privately purchased headstone or marker.

Under federal law, eligible Veterans buried in a private cemetery are entitled to either a government-furnished grave marker or the new medallion, but not both. Veterans buried in a national or state Veterans cemetery will receive a government headstone or marker of the standard design authorized at that cemetery.

The medallion is available in three sizes: 5 inches, 3 inches and 1 ½ inches in width. Each bronze medallion features the image of a folded burial flag adorned with laurels and is inscribed with the word "Veteran" at the top and the branch of service at the bottom.

Next of kin will receive the medallion, along with a kit that will allow the family or the staff of a private cemetery to affix the medallion to a headstone, grave marker, mausoleum or columbarium niche cover.

More information about VA-furnished headstones, markers and medallions is at www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm/hmtype.asp

FREE SAT/ACT SOFTWARE OFFER EXTENDED FOR MILITARY, DOD EMPLOYEES

A provider of college test preparation software has extended its offer to provide free \$200 packages of the software to military servicemembers [including retired], DoD employees and their families. <More at:

www.dodea.edu/pressroom/releasesDisplay.cfm?prId=20100629>

NOTICE

THERE WILL BE NO "SOUND OFF" IN AUGUST.

NEXT ISSUE ~ 20 SEPTEMBER 2010

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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Want to join us? Please apply for membership at www.vuft.org It's FREE!

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

I always appreciate contributions, whether it is opinion in Letter-to-the-Editor form, or articles that the reader believes would be good for our readership. Since I get a chance to vent once in awhile in these newsletters, I will certainly consider Op-Ed copy for inclusion. I always welcome reader comment or complaint. Sandy Cook, Editor <mailto:scook@vuft.org>

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

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