

SOUND OFF!



VOL. II, NO 19

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

25 MAY 2007

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

WHAT HAPPENED TO “DUTY”?

At just what precise point did we give up on the Constitution? When did we decide that the United States was a corporation, not a nation?

Before I continue, let me make it clear that this is not just a current problem. The tipping point certainly preceded this administration.

When I joined the Army at the end of the Korean War, I knew that whatever my personal reasons for doing so, I was fulfilling my constitutional obligation as a citizen. I was only 17, but thanks to both my parents and my schools I had been taught something fundamental about civic duty, and the constitutional frame that girded my service.

Later, when I made the Army a career, that feeling didn't change because I changed my status. I believed, perhaps naively, that my nation didn't take wars to others, but that we had to be prepared should war come again to us. I also believed that peace was the goal, although some of us had to know how to fight to keep the peace. We certainly weren't in it for the money.

Beyond that personal understanding was the larger communitarian sense of the armed forces and its place in the fabric of the nation. The founders had railed against standing armies, but their successors saw that the world was speeding up, and should war come, there had to be a cadre of trained and committed persons on hand who could be called on promptly to defend the nation and to train the larger force.

That established force was afforded all of the protections of the Constitution as citizens, albeit giving up a few voluntarily. They gave up their full rights in order to defend the rights of all other citizens to retain theirs fully. They also accepted the restrictions of service by submitting themselves to the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which held them accountable for their acts. Their oath committed them to service at the demand of their nation, a service that could not be walked away from for at least the term of their oath.

The end result was a force that was flexible in size to the current needs, and that was so tightly woven into the civic and constitutional fabric of the nation as to be the fundamental part of the broad commitment of the nation to defend its citizenry.

I have just finished Jeremy Scahill's frightening book *“Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army”*. I got so angry reading the book that I would at times just close it and wander out into the backyard to kick something (not the dog – never the dog).

The common complaint voiced against hiring mercenaries to fight our battles is that the profits are obscene and the contracts are no-bid.

Those complaints miss the point. Those are complaints against a corporation, not complaints about what and who we are.

By employing mercenaries to do the job (I cannot use the word “duty” here) of regular forces we have rent that fabric so carefully woven over the years since the founding of the Republic. If we continue, we may never be able to repair it.

How can this simple act of “outsourcing” be so damaging? What difference does it make who does the “job”, as long as it gets done? [See the previous editorial [“It's Not Just Another Job”](#).]

It makes one hell of a difference who does the job. It makes one hell of a difference what obligations those who do “the job” take onto themselves. What is their oath? The most important question of all may well be – Is there an oath?

In war everything is important. In the conduct of war and in taking care of our soldiers everything has tactical significance. We used to worry about fundamentals like supply, chow, mail, pay – much of it now outsourced. Now they just worry about boots-on-the-ground. We ought to know better. We ought to know by now that the fighting is only one part of war, and that it is the other stuff that may be the most important – the stuff that the hired guns aren't required or sworn to do

It doesn't matter now, apparently, that some of those boots are bound only by an employment contract, not an oath. That some of those boots can quit and go home if they feel like it, and “home” may not be Kansas but Johannesburg or Sanaá or Khartoum. That some of those boots can commit unlawful violence and perpetrate inhumane acts without fear of consequence. That some of the boots, in effect, make US foreign policy without the burden of accountability.

Donald Rumsfeld included “contractors” in his description of the “Total Force”. Not too scary if he is talking about Brown and Root running the mess halls, although that may have been the beginning of the slippery slope. But now, as reported by Scahill in his well-referenced exposé, there is serious consideration being given to fielding a “contractor's brigade” as part of the regular force. Eric Prince, the CEO of Blackwater, has proposed such a force-for-hire – Hessians, this time in the service of the U.S.

The rationale, although arguable, is that it is cheaper, the people he hires are already trained, and that they can deploy without having to go to the American people to enlist new soldiers. Politicians merely have to go to the contracting officer and they can fight where and when they want. The Constitution doesn't cover the subject of contractors in battle very well, so they can make up their own rules.

What the Constitution does cover – Article I, Section 8 – is that the legislature is in charge of when we go to war, and that they make the rules for the conduct of the forces. Not a contracting officer – not a CEO – not even the Commander-in-Chief – Congress! When Congress decides, then we go to war, and under their rules, and only then the full duties of Article II, Section 2 kick in.

Under this new proposed scheme, and in part it is in place already, the President is free to go to war anywhere, at any scale of engagement, with the new “American Foreign Legion”. Just write a new contract and fund it, or better yet, just add a new “task” to an open Indefinite Quantity/Indefinite Delivery contract, and off we go!

Is this what we want? Is this the logical outcome of an attitude of “free trade – commerce first and the nation will follow” Is this the logical and proper end result of a society where we hire those to do the jobs that we are too busy, or too lazy, or too important to do ourselves?

No draft is necessary. No encouragement for enlistment. No appeal to patriotism or duty is even called for. When the war is done we don't have to worry about long-term care of the wounded, or of the families of the dead; insurance policies will take care of that.

If this is what we want, then I say lets amend the Constitution. Delete Article 1, Section 8 in its entirety. Get Congress out of the war game – they seem to have taken themselves pretty much out of the game

anyway. Move the war duties over to the beginning of Article II, Section 2, and forget about it except to re-title the Commander-in-Chief as Chief Contracting Officer.

Then we can truly say, “They knew what they were signing up for.” We can go back to ignoring the world and instead watch it unfold through the window of “reality” TV. We can plug in our ear buds and listen to our iPods instead of hearing the screams of the dying.

Foreign policy can be made by contractors who also sit on the board of Christian Freedom International and who are members of the ultra conservative Catholic order, the Sovereign Military Order of the Knights of Malta. [Should we outsource the State Department?]

Mercenaries are cheaper in the long run. They each may cost us \$150K/year plus expenses when they fight, but we don't have to pay for them if we ever stop fighting. Also, we don't have to take care of them later because they aren't “ours”, as soldiers are.

Whoopee! Free trade rules!

“All those who seek to destroy the liberties of a democratic nation ought to know that war is the surest and shortest means to accomplish it.”

Alexis de Tocqueville 1805-1859
Author, “Democracy in America”

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

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

CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE!

PLEASE CHECK THE WEBSITE AT WWW.VUFT.ORG.

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

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

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

MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS

ON YOUR STATISTICAL COUNTS RE: IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN WARS

Counting Refugees - The Tempest Tossed

Solid, confirmed numbers may be difficult to get -- like the number of Iraqi civilian deaths attributable to this wretched war. But it would be highly informative to track the numbers of Iraqi and Afghanistan refugees. Current counts seem to put the slow bleed of Iraq civilians -- the majority of the educated, middle class -- at over 2,000,000 with precarious refuge in Syria, Jordan, Iran, Lebanon and other neighboring countries. The internal refugees in Iraq may be over 1,000,000. The count of Afghan refugees seems to vary wildly from 1,000,000 to 3,000,000 in Pakistan and the other neighboring “Stans” plus Iran and even China with perhaps internally displaced around 1,000,000. These real homeless people are also casualties of war. We may not be able to count them precisely, but THEY DO COUNT!

H. Hobgood, Avila Beach, CA

See changes in **“TAPS”** below

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

ANOTHER PARTIAL SOLUTION

Bob Filner (D-CA), chair of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs in the House, on January 22, 2007 introduced the following bill; which was referred to his Committee on Veterans' Affairs, It sounds good on the surface but it epitomizes the piecemeal approach to benefits that has plagued us for the last few decades, where small and very specific changes are made that leave out a substantial number of those who should be eligible. This bill extends from 2 to 5 years the eligibility of combat veterans for medical care if they are exposed to radiation or toxic substances in the performance of their duty. What about those who are serving in non-combat positions who may likewise be so exposed? What about those who are called to serve and who present themselves for the dangers of combat but are not then sent into combat, yet are exposed to these substances? "They also serve who only stand and wait." How can this be called the "Returning Servicemember VA Healthcare Insurance Act" when it only serves some of the returnees and not all? [Ed.]

H. R. 612

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to extend the period of eligibility for health care for combat service in the Persian Gulf War or future hostilities from two years to five years after discharge or release.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the `Returning Servicemember VA Healthcare Insurance Act of 2007'.

SEC. 2. EXTENSION OF PERIOD OF ELIGIBILITY FOR HEALTH CARE FOR COMBAT SERVICE IN THE PERSIAN GULF WAR OR FUTURE HOSTILITIES.

Section 1710(e)(3)(C) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking `2 years' and inserting `5 years'.

HOUSE VOTES TO EXTEND BENEFITS FOR VETERANS

Jim Abrams - Associated Press - May 24, 2007

WASHINGTON - The House on Wednesday marked the coming Memorial Day holiday by approving a spate of bills to benefit veterans, including one aimed at improving screening and treatment of veterans with traumatic brain injuries.

... The bills passed Wednesday included:

- H.R. 2199 ~ care facilities to deal with traumatic brain injury, and mandatory screening of veterans for traumatic brain injury
- H.R. 612 ~ which ensures that those who served in combat in the Persian Gulf War or later hostilities are eligible for health care for five years after their service ends [see above]
- H.R. 1470 ~ chiropractic care at 75 VA medical centers by 2009 and all medical centers by 2011.
- H.R. 67 ~ grant program for state and local veterans' outreach programs
- H.R. 2239 ~ expands eligibility for vocational rehabilitation benefits for severely injured service members

<More at: http://www.theeagle.com/stories/052407/nation_20070524022.php>

BILL TO PROTECT CUSTODY FOR DEPLOYED

Associated Press - May 17, 2007

The House passed an amendment Wednesday that aims to prevent Soldiers deployed to war from permanently losing custody of their children because of the absence. Rep. Mike Turner, R-Ohio, offered the amendment.

<More at: http://www.military.com/features/0_15240_136001_00.html>

AKAKA INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO HELP HOMELESS VETERANS

May 14, 2007

WASHINGTON, D.C.– Today, U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, introduced legislation (S. 1384) to enhance services that the Department of Veterans Affairs provides to homeless veterans and veterans at risk of becoming homeless. The bill would modify the funding mechanism for community-based services to homeless veterans, expand capacity of services for women veterans, and improve outreach to servicemembers and veterans who are at risk of becoming homeless. <More at: <http://www.vawatchdog.org/07/scva07/scva051407-1.htm>>

HOUSE APPROVES WAR-FUNDING BILL

Associated Press - May 24, 2007

WASHINGTON - Bowing to President Bush, the Democratic-controlled House reluctantly approved fresh billions for the Iraq war on Thursday, minus the troop withdrawal timeline that drew his earlier veto. The 280-142 vote sent the bill to the Senate for final passage, expected later in the evening.

"The Iraqi government needs to show real progress in return for America's continued support and sacrifice," said Bush, and he warned that August could prove to be a bloody month for U.S. troops in Baghdad's murderous neighborhoods.

Five months in power on Capitol Hill, Democrats coupled their concession to the president with pledges to challenge his policies anew. "This debate will go on," vowed House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, announcing plans to hold votes by fall on four separate measures seeking a change in course.

... The bill establishes a series of goals for the Iraqi government to meet as it strives to build a democratic country able to defend its own borders. Continued U.S. reconstruction aid would be conditioned on progress toward the so-called benchmarks, although Bush retains the authority to order that the funds be spent regardless of how the Baghdad government performs.

In exchange for providing the war money on Bush's terms, Democrats won White House approval for about \$17 billion in spending above what the administration originally sought. Roughly \$8 billion of that was for domestic programs from hurricane relief to farm aid to low-income children's health coverage. Democrats also won a top priority - the first minimum wage increase in more than a decade. The current federal wage floor of \$5.15 an hour will go to \$7.25 in three separate installments of 70 cents.

<More at: www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2007/05/24/national/w155705D70.DTL>

FINALLY ~ WHO SAYS THEY ARE NOT PLANNING TO LEAVE?

S. 1104

An act to increase the number of Iraqi and Afghani translators and interpreters who may be admitted to the United States as special immigrants. As ordered reported by the House Committee on the Judiciary on May 17, 2007. Current law allows certain nationals of Iraq or Afghanistan who have worked with the U.S. Armed Forces as translators to apply for permanent U.S. residence as special immigrants. This opportunity is limited to 50 individuals, plus their families, during any fiscal year. S. 1104 would increase the current limit to 500 translators or interpreters, plus their families, for each of fiscal years 2007 and 2008.

<More at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?c110:5:./temp/~c110q6ijuc>>

RETREAT – NEWS

GAS MAY HAVE HARMED TROOPS, SCIENTISTS SAY

Ian Urbina - May 17, 2007

WASHINGTON, May 16 — Scientists working with the Defense Department have found evidence that a low-level exposure to sarin nerve gas — the kind experienced by more than 100,000 American troops in the Persian Gulf war of 1991 — could have caused lasting brain deficits in former service members. Though the results are preliminary, the study is notable for being financed by the federal government and for being the first to make use of a detailed analysis of sarin exposure performed by the Pentagon, based on wind patterns and plume size. <More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/17/us/17sarin.html>>

THREE STORIES ON THE GROWTH OF SECRECY

BILL SHIELDS PENTAGON AID BOOST FROM OVERSIGHT

Eli Clifton

Newly proposed legislation would expand existing Pentagon security and military aid programs in Iraq and Afghanistan to "coalition partners" in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The Building Global Partnerships Act of 2007 [White House authored] would authorize the secretary of defense, in consultation with the secretary of state, to allocate up to \$750 million to help foreign governments set up security and military forces to "combat terrorism and enhance stability." ... The Pentagon's ability to fund foreign aid programs has in the past been contingent on compliance with the Foreign Assistance Act, which imposes restrictions on foreign aid recipients, including strict compliance with human rights standards.

"To ensure that commanders have adequate flexibility to meet operational needs, this section also would eliminate Foreign Assistance Act restrictions," the bill reads. "The joint approval process and advance congressional notification will ensure

transparency and that respect for human rights and civilian authority remain a key component of program under this section without sacrificing flexibility critical to United States national security." <More at: www.antiwar.com/ips/clifton.php?articleid=10978>

PENTAGON RESTRICTING WHO CAN TESTIFY BEFORE CONGRESS

Bryan Bender, Boston Globe - May 11, 2007

The Pentagon has placed unprecedented restrictions on who can testify before Congress, reserving the right to bar lower-ranking officers, enlisted soldiers and career bureaucrats from appearing before oversight committees or having their remarks transcribed, according to Defense Department documents. <More at: www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2007/05/11/MNGB2PP45M1.DTL>

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE TO BLOCK TROOP ACCESS TO MYSPACE, YOUTUBE, MTV, BLACKPLANET, PHOTOBUCKET AND MORE SITES

Rob Kall - May 12, 2007

Starting May 14th, the Department of defense, citing security reasons, will block troop access to some of the most popular websites on the planet. Here's the link they provide: [Restricted Access to Internet Entertainment Sites Across DoD Networks](#)
<More at: http://www.opednews.com/articles/genera_rob_kall_070512_department_of_defens.htm>

LIKE TOPSY ~ "I S'PECT I JUST GROWED"

BUSH COULD DOUBLE FORCE BY CHRISTMAS

Stewart M. Powell - Hearst Newspapers - May 22, 2007

Washington -- The Bush administration is quietly on track to nearly double the number of combat troops in Iraq this year, an analysis of Pentagon deployment orders showed Monday. The little-noticed second surge, designed to reinforce U.S. troops in Iraq, is being executed by sending more combat brigades and extending tours of duty for troops already there.

The actions could boost the number of combat soldiers from 52,500 in early January to as many as 98,000 by the end of this year if the Pentagon overlaps arriving and departing combat brigades. Separately, when additional support troops are included in this second troop increase, the total number of U.S. troops in Iraq could increase from 162,000 now to more than 200,000 -- a record-high number -- by the end of the year. The numbers were arrived at by an analysis of deployment orders by Hearst Newspapers.
<More at: <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/05/22/MNG7QPV65N1.DTL>>

AIR FORCE PREPARES MEMBERS FOR GROUND COMBAT

Guy Raz - Morning Edition - May 22, 2007

The Air Force has long billed itself as the most glamorous of the service branches. [Maybe if you're a pilot! Otherwise you're just a troop with, often, a high tech related MOS--because the primary mission requires a lot of high tech equipment. I never thought being in the Air Force make me more "glamorous" than any other service member.--Hc]

Nowadays, with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the shortage in infantry manpower, the Air Force is marching to a different beat. The Iraq war has strained the Army and the Marine Corps. The Air Force is increasingly helping fill the gaps. Members of the Air Force are training to fight on the ground at Fort Dix in New Jersey [which is now the largest Air Force retraining center in the United States]. <More at: www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=10314346&ft=1&f=1001>

THEY'RE NOT "PARENTS", THEY'RE "INFLUENCERS" ~ THEY MUST BE "CHECKED"

PARENTS BIGGEST RECRUITING BARRIER: PENTAGON

May 11, 2007 - REUTERS

WASHINGTON – The biggest obstacle for U.S. military recruiters is not finding young Americans willing to enlist in wartime, it's dealing with their parents, according to the Pentagon. That reality, which has emerged over the past year through polling data and recruiters' experiences throughout the United States, has led some parts of the U.S. military to seek new ways to either convince parents or simply bypass them.

The Army Reserve – which is having the hardest time meeting recruiting goals – has opted to shift its focus onto peers. The Reserve plans to adopt a National Guard program and use its young soldiers as recruiters in their home communities, boosting the number of recruiters reaching out to youth based on the belief that peers can be a deciding force in the decision to enlist.

"Peers recruiting peers – I think that's a great idea," Brig. Gen. Richard Sherlock, deputy chief of the Army Reserve, said Thursday after the reserve missed its monthly recruiting goal by 19 percent.

Like other Pentagon officials, Sherlock said parents and adults that recruiters call "influencers" are a tough hurdle to clear, but their influence can be checked. <More at: www.thestar.com/News/article/213016>

**BUT DON'T SEND THESE GUYS!
MILITARY FIRES GAY ARABIC LINGUISTS**

Lolita C. Baldor - The Associated Press - May 24, 2007

Lawmakers who say the military has kicked out 58 Arabic language experts because they were gay want the Pentagon to explain how it can afford to let the valuable specialists go.

Seizing on the latest discharge, involving three specialists, House members wrote the House Armed Services Committee chairman yesterday that the continued loss of such "capable, highly skilled Arabic linguists continues to compromise our national security during time of war." <more at: www.concordmonitor.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070524/REPOSITORY/705240379/1013/NEWS03>

**TRIED TO SEND THEM SOME OLD 9mm STUFF, BUT THE POST OFFICE SAID NO
WAR STRETCHES NATION'S AMMO SUPPLY**

Associated Press - May 24, 2007

DES MOINES, Iowa - Ammunition shipments to local gun shops and police departments are being delayed for months because the Army has more than tripled its demand for small caliber ammunition.

Ammunition plants have dramatically ratcheted up production, but company officials acknowledge delays to police and retailers of up to a year.

"There are millions of rounds backordered because the war has put such a demand on the manufacturers," said Lana Ulner, manager of Rapid City, S.D.-based Ultramax Ammunition, a distributor for several manufacturers. "In some cases, it can take eight to 12 months." <More at: <http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,136760,00.html>>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>What</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>Notes</u>
5/25-28		Bulger Park Melrose Park, IL	Wall That Heals	Veterans Park District	
5/30	1100 - 1500	Doubletree Hotel Tampa Westshore Airport 4500 West Cypress Street, Tampa, FL	Career Fair		813 879-4800
5/31	1730 - 2200	Playboy Mansion Los Angeles, CA	National Veterans Foundation Memorial Day fundraiser	REIAC High Flyers Ball Committee	NVF 888-777-4443
6/7	1100 - 1500	Bell Harbor International Conf. Center Pier 66, 2211 Alaskan Way Seattle, WA	Career Fair		206.441.6666
6/8-10		Humboldt County Fairgrounds Ferndale, CA	Stand Down	Kim Hall	707-822-2175
6/13	1100 - 1500	Palace Station Hotel 2411 W. Sahara Ave, Las Vegas, NV	Career Fair		702-367-2411
6/14-17		Savannah, Georgia	Wall That Heals	Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 671	
6/14		Buffalo, NY	Resource Fair	Herb Wittmeyer	716-881-5855 x227
6/15		Worcester, MA	Resource Fair	Joe Boylan	508-791-0956
6/22-23		Kansas City, MO	Resource Fair	Bob Waechter	816-753-1866
6/28	1100 - 1500	Omni San Antonio Hotel 9821 Colonnade Blvd San Antonio, TX	Career Fair		210-691-8888
6/28 - 7/1		Court House area International Falls, MN	Wall That Heals	2007 Falls High School All Class Reunion Committee	
8/3-5		Roosevelt University Chicago, IL	VVAW 40y Anniversary	Hannah Frisch VVAW National Staff	773-276-4189

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

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

VA SECRETARY 'UNAWARE' OF WAIT TIME FOR POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS TREATMENT

Nicholson Says VA Is 'Adequately Staffed'

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Under questioning from U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell, Department of Veterans' Affairs Secretary Jim Nicholson today acknowledged that he is "unaware" that appointments for veterans receiving care for post-traumatic stress disorder ("PTSD") may be delayed up to 90 days. ... At the hearing of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Nicholson said that despite reports of backlogs and delays in veterans' care, VA is "adequately staffed." <More at: www.veteransforcommonsense.org/index.cfm/page/article/id/7593>

STUDY QUESTIONS VA HEALTH CARE

Chris Adams - McClatchy Newspapers - May. 13, 2007

WASHINGTON | The VA has habitually exaggerated the record of its medical system, inflating its achievements in ways that make it appear more successful than it is, a McClatchy Newspapers study shows. Although the Department of Veterans Affairs' health system has gotten good marks for a transformation it has undertaken over the past decade, the department also has a habit of overselling its progress in ways that assure Congress and others that the agency has enough resources to care for the nation's soldiers.

... *The agency has touted how quickly veterans get in for appointments, but its own inspector general found that scheduling records have been manipulated repeatedly.

... On Oct. 2, 2003, a veteran was referred to an ophthalmology clinic. On May 3, 2004, a scheduler created an appointment, saying that the "desired date" was June 21. The appointment was scheduled for June 23, the inspector general said. Actual waiting time: 264 days. Reported waiting time: two days. <More at: www.kansascity.com/136/story/105043.html>

VETS STRUGGLE WITH GI BILL'S WANING POWER

Stephen Manning - The Associated Press - May 10, 2007

FAIRFAX, Va. — Marc Edgerly and his father, Carl, both joined the Army as young men, served during wartime and eventually decided that college, not a full-time military career, was what they wanted. But the cost they shouldered for that education is dramatically different. The GI Bill covered all of Carl Edgerly's college expenses in the mid-1970s. His son, however, expects that even with the maximum \$1,075 in monthly GI Bill benefits, he will be saddled with \$50,000 in student loans when he graduates from George Mason University. <More at: http://www.armytimes.com/news/2007/05/ap_gibill_070510/>

MILITARY MOMS IN US POORLY PAID

14 May, 2007 - REUTERS

WASHINGTON: Mothers in the US military are stressed, poorly paid and need more help caring for their children, according to a report issued by Congress last week. Nearly half of all women in the active-duty military have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, and 24,475 women are there now, the report by the Joint Economic Committee said. Yet child care services are not keeping up with longer and more frequent deployments, said the report, released to coincide with Mothers' Day in the United States on Sunday. Moreover, women get only 6 weeks of leave after the birth of a child, it found.

<More at: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/The_United_States/Military_moms_in_US_poorly_paid/articleshow/2042045.cms>

WHITE HOUSE: 3.5 PERCENT PAY HIKE UNNECESSARY

Rick Maze - Staff writer - May 16, 2007

Troops don't need bigger pay raises, White House budget officials said Wednesday in a statement of administration policy laying out objections to the House version of the 2008 defense authorization bill.

... In addition to the pay raise, there are other personnel initiatives in the bill that the White House opposes. A prohibition on converting medical jobs held by military members into civilian positions drew opposition. A death gratuity for federal civilian employees who die in support of military operations, and new benefits for disabled retirees and the survivors of military retirees also drew complaints. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2007/05/military_payhike_whitehouse_070516/>

HIGHER TRICARE FEES ENDORSED

Tom Philpott - May 24, 2007

The Pentagon-appointed Task Force on the Future of Military Health will endorse higher TRICARE fees, deductibles and co-payments for under-65 retirees and their families in an interim report to be sent to Congress May 31. It also will back other key features of the TRICARE "reform" package first proposed last year by the Department of Defense. These include:

- Raising beneficiary co-payments on prescriptions filled in the TRICARE retail pharmacy network.
- Indexing TRICARE fees and deductibles so that automatic annual adjustments keep them in step with rising healthcare costs.
- Establishing tiers for the new TRICARE fee structure, probably based on rank at retirement, so that retirees with bigger annuities pay more for their health care coverage and retirees with smaller annuities pay less.

<More at: www.military.com/features/0,15240,136837,00.html>

SOLDIERS, FAMILIES PAYING PRICE OF IRAQ WAR

News Hour with Jim Lehrer - May 23, 2007

NewsHour economics correspondent Paul Solman looks into who in America is paying the price.

A recent Saturday at a Harley dealership in Tennessee ~ for months, Javier and Marian LaRosa have been raising money to privately buy body armor for their son, and for the other Marines in his squadron, before they deploy to Iraq in June.

<More at: www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/jan-june07/warcost_05-23.html>

VETS' BENEFITS CLAIMS GOING NOWHERE

Rick Maze - Staff writer - May 22, 2007

A House subcommittee heard pleas Tuesday to get veterans off the "hamster wheel" of justice that can leave their benefits claims cycling through an unending process until they die.

The appeals process can have claims bounced between the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, a federal court, and the Board of Veterans' Appeals, an administrative court, because of the federal court can decide a case — or not — one small issue at a time. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2007/05/military_vetsbenefits_hamsterwheel_070522w/>

STUDY: GULF WAR VETS' CHILDREN HAVE HIGHER BIRTH DEFECT RATES

WASHINGTON (AP) — Children of veterans of the first Gulf War are more likely to have three specific birth defects than those of soldiers who never served in the gulf, a government study has found. Researchers found the infants born to male veterans of the 1991 war had higher rates of two types of heart valve defects. They also found a higher rate of a genital urinary defect in boys conceived after the war to Gulf War veteran mothers. <More at: www.usatoday.com/news/health/2003-06-03-vets-birth-defects_x.htm>

WARNS OF VETS DISABILITY BACKLOG

Associated Press | May 23, 2007

WASHINGTON - A special federal court that hears veterans' disability appeals is facing its highest caseload ever as the government increasingly turns down benefits for war veterans, its chief judge said Tuesday.

Judge William P. Greene Jr., who presides over the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, warned of a strained court that has had to recall five retired judges in recent months to assist with growing backlogs of veterans unhappy with the level of disability benefits assigned to them by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The seven-judge court is now averaging 300 appeals per month, which don't include veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan because many of the cases haven't reached the appeals level yet. <More at: www.examiner.com/a-742054~Judge_Warns_of_Vets_Disability_Backlog.html>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

KATE WEBB, 64; PIONEERING UPI FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT WAS CAPTURED IN VIETNAM WAR

Elaine Woo - Times Staff Writer - May 15, 2007

Kate Webb, a courageous foreign correspondent who forged a path for other female journalists in a four-decade career spent largely in turbulent Asian outposts, including a harrowing period in Cambodia during the Vietnam War when she was captured and presumed dead, has died. She was 64. Webb was the first woman to head a bureau in a war zone for United Press International.

<More at: www.latimes.com/news/obituaries/la-me-webb15may15.1.6597419.story>

SON OF PROFESSOR OPPOSED TO WAR IS KILLED IN IRAQ

Brian MacQuarrie - Boston Globe - May 15, 2007

BOSTON - Boston University professor Andrew J. Bacevich has been a persistent, vocal critic of the Iraq war, calling the conflict a catastrophic failure. This week, the retired Army lieutenant colonel received the grim news that his son had been killed on patrol there. First Lieutenant Andrew J. Bacevich, 27, of Walpole, died Sunday in Balad of wounds he suffered after a bomb explosion.

The elder Bacevich is the author of "The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War"

<More at: www.commondreams.org/archive/2007/05/15/1195/>

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF MAY 23, 2007

This week, the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps announced an increase, while the Navy and Coast Guard had a decrease. The net collective result is 1,985 more reservists mobilized than last week. At any given time, services may mobilize some units and individuals while demobilizing others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. Total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 66,169; Navy Reserve, 5,646; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 6,025; Marine Corps Reserve, 5,414; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 364. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel, who have been mobilized, to 83,618, including both units and individual augmentees.

A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel, who are currently mobilized, can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/May2007/d20070523ngr.pdf>.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE THURSDAY 24 MAY 2007

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	3,438
WOUNDED US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 5/23]	24,314
OTHER CASUALTIES [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 2/3]	≥26,188
KILLED UK	149
KILLED OTHER COALITION	127
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE 3/31]	678
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 46,529
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 70,243 [LANCET-753,209]
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400,000+ [LANCET- 1,335,776]
IRAQ REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL [5/15]	1.2M/2.15M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US	390
*OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 3/24]	6,334
KILLED COALITION	190
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	669
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (JULY 2004)	32,034
AFGHAN REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL	1.4M/4.8M
COST OF WARS TO DATE [5/24]	\$428,594,184,000

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

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

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

AFTERTHOUGHTS

THE SCRAMBLE FOR NEW RECRUITS

Amid an unpopular war, the Pentagon faces a formidable challenge in convincing young men and women to volunteer for military service. How are recruiters filling the ranks?

How is recruitment going? ~ After several bad years, all branches of the military reached their targets in 2006. The Army signed up 80,635; the Navy recruited 36,679; the Marine Corps, 32,337; and the Air Force, 30,889. This was a huge relief for the Pentagon because, with the Iraq war, recruitment has become steadily more difficult. And since the military is all volunteer, a shortage of troops has enormous military and political repercussions. Indeed, trying to refill the ranks solely through recruitment in wartime is rare. The Spanish-American War, the Mexican-American War, and the Gulf War are the only major conflicts since 1775 that did not rely, at least in part, on conscripts. "When it comes to recruiting during wartime," says Army recruiter Sgt. Rodney Moses, "it's the toughest job in the military."

How did the Pentagon reach its targets? ~ By improving incentives and loosening standards. Enlistment bonuses last year were doubled, to \$40,000, and other forms of financial incentives, such as college scholarships, were also sweetened. During 2006, the maximum age for recruits was raised twice, from 35 to 40, and then to 42. The Army also doubled—from 2 percent to 4 percent—the percentage of recruits it accepts who score on the lower end of the aptitude scale. It is even opening the door to some convicted criminals.

Is that a new policy? ~ The military has always issued some waivers for those with criminal records, but it is now being less picky. In the four years since the Iraq war began, the number of annual waivers the Pentagon granted to convicts rose by 65 percent, to 8,129 last year. Most of the waivers were for recruits convicted of misdemeanors, including aggravated assault and robbery. More convicted felons also were admitted, though convictions for sex crimes and drug trafficking are still disqualifying. All told, 11.7 percent of Army recruits in 2006 had criminal histories. "Our armed forces are under incredible strain," says Rep. Martin Meehan, a Massachusetts Democrat, "and the only way they can fill their recruiting quotas is by lowering their standards."

Is that the only strategy being used? ~ No. The Pentagon also has beefed up its corps of recruiters—there are now more than 8,000—and they have gotten more aggressive and, critics say, more manipulative. Fanning out to shopping malls, colleges, and other places where young people congregate, recruiters tout the military as a way to see the world, get job training, make decent pay, and of course, serve the nation. That's nothing new, but with more than 3,200 Americans killed and more than 24,000 wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, recruiters have been accused of playing down the risks of military service. The Pentagon launched an investigation late last year after ABC News videotaped several recruiters telling potential enlistees there was little chance they'd be sent to the war zone. One even told a recruit: "We're not at war." The Pentagon said such tactics are rare and a blatant violation of policy.

What tactics are considered appropriate? ~ The Army recruiting manual directs recruiters to sell potential enlistees on the excitement and personal growth they'll experience in the military. "The recruiter must empower, excite, and mentally stimulate the young person," the manual states. Financial incentives are important, "but first we must appeal to the heart," the manual says. "Just as an infantry leader must know the terrain and the enemy, the recruiting leader must know which segments of the population are most likely to consider military service."

Which segments are most likely to sign up? ~ Residents of rural areas and the working class, for whom patriotism is commonplace but job prospects are dim. Nationwide, the counties with the highest recruiting rates have incomes about 30 percent lower than the average income in their respective states. Recruiters naturally focus on locales where they have the best shot at meeting their quotas. About 44 percent of all recruits are from the South, and the Army has an interactive game, mounted on a mock Army jeep, that tours the NASCAR racing circuit. Fans get to fire a simulated machine gun at virtual insurgents, and recruiters take contact information to follow up with potential soldiers. In New York City, lower-income neighborhoods such as the South Bronx have several recruitment centers; the wealthy Upper East Side in Manhattan has none. But regardless of income level, recruiters say their biggest obstacle is not the attitudes of potential enlistees—it's those of their parents.

Why are parents a problem? ~ It's fairly easy to get an 18-year-old excited about the challenge and adventure of military service, says Army recruiter Sgt. Greg Gottner. But for parents, "the only thing they ever see is their son and daughter in a Kevlar helmet, walking through the streets of Baghdad." To counter that, a growing portion of the Pentagon's \$665 million advertising budget has been devoted to reaching parents, with the message that military service instills in their children confidence and direction. But it's a tough sell. At a recruitment center in Long Island, N.Y., recently, Air Force recruiter Master Sgt. Dickie Lochren was explaining to high school student Nigel Edwards how the military "lifestyle" includes free meals and gym membership. Edwards' mother interrupted to ask if that lifestyle would include a few years dodging bullets and improvised explosive devices in Iraq. "There is always a chance," Lochren responded. "You are defending the country. There's a price for that. Freedom isn't free."

Targeting High Schools ~ Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, high schools are required to provide military recruiters with their students' names and contact information, unless students sign an "opt-out" form. The National PTA and anti-war activists now are pushing to make it harder for the Pentagon to reach the students, by requiring, instead, that students agree to "opt in" before they can be contacted. They complain that recruiters have been contacting 16- and 17-year-olds without parents' knowledge, and that some of their tactics—such as providing free T-shirts, Frisbees, and video games—exploit kids' naiveté. But the Pentagon says recruiters merely want the same access to students that colleges and some potential employers are granted. "The idea is to let young men and women know what the Army has to offer," says Pentagon spokesman Richard Beckett. "I could not find a logical reason why anyone would take exception to that, because ultimately, it's the young man or woman's decision."

www.theweekmagazine.com/news/articles/news.aspx?ArticleID=1997

NOTICE

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

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

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

IT'S OUR CAGE, TOO

Charles C. Krulak and Joseph P. Hoar - May 17, 2007

Torture Betrays Us and Breeds New Enemies

Fear can be a strong motivator. It led Franklin Roosevelt to intern tens of thousands of innocent U.S. citizens during World War II; it led to Joseph McCarthy's witch hunt, which ruined the lives of hundreds of Americans. And it led the United States to adopt a policy at the highest levels that condoned and even authorized torture of prisoners in our custody.

Fear is the justification offered for this policy by former CIA director George Tenet as he promotes his new book. Tenet oversaw the secret CIA interrogation program in which torture techniques euphemistically called "waterboarding," "sensory deprivation," "sleep deprivation" and "stress positions" -- conduct we used to call war crimes -- were used. In defending these abuses, Tenet revealed: "Everybody forgets one central context of what we lived through: the palpable fear that we felt on the basis of the fact that there was so much we did not know."

We have served in combat; we understand the reality of fear and the havoc it can wreak if left unchecked or fostered. Fear breeds panic, and it can lead people and nations to act in ways inconsistent with their character.

The American people are understandably fearful about another attack like the one we sustained on Sept. 11, 2001. But it is the duty of the commander in chief to lead the country away from the grip of fear, not into its grasp. Regrettably, at Tuesday night's presidential debate in South Carolina, several Republican candidates revealed a stunning failure to understand this most basic obligation. Indeed, among the candidates, only John McCain demonstrated that he understands the close connection between our security and our values as a nation.

Tenet insists that the CIA program disrupted terrorist plots and saved lives. It is difficult to refute this claim -- not because it is self-evidently true, but because any evidence that might support it remains classified and unknown to all but those who defend the program.

These assertions that "torture works" may reassure a fearful public, but it is a false security. We don't know what's been gained through this fear-driven program. But we do know the consequences.

As has happened with every other nation that has tried to engage in a little bit of torture -- only for the toughest cases, only when nothing else works -- the abuse spread

like wildfire, and every captured prisoner became the key to defusing a potential ticking time bomb. Our soldiers in Iraq confront real "ticking time bomb" situations every day, in the form of improvised explosive devices, and any degree of "flexibility" about torture at the top drops down the chain of command like a stone -- the rare exception fast becoming the rule.

To understand the impact this has had on the ground, look at the military's mental health assessment report released earlier this month. The study shows a disturbing level of tolerance for abuse of prisoners in some situations. This underscores what we know as military professionals: Complex situational ethics cannot be applied during the stress of combat. The rules must be firm and absolute; if torture is broached as a possibility, it will become a reality.

This has had disastrous consequences. Revelations of abuse feed what the Army's new counterinsurgency manual, which was drafted under the command of Gen. David Petraeus, calls the "recuperative power" of the terrorist enemy.

Former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld once wondered aloud whether we were creating more terrorists than we were killing. In counterinsurgency doctrine, that is precisely the right question. Victory in this kind of war comes when the enemy loses legitimacy in the society from which it seeks recruits and thus loses its "recuperative power."

The torture methods that Tenet defends have nurtured the recuperative power of the enemy. This war will be won or lost not on the battlefield but in the minds of potential supporters who have not yet thrown in their lot with the enemy. If we forfeit our values by signaling that they are negotiable in situations of grave or imminent danger, we drive those undecideds into the arms of the enemy. This way lies defeat, and we are well down the road to it.

This is not just a lesson for history. Right now, White House lawyers are working up new rules that will govern what CIA interrogators can do to prisoners in secret. Those rules will set the standard not only for the CIA but also for what kind of treatment captured American soldiers can expect from their captors, now and in future wars. Before the president once again approves a policy of official cruelty, he should reflect on that.

It is time for us to remember who we are and approach this enemy with energy, judgment and confidence that we will prevail. That is the path to security, and back to ourselves.

Charles C. Krulak was commandant of the Marine Corps from 1995 to 1999. Joseph P. Hoar was commander in chief of U.S. Central Command from 1991 to 1994.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CA4Democracy/message/3222>