

SOUND OFF!



VOL. III, NO 23

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"

25 JULY 2008

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

NOTICE: THIS IS THE FINAL ISSUE OF VOLUME III. THERE WILL BE NO ISSUE ON 10 AUG. NEXT ISSUE ~ VOLUME IV, NO 1 ~ WILL BE OUT ON 25 AUG

"WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF US?"

This is going to be a long one, 'cause I am rightly pissed off, and I won't have another chance for a month. [Ed.]

First, let me share with you what is a composite of several emails, from several different readers, received since the last issue

"Sandy, you're an a**h*le! All you ever talk about is PTSD. What about the rest of us?"

The focus of our lawsuit is PTSD, which is, with TBI, the signal ailment from the current wars. The lawsuit is every bit as essential as the Agent Orange and the Gulf War Syndrome suits which have preceded it. In that context, it is a new rank in the American veterans' historical parade of complaints against the DoD and the DVA and their predecessors that extends back through the Bonus Army to the veterans of the Revolution and the War of 1812. 40 years and fighting for Agent Orange compensation. 17 years since the demolition at the Khamisiya Pit and fighting for Gulf War Syndrome. And now six years since the invasion and fighting for PTSD. Physical health – mental health – it's all there; untreated, denied, avoided.

Because of the focus of our suit, much of the reporting in this newsletter has seemed to focus on the victims of PTSD, but really it is on the victims of the whole dysfunctional system.

Not all persons with mental health issues are PTSD sufferers. Some are experiencing mental health issues because they have been abandoned by the system. Veterans commit suicide at more than twice the rate of their civilian counterparts, and many end their lives, not because of combat-related mental health issues, but just plain out of despair. They succumb to the frustration of being unable to prove to the nation that they served, that their illness, physical or mental, is as a result of their service. The real question should be, "Why do they have to prove anything?"

Of course veterans suffering from physical injury end up fighting for their benefits every bit as hard. Ty Ziegel lost part of his skull and part of his brain was damaged by an IED. Half of his left arm was amputated and some of the fingers were blown off his right hand. He was blinded in his right eye. The VA adjudicator gave him 80% for disfigurement, 10% for head trauma, and 0% for his brain injury and his blindness. That ruling save the DVA 40% of what Ty should have received. You may remember seeing a [picture of Ty](#), dressed in his

marine uniform, marrying his high school sweetheart, his face almost unrecognizable from his burns. Ty's father got his situation straightened out by going directly to the acting Secretary of the DVA, Gordon Mansfield. Why didn't the system give him what he deserved to start with? Why did Ty have to beg?

The DVA doesn't want veterans to have lawyers because, "it could turn it into an adversarial system." Ahah! It is the veteran who will turn it into an adversarial system. Bull crap! It is the DVA that has done the dirty deed, but it is easier to blame the veteran. After all, the veteran can't get a lawyer to defend himself until he has already been exhausted by the system.

Our lawsuit, despite its focus on PTSD and other mental health issues is about the rest of us.

It is about the unconscionable delay in recognition and treatment of valid conditions stemming from the wars. It is about the knee-jerk denial of claims to serve bureaucratic efficiency and the budget, rather than to serve the veteran. It is about ignoring families of military and veterans who bear the burden of repetitive service and its aftermath with little or no assistance. Of course they are never ignored in feel-good press releases and under-funded but high-sounding programs.

Even more, it is about the mendacity of the government players. It is about the lies to Congress and the public concerning the process and performance of the DVA system. It is about the callous disregard by veterans' parent services which loudly proclaim that, "We will leave no one behind on the battlefield," while they kick them out the door and leave them often homeless and in the gutter when they have used them up.

It is about the do-nothings and do-littles in Congress who hold endless hearings, and establish all sorts of commissions and ignore their findings. It is about the reports from the commissions and the hearings that gather dust on ever-growing shelves in the back rooms of Congress and the Administration.

It is about the failure of the Commander-in-Chief to take care of his troops and their families – the essential task for any commander.

Hidden in all of those reports and studies is a tale of monumental bureaucratic incompetence, and numerous medical crimes. Instead of dealing with the total underlying problem, our Congress deals with

whatever story is in the news. They know the game and its rules. They know that the American public has such a short attention span that they have to climb on stories like the Walter Reed scandal if they are going to get any personal publicity out of it. Then they can crawl back into their well-appointed holes and wait for their next TV opportunity.

Occasionally some good comes out of all this, such as Sen. Webb's GI Bill. But it is not a lack of opportunity for a college education that is giving the rest of veterans pain. The veteran hiding in his bedroom because he knows that he cannot trust himself to be out in public is hardly a candidate for the GI Bill benefit. What he needs is an appointment with a counselor who understands the problem, and he needs that appointment now – not within 30 days, not the next available – now.

He is not just a PTSD sufferer, he is one of the rest of us.

It is about the wife and mother who is trying desperately to hold a family together for that veteran and for herself and her children.

She is one of the rest of us.

It is about the older veteran now entering the system or who is appealing for increased benefits who cannot get a hearing or an appointment for months.

He is one of the rest of us.

It is about the female veteran who is a stress victim and more because she was sexually harassed or raped while in the service and who now cannot get help because it was not "combat-related."

She is one of the rest of us.

It is about veterans already in the system who have to travel hundreds of miles for help and wait hours on end once they get there – veterans who's condition is exacerbated by the stress of the trip and the wait.

They are the rest of us.

It is about the claimants who die without receiving their benefits. The VA closes their cases and no recompense is paid to the families that have borne the VA's burden for years – perhaps decades.

Those families are the rest of us.

There is a new book by syndicated columnist Martin Schram, *Vets Under Siege: How America Deceives and Dishonors Those Who Fought Our Battles*. If you weren't in a blind, bureaucrat-strangling, Congressperson-torturing, blood-in-the-eyes rage before, then please read this book; it'll get you there.

Paul Sullivan of Veterans for Common Sense has reviewed the book at www.VeteransforCommonSense.org/ArticleID/10713. Paul praises the book but laments the lack of coverage of "the rest of the story". I believe that Martin has told enough of the current story to serve as a prod to action. But then, there have been prods to action before, and precious little action.

Perhaps if we all buy Martin's book and tell its story to others, Martin himself will be inspired to write more on this shameful and continuing neglect. It's a very good book and ought to be on the required reading list of every high school civics course and college government class.

Martin cites, and we remember, the Bonus Army, President Hoover, Gen. MacArthur (with LTC Eisenhower), and the turning of armed active duty soldiers against veterans on the National Mall.

How is today different? It isn't very different, although far more subtle, when we turn President Bush, Admiral Mullen (with the service chiefs), Secretary Peake with his ¼ million bureaucrats, armed with their impenetrable regulations and willy-nilly interpretations, against today's veterans in the hidden recesses of the mustering-out interview and the DVA evaluation screening.

Then they burnt their tents and shanties. Today they destroy their lives with regulations, policies, neglect and disdain. Not much different is it?

In both cases it breaks my heart to see soldier turned against soldier. But now it is soldiers and ex-soldiers who are assaulting today's veterans. Many of the DVA evaluators are veterans themselves. How can they do this? Shame!

The military services under-evaluate to avoid paying pensions, and the DVA under-evaluates to avoid paying disability benefits. They both pride themselves on their records. The DVA even goes so far as to say on its website, *"Our goal is to provide excellence in patient care, veterans' benefits and customer satisfaction. We have reformed our department internally and are striving for high quality, prompt and seamless service to veterans. Our department's employees continue to offer their dedication and commitment to help veterans get the services they have earned. Our nation's veterans deserve no less."*

But one should note that they are "striving" not "doing", and they have a "goal" not a "mission". So they apparently grade themselves on having goals and trying, not on results. And they grade themselves very highly, by the way, dispensing to themselves large bonuses for their outstanding service.

They even crowed recently about getting a prize for a great annual report. The report was evaluated on slickness not accuracy, but that doesn't matter to them. In fact, one is tempted to believe that they pride themselves most highly on their slickness.

In the end, the Congress and the military services, and the DVA are no more than a representation of the American people. So I save my condemnation at the end for the American people themselves.

While you cower in fear that some terrorist will blow up your favorite mall, our servicepersons are rushing to the fight. When you run from the sound of battle, they run to it.

Whether you agree with this war or not, you have to care about it. You have to understand that you sent them to Afghanistan and Iraq, because it is you elected officials who did it, and who have kept them there for years. It is your officeholders and officials who fail them when they return. Your officials. Your policies. Your programs.

No matter who designs them, and who implements them, and no matter how well or poorly they are run, these programs belong to you, America. When are you going to step up

"Heroes Lament": [partial quote]

Our people are dying won't you open your eyes
You can't forever hide behind deceit and lies
It's all too clear - our day draws near
But cries fall on deaf ears

What will we do if the heroes are gone?
And who will lead if we're left all alone?
Is it too late for a new day to dawn?
Will I once more get to call... this place home?

Our land was once the greatest of all
But in a few short years we've watched her fall
It's all too clear - for their career
Our leaders have sold us dear

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Pissed off enough? I hope so. If not, see the 6-part CNN series on YouTube: "Waging War on the VA".

See you in a month. [Ed.]

PS I threw in an extra page of news to keep us all busy until next time.

SPECIAL APPEAL

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

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

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

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

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

DEPLETED URANIUM QUEST

Veterans Exposed To Depleted Uranium: Chapter 54 Of The Veterans For Peace Needs You

We are offering to help represent veterans who have been exposed to depleted uranium radiation and are suffering from cancer or other side effects. Our chapter has expertise in medical, legal and administrative law.

We as a chapter of the VFP have started a program and done research to develop a brief for presentation to the VA rating board to obtain service connection disability for the affected veteran. Gulf war I and II vets are encouraged to get in touch with us for information on this project.

A. I. Holtz, MD, FAAP has had seven years experience on the rating board in the Los Angeles office. Please contact us with any questions: <http://www.veteransforpeace.org/vfpduvets.htm>

OPERATION HOMELINK

Operation Homelink™ provides refurbished computers to the spouses or parents of junior enlisted (E1 –E5) U.S. deployed service men and women enabling email communication with their loved one deployed overseas. We offer this service on behalf of our donor corporations as a way to demonstrate their support of our brave men and women serving our country.

Operation Homelink is not able to accept individual requests for computers nor send single computers to individual families. Operational cost efficiencies enable us to maximize the families we can “connect” by only sending computers in bulk (usually 100+) to units that recently or will soon deploy. Because our donor corporations designate the recipient units or bases, (usually located near their headquarters), our program provides a simple, non-cash method to support their local military community. To learn more, view Operation Homelink's [Program Overview](#).

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/

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

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

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

Class Action Suit: Our advocates are currently working on the appeal to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

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

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

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

WE REALLY NEED YOUR HELP

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

All donations are tax deductible to the donor.

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

Please see the **ADD-ON** section for an important letter that a member has shared with us. [Ed.]

ONE VETERAN'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE PATRIOTISM QUESTION [Edited for length]

Two equal sides to Patriotism told by two different but equal U.S. Citizens. One sees Patriotism as something in the gut, the other views it by the history of the Veteran. One sees it as remembering child hood history and memory of historical events witnessed by him with his family. The other sees it as putting the country first, before party or personal ambition before anything that all people share the responsibility of freedom.

... Both these men Obama and McCain have told the true meaning of how they view Patriotism. This is what makes the United States the greatest nation in the world. One see Patriotism from the view of the eighty-nine percent enjoying freedom. The other sacrificed his life for that freedom. Veteran's can no longer be treated as second class citizens.

I like and admire both of these men. I wish that I could vote for both of these men. Patriotism to me is the sacrifice every person that ever served in our military or fought for the United States of America, in politics or uniform. Patriotism is to love a country where you will give everything for people that you do not even know. People that may not even be born yet.

Peter Macdonald Sgt USMC Semper Fi

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

FILNER LOOKS TO CHANGE VA'S "BOOTS ON THE GROUND" AGENT ORANGE RULE -- HOUSE VETS'

This week, Rep. Bob Filner (D-CA), Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, will introduce the "Agent Orange Equity Act of 2008." If this passes, it will reverse the VA's decision that prevents the "Blue Water Navy" and some other veterans from claiming presumptive status for the diseases associated with Agent Orange exposure. For more about the "Blue Water Navy" Agent Orange rule, click here... www.yourvabenefits.org/sessearch.php?q=blue+water+navy&op=and

SENATORS INTRODUCE BILL REQUIRING ACCESS TO VOTER REGISTRATION FOR VETERANS

Salem-News.com - Jul-23-2008

Washington, DC – U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and John Kerry (D-Mass.) today introduced a bill to require the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide voter registration services to veterans in the department's care. The senators introduced the legislation after receiving a response from Veterans Affairs Secretary James B. Peake earlier this month, again denying the senators' request that Secretary Peake designate VA facilities as voter registration agencies. Senators Harry Reid (D-NV), Barack Obama (D-III), Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), Patty Murray (D-WA) and Ron Wyden (D-OR) are co-sponsors.

"This is about giving those who have fought to spread democracy and freedom the right to exercise that freedom in the voting booth," Senator Feinstein said. ... "It shouldn't have taken a legislative solution to fix a bureaucratic problem, but that's what it's come down to in the name of common sense and patriotism," Senator Kerry said.

<More at: www.salem-news.com/articles/july232008/vet_voting_7-23_08.php>

SENATE COMMITTEE APPROVES OMNIBUS VETERANS HEALTH AND BENEFITS H.R. 3329: HOMES FOR HEROES ACT OF ~~2007~~ 2008

Passed the House – S. 1084 Homes for Heroes Act of 2007 in committee since 4/10/07. To provide housing assistance for very low-income veterans. <More at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?c110:3:./temp/~c110LtzZql::>>

VA FAILING TO INFORM GUARD AND RESERVISTS RETURNING FROM IRAQ/ AFGHANISTAN OF POTENTIAL BENEFITS, NEW IG REPORT SHOWS

WASHINGTON, D.C. July 21, 2008 –U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, today highlighted an investigative report www.va.gov/oig/52/reports/2008/VAOIG-06-03552-169.pdf issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs Inspector General, on the efforts of VA to provide transition assistance to veterans returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The Inspector General found VA is not meeting its clear legal obligation to inform new veterans of the benefits they may have earned through their service," said Akaka. "Especially alarming is the finding that Guard and Reserve veterans made up over half of those uninformed, even though they compose only about a quarter of servicemembers deployed.

<More at: www.senate.gov/~veterans/public/index.cfm?pageid=12&release_id=11760>

DAV SCORECARD

DAV Scorecard Website - Key Votes on Vet's Issues. How did your Congressperson vote? <http://capwiz.com/dav/keyvotes.xc?l=C>

BEFORE YOU THINK TOO KINDLY OF OUR CONGRESS MEMBERS. THIS BILL WAS READ IN ON 1 MAY 2008 AND SIGNED INTO LAW ON 17 JULY 2008 ~ 77 DAYS START-TO-FINISH.

MAYBE SERVICEPERSONS SHOULD GET JOBS AS SENATE RESTAURANT WORKERS; AT LEAST THEN THEIR BENEFITS WOULD BE PROTECTED MORE VIGOROUSLY.

S. 2967: A BILL TO PROVIDE FOR CERTAIN FEDERAL EMPLOYEE BENEFITS TO BE CONTINUED FOR CERTAIN EMPLOYEES OF THE SENATE RESTAURANT

Sponsor – Sen. Feinstein D-CA

A bill to provide for certain Federal employee benefits to be continued for certain employees of the Senate Restaurants after operations of the Senate Restaurants are contracted to be performed by a private business concern, and for other purposes. 6/3/2008--Passed Senate without amendment.

Authorizes specified Senate Restaurants employees who are employees of the Architect of the Capitol on the date of enactment of this Act and who become employees of a contractor under a food services contract to elect to continue coverage of federal benefits, including retirement benefits, life and health insurance, annual and sick leave balances and accrual rates, and transit subsidies, after operations of the Senate Restaurants are contracted to be performed by a private business concern.

Prohibits the basic pay of such an employee from being reduced below the rate paid to that employee on the day before operations are transferred. Requires the Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to prescribe regulations to provide for the continuity of benefits. <More at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d110:SN02967:@@X>>

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

RETREAT – NEWS

UNREST SURFACES IN FALLUJAH AGAIN

Ali al-Fadhily and Dahr Jamail

FALLUJAH, Jul 16 (IPS) - Security has collapsed again in Fallujah, despite U.S. military claims. Local militias supported by U.S. forces claim to have "cleansed" the city, 70 km to the west of Baghdad, of all insurgency. But the sudden resignation of the city's chief of police, Colonel Fayssal al-Zoba'i, has appeared as one recent sign of growing unrest.

Authorities may have controlled the media better than the violence.

"Assassinations never stopped in Fallujah, but the media seems unwilling to cover the actual situation here," a human rights activist in Fallujah, speaking on terms of anonymity given the tense situation, told IPS. "The two bomb blasts that killed six policemen earlier this month and another two that killed three on the weekend seem to have terminated the silence."

... According to a survey conducted in March for several news organisations by D3 Systems of Virginia in the U.S. and KA Research Ltd. of Istanbul, most Iraqis blame the U.S. military for the worsening security situation. The majority of Iraqis surveyed disapproved of U.S.-backed Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, most disapproved of the Iraqi government, and most felt that all occupation forces should leave Iraq immediately. <More at: www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=43205>

THE TALIBAN STRIKES BACK

Gary Brecher – AlterNet - July 21, 2008

After six years of ignoring Afghanistan, things have gotten bad enough to force American officials to pay attention. For the past two months, U.S. casualties in Afghanistan have been higher than in Iraq. And on July 13, Afghanistan definitely got everybody's attention when nine U.S. troops were killed in what Wikipedia is now officially calling "The Battle of Wanat." Three days after the battle, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the U.S.-dominated military force running the country, announced it's abandoning Wanat completely. <More at: www.alternet.org/story/92157/>

NO NEW TROOPS TO AFGHANISTAN

Jim Mannion -- July 24, 2008

The Pentagon is unable to send additional combat brigades to Afghanistan this year because of constraints imposed by the war in Iraq, leaving a shift of forces to the next president, a spokesman said Wednesday. US commanders in Afghanistan have requested three more combat brigades, or about 10,000 troops, to deal with growing insurgent violence in the eastern and southern parts of the country. <More at: www.capitolhillblue.com/cont/node/9719>

SPENDING ON VETS EXCEEDS 1947 HIGH

Gregg Zoroya – USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — The federal government is spending more money on veterans than at any time in modern history, surpassing the tidal wave of spending following World War II and the demilitarizing of millions of troops. Expenditures hit \$82 billion in 2007, because of the rising cost of health care, the expense of caring for an aging population of mostly Vietnam War veterans and a new crop of severely wounded troops from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

That exceeds the \$80 billion in inflation-adjusted dollars spent in 1947 after most of the 16.1 million Americans serving in World War II left the service, according to a Congressional Research Service report submitted to Congress last month. An 11% hike in spending to \$91 billion is slated for this fiscal year, and the Department of Veterans Affairs has proposed \$94 billion for 2009. And still more is needed, says U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., who is seeking another \$3.3 billion for the 2009 budget proposal.

"While we are spending more than in previous years, we are still not meeting many of the health care and benefits needs of our veterans," Murray says. <More at: www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2008-07-22-vabudget_N.htm>

8,763 VETS DIED WAITING FOR BENEFITS

William H. McMichael - Staff writer - Jul 17, 2008

The title of the House committee report sums up what happened: "Die or Give Up Trying: How Poor Contractor Performance, Government Mismanagement and the Erosion of Quality Controls Denied Thousands of Disabled Veterans Timely and Accurate Retroactive Retired Pay Awards."

The report by the majority staff of the House Oversight and Government Reform domestic policy panel, released Tuesday, concluded that at least 28,283 disabled retirees were denied retroactive pay awards because rushed efforts to clear a huge backlog of claims led program administrators to stop doing quality assurance checks on the claims decisions. And of the original 133,057 potentially eligible veterans, 8,763 died before their cases could be reviewed for retroactive payments, according to the report. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2008/07/military_concurrent_receipt_071508/>

PUTTING HER FOOT DOWN AND GETTING THE BOOT

Dana Milbank - July 10, 2008; A03

Defense Secretary Robert Gates has tried to sweep out the symbols of his predecessor's capricious reign, firing acolytes of Donald Rumsfeld and bringing glasnost to the Pentagon. But in one area, Rummy's Rules still pertain: the attempt to hide from public view the returning war dead.

When Gina Gray took over as the public affairs director at Arlington National Cemetery about three months ago, she discovered that cemetery officials were attempting to impose new limits on media coverage of funerals of the Iraq war dead -- even after the

fallen warriors' families granted permission for the coverage. She said that the new restrictions were wrong and that Army regulations didn't call for such limitations. Six weeks after The Washington Post reported her efforts to restore media coverage of funerals, Gray was demoted. Twelve days ago, the Army fired her.

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/09/AR2008070902169.html>

JAIL INMATES HEAR FROM ARMED FORCES RECRUITER

Newport News Times - July 16, 2008

The Lincoln County Sheriff's Office paired with the Newport-based Army recruiter on Saturday July 12, in an effort to convey information to jail inmates about the possibility of serving in the U.S. armed forces.

<More at: www.newportnewstimes.com/articles/2008/07/16/news/news13.txt>

SUSPECT SOLDIERS: DID CRIMES IN U.S. FORETELL VIOLENCE IN IRAQ?

Russell Carollo - Sacramento Bee - July 11, 2008

Before Army Sgt. 1st Class Randal Ruby was accused in Iraq of beating prisoners and of conspiring to plant rifles on dead civilians, he amassed a 10-year criminal record in Colorado and Washington state for assaulting his wife and in Maine for a drunken high-speed police chase, for which he remains wanted.

Before Lance Cpl. Delano Holmes stabbed an Iraqi private to death, angering the soldier's unit of coalition soldiers, he was hospitalized after threatening suicide in high school, accused of assault, disorderly conduct and trespassing, and, in the months leading up to deployment, twice linked to drug use.

Before Army Spc. Shane Carl Gonyon was convicted of stealing a pistol at Abu Ghraib prison, he was convicted twice on felony charges and arrested four times, once for allegedly giving a 13-year-old girl marijuana in exchange for oral sex. He enlisted weeks after his release from a federal prison in Oregon.

A yearlong examination of military and civilian records by The Sacramento Bee involving hundreds of troops who entered the services since the Iraq war began identified 120 cases of people whose backgrounds should have raised the suspicions of military recruiters, including felony convictions and serious drug, alcohol or mental health problems. Of those, 70 later were involved in controversial or criminal incidents in Iraq. <More at: www.mcclatchydc.com/227/story/43999.html>

SURGE IS OVER BUT MORE TROOPS REMAIN

Lolita C. Baldor - July 16, 2008

The military surge into Iraq that began more than 18 months ago has ended. But 150,000 U.S. troops remain, as many as 15,000 more than before the buildup began. In recent days, the 3rd Infantry Division's 2nd Brigade, the last of the five additional combat brigades sent in by President Bush last year, left the country. Its departure marks the end of what the Pentagon calls the "surge." And it starts the 45-day evaluation period that Gen. David Petraeus, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, told Congress he would need to assess the security situation and determine how many more troops he could send home.

In the complex battlefield that is Iraq, it's not that easy. While there now are technically 13 Army and two Marine combat brigades in Iraq — the same as before the buildup — the force is as much as 10 percent larger than it was in January 2007.

<More at: www.capitolhillblue.com/cont/node/9583>

HOUSE PASSES CIA CONTRACTOR BAN OVER VETO VOW

Randall Mikkelsen - Reuters - Jul 16, 2008

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. lawmakers defied a White House veto threat on Wednesday and voted to bar CIA contractors from interrogating suspected terrorists, in the latest clash over detainee treatment in the U.S.-declared war on terrorism. The Democratic-controlled House of Representatives approved the provision in adopting a broad measure to authorize funding of U.S. intelligence agencies for the 2009 fiscal year. A related bill awaits action in the Senate. Passage of the multibillion dollar bill came on a voice vote, indicating broad assent, despite the White House veto threat issued earlier in the day.

<More at: http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080717/pl_nm/security_usa_congress_dc_5>

ARMY BASE CANNOT COERCE SOLDIER TRAINEES TO ATTEND CHURCH SERVICES

Wednesday, July 23, 2008

Americans United for Separation of Church and State today asked the U.S. Department of Defense to investigate an Army base's practice of coercing soldiers to attend church services during their training. Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri offers "Free Day Away" as one of only two opportunities for soldiers to leave the base during eight weeks of vigorous Army training. (The other day is the day before graduation, which can be spent with parents and guests.) During "Free Day Away," trainees are picked up by a bus sent

from the Tabernacle Baptist Church of Lebanon, Mo., to participate in a day full of recreational activities, followed by dinner and a required church service.

Trainees are given the impression that the event is sponsored by the Army and that they must attend. If they do not attend, they have to remain on the base and continue with training, while those who attend the event have a break for the day.

<More at: www.au.org/site/News2?abbr=pr&page=NewsArticle&id=9965&JServSessionIdr009=qfe8l0hzb5.app7b>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
7/28		Port Townsend, WA	Resource Fair	John Braasch	
7/28		Holiday Inn Conference Center 130 Clairmont Ave, Atlanta, GA	Atlanta Military Career Fair		404-371-0204
7/31 – 8/3		TBD Fort Yates, ND	Wall That Heals	Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Veterans Organization	
8/1		Ft. Yates, ND	Resource Fair	Linda Chlecq	605-490-2404
8/2		Lancaster CA	Resource Fair	Steve Baker	661-940-5272
8/5	1100 - 1400	Holiday Inn Southgate (Detroit II South) 17201 Northline Road. Southgate, MI	Detroit Military Career Fair		734.283.4400
8/7	1100 - 1400	Holiday Inn Chicago- Mart Plaza 350 North Orleans, Chicago, IL	Chicago Military Career Fair		312-836-5000
8/7		Oakland CA	Stand Down	Tracy Cascio	510-587-3405
8/8		Roxbury MA	Resource Fair	Lana Headley	617-541-8846
8/8		Grand Rapids MI	Resource Fair	Kay Lynn VanDrunen	616-234-0220
8/8		Lower Brule, SD	Resource Fair	Linda Chlecq	605-490-2404
8/11	1100 - 1400	Holiday Inn Rosslyn at Key Bridge 1900 North Fort Myer Bridge, Arlington, VA	Washington DC Military Career Fair		703.807.2000
8/13	1100 - 1400	Radisson Martinique On Broadway Hotel 49 West 32nd Street, New York, NY	New York Military Career Fair		212-736-3800
8/14	1000 - 1600	Cobb Galleria Centre Two Galleria Parkway, Atlanta, GA	Southeast Regional Career Event		Register
8/14 – 8/17		Vinton High School Vinton, Iowa	Wall That Heals	American Legion George G. Luckey Post 57	
8/18	1100 - 1400	Holiday Inn - Raleigh-Brownstone Downtown 1707 Hillsborough St, Raleigh, NC	Raleigh Military Career Fair		919-828-0811
8/21		Marysville CA	Stand Down	Korina Ayers	530-743-2713
8/21		International Falls MN	Resource Fair	Kara Cornils	651-292-0145
8/21	1000 - 1600	New World Landing 600 South Palafox Street, Pensacola, FL	Southeast Regional Career Event		Register
8/22		Duluth MN	Resource Fair	Kara Cornils	651-292-0145
8/23		Fairbanks AK	Resource Fair	Nancy Smoyer	907-456-4238
8/23		Pittsburgh, PA	Resource Fair	Scott Grady	412-481-8200
8/25	1100 - 1400	Omni San Antonio Hotel 9821 Colonnade Blvd, San Antonio, TX	San Antonio Military Career Fair		210.691.8888
8/28	1100 - 1400	Crowne Plaza Hotel Tampa East 10221 Princess Palm Avenue, Tampa, FL	Tampa Military Career Fair		813-623-6363
8/28		Doubletree Hotel Colorado Springs 1775 E. Cheyenne Mt Blvd., Colorado Springs, CO	Midwest Regional Career Event		Register
8/28		Niagara Falls, NY	Resource Fair	Herbert Wittmeyer	716-881-5855
8/28 – 8/31		Santa Rosa Memorial Park Santa Rosa, CA	Wall That Heals	Sonoma County United Veterans Council	
9/15-16		DVA Main HQ 810 Vermont Ave NW, Washington, DC	VA Hearing - Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illness	DSNurse@aol.com	
9/19	0800 - 1300	Cafeteria, American River College 4700 College Oak Drive, Sacramento, CA.	2nd Annual Road Home... From Combat to College	RSVP Cheryl Burkhart	

[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

COLLEGE-BOUND VETS SAY CAMPUS NEEDS OFTEN UNMET

David Mercer - The Associated Press - July 18, 2008

As veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq return to campus, many are finding that colleges and universities are only beginning to figure out how to help soldiers, sailors and others transition back to civilian, social and academic life. Many need help with paperwork. Others seek emotional and psychological support. And others struggle to fit into the social fabric of a campus where their classmates often are much younger. <More at: www.chicagotribune.com/news/chi-ap-il-veteransoncampus.0.3662245.story>

A MOVE TO TAKE CARE OF 'STOP-LOSS' SOLDIERS

Edward Colimore - Philadelphia Inquirer - 21 Jul 08

More than 12,000 soldiers - including nearly 4,000 Guard members - were under stop-loss orders in May, compared to about 8,500 about the same time last year. And many have objected strongly to the months of extra duty, often in combat zones. A bill now in Congress would pay them an additional \$1,500 a month of extended duty. The measure, introduced by U.S. Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D., N.J.), also would make payments retroactive to October 2001, covering servicemen and women affected by stop-loss since the start of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is being considered by committees in both houses.

<More at: www.philly.com/inquirer/home_top_stories/20080721_A_move_to_take_care_of_stop-loss_soldiers.html>

VA, MONSTER PARTNER FOR VETERAN JOB SEEKERS

July 22, 2008

WASHINGTON – In a new plan to help veterans find jobs, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has partnered with Monster Government Solutions, a division of Monster Worldwide, Inc., a company that markets online employment services to employers and job seekers. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/08/vap08/vap072208-1.htm>

VA ANNOUNCES ON-LINE CLAIMS APPLICATIONS

July 16, 2008

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that on-line applications are now accepted from veterans, survivors and other claimants filing initial applications for disability compensation, pension, education, and vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits without the additional requirement to submit a signed paper copy of the application.

Effective immediately, VA will now process applications received through its on-line application website VONAPP (www.va.gov/onlineapps.htm) without the claimant's signature. The electronic application will be sufficient authentication of the claimant's application for benefits.

VA BEGINS TAKING CLAIMS RELATED TO AGENT ORANGE EXPOSURE

Chris Roberts - El Paso Times

Veterans Affairs has started taking claims for hypertension related to Agent Orange exposure, but it will determine at a later date whether the claims will be honored as being military "service-related," according to service organizations who received notices from VA. For more information, please visit www.agentorangelaw.net. <More at: www.elpasotimes.com/newupdated/ci_9207845>

VICTORY FOR VETS WITH ALS

Jill Coley - The Post and Courier - July 15, 2008

Two years of hard work came to fruition Monday in a move that could benefit thousands of veterans who suffer from Lou Gehrig's disease. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will grant a service-connected disability, the highest category of disability, to all veterans with ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a degenerative disease that affects veterans at a rate at 1.6 times the general population.

The news came during a conference call among Dr. James Peake, secretary of Veterans Affairs, Sen. Lindsey Graham and retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Tom Mikolajcik, who suffers from ALS and spoke from his Mount Pleasant home.

Mikolajcik cried when he heard the news. He deflected credit for the policy change and praised Peake and South Carolina legislators, including Graham, Rep. Henry Brown and Sen. Jim DeMint. "This will impact thousands of veterans," Mikolajcik said. "This is a reason to have hope — hope meaning helping other people endure."

<More at: www.charleston.net/news/2008/jul/15/victory_vets_als47483/>

VETS FAULT VA INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

Cristian Hernandez - Staff writer - Jul 17, 2008

The Department of Veterans Affairs' Independent Living Program (ILP) is failing to adequately address the needs of severely disabled veterans, a House subcommittee was told Thursday. Bruce McCartney, a former soldier, told the House Veterans' Affairs economic opportunity subcommittee that the ILP is riddled with problems related to application delays, staffing shortages and limited spots in the program. The ILP, created as part of VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services, is designed to provide severely disabled veterans with specialized medical and mental health assistance and training in independent living skills.

McCartney, who spent 17½ years on active duty, applied for the ILP in 2003 and was taken on what he called a "four year-nightmare." His application spent four years going from local case managers to counselors and regional and local headquarters until he finally began receiving assistance last year. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2008/07/military_independentliving_VA_071608w/>

THE VA SHOULD BE ASHAMED

Martin Schram - July 16, 2008

The Mystery Caller dialed the Department of Veterans Affairs help line 1,089 times in 2002. And it created quite a problem. The problem wasn't about the questions, but the answers. The VA's Veterans Service Representatives gave answers that were often totally wrong, most often partially wrong, rarely completely accurate -- sometimes embarrassingly unprofessional and occasionally downright rude.

-- MYSTERY CALLER: My father served in Vietnam in 1961 and 1962. Is there a way he can find out if he was exposed to Agent Orange?

-- VA SERVICE REP: He should know if they were spreading that chemical out then. He would be the only one to know. OK (hung up laughing).

The Mystery Caller was no mystery at all to the VA's top brass. It was a department exercise -- officially titled "Mystery Caller Telephone Service Quality Assessment" -- to evaluate the information veterans received when calling the VA's 57 regional offices. But the results mystified the VA's top brass, because they were unacceptably awful. Only 5 percent of the callers in the 2002 study received answers that were "completely correct" from the VA's supposedly well-trained service reps.

<More at: www.capitolhillblue.com/cont/node/9580>

Much more in Martin's book: "*Vets Under Siege: How America Deceives and Dishonors those Who Fight Our Battles*" (Thomas Dunne Books). Available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Borders, among others.

DISABLED VETS PAY MORE FOR HEALTH CARE

Pauline Jelinek - Associated Press - July 09, 2008

WASHINGTON - Some military retirees disabled in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan pay more for health care than other retirees, and a new report recommends waiving their insurance premiums to correct the inequity. The report Tuesday by inspectors general of the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs suggests waiving for life the Medicare Part B premiums for servicemembers who have been medically retired and are unlikely to get another job.

Servicemembers judged unfit for continued service after a service-related injury or illness are called "medically retired" and are eligible to continue receiving care through the military health care system. But those who don't live near VA facilities can enroll in Medicare and go to civilian providers, the report said. Such retirees pay roughly \$1,160 annually in monthly premiums until reaching the age of 65, while other retirees remain in the military health care system and don't need the Medicare plan.

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/report-disabled-vets-pay-more-for-health-care.html

AS WARS LENGTHEN, TOLL ON MILITARY FAMILIES MOUNTS

David Crary - AP National Writer - 19 July 2008

FORT CAMPBELL, Ky. - Far from the combat zones, the strains and separations of no-end-in-sight wars are taking an ever-growing toll on military families despite the armed services' earnest efforts to help. Divorce lawyers see it in the breakup of youthful marriages as long, multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan fuel alienation and mistrust. Domestic violence experts see it in the scuffles that often precede a soldier's departure or sour a briefly joyous homecoming.

Teresa Moss, a counselor at Fort Campbell's Lincoln Elementary School, hears it in the voices of deployed soldiers' children as they meet in groups to share accounts of nightmares, bedwetting and heartache. "They listen to each other. They hear that they aren't the only ones not able to sleep, having their teachers yell at them," Moss said. Even for Army spouses with solid marriages, the repeated separations are an ordeal. "Three deployments in, I still have days when I want to hide under the bed and cry," said

Jessica Leonard, who is raising two small children and teaching a "family team building" class to other wives at Fort Campbell. Her husband, Capt. Lance Leonard, is in Iraq. <More at: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20080719/ap_on_re_us/military_scarred_families_1>

MORE MALPRACTICE IN VETERAN'S HOSPITALS

July 14, 2008

Indeed, the stark reality is that malpractice related deaths rank as the number eight killer in America (even higher than traffic accidents). In ominous times of medical need, what choice would one have than to place one's full faith and trust in the hands of a doctor? To be sure, doctors are human beings too, and just like police officers, salesmen, and lawyers: you have the good and the bad. What is interesting, however, is that there have been more malpractice reports in hospitals governed by the Veterans Health Administration (VA).

One answer as to why Veteran's hospitals are so riddled with medical error is that the government does not require VA governed medical facilities to purchase Malpractice Insurance. The government simply picks up the tab for compensating patients and their families in incidents of malpractice. VA hospitals are also notorious for poor sanitation, careless staff members, and other problems. <More at: www.wiredprnews.com/2008/07/14/malpractice-veterans-hospitals_20080714395.html>

PILOT PROGRAM MAY OVERHAUL TREATMENT OF VETERANS

Sydney J. Freedberg Jr.- National Journal - July 18, 2008

The influx of wounded troops from Afghanistan and Iraq has burst the seams of the military health care system. The much-publicized scandal in 2007 at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, which kick-started reforms, has proved to be only the tip of a large and ugly iceberg. The problem is not just about organizations and processes, but about mind-sets.

Although most people in the Defense Department go above and beyond to take care of their wounded, others can still lapse into an attitude of "shut up, shape up, and soldier on"--especially toward those troops who suffer subtle but deeply disabling mental problems rather than obvious physical wounds. Yet it is precisely the hard-to-diagnosis cases of post-traumatic stress disorder and "mild" traumatic brain injury that have become the distinctive injuries of this war.

This fall, however, the departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs will decide whether to expand a pilot program that has the potential to dramatically change the treatment of those disabled in the line of duty. Started in November and currently limited to the Washington metropolitan area, the program takes aim at a bureaucratic redundancy that has long bedeviled injured troops leaving the armed forces. This is the double take in which--before discharge--the Army, Navy, or Air Force first conducts an exit exam of a departing service member to assess any conditions that might trigger military disability benefits, and then--after discharge--the VA conducts its own entry exam of the same individual for the same conditions to determine eligibility for VA benefits.

Rarely do the two departments agree on just how disabled a departing service member is. Even when they do, they pay compensation at different rates set by different statutes. What's more, under federal laws banning "concurrent receipt" of both benefits by the same person, a disabled veteran will often discover his monthly check from the Defense Department is reduced by an amount equal to some or all of the value of his VA benefit. Because the VA is usually more generous, this offset can cut the payment from Defense to nothing.<More at: www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0708/071808nj1.htm>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF JULY 23, 2008

This week the Navy announced an increase, while the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps announced a decrease. The Coast Guard number remained unchanged. The net collective result is 1,542 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 83,346; Navy Reserve, 5,766; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 10,848; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,142; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 777. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 108,879, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated can be found at www.defenselink.mil/news/Jul2008/d20080723ngr.pdf.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE THURSDAY 24 JULY 2008

NOTE: STATISTICS FOR WOUNDED ARE GETTING SHAKIER - DoD REVISES NUMBERS – DROPS NON-HOSTILE “OTHER”

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (1,878 DAYS)		OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,407 DAYS)	
KILLED US	4,124	KILLED US	560
WOUNDED US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 7/24]	30,324	OTHER CASUALTIES US [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 10/2007]	1,994
OTHER US CASUALTIES [EST. LAST DoD UPDATE 4/5]	≥38,631	KILLED COALITION	337
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [LAST DoD UPDATE 3/1]	145	WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/2007)	1,472
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1	KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED UK	176	KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (7/2004)	≥ 3,525
KILLED OTHER COALITION	138	WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (7/2004)	32,034
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819	AFGHAN REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL	1.75M/4.8M
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [LAST DoD UPDATE 6/30/07]	1,001		
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 47,555		
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 94,031		
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 400K – 1.246M	COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$539,544,054,878
IRAQ REFUGEES INTERNAL/EXTERNAL [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M		

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

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

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

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

LOTTERY FUNDS WILL SUPPORT IOWA VETERANS

FRED LOVE, Courier Des Moines Bureau

DES MOINES --- Iowans can now support state veterans by playing the lottery. The Iowa Lottery launched a new scratch game Monday that will benefit the Iowa Veterans Trust Fund. The new \$1 tickets were available in some locations Monday, and will be available throughout the state by Friday.

The new support from the Iowa Lottery will provide a stable funding source for the trust fund that aids Iowa veterans with travel expenses for medical care, job training, tuition assistance and a range of other needs, said Pat Palmersheim, executive director of the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs. Palmersheim said the funding is especially important now because the Legislature may not be able to allocate as much funding to the program over the next few years as the state rebuilds after flooding that ravaged the state in June. <More at: <http://www.wfcourier.com/articles/2008/07/15/news/politics/10472522.txt>>

WHAT IF WE DID SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

There is a paucity of linguists in the Armed Forces and the State Department, a critical need for now and the future. Battalion-sized units are deployed without a single linguist for the local language assigned. Embassies and consulates have one or two American linguists that are even partially fluent in the local language; most have gone through some crash course, taken at their desks in Washington before they are assigned. If we want to be successful in our foreign endeavors, we need linguists badly. We always have, and we have always done little about it.

One F-22 costs \$138M. One F-35 costs \$97.6M. There is no conceivable threat that these aircraft face. The F-16 does the job. No F-16 was shot down by the Taliban, to my knowledge. The Chinese aren't going to attack us tomorrow – their economy depends on us, although that has not always stopped wars in the past.

The Foreign Language Institute at Monterey will give one year of instruction for an estimated \$45,460, including local living costs. Let's scrap one squadron each – 18 F-22s and 18 F-35s – (that is never build them) and train 93,000 linguists. They will be more effective in the real threat environment than 20 fighter pilots zooming their tax-funded sports cars around the skies, and the lessening of air readiness won't even be noticed in the increased readiness of the total force (except perhaps in the USAF. [Ed.]

DISCOVER WHAT THE CANDIDATES SAY ABOUT VETERANS

Senator John McCain's official veteran web page: <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues/9cb5d2aa-f237-464e-9cdf-a5ad32771b9f.htm>

Senator Barack Obama's official veteran web page: <http://www.barackobama.com/issues/veterans/>

ADD-ON ~ ABSOLUTELY CURRENT FIRST-HAND EVIDENCE

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi

Dear Madame Speaker

July 23, 2008

I am a Captain in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves and an Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) veteran seeking treatment at the Veterans' Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in San Francisco. I write to you on behalf of myself and other veterans who may be experiencing or have experienced what I have encountered but who are not able to speak up in order to find solutions to this wrongful treatment.

During a recent visit to the VAMC for a physical therapy appointment (Aug. 16), I was alerted to three required Compensation and Pension (C & P) Examinations that I had not scheduled. I visited the C & P reception desk to inquire more and learned from the receptionist that she already scheduled me for the three appointments without consulting me on the dates and times. From the onset and throughout our exchange, the receptionist (Anne) was hostile, evasive and disrespectful. However, I maintained my composure and persistently asked her about the nature of the appointments and whether I could reschedule due to prior commitments.

Throughout this exchange, the receptionist exhibited only rude and dismissive behavior and threatened numerous times to cancel my claim if I could not be seen within thirty days. We were able to resolve two of the appointments but were not able to resolve the third, because of a long-standing prior commitment. When I informed the receptionist that I would be on the East Coast during my Aug. 7 appointment, she informed me that she was going to cancel my claim and I would have to take it up with the Regional Office. She provided no further guidance.

Since the appointments were scheduled without my consult, I was shocked by this statement and requested that she not cancel my claim. I asked how the scheduling process works since I had not been contacted before the C & P appointments were scheduled. She told me that the VA sets the appointments and that if the veteran cannot make the appointments his or her claim is canceled. She had the audacity to tell me that since I chose to file the claim that I in effect "picked" those unnoticed and arbitrary appointment times.

In trying to resolve the conflict with the third appointment, I asked what other appointment times were available at any time in the next three months. Again, I was told that no other appointment times were available. It was at this point that I was informed of the "thirty day policy" that requires me to be seen within thirty days or else my claim will be canceled. I do not know what event starts the thirty-day countdown, or how the VA can cancel my claim before I have been evaluated.

In fact, the VA has subsequently canceled and rescheduled one of my C & P Examinations without my consultation or notification. This scheduling policy would have led to yet another canceled claim before the initial evaluation if I had not called to verify the status of my claims. I was and continue to be appalled. This thirty-day policy is obviously not a policy that was developed at the reception area of the C & P desk, but something originating from higher levels of administration.

I initially had no intention of raising my concerns regarding this policy, but after sharing the story with a fellow Marine veteran, he reminded me of my obligation to write this letter on behalf of those who are being similarly treated but who are unable to speak out. Far too many of my contemporaries need assistance, not confrontation and hostility, and it saddens me to think of the countless depressed or suicidal veterans that encounter such roadblocks. It is policies such as these and rude, callous treatment reported here that lead to dropped claims, abandoned treatment and preventable suicides.

If I am being subjected to appalling treatment in a major facility such as the VAMC San Francisco, I am confident that it is occurring elsewhere. Although my experience in dealing with medical professionals during treatment at the VAMC has been positive, I find the VA's threat to cancel my claim if I cannot be seen within thirty-days to be totally unacceptable. The VA's attempt to circumvent a protective policy originally enacted to ensure timely processing of the veteran's claim has created yet another barrier for the veteran. It is disturbing that the VA is more concerned with negative statistics on claims processing time than caring for veterans. I have served my country and am entitled to medical care as a result of this service. This entitlement should not be taken from me or any other veteran arbitrarily, let alone for a strictly bureaucratic reason.

The C & P Examination process has become adversarial, and policies designed to protect veterans from unnecessary delays have become obstacles. I kindly request that the House Committee on Veterans Affairs investigate how many claims the VA is canceling because veterans are not seen within thirty days. Thank you in advance for your time and action.

Kind Regards,

[Name withheld]

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