

SOUND OFF!



VOL. IV, NO 19

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

25 MAY 2009

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

WHAT PRICE “FREEDOM”? IS “FREEDOM” WHAT WE ARE FIGHTING FOR?

Every period, every cause, every war, every political campaign, even every commercial product pitch comes up with a catch-phrase that quickly becomes a cliché. The phrase is repeated and repeated until it loses its meaning, if it ever had one, and goes right on being repeated by those who will never understand what it was supposed to mean originally.

One of the most enduring of these clichés is “Freedom Isn’t Free”. Well, I have to believe that statement to be true as a matter of practical and critical analysis, but does it mean the same thing to me as it does to the people who are spouting it endlessly on the internet, on the talk shows, and in the press? I am not sure, but I have my suspicions.

And if freedom isn’t free, then who pays? By that, of course, I mean who **really** pays? How much? In what currency?

All wars are not fought for freedom, no matter what the supporters say. To fight for freedom means that you have to be committed to fighting for some definable group of people who are either not free, or who are in danger of losing whatever freedom they may have. It can be your own people, or it can be others, but it has to be people – not land, not treasure, not power, certainly not jingoism – people.

People have to be the decisive and profoundly important objective of a fight for freedom. Otherwise, you obviously are fighting for something else, whatever it may be, but it is not “freedom”.

And when you spout the cliché, you have to be prepared to follow up with the words “... and I am prepared to pay.” If you can’t do that, then don’t even talk about it, because talking isn’t **doing** it, is it?

Regardless, if we fight we should be fighting for a cause. Not one person’s cause, or one small group’s cause – our cause, the people’s cause, the nation’s cause. If it isn’t “freedom”, then it must be some other cause that we can all get behind.

If freedom or something else is our cause in a particular war, what does it mean that “our cause isn’t free”?

From the point of view of most Americans it is pretty much free. Oh yes, they will suffer a bit from a slight lack of services because of the cost of the war, and the cost of servicing the debt of the war, but they won’t really see that, will they? For those who believe that government has no place in our lives on any level, the result of reduced services should be a gain, at least by their definition.

If “war is not free”, then it has to have a describable cost, doesn’t it? The true cost of war isn’t just the armaments, the operating costs, and the salaries of serving soldiers, it is the complete cost including the cost of compensating those who are truly paying a price – the serving military and their families – and compensating them in full.

We only compensate them in full if we take into account the full effect of their service on their lives and the lives of their families. You can repair cars for three years and then go on to something else and there is no lasting negative effect. You can get a job painting houses or building them for three years, and unless you are injured on the job, when the job is over you are pretty much the same person you were when you started.

Soldiers aren’t.

We know full well that almost without exception the effect of military service, even including the service of those who do not see war, has a lasting change on the individual soldier. Training to kill starts it, and then the stress and trauma of war, should they go, solidifies it and intensifies it to a point where many need lifetime support. It is simpler to define the support needed by those who have suffered physical trauma, but there are also 300,000 out there from the current wars who are suffering from psychological trauma, and that is only a portion of the millions suffering from previous wars.

Those who have paid the price – physical or mental – know that it isn't free – they have paid a terrible price. What about the rest?

What if wars had to be currently funded, and funded to the full extent of their long-term costs? What if we truly had to have a balanced defense budget but could not cut back on expenses? Then for 2010, based on current rates, individual income taxes would have to increase by \$100B and corporate taxes by \$26B. That means an increase in income taxes of \$335 per person or \$1,340 for a family of four. Of course prices in local stores would nearly double since the tax on corporations would be added to the price of goods, but then we all would really know that “war isn't free”.

This tax surcharge would have to be collected long after the war was over – so long as there is a soldier alive who needs help, although, if we were clever enough to stay out of wars of choice we might be able to reduce that surcharge after twenty years or so, but it would go on until the last veteran died or no longer needed care.

There are a few ways to recoup some bucks.

It costs \$2B a year to run the House and Senate, and they only are doing about 20% of the job called for in Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution. We ought to be able to collect about \$1.6B back from them, thereby reducing the individual debt by a little over \$5. Congress would then know that “war isn't free”. Congress could still meet, but they would have to let their staffs go; since they all do so little real work for the American people we citizens shouldn't notice any real difference. They cannot come to grips with the real needs of the country, and they certainly cannot act to solve the problems that veterans face.

Of course they can pass bills like the Patriot Act without even reading it, and do it in two days, giving away our true freedoms out of quaking and quivering fear, but they have been jawboning full compensation

for veterans practically since the Revolutionary War, addressing it only piecemeal, and never quite coming to grips with it. They can shovel money out the door to failed banks and businesses without a moment's hesitation, but must always go back to their committees and pick the nits when it comes to veterans benefits until the issue dies or time runs out. If we cut them back to themselves and a secretary, all on reduced salary, they would then be free to concentrate on their real job which is reelection.

We could also line up behind our founding fathers and their fear of the power of inherited wealth, and reinstate truly progressive taxation and reestablish solid estate taxes. We'd reduce the war tax surcharge by \$3 for every billion collected. The wealthy who generally do not send their sons and daughters to fight would begin to understand that “war isn't free”.

Since American CEOs are making 363 times the average worker's salary, we could let them continue to get paid at that level, but tax away everything over \$1M. They would get to keep score based on their pretax salary and brag and gripe about their “true earnings”, and we could get one heck of a windfall. That would lower our individual surcharge to pay for the war by at least \$25/person, and probably more.

We could reduce expenditure, and lower the war surcharge accordingly, by having open competition on all government contracts, and award only fixed fee contracts. Defense contractors would begin to understand that “war isn't free”, and it certainly shouldn't be free to freebooters and war profiteers.

Billions could be saved by stopping the subsidies to mega-agriculture, and other businesses perfectly capable of standing on their own in their much-beloved free market. That's \$30 or so off the war tax surcharge.

Families who refuse to send their sons and daughters to fight should be required to pay the taxes of the families who do, thus no one would have to pay more than once. It wouldn't be too much of an additional burden since only one half of one percent of all families are sending their kids to fight our wars.

This is all fanciful, of course, but the core message is that before you say “freedom isn't free”, when what you really mean is “war isn't free”, then you had better be prepared to pay your share of the price.

Otherwise, kindly shut up! [Ed.]

“War is sweet to those who have not tried it. The experienced man is frightened at the heart to see it advancing.”

Pindar (522-443 BC)

PLEASE SEE ADDITIONAL EDITORIAL COMMENT UNDER **"AFTERTHOUGHTS"**

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

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

WAKE UP! SPREAD THE NEWS!

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

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

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

Case Progress to Date:

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

9/25/2007 Defendant's Motion to Dismiss

2/11/2008 Motion for Preliminary Injunction

2/25/2008 Preliminary Injunction Hearing

4/21/2008 Trial

6/25/2008 Judgment based on jurisdiction

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

12/10/2008 Appeal brief filed

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

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

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

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

4/22/09 Extension granted to 1 May 2009

5/1/09 Appellants' Reply Brief filed

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.

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

FIRST GULF WAR VETERANS – INTERVIEW REQUEST

[This letter is from a documentary film maker interested in the first Gulf War]

We are looking to interview a Persian Gulf War veteran for our movie-especially one who can speak about the Pentagon's media relations unit, the pool system and, in general, the staged news coverage of the war. Any assistance in this regard would be greatly appreciated. We are in New York City, so they would have to be located here (or nearby) as well.

Damen damencorrado@gmail.com

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

BILL TO REPEAL FERES CLEARS FIRST HURDLE

William H. McMichael - Staff writer - May 19, 2009

An effort to overturn a 59-year-old Supreme Court decision barring service members from suing the government for negligence inched forward Tuesday when a House subcommittee approved the Carmelo Rodriguez Military Medical Accountability Act.

The bill is named for a Marine Corps platoon leader and Iraq war veteran who was not told by military doctors that he had been diagnosed with melanoma, was not referred for treatment and, years later, was told the growth was a birthmark. Rodriguez, of Ellenville, N.Y., died from skin cancer in November 2007 at age 29.

<More at: http://www.armytimes.com/news/2009/05/military_feres_doctrine_hinchev_051909w/ >

BIPARTISAN BILL INCREASES WIDOWS/WIDOWERS' BENEFITS

May 05, 2009

Washington, D.C.—Congressman Steve Buyer (IN-04), Ranking Member on the House Committee of Veterans' Affairs, has introduced bipartisan legislation with Congressman Tim Walz (D-MN) that would increase benefits the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) pays to widows and widowers whose spouses died while on active military duty or as the result of a service connected injury or illness. The Surviving Spouses' Benefit Improvement Act of 2009, H.R. 2243, would also eliminate an unjust offset between the VA benefit and a military benefit for survivors.

<More at: www.house.gov/apps/list/press/in04_buyer/bill_increases_widows_widowers_benefits.html>

SENATE COMMITTEE ADVANCES AKAKA LEGISLATION FOR VETS

May 21, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, chaired by Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), approved comprehensive legislation to better enable the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide for the needs of veterans and their families. The bills approved today will help veterans in rural areas receive better health care, establish a permanent program to support veterans' caregivers, and secure timely and transparent funding for VA's health care system through advance appropriations. <More at: <http://www.vawatchdog.org/09/scva09/scva052109-1.htm>>

VETERANS EDUCATIONAL EQUITY ACT INTRODUCED BY MCKEON

Tuesday, 19 May 2009

Leading a coalition of California elected officials, Rep. Howard P. "Buck" today introduced the Veterans Educational Equity Act. McKeon, the top Republican on the U.S. House Education and Labor Committee and a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee, says that he developed the legislation in response to reports that California veterans may be unfairly denied educational benefits under the post-9/11 GI Bill.

Under California law, public institutions of higher education may not charge tuition to in-state residents. The post-9/11 GI Bill calculates a veteran's educational benefits based on the public tuition and fees charged to an in-state resident. Thus, in California, veterans receive no tuition benefit and are often only allowed to use a fraction of their fee allotment at a private institution of higher education. <More at: <http://www.hometownstation.com/local-news/mckeon-veterans-education-2009-05-19-11-56.html>>

RETREAT – NEWS

DUCKWORTH TAKES CHARGE OF VA'S PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND OUTREACH PROGRAMS

May 20, 2009

WASHINGTON – Tammy Duckworth returned Wednesday to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, a key site in her long recovery from wounds suffered in Iraq, to take the oath of office as the chief spokesperson for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

"I am so honored to serve the Obama administration by helping to care for our Veterans," Assistant Secretary Duckworth said. "They are our nation's greatest treasure and deserve the best care available. I fully support Secretary Shinseki as we work to provide that care."

... As assistant secretary, Duckworth will direct VA's public affairs programs and its intergovernmental efforts. She also will oversee programs for homeless Veterans and consumer affairs. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/09/vap09/vap052009-1.htm>

IRAQI ARMY: ALMOST ONE-QUARTER LACKS MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

Jane Arraf - Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor - May 22, 2009

In a legacy of the US rush to build up Iraqi security forces, almost one-quarter of the Iraqi Army currently fails to meet its own minimum qualifications for soldiers, the Iraqi government is discovering in its first real look at the composition of the Army.

"They're finding about 24 percent are not qualified based on Army criterion for being in the Army," US Brig. Gen. Steven Salazar says of an ongoing rescreening of Iraq's 253,000 soldiers.

"A very small number of them are overage, a little bit bigger number of them would be medically disqualified, and then somewhere – around 15 percent they're finding – are illiterate," says General Salazar, deputy commander of the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq, in an interview.

Salazar says the rescreening, which has surveyed 46,000 soldiers so far, was undertaken because neither the Iraqi Ministry of Defense nor US officials knew who exactly was in the Army. <More at: www.csmonitor.com/2009/0522/p06s07-wome.html>

U.S. PREDICTS SPIKE IN AFGHAN BOMBS

The Associated Press - May 15, 2009

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan - Strategically buried in the middle of dirt roads, packed in culverts and attached to trip wires, a heightened hidden danger awaits the thousands of U.S. troops pouring into Afghanistan to fight a tenacious Taliban.

The U.S. military expects a 50 percent spike this year in roadside and suicide bombings, which surpassed the number of similar strikes in Iraq during the spring. These types of bombs killed 172 coalition forces last year — and far more Afghan civilians — according to military figures. <More at: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/30771872/>

TOP U.S. MILITARY OFFICER PUSHES GUANTANAMO CLOSING

Will Dunham – 24 May 2009

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – The top U.S. military officer on Sunday pushed for the closure of the Guantanamo Bay prison despite rising resistance in Congress, saying it serves as a "recruiting symbol" for America's enemies.

Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. military's Joint Chiefs of Staff, rallied behind President Barack Obama's move to close the detention facility at the U.S. naval base in Cuba, which is operated by the U.S. military.

"Well, the concern I've had about Guantanamo in these wars is it has been a symbol -- and one which has been a recruiting symbol for those extremists and jihadists who would fight us. ... That's at the heart of the concern for Guantanamo's continued existence," Mullen said on ABC's "This Week."

"Well, I've advocated for a long time now that it needs to be closed. President Obama made a decision very early after his inauguration to do that by next January. And we're all working very hard to meet that deadline," Mullen added.

<More at: http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20090524/pl_nm/us_guantanamo_usa_2/print>

U.S. INVESTIGATES AFGHAN SHOOTING BY MILITARY CONTRACTORS

Mike Mount and Suzanne Simons – CNN – 16 May 2009

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- The U.S. military in Afghanistan is investigating a group of military contractors who shot and wounded two Afghan civilians in Kabul earlier this month, according to the military. The contractors worked for a company called Paravant, which is affiliated with Xe, the new company name for the security contractor Blackwater Worldwide, according to sources familiar with the incident. Paravant is owned by Erik Prince, who is also the owner of Xe.

"The contractors were involved in a vehicle accident in Kabul at approximately 9 p.m. May 5. While stopped for the vehicle accident, the contractors were approached by a vehicle in a manner the contractors felt threatening," according to a U.S. military press release. "The contractors fired upon the vehicle, reportedly wounding two Afghans," the statement said. The wounded Afghans were taken to a hospital, according to the release.

The press release did not identify the contracting company. A spokesman for the U.S. Military's Central Command, which oversees combat in Afghanistan, said, "Because the incident remains under investigation, there's no further information available beyond the information in the press release." A senior source in the contracting industry said that, while off duty, the four contractors were allegedly drinking before the accident.

<More at: www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/05/15/afghanistan.contractors/index.html>

OUR ADVOCATES TAKE ON ANOTHER CHALLENGE – THANKS GORDON AND EVERYONE AT MORRISON & FOERSTER LLP

UNCLE SAM'S HUMAN LAB RATS

Bruce Falconer - Mon May 18, 2009

Their stories are a staple of conspiracy culture: broken men, suffering hallucinations and near-total amnesia, who say they are victims of secret government mind-control experiments. Think Liev Schreiber in *The Manchurian Candidate* or Mel Gibson in *Conspiracy Theory*. Journalists are a favorite target for the paranoid delusions of this population. So is Gordon Erspamer—and the San Francisco lawyer's latest case isn't helping him to fend off the tinfoil-hat crowd. He has filed suit against the CIA and the US Army on behalf of the Vietnam Veterans of America and six former American soldiers who claim they are the real thing: survivors of classified government tests conducted at the Army's Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland between 1950 and 1975. "I get a lot of calls," he says. "There are a lot of crazy people out there who think that somebody from Mars is controlling their behavior via radio waves." But when it comes to Edgewood, "I'm finding that more and more of those stories are true!"

<More at: www.motherjones.com/politics/2009/05/uncle-sams-human-lab-rats>

SOME US SOLDIERS FORCED TO STEAL WATER IN IRAQ

Jeremy Rogalski - 11 News Defenders - May 12, 2009

HOUSTON -- Take Houston's heat on a miserable summer day and add 40 degrees, making temperatures 130 or more. Next, add an extra 100 pounds of life-protecting gear to your body: bulletproof vests, guns and ammunition. And then imagine not having enough water around to drink.

Stories of short supplies have haunted the U.S. military throughout the war in Iraq—things like inadequate body armor or unshielded Hummers. But while many soldiers say they had good access to water and even Gatorade, the 11 News Defenders discovered that others, stationed all over the country and during all phases of this desert war, say something else was often missing.

"We were rationed two bottles of water a day," said Army Staff Sgt. Dustin Robey, referring to 1 to 1.5 liter bottles.

And he said that wasn't nearly enough. ... Robey said eventually they became desperate.

"It really hit me the day I was with my commander and we're stealing water," Robey said, describing how they raided supplies at the Baghdad International Airport.

To get there, they had to take one of the riskiest routes in Iraq at that time, riddled with road bombs and roadside insurgents. But they reached the airport and found plenty of water. It was in the hands of civilian contractors, who Robey claims were supposed to be distributing it to soldiers.

"You just had pallets upon pallets upon pallets of (bottled) water," Robey said.

<More at: www.khou.com/topstories/stories/khou090511_tnt_water-shortages-iraq-soldiers.16ebba1d.html#>

U.S. ARMY PAID BONUSES TO KBR DESPITE QUESTIONS

REUTERS - May 20, 2009

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. Army paid "tens of millions of dollars in bonuses" to KBR Inc, its biggest contractor in Iraq, even after it concluded the firm's electrical work had put U.S. soldiers at risk, according to a source close to a U.S. congressional investigation.

The Senate Democratic Policy Committee plans to hold a hearing on Wednesday to examine KBR's operations in Iraq, and question why the Army rewarded the Houston-based company. The panel says KBR has been linked to at least two, and as many as five, electrocution deaths of U.S. soldiers and contractors in Iraq due to "shoddy work." Investigators believe hundreds of other soldiers may have received electrical shocks, the source added. The Army is investigating.

The company denies responsibility for any of the electrocutions, saying it is proud of its work and that its employees make great sacrifices to get the job done. <More at: www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSTRE54J19520090520>

EX-SOLDIER GETS LIFE SENTENCE FOR IRAQ MURDERS

James Dao - May 22, 2009

A jury in Kentucky sentenced a 24-year-old former soldier to life in prison without parole on Thursday for raping a 14-year-old Iraqi girl and murdering her, her parents and a younger sister in Iraq. The verdict spared the defendant, Steven D. Green,

death for a crime that prompted Iraqi demands for retribution and raised questions about Army oversight of its combat-stressed forces. <More at: www.nytimes.com/2009/05/22/us/22soldier.html?_r=1&hpw>

MULLEN: MILITARY TO COMPLY IF GAY BAN LAW CHANGES

24 May 2009

WASHINGTON – President Barack Obama's top military adviser said Sunday the Pentagon has enough challenges — including two wars — without rushing to overturn a decade-old policy that bans gays and lesbians from serving openly in the military and incites political and social factions on both sides.

Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said he is working on an assessment of what — if any — impact overturning "don't ask, don't tell" policies would mean for the military and its culture.

In the meantime, the Pentagon plans to follow the existing rules, which say gays and lesbians can serve in the military if they do not disclose their sexuality or engage in homosexual behavior.

"The president has made his strategic intent very clear, that it's his intent at some point in time to ask Congress to change this law," Mullen said. "I think it's important to also know that this is the law, this isn't a policy. And for the rules to change, a law has to be changed." <More at: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090524/ap_on_go_ca_st_pe/us_military_gays_4/print>

ANOTHER "HONOR THE VETERAN" MOMENT

SOCAL VETERANS SUED OVER PAY-PER-VIEW FIGHT NIGHTS

The Associated Press -05/13/2009

CHINO, Calif.—For a decade, veterans gathered at an American Legion hall to watch televised boxing matches with friends, each chipping in a few dollars to cover the cost of ordering pay-per-view.

But the tradition came to an abrupt end this year after the owners of broadcast rights sued American Legion Post 299 over its fight nights, the Los Angeles Times reported Wednesday.

KingVision Pay-Per-View and J&J Sports Productions sued over two pay-per-view boxing matches shown to veterans in 2008 without a commercial license.

Both accused the American Legion post of charging admission to see the fights. But veterans said they only passed around a hat for voluntary donations to cover the cost of airing the boxing matches.

The lawsuits were for \$150,000 and \$160,000. Fearing a costly legal battle, the veterans agreed to settle each of the lawsuits for \$20,000. They also canceled pay-per-view events.

Thomas P. Riley, attorney for the pay-per-view companies, said a sports bar that showed boxing matches had to pay a few thousand dollars to show the fights and could be losing customers to the veterans' hall.

But veterans said they didn't make any money off fight night. Sometimes, they couldn't even cover the cost of airing the matches.

"A lot of times when we pass the hat, some guys will throw in 25 cents," Don Avila, a Vietnam War veteran and commander of the Post, told the Times. "If it's a member, we ask for \$1 or \$2 or sometimes \$5." www.mercurynews.com/news/ci_12360996

TO THE COLORS - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
5/22-5/25		Norborne Football Field Norborne, MO	The Wall That Heals	Norborne Betterment Association	
6/3		Portland, OR	Resource Fair	Melissa Bensink	503-226-7387 x233
6/4-6/7		Freedom Hall Johnson City, TN	The Wall That Heals	Rolling Thunder Cha. 4	
6/5-6/6		Kansas City, MO	Resource Fair	John Brown	816-753-1866
5/28	1000- 1600	Howard Johnson Hotel 111 W. Fortune St., Tampa, FL	Southeast Regional Career Event		Register
7/9	1730	Marines' Memorial Theater, 2nd Floor, 609 Sutter Street, San Francisco	George P. Schulz Lecture Series – GEN David Petraeus	World Affairs Council of Northern California	\$10 members \$25 non-members
7/27-8/2		Galt House Hotel, 140 N Fourth St Louisville, KY 40202	Vietnam Veterans of America Biennial Convention	VVA	

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

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TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

ARMY SUICIDES SOAR PAST 2008'S PACE

Mark Benjamin - May. 12, 2009

The Army is on a pace this year to shatter the record suicide rate set among soldiers in 2008, according to data released by the Army to Salon. And the numbers, obtained a day after a patient at a combat stress clinic in Iraq killed five, suggest that combat stress may be contributing to the spike in suicides.

During the first four months of 2009, 91 soldiers committed suicide, including suspected suicides still under investigation. During all of last year, 140 Army soldiers committed suicide, resulting in the highest rate on record. If Army suicides continue at the rate recorded from Jan. 1 to April 30, more than 270 soldiers will be dead by their own hands at the end of this year. The large majority of suicides are among enlisted soldiers, privates, specialists and sergeants.

<More at: www.salon.com/news/primary_sources/2009/05/12/ocpa/>

GENERALS FIND SUICIDE A FRUSTRATING ENEMY

Ann Scott Tyson and Greg Jaffe - Washington Post Staff Writers - May 23, 2009

As Numbers Continue to Climb, Top Officers Meet Monthly to Look for Answers

It was just past midnight in Afghanistan when Brig. Gen. Mark Milley appeared on the video screen in the Pentagon conference room to brief some of the Army's top generals on a sobering development: his unit's most recent confirmed suicide.

A 19-year-old private, working a night shift at his base, had shot himself a few weeks earlier. "There was no indication that he would harm himself, he had not been seen by the chaplain, no intimate relationships," Milley said, running through warning signs.

In the Pentagon, Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli, the Army's vice chief of staff, homed in on one detail. The soldier worked a job that often entailed long, solitary hours. In scouring the Army's suicide statistics, Chiarelli had noticed a slight suicide increase among those who worked such positions. Milley said that going forward none of the 20,000 soldiers under his command would routinely work by themselves.

For more than two hours, Chiarelli, Army personnel chief Lt. Gen. Michael D. Rochelle and a roomful of other generals combed through the facts surrounding a dozen of the Army's latest suicides, with commanders from

<More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/22/AR2009052203556_pf.html>

ARMY FIGHTS STIGMA OF MENTAL CARE IN IRAQ

Robert H. Reid - Associated Press Writer - May 16, 2009 (AP)

BAGHDAD (AP) -- A military culture that values strength and a "can do" spirit is discouraging thousands of soldiers from seeking help to heal the emotional scars of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, despite top-level efforts to overcome the stigma, commanders and veterans say.

Up to one-fifth of the more than 1.7 million military members who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan are believed to have symptoms of anxiety, depression and other emotional problems. Some studies show that about half of those who need help do not seek it.

"It's a reality that for some -- certainly not all, but for some -- there's a stigma to stepping forward for behavioral health," Maj. David Cabrera, who runs counseling services at a military hospital in Germany, told The Associated Press.

"Our goal is to eradicate the stigma," he said. "We're not there yet."

Encouraging more soldiers to seek help, and training leaders to spot signs of trouble, have taken on new urgency since the fatal shooting last Monday of five U.S. service members at a counseling center at Baghdad's Camp Liberty.

<More at: <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=7603533>>

DOD LAUNCHES PROGRAM TO FIGHT STIGMA OF SEEKING PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH CARE

No. 354-09 - May 21, 2009

The Department of Defense today launched the Real Warriors Campaign, a multimedia public education effort designed to combat the stigma keeping some service members veterans and their families from seeking needed psychological health care.

The campaign will promote the processes of building resilience, facilitating recovery and supporting reintegration for those with psychological wounds via an interactive web site and through radio and television public service announcements.

<More at: www.defenselink.mil/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=12692>

GROUPS DISAGREE ABOUT GULF WAR ILLNESS RESEARCH

Kelly Kennedy - Staff writer - May 22, 2009

The Pentagon and Department of Veterans Affairs say an Institute of Medicine study shows there is no Gulf War "syndrome," and that there is nothing unique about the symptoms 1 in 4 Desert Storm veterans suffer.

But the congressionally mandated Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illness say that not only is there a series of symptoms that make up a definable illness, they know what caused that illness.

Those opposing views were on full display May 19 in the first of three congressional hearings about Gulf War Illness.

"We do believe that Gulf War illnesses are real — but there is no unique set of symptoms," said Craig Postlewaite, deputy director of force readiness and health assurance under the assistant secretary of defense for health affairs.

He based that view on the IOM study that concluded veterans' symptoms vary too much to be seen as unique and recommended no more epidemiological studies. <More at: www.armytimes.com/news/2009/05/military_gulf_war_illness_studies_052009w/>

FOR FEMALE SOLDIERS, LAST BATTLE IS WITHIN

Mark Curnutte - May 22, 2009

They are just a fistful of the 200,000 female troops thrust into battle – intentionally or not – in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Angela Strittholt, Jennifer Wells, Iva Griggs and Laura Seaman are among those female troops who have come home with problems once reserved for fighting men.

They arrive with physical injuries such as paralysis, lost limbs and bad backs. They develop mental health issues, as seemingly benign as sleeplessness and as potentially debilitating as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which the Department of Veterans Affairs reports that up to 40 percent of veterans – regardless of sex – have or develop during their lives.

In many cases, they fought in wars with no battle lines and a sense of not knowing who the enemy is. Spc. Strittholt, in two year-long tours of duty in Iraq as a truck driver, shot at snipers and twice had bombs hit her convoy – once under the Humvee directly in front of her as she hauled an ammunition trailer. Now home, she struggles with anger and has bad dreams she will be sent to Iraq a third time. <More at: <http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20090522/EDIT03/305220004/For+female+soldiers++last+battle+is+within>>

SPECIAL COURTS GIVES VETS SECOND CHANCE

Associated Press - May 23, 2009

EDWARDSVILLE, Ill. - After a high-speed back-and-forth with a driver he says nearly ran him off the road, Army Lt. Andrew Myatt was arrested by police in Illinois and accused of waving a pistol.

But the 41-year-old soldier is getting help through a fledgling court program specifically for current or former members of the military who run afoul of the law.

The "veterans court," one of several popping up across the country, is aimed at getting nonviolent soldiers with otherwise clean records into treatment, sparing them a criminal conviction. Treatment can include psychological counseling or drug and alcohol rehab.

"I've been awed in that they take into account that you volunteered for your country and that it stands for something," said Myatt, with roughly 23 years of service in the Army and, lately, the National Guard. "The judge and the others are saying our own brothers are lost in the system and we can help. This is our own taking care of our own."

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/special-courts-gives-vets-second-chance.html>

OBAMA'S CRDP PLAN WOULD HELP 103,000 DISABLED RETIREES

Tom Philpott - Special to the Montgomery Advertiser - 24 May 2009

As reported here last week, President Obama has asked Congress to phase in "concurrent receipt" for all Chapter 61 retirees -- those who received a disability retirement from the Department of Defense.

... the plan... if enacted, would boost pay for 103,000 veterans by more than \$2 billion through 2014.

Concurrent receipt means being able to receive both VA disability compensation and military retired pay earned for years served. For many decades, retired pay had been reduced by the amount of disability pay.

<More at: www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/article/20090524/NEWS02/905240304/1009/rss04>

MORE ON CAMP LEJEUNE WATER

US CAN'T VOUCH FOR CANCER ASSURANCES TO MARINES

Rita Beamish - Associated Press Writer – April 28, 2009

In an about-face, the government Tuesday disavowed a 12-year-old federal report that found little or no cancer risk for adults who lived on a Marine base where drinking water was contaminated for three decades.

Up to 1 million people could have been exposed to toxins that seeped from a neighboring dry cleaner and industrial activity at Camp Lejeune, N.C., federal officials say. Now, a report that minimized the cancer threat for adults has been discredited.

"We can no longer stand behind the accuracy of the information in that document," William Cibulas, director of health assessment for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, said at a meeting in Atlanta. "We know too much now."

Sick veterans, who became known as "poisoned patriots," and their advocates never believed the report's conclusions. Their families have filed claims for \$33.8 billion in damages. A study continues on whether fetuses might have been harmed.

Federal information on the base and its water: www.atsdr.cdc.gov/SITES/LEJEUNE

Marines "The Few, The Proud, The Forgotten": www.TFTPTF.com <More at: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090428/ap_on_re_us/us_toxic_tapwater>

AGENCY TO PROBE BODY ARMOR DELAYS

Sara A. Carter - May 20, 2009

Body-armor manufacturers are raising concerns that a Pentagon decision to move armor testing from private labs to an Army research center will increase costs and slow the availability of lifesaving equipment as thousands of additional U.S. troops head to Afghanistan.

Those concerns have prompted the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the investigative arm of Congress, to open an inquiry, The Washington Times has learned.

Army Secretary Pete Geren decided in February to strip private contractors of responsibility for quality and safety testing after a Pentagon inspector general report criticized Army quality-control procedures.

As a result, Mr. Geren moved testing to Aberdeen Test Center in Maryland, prompting a rare public controversy within a community of private contractors that prides itself on keeping secret the ways in which the United States protects its troops.

<More at: www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/may/20/body-armor-firms-fear-availability-issues-in-test/>

USERRA? WE DON'T NEED NO STINKIN' USERRA!

CALLED-UP RESERVIST SUES FORMER EMPLOYER

Virginian-Pilot - May 23, 2009

A former police lieutenant sued the city of Chesapeake on Friday, alleging he was denied the right to re-employment after returning from service in the Coast Guard.

The federal lawsuit, filed in Norfolk by the U.S. Justice Department, claims Paul F. Sutton, a Norfolk resident, qualified for re-employment under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994.

<More at: www.military.com/news/article/calledup-reservist-sues-former-employer.html>

FLYING TIGER TESTIFIES: "I CAME TO SEEK EQUITY"

Washington, D.C. — One of the few surviving members of the American WWII Volunteer Group famously known as the 'Flying Tigers' appeared before a Subcommittee hearing today on behalf of his fellow veterans who were left out of a benefits bill that recently passed the House.

"I did not come here seeking sympathy, but to seek equity," said Ed Stiles Sr., a ninety year-old former crew chief for the Flying Tigers. "I believe if benefits are provided to one group of veterans, eligibility should be established for all similarly categorized groups."

Mr. Stiles' testimony referenced H.R. 23, as amended, which the House recently approved to provide a \$1000 monthly payment to WWII Merchant Mariners, but did not include the other 28 groups that were awarded veteran status under the G.I Bill Improvement Act of 1977. <More at: www.vawatchdog.org/09/hcva09/hcva052109-2.htm>

OBAMA CONCURRENT RECEIPT PLAN DETAILS

MOAA Legislative Update – 15 May 2009

More details surfaced this week on the Administration's proposal to expand concurrent receipt to service members who were medically retired, sometimes referred to as Chapter 61 retirees.

Under the Administration's Omnibus proposal, all Chapter 61 retirees will become eligible for Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP) over a five-year period starting in January 2010.

<More at: www.moaa.org/lac/lac_issues/lac_issues_update/lac_issues_update_090515.htm#issue2>

SINGLE WEB SITE KEY FOR VETS' COMBINED MEDICAL, BENEFITS RECORD

Bob Brewin 05/08/09

The Veterans Affairs Department said in its proposed fiscal 2010 budget released on May 7 that it has placed a high priority on building a virtual lifetime electronic record, which will follow soldiers from active duty through their retirement, an initiative that the yet-to-be-confirmed VA chief information officer said last week will be supported by a single Web site.

The virtual record, which the Defense Department and VA will share from the time a recruit joins the military to when he or she becomes a veteran, supports the Obama administration's initiative for a standard registration process for VA for all service members. Its aim is to improve how benefits are delivered to vets because it will provide medical and administrative data in one file so doctors can treat soldiers and vets in the examining room and also determine benefits for service-related disabilities.

... Roger Baker, President Obama's nominee for chief information officer at VA, said at his confirmation hearing on May 6 that development of a single Web site to provide benefits and health information to military personnel and veterans would be a key element of the virtual lifetime electronic record. [he was [confirmed](#) 19 May] <More at: www.nextgov.com/nextgov/inq_20090508_7017.php>

ARMY FAMILIES UNDER FIRE

Kristina Kaufmann - May 11, 2009

As we approach eight years of war, too many military families are quietly coming apart at the seams. The public hears the most dramatic stories and statistics -- soldiers killing their wives, themselves, each other. Less well known are the effects that prolonged war and multiple deployments have had on our daily lives. As the wife of a commander of a battalion that deployed last year, I know that many of us feel embittered, powerless and disconnected from the Army in which we and our husbands serve.

The blogosphere provides a sense of the many families coping with health issues and the less tangible effects of war and military life, including how marginalized many feel. "Spare me the rah rah party line about how much the Army is doing for the soldiers once they come home," [wrote](#) one wife whose husband had suffered a traumatic brain injury. "[T]hey don't do even half of what they should to provide adequate treatment for soldiers coming back from deployment." [Wrote](#) another wife: "We are outsiders living inside an institution that doesn't want to see or hear us. . . . You don't have to wear a uniform to be wounded by these wars, but no one outside of those of us impacted seem[s] to know this."

Dishearteningly, the response from Army and Defense Department leaders has been haphazard, sluggish and widely ineffective. <More at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/03/AR2009050301850.html>>

VETERANS RETREAT:

Bellingham, Washington VFP Chapter 111 member and former National Guard sergeant Ash Woolson, OIF, has created Vetretreat.com <<http://www.vetretreat.com/>> , a website dedicated to veterans deployed and returning home, not only to facilitate a reconnection but to emphasize support using YouTube vignettes.

"This project was created to connect everyone and anyone to the soldiers returning or involved in war. We want to make a place for civilians to broadcast gracious messages to soldiers, and for the soldiers, this is a place to come from anywhere in the world and watch people thanking them for their service."

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SUNDAY 10 MAY 2009

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,229 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,287
WOUNDED US [5/2/09]	31,245
OTHER US CASUALTIES [5/2/09]	≥36,903
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [5/2/09]	181
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED UK	179
KILLED OTHER COALITION	139
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/25/09]	≥ 48,874
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [5/2/09]	≥ 100,339 - 668,051
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [11/9/08]	≥ 400K – 1.374M
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,758 DAYS)

KILLED US	682
WOUNDED US [5/2/09]	2,820
OTHER CASUALTIES US [5/2/09]	7,860
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [5/2/09]	31
KILLED COALITION	463
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/07)	1,602
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY [1/25/09]	≥ 11,017
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (2/24/2009)	≥ 7,373
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (2/24/2009)	46,322
AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$667,720,123,887
COST OF AFGHAN WAR TO DATE	\$187,657,202,582

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

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

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

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

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF MAY 5, 2009

This week the Army, Navy, and Air Force announced an increase, while the Marine Corps and Coast Guard announced a decrease. The net collective result is 930 more reservists activated than last week. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 103,709; Navy Reserve, 6,750; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 14,892; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,575; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 697. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 133,623, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Apr2009/d20090428ngr.pdf>

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

OLD, NEW VETS CLASH OVER IAVA CHIEF COMMENT

Rick Maze - Staff writer - May 16, 2009

With five words, the executive director of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America opened a rift among veterans groups that could derail efforts to improve mental health care and other benefits.

The dispute — with older veterans complaining that Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are getting too much attention and too much money while they wait in long lines for medical appointments — was sparked by a statement issued May 11 by Paul Rieckhoff, founder and chief of IAVA, about the fatal shooting of five service members at a counseling center in Iraq, allegedly by another U.S. service member.

Trying to put the reported case of friendly fire in perspective, Rieckhoff said: "Unlike during the Vietnam War, today's military is a professional, all-volunteer force."

<More at: http://www.armytimes.com/news/2009/05/military_veterans_professionalism_051509w/>

EDITORIAL COMMENT – AN OPEN LETTER TO PAUL RIECKHOFF

Dear Paul,

I'm going to believe that this was a poor choice of words on your part. At least I hope that is what it was.

There were different circumstances in which we all entered the service, depending on which war and the state of the world at that time. Some of us stayed a short time, and some of us made a career of it.

One thing we know for sure, volunteering doesn't make you a professional,. It didn't in my era –Korea/Vietnam, it didn't in World War II, and it doesn't now. Even staying for a career doesn't make you a true professional.

Professionalism doesn't come out of an enlistment or reenlistment certificate, it comes out of the inner strength and hard work of a serving soldier, marine, sailor or airman. Some stay 30 years and never become true professionals, some stay two or three years and are professional all the way.

The draft wasn't like a British press gang of the 17th century, ranging through the town and dragging unwilling or cowardly citizens off to fight the King's war. Draftees got drafted rather than enlisting for myriad reasons. True, some hoped never to have to serve, but many draftees went gladly, waiting for the draft because of their own plans, or to minimize the total length of their service. Having fought with draftees, I am proud of their service too. Unfortunately something like the press gang description seems to be the stereotype for your generation's description of ours.

So, Paul, the fact that everyone today volunteers doesn't mean that they are somehow different from all of us who went before you. You could not imagine the professionalism of some draftees. They didn't want a career, but they worked hard to know their jobs and they served with distinction. I volunteered, but I didn't feel like a true professional until I made my fourth stripe after three years, and I strove to earn my professional status at every level for another 25 years after that.

Throughout, "non-professionals" died in the same way that professionals do, serving their country to the best of their ability. We remember all of them, not just the "professionals", and certainly not just the volunteers.

Professionalism is of the heart and mind – attitude and intellect – not of the contract. I think you know that Paul, and we trust that that is what you really meant to say.

Your friend in VUFT – Sanford Cook, LTC USA (Ret) – Professional

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

RIGHT-WING RADIO HOST GETS WATERBOARDED, AND LASTS SIX SECONDS BEFORE SAYING IT'S TORTURE

John Byrne - Raw Story - May 22, 2009

Chicago radio host Erich "Mancow" Muller decided he'd get himself waterboarded to prove the technique wasn't torture.

It didn't turn out that way. "Mancow," in fact, lasted just six or seven seconds before crying foul. Apparently, the experience went pretty badly -- "Witnesses said Muller thrashed on the table, and even instantly threw the toy cow he was holding as his emergency tool to signify when he wanted the experiment to stop," [according to NBC Chicago](#).

"The average person can take this for 14 seconds," Marine Sergeant Clay South told his audience before he was waterboarded on air. "He's going to wiggle, he's going to scream, he's going to wish he never did this."

Mancow was set on a 7-foot long table with his legs elevated and his feet tied.

"I wanted to prove it wasn't torture," Mancow said. "They cut off our heads, we put water on their face...I got voted to do this but I really thought 'I'm going to laugh this off.' "

The upshot? "It is way worse than I thought it would be, and that's no joke," Mancow told listeners. "It is such an odd feeling to have water poured down your nose with your head back...It was instantaneous...and I don't want to say this: absolutely torture." <More at: www.alternet.org/story/140205/

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

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