

SOUND OFF!



VOL. V, NO 5

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

25 OCTOBER 2009

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

LET'S TAKE A DEEP BREATH!

Everything is going so swimmingly after seven years, let's just do a lot more of the same! Yeah right!

We have many kinds of people who are members of Veterans United For Truth. We all joined for different reasons and we all have stayed with it for our reasons.

We have Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, Anarchists, and probably more than a few Socialists.

We have Christians Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, atheists and probably a Zoroastrian or two.

We have Whites, Blacks, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and many of mixed race (just like our current President).

We have serving military, veterans, family members of veterans, and friends of veterans.

We have hawks, doves, and only a very few of those I-don't-give-a-s***ters.

In the many permutations and combinations of our membership we have those who supported the Afghan War and opposed the Iraq War, those who opposed both wars, those who supported both wars, and those who sit quietly by and say, “Is there a war on?” (only a few of those also).

In letters, emails, op-ed columns and just sitting around the old camp fire the arguments rage about all of the flavors of *Should-We-Have-Gone?*, and *Should-We-Stay?*

Most of these conversations take the form of some combination of, “**Obama must/shouldn't stay/expand/ drawdown/withdraw.**”

Every one of these conversations that I have been a party to treat the subject as if there is one problem with one obvious answer (the speaker's), and no one seems to understand why it is taking so long to get a decision.

Some say just give GEN McChrystal the troops he asked for and get out of the way. Replace **McChrystal** with **Westmoreland** and you begin to get a sense of the danger such an attitude places us all in, but most particularly the troops.

Well folks, we should all take a deep breath and wait. While we are waiting, I'll give you my take on the Afghan situation, and will explain why I am glad that the decision is taking so long.

First, let's list some of the more prevalent current “obvious solutions”.

1. We can't leave without “winning”, (“winning” is undefined..
2. We should declare a “win” and leave.
3. We only have to stay until the Afghans take over (the reins of government?, the opium trade?).
4. The Afghans can't be trusted/counted on so we must leave (now/next month/in a few months).
5. No Afghan life is worth one American life so we should leave now.
6. No one can win in the Middle East/Asia so we should just come home.
7. A few still argue that the solution is that we shouldn't have gone in the first place (as if that decision could be undone).
8. And fewer yet (but a vocal bunch) say that if the US would just stop fighting other people, peace would break out all over the world.
9. Also a few (thankfully only a few) say the US should kick ass wherever we want to until people do what we think is right.

None of these deal with the totality of the problem nor with the reality on the ground. Few of them approach dealing with our historical place in the world.

It has been a long time since the problem was simply should we or should we not go to war. We did go, and those decisions and their aftermath are part of the current problem set. No do-overs.

The problem is no longer just the Taliban or even Al Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The problem is an admixture of at least the following:

- a. Afghanistan was never a democracy but it was a stable monarchy with a decentralized government largely in the hands of tribal leaders and warlords. It won't be a US-style democracy any time soon, if ever.
- b. The Taliban is largely Pashto and "Pashtunistan" includes a sizeable part of Pakistan – they don't recognize the Durand Line that forms the "Af-Pak" border. They don't just intend to rule Afghanistan, they intend to rule Pakistan as well
- c. The opium trade is huge and is the source of Taliban funding, and the funding of many corrupt Karzai officials and smugglers and their Afghani and Pakistani government patrons.
- d. Pakistan is a nuclear country which has exported nuclear technology to others despite its international agreements.
- e. Taliban control of the Afghani opium trade would fund their continued aggression in the region. If the Taliban takes control of Pakistan, we will have 21st century WMD's in the hands of 8th century thinkers.
- f. The Pakistanis, in recent surveys, have proven themselves to be strongly anti-American, despite the billions in bribes we have been sending them.
- g. Pakistan's hatred of India supersedes any other policy considerations. They will ultimately decide critical issues on how it positions them vis-à-vis India regardless of the US's wishes.
- h. All of the nations in the region, from Russia and the former Soviet Republics to Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan meddle in Afghan affairs for religious, ethnic, or monetary reasons.
- i. Afghanistan is the logical route for oil and gas pipelines out of Central Asia to southern ports, and Western oil companies and their parent nations meddle in Afghan business every day.

The above list is not all-inclusive, and leaves out many other important considerations. The list is

presented for the sole purpose of depicting the complexity of the Afghanistan situation.

The current administration, Congress, and the Department of Defense must wrestle with all these combustible variables in a myriad of possible permutations and relationships.

It is as if they were trying to solve an equation where (using the list above) *a* through *i* were ever-changing elements, the value and the relationships of which can never be determined even loosely.

The projected outcomes of any decision are certain to contain more potentially perverse consequences than they do predictable results. The decision-makers – the President and his advisers – are locked in by recent history and do not have some single easy choice.

The status quo sucks. Escalating has to have a purpose and a practical end state. Walking away will leave the region in an explosive situation that will result in further conflict – civil and/or national wars – with possibility of nuclear engagement, all of which will surely entangle us further.

At the least, if we leave we can count on a massive increase in the flow of narcotics into the West as Afghanistan ratchets up to its full production potential.

It used to be that politics stopped at our nation's shores, and foreign affairs decisions were made on the basis of what is best for the country and for our relations with other countries. Those days are sadly gone, and everything now seems to be calculated on the basis of its effect on the next US election.

So let's all take that big breath and sit back and give our leaders time to do their job. The only thing we can hope for – even if there is only a slim chance – is that the final decision is made without any consideration for US electoral politics.

Our young men and women will fight for us regardless. Let's finally give them a clear mission for Afghanistan and the total wherewithal to do whatever mission they are given. That would be a welcome change, wouldn't it?

And let's remember what we really stand for and hope that our leaders also remember.

“America is a Nation with a mission - and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs. We have no desire to dominate, no ambitions of empire. Our aim is a democratic peace - a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman.”

George W. Bush

43rd President of the United States

[Ed.]

REVELLE - 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>.

FRAUD ALERT!

The Department of Veterans Affairs has reported that the "Patient Care Group" is conducting a scam operation against veterans who receive VA prescriptions. Callers claiming to be representatives of this group tell veterans that their prescriptions are being administered by the company. They then ask for credit card information so that the veterans can continue to receive their medications. VA officials said that the department has made no change to its prescription system, and that veterans should not provide any information to callers from this group. <http://www.va.gov/hac/forbeneficiaries/forbeneficiaries.asp>

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

Class Action Suit: On 12 August we appeared before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. An article from the LA Times on 24 August summarizes the results so far < latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/healthcare/la-me-veterans-suit24-2009aug24.0.1423297_story>

.Case Progress to Date:

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

9/25/2007 Defendant's Motion to Dismiss

2/11/2008 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

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

8/12/09 Oral arguments

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

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

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 bhandy@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]

No letters this issue

VETERANS' AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ADVANCES BILLS TO ENHANCE VETERAN PROTECTIONS

For Immediate Release - October 14, 2009

Washington, D.C. – On Thursday, October 8, 2009, the House Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, led by Chairwoman Stephanie Herseth Sandlin (D-SD), approved seven bills that would improve benefits and services to veterans provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

“This Subcommittee passed a slate of bills that will provide needed changes for veterans and their families,” said Chairwoman Herseth Sandlin. “These bills address the unique needs of our veteran population and I would like to thank the Subcommittee members for addressing these critical issues here today.”

* H.R. 1182, Military Spouses Residency Relief Act (Carter) - amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act by extending the same residency rights to military spouses as are currently extended to active duty service members.

* H.R. 2416, The Success After Service Act (Adler) - require contracting officers of the VA to use purchases of goods or services through the federal supply schedules for the purpose of meeting the government-wide goal for participation by small businesses owned and controlled by veterans and service-disabled veterans.

* H.R. 2614, Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education Reauthorization Act of 2009 (Kirkpatrick) - reauthorize the Veterans Advisory Committee on Education until the end of 2015.

* H.R. 1168, as amended, Veterans Retraining Act of 2009 (Boozman) - authorizes \$100 million per year to provide a living stipend and moving assistance to veterans who have been unemployed for at least 4 months, who are not eligible for training or education under the Department of Veterans Affairs, and are enrolled in a U.S. Department of Labor re-training program.

* H.R. 2696, as amended, Servicemembers' Rights Protection Act (Miller) - expand Servicemembers Civil Relief Act protections to service members seeking to cancel certain service contracts due to a change in duty station where such service is not provided.

* H.R. 2461, Veterans Small Business Verification Act (Herseth Sandlin) - clarify current law and require VA to verify that firms are veteran-owned small businesses or service disabled veteran-owned small businesses in order to be listed in the Vendor Information Pages database maintained by the VA Secretary.

* H.R. 2874, as amended, Helping Active Duty Deployed Act of 2009 (Connolly) - amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to improve the equitable relief available for service members called to active duty, including allowing greater flexibility for family cell phone plans, rental leases, and motor vehicle leases when a service member changes duty stations or is deployed.

The bills will next be considered by the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. <http://www.vawatchdog.org/09/hcva09/hcva101409-2.htm>

CONGRESS PASSES BILL TO EASE MILITARY VOTING SNAGS

Ann Sanner (AP) – 10/22/09

WASHINGTON — U.S. troops and other American voters overseas will get more time to send in their ballots and more electronic access to voting forms under legislation Congress passed Thursday. The bill, called the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act, aims to remove some of the hurdles that have caused thousands of overseas ballots to be lost or uncounted in past elections. The measure was attached to a \$680 billion defense policy bill that the Senate approved Thursday on a 68-29 vote. The bill now goes to President Barack Obama for his signature.

<More at: http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jcH8aKjkxZ7-e3_lLumCMtkqv9QD9BGCS3O0>

CONGRESS PASSES 3.4 PERCENT PAY BOOST FOR MILITARY

Andrew Taylor - Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Military personnel will get an above-inflation pay raise of 3.4 percent under a Pentagon policy bill the Senate passed Thursday and sent to President Barack Obama for his signature.

The pay increase was a half-percentage point more than Obama sought earlier this year and beats the average pay boost in the private sector. <More at: http://ap.stripes.com/dynamic/stories/U/US_congress_defense?site=dcsas§ion=home&template=default>

**WE HELPED A LITTLE, BUT BILLY IS THE HERO OF THIS BATTLE.
WHY DOES IT TAKE SO LONG FOR VETS TO GET WHAT THE LAW CLEARLY ALLOWS?**

HOT DOG VENDOR RELISHES HIS SALES-TAX VICTORY

Steve Chawkins - October 22, 2009

After 16 years, the owner of the Surf Dog stand [in Carpinteria, CA], a disabled veteran, has won an exemption for peddlers such as himself. On Thursday, the dogs are on him.

As light on his feet as the prizefighter he once was, Bill Connell moves quickly around his Carpinteria hot dog stand, jabbing hot sausages, whipping Monster Dogs into buns, and boasting about the recent knockout he scored against state tax officials.

"They told me the law didn't mean what it said in plain language, and I told them: 'Are you kidding me? I was educated in Catholic schools! I know what the law says!'"

For 16 years, Connell sparred with the state Board of Equalization over the interpretation of an 1872 statute exempting street peddlers who are disabled veterans from paying various taxes. This morning, he'll celebrate his victory by giving away hot dogs and carving up sheet cakes decorated with the Stars and Stripes.

... "This was a real David-and-Goliath struggle, and Bill never gave up," said state Sen. Jeff Denham (R-Atwater), chairman of the [California] Senate Veteran Affairs Committee. "It's an emotional issue for him and it's an emotional issue for all veterans." <More at: latimes.com/news/local/la-me-hotdog22-2009oct22.0.1120937.story>

RETREAT – NEWS

UNODC REVEALS DEVASTATING IMPACT OF AFGHAN OPIUM

21 October 2009

Afghanistan has a monopoly on global opium poppy cultivation (92 per cent), the raw material for the world's deadliest drug - heroin. The size and impact of the opium economy in Afghanistan were documented in the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009* published in September. Less well known, however, is the size of the opiate trade once it leaves Afghanistan, and its impact on the world.

In a new report, [*Addiction, Crime and Insurgency: The Transnational Threat of Afghan Opium*](#), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) shows the devastating consequences that the 900 tons of opium and 375 tons of heroin that are trafficked from Afghanistan every year have on the health and security of countries along the Balkan and Eurasian drug routes, of countries in Europe, of China, India and the Russian Federation.

<More at: <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2009/October/unodc-reveals-devastating-impact-of-afghan-opium.html>>

EMANUEL SAYS AFGHANS NEED CREDIBLE RULE BEFORE TROOPS (UPDATED)

Vincent Del Giudice - Oct. 19 (Bloomberg)

White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel signaled the U.S. may refrain from deciding to send more troops to Afghanistan until a "legitimate and credible government" is in place.

"The president will not be rushed to making a decision" on Afghanistan, Emanuel said on CNN's "State of the Union" program yesterday. It would be "reckless to make a decision on U.S. troop levels" without a thorough analysis of the country's ability to govern itself, Emanuel said. <More at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601091&sid=aXDO1DDCKy.k#>>

DRUM SOLDIERS' IRAQ DUTY CANCELED

Joanna Richards - Times Staff Writer - October 16, 2009

FORT DRUM — Some 10th Mountain Division soldiers set to go to Iraq in January were informed today the deployment has been canceled, division spokeswoman Julie A. Cupernall said Thursday.

The change affects the approximately 3,500 troops of the 10th Mountain Division's 1st Brigade Combat Team.

Ms. Cupernall said there's been no change of mission, meaning there's no word yet on whether the troops might be headed to Afghanistan instead as part of a troop level increase now being debated.

"There's no way to speculate at this point if there is going to be a change of mission in the future," she said. That will depend on "decisions that are made at the very highest level."

For now, all that's clear is that the 1st Brigade Combat Team will "go back in the pool of deployable brigades," Ms. Cupernall said. <More at: <http://www.watertowndailytimes.com/article/20091016/NEWS03/310169915>>

HOW COME I'M NOT SURPRISED?!

U.S. TROOP FUNDS DIVERTED TO PET PROJECTS

Shaun Waterman - The Washington Times - October 15, 2009,

Senators diverted \$2.6 billion in funds in a defense spending bill to pet projects largely at the expense of accounts that pay for fuel, ammunition and training for U.S. troops, including those fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to an analysis.

<More at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/oct/15/troop-funds-diverted-to-pet-projects>>

U.S. IGNORED WARNINGS BEFORE DEADLY AFGHAN ATTACK

Bill Gertz - October 16, 2009

Three intelligence reports warned that Taliban insurgents were planning an attack just days before this month's raid on two remote military outposts in eastern Afghanistan that killed eight U.S. soldiers, but the reports were dismissed as insignificant, U.S. officials told The Washington Times.

As a result, military officials did not send additional troops or make preparations to protect the 140 U.S. and Afghan troops at the combat outposts near Kamdesh in Nuristan province by the Pakistan border, the officials said.

<More at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/oct/16/us-ignored-warnings-before-deadly-afghan-attack/>>

SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ERIC K. SHINSEKI DELIVERED HIS "STATE OF VA" TESTIMONY TO CONGRESS. WASHINGTON, Oct. 14 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ --

Here is Secretary Shinseki's written statement. <http://vets4politics.blogspot.com/2009/10/secretary-shinseki-oct-2009-state-of-va.html>

US MILITARY BASE IN ROMANIA TO BECOME PERMANENT

(AP) – 10/23/09

BUCHAREST, Romania — A U.S. army official in Romania says an American military base near the Black Sea port of Constanta will become a permanent facility in the spring and be jointly used with Romanian forces. Lt. Col. Daniel Herrigstad says the U.S. government invested \$48 million to modernize the base. Herrigstad told the news agency Agerpres on Friday that the base would initially host up to 1,700 U.S. and Romanian soldiers.

<More at: <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hnPslnQCbtn5dEKa5Tnu5GixcNRqD9BGsfJG0>>

ADMIRAL: I CAN EMPTY GUANTÁNAMO IN 10 DAYS

Carol Rosenberg - Brennan Linsley - AP - Oct. 20, 2009

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVY BASE, Cuba -- The military can comply with a White House order to empty the detention center and clear all 221 war-on-terror captives off this remote base "with 10 days notice," the prison camps commander said Tuesday.

Navy Rear Adm. Tom Copeman told The Miami Herald and Fox News in an interview that his 2,100-member team of guards and other support staff can meet President Barack Obama's Jan. 22 closure deadline right through the eighth anniversary of the establishment of the controversial prison camps. <More at: <http://www.miamiherald.com/1218/story/1291809.html>>

IS THIS THE LAST (DRAFTED) MAN STANDING?

FORMER DRAFTEE TO HANG UP UNIFORM

Jim Garamone - Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs - 10.23.2009

WASHINGTON - The Army Reserve's top enlisted soldier retires this month from an Army that's vastly different from the one he was drafted into almost 40 years ago.

... "I went through the induction center at Jacksonville, Fla., and eventually ended up at basic at Fort Jackson [S.C.] and advanced infantry training. I came home, and 11 days later my Dad drove me to the airport and I was shipped out to the Republic of Vietnam," he said during a recent interview. "When I went in, it was at night and there were tracers coming in and tracers going out. That has a tendency to focus your attention."

The sergeant major served with the 4th Infantry Division in Vietnam's Central Highlands. He earned his Combat Infantryman's Badge and his first Bronze Star in Vietnam. <More at: http://www.dvidshub.net/?script=news/news_show.php&id=40563>

OBAMA PRESENTS PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION TO VIETNAM VETS

CNN – 10/23/09

Citation awarded for extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry to 86 members of the Army's Troop A, First Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- Nearly 40 years after members of a U.S. cavalry unit put their lives in peril to save 100 fellow soldiers trapped under blistering enemy fire in Vietnam, they received the Presidential Unit Citation on Tuesday. It's an honor their captain says is long overdue.

President Obama awarded the citation for extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry to 86 members of the Army's Troop A, First Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment.

"These soldiers defined the meaning of bravery and heroism," Obama said at a White House reception honoring the group's heroics. "It's never too late. You can never say it enough. ... We honor your service, and America is forever grateful."

<More at: <http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/10/20/vietnam.citation/>>

INCENTIVES DRAWING MORE LATINOS TO MILITARY, RAND STUDY FINDS

Laurie Ure - CNN

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- Though the percentage of Latinos in the U.S. military remains lower than the percentage in the general population, gains are being made in efforts to increase diversity in the military, a recent study shows.

In 2007, the percentage of Army recruits who were Hispanic was 11.4 percent, up from just 6.6 percent in 1994, according to the study by the Rand Corporation. For the Navy, the percentage of recruits who were Latino rose to 15 percent from 8.9 percent.

That success can be directly related to specific signing incentives, the study found.

Martin Enriquez of Los Angeles, California, said he was inspired to enlist in part because of the signing bonus but even more because of the education benefits. "They gave me a thousand dollars for my enlistment bonus, but they gave me \$71,600 for my school," he said.

The lure of a higher education has proven to be a strong incentive for the Latino population.

<More at: http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/10/21/latinos.military/index.html?eref=s_topstories>

US SENATORS TO WEIGH OVERTURNING MILITARY BAN ON GAYS

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Oct 23, 2009

A key US Senate panel will hold a hearing next month to look at a possible repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" ban on gays serving openly in the US military, the committee's chairman said Friday.

"We'll have a hearing in November in the Armed Services Committee," Democratic Senator Carl Levin told AFP, adding: "My hope is that we are going to find a way to repeal 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.'"

<More at: http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/news/2009/10/us_senators_to_weigh_overturning_military_ban_on_g.php>

AMAZING WHAT ONE DEDICATED PERSON CAN DO WHEN THE SYSTEM CAN'T **MILITARY RETIREE LAUNCHES VIRTUAL ARMY FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER**

Bob Brewin - 10/16/09

The Army has developed a range of online resources to support the families of soldiers, especially deployed troops, but these can take hours of Web searches to locate and organize.

Jaque Davison, a retired Army helicopter pilot who has nearly three decades of experience in the construction of 3-D objects and virtual worlds, believes he has found a better way to manage and present that information.

Davison, who runs a one-man virtual world development operation out of his home in Springfield, Va., thinks the best way to organize and present information is through visual 3-D cues, rather than static Web text searches. So, he recently launched the Army Family Support Center in ActiveWorlds, an online virtual world.

... Davison set up the support center on his own dime out of a passionate belief that virtual worlds can turn data into knowledge.

To visit the virtual Army Family Support Center, users will need to download the free client software from [ActiveWorlds](#), register as a guest and then go to [this link](#). <More at: http://www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20091016_8400.php>

BURNED GI'S PORTRAIT SMITHSONIAN BOUND

Associated Press October 23, 2009



SAN ANTONIO -- Retired Army Sgt. Richard Yarosh has gotten used to the stares. His face is blanketed in knotty scar tissue. His nose tip is missing. His ears are gone, as is part of his right leg. His fingers are permanently bent and rigid.

All is the result of an explosion in Iraq that doused him in fuel and fire three years ago.

"I know people are curious," he said. "They'll stop in their tracks and look. I guess I can understand. I probably would have stared, too."

Soon, a lot more people will be staring at Yarosh's face but in a very different way: A life-sized oil painting of him will go on display at the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington later this month. The portrait, by Matthew Mitchell, is a finalist in the Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition, which recognizes modern portraiture at the gallery known for its

collection of notable Americans.

The gallery received more than 3,300 entries. Many are less conventional portraits, including video and photos, but others, like that of Yarosh, draw strength from the traditional head-and-shoulders composition, said curator Brandon Fortune.

Mitchell's use of the style - historically reserved for nobility, a high-ranking military officer or a president, not a disfigured soldier in an Army T-shirt - democratizes such paintings, Fortune said.

"The portrait is clearly meant to honor him. I think that contributes to the gravity of the presentation," she said.

<More at: <http://www.military.com/news/article/burned-gis-portrait-smithsonian-bound.html>>

TO THE COLORS - GATHERINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>What</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>Notes</u>
10/23-25		Tucson, AZ	Stand Down	Mark Pollinger	520.293.1919
10/30		St. Cloud, MN	Resource Fair	Nick Johnston	320-255-6320
11/06		Salem, VA	Resource Fair	Gaylene Sanford, LCSW	540-982-7463 x-1230
11/07		Los Angeles, CA	Resource Fair	Doris Nickelson	310-545-2937
11/10		Mankato, MN	Resource Fair	Sue Sorenson	507-345-8258
11/11-11/15		The Medford Area Middle School Medford, WI	The Wall That Heals	The Medford Area Middle School	
11/11		Scottish Rite Event Center 1895 Camino del Rio South San Diego, CA	Military Career Expo Memorial Hiring Event		Register

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

OBAMA SIGNS SPENDING BILL FOR VETERANS

AP – 10/22/09

President Barack Obama on Thursday signed into law a measure designed to keep funding for veterans' medical care steady amid future budget negotiations. Noting the Veterans Affairs Department is providing care for veterans without a Congress-approved budget right now, Obama said the new law would guarantee timely and predictable funding by laying out the VA budget ahead of schedule. The president said the measure would let the VA know as much as a year ahead of time just how many tax dollars officials could expect to buy equipment, provide health care and hire employees.

"Over the past two decades, the VA budget has been late almost every year, often by months," Obama said in the White House's East Room, surrounded by veterans and lawmakers. "At this very moment, the VA is operating without a budget, making it harder for VA medical centers and clinics to deliver the care our vets need." <More at:

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/10/22/politics/main5410674.shtml>>

SECRETARY ANNOUNCES EXPANSION OF VETERANS APPEALS BOARD

October 21, 2009

WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced the addition of four new Veterans Law Judges to the Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA), which will enable the board to increase the number of cases being decided.

"Veterans have earned the right to prompt, exhaustive and professional review of their claims for benefits," Secretary Shinseki said. "This expansion of BVA will enable Veterans to receive more expeditious decisions on their appeals."

<More at: <http://www.vawatchdog.org/09/vap09/vap102109-1.htm>>

VA ADDS ILLNESSES TO AGENT ORANGE BENEFITS LIST

Leo Shane III - Stars and Stripes Online edition - October 13, 2009

The list of illnesses previously recognized under VA's "presumption" rule as being caused by exposure to herbicides during the Vietnam War are:

- Acute and subacute transient peripheral neuropathy
- AL amyloidosis
- Chloracne
- Chronic lymphocytic leukemia
- Diabetes mellitus (Type 2)
- Hairy cell leukemia
- Hodgkin's disease
- Ischemic heart disease
- Multiple myeloma
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Parkinson's disease
- Porphyria cutanea tarda
- Prostate cancer
- Respiratory cancers, and
- Soft-tissue sarcoma (other than osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, or mesothelioma)

Source: Department of Veterans Affairs

WASHINGTON — Veterans Affairs officials added three new illnesses Tuesday to the list of diagnoses connected to Agent Orange, allowing quicker health care claims for Vietnam veterans suffering from Parkinson's disease, hairy cell leukemia, and ischemic heart disease. <More at: <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=65358>>

PROPOSAL COULD EASE WAY FOR DISABILITY PAYMENTS

Kimberly Hefling - The Associated Press - Oct 15, 2009

WASHINGTON — Female soldiers and others serving in dangerous roles behind the front lines in Iraq and Afghanistan have long complained it was hard to prove their combat experience when applying for disability for post-traumatic stress disorder.

That could soon change. The Veterans Affairs Department has proposed reducing the paperwork required for veterans to show their experience caused combat-related stress. Even just the fear of hostile action would be sufficient, as long as a VA psychologist or psychiatrist agreed.

The VA says the change would streamline claims and recognize the "inherently stressful nature" of war service. The agency is accepting comment until Oct. 23.

Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki told lawmakers on Wednesday he's committed to improving trust in the claims process between veterans and the VA, and to helping veterans receive benefits they are entitled to.

"We will change the culture," Shinseki said. "I will assure you of that."

<More at: http://www.armytimes.com/news/2009/10/ap_military_va_ptsd_disability_101409/>

UNLIKELY CANCERS SHAKE FAITH IN CORPS

William R. Levesque - Times Staff Writer - October 16, 2009

The U.S. Marine Corps has long assured the public that it closed drinking water wells at Camp Lejeune as soon as it found they were tainted with toxic chemicals.

But a *St. Petersburg Times* review of Marine Corps documents shows the base failed to close the wells for years — despite stark warnings that its drinking water was befouled by industrial cleaning solvents.

The Corps then provided misleading and incomplete information about the contamination to regulators, the public and its Marines, the review shows.

Today, former Marines and their family members — dubbed "Poisoned Patriots" by Congress — wonder if contaminated water at the North Carolina camp sickened them. At least 146,000 people who lived at Camp Lejeune have signed up to a Marine health registry. <More at: <http://www.tampabay.com/news/military/veterans/article1044542.ece#>>

MARINE WINS BATTLE AGAINST CAMP LEJEUNE'S TOXIC WATER

Tim King - Salem-News.com - Oct-20-2009

(CAMP LEJEUNE, N.C.) - The Marines are winning another battle, and this time the victors are veterans suffering from a variety of diseases that arose from their service at the Camp Lejeune Marine base in North Carolina.

A former Camp Lejeune Marine in Wisconsin has been awarded a 30% disability over illnesses contracted from the base's toxic water. This is a surprise because the federal government has been trying very hard to get out from under the liability of Camp Lejeune. By the looks of things, it isn't going to continue much longer.

<More at: http://salem-news.com/articles/october202009/lejeune_news.php>

THIS IS THE PROBLEM THAT GOT US STARTED FIVE YEARS AGO, AND IT HASN'T GOTTEN ANY BETTER

THE FEW, THE PROUD, THE ALONE

Tony Perry - October 14, 2009

Marine reservists who serve in Iraq or Afghanistan often feel out of place when they return home. A new Corps video tackles their issues frankly.

In an unusually direct way, the Marine Corps is warning reservists and their families about the alienation and psychological pain that Marines can feel when returning to civilian life after duty in a war zone.

A video titled "Worlds Apart" made by a San Diego production company warns that even well-meaning civilians cannot be expected to understand what it is like to serve in Iraq or Afghanistan.

<More at: latimes.com/news/local/la-me-reservists15-2009oct15.0.6062755.story>

GRASSLEY QUESTIONS MILITARY OVER DISMISSAL OF SOLDIERS WITH PTSD

Matt Kelley - October 20, 2009

Iowa Senator Chuck Grassley is calling on the nation's military leaders to document how they're working to solve the problem of combat soldiers being unfairly discharged due to undiagnosed cases of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Grassley says some soldiers may've been kicked out, then forced to repay bonuses they got for re-enlisting, even though it was the wartime experiences that were the root cause of their mental health issues. Grassley says a recent study found flaws in the U.S. military's procedures when troops return home from battle zones.

"The Pentagon failed to meet key personality disorder separation requirements," Grassley says. "This means some members of the military may've been discharged for pre-existing personality disorders when it's possible the disorders could have been due to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from serving in Iraq and Afghanistan."

<More at: <http://www.radioiowa.com/2009/10/20/grassley-questions-military-over-dismissal-of-soldiers-with-ptsd/>>

FINALLY, TWO EXCEPTIONALLY PROVOCATIVE QUESTIONS

IS THE GI BILL JUST AN IOU?

Linsay Rousseau Burnett - LA Times Opinion page - October 25, 2009

Like me, tens of thousands of student veterans are still waiting for the government to make good on its promise of education benefits.

In the military, I learned to expect screw-ups, especially when it came to money. So maybe the Department of Veterans Affairs is just trying to ease my transition to civilian life by doing things the military way in its handling of Post 9/11 GI Bill education benefits.

Student veterans began applying for education benefits in May, and we were supposed to have our tuition paid and receive our housing and book stipends in August. That didn't happen. Instead, more than two months into the school year, most of us have received nothing, although the VA is graciously offering to advance us emergency checks of up to \$3,000 to ease the economic burden of not yet receiving the money we were promised.

Along with healthcare, job experience and a steady paycheck, the GI Bill was one of my primary reasons for joining the Army in 2004. I went into the military -- and spent a year in Kirkuk province in northern Iraq -- with the express intention of pursuing graduate studies when my contract was up. Truth be told, I wouldn't be writing this column right now, as a student at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, were it not for the GI Bill. Or at least for the promise of the GI Bill.

At this rate, it will take longer for the VA to get me my education benefits than it took for the Army to turn me into a soldier.

Why can't student vets get the money we were promised back when the Post 9/11 GI Bill was signed in July 2008? According to Paul Sherbo, a VA spokesman, the department has been overwhelmed with new applications, and the backlog has caused massive delays.

By the VA's own count, more than a quarter of a million education claims have been filed by eligible veterans since May 1, and about 70% of those have been processed. While this might sound great, let's not confuse processing with disbursement of funds. As of the first week in October, despite having about 900 employees working overtime to process claims, the VA had distributed only 27,000 payments for tuition or for living and book stipends. In other words, nearly 200,000 veterans hadn't received a dollar.

No one seems to be talking about the interest that's been accruing on the education loans some veterans were forced to take out while waiting for their GI Bill money. I doubt the VA will pay it. I myself have taken out almost \$16,000 in education loans. Most universities require a student to pay tuition and fees up front, and turning in an IOU from Uncle Sam doesn't quite do the trick. <More at: latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-burnett25-2009oct25_0_2605535_story>

DOES MILITARY SERVICE TURN YOUNG MEN INTO SEXUAL PREDATORS?

Penny Coleman - AlterNet - October 22, 2009

Every day, for four years as a West Point cadet, Tara Krause lived and worked alongside the men who had gang-raped her. Still, she managed to graduate in 1982. She served as a field artillery officer during the Cold War and was attached to the 518th Military Intelligence Brigade during the Gulf War. In what she calls "an act of incredible self-destruction," she married a three-tour Vietnam vet in 1985 and, for the next eight years, lived "the private hell of his PTSD."

"Suicidal behavior, violence and degradation were common threads of daily life," she told me. She survived only because when he put his gun to her head one day, it finally gave her the courage to flee. "Like Lot's wife," she says, she struggles not to look back.

It's been almost 30 years since the rape, and Krause says she still "dance(s) the crushing daily struggle" of her own PTSD: "The nightmares, panic attacks, flashbacks, cold sweats, suicidal thoughts, zoning out, numbing all emotion and desperately avoiding triggers (reminders) -- I have become a prisoner in my own home."

Krause is rated 70 percent disabled by the Veteran's Administration and has been in treatment at the Long Beach [Calif.] VA for the past six years.

For all the work she has done to heal her own injuries, she still has no answer for the question: "How do you get a group of Southern white teenagers, all of whom were Eagle Scouts, class presidents, scholars and athletes, to be capable of raping a classmate?"

The question deserves an answer, and not a simplistic one. A [2003 survey of female veterans](#) from Vietnam through the Gulf War found that almost 8 in 10 had been sexually harassed during their military service, and 30 percent had been raped.

Yet for decades, in spite of the terrible numbers, the military has managed with astonishing success to get away with responding to grievances like Krause's with silence, or denial, or by blaming "a few bad apples." But when individual soldiers take the blame, the system gets off the hook. <More at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/142942>>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF OCTOBER 20, 2009

This week the Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard announced an increase in activated reservists, while the Army and Marine Corps announced a decrease. The net collective result is 1,144 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 109,317; Navy Reserve, 6,427; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 13,242; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,188; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 667. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 137,841, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated may be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Oct2009/d20091020ngr.pdf>

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SUNDAY 25 OCTOBER 2009

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (2,412 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,351
WOUNDED US [10/11/09]	31,527
OTHER US CASUALTIES [10/3/09]	≥38,917
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [8/1/09]	191
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 [10/25/09]	≥ 102,096 – 1,339,771
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [11/9/08]	≥ 400K – 1.374M
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (2,941 DAYS)

KILLED US	886
WOUNDED US [10/11/09]	4,198
OTHER CASUALTIES US [10/3/09]	8,743
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [8/1/09]	33
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED COALITION	583
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/07)	1,602
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY [7/4/09]	≥ 11,152
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (7/4/2009)	≥ 7,589
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	\$694,359,202,637
COST OF AFGHAN WAR TO DATE	\$229,999,331,648

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

D.C.'S VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL UNDER REPAIR

The Associated Press - 22 October 2009

WASHINGTON — Workers began repairing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall on Wednesday as a private memorial fund took over maintenance of 13 acres from the National Park Service.

Over the next two weeks, workers are restoring the flagpole's bronze finish and its decorative base with five military branch insignias. They will also restore the bronze finish for five stands that hold directories that help people find names on the V-shaped memorial wall, which draws millions of visitors each year.

<More at: http://www.usatoday.com/printedition/news/20091022/vetmemorial22_st.art.htm>

SUBWAY ILLEGALLY TOOK GI'S SHOPS

Dallas Morning News - October 23, 2009

DALLAS -- A civil judge in Dallas ruled late Wednesday that the real estate arm of the Subway sandwich chain violated the rights of an Army reservist when it stripped him of his two restaurants while the reservist was serving in Afghanistan.

Grant Walsh, an attorney for Leon Batie Jr., said the ruling settles the biggest legal issue in a case that has dragged on for more than two years - that the chain's real estate affiliate broke the law when it terminated leases at two Dallas Subway franchises without a court order. <More at: <http://www.military.com/news/article/judge-subway-illegally-took-gis-shops.html>>

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

DOD TO IMPLEMENT RETROACTIVE STOP LOSS SPECIAL PAY

No. 820-09 - October 21, 2009

The Defense Department announced today the services' implementation plans to provide retroactive stop loss special pay. Active, reserve and former service members who had their enlistment extended or retirement suspended due to stop loss are eligible for this special pay, if they served on active duty between Sept. 11, 2001 and Sept. 30, 2009.

Service members may begin submitting their claim for retroactive stop loss special pay on Oct. 21, 2009. In accordance with the 2009 Supplemental Appropriations Act, all applications must be submitted to the respective

services no later than Oct. 21, 2010. Eligible personnel will receive a payment of \$500 per month for each month (or any portion of a month) that a member was retained on active duty due to stop loss. Applicants for retroactive pay who are no longer in the military had to be honorably discharged, and for those who were stop loss in fiscal 2009, may only receive payment from one stop loss authority – either the money appropriated for stop loss special pay in the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009, or the money allocated for retroactive stop loss special pay in the 2009 Supplemental Appropriations Act, but not both.

Service members must provide documented proof they were stop loss with their claim. Family members of deceased service members should contact the appropriate military service for assistance in filing their claim.

Information on how to contact each of the services is listed below:

Army: Go to <https://www.stoplosspay.army.mil> or email RetroStopLossPay@CONUS.Army.Mil

Navy: Email NXAG_N132C@navy.mil

Marine Corps: Go to <https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/stoploss> or email stoploss@usmc.mil

Air Force: Go to <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/stoploss/>

Stop loss provides a valuable and critical tool to quickly retain and generate forces to surge in a major conflict. However, as deployment schedules stabilize, the department must then adapt and minimize its use of stop loss. The secretary of defense announced in March a comprehensive plan to eliminate the current use of stop loss, while retaining the authority for future use under extraordinary circumstances.

<http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=13063>

NOTE! NEW BOOK!

I have been accused of recommending every book that I have read, which is definitely not the case. What is true is that I never recommend a book that I have not read and which meets my subjective standard of excellence. About one in five of the books that I choose to read meets that criterion.

The book that I am adding to our recommended reading list with this issue is more than just an excellent book, it is a remarkable and outstanding chronicle of a year in the life of an Infantry Battalion in Iraq. Here is what three well-known authors have to say about *The Good Soldiers* by Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter David Finkel:

"...an incandescent and profoundly moving book: powerful, intense, enraging. This may be the best book on war since the Iliad." Geraldine Brooks, author of *People of the Book* and *March*.

"This is the best account I have read of the life of one unit in the Iraq War. It is closely observed, carefully recorded, and beautifully written. David Finkel doesn't just take you into the lives of our soldiers, he takes you deep into their nightmares." Thomas Ricks, author of *Fiasco* and *The Gamble*.

"Brilliant, heartbreaking, deeply true. *The Good Soldiers* offers the most intimate view of life and death in a twenty-first century combat unit I have ever read. Unsparing, unflinching, and, at times, unbearable." Rick Atkinson, author of *Army at Dawn* and *The Day of Battle*.

The book offers an additional benefit. If you want to know how "the surge" really played out in one unit on one part of Iraq, and are unsatisfied with the party-line reporting of the current and past administrations, then read this book. It will move you like none I have read recently. [Ed.]

NOTICE

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

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

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

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

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