

SOUND OFF!



VOL. I, NO 9

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

25 NOVEMBER 2005

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

Our subject for this issue is the constant assault on veterans' benefits which has been waged by a succession of Congresses and Administrations, and what we intend to do about it. The problem always seems to be two-fold. First, our national memory is short, and once the conflict or threat of conflict is over we don't want to be bothered with paying the total bill; and second, active duty, former soldiers, and retired veterans are always an easy target for budget savings since we don't make for a really large voting block in any single district, compared to some others, and we tend to keep quiet when we are being attacked. Once loyal to the nation always loyal to the nation, so we shut up and take it. We should remember, however, what Mark Twain said about loyalty:

“My kind of loyalty was loyalty to one's country, not to its institutions or its officeholders. The country is the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing; it is the thing to watch over, and care for, and be loyal to; institutions are extraneous, they are its mere clothing, and clothing can wear out, become ragged, cease to be comfortable, cease to protect the body from winter, disease, and death. “

The purpose of Veterans United For Truth is to help organize all of us to quit just shutting up and taking it.

Recently Arthur H. Wilson, the National Adjutant/CEO of the Disabled American Veterans spoke out:

WAR ON VETERANS

“On Veterans Day, as our nation remains at war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the President and Members of Congress will call on America to support our troops and talk about how much we owe our men and women in uniform. But instead of honoring its commitment to those whose service and sacrifice have kept us free and safe, our government has launched a devastating assault on benefits for America's veterans.

Federal funding for veterans programs over the years has not even kept pace with inflation, let alone the increased demands on the Department of Veterans Affairs for health care and other earned benefits. The administration claims to have provided record increases for veterans, yet thousands of them have been denied access to VA health care. Because of budget shortfalls, VA facilities in every region of the country have exhausted reserve funds to meet critical needs. Many have stopped hiring doctors and nurses, while still others have cut back or even eliminated medical services. It is a clear indication that the men and women who have served and sacrificed for our country are not a national priority

But inadequate funding for medical care isn't the only thing veterans are concerned about.”

<More at http://www.dav.org/news/war_on_veterans.html>

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS

Following on the request in the last issue for more members and non-members to get directly involved in veterans' issues, there is a plan in development to present our case broadly to Congress on Memorial Day weekend, 2006.

There has been talk among many veterans about planning a march on Washington DC, for Memorial Day weekend, 2006. VUFT does not think that a march alone would be in the best interest of veterans' issues. If you search the Internet for the marches planned over the last several years you will see that most just never panned out. For a “march” to work it needs to reach a size approaching the “Million-Man March” to have a real impact – veterans' marches so far don't seem to do that. The largest marches have been the “Peace Now” marches, and they have hit the news on one day, or at the most two, and then are conveniently forgotten by precisely the people we wish to motivate – the Congress, the military departments, and the VA.

Since our goal is to be effective as spokespersons for the serving military, veterans and their families, we have to plan to approach our audience in a way that will give the highest probability of moving them to action. Our general plan is to be in Congressperson's and Senator's offices on the Tuesday and Wednesday after the Memorial Day weekend with specific proposals that we want them to support. Our goal is to have, as a minimum, one 5-person team from each state – we would prefer to have at least one 5-person team for every 5 representatives. We are looking for volunteers to join in the planning effort.

Those who are the most agitated about veterans issues love the idea of an assault on the Capitol. As you look around the Internet you can see pictures of what has happened when only a handful show up – there is no press and there is no effect. If a march comes about as a result of this effort, we believe that it should be incidental to the effort and not the main focus. If the teams and their supporters were to meet on the preceding Saturday or Sunday on the Mall that would be great. But if we cause the focus to be on a march and only 500 or 600 people show up we won't even make the comics page, let alone get the attention we want these issues to have. If, however, the same 500 to 600 in teams of constituents carrying identical packages of proposed legislation and other proposed actions, were to show up and spread all over the Capitol complex on Tuesday and Wednesday, with appointments to speak to Representatives, the impact could be quite large.

From publication date of this issue we have almost exactly six months to get this effort planned, organized and in place. Will you join us? Will you stand up as loyal citizens and veterans to demand vastly improved treatment for soldiers and their families when they serve, and when they come home from their service? Will you put your money and effort where I know your heart is?

If you are willing to volunteer we need you to help plan the effort, recruit and organize teams, and make your arrangements. If you are willing to pitch in, please email the Events Chair, Erik Jensen, at ejensen@vuft.org, with an info copy to me at scook@vuft.org. As we hear from you we will be building the team page and a forum on the website. The team page will give the state POC and list the progress of the state teams. The forum will allow us to work together to develop the proposals that we will present to Congress.

LET'S SHOW THE WORLD WHAT IT REALLY MEANS TO "SUPPORT THE TROOPS"!

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

GOOD NEWS: On 18 November we received a positive tax-deductible status ruling from the California Franchise Board. We are now held as an RTC-23701w corporation in the State of California, and can accept donations which are fully deductible against California Income Tax for individuals who itemize deductions and for corporations. Note the change in our footer message. Congressional staff is assisting us in speeding up the ruling on federal tax-deductible status ASAP.

MEMBERSHIP: We have acquired our membership cards and they are almost on their way to all of our patient members. I'll take the gig for not getting them done before this, but from now on we'll be able to proudly present our proof of membership in the one organization that is dedicated solely to making the system really work for our military and our veterans.

MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS

WHILE NOT A LETTER TO US, THIS ARTICLE BY ONE OF OUR ADVISORS IS REALLY WORTH READING, ESPECIALLY IF YOU OCCASIONALLY FORGET WHY AND FOR WHOM WE ARE WORKING.

REFLECTIONS ON THE IRAQ WAR - THEY CARRIED OUT THEIR ORDERS

- Pete McCloskey - Thursday, November 10, 2005

Today, we quietly honor the action of the Continental Congress, which, on this date in 1775, created one of America's oldest and most respected institutions, the United States Marine Corps. In the years that followed, Marines distinguished themselves in conflicts large and small around the world.

One regiment, the Fifth Marines at Camp Pendleton, has had a particularly proud record, from Belleau Wood in World War I, to Guadalcanal and Okinawa in World War II, to the Naktong Perimeter and Chosin Reservoir in Korea. The regiment retook Hue City in early 1968 and was among the first to enter Baghdad in April 2003.

In early October, the First Battalion of the Fifth Marines returned from its third tour of duty in Iraq, having been engaged for six months in the attempted pacification of Ramadi, a city of 350,000. In the hope of learning about its experiences firsthand, I went to visit them last week at Camp Pendleton.

Most of the battalion was on leave, but I was able to talk with four of Charlie Company's young lance corporals and later with one of their lieutenants and their first sergeant. A full quarter of their men had been killed or wounded in Ramadi.

These men would qualify as the top young people in any university, business or profession. They carried up to 60 pounds of weapons and gear in heat that sometimes exceeded 115 degrees, and their casualties had come mostly from roadside bombs

detonated from several hundred yards away by an individual with a cell phone. Their job had been to patrol the streets and homes, both night and day, searching for weapons caches and insurgents. Fear was always with them. They had learned early on that foot patrols were safer than vehicle patrols and that going over walls in backyards was safer than along roadways. As they learned, their opponents had learned also.

The young lance corporals were impressive. Averaging 20 years of age, they were fully the equivalent of the young lieutenants from Yale, Stanford and other universities with whom I had served in Korea. Their first sergeant was an "old man" of 39. They called him Dad. Only after he left did they tell me he had earned a Bronze Star for saving the lives of three Marines, pulling them out of a burning vehicle after a mine had killed their company commander.

They were courteous, well-spoken and in superb physical condition, proud to be serving their country. The "big picture" was not uppermost in their minds; they carried out their orders and tried not to let down their companions. To a man, they felt that when the U.S. forces were withdrawn, there would be a bloody civil war to determine how Iraq would be governed. They were not sanguine about the future performance of the Iraqi troops they were training to take over the security of Iraq. They didn't question their mission, but felt strongly that the necessary searching of homes, rousting out of families for search and questioning, was creating more insurgents than were being found and killed.

The lieutenant, modest to a fault, commanded the 2nd Platoon. I told him that his platoon had once become famous 54 years earlier by overrunning a North Korean regiment four times its numbers in a ridgetop bayonet assault. I told him that its lieutenant, Chuck Daly, after a year of convalescing from wounds, had gone on to work in the Kennedy White House and later became the vice president of the University of Chicago and Harvard. I told him further that I had no doubt that he and his men would achieve similar success in their future lives, and that wherever they went there would be a network of old Marines who would look out for them. We agreed that the good fortune of commanding a Marine rifle platoon might be the greatest of all privileges.

I came away with an awe bordering on deep reverence for these men.

Their service to the nation seems especially praiseworthy in light of the ease and privilege enjoyed by the rest of us. It is to be hoped they will not have to go back for a fourth tour of duty next year.

Pete McCloskey, a farmer in Yolo County, was a Marine Reserve lieutenant colonel in 1967, the year he was elected to Congress from San Mateo County as the first Republican opposing the Vietnam War. During the Korean War, he was awarded the Navy Cross, Silver Star and two Purple Hearts.

San Francisco Chronicle Page B-11: <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/11/10/EDG9PFL4JJ1.DTL>

ANOTHER VOICE

I recommend another submission, this one by an angry daughter of a veteran who gives us all something to think about in her letter to BUZZFLASH. Some of you will not agree with her comments about the Administration, but please work your way through that and get her real message to veterans, which is, "Stand up and speak up for each other!" You can find her letter, "No More Band of Brothers B.S.", at <http://www.buzzflash.com/contributors/05/11/con05441.html> [Ed.]

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

SENATE PASSES ADAPTED HOUSING GRANT BILL TO HELP VETERANS

November 4, 2005 - Senate Committee On Veterans' Affairs

(Washington, DC) During a marathon session of voting on Thursday, the U.S. Senate passed legislation which will help disabled veterans who live with family members. Under the bill, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs would establish a five year pilot program to provide veterans with up to \$10,000 to widen doorways, install wheelchair ramps, or make other adaptations to the homes of family members where they are temporarily living.

<More at <http://www.vawatchdog.org/senatecvanews/senatecvanews11-04-05.htm>>

AND AS FAR AS VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS HAVING A SAY – FUGEDDABOUTIT!

USE THE URL BELOW TO WRITE YOUR CONGRESSPERSON

REPRESENTATIVE BUYER ELIMINATES JOINT HEARINGS FOR VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

November 10, 2005

On Monday, November 7, 2005, Representative Steve Buyer (R-IN), Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, announced a new hearing schedule for the Committee, eliminating the long-standing tradition of joint hearings to present the legislative agendas of veterans' service organizations.

For several decades now, these joint hearings have been held each year to allow the elected leaders of veterans' groups to discuss their organization's legislative agenda and foremost concerns with the lawmakers who have jurisdiction over federal veterans' programs. Senators and Representatives who serve on those committees also get the rare opportunity to address the hundreds of constituent members from these organizations who make the annual pilgrimage to Capitol Hill.

Please write to your member of Congress, asking him or her to urge Representative Buyer and the House Leadership to restore this important tradition. <<http://capwiz.com/dav/issues/alert/?alertid=8232126&type=CO>>

PROPOSED CUTS IN VETERANS' BUDGET TO PAY FOR KATRINA AID

DVA - October 28, 2005

The budget for veterans' health care for fiscal year 2006 has not yet been resolved. Currently several bills have been introduced in Congress that either would call for one-, two-, or five-percent reductions in all federal agency budgets, to pay the costs of the restoration of the Gulf Coast from recent hurricanes. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), a two percent cut would be more than a \$600 million reduction in VA health care funding and an estimated 97,257 veterans would be denied VA health care. A five percent reduction would mean 243,143 veterans would need to leave VA health care.

[From the DVA website] We ask that you please consider sending the prepared e-mail [use URL below] to your Members of Congress, urging them to oppose any effort to reduce the VA health care budget, whether paying for hurricane damage or for any other reason. <http://capwiz.com/dav/issues/alert/?alertid=8173321>

SENATE GIVES BOOST TO VETERANS' MEDICAL CARE *BUT IS IT ENOUGH?*

AP - Fox News - Nov 11, 2005

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Thursday approved a big boost in the budget for veterans' medical care.

The measure, approved by a 98-0 vote, would increase spending by 21 percent, or about \$4 billion, to \$23.3 billion, for the budget year that begins Oct. 1. More veterans are seeking care and the cost per patient is on the rise, too. ... The Veterans Affairs Department acknowledged in April that it had underestimated 5 percent over last year, compared with the predicted growth of about 2 percent. <More at: <http://www.veteransforcommonsense.org/?Page=Article&ID=5393>>

DETAILS ON THE FINAL BILL ARE AT <http://www.vawatchdog.org/housecvanews/housecvanews11-18-05.htm>

DEFENSE SPENDING BILL EXTENDS BENEFITS

Associated Press | November 16, 2005

WASHINGTON - The children of soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan or in support operations would no longer have their military health insurance cut off after three years, under a defense spending bill passed Tuesday by the Senate. Instead, the children would remain covered at no extra cost until they reach age 21, or 23 if they are still enrolled in school.

<More at <http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,80573,00.html>>

CALIFORNIA CONGRESSMAN SEEKS GUINEA PIG PROBE

CalAware Weekly News - 2005-11-18 - Volume: 2 - Number: 36

WASHINGTON, November 18 (CalAware) -- Rep. Mike Thompson wants an independent commission to investigate chemical and biological weapons testing conducted on American servicemen and women. The Democrat representing California's North Coast First Congressional District, together with Republican Congressman Denny Rehberg of Montana, introduced the "Veterans Right to Know Act," a bill that would establish such a commission, on November 8. ... "This is about openness, honesty and forthrightness in government; above all, it's about doing the right thing and uncovering the truth. Truth is what these brave of [veterans have asked for](#) and truth is what they deserve," Rehberg said.

The "[Veterans Right to Know Act](#)" would create a 10-member, bipartisan commission (modeled after the 911 Commission) to investigate chemical or biological warfare tests carried out under Project 112/SHAD. Note that this bill was originally introduced in 2002 but died in committee. <More at: http://www.calaware.org/news/weekly_detail.jsp?article_id=1038>

RETREAT – NEWS

VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS FADING AWAY

Daily News Tribune - Nov 17, 2005

World War II vets cannot win the battle against time as they die at an ever-quickenning pace, but veterans organizations are losing a war of attrition as their core membership fades, with no replacements filling the ranks.

managing medical and physical fitness policy and procedures, the report determined that this office has no way to determine if reserve soldiers are fit to serve or have pre-existing medical conditions prior to deployment.

The GAO found that the Pentagon couldn't confirm to the Secretary of Defense or Congress that reserve forces are medically and physically fit when they are called to active duty. <More at: http://www.onlinejournal.com/artman/publish/article_164.shtml>

US 'CAN'T MAINTAIN IRAQ TROOP LEVELS'

By John P. Gramlich – UPI - Friday 11 November 2005

Washington- Unless the Bush administration significantly cuts American troop levels in Iraq next year, the U.S. military's roughly 140,000-strong presence there will become a detriment to America's national security, according to a report released this week.

In the latest instance of foreign policy experts calling for the Bush administration to set a timetable for U.S. troop reductions in Iraq, the Center for American Progress, a think tank headed by President Bill Clinton's former chief of staff John Podesta, Wednesday said the future of America's military hangs in the balance.

"It has become clear that if we still have 140,000 ground troops in Iraq a year from now, we will destroy the all-volunteer army," said the report written by the center's Lawrence Korb and Brian Katulis. Korb served as assistant secretary of defense under President Ronald Reagan. <More at: http://www.truthout.org/docs_2005/111305A.shtml>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>What</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
2-Dec	-	Phoenix AZ, Wyndham Hotel	Meeting	DNC Vets & Mil Fam Cmte	Establish Goals
27-31 May	-	Washington DC	Legislative Action Rally	VUFT and others	Get their attention

NOTE: Bob Handy and I will be attending the Phoenix session and representing VUFT.

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

ONE MEASURE OF ONE PROBLEM

At a hearing on 28 October 2005 the Government Accountability Office reported that from fiscal years 1999 to 2004, the number of veterans receiving unemployability benefits more than doubled, from 95,000 to 197,000. There are now over 221,000 veterans who have been deemed unemployable by the VA.

THIS NEXT ONE IS TRYING TO CATCH VETERANS UP TO WHAT LEGISLATORS GAVE THEMSELVES YEARS AGO – USEFUL, BUT LATE AND IT IS YET ANOTHER PIECEMEAL APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM

BILL TO HELP VETERANS AFFORD HEALTH INSURANCE

November 2, 2005

(Washington, DC) U.S. Senator Larry Craig (R-Idaho), chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, has joined in as a co-sponsor of a bill to help federal civilian and military retirees to pay for their health insurance premiums. The bill ([S. 484](#)) would allow federal and military retirees to use pre-tax dollars to pay supplemental premiums for the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, and TRICARE, the military health insurance program. The legislation would also grant a tax deduction to those who purchase TRICARE. <More at: <http://www.vawatchdog.org/senatecvanews/senatecvanews11-02-05.htm>>

HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT FOR RETURNING VETS

United Press International - Nov 18, 2005

WASHINGTON, Nov. 16 (UPI) -- U.S. troops returning from service in Afghanistan and Iraq are finding it difficult to return to civilian employment. According to recently released figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, for the first three quarters of 2005 nearly 15 percent of veterans aged 20-24 are jobless. The rate for returning veterans is three times the national average. New data released by the National Statistics Office gives a national unemployment rate of 5 percent. <More at: <http://www.veteransforcommonsense.org/?page=article&id=5451>>

WHY SKIMP ON THE GI BILL?

By Suzanne Mettler - November 11, 2005

ALTHOUGH MAGNETIC RIBBONS and hometown fundraisers show Americans' gratitude for the troops' sacrifices in the war on terror, as a nation we have done less than we should to truly honor them when they return home. In contrast to World War II veterans, whose transition back to civilian life was eased by the education and training benefits of the first GI Bill, service members now find a policy that is much less generous, inclusive and fair.

For those returning today from Kandahar, Fallouja or Baghdad, educational benefits have fallen way behind college costs, even for the active-duty forces. Reserve and National Guard units, though they make up fully half of the U.S. troops deployed in Iraq, receive substantially less. The word in Washington is that there is simply no money — even for the 1% of Americans who make up our all-volunteer military. <More at: <http://www.military.com/opinion/0,15202,00.html>>

INJURED VET STILL AWAITS VA FUNDS

Miami Herald - November 16, 2005

Over the past 55 years, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has repeatedly failed World War II veteran Frank Fong. So he's angry -- but not terribly surprised -- that VA has now messed up his hard-won disability payment.

VA was supposed to pay Fong, a highly decorated fighter pilot partially blinded during combat, \$66,806 in October -- money he's been waiting for since 1950.

But as of Veterans Day, VA had sent him just \$1,414.25. <More at: <http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/13178026.htm>>

VETERAN BENEFITS HELD UP: NO CHECKS SENT IN FIRST YEAR

Alison Young - Kansas City Star - Nov 11, 2005

WASHINGTON — More than a year ago, Congress passed a law giving extra college money to as many as 175,000 veterans of Iraq, Afghanistan and other actions against terrorism. Aimed at activated members of the Reserves and the National Guard, the new benefit is worth as much as \$827 a month. But as a second Veterans Day goes by, not a single check has been mailed and most reservists have not even applied for it. <More at: <http://www.veteransforcommonsense.org/?Page=Article&ID=5382>>

MILITARY BODY ARMOR RECALLED

Associated Press | November 18, 2005

WASHINGTON - The military is recalling more than 18,000 protective vests because they did not meet ballistic test standards when the body armor was made up to five years ago.

It is the second recall in about six months.

Some vests in the latest recall may have been used in Iraq or Afghanistan. Made between 1999 and 2001, they were green or woodland camouflage, making it less likely they were used in the Gulf, where troops use the newer, desert-colored camouflage vests. <More at: <http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,80768,00.html?ESRC=army-a.nl>>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

Total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 121,295; Navy Reserve, 4,268; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 10,151; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,840; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 543. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel, who have been mobilized, to 145,097, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel, who are currently mobilized, can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Aug2005/d20050824ngr.pdf>.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE FRIDAY NOVEMBER 25, 2005

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	2,105
WOUNDED US [5 NOV + ESTIMATE]	≥ 15,804
KILLED UK	98
KILLED OTHER COALITION	103
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	600
KILLED CONTRACTORS	286
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 33,643
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 30,545
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIV	≥ 138,589

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US	257
WOUNDED/INJURED US	652
KILLED COALITION	124
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	372
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS	≥ 3,525

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

AFTERTHOUGHTS

IN MEMORIAM

If you are at all like me, you wonder what ever happened to the community ceremonies memorializing and celebrating the service of those currently in the Armed Forces, those veterans who have served, and especially, all those families who have sacrificed so much. Here in California I can't even find anyone selling poppies anymore.

Well, folks, the Canadians still do it up rather well. I encourage you to go to Terry Kelly's website and read the article there, then click on "Video" at the top and watch a truly moving 4.5 minutes of dignified and heartfelt tribute to the fallen in Terry's "A Pittance of Time". <http://www.terry-kelly.com/pittance.htm>

PTSD UPDATE

Here is an occasional compendium of PTSD-related incidents that are beginning to plague returning veterans, their families and their communities: <http://www.politicalcortex.com/story/2005/11/20/184933/36>

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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