

SOUND OFF!



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THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

25 DECEMBER 2005

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

Our focus for this issue is on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. Disclaimer – I am no expert, but, like many, I have my views. I will try to clearly identify “my views”, “reportage”, and “expert opinion”.

Gang, we have a problem! Google “PTSD” and you get 2,740,000 hits; Google “PTSD veterans” and you get 538,000 hits. Something big and bad is going on out there!

Part of the problem that returning veterans are having, I believe, is that the American public is so disengaged from this war that the continuing mental anguish of many of the returnees is just seen as some remote clinical problem. Add to it that the way we talk about PTSD, when the subject is broached, is as a second-tier news item of passing interest, but not really critical. Just by tagging it with an awkward acronym we allow ourselves to treat it in an offhanded manner. How much more personal was the World War I tag – “shell-shock”, or even the World War II tag of “combat fatigue”? At least you had to use complete words to talk about it, and those words carried the clear message of personal injury – “shock” – “fatigue” – Somebody is hurt here! Instead we can conveniently talk about PTSD in the same way we talk about AIDS, or the SEC or the FDA – some reality there, but it is hidden behind those masking acronyms.

It wasn't until 1989 that the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was created within the Department of Veterans Affairs, in response to Congressional concern. Its mission is to advance the clinical care and social welfare of America's veterans through research, education, and training in the science, diagnosis, and treatment of PTSD and stress-related disorders. It's website is at <http://www.ncptsd.va.gov>. Yet, if you go to their site today, their most recent publication concerns dealing with flood, tornado, and hurricane victims. A critical resource for veterans is apparently diverted to satisfy other needs. For those interested in the details, the NCPTSD Clinical Guide (247 pp.) is available at http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/war/iraq_clinician_guide_v2/iraq_clinician_guide_v2.pdf

The Vietnam Veterans of America have an informative guide at <http://www.vva.org/benefits/ptsd.htm>.

The stories are legion. As a lead in to the articles carried under Issues, this one is typical, and worth accessing on the net to get the whole article:

THE DOWNHILL SPIRAL CONTINUES

Tom Berger, Chair - VVA “Veteran” - Dec 14, 2005

With the number of American soldiers killed in Iraq having topped 2,000, those fortunate enough to return face the task of putting the war behind them and resuming their lives. Some are getting reacquainted with wives and children they left behind a year or more ago. Many face the task of catching up on bills or fixing homes that have gone in need of repair. Some lost jobs or had their businesses falter while they were gone. More than a few have found they have returned home with their war anxieties.

“They are witnessing far more traumatic experiences than they did in the first Gulf war,” said Terri Tanielian, a senior military health policy analyst for the Rand Corporation. Longer deployments, fiercer engagements, and more casualties have left Iraq war veterans more vulnerable to psychological trauma than Gulf War veterans, Tanielian said. She said many veterans may be shunning counseling services offered by the military out of a misplaced sense of honor. “Their training is to go on with the mission and put on the brave face,” Tanielian said.

A recent article in *USA Today* noted that more than one in four American troops have come home from Iraq with health problems that require medical or mental health treatment. According to the Pentagon's first detailed screening of service members leaving the war zone, almost 1,700 returning this year said they harbored thoughts of hurting themselves or that they would be better off dead. More than 250 said they had such thoughts “a lot.” <More at: http://www.vva.org/TheVeteran/2005_11/ptsd.htm

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REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS

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.

CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE!

PLEASE CHECK THE WEBSITE AT WWW.VUFT.ORG. CHECK OUT THE NEW "CANDIDATES" PAGE, WHICH IS OUR EFFORT TO LIST ALL VETERANS RUNNING FOR STATE-WIDE AND FEDERAL OFFICE IN THE U.S. (OR ALL WE KNOW OF SO FAR). PLEASE HELP US MAKE THIS AS COMPETE A LIST AS POSSIBLE BY SENDING CANDIDATE INFO TO SANDY.COOK@VUFT.ORG.

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

OUTREACH: We have learned that a chapter of Veterans United For Truth Inc. is being formed in Arizona. This has come about as a direct result of our contacts with Arizona veterans at the DNC meeting in Phoenix at the beginning of December. With the possibility of a chapter in North Carolina, and the founding chapter in California, only 47 states to go! The formation of this chapter affirms our belief that there is a need for our organization, separate and apart from the many veterans' organizations that already exist, and that our focus on legislators and their performance, as well as the executive departments and their performance in the service of veterans, is truly needed.

MEMBERSHIP: After much consideration we have changed our requirements for membership in Veterans United For Truth, Inc. We have found that when dealing with Congress or with State Legislators it is imperative that we present not just good ideas, but more importantly to them, that we present a large front. That is to say, we must represent large numbers or we have a hard time getting a hearing – ideas be damned. Therefore, the board has decided to eliminate the donation requirement for membership. From now on, membership will be free. The website join-up page has been changed to reflect this policy change.

We will still encourage donations from everyone. Those who donate will receive one of our great membership lapel pins as a premium for their donation. All members will receive membership cards. There is no other difference in levels of membership.

The membership cards and pins went out 10 days ago. If you did not get a card let me know at scook@vuft.org.

SUPPORTING THE CAUSE

If you wish to donate to our work you may now do so via PayPal or Visa on our website "Join" page. You can also buy our pins using the same method, should want just the pin, or if you want more than the one sent in response to your donation.

MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS

"Colonel Dan" at www.angelfire.com/il2/VeteranIssues/ has sent us a long letter from one of his correspondents, an extract of which is included here:

"Once again Congress has cheated "Concurrent Receipt" Service Connected Disabled Military Retirees. ... This issue seems to be a joke among members of Congress. We 28,000 affected retirees are not looking for a handout. We are simply demanding that our Government pay us the full retirement we earned and deserve.

There is another attempt underway to correct this issue. The only problem is that time has almost run out. In case you haven't tracked the status of the Discharge Petition H.R. 303 (Concurrent Receipt), presented by Rep. Jim Marshall, the number of co-signers is now at 210. 8 more co-signers would force this issue to be considered on the floor of Congress. I know for a fact that between MOAA, TMC, and other military and Veterans organizations they could easily muster those 8 additional signatures. The question is, will you?

... Most disturbing is the thousands of permanently disabled servicemembers who are coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan who will be treated equally as bad as current veterans, or because of fiscal constraints even worse. That's the appalling truth about how much our Government really cares about its military, disabled military, and worst of all veterans. ... It's obvious how important the military and injured veterans are to these incompetents. It would appear that their only priorities are their 4 to 5 months of vacation each year, and the luxuries that lobbyists rain down on them. When will these people be held accountable for their apathy, lack of work ethic, and ethics violations in general? "

Larry Scott

McCain's Ban On Torture Does Not Address Rendition

In the Associated Press story by Liz Sidoti on the Bush White House acceptance of US Senator John McCain's Ban On Torture; the agreement to language on such a ban and interrogation standards woefully does not address the practice of "Rendition"! In the AP article posted this afternoon "Bush said that the ban and accompanying interrogation standards will ' make it clear to the world that this government does not torture.....' "

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice " During a trip to Europe last week, was pressed repeatedly on the topic, finally saying that ' as a matter of U.S. Policy, such treatment was banned for U.S. personnel wherever they are ."

You will notice in both cases, the quotes from the Administration address that the government or U.S. personnel do not torture. The allows a Holland Tunnel size exception in the case of the practice of "Rendition". This practice is the widely recognized, but never admitted practice of rendering a prisoner or detainee for interrogation to a foreign agency for what might well be practices that we ourselves cannot do! In granting CIA operatives the same exemptions and defenses that U.S. Military Personnel are given, also would not technically cover the acts of foreign nationals or operatives recruited by our Intelligence Agencies in the field but not employees of, nor classified as U.S. personnel.

At the end of the Day a detainee could be subjected to sensory deprivation, water torture, lack of sleep or other physically damaging treatment along with all the catalog of psychological deprivations that the United Nations, Amnesty International, or Human Rights Watch consider as torture and not be in violation of this current panacea for the damaged reputation of our country around the world.

Until Rendition is addressed and repudiated the posturing of the current administration on human rights, the Geneva Convention, and the treatment of "Confined Prisoners of Interest" will be just so much smoke and mirrors.

Thomas O'Shaughnessy

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

In our continuing effort to monitor the glacial (maybe geologic is a better term) progress of our legislators, we present our quarterly report on the progress of bills of interest to veterans currently in play in the House and Senate. The update is attached at the end of the newsletter. Updates are shown in the number of cosponsors. Amazing progress in 90 days – **NOT!**. Keep tuned!

Of the 40 bills that we are monitoring, only HR 994 has had action. It has been approved by the Government Reform Committee, however, it still sits in the Armed Services and Ways & Means Committees. This bill covers the payment of health premiums by military and federal retirees with pre-tax dollars – kind of a *schnorer* compared to many of the others.

RETREAT – NEWS

\$441.5 BILLION DEFENSE BILL INCLUDES BENEFITS CHANGES

By Rick Maze - Army Times staff writer - December 16, 2005

Congressional negotiators have approved several landmark changes in military benefits, particularly for members of the National Guard and reserve. The 2006 defense authorization bill approved Dec. 16 by House and Senate negotiators includes:

- A precedent-setting plan opening the military's Tricare health plan to any drilling member of the National Guard or reserve who agrees to continue in uniform.
- Income replacement pay of up to \$3,000 for reservists mobilized for 18 months or longer who make less money on active duty than as civilians.
- A change allowing reservists mobilized for more than 30 days to receive full Basic Allowance for Housing, which means an average increase of \$400 a month.

The compromise bill also includes extensions of more than 20 pays and bonuses that are due to expire Dec. 31; creates a \$2,500 bonus for transferring from one service to another; and increases the maximum payment possible for assignment incentive pay and hardship duty pay. Lawmakers were putting final touches on the bill Friday and hope to get it to President Bush for his signature by Christmas. [Approved 12/22/05] <More at: www.armytimes.com/story.php?f=1-292925-1417559.php>

CONGRESS EXPECTS \$100B WARTIME REQUEST

WASHINGTON - The Pentagon is in the early stages of drafting a wartime request for up to \$100 billion more for [Iraq](#) and Afghanistan, lawmakers say, a figure that would push spending related to the wars toward a staggering half-trillion dollars. <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,82850,00.html?ESRC=eb.nl

RUMSFELD: BUSH TO CUT BACK U.S. TROOPS IN IRAQ

BAGHDAD, Iraq (CNN) -- President Bush has authorized a reduction in U.S. combat troops in Iraq, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said Friday, talking before troops at Camp Falluja, Iraq. "At the recommendation of our military commanders and in consultation with our coalition partners and with the Iraqi government, President Bush has authorized an adjustment in U.S. combat brigades in Iraq from 17 to 15," Rumsfeld told 400 to 500 U.S. troops.

The adjustments will reduce forces in Iraq below the base-line level of 138,000 -- which has provided the guideline for most of the year -- by spring 2006. There were 160,000 U.S. troops in Iraq as elections approached, Rumsfeld said. A statement issued by the U.S. military said one brigade -- the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division -- would not be deployed to Iraq, and a second brigade scheduled to deploy to Iraq -- the 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division -- would remain in Kuwait as a "call forward" force for support if necessary. About 3,500 soldiers are in each brigade, the statement said.

COMMENT: I guess that reducing to previous levels is now "withdrawal".

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."
Lewis Carroll, "Alice in Wonderland"

SOLDIERS VERSUS DEFENSE CONTRACTORS Editorial December 15, 2005

It's what passes for crunch time at the Pentagon. Word has now gone out that \$32 billion in savings must be found out of the \$2.3 trillion the Defense Department is planning to spend in the next five years. After the Pentagon's spending orgy over the past five years, there is plenty of scope for cutting, without weakening America's defenses - but only if the cuts come out of the most costly and least needed Air Force and Navy weapons programs, not from the money required to replenish and re-equip the Army and Marine ground forces that have been worn down by Iraq.

Alleviating the dangerous strain on America's overstretched, under-rested and increasingly taxed land-based forces must be the Pentagon's highest priority for the next five years. Even if it becomes possible to draw down some fraction of the troops now in Iraq and Afghanistan, the overall size of America's land forces needs to be increased to reverse the declines in readiness and morale, help recruiting, and reduce the reliance on the Reserves for overseas combat. America cannot be a global military power without a healthy Army. Without significant new investment to add and train more soldiers, the Army's strength will continue to deteriorate. <More at: www.nytimes.com/2005/12/15/opinion/15thu1.html>

SHORT OF RECRUITS, ARMY REDOES ITS MATH

It trims enlistment goals for the coming months in hopes of a big influx next summer.

By Mark Sappenfield | *Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor* December 15, 2005

WASHINGTON — This week, the Department of Defense reported that for the second month in a row, the service hit hardest by the recruiting shortfall - the Army - exceeded its monthly recruiting goals. Yet both this month and last, there has been hardly a peep about that success. The reasons have more to do with math than media bias. Even within the Defense Department, few suggest that the Army has seen its way through the crisis. Instead, what the Army has done is back-load the goals for its recruiting year. <More at: www.csmonitor.com/2005/1215/p02s01-usmi.html>

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN WARS TOP REASON FOR INCREASE IN VA CLAIMS BACKLOG

Ronald R. Aument - Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits, VA; before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs – 12/705

... The number of veterans filing initial disability compensation claims and claims for increased benefits has increased every year since fiscal year (FY) 2000. **Disability claims from returning Afghanistan and Iraq war veterans as well as from veterans of earlier periods of war increased from 578,773 in FY 2000 to 788,298 in FY 2005. For FY 2005 alone, this represents an increase of more than 209,000 claims or 36 percent over the 2000 base year. It is expected that these increases will continue over the next five years.**

The most important factors leading to the sustained high levels of claims activity are: Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom; more beneficiaries on the rolls, with resulting additional claims for increased benefits; improved and expanded outreach to active-duty servicemembers, guard and reserve personnel, survivors, and veterans of earlier conflicts; and implementation of Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) and Concurrent Disability and Retired Pay (CDRP) programs by the Department of Defense (DoD). <More at: <http://veterans.house.gov/hearings/schedule109/dec05/12-7-05/raument.html>>

NOTE: The above is a long article - but well worth reviewing

COMPANIES HELP SOLDIERS' SPOUSES FIND JOBS

Associated Press | December 16, 2005

Amid debate on the war, employers are mounting a military campaign of their own: Helping Soldiers' spouses find jobs. A growing number of big employers have begun actively seeking to hire the wives and husbands of armed-forces enlistees. In partnerships with branches of the military, companies like Boeing, Trammell Crow, Sears Holdings, Dell and CVS, among others, are signing accords to improve job opportunities for spouses, posting jobs on Web sites for military families or setting up resume-sharing systems with military bases. <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,83006,00.html?ESRC=army-a.nl>

CHANGES SWEETEN 'RE-UP' BONUSES AND HOW!

The Air Force changed the reenlistment window and waived obligated service requirements for Airmen in two career fields eligible to receive the enlisted critical skills retention bonus. Airmen who meet requirements may qualify for a retention bonus of up to **\$150,000**. The reenlistment window now allows CSRB-eligible Airmen to reenlist at any time. The changes will remain in effect until Dec. 31, 2007. The program is open to technical sergeants and above with: (1) at least 19 years of service, but not more than 24 years of service; (2) a controlled AFSC of 1C2X1, combat control; or 1T2X1, pararescue; and (3) a willingness to commit to serving two to six years. For more information, eligible Airmen should contact their local military personnel flight reenlistments section or commander's support staff. <www.military.com/MilitaryReport/0,12914,82514,00.html?ESRC=miltrep.nl>

ARMY REACHES LOW, FILLS RANKS

Tom Bowman – Baltimore Sun – November 8, 2005

12% of recruits in Oct. had lowest acceptable scores

WASHINGTON // The number of new recruits who scored at the bottom of the Army's aptitude test tripled last month, Pentagon officials said, helping the nation's largest armed service meet its October recruiting goal but raising concerns about the quality of the force. Former Army Secretary Thomas E. White said the service was making a mistake by lowering its standards. "I think it's disastrous. You are throwing the towel in on recruiting quality," said White, a retired general whom Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld fired in 2003 over other policy differences.

<More at: www.baltimoresun.com/news/nationworld/bal-te.recruit08nov08,1,1130565.story?coll=bal-home-headlines>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Where</u>	<u>What</u>	<u>Who</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
5/27-31/06	-	Washington DC	Legislative Action Rally	VUFT and others	Get their attention

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

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

ALCOHOL MISUSE, DIVORCE RATES HIGHER AMONG RETURNING TROOPS

Leo Shane III - Stars and Stripes, - December 9, 2005

WASHINGTON — Army researchers saw alcohol misuse rise from 13 percent among soldiers to 21 percent one year after returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, underscoring the continuing stress of deployment for some troops. In post-deployment reassessment data completed in July, researchers also saw soldiers with anger and aggression issues increase from 11 percent to 22 percent after deployment. Those planning to divorce their spouse rose from 9 percent to 15 percent after time spent in the combat zone. And that's just the start of the problems, according to military family support groups.

<More at: www.veteransforcommonsense.org/?Page=Article&ID=5722>

GUARDSMAN STILL SEEKING RE-UP BONUS DUE LAST JUNE

Kelly Kennedy December 13, 2005 - Army Times staff writer

After re-enlisting during his second tour in Iraq but not receiving a promised \$15,000 re-up bonus, Sgt. 1st Class Carl Latson says he won't re-enlist ever again. In January, the Spanaway, Wash., soldier signed a six-year contract that was supposed to get him a \$15,000 bonus — tax-free, since he signed up in the war zone. But when his 13th year of service ended in March, the check never made it to the bank.

Latson's contract contains the \$15,000 bonus, but the Army said the bonus was for regular active-duty soldiers only. Latson is in the Active Guard and Reserve, so his bonus should have come through a program that yields up to \$60,000 in re-enlistment bonuses. <More at: www.armytimes.com/story.php?f=1-292925-1403944.php>

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR HAS PUBLISHED FINAL USERRA RULES

After a long delay, the Department of Labor has finally produced its rules for the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). The rules are at www.dol.gov/vets/programs/userra/Final_USERRA_Poster.pdf. The private and state government employees poster is at www.dol.gov/elaws/userra.htm. The federal employee poster is at www.dol.gov/vets/programs/userra/USERRA_Federal.pdf

BUT -

VETS' PREFERENCE RULES AT ISSUE IN DEFENSE PERSONNEL REFORM

Karen Rutzick – govexec – December 15, 2005

Despite assurances from the Defense Department, unions are concerned that the National Security Personnel System will fail to protect veterans preference. Union leaders are worried that the system's flexibilities for reductions in force allow supervisors to circumvent veterans preference when downsizing. Under NSPS, supervisors can base groups of jobs targeted in RIFs on geographical location, line of business, product line, organizational unit or funding line. Within those areas, supervisors can designate RIF competition groups based on career group, pay schedule, occupation, pay band or trainee status.

Those considerations are too all-encompassing, said Ron Ault, president of the Metal Trades Department of the AFL-CIO. "They've got it so broad they can do it any way they want to do it," said Ault. "The area of competition can be a four-foot square on the floor." <More at: www.govexec.com/dailyfed/1205/121505r1.htm>

VA PONDERES LUMP SUM PAYMENTS FOR LESSER DISABILITIES

Rick Maze - Army Times staff writer – December 15, 2005

The Department of Veterans Affairs is considering a controversial change in disability benefits that would provide a one-time lump sum, rather than monthly payments, to those with low-rated disabilities.

Veterans' groups do not like the idea, recommended in a May report from the VA's inspector general as a way to cut costs. Donald Mooney of the American Legion, testifying Dec. 7 before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee about problems in processing disability claims, said such lump-sum payments would create a number of problems. For example, if a service-connected condition worsened over time, it is unclear if or how the veteran could get an increase in disability compensation.

"The veteran would not be able to obtain an increase in evaluation if he or she accepted the lump-sum payment," Mooney said, adding that it also is unclear whether a spouse would be entitled to service-connected death benefits in such cases.

<More at: www.armytimes.com/story.php?f=1-292925-1413811.php>

SICKENED IRAQ WAR VETERAN FIGHTS FOR FELLOW VETERANS

Juan Gonzalez - New York Daily News - Nov 30, 2005

Iraq war veteran Gerard Matthew had a terrible nightmare six weeks ago. He dreamed he was killing his year-old baby daughter. Matthew awoke in a panic in his Bronx apartment. He rolled over in his bed and realized his precious Victoria was sleeping peacefully beside him. The baby, born June 29, 2004, is missing three fingers and most of her right hand, and Matthew, 31, keeps fighting off the depression and guilt.

His wife, Janise, became pregnant shortly after he returned from Iraq. He arrived suffering from an illness the Army doctors couldn't explain. One side of his face swelled up each morning. He had constant migraine headaches, blurred vision, blackouts and a burning sensation when he urinated. The couple suspected from the start that the baby's deformity had something to do with Matthew's illness.

A few months after Victoria's birth, this column revealed that Matthew, a specialist with the 719th Army National Guard Transport Company, had tested positive for depleted uranium exposure in screening tests sponsored by the Daily News.

<More at: www.veteransforcommonsense.org/?Page=Article&ID=5588>

PTSD – THE FOLLOWING TWO ARTICLES ARE QUOTED IN THEIR ENTIRETY

TROUBLED VET FELL THROUGH THE CRACKS

12/10/05 By Scott Hadly News-Press Staff Writer

Ex-Marine who killed dad, himself sought help but was unable to heal

Knowing that he needed help, former Marine Sgt. Jeffrey Lehner admitted himself into a VA hospital in Los Angeles about a year ago.

Reliving the loss of eight Marines in his unit in Afghanistan, he couldn't sleep or sit still, and his drinking was becoming a problem, former fiancée Sarah Farmer said. Although he was going to group therapy at the local Vet Center, he felt he needed more intensive care. He wanted help.

But because the group treatment program for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress was full, he was shuffled into treatment for veterans suffering from schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. He lasted a day before calling Ms. Farmer to pick him up.

"He was doing everything he could to heal himself," she said.

In the past few years, both the military and the Department of Veterans Affairs have made great strides in treating military personnel carrying the trauma of combat with them after their service. But somehow Sgt. Lehner slipped through the cracks.

He shot and killed his father, 77-year-old retired pharmacist Edwin Lehner, on Wednesday and then took his own life.

The murder-suicide also sent ripples through the community of veterans in the county, who know that someone doesn't have to be bleeding to be wounded. Sgt. Lehner participated in a local support group for veterans who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Many of the men in the group recalled that Sgt. Lehner struggled with survivor's guilt after the eight crew members died three years ago during a flight that he was pulled off at the last minute.

But the members of the group, all veterans from Vietnam, are at a loss to explain why Sgt. Lehner took his life when help for veterans is more readily available than decades ago.

The Marine Corps, like other branches of the military, now tries to prepare Marines headed for combat on what to expect emotionally. They also talk to their families and try to prepare them for the separation and the possibilities that their loved ones won't come home or may come home injured, said Maj. Matt Baker, a community service officer at Twenty-nine Palms.

They talk about everything from financial issues to mental health problems. The idea is to prevent a problem before it appears. When Marines end up in a combat zone, they now have access to psychologists or psychiatrists and chaplains who are trained to help them deal with trauma.

Before they go home, they are screened for any sign of emotional or mental problems from their service, Maj. Baker said.

Although there still is a stigma among some men in the service to seek help when they need it, that too is changing, he said.

"We're absolutely trying to break down that paradigm," Maj. Baker said.

A former infantry officer who commanded a battalion in combat in Iraq, Maj. Baker said his current job is vital to the military effort.

"As an infantry officer, I was proudest as a (commanding officer) for the battalion," he said. "That was the pinnacle for me, but the most important job I've done is what I'm doing now."

Post-traumatic stress disorder is not isolated to people who have been through combat. It can happen to anyone who has experienced or witnessed a life-threatening event, whether it's a natural disaster, a serious accident or an assault. Those suffering from the disorder often relive the emotional experience of the trauma. They might have nightmares or flashbacks, difficulty sleeping, or become detached or estranged from loved ones.

One study of the mental health of veterans found that 18 percent of those who served in Iraq and 11 percent of those who served in Afghanistan were at risk for suffering post-traumatic stress. Those conflicts, now the most sustained fighting for American troops since Vietnam, include particularly stressful guerrilla-type warfare and multiple deployments. More than 90 percent of the soldiers who served in Iraq reported coming under small-arms fire; 86 percent of those in Afghanistan reported the same. More than half of both groups had known someone killed or seriously wounded, according to the study published last year in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Many of those who suffer from post-traumatic stress function fine and lead productive lives, but left untreated, some can develop debilitating problems. Although the military offers help for active-duty service members, the study found that only about a quarter of those who needed help sought it.

Once out of the military, veterans can become isolated and miss out on needed services. The Department of Veterans Affairs has set up a nationwide Vet Center that helps men and women adjust to civilian life.

Joseph Narkevitz, a Vet Center team leader in Santa Barbara who served as an Army medic in Vietnam, said the military has made great strides in helping service members deal with the emotional trauma of combat.

The best approach is to talk about it to a friend, family member, a fellow vet or in a group counseling setting, Mr. Narkevitz said. It's not something that you necessarily get over, but that you deal with, he said.

"What we want to do is be able to help a person recognize and find ways to cope," he said. "A lot of times they're coming back with a lot of rage because the war experience can be extremely frustrating and dangerous. They'd been in battles and had friends killed and killed people themselves. In battle you are allowed to release that rage. We want to help redirect (it)."

GROUP URGES MORE HELP FOR VETS

12/9/05 Thomas Schultz News-Press Staff Writer

Haunting memories all too common for post-traumatic stress sufferers

Washing down turkey with root beer inside the recreation room of the Patio Garden Apartments on Via Lucero on Thursday evening, a group of veterans who were in a support group with Sgt. Jeffrey Lehner criticized the government for not doing enough to help vets cope with the lingering anger, pain and guilt they said inevitably follows combat.

Originally planned as a holiday dinner, the gathering of the post-traumatic stress disorder support group turned into a somber wake for Sgt. Lehner, who killed his father and then himself Wednesday.

Sgt. Lehner joined the support group more than 18 months ago, and his fellow veterans remembered their late friend as an insightful man who would drop anything to help despite the tortuous past that trailed him from Afghanistan back to Santa Barbara.

As individuals who have waged war and seen its aftermath -- divorce, alcoholism, lost jobs, alienated children and, in Sgt. Lehner's case, suicide -- the group members said they hope to recruit more veterans of the war on terror into their own ranks. Talking about the past in particular with one another at weekly meetings organized by the local VA outpatient clinic, they said, can pave the way to a better future.

"As a national community, we have to meet these guys at least halfway. It's our responsibility," said Malcolm Hamilton, 59, a builder who fought in Vietnam with the Marine Corps from 1966 to 1968. "Everybody in this room has something, something you look back on and say, 'If only . . .'"

A veteran of Afghanistan, Sgt. Lehner at age 42 was the youngest member and only participant of the support group who did not serve in Vietnam. Remaining members say they hope to increasingly reach out with sage advice to a new generation returning with a sense of loss.

"There are going to be a lot of them in the near future, and our society is not ready," group member Jim Nolan, 59, who fought from 1966-67 with the Marines, wrote in an e-mail prior to Thursday's gathering.

Later sitting with his friends, the former sniper said it's all too common for military men and women to try to push away haunting memories.

Active-duty troops working to pay the bills are reluctant to reveal symptoms that could lead to financial ruin. And veterans can feel stigmatized by their service in a variety of ways, so they avoid discussing it. Some might not want their children to know they killed people, the group members said.

"No one had talked to me, or said the things these guys did," said Jerry Graham, 57, a public works supervisor and former Navy Seabee who fought in 1969.

Michael Moore, 55, an artist who fought with the Marines from 1969 to 1970, said fitting back into society is its own unique battle. "I think we should learn that war is not what we should be doing. It doesn't work. I think the president of the United States ought to go to war, then maybe we wouldn't have so many."

FOR TROOPS, STRESS, A LINGERING HAZARD

David Mclemore - Dallas Morning News - December 09, 2005

DALLAS - Not all the wounds received in Iraq are visible. Not all the combat deaths occur on the battlefield. For Capt. Michael Pelkey, the war followed him home.

After a year in the Persian Gulf region, Pelkey returned to Fort Sill, Okla., in July 2003. He quickly immersed himself in a new job and began getting reacquainted with his wife and infant son. Then came the terrifying nightmares of the death and destruction he had seen in Iraq - and the inexplicable anxiety he felt in the safety of home. He grew forgetful. He began sleeping with a loaded 9mm handgun.

On Nov. 5, 2004, a week after an off-post therapist determined that he had post-traumatic stress syndrome, Pelkey shot himself in the chest and died.

... "This is the froth of the wave. The big numbers are coming," said Steve Robinson of the National Gulf War Resource Center, an advocacy organization for veterans of conflicts in the Persian Gulf region. "It took years for the severity of PTSD among Vietnam veterans to show up. If we don't give the Soldiers the help they need, such as face-to-face counseling, we're cheating them of a debt owed." <More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,82452,00.html?ESRC=eb.nl>

THE STRUGGLE TO GAUGE A WAR'S PSYCHOLOGICAL COST

November 26, 2005 - Coping With Combat - BENEDICT CAREY

It was hardly a traditional therapist's office. The mortar fire was relentless, head-splitting, so close that it raised layers of rubble high off the floor of the bombed-out room.

Capt. William Nash, a Navy psychiatrist, sat on an overturned box of ready-made meals for the troops. He was in Iraq to try to short-circuit combat stress on the spot, before it became disabling, as part of the military's most determined effort yet to bring therapy to the front lines.

His clients, about a dozen young men desperate for help after weeks of living and fighting in Falluja, sat opposite him and told their stories. One had been spattered with his best friend's blood and blamed himself for the death.

<More at: <http://www.veteransforcommonsense.org/index.cfm?page=article&id=5511>>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ASK BUSH TO STOP UNDERCOUNTING US CASUALTIES

By Kevin Zeese - DemocracyRising.us - 07 December 2005

"Dear Mr. President:

We are concerned that the Department of Defense has been under-reporting casualties in Iraq by only reporting non-fatal casualties incurred in combat. We write today to request that you provide the American people with a full accounting of the American casualties in Iraq since the March 19, 2003 invasion, including a full accounting of the fatalities, the wounded, those who have contracted illnesses during their time overseas, and those suffering from mental afflictions as a result of their service in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. We are concerned that the figures that were released to the public by your Administration do not accurately represent the true toll that this war has taken on the American people."

<More at: <http://democracyrising.us/content/view/381/165/>>

Total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 116,946; Navy Reserve, 4,078; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 8,122; Marine Corps Reserve, 8,742; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 416. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel, who have been mobilized, to 138,304, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel, who are currently mobilized, can be found at www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec2005/d20051221ngr.pdf .

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE FRIDAY DECEMBER 09, 2005

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	2,164
WOUNDED US [5 DEC + ESTIMATE]	≥ 16,154
KILLED UK	98
KILLED OTHER COALITION	103
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	600
KILLED CONTRACTORS	293
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 33,812
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 31,088
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIV	≥ 139,262

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US	258
WOUNDED/INJURED US	658
KILLED COALITION	126
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	378
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.

TO SEE THE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA ON THE CASUALTIES GO TO WWW.MILITARYCITY.COM/2000CASUALTIES/

AFTERTHOUGHT

SOMETIMES YOU JUST NEED A PERSON IN THE KNOW TO TALK TO.

The National Veterans Foundation has opened a toll-free helpline (1-888-777-4443) for Troops, Veterans and their families.

All calls are answered live by trained veterans, who listen, provide crisis intervention services, emotional support and information, or immediate referrals to local providers who can help. The NVF Helpline has already served more than 275,000 people in need.

NVF aims to get the helpline running 24/7, but it currently operates from 9a.m.-9p.m., M-F. All messages received during off hours are returned the next business day, and requests for assistance can also be submitted via e-mail at vetsupport@nvf.org.

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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ACTIVE DUTY/GUARD/RESERVE [AD/G/R]

Bill	Sponsor	Co	Subject	Status - Committee	Change?
HR 97	Graves (R-MO)	55	Consumer credit relief [AD]	Veterans' Affairs (VAC)	
HR 197	Scott (D-GA)	8	In-state tuition active duty & dependents [AD]	Armed Services (AS)	
HR 269	Camp (R-MI)	28	One-time Montgomery GI Bill open registration for members in the 77-85 VEAP "hole" [AD]	AS, VAC	
HR 333	Lynch (D-MA)	50	Preserve status of students called to active duty [G/R]	Education & the Workforce (E&W)	
HR 621	Beauprez (R-CO)	2	Penalty-free withdrawal from retirement plans during active duty [G/R]	Ways & Means (W&M)	
HR 771	Markey (D-MA)	48	Wounded/injured in combat draw pay during recovery [AD/G/R]	W&M, AS	
HR 772	Matheson (D-UT)	128	Educational assistance under Montgomery GI Bill for certain members of Selected Reserve [R]	VAC, AS	
HR 838	Lantos (D-CA)	90	Protect financial security of activated reserve component members [G/R]	W&M, Government Reform (GR)	
HR 1667	Udall (D-NM)	14	Family & Medical leave amendment for leave for spouse, parent, child of member on activation notice [G/R]	GR, E&W, House Administration (HA)	
HR 1860	Rohrabacher (R-CA)	1	Exempts reserve component members from means test under 2005 bankruptcy law [G/R]	Judiciary (J)	
S 11	Levin (D MI)	24	Increase Army & MC strength; tax credits to employers of G/R; eliminate DIC offset to SBP; moves up effective date of SBP by 3 years to 10/1/05 healthcare options for G/R [AD/G/R]	Finance (F)	
S 32	Dayton (D-MN)	8	TRICARE eligibility for all dependents in all reserve components; remium assistance for retained private insurance; change in retirement age/ service requirements for non-regulars; 50% parity with AD GI Bill [G/R]	AS	
S 43	Hegel (R-NE)	6	Waives GI Bill enrollment fee; allows members to opt in to GI Bill without payment of fee or penalty [AD/G/R]	AS	
S 337	Graham (R-SC)	21	Revises age/service for non-regulars; expands healthcare for all non-regulars [G/R]	AS	
S 460	Kerry (D-MA)	0	Increase Army by 30,000; healthcare for all non-regulars; penalty withdrawals from IRAs; tax credit for small businesses for lost wages	F	
S 938	Leahy (D-VT)	2	Housing allowance for non-regulars at same rate as regulars	AS	
S 1142	Landrieu (D-LA)	5	Tax credit for small business for lost wages; tax credit for self-employed members called to AD	F	

VETERANS' ISSUES

Bill	Sponsor	Co	Subject	Status - Committee	Change?
HR 616	Baca (D-CA)	38	Reduction of backlog of claims pending with VA	VAC	
S 13	Akaka (D-HI)	24	Mandatory funding of VA medicals care budget; concurrent receipt for all; open registration for GI Bill	VAC	

RETIREES' ISSUES

Bill	Sponsor	Co	Subject	Status - Committee	Change?
HR 303	Bilirakis (R-FL)	205	Concurrent receipt for non-regulars; eliminates phase-in period	AS, VAC	
HR 463	Evans (D-IL)	5	GI Bill benefits for licensing/certification programs	AS	
HR 558	Latham (R-IA)	121	Revises age/service requirements for non-regular retirement	AS	
HR 783	Saxton (R-NJ)	112	Revises age requirements for retirement for non-regulars	AS	
HR 1366	Bilirakis (R-FL)	32	Expands eligibility for Combat Related Special Compensation;	AS	
HR 2076	Bilirakis (R-FL)	20	Expands eligibility for concurrent receipt; members rated by VA as "unemployable" to get 100% concurrent receipt	AS	
S 558	Reid (D-NV)	31	Authorizes concurrent receipt; eliminates phase-in period	AS, VA	
S 639	Corzine (D-NJ)	2	Reduce age of non-regular retirement to 55	AS	

SURVIVOR ISSUES

Bill	Sponsor	Co	Subject	Status - Committee	Change?
HR 460	Edwards (D-TX)	3	Increases SGLI from \$250K to \$500K	VAC	
HR 808	Brown (R-SC)	178	Repeals VA/SBP offset	AS	
HR 968	Saxton (R-NJ)	113	Moves up paid-up date under SBP to 10/1/05	AS	
S 185	Nelson (D-FL)	30	Repeals offset for SBP/DIC	AS	

HEALTHCARE ISSUES

Bill	Sponsor	Co	Subject	Status - Committee	Change?
HR 602	Hollen (D-MC)	232	Retirees & families in Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan; waives most Medicare Part B premiums; adds beneficiaries to TRICARE pharmacy program	AS, W&M, GR, Energy & Commerce (E&C)	
HR 515		125	Assured VA healthcare funding	VAC	
HR 994	Davis (R-VA)	288	Federal civilian & military retirees pay health insurance premiums pre-tax	AS, W&M, GR	GR Adopts
HR 3327	Spratt (D-SC)	11	Travel expense reimbursement for TRICARE for Life recipients	AS	
S 407	Johnson (D-SD)	11	Retirees & families in Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan waives most Medicare Part B premiums; adds beneficiaries to TRICARE pharmacy program	AS	
S 484	Warner (R-VA)	51	Federal civilian & military retirees pay health insurance premiums pre-tax	F, W&M	

RELATED CIVILIAN ISSUES

Bill	Sponsor	Co	Subject	Status - Committee	Change?
HR 147	McKeon (R-CA)	301	Repeals Government Pension Offset	W&M	
HR 633	Hoyer (D-MD)	59	Increases Government contributions to Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan	GR	
S 619	Feinstein (D-CA)	23	Repeals Government Pension Offset	F	