

SOUND OFF!



VOL. I, NO 16

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"

10 MARCH 2006

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

Our main purpose is to pressure legislators at all levels to stand up for our veterans and their families.

Some good things have happened. A bill has been introduced in the California Assembly ([AB 2750](#)) that is based largely on our "Shared Sacrifice Act" Legislative Proposal. We are thankful to Assemblymember Nava for pushing this through. We did not get all we asked for, and we are pressing other Assemblymembers to both support the bill and to amend it to increase its scope and timeliness, and to re-introduce the concept of sacrifice by defining specific outcomes and specific obligations. <More about this bill and other actions in **RECALL** below.>

Also in the California Assembly three bills have been introduced by Assemblymember Blakeslee: [AB 2549](#) – management and oversight of the Guard with emphasis on readiness, armament and training; [AB 2550](#) –broaden the applicability of current unemployment compensation to be more favorable to veterans, and to include additional points for state hiring for veterans and their widows; and [AB 2551](#) – fund an education loan assumption program for veterans that was previously passed but which remains unfunded.

Connecticut had passed [HB 6008](#) concerning Depleted Uranium (DU) exposure of Connecticut National Guard members and is now improving it, although it too has problems in that it precludes the state from paying for tests, only "providing assistance". Louisiana likewise has passed [a bill](#) requiring that the state "provide assistance" for Depleted Uranium (DU) testing but not pay for it. Individual local jurisdictions are passing small relief bills for small local problems.

All of these bills are steps forward – some giant steps, but many more are baby steps. Most of the current and immediate past legislation seems to be setting the states up to point fingers at the feds. We have a message for the states – **that is insufficient**. We have a further message for the states - **this is about people, not about process**.

The critical missing element in all of these legislative efforts is a sense of a full-fledged common obligation that the nation incurs to our serving military and their families.

We have a model for legislation in our "Shared Sacrifice Act" <http://www.vuft.org/legislation.html> that directly addresses the need to get support to the troops and their families **NOW**. The problem is already very real and we don't need to study it to death. No one has to conduct a survey to determine if bad things are happening – they are. The only survey that needs to be conducted is an emergency survey to determine how to deal with the very obvious and well-known problems **fast**.

Answers are needed now. Emergency action is a necessity. Our forces have been at war since October 7, 2001. Trying to do too much with too small a standing force has thrown an enormous burden on the Reserves and National Guard, and in turn on the states, who must pick up this burden. They cannot sidestep it and let it fall on the individuals.

The states must step up where the feds are failing. The assessment of failure or success must be made at the precise point where support and benefits are provided – with the person, not with the agencies. Stop looking at process and start looking at results. Any question of eligibility should be adjudicated immediately in favor of the person, not the system. Procedural mistakes can be corrected later, but adjudication mistakes can be a matter of life and death; mental health or infirmity; financial health or ruin.

The individual and families should not have to deal alone with the huge, federal, impersonal system. Those who are sick should go to a doctor – period. Those who are unpaid should be able to go to a bank – period. Those who are untrained or unarmed should go nowhere – period. The states should pay first and deal with the feds for reimbursement. If the states are not reimbursed then the taxpayers should eat the cost. That's what we mean by shared sacrifice.

These are not political issues

These are American issues.

[Ed.]

"At this point, the war transcends political lines. And truth isn't a partisan issue."

Paul Rieckhoff – IAVA

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.; IT IS BEING UPDATED DAILY. PLEASE HELP US MAKE THIS AS COMPLETE A LIST AS POSSIBLE BY SENDING CANDIDATE INFO TO SANDY.COOK@VUFT.ORG.

If you would like to give some telephone time to those serving in Iran and Afghanistan, the VFW has a donation site at

https://secure2.convio.net/vfw/site/Donation/941705061?ACTION=SHOW_DONATION_OPTIONS&CAMPAIGN_ID=1381&=&=

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

NEW MEMBERS are joining us every week. If you are getting this newsletter and have not yet joined, please go to our website at www.vuft.org/membership.html and join. Membership is free. The more our numbers grow, the greater voice we have with legislators. It shouldn't be that way, but it is, so join us and help us take the fight to Congress and the state legislatures.

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. Every little bit helps. You can also buy our handsome pins using the same method.

VUFT, INC. BOARD MEETING

At the VUFT, Inc. Board Meeting on 25 February we were informed by Assemblyman Pedro Nava that a new bill had been read in the legislature the day before responding to our "Wartime Shared Sacrifice Act" Legislative Request. (see above)

The Board agreed to an amendment establishing chartering provisions in the national by laws so that charters can legally be offered to organizations in other states. VUFT, Inc.'s goal is to establish a chartered department in each state and territory. Organizations within states would incorporate under their own state laws and organize under their own bylaws, consistent with the national bylaws. Bylaws are available from the chair bhandy@vuft.org, or the vice chair scook@vuft.org.

MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS

RESPONSE TO THINK-TANK SKEPTICISM

In an Op-Ed to the New York Times on March 1, Dr. Sally Satel wrote of those who were receiving compensation for PTSD:

"...some...who have filed claims in recent years did so not out of medical need but out of a desire for financial security in their retirement years."

"Only in rare instances should veterans be eligible for lifetime disability...there should be a deadline of years after service by which claims must be submitted...Decades after a war is too late to make sense of [PTSD]"

Dr. Sally Satel is a psychiatrist and a writer for the American Enterprise Institute (AEI). The Times printed a number of responses – here are two

To the Editor:

As a former Marine officer who served in the Vietnam War, I take issue with Sally Satel's conclusion that "we must be skeptical of veterans who file claims as retirement approaches."

Post-traumatic stress disorder came into bloom in my life 25 years after the trauma. It took five years of therapy before I was able to deal with the demons. I had been a successful lawyer, elected official, father and husband, but the disorder took its toll. I've met traumatized veterans and urged them to seek help. Not many did. They too were "successful," but haunted. I thought that some day it would catch up with them. The stresses of old age would do it.

We are old, proud veterans. Few who need help get it. Let us not turn our backs on those who do. Time does not make post-traumatic stress disorder any less powerful. It does not make sense to deny it because it is "decades after" the war.

Tom Brush - Ann Arbor, Mich., March 1, 2006

To the Editor:

Even the certainty that some veterans' claims of reactivated war trauma are false does not excuse the failure to treat other veterans who are suffering.

Bureaucratic policy-making and speculative notions about those who "deserve" treatment are trivial (though money-saving) objections to our duty to help men and women who have fought our wars.

Rosemarie Arbur - Klamath Falls, Ore., March 2, 2006

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

Picking up on the discussion in the opening article, we need to start a full-court press on essential legislative initiatives at the state level. We have the most immediate examples of what can be done, or at least started, in California, Connecticut, and Louisiana; Minnesota also had 5 bills pop up in their legislature in the last several weeks. There are many more.

But why should we act in the states and not at the federal level? We think that the closer you can get to the point of delivery, the more effect you will have. True, the "point of delivery" often belongs to an agency of the federal government. That should make little difference if we can get a dozen or more state governments, including the very powerful office of Governor in each of those states, to start acting on the problems that their citizens are having daily.

Governors are the Commanders-in-Chief of the state militias. Beyond that, they are the political leader and the chief magistrate in their states for all of their citizens, including activated reservists and citizens serving in the regular military. A North Carolinian doesn't cease being a North Carolinian because he or she joins the Armed Forces. A Florida Guardsman doesn't stop being a Floridian when he or she is activated.

The Governors have some legitimate responsibility for these persons always, but at the least when they come home. For the Guard members it is more complex since the Governor is responsible for their equipping, training and readiness also. The legislators are responsible for providing the Governors with the wherewithal to stand up a militia. They share responsibility with the Governor for the care and support of all of their citizens.

The states have the same difficulty, on their scale, that the federal government has. This is a large and complex problem. The legislators pass laws, allocate money, and set up oversight committees – and then they believe that their job is done (they certainly sound that way in their stump speeches). The military departments and to a lesser extent the labor and justice departments read the laws, take the money, and establish the programs. The program directors write the procedures, budget the funds, and open the offices. The offices make the contact with the individual veterans and their families, providing services and benefits, for better or worse.

Unfortunately every link of this chain is chronically examined and graded EXCEPT the link between the offices and the individuals. When offices are graded, they are graded on how well they implement the program directives of their departments, and how well they follow their internal procedures. The departments are graded on how well they account for the money spent, and whether the program directives cover all the intent of the laws. Congress gets graded by you and me, and maybe 3% of the incumbents lose their jobs each two years, so they don't get graded very hard or bothered very much.

It is the kids who suffer. Nobody is consistently and thoroughly grading the entire system on how well it performs for the individual, and that is what we want the states to do. They are there on the ground; they are interested in the outcomes by definition, because the failures of the system become their future problems. They can step in and help, and can do so on a much more timely basis than is allowed by the larger federal system.

We need smart legislation that says the state will step in, in all cases where the individual veteran has an obvious need, without hesitation and without regard as to the source of the ultimate payment for the service or benefit. The states can then go after the feds to make things right far more easily than the individual veteran can.

Legislators won't write these laws by themselves; they lack both the imagination and the political will. We have to do it for them and we have to lobby them to get the bills through. We believe that if we can get three states around the country who will take this approach to veterans' benefits, they will start a landslide. The civic will is there, but the ordinary citizen doesn't know how to get this done. We can provide the leadership that links civic will to legislative action.

To make this successful we need to broaden our reach and improve our clout. Three actions that you can take will help.

- Forward this newsletter to your own mailing lists and ask them to join us directly at www.vuft.org – the more numbers we have, the more legislators listen.
- Help us to gather specific stories of problems that veterans of your acquaintance or those in your community have had. We need specifics and many veterans are reluctant to give those details because they hope for a continuing career and

are afraid of retribution. Without details, our legislators and bureaucrats dismiss our stories as “anecdotal” – which allows them to treat real horror stories as myth rather than fact. Send the stories to me scCook@vuft.org.

- Consider starting a VUFT, Inc. chapter in your state, and become one of those who starts the landslide.

RETREAT – NEWS

72 TUSKEGEE AIRMEN RECEIVE HONORS AS PART OF UNIVERSITY'S 125TH ANNIVERSARY

TUSKEGEE, Ala. – (February 23, 2006) – Remembered for their valor and bravery, 72 of the nation's first African-American fighter pilots were recognized during the Sixth Annual Tuskegee Airmen Convocation on Feb. 23 in the General Daniel “Chappie” James Center for Aerospace Science and Health Education. Recognizing the Tuskegee Airmen's exemplary combat performance during World War II and their important contribution to Tuskegee's distinctive educational mission, they received honorary Doctor of Public Service degrees..

Our own Art Hicks, a member of our Advisory Board, received an honorary degree at this ceremony. Congratulations, Art, and thanks to you and your fellow Tuskegee Airmen.



Credit 1 - Photo: Tuskegee University

Between 1941 and 1945, nearly 1,000 African-Americans were trained as fighter pilots at Tuskegee . Program participants were graduates of Tuskegee University , as well as graduates of other universities across the nation.

The Tuskegee Airmen had a distinguished record of combat performance, including:

- destroying 260 enemy aircraft
- not losing a single bomber to enemy fire in more than 200 combat missions as air escorts – an achievement unmatched by any other fighter group.
- earning 850 medals

“Their distinguished combat performance helped persuade then-President Harry S. Truman in 1948 to issue Executive Order 9981, which desegregated the U.S. Military,” Dr. Payton said.

SERVICES APPEAL FOR \$22 BILLION MORE

InsideDefense.com NewsStand | Jason Sherman | March 06, 2006

The military's top brass have tallied up \$21.8 billion worth of combat hardware they need but is not paid for in the Pentagon's fiscal year 2007 spending request now before Congress.

Over the last two weeks, the service chiefs have provided lawmakers lists detailing a wide range of programs that require funding beyond the \$439 billion spending request the Defense Department sent to lawmakers for FY-07 last month, and also in addition to the recently detailed \$65.3 billion supplemental spending request for FY-06.

These lists detail needs for everything from individual first-aid kits and machine guns to funds for major weapon system acquisitions, including amphibious warships, additional C-17 cargo planes and additional armored Humvees.

<More at: www.military.com/features/0,15240,90081,00.html>

TROOP WITHDRAWAL MAY BE DELAYED

Associated Press | March 03, 2006

WASHINGTON - President Bush is expected to meet with top U.S. military commanders next week, just as the escalating violence in Iraq threatens to complicate the administration's goal of withdrawing more troops this year.

So far, military officials say they have made no decisions on future troop withdrawals. They say they are sticking to current plans to send additional units to Iraq later this summer, and acknowledge that a decision will have to be made soon on whether to keep some of those troops home instead. ... Middle East experts, however, warn that the military is facing a difficult choice: Continue the gradual withdrawal and risk leaving the country in chaos, or stay in an increasingly dangerous and divided Iraq and try to force national unity.

The escalating bloodshed, they say, is happening too fast for U.S. forces to train and equip the Iraqi military and police to handle it. That may force troops to stay in Iraq longer to try to quell the violence.

<More at: www.signonsandiego.com/news/world/iraq/20060303-0810-us-iraq.html>

NATIONAL GUARD DRAINED BY IRAQ

International Herald Tribune | March 01, 2006

State governors from both parties say that Bush administration policies are stripping the National Guard of equipment and personnel needed to respond to hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, forest fires and other emergencies. ...

David Walker, the comptroller general of the United States, who is head of the accountability office, said the governors had some basis for their concerns.

"The army cannot account for over half the equipment that Army National Guard units have left overseas," Walker said. "And it has not developed replacement plans for the equipment, as Defense Department policy requires."

>More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,89617,00.html>

COMMISSION TO EXAMINE USE, FUNDING OF RESERVE COMPONENTS

By Jim Garamone - American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 6, 2006 – A congressionally appointed commission will commence the most comprehensive review of the National Guard and reserves in history. Retired Marine Maj. Gen. Arnold Punaro chairs the 13-member commission.

The reserve components have played an increasingly important part in the global war on terror, Punaro said during an interview. Congress formed the commission on the National Guard and Reserves as part of the 2005 National Defense Authorization Act.

Punaro said Congress felt an independent group needed "to take a more fundamental look at how the reserves are organized, trained and equipped." In addition, the commission will look at future threats and requirements to combat those dangers.

Nothing concerning the reserves is out of the scope of the commission, Punaro said. The group will look at laws governing the reserve components, and key issues include roles and missions of reserve forces, capabilities, reserve component organization and structure, readiness, compensation, and benefits and funding. The commission will also examine the relationship between the active and reserve components.

The commission stood up March 1 and must draft an interim report in 90 days. The commission will deliver a final report to Congress and the defense secretary in one year. <More at: www.theconservativevoice.com/articles/article.html?id=12873>

TO THE COLOR - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Purpose
3/14 – 19/06		Mobile AL to New Orleans LA*	Veterans & Survivors March for Peace & Justice	Various Groups	Support survivors; oppose Iraq war
3/18/06		Fayetteville, NC	Bring Them Home Now Rally	Various Groups 1.252.725.4692	Rally for Peace
4/20 – 23/06		Pleasanton/Camp Parks, CA	AUSA Spring Symposium	AUSA 6 th Region	Periodic Meeting
4/25-26/06		Washington DC	Veterans March	Various Groups	VA funding

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

Note: We are a non-partisan organization that does not take a position, as an organization, on this war. We will, however, advertise all veterans' events, regardless of purpose.

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

SAVING THE FISH, NOT THE TROOPS

Douglas Feiden , Daily News Staff Writer - February 26th, 2006

Body armor that can mean the difference between life and death has been shamefully tough to find for battalions of U.S. troops on the bloodiest battlefields of Iraq.

But that hasn't stopped Congress from squandering Pentagon funds on thousands of wacky and wasteful projects that do more to protect pols' jobs than save soldiers' lives. The Defense Department Appropriations Act of 2006 was designed to oil the American war machine, pay military salaries and buy tanks, drones, destroyers and Hellfire missiles.

But the bill also doled out taxpayer grants to dog mushers in Alaska, tree-huggers in Iowa, museum curators in Texas, cranberry farmers in Wisconsin and wild-turkey hunters in the Carolinas. With no scrutiny, oversight or debate, lawmakers larded the \$458 billion spending package with a record-breaking 2,966 pork-barrel projects for their home districts at a cost of \$11.1 billion.

<More at: www.nydailynews.com/02-26-2006/news/wn_report/story/394799p-334738c.html>

LAWMAKERS CALL FOR VETS CARE TO BE INCLUDED IN IRAQ SUPPLEMENTAL

Tuesday March 7, 2006

WASHINGTON, DC – Led by their most junior and senior Members on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Congressman John Salazar (D-CO) and Congressman Lane Evans (D-IL), House Democrats today moved to prevent a repeat of last year's shameful shortfall in funding for the Department of Veterans' Affairs. In a letter sent to Speaker Hastert this morning, more than 120 House Democrats called for the inclusion of \$630 million in veterans' health care funds as part of the President's \$72.4 billion Iraq War Supplemental request:

<More, including complete text of letter and list of signers at: www.airforcetimes.com/story.php?f=1-292925-1580976.php

LAWMAKERS ADDRESS PROBLEMS WITH VA PROGRAMS

Chris Adams - Mercury News - Mar 03, 2006

WASHINGTON - Congressional leaders from both parties have begun pushing the Bush administration to boost staffing for its veterans' disability compensation program, now mired in a growing backlog of cases and beset by increasing delays. ...

"Many veterans and their survivors who are most in need of the pension program - our World War II and Korean-era veterans - have no idea that the program exists," said Rep. Lane Evans of Illinois, the top Democrat on the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, which just finished a series of hearings on the Bush administration's 2007 budget proposal for the VA.

The VA's disability compensation program sends checks to 2.7 million veterans for injuries suffered during military service. Yet high error rates, lengthy appeals, backlogs and wide regional inconsistencies mean many veterans wait years for decisions. One result, detailed by Knight Ridder: Thousands of older veterans die with their claims still pending.

Although the Bush administration expects the backlog to continue rising, its 2007 budget proposal calls for decreasing the staff that directly handles such cases - 149 fewer workers, from the current year's 6,574.

<More at: www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/news/politics/14001890.htm>

QUALITY NO LONGER 'JOB ONE' FOR VA CLAIMS PROCESSING

Shannon Hanson

In 2001, VA's backlog of disability claims alone was a staggering 421,000. Then-department secretary Anthony Principi vowed to decrease it and succeeded: The number dropped to 254,000 in 2003. But that progress is now in reverse, as the number has climbed back up to more than 368,000, as of Jan. 27, 2006.

That's not the only number to rise. The average claim processing time is 120 days (VA's original goal was 100 days or fewer), and the average appeal processing time is 622 days, 122 days over the goal of 500.

"VFW is very concerned about the timeliness and accuracy of VA claims processing," said Bill Bradshaw, director of VFW's National Veterans Service (NVS). "The Department of Veterans Affairs has encountered many obstacles in controlling and maintaining a reasonable pending workload. The increasing levels do not offer much hope in the short term."

"There is no immediate help in sight for those veterans who have or will be filing claims," said Jerry Manar, NVS deputy director. "It takes a willing administration and Congress to fund an adequate budget to make a difference, and it takes accountability at all levels of the VA to ensure that when resources are spent, it's on people and programs that will have the most positive impact on veterans." <More at: www.vfw.org/index.cfm?fa=news.magDtl&dtl=1&mid=3028>

VA Claims Breakdown	Claim Category	Jan-06	Jan-05	Change
In nearly every claims category there were more claims backlogged at the end of 2005 than there were at the end of 2004	Cases requiring a rating	365,194	342,126	23,068
	Non-rating cases	142,002	90,015	51,987
	Miscellaneous cases	40,215	41,728	(1,513)
	Total original disability claims	547,411	473,869	73,542
	Appeals (RO & BVA)	152,494	152,550	(56)
	Total disability claims	699,905	626,419	73,486
	Education (at RPOs)	113,908	92,016	21,892
	Total Claims	813,813	718,435	95,378

RO = Regional Office RPO = Regional Processing Office BVA = Board of Veterans Appeals

CLARIFIED USERRA GUIDES

New guidelines have been published for the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). According to the guide, as members of the uniformed service, employees have the following rights under USERRA:

- Military leave of absence
- Prompt reinstatement back to civilian job
- Accumulation of seniority, including pension plan benefits
- Reinstatement of health insurance, regardless of pre-existing conditions
- Training or retraining of job skills
- Protection against employer discrimination

No change has occurred in the employer sanction portion of the guidelines that I can determine [Ed.]

Source: *Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve* - T.A. www.benefitnews.com/finance/detail.cfm?id=8711

The problem is, of course, that the employer can still claim that reinstating the person to his/her job will harm the company, and the individual has no recourse but to file a complaint with the Department of Labor, who turns it over to the Department of Justice, which has **30 months** to resolve the claim. Meanwhile, the individual just might need a paycheck this Friday. Claims have gone down in the last 18 months, but there is a suspicion that it is because the individual soldier has found out from his compatriots that it just takes too long to get anything done, so why bother. [Ed.]

YOUNG WAR VETS FACE UPHILL CLIMB IN JOB MARKET

WHEC-TV, NY - Mar 07, 2006

Some of our newest veterans are dealing with one of America's oldest problems. Coming home from the battle lines and heading straight for the unemployment line. The latest Department of Labor statistics show that veterans between the ages of 20 and 24 have an unemployment rate of 15%. That's twice the rate of unemployment for non-military people in that age bracket and more than three times the national average. <More at: http://www.10nbc.com/news.asp?template=item&story_id=17989

PLEASE CLICK ON THE LINK AND READ THIS WHOLE ARTICLE

MY HUSBAND WAS NOT PROPERLY EQUIPPED FOR WAR

By Elizabeth Frederick - t r u t h o u t | Statement - 01 March 2006

Testimony provided to the House Appropriations Sub-Committee on Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs.

In May of 2004, my partner informed me his National Guard division was being mobilized to deploy to Iraq. Eight months later, his division finally deployed. I say finally because his date of deployment kept changing. They were initially scheduled to leave in October, and for whatever reason, the date kept being pushed back. While I enjoyed having him home for a longer period of time, it was mentally taxing to constantly be saying a final goodbye, only to repeat the process again month after month.

Regardless, I assumed the delays were happening because the division was ensuring everything was in order prior to deployment. I assumed those in charge were making sure everyone had proper supplies and training. With eight months of preparation, I assumed my loved one was being sent to war with everything he would need to keep him safe. That assumption could not have been further from the truth.

When I finally had the opportunity to talk to my partner, I learned about the severe lack of equipment, armored vehicles, and body armor. I learned a lot about the so-called "farmer armor" he and his men were being forced to use. I learned about the truck he was using in missions throughout northern Iraq. The truck lacked windows and bullet proof glass. The gun in the back had been welded onto an old oxygen tank. The makeshift doors would swing open unless they were secured with rope inside the cab of the truck. <More at: www.truthout.org/docs_2006/030406C.shtml>

HOW MANY DOCTOR'S OFFICES AND HOSPITALS DO THEY PASS ON THE WAY? SICK VETS IN SOUTH TEXAS TRAVEL HUNDREDS OF MILES FOR HEALTH CARE

Lynn Brezosky - The Dallas Morning News - Feb 27, 2006

Four mornings a week, two vans with government tags and volunteer drivers make circuits of the Rio Grande Valley, picking up veterans for a five-hour trip to the nearest veterans hospital in San Antonio.

They're a blessing and a sore point, these "vet vans." They're free, and invaluable to those too sick to drive or who don't have a reliable car. The veterans call weeks ahead to reserve a space, wait in parking lots with supplies of muscle relaxers and breakfast tacos, then bump along between numerous stops.

But these former military members question why a region with an estimated 45,000 to 80,000 veterans has no hospital to serve them. "When you're 75 years old, it's just too much," Dewain Manthey, who lost much of his hearing to machine gun fire during the Korean War, said of the 250-mile trip. "They're just cutting us right out. It's just a crying shame."

His wife, Christine, said the 10 beds the Veterans Administration recently commissioned at the nearby Valley Baptist Medical Center was an insult. "They've already served the country, now the country needs to serve them with quality care," she said. <More at: www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/APStories/stories/D8G0RD401.html>

SWELLING THE RANKS OF AN OLD CRISIS

Gilles Malkine - [Times Herald-Record, NY](#) - Mar 01, 2006

It was recently announced that according to Pentagon figures, more than 100,000 Middle East war veterans are likely to require mental health treatment in the years ahead. Typically, official bad news numbers are low, and the report explained that even if it's accurate, the news is probably much worse than it sounds.

The New England Journal of Medicine studied members of four U.S. combat infantry units using an anonymous survey administered to thousands of subjects, either before their deployment or three to four months after their return from combat duty in Iraq or Afghanistan. In survey responses, major depression, generalized anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder ranked 15.6 percent to 17.1 percent after duty in Iraq, 11.2 percent after duty in Afghanistan, and 9.3 percent before deployment to Iraq.

Evidence shows that when post-traumatic stress disorder is military in origin, it is usually resistant to treatment and is often considered permanent. The kicker is that only about a third of the portion of those who admit a problem will seek mental health care; many don't even realize the existence of the problem until they get home and realize they can't hold a job, maintain a relationship, control their drinking, and/or exhibit signs of a condition known as "hypervigilance."

<More at: www.recordonline.com/archive/2006/02/28/opinion-26malkine-02-28.html>

VETERANS DESERVE BETTER

The Spectrum- Utah - Feb 27, 2006

The health care system set up to help the men and women who served their country is failing. A 23-year-old veteran of Iraqi Freedom shared a story Thursday during a meeting in St. George with Veterans' Affairs officials that illustrates the point: He was told that he had to drive to Salt Lake City [300 miles away] to receive medical treatment for mental distress.

NOTE TO THE VA In case you've forgotten, there is a VA psychiatric treatment facility in Las Vegas, NV only 130 miles from St. George, UT; it is the Arville House Psychiatric Day Treatment Center, 1501 South Arville, Las Vegas, NV 89102 (702) 259-4646. Also, there is a hospital with two psychiatrists on staff right in St George. It took me 5 minutes on Google and Mapquest to figure this out, and I don't have a staff of thousands. [Ed.]

When will those who've served this country so valiantly receive relief and the benefits they repeatedly have been promised? The Veterans Benefits Administration has experienced problems with its claims-processing operations with large backlogs and long waits for decisions with which veterans should have few complications.

Compensation and pensions, education subsidies, home loans, life insurance, vocational rehabilitation and employment, dependency and indemnity compensation are all benefits veterans may qualify for but are finding it difficult to actually receive. Why?

One issue is the complexity of the process. The application for compensation and/or pension alone is 26 pages long.

Need more evidence? The average time for processing initial compensation from a disability claim in 1999 was 205 days, according to testimony taken May 18, 2000, from Cynthia A. Bascetta, U.S. General Accounting Office director of health care. When veterans appeal decisions made by regional offices, the average time spent to resolve the appeals is even longer: An average of 745 days. That was nearly six years ago, and the wait time has not improved dramatically. Just ask a veteran.

<More at: <http://www.thespectrum.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060226/OPINION01/602260321/1014>>

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WHEC-TV, NY - Mar 07, 2006

Some of our newest veterans are dealing with one of America's oldest problems. Coming home from the battle lines and heading straight for the unemployment line. The latest Department of Labor statistics show that veterans between the ages of 20 and 24 have an unemployment rate of 15%. That's twice the rate of unemployment for non-military people in that age bracket and more than three times the national average. <More at: www.10nbc.com/news.asp?template=item&story_id=17989>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

NATIONAL GUARD (IN FEDERAL STATUS) AND RESERVE MOBILIZED AS OF MARCH 8, 2006

This week, the Air Force announced an increase in the number of reservists on active duty in support of the partial mobilization, while the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard numbers decreased. The net collective result is 691 fewer reservists mobilized than last week.

At any given time, services may mobilize some units and individuals while demobilizing others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. Total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 99,229; Navy Reserve, 5,262; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 7,578; Marine Corps Reserve, 6,957; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 408. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel, who have been mobilized, to 119,434, 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/Mar2006/d20060308ngr.pdf>.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE THURSDAY MARCH 9, 2006

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	2,306
WOUNDED US [No DoD UPDATE SINCE 28 FEB] ≥	17,004
KILLED UK	103
KILLED OTHER COALITION	103
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	600
KILLED CONTRACTORS	311
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 34,278
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 37,589
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 139,262

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US	277
WOUNDED/INJURED US	685
KILLED COALITION	68
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	393
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 8,619
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS	≥ 3,525
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS	32,034

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/

AFTERTHOUGHTS

NOW THAT'S THE KIND OF SUPPORT WE LOVE TO SEE – LECTURES ON FITNESS! DEPARTMENTS GET FIT TOGETHER

by Dennis Ryan - Pentagon staff writer - March 10, 2006

It is hardly a secret that many Americans are overweight. What is less well known is the fact Veterans are more overweight than the general populace and this larger girth means veterans are three times more likely to suffer from diabetes than the average American.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson and the Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael O. Leavitt want to do something about these statistics. Feb. 27 they announced a new joint initiative -- Healthier U.S. Veterans -- during a news briefing at the National Press Club.

The program aims to promote smarter eating habits and physical activity among veterans and their families. The VA will kick off the program at 40 of their medical centers this spring, with help from Health and Human Services grants in a program titled "Steps to a HealthierUS." <More at: http://www.dcmilitary.com/army/pentagram/10_60/features/40143-1.html>

DOES IT BOTHER ANYBODY THAT THE FORT MYER PAPER (ABOVE) HAS THE SAME NAME AS THE WICCAN SYMBOL BUT THE VETERANS' ADMINISTRATION WON'T LET A WIDOW PUT THAT SYMBOL ON HER HUSBAND'S HEADSTONE?

"The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and its National Cemetery Administration prohibit graphics on government-furnished headstones or markers other than those they have approved as "emblems of belief." More than 30 such emblems are allowed on gravestones and markers in veterans cemeteries, from the Christian cross to the Buddhist wheel of righteousness. A symbol exists for atheists, too." <More at: <http://www.armytimes.com/story.php?f=1-292925-1584012.php>>

NOTICE

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

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

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

EXTRAS FOR YOUR USE:

I GUESS WHAT FROSTS ME ABOUT THESE FIGURES IS THAT WE DEMAND THAT MOST VETERANS BE IN POVERTY OR AT NO MORE THAN 110% OF POVERTY IN ORDER TO GET FULL ASSISTANCE. WE SHOULD BE ASHAMED!

Financial Income Thresholds for VA Health Care Benefits

Financial Test Year 2006	Veteran with:	Free VA prescriptions and travel benefits (maximum allowable rate):	Free VA Health Care: (0% service connected (noncompensable) and nonservice-connected veterans only):	Medical expenses deduction (5% of maximum allowable pension rate from previous year):
	0 dependents	\$10,579 or less	\$26,902 or less	\$508
	1 dependent	\$13,855 or less	\$32,285 or less	\$665
	2 dependents	\$15,661 or less	\$34,091 or less	\$752
	3 dependents	\$17,467 or less	\$34,480 or less	\$839
	4 dependents	\$19,273 or less	\$37,703 or less	\$926
	For each additional dependent add:	\$1,806	\$1,806	\$87
	Medicare Deductible: \$952		Income & Asset net worth: \$80,000	

VA/VHA/CBO/HEC: MT Thresholds

Revised: December 2005

2005 HHS POVERTY GUIDELINES

Persons in Family Unit	48 Contiguous States and D.C.	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$ 9,570	\$11,950	\$11,010
2	12,830	16,030	14,760
3	16,090	20,110	18,510
4	19,350	24,190	22,260
5	22,610	28,270	26,010
6	25,870	32,350	29,760
7	29,130	36,430	33,510
8	32,390	40,510	37,260
For each additional person, add	3,260	4,080	3,750

SOURCE: *Federal Register*, Vol. 70, No. 33, February 18, 2005, pp. 8373-8375

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