

Sound Off!



Vol. I, No 25 The Newsletter of VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, Inc.

“Veterans standing up for each other”

25 July 2006

First Call - THEME OF THE ISSUE AND/OR CLIPS & QUOTES

On truth -

“Unthinking respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth.” – Albert Einstein

On 21 May 2005 your board had a long discussion on what the name of our organization should be. We voted and settled on “Veterans United For Truth”.

Truth is not an absolute – new facts can be found to disprove what we originally knew to be true. Nor is it relative – you can’t have your truth and my truth if we both own the same facts.

What we can have is a variance in interpretation or understanding of the facts, but we cannot have a factual variance in truth. We can be wrong about what we assert to be the truth, and we can be right even if others disagree; but the truth and the facts stand independent of our interpretation and our understanding.

“The truth is incontrovertible: malice may attack it, ignorance may deride it, but in the end, there it is. – Winston Churchill

We try to present the facts as they present themselves to us – and have tried also to cite when we were estimating or even guessing.

The truth is sometimes hard to determine; often it is hard to swallow. Political or ideological position cannot get in the way. We can both praise and condemn the actions relative to the current wars as long as we stick to the facts. Because of this, we can tell some stories better than others. We must strive for factualness, and fairness.

We choose our positions based solely on the effect of an event or a decision or a policy on our target constituency, the veterans of all periods and those who love and support them.

We have a Five-Point Philosophy and post it on our [website](#). That statement is our lodestar. What can we say about that statement that we know to be true about our world in general after one year?

1. *War only if our nation or its true allies are in grave danger.*

We are one-for-one. We were attacked and had the promise of more attacks by Al Qa’ida, and we went to war against those who sheltered them. We were never in danger of an attack from Iraq, and there is no evidence that Iraq planned to attack anyone else.

2. *Strict adherence to Article I, Section 8 - “The Congress shall have power ... To declare war ...”*

We are zero for two, since no declaration of war ever ushered forth from Congress. Instead, Congress gave up its rights and obligations under Article I and handed them over to the Executive. At each new test of Article I they let the Executive do as it pleases.

3. *A decision for war is a decision for immediate and meaningful national sacrifice which must include relief, wherever possible, of the grave burden on the troops and their families.*

Out of 299,285,958 of us, 22,446 are either dead or wounded. If each of them come from a family of 3.5 and half are married and half of those have one child, then counting fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, wives, and children we have 157,122 who have sacrificed for a count of ½ of 1% [only an estimate based on conventional wisdom].

Congress will not take on the issue of national sacrifice. Of almost 300 “veterans” bills in Congress, only a handful have made their way out of committee in the 109th Congress, which is almost done.

4. *Affirm the Powell Doctrine - troops must be totally prepared, must be sent in overwhelming numbers, and must know the truth of what they are fighting for, what constitutes success, and how they will exit.*

Zero. The Afghan and the Iraqi wars are in chaos. There are still not enough armored vehicles, body armor, even ammunition, as reported by the troops on the ground. Airmen and sailors are being used in ground combat positions due to the lack of soldiers and marines to do those jobs. More troops are being sent quietly to increase the numbers. No precise conditions have been set for knowing when the mission is complete or when the war is over.

5. *Perpetual, timely, quality care for those who have borne the direct burden - the troops and their families - inclusion of these costs in the initial cost of war as part of the continuing national sacrifice.*

VA hospitals were to take the increase in returning wounded, but are being underfunded. Funding for TRICARE is being cut away, and facilities designed for veterans support are being closed or consolidated.

The unemployment rate for 20-24 year-old veterans [@45% of the enlisted force] is 11.2%; 3 % higher than their civilian counterparts.

There are still pay discrepancies; soldiers return to combat after only a few months at home; education benefits are being denied. Reservists and guardsmen are losing their jobs and businesses with little effort in enforcing the laws that should protect them.

So, our new national baseline after this year is lower than the old one. We are a long way from any meaningful or substantive change. Let’s hope for a better year ahead – and more truth.

“If you tell the truth you don’t have to remember anything.” – Mark Twain

Reveille - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

wake up! spread the news!

MEMBERSHIP IS OPEN, FREE, AND VERY WORTHWHILE! GET YOUR FELLOW VETERANS, AND VETERANS' FAMILY MEMBERS TO JOIN VUFT! WE ARE BEGINNING TO BE HEARD, AND WE NEED YOU TO HELP US GET THE MESSAGE OUT. IF EACH OF US WOULD BRING IN ONE NEW MEMBER EVERY MONTH, WHAT AN IMPACT WE COULD HAVE!

check out the website!

PLEASE CHECK THE WEBSITE AT WWW.VUFT.ORG. CHECK OUT THE "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.

Assembly - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

Be a member If you are getting this newsletter and have not yet joined, please go to our website and join. Membership is free. The more our numbers grow, the greater voice we have. It shouldn't be that way, but it is, so join us and help us take the fight to Congress and the state legislatures. Please encourage your friends who either are veterans, are related to veterans, or who support veterans' causes to join VUFT, Inc.

Supporting the cause If you wish to donate to our work you may now do so via PayPal or Visa on our website "Join" page. Every little bit helps. We are a 501(c)(3): your donations are deductible on your federal taxes. You can also buy our handsome pins using the same method.

If you wish to volunteer your services to the organization, please contact the Chair at rhandy@vuft.org or the Vice Chair at scook@vuft.org. Watch for details at www.vuft.org

Mail call - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS

No letters this issue

RECALL - FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATORS

Committee passes omnibus bill to improve benefits for veterans

H.R. 3082, as amended, the Veterans Small Business and Memorial Affairs Act of 2006 - July 13, 2006

Washington, D.C. — Today, the full House Committee on Veterans' Affairs marked up and passed H.R. 3082, as amended, the Veterans Small Business and Memorial Affairs Act of 2006. Among other things, the bill would increase benefits for America's veterans by; establishing the annual contracting goals for VA to include a greater number of veteran owned small businesses, clarifying the rules regarding contracts, prohibiting bonus payments to senior executives who do not meet veteran and disabled veteran contracting goals, and provisions to extend veteran business status to the spouses when the veteran dies. The bill will also make permanent the Secretary's authority to furnish a government headstone or marker for veterans who are interred in a marked grave at a private cemetery, set to expire December 1, 2006.

Some of the notable improvements that our veterans will benefit from within this bill include:

Small business -

- Incentives for the VA to award more contracts to veteran and disabled veteran owned small businesses.
- Clarify veteran small business competition rules for contracts worth less than \$5 million.
- Authorize continued status as a veteran or disabled veteran-owned small business by a surviving spouse for a period of 10 years following the death of the veteran or disabled veteran.
- Require annual performance reviews of senior VA procurement officials to include assessment of efforts to meet veteran contracting goals and prohibit award of performance bonuses to those senior officials whose organizations within VA do not meet veteran or disabled veteran-owned business contracting goals.

Education -

- Reinstate education benefits to National Guard members who receive benefits under Chapter 35 who have been forced to discontinue a course of education due to being called to duty.

- Exempt federal, state and local government institutions from the rule that requires a non-accredited education program to have a pro-rata refund policy.
- Extend authorization for work-study positions located at VA cemeteries, state veterans homes, and State Approving Agencies through June 30, 2007.

Veterans' Employment and Training -

- Require the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) to establish professional qualification guidelines for Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPS) and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVER).
- Require States to develop a licensing and certification program within two years after date of enactment for veterans as a condition to receive a grant from VETS.
- Clarify that part-time employment of DVOPS/LVERs is half-time employment.
- Require that all DVOPS/LVERs hired after date of enactment successfully complete training by the National Veterans Training Institute within three years of appointment.
- Authorize a 5-year demonstration project to allow the Assistant Secretary of Labor for VETS to enter into contracts with non-governmental entities to carry out placement services in high-unemployment areas using unobligated funds and require GAO to report on the demonstration project.
- Establish a demonstration project that would: authorize the Secretary of Labor to identify not less than 10 military occupational specialties that would lead to civilian credentialing within an industry that has a critical shortage of employees or that is a high growth industry; require the Secretary to work with States and industries to identify the civilian credentialing requirements within each State and industry to reduce the barriers for servicemembers; require an annual report to Congress describing the efforts and results of the previous year towards credentialing services; terminate the authorization of the demonstration project on September 30, 2009; authorize appropriations of \$1,000,000 for each of the fiscal years 2007 through 2009.

* The Committee expects to take H.R. 3082, as amended, to the floor the week of July 24, 2006.

RETREAT – NEWS

U.S. Military Suffers Equipment & Base Shortfalls

Diane M. Grassi - Jul 12, 2006

For the last quarter of 2006 United States Army bases stateside face a funding deficit of \$530 million while troops active in Iraq and Afghanistan will not see the promised replacement levels of military equipment previously committed. Additionally, payroll for active-duty troops is short \$1.4 billion while the Army Reserve and National Guard face a \$500 million deficiency.

... President Bush signed the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terrorism and Hurricane Recovery 2006 on June 15, 2006, in the amount of \$94.5 billion for such emergency spending. Although it provides the Department of Defense with \$66 billion, most of it is allocated for military expenditures for the ongoing costs of the War in Iraq and Afghanistan. <More at: www.veteransforamerica.org/index.cfm/Page/Article/ID/7494>

More Troops Headed for Iraq

Associated Press | July 22, 2006

WASHINGTON - The Pentagon is moving ahead with scheduled troop deployments to Iraq next month as the U.S. military struggles to gain control of the escalating violence in Baghdad, according to a senior defense official.

The decision caps weeks of internal discussions about whether to delay or cancel the deployment of any units, which would have signaled an accelerated withdrawal of U.S. troops. It also underscores the difficulties in quelling the sectarian fighting and reflects remarks by the top U.S. commander in Iraq that he may shift more soldiers into Baghdad.

The military's current sentiment is to keep the status quo in Iraq, rather than moving toward a withdrawal that might be ill-advised considering the violence between the Sunnis and Shiites, the senior defense official said.

<More at: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,106579,00.html

White House Cancels Vet ID Monitoring Money

Gregg Keizer, TechWeb Technology News - July 18, 2006

The White House on Tuesday withdrew its request for \$160.5 million to fund a promised free credit monitoring service for veterans whose names and personal information was on a stolen laptop. Rod Portman, the director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), canceled the June request in a letter to House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), the Associated Press reported Tuesday afternoon. The money isn't needed, Portman told the Speaker, because the laptop has been recovered and the FBI has concluded that there was little chance the data on it had been accessed.

Tuesday, however, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a last round of hearings before a markup of a bill that would, among other things, fund services to vets whose data was on the laptop, including credit monitoring, credit alerts, and insurance against financial loss. <More at: www.techweb.com/wire/190500784>

Guard Leaders Say Policies Must Change

Associated Press | July 20, 2006

SAN ANTONIO - The nation's laws and policies aren't changing fast enough to reflect the increasing demands on citizen soldiers, top commanders of the National Guard and reserves told an independent commission Wednesday.

"I think we're not changing and shaping our forces for the threats that are out there today," said Vice Admiral John Cotton, chief of the Navy Reserve.

The 13-member Commission on the National Guard and Reserves was formed by Congress to investigate how well the units are equipped and organized. It began a yearlong review in March to address needs for future roles and missions. Lt. Gen. Craig McKinley, director of the Air National Guard, raised the possibility of a draft if needs are not met.

"What is the cost if we don't support our Guard and Reserve?" McKinley said during discussions about funding. "I believe it would be a debate over conscription." McKinley, however, said his force of 106,800 is being funded at adequate levels to remain operational. <More at: www.guardian.co.uk/world/latest/story/0,,5962404,00.html>

Price tag to rebuild Iraq rises by \$50b

Bryan Bender - Globe Staff - July 19, 2006

Auditor says US to pay most of tab

WASHINGTON -- The new Iraqi government will need about \$50 billion in additional aid to rebuild the country's oil facilities and electrical grids to prewar levels, the US government's top auditor told Congress yesterday. And he warned that the United States is likely to have to pay the vast majority of it. The funds would be on top of the roughly \$30 billion that the United States has already committed to rebuild the war-torn country since the March 2003 invasion -- most of which has been spent. The estimate is also in addition to the steadily rising cost of the American military deployment in Iraq, which has topped \$300 billion, according to the latest government figures.

The estimate is the first full accounting of Iraqi reconstruction needs by US Comptroller General David M. Walker, the nation's top fiscal watchdog. The Bush administration has not offered any recent estimates of Iraqi reconstruction expenses and had given no indication that costs could grow so significantly. The administration's last request for rebuilding dollars, approved in early June, was for \$1.5 billion.

<More at: www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2006/07/19/price_tag_to_rebuild_iraq_rises_by_50b/>

Don't forget that other war

Welcome to "Camp Hell"

Kim Barker - Chicago Tribune

MUSA QALA BASE, Afghanistan — Nobody waves at the soldiers here. Children do not crowd around the Humvees, asking for pens and candy, as they do in the rest of Afghanistan. Even the girls throw rocks at passing U.S. military helicopters.

U.S. troops set up this base in southwestern Helmand province in mid-June to fight insurgents, part of the largest military operation since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001. This area, virtually abandoned by the government for years, is probably the most hostile place for foreign troops in all of Afghanistan. Here, all government enemies have a comfortable home — the opium poppy farmers, the drug runners, the Taliban. Everyone else is scared.

The only Afghan visitors to the new base have either tried to attack it or complained about it. Some soldiers refer to the nearest large village, Musa Qala, as Taliban Town. Many are resentful of locals who pretend the Taliban does not exist, who refuse to help. <More at: www.e-ariana.com/ariana/eariana.nsf/aa8e81dc17f7b0eb87256c030066e73b/1addf0f5de38dac7872571b00043f436?OpenDocument>

Afghanistan Close to Anarchy, Warns General

Richard Norton-Taylor - The Guardian UK - 22 July 2006

NATO commander's view in stark contrast to ministers'. Forces short of equipment and 'running out of time'.

The most senior British military commander in Afghanistan yesterday described the situation in the country as "close to anarchy" with feuding foreign agencies and unethical private security companies compounding problems caused by local corruption.

The stark warning came from Lieutenant General David Richards, head of NATO's international security force in Afghanistan, who warned that western forces there were short of equipment and were "running out of time" if they were going to meet the expectations of the Afghan people.

The assumption within NATO countries had been that the environment in Afghanistan after the defeat of the Taliban in 2002 would be benign, Gen Richards said. "That is clearly not the case," he said yesterday. He referred to disputes between tribes crossing the border with Pakistan, and divisions between religious and secular factions cynically manipulated by "anarcho-warlords".

Corrupt local officials were fuelling the problem and NATO's provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan were sending out conflicting signals, Gen Richards told a conference at the Royal United Services Institute in London. "The situation is close to anarchy," he said, referring in particular to what he called "the lack of unity between different agencies".

He described "poorly regulated private security companies" as unethical and "all too ready to discharge firearms". NATO forces in Afghanistan were short of equipment, notably aircraft, but also of medical evacuation systems and life-saving equipment. <More at: www.guardian.co.uk/afghanistan/story/0,,1826479,00.html>

US sees three more years in building Afghan army

By Will Dunham | July 13, 2006

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - It will take three more years for the U.S.-trained Afghan army, intended to assume security responsibilities now shouldered by foreign forces in Afghanistan, to reach the planned goal of 70,000 soldiers, a U.S. commander said on Thursday.

Army Maj. Gen. Robert Durbin, who heads the U.S. effort to train and equip Afghan government security forces, said the national army numbers "a little bit over 30,000," and that it is growing at a rate of 1,000 per month, with a plan to reach 70,000 in roughly three years. <More at: <http://go.reuters.com/newsArticle.jhtml?type=topNews&storyID=12838033&src=rss/topNews>>

Tuskegee Airmen Observe 65th Anniversary

By Donna Miles - American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, July 19, 2006 – Sixty-five years after the Defense Department launched a program to train the first black military pilots and aircrews, veterans of the Tuskegee Airmen say they're proud of the barriers they helped break down and the example they set for today's servicemembers. <More at: www.defenselink.mil/news/Jul2006/20060719_5696.html>

To the Color - GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Purpose
8/10-8/13		Seattle, WA – place TBD	National Convention	Veterans for Peace	Periodic Meeting

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 advertise all veterans' events, regardless of purpose.

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

Skelton: Many signs of trouble for military

Rick Maze ARMY TIMES - July 12, 2006

Military forces are beginning to suffer from the strain of extended deployments to Iraq without enough money or force structure, says the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee. Rep. Ike Skelton, a long-time critic of the current force structure that he says is too small, said Wednesday there are many signs of trouble. The Army, he said, is not able to pay some utility bills, some defense workers are on the unemployment lines and equipment readiness is slipping to "historic lows," Skelton said in a speech on the House floor. <More at: www.armytimes.com/story.php?f=1-292925-1947424.php>

Military Confirms Pre-deployment Training Failures

Thomas E. Ricks - Washington Post Staff Writer - July 8, 2006

The U.S. military officer overseeing the investigation into 24 civilian killings in Haditha, Iraq, has concluded that Marine leadership failed multiple times, including in pre-deployment training, in the tone set by commanders, and in how information was reported up the chain of command, defense officials said. Army Lt. Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli, the No. 2 officer in Iraq, found that commanders and staff at the regimental and division levels were negligent in how they conveyed orders about how to deal with Iraqi civilians and also in how they responded to conflicting reports they received from units about the Haditha incident, the officials said. <More at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/08/AR2006070800566.html>

Young veterans' new battle: the job front

Christina Rexrode - July 15, 2006 - St Petersburg Times

Many 20- to 24-year-old veterans returning from overseas are struggling to find work. In recent years, the unemployment rate has soared for vets in that age group, while non-veterans the same age are doing better finding jobs.

Military veterans, many companies will tell you, make great hires. They're hardworking, resourceful and respectful. And then there's the patriotic undercurrent in hiring someone who served our country. But the high unemployment rate for the youngest veterans — nationally, 15.6 percent in 2005 — indicates some are falling through the cracks after coming home from tours overseas. Moreover, many young veterans who work feel stuck in jobs that are demeaning or don't pay them what they're worth. <More at: www.sptimes.com/2006/07/15/Business/Young_veterans_new_b.shtml>

War veterans denied GI Bill benefits

Ron Martz - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution - 07/09/06

SUMMERVILLE — Andy Rowe thought he had life after the Army pretty well figured out before he came home from eight months in Afghanistan in November 2003. An Army reservist since high school, Rowe, 27, planned to serve out the remaining four months of his military obligation in the inactive Reserve, get his honorable discharge and then use his GI Bill education benefits to go to college, just as his father did more than 30 years ago.

But Rowe soon realized that, despite his time in a combat zone, he didn't qualify for those education benefits unless he remained in the Reserves or Guard.

It's the same for tens of thousands of National Guard and Army Reserve troops mobilized since 9/11 — the largest deployment of reservists since World War II. <More at: www.truthout.org/docs_2006/071106Z.shtml>

a view from one community that is becoming familiar

Is this any way to treat our veterans?

Dick Hughes - July 22, 2006 – Salem, OR Statesman Journal

America's military men and women got used to that during their service years. They just didn't know it would continue decades later, when they tried to get medical treatment through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

It starts when they try to make an appointment for the VA clinic on Mission and 17th streets SE in Salem. The clinic has been open nearly five years, but don't bother looking in the Salem phone book for a number. Vets have to figure out that appointments are handled through the Portland VA. Besides, the Salem clinic only handles the simplest requests — primary care or mental-health appointments. Anything involving a lab test, an X-ray or a specialist requires a trip to the Portland VA hospital.[50 miles away] <More at: www.statesmanjournal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060722/BLOGS02/60722029/1046/OPINION>

And from another community

Many returning veterans fail to seek help

Robert Kalinowski - Citizens' Voice [NE Penn.] - 07/23/2006

When Joe May returned from a yearlong deployment to Iraq last year, he had problems adjusting to civilian life. Uncharacteristically frustrated, edgy and depressed, the Dunmore man took advice from his Vietnam veteran father and sought help. He enrolled in a program at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Plains Township, was diagnosed with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and received the care he needed. But May appears to be the exception to the rule.

Whether they don't know help is available or simply choose to deal with their problems on their own, many returning veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan aren't following May's lead, according to officials at the local hospital.

... Only a handful of soldiers showed up at a get-together hosted by the VA hospital last week to advise a wave of returning soldiers — including approximately 500 from the Scranton-based 109th Mechanized Infantry who returned home in late June — of their options.

"One problem is a lot of the guys are still in the Guard and they are afraid to get labeled (as having a mental or physical problem)," said May, who resigned from the Guard last month after his six-year term was complete.

<More at: www.citizensvoice.com/site/index.cfm?newsid=16956885&BRD=2259&PAG=461&dept_id=455154&rft=8>

meanwhile these guys argue about bureaucratic process! Just pay the bill and worry about your internal problems later!

Retirees Due Back Pay

Tom Philpott | July 14, 2006

100,000 Disabled Retirees Due Retroactive Pay

Retired Army SSgt. Daniel F. Purinton, 71, has argued for almost two years that the Department of Veterans Affairs owes him an additional \$8044. Purinton said the underpayment occurred as DoD and VA officials implemented a complex series of laws, starting in 2003, to end for many retirees the ban on "concurrent receipt" of both military retirement and VA disability compensation.

Purinton is right, but he also is far from alone. Back pay is owed to roughly 20,000 recipients of Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) and 78,000 recipients of Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP). Total back pay owed is said to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Within the next two weeks, Defense officials hope to resolve final details with the VA on how their underpayments will be calculated, how processing costs will be shared between departments, how retirees will be notified and when most of these retirees can expect to be paid. <More at: www.military.com/features/0,15240,105439,00.html?ESRC=eb.nl>

Veterans court swamped with disability claims appeals

Dennis Camire - Army Times - Jul 17, 2006

Veterans appealing disability claims and other issues may soon be waiting much longer for decisions. The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims' case backlog has more than doubled in the past two years to 5,800. If the trend continues, veterans could be waiting more than three years for a decision from the court, said Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. Currently, it takes a year, on average, for a case to go through the court.

"With thousands of wounded service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, we must ensure that our veterans will receive timely decisions on their claims," Craig said at a committee hearing on the issue.

For Irving M. Levin, 83, a World War II veteran appealing a disability claim decision by the Veterans Affairs Department to the court for the third time, time is running out. Levin, a former U.S. Army Air Forces flight engineer who lives in Stuart, Fla., was hit by a flying chunk of metal when his B-29 bomber crash-landed on Iwo Jima in April 1945. Levin, who originally filed his disability claim in 1988, said his injury led to a spinal problem requiring three back surgeries.

"I've had nothing but grief from this thing (VA disability claim process)," said Levin, who uses a walker and a wheelchair to get around. "It's got to the point that it is running my life."

Each time Levin's case has come to the appeals court, it has been sent back to the VA for more development, medical opinions and clarifications. Each step has required months or years. Irving said it seems like the VA is waiting for him to give up or die. But, he said, "I'm not a quitter." <More at: www.armytimes.com/story.php?f=1-292925-1950681.php>

National veterans health official pledges improved access to care

Sheryl Kornman - Tucson Citizen - 7.14.2006

In spite of years-long waits for medical disability claims to be processed, a Veterans Affairs official speaking here said the agency's health-care record-keeping system is "the gold standard for health care." These medical records are used to support claims of medical disability by veterans.

Joseph Williams, the VA's new assistant deputy undersecretary for operations and management in the Veterans Health Administration in Washington, D.C., said the system's electronic medical records system is key to providing accurate diagnostic information to doctors and veterans and to "enhancing recovery" with proper follow-up care. He said the VA's health providers are moving from a maintenance model to a recovery model that will aim to get veterans back to a normal life, to improve their treatment and rehabilitation so they can work, enjoy their families and recreational activities.

The number of disability claims that have been denied by the VA and end up in the U.S. Court of Appeals has doubled in the past two years, Gannett News Service reported yesterday. Veterans appealing decisions may now face a wait of more than three years for a court date, said the chairman of the Senate Veteran's Affairs Committee.

<More at: www.tucsoncitizen.com/daily/local/19152.php>

Redos make coming home a little easier for some soldiers

By Lew Sichelman, United Feature Syndicate

July 16, 2006

WASHINGTON — It's hard to think of Jay Briseno as lucky. After all, he is among the most severely injured soldiers to return from Iraq alive.

In June 2003, Briseno was shot in the back of the neck while serving as a civil-affairs specialist with his Army Reserve unit in a Baghdad marketplace. His spinal cord was severely damaged, leaving him paralyzed from the chin down. The 22-year-old veteran from Manassas, Va., has lapsed into a coma and has had two heart attacks. And three years after being shot in the line of duty, he still requires a ventilator to help him breathe and a feeding tube for some of his nourishment.

But he is alive and he's now living in a house that has been extensively modified to accommodate his needs. Thanks to [Serving Those Who Serve](#), an initiative aimed at attending to the housing needs of critically injured military personnel returning from the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, the doorways in Briseno's parents' house have been widened, the bathroom has been rebuilt to provide wheelchair accessibility to the shower, the electrical service has been upgraded, and a backup generator has been installed. <More at: www.latimes.com/classified/realestate/printedition/la-re-lew16jul16_1_2058443.story>

Taps - Passings and War Statistics

George S. Prugh, 86; He Got POW Status for Foes in Vietnam War

Retired Army Maj. Gen. George S. Prugh, 86, who was credited with helping to save the lives of American prisoners of war in Vietnam, died July 6 in Moraga, CA, of complications from Parkinson's disease.

In his role as an Army lawyer, Prugh persuaded the South Vietnamese to grant POW status to Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers during the war. The U.S.-backed designation gave the enemy combatants international protections and set humane standards for their treatment under the Geneva Conventions.

"Prugh realized that if the South Vietnamese continued to treat the Viet Cong as criminals and dealt with them in their own way, there was no way captured Americans would survive," said retired Col. Fred Borch, a U.S. Army historian,

As the Army's top lawyer in the early 1970s, Prugh stood up to President Nixon. The case involved the 1968 My Lai massacre in which U.S. soldiers, under the command of Lt. William Calley, killed many South Vietnamese civilians. In a military trial, Calley was found guilty; Nixon wanted to decide Calley's appeal but Prugh held firm that the president did not have the authority to make that decision.

War Photographer Catherine Leroy Dies

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (AP) -- Catherine Leroy, the French-born photojournalist whose stark images of battle helped tell the story of the Vietnam War in the pages of Life magazine and other publications, has died. She was 60. Leroy died of cancer early Saturday at St. John's Health Center in Santa Monica, said the attending physician, Dr. Jerome Helman.

Leroy was 21 years old in 1966 when she took a one-way ticket to Saigon to document American troops in Vietnam. A year later she became the only accredited journalist to participate in a combat parachute jump, joining the 173rd Airborne in Operation Junction City. In 1968, during the Tet Offensive, Leroy was captured by the North Vietnamese Army. She managed to talk her way out and emerged with images of the North Vietnamese Army in action that were used for a Life magazine cover. In 1972, Leroy shot and directed "Operation Last Patrol," a film about Ron Kovic and the anti-war Vietnam veterans.

Leroy co-authored the book "God Cried" with Tony Clifton, about the siege of West Beirut by the Israeli army in 1982.

National Guard and Reserve Mobilized July 6, 2006

This week, the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps announced an increase in the number of reservists on active duty in support of the partial mobilization, while the Coast Guard number decreased. The net collective result is 1,842 more 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 84,128; Navy Reserve, 4,916; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 7,132; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,456; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 320. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel, who have been mobilized, to 103,952, 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/Jul2006/d20060706ngr.pdf.

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE MONDAY 24 JULY 2006

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

KILLED US	2,567
WOUNDED US [EST. NO DoD UPDATE SINCE 7/1]	≥18,988
KILLED UK	114
KILLED OTHER COALITION	114
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	645
KILLED CONTRACTORS	341
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY	≥ 34,887
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS	≥ 43,744
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS	≥ 193,000+

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

KILLED US	321
WOUNDED/INJURED US	876
KILLED COALITION	93
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	453
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

Nation's Elite AWOL From Military

Joe Galloway | June 23, 2006

A new book expands on a familiar subject: the absence of America's elite and its governing class -- and their children -- from the ranks of our nation's military.

The book is "AWOL: The Unexcused Absence of America's Upper Classes from Military Service -- and How It Hurts Our Country." Its authors, Kathy Roth-Douquet and Frank Schaeffer, didn't embrace the military ethos so much as it embraced them.

Roth-Douquet describes herself as a former agitator, feminist, Ivy Leaguer and Clintonite. She just happened to fall in love with a Marine pilot and married him, she told me, thinking that within a year she would "turn him around" and get him out of uniform.

Instead she found herself falling in love with the military life, so much so that this year, when her husband made the list for promotion to colonel, she was delighted because it meant they could have a few more years on active duty.

Schaeffer, a novelist, painter and filmmaker, saw his plans for his youngest son -- "top college, good grades, smart jobs ..." -- go awry when his son enlisted in the Marines after he finished high school.

It almost goes without saying that both authors swiftly discovered that in their circles, they alone had personal connections to today's military.

As recently as 1956, 400 members of Princeton's graduating class went on to serve in the military. In 2004, nine graduates did so. Harvard, Yale, Brown and other elite universities don't even allow Reserve Officer Training Courses on their campuses.

In the years after World War II, virtually every member of Congress was a veteran of military service. By 1971, three-quarters of the members had worn the uniform. Today, only a third of the 535 members of the Senate and the House of Representatives have served.

During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had sons serving in uniform. Today's political leaders and the rest of the country's elite don't feel the same obligation to send their children to serve in harm's way.

Military recruiting has suffered as a consequence. Parents in some better neighborhoods demand that recruiters not be allowed to visit the schools their children attend, and that they not be given their names and phone numbers.

It's enough of a shame that less than 1 percent of the 300 million Americans are charged with protecting and defending all the rest of us. They and their families do all the fighting and dying and suffering and sacrificing for all of us.

Recruiters and their services are forced, as a consequence, to reach down rather than up, and to offer enlistment bonuses of as much as \$40,000 to entice young men and women to accept the burdens of service.

The Army, in particular, has been forced to accept more recruits who score in the lowest quarter of the military's aptitude testing and has set up programs to bring in high school dropouts. This at the same time that Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld is determined to "transform" the Army into a smaller force that relies more on high technology and speed.

Roth-Douquet and Schaeffer argue that there are three potentially dangerous consequences to this civil-military divide:

* Not having veterans throughout the decision-making process damages the country's ability to make sound decisions on the use of our military. Without them, the political leadership has less understanding of the true cost of war and who pays that price.

* Any division between the military and the rest of us weakens the country and, the authors argue, increases the risk that the military "will be over-used and under-led and that support will run out fast for any project that becomes a political liability."

* Finally, "When those who benefit most from living in a country contribute the least to its defense and those who benefit least are asked to pay the ultimate price, something happens to the soul of that country."

Both authors believe that the answer lies not in drafting America's young people into service but in asking them to serve, challenging them to serve, asking them to take an ownership of freedom and democracy that, in the case of many of the elite, their parents weren't willing to accept.

As Roth-Douquet told me: If the military life could turn around a dyed-in-the-wool East Coast liberal like her, there must be something there that makes all the sacrifices worthwhile.

<http://www.military.com/opinion/0,15202,102491,00.html>

Joe Galloway is a decorated war correspondent from the Vietnam War era – a civilian who was awarded the Bronze Star for valor for his actions at the battle of the Ia Drang Valley, November 1965, the only civilian award of that medal during the Viet Nam War. He is the co-author with Lt. Gen Hal Moore, USA (Ret), of the account of that battle, "We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young".

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

Add-on – one person's very good opinion

Are We Really Supporting Our Troops?

The Australian government, through its [Vietnam Veterans Counseling Service \(VVCS\)](#), offers their returning troops -- along with each immediate family member, including partners, children, widows, and even some ex-partners -- complimentary reintegration services that include individual, couple, and family counseling services as well as a plethora of other programs to help their troops fold back into society. Are we doing as much?

Many military families (especially those who've suffered losses due to PTSD-related suicide) say that it's wrong to expect that individual troops should have to seek out help on their own when they're floundering. They say it's hard enough to get their loved one to admit they need help when they need it; it's even harder to get them to agree to go to the VA and use the services set up to help them. One question I'd like to ask as I advocate for these families: why is it that our system is set up in this way? Why are individual troops expected to go it alone -- did they acquire the mental problems all on their own?

One point I've heard made is this: just as troops are required to go through basic and combat training to learn how to fight and kill, shouldn't they be required to go through some form of reintegration program to decompress on their return home?

To be effective, post-deployment help should be more than one weekend affair -- even one week doesn't cut it. It should be a full program (anger management, stress reduction techniques, counseling support to deal with family reintegration and the horrors of what they've seen (and done), etc.) that allows every troop to be assisted for a period of months on their return.

Why do some families say this reintegration program should be mandatory? Because doing so would neuter the stigma surrounding the need for mental health/post-combat stress support. Troops wouldn't have to worry about losing a promotion or being labeled as 'weak' because *everyone* would be going through the same program, too. Those who seem to be doing fine could be placed into roles of assisting others who are having a harder time of it.

A program like the one I outline here -- one which many military family members are advocating -- requires a society to be mature and exhibit some sort of moral responsibility to those they sent into war. We need to grow up concerning mental health issues vs. falling back on the desire to sweep these things under the rug and tag anyone suffering as 'crazy' or 'weak'.

In Australia, they take the opposite track. Things aren't swept under the rug. And their approach is much more holistic than the one we've in place at home. Although their reintegration programs are not mandatory, they do offer a wide variety of counseling and social functioning programs. And their offerings are available not only to the veteran, but to family members as well.

So, let's say the troop doesn't want to own up to his/her problems; yet, the spouse is at their wits end under all of the stress at home. They can go in and get complimentary help. The troop still doesn't want to go in to get help; yet, their kids are really having a hard time adjusting to the upheaval at home? They can access care, too.

Besides these counseling options, the Aussies offer the following programs (and more) -- all free to their former veterans, returning troops and their immediate family members. From the [Vietnam Veterans Counseling Service \(VVCS\) Services Guide](#) :

Dealing with Daily Hassles for all Veterans -- a 7-week program that meets once a week for 2 hours which helps vets learn practical skills to help them better manage their day-to-day lives.

Lifestyle Management for Veterans & Partners -- 5 day/4 night group program that offers lifestyle strategies and coping skills training, stress management advice, info on PTSD, and more...

Heart Health Program -- A 40 week that promotes health and well-being.

Keeping it Cool -- A 6-week program where participants meet once a week for 2 1/2 hours and learn to apply advanced skills to better manage anger.

Changing the Mix -- Alcohol and substance abuse information session.

Worry & Blues: It's Mind Over Matter -- A 7-week program teaching skills to better manage depression/anxiety.

Stepping Out of the Workforce -- 1 1/2 day workshop to help recover from having to step out of the workforce due to disability.

We in America today seem unwilling to do this much for our troops and their families. Has it always been this way?

Although WWII-era troops didn't receive any mental health care support, even they returned home to a heck of a lot more support and services than our troops find themselves on the receiving end of today: Fully funded education (including books, fees, a monthly living allowance), low-cost loan guarantees for starting your own business or purchasing your first home; job-search help, and even unemployment pay of \$20 (1944 dollars) a week for up to 52 weeks.

The only benefit remaining in the gutted GI Bill requires our troops pay in \$100 per month for 12 months (non-refundable if they don't use it) during the last year of their service. In return, they then receive \$1004 per month for up to 36 months towards college. \$1004 a month doesn't even cover average tuition costs if they're attending a university, much less leave money for books, fees, or monthly living allowances.

Let's be honest here. We Americans today don't seem to have a clue what *really* supporting our troops looks and feels like. Isn't it time we begin to put our money -- and effort -- where our mouth is?