

SOUND OFF!



BULLETIN

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

#12

"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"

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Every once in a while an article comes along that cannot wait for our next issue. This is such an article. Please note that the General Kiley who is referred to here just took over Walter Reed again yesterday.

WHAT DOES AMERICA OWE TO THOSE WHO SERVE?

Bobby Muller, PRESIDENT, Veterans for America - Mar 01, 2007

Walter Reed has caused quite a stir here in Washington.

Hearings have been announced, people are starting to get fired, ceilings are being patched, members of congress are taking tours and soldiers are being told to shut up.

Everyone seems to be very upset.

I'm not - I am outraged.

The conditions at Walter Reed come as no surprise to most of us in the Veterans community. The failure of our government to follow through on their obligation to heal those injured in battle is not a new phenomenon in this country.

These problems didn't happen over night - we just want to think they did.

As the Washington Post reported this morning, our own Director of veterans affairs, Steve Robinson told Army Surgeon General, Gen. Kiley, point blank in 2003 while he was commander of Walter Reed, that the conditions were appalling and that soldiers were drinking themselves to death, sharing drugs and not getting the care that they needed.

Sadly, this is the way we have always treated injured service members and veterans in this country -- like disposable commodities.

38 years ago, while serving in Vietnam, a bullet severed my spine and left me paralyzed from the chest down. The hospital I recovered at -- Kingsbridge VA Hospital in the Bronx -- was the subject of a shocking cover story in LIFE magazine about the horrible conditions we were forced to endure.

The issue was the second-biggest selling LIFE issue ever. The cover story included a photograph of Mark Dumpert, one of the quadriplegics in my spinal chord injury unit, who had been left dripping wet in his chair after being showered.

Similar to the Walter Reed story, the nation was up in arms to learn about our conditions at Kingsbridge. And similar to Walter Reed, there were congressional visits, hearing and pledges galore that justice would be realized for those wounded in wartime service in Vietnam.

It never happened.

My best friend in that spinal chord injury ward, John Macari, gunned down by machine gun fire at age 19, committed suicide out of despair. Many others followed suit.

It was then that I decided to fight for my care so that the system would not ruin me.

Being an advocate, first for my own survival, put me on a path that led to founding a national organization for Vietnam veterans (VVA). I remained its president for nine years. I was intimately involved in the efforts to attain justice for Vietnam veterans. We led congressional hearings on PTSD, vet centers, an improved GI Bill, Agent Orange compensation, judicial review of VA decisions, etc.

Nothing we achieved came without a fight.

Round two is different. In many ways it's harder - it's deeper now.

As the media has demonstrated over the past several weeks, this country is failing its service members and veterans across-the-board.

The system is beyond broken. It is completely shattered.

The root of this problem is much, much deeper than any current political debate. It goes deeper than decrepit facilities, convoluted claims processes, long waiting lines, interminable budget hearings, inaccurate casualty numbers and ridiculous gag orders on soldiers.

The social contract between this country and those it sends to war is broken. Every problem facing our service members and veterans stems from the fact that as a country, we have never been able to answer one fundamental question - What does America owe to those who serve?

We have NEVER had a guiding philosophy for the healthcare and rehabilitative needs of service members and veterans. And as a result, the system in place today is an erratic hodgepodge of programs that has failed over and over again.

We are at a critical juncture in this country. We must come to an understanding about what is owed to those who serve, and we must find a way to engage the America people in this issue so that treatment of service members and veterans becomes a national issue and national commitment.

Anything less is unacceptable. We need an overhaul; we need a moratorium on band-aid solutions that do nothing more than perpetuate the failing status quo.

Enough.

What does America owe to those who serve?

The Failed Policies will Haunt Us and the World for Decades!

<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2007/3/1/115859/28>