

SOUND OFF!



VOL. VI, NO 9

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

20 MAY 2011

FIRST CALL – NOTES FROM THE FRONT

THE LONG WAIT

Over the past six years we have often lamented the long wait that veterans face when dealing with the DVA and the courts. We at Veterans United For Truth and Veterans for Common Sense have just experienced a long wait of our own.

1,387 days passed from the filing of our initial complaint with the Federal District Court on 23 July 2007 to the 9th Circuit’s ruling on 10 May 2011.

That is 220 days more than you would have waited after an initial claim for a decision from the Board of Veterans Appeals, but 1,066 days (2 years and 11 months) less than you would have waited for a decision from the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

Given that comparison I guess that we should not complain too much.

The case received coverage, at least for one or two days after the ruling, from all over the country and from many of the largest newspapers.

One excellent report on the court’s decision was presented in the *Brattleboro (VT) Reformer* entitled “A Disgrace”. The article is presented in its entirety after this editorial with the permission of the *Reformer’s* Executive Editor, Tom D’Errico.

Not surprisingly the court’s action received almost no coverage from the broadcast and cable news networks, even though we contacted many of them. They were more concerned with the invitation that Common got to the White House, the reception that Congressman Paul Ryan got in his home district, and whether or not Donald Trump was a real candidate.

We shouldn’t be surprised after all, since the news programs usually only go for the sensational, and our

complaint is so normal—so built in to the fabric of American society that for them it is a yawner.

Who today considers the fact that the public is not served well by the Executive or Congress to be news? Hardly anyone.

Who wants to hear yet another of those boring complaints from veterans? We Americans have so many more important things to do.

“Why do they complain so much? Didn’t we pass laws to help them? Don’t we have a huge bureaucracy in place to serve them?”

The answer to the latter question is, of course, “Yes”. But as we all know, that is an incomplete answer. The system has to work, and that is the crux of the problem.

I have always been surprised that the DVA did not welcome our suit. They needed help back in 2007 in getting a number of things out of Congress including an increased budget, and perhaps even more importantly, a two-year budget commitment. Our suit helped them make their point, whether or not they admit or even realize it.

Unfortunately, when you sue a leviathan like the DVA, the entire bureaucracy circles the wagons and responds like any besieged establishment. As with all government bureaucracies they also spend tons of energy enlisting help from those who believe their message that they are doing an amazing job if only those pesky people who are suing them would go away.

In this case they got an ally in the American Legion. The Legion mildly agreed with the court’s decision but was [reported](#) as saying officially:

“... *it has long been apparent that to us – and now to the court – that we have a long way to go in addressing the needs of our nation’s veterans. Through feedback from our 2.4 million members and our annual visits to VA regional offices and medical centers throughout the country, we have been gathering evidence to support the supposition that systematic failures have been and are occurring.*

“However, we of The American Legion,” he continued, “want it known that we are already working with the overburdened Department of Veterans Affairs to alleviate this problem and stand ready to lend any additional assistance we can in advance of court-ordered ‘evidentiary hearings’ and subsequent actions. This matter is far too critical to await ‘due process.’”

The courts, the administration and Congress have had ample evidence available for a long time, including that evidence we presented almost four years ago, all from reliable sources. Thus, we are surprised at the Legion’s comment “...we have been gathering evidence...” which implies that the evidence before the courts was faulty or flawed.

“Due process” is owed to individuals in pursuit of their rights and of their benefits under the law, The Legion speaks of it as if it defines the remedial process called for by the courts.

We also cannot wait for “due process” as guaranteed by the Fifth Amendment, and by this we mean the real, individual due process, and we have been waiting for a long time. Every veteran who presents his or her case to the DVA, and to the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) is owed due process from the start.

We are thankful that certain veterans organizations like the Legion have access to the administration and to Congress, an access which we do not enjoy. Unfortunately, that access has done little to improve the system, and even that access was impaired or denied for several years during the last administration

None of this denies the fact that individual Legion and VFW assistance officers have done a great deal to help in individual cases.

But the system has just gotten worse.

In laymen’s terms (as interpreted by this layman), the court’s decision upheld the fact that the DVA could not be sued for performance; such a suit is denied under the Administrative Procedures Act (APA).

This is not a surprising conclusion. Congress, in its wisdom, did not want millions of veterans taking the DVA to court just because they got a 40% disability

instead of the 60% disability that they wanted, or because they got their tuition checks late.

Unfortunately, the same law that keeps veterans benefits from swamping the courts denies the veteran recourse against bad actions and lousy decisions by the DVA, since the APA gives the DVA Secretary final say without review by any agency, government body, or the courts. Inherent in that Act was the charge to the DVA to establish adequate appeal provisions within the structure of the VA itself. Unfortunately it is the DVA itself which determines “adequacy”.

The Court of Appeals did rule, however, that the DVA could be sued for violating individual veterans rights under the Constitution, specifically to their right to due process under the Fifth amendment.

The court (Judge Reinhardt) stated in the introduction to the decision that,

“Because the VA continues to deny veterans what they have been promised without affording them the process due to them under the Constitution, our duty is to compel the agency to provide the procedural safeguards that will ensure their rights.”

Chief Judge Kozinski wrote in his dissent a long treatise disagreeing with the Constitutional claims of the majority, but, in this layman’s opinion, his disagreement with the Constitutional claims was based on his agreement with the restrictions of the APA, a differentiation that the majority was careful to provide.

In any event, we have reached another milestone. Will the DVA appeal? Probably. Will we pursue it to the Supreme Court? Definitely. Will the Supreme Court hear the case? Who knows?

In the end, it is not just the judicial decision that counts, but what the DVA does to respond to it.

“Justice has nothing to do with what goes on in a courtroom; Justice is what comes out of a courtroom” ~ Clarence Darrow

[Ed.]

For those who are interested:

[The Original Complaint \(73pp pdf\)](#)

[Original District Court Ruling \(82pp pdf\)](#)

[9th Circuit Intro & Conclusion Extract \(4pp pdf\)](#)

[Complete 9th Circuit Ruling \(140pp pdf\)](#)

A DISGRACE

Brattleboro VT *Reformer* - May 13, 2011 [Printed with permission]

More than half of all veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars who were treated in Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals since 2002 have been diagnosed with mental health problems, according to statistics obtained by the advocacy group Veterans for Common Sense.

To make matters worse, the number of veterans requiring mental health help continues to increase. Almost 18,000 new patients were treated for mental health issues at VA facilities in the last three months of last year, pushing the total needing treatment to more than 330,000.

Even though the VA has increased its mental health staff in the United States by 40 percent to more than 20,000 providers, there are no suicide prevention officers at any of the VA's 800 outpatient clinics, where many of those veterans receive their care.

None.

The VA and the Obama administration were excoriated by a federal appeals court earlier this week, which ruled the VA is violating the constitutional rights of veterans by making them wait weeks for mental health care and years for disability benefits.

"For some veterans, most notably those suffering from combat-derived mental illnesses such as (post-traumatic stress disorder), these delays may make the difference between life and death," wrote Judge Stephen Reinhardt.

Here are some harsh numbers to prove the judge's point: On average, 18 veterans take their lives every day. That's 18 times 365. You do the math.

Another 1,000 veterans attempt suicide each month.

The number of suicides committed by service members reflects poorly on our nation's attitude toward those who sacrifice their lives (only 1 percent of our total population has served or is serving in the nation's longest wars).

We agree wholeheartedly with Mark Thompson, writing on Time.com, who stated, "Never have so few fought for so long, on behalf of so many who were asked to do so little in return."

For most of us, our idea of sacrifice is damaging the paint on our cars when we stick bumper stickers on them in support of the troops.

Our treatment of veterans is a disgrace, especially when you consider that we spend billions of dollars on weapons systems but can't seem to find the money to properly treat the veterans who operated those systems.

We urge the VA and the administration to not appeal the court's decision to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Instead, it should take to heart the words the three-judge panel wrote in its unanimous decision.

"There comes a time when the political branches have so completely and chronically failed to respect the people's constitutional rights the courts must be willing to enforce them," wrote the court. "We have reached that unfortunate point with respect to veterans who are suffering from the hidden, or not hidden, wounds of war."

It's time that we demand that the president and Congress find the money and order the VA to do whatever it takes to care for our veterans ... and that's all veterans of all of America's wars, past and present.

It is totally unacceptable that our nation still hasn't taken the steps necessary to address this situation.

How many more veterans have to take their own lives before we do so?

http://www.reformer.com/ci_18054651

HERE ARE SOME OF THE OTHER NEWS STORIES AND EDITORIALS:

New York Times Editorial, 18 May: "[A Victory for Veterans](#)"
AllGov.com, 15 May: "[Appeals Court Blasts VA for Mental Health 'Incompetence'](#)"
Truthout, 13 May: "[Court Demands Mental Health Care Reform for Veterans. Cites VA's 'Unchecked Incompetence'](#)"
Huffingt5on Post, 13 May: "[Finally Giving Our Troops the Support They Really Need](#)"
All Headline News, 12 May: "[Court ruling forces White House to defend record on veterans' health issues](#)"
Salem-News.com [OR], 12 May: "[Ninth Circuit Court Says VA, Congress and President Seriously Screwed Up](#)"
NY Times, 11 May: "[Court Backs Veterans' Complaints on Mental Health Services](#)"
UPI.com 11 May: "[Court blasts VA's mental healthcare](#)"
LA Times, 11 May: "[Court orders major overhaul of VA's mental health system](#)"
Boston Globe, 11 May: "[Court orders overhaul for veterans' care](#)"
NextGov.com, 11 May: "[Judge orders VA to reform mental health care, cites 'unchecked incompetence'](#)"
Reuters.com, May 10: "[Court says Congress and president failed to help veterans](#)"
Washington Post, 10 May: "[Federal appeals court blasts VA mental health care system, orders dramatic overhaul](#)"
KQED (NPR), 10 May: "[Appeals Court Rules That Delays in Medical Care Violates Veterans Rights](#)"
Time.com, 10 May: "[Appellate Court Rules Poor VA Mental-Health Care for Vets Is Unconstitutional](#)"
The Bay Citizen, 10 May: "[Veterans Administration Cited for 'Unchecked Incompetence'](#)"

HERE IS THE TRANSCRIPT OF THE WHITEHOUSE PRESS BRIEFING:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/11/press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney-5112011>

REVEILLE - WAKE-UP CALLS – CALLS TO ACTION

NEED LEGAL HELP IN AN APPEAL TO THE DVA?

Try these two websites: Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program www.vetsprobono.org/index.htm. United States Court of appeals for Veterans Claims "Public List of Practitioners" are members of the court's bar www.velapp.gov/practitioners/. Also this site for west coasters <http://www.chapman.edu/law/programs/clinics/amvets.asp>.

ASSEMBLY - PROGRESS OF THE ORGANIZATION

VCS - VUFT LAWSUIT UPDATE:

Class Action Suit: On 12 August 2009 we appeared before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. An article from the LA Times on 24 August summarizes the results so far < <http://latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/healthcare/la-me-veterans-suit24-2009aug24.0.1423297.story>>

Case Progress to Date:

7/23/2007 Suit filed w/Federal District Court
9/25/2007 Defendant's Motion to Dismiss
2/11/2208 Motion for Preliminary Injunction
2/25/2008 Preliminary Injunction Hearing
4/21/2008 Trial
6/25/2008 Judgment based on jurisdiction

7/25/2008 Appeal notice filed w/9th Circuit Court of Appeals
12/10/2008 Appeal brief filed
12/15/2008 *Swords to Plowshares* and *Vietnam Veterans of America* file amicus briefs
12/22/2008 *Military Spouses for Change* and *United Spinal Association* file amicus briefs
3/4/2009 Appeal will not be subject to Mediation

4/6/2009 Requested an extension to reply to the DVA response to our brief
4/22/09 Extension granted to 1 May 2009
5/1/09 Appellants' Reply Brief filed
6/11/09 Oral Arguments Scheduled for 12 August 2009
8/12/09 Oral arguments
9/14/09 Reply on mediation [changed date]
9/14/09 No agreement on mediation. 9th Circuit accepts the case.

05/20/11 The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled in part in our favor, specifically on the Constitutional issues in our claim.
The next step is a "Case Management Conference" before the original trial judge, Judge Conti, in Federal District Court in San Francisco on 27 May 2011.
We'll definitely keep you posted

Here is a link to the legal documents on the lawsuit. www.veteransptsdclassaction.org/

BE A MEMBER If you are getting this newsletter and have not yet joined, please go to www.vuft.org/membership.html 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. at www.vuft.org/membership.html

SUPPORTING THE CAUSE If you wish to donate to our work you may now do so via PayPal or Visa on our website "Donate" page at www.vuft.org/donate.html. 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.

**The case is moving on and we must support our legal team.
Please dig down and help us if you can. Any amount helps.**

P L E A S E D O N A T E !

MAIL CALL - LETTERS FROM MEMBERS AND OTHERS [SOME EDITED FOR LENGTH]

The following letter refers to [VHA Directive 2009-07](#)

News to use. Did you know that veterans can get no-cost Medical Alert ID bracelets through the VA? Neither did I. Neither did anyone at my clinic. ... Do you know a vet with diabetes, allergies, seizures, etc.? Please pass this on.

[Jim Strickland](#), at [VA Watchdog Today](#)

Congratulations! This IS a WATERSHED VICTORY!!! – 5/11/11

I'm sure you're aware that the VA's toll-free 1-800-827-1000 number has for the 9 months (at least) become a "dead end" automated answering system whereby the veteran is told by recording that the system is too busy to reply to the caller and that they should phone back at another, less busy, time. It doesn't matter what time the caller phone's back, they invariably get the same message: phone back again.

I've phoned 8 times over the past 9 months and have not been able to talk with a Veterans Benefits Counselor once! I'm just trying to learn the status of my ischemia claim (Vietnam vet). I'm an Obama and Shinseki supporter, but this is ridiculous! Jim Hudson ~ Former President, Colorado Veterans for America

Work with suicide prevention... May 13, 2011

Dear Bob [VUFT Chair Bob Handy],

I have recently been made aware of your organization's work with Veterans for Common Sense on court proceedings related to the rise in Veteran suicide rates. I wanted to take a moment and encourage you and your non-profit that this topic is a place where I feel the US military is not providing for those that serve our country.

My husband was active duty US Army Airborne for 4 years, he served in Iraq and Kuwait and I know that he struggled with undiagnosed depression and suicidal thoughts throughout his service and afterward. He committed suicide in September of 2007. While I know that he tried to hide his struggles from his commanding officers and from the medical staff I also feel that he was one of the young men that simply fell through the cracks of a flawed system.

I pray that your work will impact those already affected by suicide, and I also pray that your work can prevent continued loss of life. Have a blessed day, ~ Beth Hutchison

West LA Veterans Home - 4/25/11

As a disabled Vietnam veteran, I am disgusted and fed up with this sham being perpetrated by the residents of Beverly Hills and Brentwood to surreptitiously acquire land on the V.A. grounds at the West L.A. Veteran Hospital. Their "Land Grab" is despicable and underhanded. Sen. Feinstein, Henry Waxman and the entire board should be sued for malfeasance and [for perpetrating a] fraud by the Veteran's Park Conservancy (just their name is an affront to any veteran) Sincerely, Walter Cronin

SENATORS BLAST DOD, VA FOR BAD COORDINATION

Rick Maze - Staff writer - May 18, 2011

Combat veterans are being poorly served as a result of weak coordination between the Defense and Veteran Affairs departments, a key senator said Wednesday.

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee chairwoman, said drug abuse and suicides among recently separated combat veterans can be partly blamed on inadequate coordination as service members leave the military and become the responsibility of VA.

A lack of coordination also hurts treatment of combat-related wounds. Amputees are an example, Murray said.

"Where DoD has outstanding prosthetics, VA needs to do much better," she said. "I was shocked to hear of a veteran who, after receiving advanced prosthetics from the military, went to VA to have them adjusted and maintained. When the veteran got to the prosthetic clinic, the VA employees were fascinated by the device, having never seen that model before, and were more interested in examining it than the veteran."

The services have used narcotics heavily to treat service members, with the Army reporting 14 percent of soldiers have been prescribed an opiate, with a third of them being prescribed more than once, Murray said.

"It is imperative that these individuals receive a truly seamless handoff to VA medical care so a provider there can manage those medications after the individual has left the service," Murray said. "If that link is not made, those new veterans become far more likely to abuse drugs, become homeless or commit suicide."

<More at: <http://www.navytimes.com/news/2011/05/military-veterans-dod-va-051811w/>>

PANEL VOTES 'SENSIBLE' TRICARE HIKE, 'WIDOWS' TAX' CUT

Tom Philpott - y 12, 2011

The House Armed Services Committee has endorsed key portions of the Obama administration's plan to begin to raise out-of-pocket costs modestly for some TRICARE beneficiaries, particularly working-age retirees.

The committee voted early Thursday to allow the first bump in TRICARE Prime enrollment fees in more than 15 years. Retirees not yet eligible for Medicare would see a \$30-a-year fee increase, to \$260, for individual coverage and a \$60 hike, to \$520, for family coverage.

The committee's bill also would allow these fees for retirees to be adjusted each year to keep pace with inflation. But while the Department of Defense wanted the fees indexed to medical inflation nationwide, the committee language would cap any increase to the percentage rise in retired pay made through by the annual COLA or cost-of-living adjustment. <More at: <http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,230753,00.html>>

HOUSE PLAN BLOCKS TRICARE INCREASE

Week of May 09, 2011

The House of Representatives proposed 2012 defense budget includes provisions that would protect military retirees from the [Department of Defense's plan to increase TRICARE premiums and fees](#) for yet another year. Given DoD's need to somehow cover for rapidly increasing cost of TRICARE, some veteran's groups are now willing to accept some moderate increases tied to the annual [cost-of-living-allowance \(COLA\) rate](#). However, DoD is hoping to peg the rate increases to the much more aggressive National Health Expenditure index, which could save the DoD \$3.2 billion. <http://www.military.com/military-report/house-plan-blocks-tricare-increase>

MILITARY LEADERS OPPOSE LENDER LEGISLATION

Paul Woolverton - Staff writer - May 07, 2011

Leaders at North Carolina's three largest military bases oppose legislation in the N.C. General Assembly that would raise fees and interest rates on installment loans, Col. Stephen J. Sicinski said Friday during a financial forum at Fort Bragg.

Sicinski said installment loan lenders lure naive young soldiers into high-interest debt.

Sicinski, the garrison commander at Fort Bragg, said he discussed the legislation with his counterparts at Camp Lejeune Marine base near Jacksonville and Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro "and all of us are in violent opposition of letting that bill pass." <More at: <http://www.fayobserver.com/articles/2011/05/07/1092267>>

Snoqualmie (WA) Valley Record Apr 22 2011

A bill that would permit Washington employers to give veterans preference in employment decisions was signed into law Thursday, April 21, by Gov. Christine Gregoire.

House Bill 1432, sponsored by Rep. Jay Rodne, will allow private employers to establish preferences in employment for veterans, widows or widowers of veterans, and spouses of certain veterans. <More at: http://www.pnwlocalnews.com/east_king/svr/news/120474984.html>

RETREAT – NEWS

COULD THIS EXPLAIN THE PROBLEM, AT LEAST IN PART?

TROOPS' VALOR ISN'T ENOUGH

Jonathan Gurwitz – Albany Times-Union - March 14, 2011

"An epidemic of disconnection."

That's how writer Bob Woodward has described the increasing distance between the small community of military personnel who are bearing the burden of war and American society in general.

For a while, the flags on porches and magnetic ribbons on cars gave plausibility to the notion that, irrespective of whether Americans supported the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, they supported the troops.

Those wars are now among the nation's longest, and the American people are tired. Not tired of the repeated deployments in which literally 99 percent of them have no part. They have tired of even thinking about war and its consequences for the men and women who have volunteered to serve.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq did not remotely factor into the November elections. President Barack Obama gave them only a passing reference in his 62-minute State of the Union address in January. A February CBS News poll found a paltry 4 percent of respondents who thought the wars were the most important issue for the country.

Marine Lt. Gen. John Kelly lost his son, 2nd Lt. Robert Kelly, to a land mine in southern Afghanistan in November. Addressing a group of fellow Marines days later, he expressed his frustration at the epidemic of disconnection.

"We are in a life-and-death struggle, but not the whole country," he was quoted as saying. "One percent of Americans are touched by this war. Then there is a much smaller club of families who have given all."

<More at: <http://www.timesunion.com/default/article/Troops-valor-isn-t-enough-1116457.php#ixzz1Mkf1Vu6e>>

BUT PHONY “VALOR” GETS A CELEBRATION!

'HERO' FAKED HER MILITARY CAREER

Chicago Sun-Times - Apr 26, 2011

CASS LAKE, Minn. — Dressed in an Army uniform, Elizabeth McKenzie was honored here last month as a war hero who had survived Afghanistan.

Problem is, she isn't a hero and had never been to Afghanistan. McKenzie, in fact, has never been in the military.

Accepting the town's gratitude at a ceremony at her old high school, McKenzie, 20, talked about the close calls she'd had and a war injury that brought her home. She led the march in the high school gym, carrying the American flag.

<More at: <http://www.suntimes.com/news/nation/5018415-418/hero-faked-her-military-career.html>>

SOLDIERS HOSPITALIZED FOR SUICIDAL THOUGHTS INCREASED 7000 PERCENT OVER PAST FIVE YEARS: STUDY

Nina Mandell - Daily News Staff Writer - May 06, 2011

The rate of soldiers hospitalized for having suicidal thoughts has soared a staggering 7,000% in the last five years, a new [Pentagon report says](#).

The report, which covers the period from the fourth year troops were in Afghanistan and the third year they were in Iraq, is the latest troubling survey on potential suicides in the military.

* The Army reported last month there in March had been eight reported potential suicides involving soldiers who were not on active duty and seven potential suicides among active duty soldiers.

* A study released in March found the suicide rate for female soldiers tripled while at war between 2004 and 2009 compared to soldiers who were not overseas.

* Five months ago, another survey found suicides had doubled among National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve soldiers from 65 in 2009 to 145 in 2010.

<More at: http://articles.nydailynews.com/2011-05-06/news/29534102_1_suicide-prevention-suicides-among-active-duty-suicide-rae>

MILITARY FACES CHALLENGE TO MALPRACTICE SHIELD

(AP) – 22 April 2011

BRADENTON, Fla. (AP) — Veterans, military families and others who oppose a decades-old law that shields military medical personnel from malpractice lawsuits are rallying around a case they consider the best chance in a generation to change the widely unpopular protection.

The U.S. Supreme Court has asked for more information from attorneys and will decide next month whether to hear the case of a 25-year-old noncommissioned officer who died after a nurse put a tube down the wrong part of his throat.

If the law is overturned, it could expose the federal government to billions of dollars in liability claims. That makes it highly unlikely a divided Congress desperate to cut expenses will act on its own to change what's called the Feres Doctrine, a 1950 Supreme Court ruling that effectively equates injuries from medical mistakes with battlefield wounds.

<More at: http://www.lompocrecord.com/news/national/article_4ac69496-c0b1-5227-8957-47b35b796861.html>

LOCAL VA MENTAL HEALTH CARE GIVEN AN 'F' BY ADVOCATE FOR VETERANS

Tony Leys – Des Moines Register - May. 10, 2011

An activist who works with injured veterans said the Des Moines Veterans Affairs Medical Center is plagued by the same kind of poor mental health care that an appeals court cited nationally on Tuesday.

"I would say that they would rank an 'F' if they had a report card," said P.J. Sesker-Green of Grimes, who volunteers with a veterans-assistance group called Operation First Response.

Sesker-Green said she's known soldiers who wait two or three months for treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder after they return to central Iowa from Afghanistan or Iraq. Once they get in, she said, they see a psychiatrist just once a month or so, plus a psychologist or counselor a few times a month.

"Mostly what they do for them is throw medication at them," she said.

<More at: <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20110511/NEWS/105110359/-1/bankperformance/Local-VA-mental-health-care-given-an-F-by-advocate-veterans>>

DAYTON VA HOSPITAL'S SATISFACTION FALLS BELOW OTHER VETERAN CENTERS

Ben Sutherly, Dayton Daily News Staff Writer - April 23, 2011

DAYTON — As a World War II fighter pilot, Lt. Col. James B. Cheney was taken prisoner and beaten severely by German soldiers with shovels, leaving him with lifelong health complications.

Nearly 65 years later, on Sept. 14, 2009, those old war injuries would come back to haunt the Urbana man when he was physically and verbally abused while seeking treatment at the Dayton VA Medical Center.

Elected officials have sharply criticized the Dayton VA in recent months after the hospital revealed at least 535 patients in its dental clinic may have been exposed to blood-borne pathogens by a dentist who failed to change his gloves and sterilize dental instruments between patients.

But the dental clinic isn't the only aspect of the center to come under fire.

The Dayton VA in general has long struggled with negative perceptions, consistently ranking lower than its peers in surveys of patient and employee satisfaction.

<More at: <http://www.daytondailynews.com/news/dayton-news/dayton-va-hospitals-satisfaction-falls-below-other-veteran-centers--1143792.html>>

INJURED TROOPS STILL WAITING FOR CLAIM PROCESSING

Wilkes-Barre Times-Leader - May 18, 2011

WASHINGTON (AP) — A system designed to get wounded troops out of the military and on disability compensation more quickly has failed recently to meet its efficiency goals, delaying service members' release sometimes more than a year, documents show.

The lag has caused some of the troops to turn down job offers or postpone college because they don't know when they will be discharged from the military.

... Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., chairwoman of the committee, said in a statement that under the new system, it takes on average nearly 400 days to process a claim.

... Thirteen troops going through the new system have committed suicide or died from drug overdoses, according to the records.

Despite the delays as the new system is rolled out, it appears that claims are being processed faster than under the older "legacy" system. In a report late last year, the Government Accountability Office said comparisons are difficult, but that under one estimate under the older system, it took on average 540 days. <More at: <http://www.timesleader.com/news/ap?articleID=7050432>>

TO THE COLORS – GATHERINGS

Date	Time	Where	What	Who	Notes
Every Sunday	1300-1600	Wilson & San Vicente Blvds. NE Corner, Los Angeles, CA	Save Our Veterans Land	Veterans Revolution	
5/19-5/22		7 Garoner St. East Windsor, CT	The Wall That Heals	American Legion	
5/25		Lansing, MI	Resource Fair	Kate Reed	517-333-3379
5/25		Buffalo, NY	Resource Fair	Mark LaHood	716-854-3494
6/3		Kansas City, MO	Resource Fair	Jennifer Gould	816-519-8805
6/4		Riviera Beach, FL	Resource Fair	Nelsy Andros	561-968-1612
6/8		Florence, SC	Stand Down	CB Anderson	843-346-2123
6/13		Rochester, MN	Resource Fair	Susan Worlds	507-345-8258
6/17		Shrewsbury, MA	Resource fair	Joe Boylan	508-791-3273
6/18		Bozeman, MT	Resource Fair	Morris McLees	406-580-7654

We are a non-partisan organization. We will advertise all legitimate veterans' events, regardless of purpose or affiliation.

TATTOO - CURRENT ISSUES

CHIARELLI: STRESS DISORDER, BRAIN INJURY SCIENCE LACKING

Terri Moon Cronk - American Forces Press Service - Army Times - May 13, 2011

WASHINGTON, May 12, 2011 -- The therapies used for the treatment of brain injuries lag behind the advanced medical science employed for treating mechanical injuries, such as missing limbs, Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli told reporters here today at the Defense Writers Group breakfast.

Chiarelli said more work must be done to properly diagnose and treat servicemembers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and suicidal thoughts.

"There's a lot of criticism with how we handle PTSD and TBI and other behavioral health issues," he said. "I think a lot of that is unfair, because if you study this, we don't know as much about the brain. That is the basis of the problem."

Meanwhile, Chiarelli said, the stigma that some servicemembers associate with actively seeking treatment for mental health issues is still active. <More at: <http://www.army.mil/news/2011/05/13/56485-chiarelli-stress-disorder-brain-injury-science-lacking/>>

VETERANS HAVE PROMISES, BUT STILL BATTLE FOR BENEFITS

Martin Schram - Scripps Howard News Service - : May 18, 2011

When he talks about America's military veterans, President Barack Obama's words ring with the heartfelt commitment of a commander in chief determined to make sure those who fought our battles will get the benefits they earned. And so will their families.

So it was more than surprising — actually shocking — to discover the latest woe that has befallen thousands of veterans who have been trying to appeal disability benefits claims that were initially rejected by the Department of Veterans Affairs adjudicators. Not only are veterans' appeals languishing in a growing backlog that has clogged the special court that was created as their last resort, but one big reason for the backlog is the failure of the Obama White House to nominate candidates for one-third of the court's judgeships.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims is allotted nine judges — but three of the judgeships are vacant — and have been for more than a year. Meanwhile the caseload has nearly doubled since the attacks of Sept. 11 — from 2,442 appeals in 2000 to 4,725 in 2009. Just six judges decide all those cases.

<More at: <http://www.stripes.com/veterans-have-promises-but-still-battle-for-benefits-1.143910>>

VA TO EXPAND CAREGIVERS PROGRAM

The Associated Press - Seattle Post-Intelligencer – May 3 2011

WASHINGTON (AP) — The [Veterans Affairs Department](#) reversed course Tuesday and said it will make sure more caregivers of severely disabled Iraq and Afghanistan veterans can receive the support they need to help their wounded relatives.

President [Barack Obama](#) signed a law in May of last year that provided a monthly stipend, mental health help and health insurance to family members who provide around-the-clock care to these veterans.

But when the VA announced earlier this year how the caregivers program would work, advocates and congressional members said it helped fewer families than they had expected. Among those who likely were not eligible were Sarah and Ted Wade, who stood with Obama at the bill signing. Ted Wade lost his right arm and sustained a [traumatic brain injury](#) in a roadside bombing in Iraq in 2004 while serving with the 82nd Airborne Division.

The VA now says about 3,500 families will be eligible, which is how many Sen. [Patty Murray](#), the chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, has said Congress wanted. Under the earlier plan, the VA said about 10 percent of the critically wounded from the recent conflicts would be eligible, which was about 850 veterans. The plan will cost about \$770 million over five years. <More at: <http://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/APNewsBreak-VA-to-expand-caregivers-program-1363556.php>>

VA DETAILS NEW RULES FOR PROGRAM THAT COMPENSATES FAMILY CAREGIVERS

Leo Shane III - Stars and Stripes - May 8, 2011

WASHINGTON — Advocates for wounded troops are hailing major changes to the Veterans Affairs caregivers program announced last week, and military families can formally apply for the benefits starting Monday.

Officials from the department on Tuesday unveiled new rules for the program, established by Congress last year to assist military spouses or parents who have given up their full-time jobs to care for their returning wounded veterans.

VA officials had drawn intense criticism earlier this year when they first unveiled rules for the caregivers benefits, which did not include coverage for veterans suffering from mild traumatic brain injury. After veterans groups and lawmakers demanded changes, the department came back with the revised rules.

Payouts won't start until July, but the stipend will be retroactive to the date of application. So, VA officials are urging caregivers to get their applications in as early as possible.

... Since the stipend payout is retroactive, families should file an application as soon as possible. Starting today, forms will be posted at www.caregiver.va.gov. <More at: <http://www.stripes.com/news/va-details-new-rules-for-program-that-compensates-family-caregivers-1.1431>>

WOMEN HELPING WOMEN VETERANS: WOMEN ARE VETERANS, TOO

Karen St. John – 5/17/2011

Women. We do it all. Dance backwards in heels. Look soft in a dress and tough in grubs. Give birth, raise the children. Keep up the house, make it a home. Keep the job, bring in a paycheck. Enlist, fight the war right along side the men.

Yep, fight the war right alongside the men. Many of us become officers. But all too often, there is yet something else that we do: we have to go it alone and without help. For unfortunately, when many female officers and leaders come home, they are told their military skills do not translate into the civilian world, but maybe they could get a job as a waitress or clerk somewhere. Many single mothers have to go on assistance and too many become homeless. Many despair.

Sadly, this happens to many military men who return home as well. But one specific group's focus is on our women veterans. Not because our men veterans are not worthy of mention...but because one specific group believes our women are as well: the [Business & Professional Women's Foundation](http://www.businessandprofessionalwomen.org). It learned of these women veterans and not only listened to their stories, but *heard* them. <More at: <http://www.veteranstoday.com/2011/05/17/women-helping-women-veterans/>>

HEALTH RECORDS MISSING FOR GULF WAR VETS

Diane Wilson - May 09, 2011

RALEIGH (WTVD) -- Sgt. Gerry Propst remembers Operation Desert Storm like it was yesterday. The 82nd Airborne veteran has the pictures and the medals to prove he was there, but what he doesn't have is most of the medical records from his five years of Army service.

"They told me the only thing that they had was my physical before going in, and an ear exam going out. Well, how do you lose everything in between?" he asked.

Among the missing records is the documented proof he suffered a major back injury during a parachute assault. <More at: <http://abclocal.go.com/wtvd/story?section=news%2Ftroubleshooter&id=8120891>>

VETERANS GET A RAW DEAL -- AGAIN

Jerry Chautin – Huffington Post - 05/18/

Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are consistently plagued by higher unemployment rates than the civilian community. Ted Daywalt, a retired Navy Captain (O-6), and chief executive officer of [VetJobs.com](http://www.vetjobs.com), explains why the dichotomy exists.

"Many human resource managers and hiring managers have no idea what a military person brings to the job," he e-mailed me. He says that recruiters do not understand the skills perfected in the armed forces because military service has declined from one in ten Americans in 1970 to one in 270 today. He blames the end of the draft.

"Too many employers think all the OEF/OIF veterans have PTSD," he wrote, referring to post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from participation in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

"This is definitely wrong," Daywalt says. "In fact, some employers think PTSD is contagious, which is also false." Equally as erroneous, veterans are sometimes "being perceived as John Wayne movie, Sad Sack and Beetle Bailey stereotypes." He cites other common misperceptions that veterans are "not team players, lack of up-to-date technical experience, do not have good work habits and lack of civilian certifications." <More at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jerry-chautin/veterans-get-a-raw-deal-a_b_863621.html>

MORE THAN HALF OF RECENT WAR VETS TREATED BY VA ARE STRUGGLING WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Joaquin Sapien – ProPublica - May 11, 2011.

More than half of all Iraq and Afghanistan veterans treated in Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals since 2002 have been diagnosed, at least preliminarily, with mental health problems, [according to statistics](#) obtained by the advocacy group Veterans for Common Sense.

The data, which is released quarterly, also show that the raw number of returning soldiers with psychological problems is rising. Nearly 18,000 new patients were treated for mental health issues at VA facilities in the last three months of last year—the most recent time period for which data is available—upping the total to more than 330,000. <More at: <http://www.propublica.org/article/more-than-half-of-recent-war-vets-struggling-with-mental-health-problems/single#republish>>

'IN THE US ARMY, LESS YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN DIE IN COMBAT THAN DIE BY THEIR OWN ACTIONS'

Edinburgh (Scotland) *The Herald* - 8 May 2011

On March 31, burdened with survivor's guilt over the deaths of three close friends, numb with prescription drugs and unable to cope with the nightmares, panic attacks and depression of post-traumatic stress disorder, Corporal Clay Hunt shot himself in his apartment.

According to official US military statistics, he was not a casualty of war.

He had been out of uniform since May 2009, after four years in the Marines, including two deployments, to Iraq and Afghanistan. His mother, Susan Selke, insists he died for his country, no less than the victim of a Taliban sniper or a roadside bomb. "Clay took his life because of mental problems that are a direct result of his experience in war," she says. "I want our government to acknowledge that." <More at: <http://www.heraldsotland.com/news/world-news/in-the-us-army-less-young-men-and-women-die-in-combat-than-die-by-their-own-actions-1.1100218>>

GRATEFUL NATION? LAWTON, OK WOMAN FACES WAR WIDOW TAX

April 26th, 2011 - Posted By Angelia Phillips.

WASHINGTON (AP) A Lawton woman is among tens of thousands of the nation's war widows who find it perplexing and downright disrespectful to their late military husbands: In order to fully collect on insurance their husbands bought for them when alive, they must marry another man.

And to qualify, the widows must remarry when they are 57 or older. Those who remarry earlier miss out, as do widows who never remarry.

"I've never even wanted to date, much less remarry," said Nichole Haycock, a mother of three teenagers in Lawton, whose 38-year-old military husband died in 2002. "I already married the love of my life. Why would you bring that as a factor?"

At the heart of the issue is a government policy known as the "widows' tax." It says a military spouse whose loved one dies from a service-related cause can't collect both survivor's benefits and the full annuity benefits from insurance the couple bought from the Defense Department at retirement. Instead, the amount of the annuity payment is reduced by the amount of the monthly survivor benefit. <More at: <http://patdollar.com/2011/04/grateful-nation-lawton-ok-woman-faces-war-widow-tax/>>

VIETNAM VETERAN SUES TO CHANGE DISCHARGE STATUS

|John Christoffersen -Associated Press - ril 22, 2011

NEW HAVEN — A Vietnam veteran who received the Bronze Star and later was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder filed a federal lawsuit yesterday trying to get the US Army to modify his other-than-honorable discharge so that his sacrifice will be recognized and he can get disability benefits.

John Shepherd, a 63-year-old New Haven resident, says he battled alcoholism and struggled to stay employed for 40 years, but was not diagnosed with the stress disorder until 2004.

"My other-than-honorable discharge has made me feel deeply ashamed for many years," Shepherd said. "I hope this lawsuit can finally change that." <More at: http://articles.boston.com/2011-04-22/news/29463892_1_stress-disorder-discharge-lawsuit>

THE LARGER QUESTION MAY WELL BE, “WHAT ABOUT ALL THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN DISCHARGED OVER THE PAST CENTURY OR TWO?”

VETERANS BATTLE TO REGAIN ‘DON’T ASK, DON’T TELL’ LOSSES

Aaron Glantz - New York Times - April 30, 2011

For Anthony Loverde, the fight against “don’t ask, don’t tell” is not over.

Mr. Loverde, 32, was discharged from the Air Force in 2008 after revealing to his commanding officer that he is gay. President Obama signed legislation repealing “don’t ask, don’t tell” last December, but the fate of Mr. Loverde and some 14,000 other service members whose lives were turned upside down by the 17-year-old policy is unclear.

The Pentagon is preparing to phase out “don’t ask, don’t tell,” possibly by the fall, but the measure revoking the policy was silent on what steps the Pentagon should take regarding service members who were already discharged because of their sexual orientation. <More at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/us/01bcdischarged.html>>

TAPS – PASSINGS AND WAR STATISTICS

OIF/OEF – HACK DATE SUNDAY 19 MAY 2011

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM/**NEW DAWN** (2,983 DAYS)

KILLED US	4,452/19
WOUNDED US [5/2/11]	31,931/148
OTHER US CASUALTIES [5/2/11]	40,422/899
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [5/2/11]	223/3
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	1
KILLED UK	179
KILLED OTHER COALITION	139
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION	1,819
**KILLED CONTRACTORS [11/9/08]	1,182
KILLED IRAQI POLICE/MILITARY [1/25/09]	≥ 48,874
KILLED IRAQI CIVILIANS [3/21/11]	≥ 109,359–1,421,933
WOUNDED IRAQI MIL/CIVILIANS [9/20/10]	≥ 400K–1.556M
IRAQ REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	2.1M/2.5M

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM (3,512 DAYS)

KILLED US	1582
WOUNDED US [5/2/11]	11,191
OTHER CASUALTIES US [5/2/11]	13,334
DIED OF SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS [5/2/11]	60
MISSING OR CAPTURED US	0
KILLED COALITION	881
WOUNDED/INJURED COALITION (12/2/07)	1,602
KILLED AFGHANI POLICE/MILITARY [7/4/09]	≥ 11,152
KILLED AFGHANI CIVILIANS (9/10/2010)	≥ 8,813
WOUNDED AFGHANI MIL/CIVILIANS (2/24/2009)	46,322
AFGHAN REFUGEES INT./EXT. [9/27/07]	1.75M/4.8M
COST OF IRAQ WAR TO DATE	\$791,054,371,875
COST OF AFGHAN WAR TO DATE	\$405,632,093,035

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

* This entry has been changed to “Non-mortal casualties” which includes wounded, non-hostile casualties, and diseased where medical air transport was required. ** Includes 280 additional contractor casualties reported in international press but not in US official figures

CLAUDE CHOULES, LAST COMBAT VETERAN OF WORLD WAR I, DIES AT 110

May 5

Claude Choules, the only remaining male veteran of World War I and one of the last people to have served in both world wars, died May 5 at a nursing home near Perth in western Australia. He was 110, and no cause of death was reported.

The former seaman, who was underage when he signed up for duty, witnessed the surrender of the German Imperial Navy in 1918. He also watched as German sailors scuttled their own fleet at Scapa Flow, near Scotland, to avoid having the ships fall into British hands after the war.

Mr. Choules and another Briton, Florence Green, became the war’s last known surviving service members after the death of American Frank Buckles in February, according to the Order of the First World War, a U.S.-based group that tracks veterans. <More at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/claude-choules-last-combat-veteran-of-world-war-i-dies-at-110/2011/05/05/AFxEdu0F_story.html>

NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE ACTIVATED AS OF MAY 10, 2011

This week the Navy announced a decrease in activated reservists, while the Army, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard, announced an increase. The net collective result is 545 more reservists activated than last week. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 70,155; Navy Reserve, 5,462; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 9,906; Marine Corps Reserve, 5,988, and the Coast Guard Reserve, 801. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 92,312, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated may be found on line at <http://www.defense.gov/news/d20110510ngr.pdf>.

AFTERTHOUGHTS ~ MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER STUFF

PLEASE CLICK THROUGH AND READ THIS COMPLETE ARTICLE – IT IS WORTH IT THE COST OF OUR WARS: ON LISTENING TO OUR TROOPS

William J. Astore

“Support our troops” is an unconditional American mantra. We’re told to celebrate them as warrior-liberators, as heroes, as the finest fighters the world has ever known. They’re to be put on a pedestal or plinth, holding a rifle and a flag, icons to American toughness and goodness.

What we’re not told to do is listen to them.

Today, I’d like to suggest six vows we should make when it comes to those troops: [These are extracts only – Ed.]

... Vow #1: Let’s start listening to them. ...

... Vow #2: Let’s stop consoling ourselves with the myth that all our troops are volunteers -- a myth which leads most Americans to pay remarkably little attention to and take no responsibility for the wars our “volunteers” are fighting. ...

... Vow #3: Let’s stop putting a happy face on our wars. ...

... Vow #4: Don’t send novices on nation-building exercises in places where the natives are hostile and the rebels are trying to kill them. ...

... Vow #5: Some things are worth fighting and dying for, others aren’t. It’s time for us to do a far better job of figuring out the difference. ...

... Vow #6: Don’t get involved in land wars in the Middle East and Central Asia -- unless you’re willing to reap what you sow. ...

... Bonus Vow: Recalling Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address, let’s vow to care for those who have borne the battle, and for their families, and strive to achieve a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

... <More at: http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175357/tomgram%3A_william_astore%2C_six_vows_to_support_our_troops/

CENSUS BUREAU COUNTS 2.4 MILLION BUSINESSES OWNED BY VETS.

William Pack - May 17, 2011

U.S. military veterans owned 2.4 million businesses as of the most recent count by the Census Bureau — and both San Antonio and Houston were key contributors to that total.

Houston was home to 17,636 veteran-owned businesses in 2007, the bureau's report said, the third-highest of the top 10 big cities, behind New York and Los Angeles. San Antonio's veteran-owned business inventory was about 5,500 below Houston's, but its concentration — the share of veteran-owned companies in the total business count — was the largest of the 10 biggest cities at 11.1 percent.

In all, veteran-owned companies made up 9 percent of all the businesses in the nation, and they produced \$1.2 trillion in receipts, or about 4.1 percent of the nation's business receipts. The veteran-owned businesses also employed nearly 5.8 million people, data taken from the 2007 Survey of Business Owners showed.

"Veteran-owned businesses make a valuable contribution to our economy, but until now, we did not have a benchmark that measured their role," Thomas Mesenbourg, the bureau's deputy director, said in a news release. <More at: <http://www.mysanantonio.com/business/article/Veterans-economic-gifts-1383906.php#ixzz1MkXRjnqk>>

US NAVY GIVES OK FOR ON BASE SAME-SEX MARRIAGES

Paula Brooks – 5/9/11

It would appear the Navy has decided to let same-sex couples in the Navy, get married in Navy chapels that are located on bases in state where same-sex marriage is legal, and will allow willing Navy chaplains to perform those ceremonies.

The changes came in the form of an April 13 advisory memo issued to all chaplains which said the Chaplain Corps was revising its Tier I DADT Repeal training manuals, which had previously indicated that same-sex marriages are not authorized on federal property.

Citing "additional legal review" by Navy attorneys, the Chief of Navy Chaplains, Admiral Michael Tidd said the Navy "has concluded that, generally speaking, base facility use is sexual orientation neutral."

"If the base is located in a state where same-sex marriage is legal, then the base facilities may be used to celebrate the marriage," added Tidd.<More at" <http://lezzgetreal.com/2011/05/us-navy-gives-ok-for-on-base-same-sex-marriages/>>

ADD-ON ~ STUFF OF INTEREST

TRICARE OFFERS YOUNG ADULT OPTION

Week of May 16, 2011

[TRICARE Young Adult](#) is a new program offering TRICARE Standard coverage to qualified uniformed services dependents under age 26. TYA Standard has a monthly premium of \$186. Dependents who qualify for TYA are no longer eligible for the Continued Health Care Benefit Plan (CHCBP) as of May 1, 2011. Beneficiaries can get complete information about TYA and application forms at TRICARE's TYA website at www.tricare.mil/tya. An in-depth TYA Webinar at www.tricare.mil/mediacenter explains who qualifies, when and where to enroll, and what type of coverage to expect.

Military.com surveys have found that most servicemembers and their families are confused by TRICARE. [Get the facts and latest news on TRICARE.](#)

<http://www.military.com/military-report/tricare-offers-young-adult-option>

VA TO ISSUE DEBIT CARDS

Week of May 16, 2011

The Department of Veterans Affairs (through the Treasury Department) will offer beneficiaries without bank accounts the option to enroll in the Direct Express debit card program with Comerica Bank. Direct Express payments will be directly deposited into that account and made accessible through a debit card. Personal funds cannot be transferred into this account as it can only be used to receive Federal benefits. Direct Express cardholders have 24/7 access to their money at automated teller machines and are able to make purchases at any retailer that accepts MasterCard. <http://www.military.com/military-report/va-to-issue-debit-cards>

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 <mailto:scook@vuft.org>

If you need to call us, our number is 1.805.530.6417.

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