

Nov 2 506



*Everyone have a safe and happy holiday season!
Keep our service men and women in your thoughts and prayers.*

On Veteran's Day we had the War Memorial Ceremony and the first Veteran's Day parade in thirteen Years. Both events were fantastic. There were some bumps along the way and we will be correcting them next year. We will be getting together to review everything and make it even better next year. Our thanks go out to Nick Pirro and Matt Driscoll for making all this happen. The UAW Veteran's Committee, the Mayor's Advisory Board, the Unions, the Onondaga County Veterans Council and of course the people who worked for six months of their lives on the committee to get this done and done so well. Of course none of this would have worked without strong leadership and organizational skills. There are three people who stand out, our co-chairmen, our own Dave Holihan, Mike LaNasa from the UAW's Veterans Committee, and Kathy Deman from New Channels. The next time you see any of these good people, tell them thank you for all they have done.

This year at the War Memorial on Veteran's Day, Dave Holihan and our friend Tony Nesci from the UAW Veterans Committee received the Distinguished Veteran of the Year Award 2006. This award was split this year and two great people have done us proud. Thank You for all that you do and have done.

This year I was amazed at the amount of our membership that came to the ceremony and watched the parade. Our Color Guard and the Vietnamese Community matched together and we all got a lot out of that. As we approached the end of the parade route we fell off of the route and met the Korean War Veterans at the Korean-Vietnam Memorial and had short ceremony of our own. It was not planned, it just worked out that way and we went with the flow. We had a chance to spend some time with our Korean War Vet friends and it felt great. The Vietnamese Community, about thirty of them, joined us, so it was extra special. They sent us a Thank You card and we will print it. The card will show you how proud they were to be with us and spend time with us. You just had to see them march with us, this is a first for them walking in this type of parade, they could not wave the American flag enough.

At our December meeting the 21st at 7pm we will be having pizza and wings. We would like to have you all show up. Come out and make some new friends and get re-acquainted with old friends.

I want to say a few words about the VVLP Luncheon. This year the key note speaker was just great, General Wayne Downing. Our hats come off to the VVLP and John Despirto for a great choice and a great program this year.

On behalf of the BOD and your Officers we want to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and we hope to see you at the last meeting of the year.



VETERANS OF AMERICA VETERANS OF FOREIGN BATTLES

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 20, 2006

No. 06-36

Press Release

**Contact:
Rick Weidman
301-585-4000, Ext. 127
cell: 301-996-8557**

Additional Staffing Desperately Needed at VA's Vet Centers

(Washington, D.C.) – "At a time when more than one in four of our troops have acknowledged mental health issues after returning home from the fields of battle in Afghanistan and Iraq, the VA is short-changing them," said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), citing a staff report released yesterday by Rep. Lane Evans (D-Ill.)

"The resources are not there in the VA Vet Centers," Rowan said, "and the General Accountability Office has demonstrated that the Department of Veterans Affairs has diverted many millions of dollars specifically designated for hiring additional mental health staff, or they do not know where the money has gone. This lack of accountability is unacceptable.

"Not only is the mental health and well-being of veterans being placed at risk, the Vet Centers themselves are at risk," Rowan said. "Because of significantly increased work loads, some centers have introduced waiting lists. Accommodating the ever-increasing demand for readjustment counseling is taking a heavy toll on already overworked staff.

"VVA has repeatedly called for additional dollars and at least 250 more permanent staff for the 207 Vet Centers, which VA officials acknowledge are the crown jewels of the health care system," Rowan said. "Each center needs at least one new family counselor who is also certified in Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and bereavement counseling. This would cost less than the cost of the war in Iraq for one half-minute.

"Although we applaud the VA for adding three new centers this fall and for announcing that they have hired 100 recently separated war veterans to serve in temporary positions at Vet Centers as outreach specialists and peer counselors, that is simply not enough in the face of the growing, well-documented needs of our veterans and their families.

"We cannot wait until the next budget cycle," Rowan concluded. "Additional money, specifically restricted in a line-item appropriation that can be used only for the Vet Centers and for additional mental health professional staff in the VA Medical Centers, needs to be added promptly to the FY 2007 VA appropriations when Congress returns in November. This should not be a partisan issue. When returning veterans need mental health services, they should be able to get the quality and quantity of care needed without delay or bureaucratic excuses."

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 10, 2006

No. 06-39

Press Release

Contact:
Mokie Porter
301-585-4000, Ext. 146

VVA Joins New Veterans Coalition

(Washington, D.C.) – “I am pleased to announce that Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) has accepted the invitation to become the first dues-paying Associate Member of the recently formed Veterans Coalition,” VVA National President John Rowan said. The Coalition is behind the efforts of the new Commission on the Future of America’s Veterans, which held its inaugural meeting yesterday in the Cannon House Office Building.

“We are in total agreement with Coalition President Harry Walters, former Administrator of the Veterans Administration, the precursor to the Department of Veterans Affairs,” Rowan said. “Mr. Walters has noted that, ‘Too often our government gets bogged down in short-term cycles of elections and budgets,’ with ‘strategic planning often restricted to less than two years.’

“The purpose and goal of the Veterans Coalition, and the commission, is to take a longer view of things, to set a strategic direction for the VA in providing benefits and services to the next generations of veterans,” Rowan said. “There really is no long-range planning by the VA, or vision as to where its programs and services ought to be in ten or 20 years.

“In 20 years, the World War II veterans will mostly have died and been replaced by a very different population of older Vietnam veterans, veterans of the Persian Gulf War, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and veterans of future conflicts that we can only imagine today,” Rowan said. “And many of these veterans will be members of the Reserves and National Guard. On Veterans’ Day we remember and honor veterans of every generation, but at the same time we must be planning for future needs of those serving today and who will serve in the future.

“VVA believes that the Veterans Coalition will fill a very real need in the veterans’ community, and we’re pleased to be part of this effort,” Rowan concluded.

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Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is the nation’s only congressionally chartered veterans service organization dedicated to the needs of Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA’s founding principle is “Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another.”

PTSD/SUBSTANCE ABUSE COMMITTEE REPORT

The Downhill Spiral Continues

BY TOM BERGER, CHAIR

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

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

A recent article in *USA Today* noted that more than one in four American troops have come home from Iraq with health problems that require medical or mental health treatment. According to the Pentagon’s first detailed screening of service members leaving the war zone, almost 1,700 returning this year said they harbored thoughts of hurting themselves or that they would be better off dead. More than 250 said they had such thoughts “a lot.” Nearly 20,000 reported nightmares or unwanted war recollections; more than 3,700 said they had concerns that they might “hurt or lose control” with someone else.

The survey results, which have not been publicly released, were provided to *USA Today* by the Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine. They offer a window on the war and how the ongoing insurgency has added to the strain on troops.

Overall, since the war began, some 28 percent of Iraq veterans—about 50,000 service members this year alone—returned with problems ranging from lingering battle wounds to toothaches, and from suicidal thoughts to strained marriages. The figure dwarfs the Pentagon’s official Iraq casualty count: more than 2,000 U.S. troops dead and more than 15,220 wounded as of early November. A greater percentage of soldiers and Marines surveyed in 2004-05 said they felt in “great danger” of being killed than those surveyed in 2003 after a more conventional phase of fighting. Twice as many surveyed in 2004-05 had fired a weapon in combat.

At the same time, months after VA officials told Congress that they expected the processing time for veterans’ disability claims to drop, agency internal reports

Subj: -- -- **FW: USA Today - PTSD/ TBI and VA**
Date: 11/2/2006 9:43:05 AM Eastern Standard Time
From: tberger@mchsi.com
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FYI... tom berger

Subject: USA Today - PTSD/ TBI and VA

USA Today

November 2, 2006

Pg. 1

Troubled Troops In No-Win Plight

Marines kicked out for conduct linked to stress disorder are often denied treatment by the VA

By Gregg Zoroya, USA Today

Camp Pendleton, California — Chris Packley returned from Fallujah in 2004 a top marksman on a sniper team showcased in the *Marine Corps Times* for its 22 kills •

“I was exceptionally proud of that Marine,” says Gunnery Sgt. Scott Guise, his former team leader.

He also came home with flashbacks — memories of his friend, Lance Cpl. Michael Blake Wafford, 20, dying on the battlefield. Packley says he smoked marijuana to try to escape the images. He also left the base without permission. “I wanted out,” Packley says.

Last year he got his wish and was expelled from the Marine Corps. As a consequence, he lost access to the free counseling and medication he needed to treat the mental wounds left from combat, according to Packley, his former defense lawyer and documents from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Scores of combat veterans like Packley are being dismissed from the Marines without the medical benefits needed to treat combat stress, says Lt. Col. Colby Vokey, who supervises the legal defense of Marines in the western USA, including here at Camp Pendleton.

When classic symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) arise — including alcoholism and drug abuse — the veterans are punished for the behavior, Vokey says. Their less-than-honorable discharges can lead to a denial of VA benefits. Vokey calls it a Catch-22, referring to the no-win situation showcased in Joseph Heller's 1961 satirical war novel *Catch-22*.

“The Marine Corps has created these mental health issues” in combat veterans, Vokey says, “and then we just kind of kick them out into the streets.”

Monday, November 27, 2006 America Online: SPD179RET

Pendleton, says he sees about 40 Marines each month who are in trouble. About a third fit the profile of combat veterans with impressive records who suddenly have drug or alcohol problems and face dismissal and loss of benefits.

“You have guys coming in this building who are, no question about it, heroes in everything that they have done in the past,” Studenka says. “You have them saying, ‘I just need to get out. I want out.’ That breaks your heart.”

The Marine Corps says post-traumatic stress disorder is no legal defense for misconduct and that discipline must be maintained.

“PTSD does not force anyone to do an illegal act,” Nash says. “The consequences to the Marine Corps of not upholding those standards of behavior would be a much greater tragedy. It would dishonor all those Marines who have been injured by the stress of war but who have not broken the rules.”

Marines, sailors, soldiers and airmen who get in trouble can receive one of four discharges. The lightest is a general discharge, often described as “under honorable conditions,” in which recipients remain eligible for most VA benefits.

More serious misconduct can lead to an other-than-honorable discharge or, worse, a bad conduct discharge. A serious felony results in a dishonorable discharge.

The law prohibits a veteran from receiving the full spectrum of VA benefits — such things as health care, insurance and home loans — in certain cases, such as those involving deserters, conscientious objectors or those who receive dishonorable discharges.

But the VA has discretion to grant full benefits in other-than-honorable or bad conduct discharge cases. It can still deny them if the agency decides the underlying misconduct was “willful and persistent,” a largely subjective decision, VA official Jack McCoy says.

Statistics from 1990 through September show that about eight out of 10 veterans who received bad-conduct discharges were turned down when they sought benefits, McCoy says.

Even if the full package of benefits is denied, the VA can still grant health care for specific war-related injuries such as PTSD. Gary Baker, director of the VA's health eligibility center, says that in his 20 years of experience he has seen this exception granted fewer than six times.

The VA offers temporary counseling, but no medication, for veterans who are appealing their discharges. Counseling ends if the appeal fails. Vokey argues that the VA could relax its practices and treat veterans who are discharged for PTSD-related misconduct.

Mental health experts say this problem almost certainly occurred in prior wars. But combat-induced mental disorders and how they may contribute to bad behavior were not as well understood.

The issue exists today in the Army but to a lesser degree, says Army Lt. Col. John Wells, a former supervising defense lawyer. Combat-stress cases involving misconduct are handled in informal ways that often do not lead to a loss of benefits, Wells says.

The Marine Corps, by comparison, prides itself on its strict standards.

Growing tired of that life, he finally called his parents and they brought him to their home in Las Vegas last month. "Life is great," says his mother, Kim Lukas, who says she's ecstatic to have him home again.

For Birrell, who now lives in Torrance, Calif., insomnia is back. "When I do sleep," he says, "I'm constantly waking up from dreams, constantly tired throughout the day." His nightmares are of war. He visited VA offices Tuesday asking for benefits despite his other-than-honorable discharge. Birrell says he needs treatment for his PTSD. Weirick fears they will turn him down regardless of his battlefield heroism.

Lukas says that makes her angry. "He's done two tours over there, and God knows how many lives he's saved," she says. "He's going to need the **care.**"

and merit."

The letter is signed by representatives from the American Legion, AmVets, Blinded Veterans Association, Disabled American Veterans, Jewish War Veterans, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Vietnam Veterans of America.

[Non-text portions of this message have been removed]

***From our friends in the Vietnamese community honoring our
servicemen and women on Veterans Day.***

11/13/2006.

Dear Mr. Gordon!

Thank you deeply for your
great welcome us on
Veterans Day.

Enclosure is some pictures
taken on that day as your
souvenir.

Thank you! Thank you!

Yours,

Ky phan
present of
The Vietnamese Expolitical
Prisoners Group in Syracuse



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Syracuse VA Medical Center
800 Irving Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13210

Team Blue Phone: (315) 425-6515
Team Red Phone: (315) 425-4828

VA Medical Center: (315) 425-4400

<u>Department</u>	<u>Extension:</u>
DAV Transportation:	54352
Emergency Room:	52894
Eye Clinic:	53281
Mental Health Clinic	53463
Patient Representative:	54345
Pharmacy extension:	52119 or (315) 425-2491
Pharmacy Automated Refills:	425-6505
Prosthetics:	54660
Rehab Medicine:	52684
Social Work (Team Blue)	54333
Social Work (Team Red)	54682
Specialty Clinic (2E):	52611
Specialty Clinic (2W):	52604
Specialty Clinic (4W):	52316
Telecare:	1-888-838-7890
Veterans Service Center (Customer Service):	54337 / 53217
Women's Health Clinic:	54652

Team Blue Fax: (315) 425-2489
Team Red Fax: (315) 425-4827
VAMC Toll Free#: 1-800-221-2883

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA
CENTRAL NEW YORK CHAPTER #103**

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Veteran (Y) (N)


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