

## GI SPECIAL 5E4:

**GENERAL PETRAEUS, SIR?  
THERE'S A LADY HERE WHO WOULD LIKE TO  
HAVE A WORD WITH YOU**



Local residents rally against the U.S. military occupation in Kamaliyah neighborhood, Baghdad May 2, 2007. (AP Photo/Adil al-Khazali)

**“As Kurt Vonnegut  
Suggested, Our Morale  
Is Shot To Pieces”**

The most devious trick the media and the government has pulled in the last ten years is suggesting to the public that the soldiers believe in the mission and the war itself.

In my unit that is definitely not the case.

We just fight for food and friends, and the hope of getting home.

[By a soldier in Iraq. To protect from unwanted attention by Bush buddies, all personal information removed.]

April 21, 2007

"At least they told us now and not in June."

Those were my words when I found out about the extension policy that was implemented on April 12.

Minutes before, I read about the death of Kurt Vonnegut at an internet terminal at the Frankfurt International Airport. He died on April 11. I'm glad to say I'm new to his writings, because after finishing three of his books, I still have a lot of his work to look forward to.

Vonnegut has the reputation of being anti war, anti imperialism and against any absurdities committed in the name of America.

I came to the conclusion that the administration waited patiently for Kurt Vonnegut to die before rolling out this Iraq wide extension.

They didn't want to be embarrassed by what he would have to say.

And I can't imagine what that would be. But here is what he said about me and my friends in his column in the magazine *In These Times*:

*By saying that our leaders are power-drunk chimpanzees, am I in danger of wrecking the morale of our soldiers fighting and dying in the Middle East? Their morale, like so many bodies, is already shot to pieces. They are being treated, as I never was, like toys a rich kid got for Christmas.*

He speaks, of course, of the hawkish writers that suggest speaking out against the administration, Bush and of the Iraq War was unpatriotic, and gasp! Would seriously undermine the morale of the military.

Like a congregation of Tipper Gore clones they loudly bombasted, "Oh, would someone *please* think of the soldiers!"

At the same time, those same people in the Senate, as well as Bush, reject a timetable for troop pullout, saying it would put us in serious danger and give the insurgents a plan for attack.

Now let that settle in.

*A pullout date would put us in serious danger and give the insurgents a plan for attack.*

What are we in now, relative safety, and the insurgency in its last throes?

Last throes?

**Oh shit, where have I heard that before? [June 20, 2005: Iraq insurgency in 'last throes,' Cheney says.]**

**This of course comes back to the extension.**

Secretary Gates issued at least a three month extension to everyone in Iraq, on top of the twelve months they already have. Their plan was to have units home for a full year before deploying again, but some units were coming back to Iraq and Afghanistan in ten months. It wasn't adequate time they decided. And since the military is stretched, especially during the surge, some units would have to spend more time in Iraq than promised.

A problem arose from this. They couldn't pick and choose which units to extend to relieve the pressure, so with an effortless gesture of a pen stroke, 160,000 troops are being held for fifteen months (except us, we're staying for sixteen months! Hooboy!).

Secretary Gates also mentioned that every soldier spending more than a year deployed will get an extra \$1000 per month, and a guarantee of twelve months home between deployments *and you're fucking lucky to get that much.*

**If I've learned anything thus far, a guarantee from the Army and three dollars will get you a coffee at Starbucks.**

Let me give you a little background if I haven't already. I joined the Army out of half patriotism, half desperation in 2004. I was still angry about September 11 and I totally fucked up school. I barely made it out of there with a diploma, and I knew it was because I had no discipline or direction. I thought the Army would be a magic bullet for all of those problems.

The war was going on for a year when I joined, and I thought it was just and right at the time.

Flash forward to 2007, and please, let's be grownups now.

There were no weapons of mass destruction found, reason one. Reason two, the connection between Saddam and Al-Qaeda, which is largely unfounded. So why did we attack Iraq in response to September 11? It was like getting stung by a bee in your house and responding by going outside and kicking over an anthill.

I promise you all, there's no method to the madness. I put my life on hold for another four months for nothing. Can you imagine?

I know soldiers fighting in previous wars had it a lot tougher. Kurt Vonnegut had it tougher in World War II. But at the very least, they had a goal, a promise of a bright new world free of Nazism. Brave men literally fought for freedom, because if they didn't, the world was going to be in the hands of Germany and Japan. That was the light at the end of their tunnel.

Do you know what the light at the end of the tunnel is for us?

*Food.*

Yeah, food.

When we're on patrols and house clearing missions, what's keeping us going is not the promise of freedom and democracy in Iraq. It's the vision of hamburgers, fries and ice cream. I can live without a market based economy in the Middle East, but I can't live without a toasted ham sandwich. Several times we have raced back to the base to get to the dining hall as it closed.

**Something to eat is the high point of the day. Imagine the low points.**

**As Kurt Vonnegut suggested, our morale is shot to pieces.**

**The few tattered remains left were eviscerated when they extended us four months.**

**The most devious trick the media and the government has pulled in the last ten years is suggesting to the public that the soldiers believe in the mission and the war itself.**

**In my unit that is definitely not the case.**

**We just fight for food and friends, and the hope of getting home.**

I know a few people who still believe in the cause. I would know one more, but he died when I was on leave.

Remember that naive 19 year old kid I described earlier? The one unsure about his future that wound up in the Army?

Those kinds of kids are the most succulent prey in the system.

Kids that age and a little older are slammed with guilt trips to reenlist to stay in for several more years. In Iraq they are given \$15,000 bonuses, tax free. That's a lot to a kid, very irresistible.

At the same time, they are browbeaten by their superiors into reenlisting, saying it's for their own good. You'll fail on the outside. Stay where you're loved. What else are you going to do?

All common phrases thrown around in the countless reenlistment briefs I've attended. But it's 2007, not 2004, and I'm not falling for it a second time.

Earlier editions of this blog have mentioned the date in which I separate from the military, November 24, 2007.

That is merely symbolic now.

After coming home, you must stay for three months so they determine you're not crazy and all that.

Our return home date is October 15. So that means I'll be held against my will again, until January 2008 it seems.

So [xxxxx], my sweetheart, I won't get to go on summer walks and picnics with you. I hope Pike's Market is nice in the winter.

Mom, I won't be there for your birthday. Yours either Dad.

Can't forget [xxxxxx]'s. And [xxxxx]'s. Won't be making your wedding either, [xxxxx]. To the students of my high school, I won't get to thank you in person for the letters and packages you sent until November at least.

Readers, fear not!

Despite the caustic undertone of this entry, I am glimmering with hope.

The dining hall opens in ten minutes for breakfast, and they make some killer omelettes.

*I tell you, we are here on Earth to fart around, and don't let anybody tell you different. - Kurt Vonnegut*

**Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward GI Special along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, inside the armed services and at home. Send email requests to address up top or write to: The Military Project, Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657**

## **IRAQ WAR REPORTS**

### **Two U.S. Soldiers Killed, Six Wounded By Attack In Baghdad**

May 3, 2007 Multi National Corps Iraq Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory RELEASE No. 20070503-07

BAGHDAD – Two MND-B Soldiers were killed and six others were wounded in an insurgent attack in southern Baghdad May 3.

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### **Friends Remember Fallen Marine's Smile, Spirit**

April 26, 2007 By TIM WAGNER STAFF WRITER, Sun-Times

We little knew that morning

God was going to call your name,

In life we loved you dearly,

In death we do the same.

Mourners gathered at Dieterle Memorial Home on a dreary Wednesday afternoon to pay their respects to the family of Marine Lance Cpl. Jesse De La Torre -- an East Aurora High School graduate who was killed April 16 in Iraq.

De La Torre's visitation drew hundreds of family members, friends, former teachers and decorated Marines. The 29-year-old was a member of the 2nd Battalion out of Twentynine Palms, Calif.

He was the classmate whom friends could always count on to provide a wide smile. A kid whose saxophone blared magic.

"He was a very passionate young man," said Steve Ode, a friend and bandmate of De La Torre in the late 1990s at East High. "He was very upbeat, always positive and really well-liked in band. He could play the heck out of that saxophone."

The verse on the back of his remembrance holy card continued:

It broke our hearts to lose you,

You did not go alone.

For part of us went with you,

The day God called you home.

His open casket draped with the American Flag and guarded by two Marines, De La Torre was remembered as a caring person through all phases of his life. Friends recall him carrying a Bible in the East High hallways.

Friends and relatives, weeping quietly, said that even as a young boy, unsure where God might one day lead him, De La Torre always wore a smile.

"We had a very good relationship," said Gerald Lubshina, De La Torre's American history teacher at East High. "Not only was he a very good student in class, but he would often stop by to discuss many different things."

"He had goals and desires, and was a leader with lots of friends," said Wendi Goins, De La Torre's home economics teacher at Waldo Middle School.

You left us beautiful memories,

Your love is still our guide.

And though we cannot see you,

You are always by our side.

The funeral for De La Torre will be at 10 a.m. today at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Aurora. Burial will be in Riverside Cemetery in Montgomery.

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## Iowa Soldier Killed In Iraq



U.S. Army private first class Katie Soenksen, of Davenport, Iowa, 19, was killed in an explosion in Iraq, family members said on May 3, 2007. (AP Photo/Soenksen family)

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## AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

### Yeah, Sure

**Maj. Chris Belcher, a U.S. military spokesman, said "We are here at the invitation of the Afghan people and we value their participation in the fight against the Taliban." Pamela Constable, The Washington Post, 03 May 2007**

**[Gen. John de Sutton, Lord Wivenhoe, His Majesty's military spokesman, said "We are here at the invitation of the His Majesty's American subjects and we value their participation in the fight against the rebels." London Times, 03 May, 1777]**

[Reichsführer-SS Kurt Hauser, a German military spokesman, said “We are here at the invitation of the Czech people and we value their participation in the fight against the Jew Communists.” Der Stürmer, May 03, 1940]

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## TROOP NEWS

**THIS IS HOW BUSH BRINGS THE TROOPS HOME:  
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW, ALIVE**



Funeral services at Arlington National Cemetery for Army Spc. Aaron Michael Genevie, 22, of Chambersburg, Pa. April 30, 2007. Genevie was killed April 16 when his vehicle struck a roadside bomb in Baghdad. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh)

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**“Idiot Renegades”  
“The Reserve Unit Was Mostly Made Up  
People Who In Their Civilians Lives Were  
Law Enforcement”**

May 1, 2007 Radley Balko, Reason.com [Excerpt]

There’s a telling scene related to all of this in Evan Wright’s terrific book Generation Kill.

Wright was embedded with an elite U.S. Marine unit in Iraq. Throughout his time with the unit, Wright documents the extraordinary precautions the unit takes to avoid unnecessary civilian casualties, and the real heartbreak the soldiers feel when they do inadvertently kill a civilian.



About 3/4 through the book, Wright explains how the full-time Marines were getting increasingly irritated with a reserve unit traveling with them.

The reserve unit was mostly made up people who in their civilians lives were law enforcement, "from LAPD cops to DEA agents to air marshals," and were acting like idiot renegades.

Wright quotes a gunnery sergeant who traveled with the reserve unit:

"Some of the cops in Delta started doing this cowboy stuff. They put cattle horns on their Humvees. They'd roll into these hamlets, doing shows of force—kicking down doors, doing sweeps—just for the fuck of it. There was this little clique of them. Their ringleader was this beat cop...He's like five feet tall, talks like Joe Friday and everybody calls him 'Napoleon.'"

The unit ends up firebombing a village of Iraqis who'd been helping the Marines with intelligence about insurgents and Iraqi troops.



[Thanks to Mark Shapiro, who sent this in.]

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## ***Wounded In Battle, Troops Deliberately Cheated Of Disability Pay By Order Of The***

## ***Traitors Who Run The Government:***

**“A Budgetary Ceiling Has Been  
Imposed To Contain War Costs”**

**“The U.S. Military Appears To Have  
Dispensed Low Disability Ratings To  
Wounded Service Members With Serious  
Injuries And Thus Avoided Paying Them  
Full Military Disabled Retirement  
Benefits”**



Chad Miller: The former Oregon national guardsman was wounded by bombings in Iraq in 2005. Miller, 39, is appealing his zero disability rating. KEVIN HORAN-AURORA FOR USN&WR

By Linda Robinson, U.S. News & World Report [Excerpts]

In the middle of a battle in Fallujah in April 2004, an M80 grenade landed a foot away from Fred Ball. The blast threw the 26-year-old Marine sergeant 10 feet into the air and sent a piece of hot shrapnel into his right temple. Once his wound was patched up, Ball insisted on rejoining his men. For the next three months, he continued to go on raids, then returned to Camp Pendleton, Calif.

But Ball was not all right.

Military doctors concluded that Ball was suffering from a traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), chronic headaches, and balance problems. Ball, who had a 3.5 grade-point average in high school, was found to have a sixth-grade-level learning capability.

**In January of last year, the Marine Corps found him unfit for duty but not disabled enough to receive full permanent disability retirement benefits and discharged him.**

**Ball's situation has taken a dire turn for the worse.**

**The tremors that he experienced after the blast are back, he can hardly walk, and he has trouble using a pencil or a fork. Ball's case is being handled by the Department of Veterans Affairs-he receives \$337 a month-but while his case is under appeal, he receives no medical care.**

**He works 16-hour shifts at a packing-crate plant near his home in East Wenatchee, Wash., but he has gone into debt to cover his \$1,600 monthly mortgage and support his wife and 2-month-old son.**

**"Life is coming down around me," Ball says. Trained to be strong and self-sufficient, Ball now speaks in tones of audible pain.**

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**Fred Ball's story is just one of a shocking number of cases where the U.S. military appears to have dispensed low disability ratings to wounded service members with serious injuries and thus avoided paying them full military disabled retirement benefits.**

While most recent attention has been paid to substandard conditions and outpatient care at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, the first stop for many wounded soldiers stateside, veterans' advocates say that a more grievous problem is an arbitrary and dysfunctional disability ratings process that is short-changing the nation's newest crop of veterans. The trouble has existed for years, but now that the country is at war, tens of thousands of Americans are being caught up in it.

Now an extensive investigation by U.S. News and a new Army inspector general's report reveal that the system is beset by ambiguity and riddled with discrepancies.

Indeed, Department of Defense data examined by U.S. News and military experts show that the vast majority-nearly 93 percent-of disabled troops are receiving low ratings, and more have been graded similarly in recent years.

**What's more, ground troops, who suffer the most combat injuries from the ubiquitous roadside bombs, have received the lowest ratings.**

**One counselor who has helped wounded soldiers navigate the process for over a decade believes that as many as half of them may have received ratings that are too low.**

Ron Smith, deputy general counsel for the Disabled American Veterans, says: "If it is even 10 percent, it is unconscionable."

Smith says he recently asked the staff to cull those cases that appeared to have been incorrectly rated. Within six hours, he says, they had forwarded him 30 cases. "So far," Smith says, "the review supports the conclusion that a significant number of soldiers are being fairly dramatically underrated by the U.S. Army."

At first glance, the disability ratings process seems straightforward.

Each branch of service has its own Physical Evaluation Boards, which can comprise military officers, medical professionals, and civilians. The PEBs determine whether the wounded or ill service members are fit for duty. If they are, it's back to work. Those found unfit are assigned a disability rating for the condition that makes them unable to do their military job.

**The actual rating is key, and here's why: Service members who have served less than 20 years-the great majority of wounded soldiers-who receive a rating under 30 percent are sent home with a severance check.**

**Those who receive a rating of 30 percent or higher qualify for a host of lifelong, enviable benefits from the DOD, which include full military retirement pay (based on rank and tenure), life insurance, health insurance, and access to military commissaries.**

**But the system is hideously complicated in practice. The military doctors who prepare the case for the PEBs pick only one condition for the service member's rating, even though many of the current injuries are much more complex.**

The PEBs use the Department of Veterans Affairs ratings scale, which grades disabilities in increments of 10-a leg amputation, for example, puts a soldier at between 40 and 60 percent disabled.

**The PEBs claim they have the leeway to rate a soldier 20 percent disabled for pain, say, rather than 30 percent disabled for a back injury.**

**If rated at 20 percent or below and discharged, the soldier enters the VA system as a retiree where he is evaluated again to establish his healthcare benefits. Ball, for example, was found by the VA to be 50 percent disabled for PTSD.**

**Since 2000, 92.7 percent of the disability ratings handed out by PEBs have been 20 percent or lower, according to Pentagon data analyzed by the Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission, which Congress formed in 2004 to look into veterans' complaints.**

**Moreover, fewer veterans have received ratings of 30 percent or more since America went to war in Afghanistan and Iraq, according to the Pentagon's annual actuarial reports.**

**As of 2006, for example, 87,000 disabled retirees were on the list of those exceeding the 30 percent threshold; in 2000, there were 102,000 recipients.**

**Last year, only 1,077 of 19,902 service members made it over the 30 percent threshold.**

**The total amount paid out for these benefit awards has remained roughly constant in wartime and peacetime, leading disabled veterans like retired Lt. Col. Mike Parker, who has become an unofficial spokesperson on this issue, to allege that a budgetary ceiling has been imposed to contain war costs.**

**Other data reveal glaring discrepancies among the military services.**

**Even though most of those wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan have been ground troops, the Army and Marine Corps have granted far fewer members full disabled benefits than the Air Force.**

The Pentagon records show that 26.7 percent of disabled airmen have been rated 30 percent or more disabled, while only 4.3 percent of soldiers and 2.7 percent of marines made the grade.

**Services engaged in close combat, experts say, could be expected to find more members unfit for duty and meriting full retirement benefits. Instead, the Air Force decided that 2,497 airmen fall into that category while the much larger Army, with its higher tally of wounded, has accorded those benefits to only 1,763 soldiers since 2000.**

How many of these veterans' cases have been decided incorrectly? Nobody knows.

But there is abundant anecdotal evidence of a process cloaked in obscurity and riddled with anomalies, and of ratings that are inconsistent and often arbitrarily applied.

**DAV lawyer Smith, for example, took on the case of a soldier whose radial nerve of his dominant hand had been destroyed, the same affliction former Sen. Bob Dole has.**

**Like Dole, the soldier was unable to write with a pen or to button his shirt.**

**"There is one and only one rating for that condition, which is 70 percent disability," says Smith. The PEB gave the soldier 30 percent, the lawyer said, "which I found to be fairly outrageous."**

Upon appeal to the Army Physical Disability Agency, the entity that oversees that service's disability evaluation process, the rating was raised to 60 percent.

**Smith recently took on another case, that of Sgt. Michael Pinero, a soldier who developed a degenerative eye condition called keratoconus that required him to wear contact lenses.**

**Army regulations prohibit wearing contacts in combat, which should have made him ineligible for deployment and therefore unfit to perform his specific military duties.**

**But the PEB ignored the eye condition, which Smith believes merited a 30 percent rating or more, and rated Pinero 10 percent disabled for shin splints.**

Smith has asked the Army to clarify whether it considers the regulation on contact lenses binding or, as one board member alleged, merely a guideline. Disputes over such distinctions are common in the Alice in Wonderland world of disability ratings.

Controversy frequently surrounds decisions on which conditions make a soldier unfit for duty. Smith took issue with a recent statement made by the Army Physical Disability Agency's legal adviser, quoted in Army Times newspaper.

***The official said that short-term memory loss would not necessarily render soldiers unfit for duty since they could compensate by carrying a notepad.***

"Memory loss is a common sign of TBI," Smith said, using the abbreviation for traumatic brain injury, which has afflicted many soldiers hit by the roadside bombs commonly used in Iraq.

**"The rules of engagement are a seven-step process...."**

**"If a suicide bomber is coming at you, you cannot stop and consult your notepad," he added.**

**"I find this demonstrative of the attitude that pervades the Physical Disability Agency," which is in charge of reviewing evaluations for accuracy and consistency.**

Trying to overturn a low rating can be a full-time job-and an exasperating one.

Take Staff Sgt. Chris Bain, who lost the use of his arms but not his sense of humor. "They call me T-Rex because I have a big mouth and two hands and I can't do nothing with them," he jokes.

He left the Army in February, but he still has plenty of fight in him.

During an ambush in Taji, Iraq, in 2004, a mortar round exploded 2 feet away from him, ripping through his left arm and hand. A sniper's bullet passed through his right elbow. His buddies saved his life, throwing Bain on the hood of a humvee and rushing him to a combat hospital.

**Once transferred to Walter Reed, Bain refused to have his arm amputated and underwent eight surgeries to save it. That choice cost him. While an amputation would have automatically put him over the 30 percent threshold, the injury to his left arm was rated at 20 percent even though he cannot use the limb.**

**Bain was angry.**

**A noncommissioned officer who had planned on 20 or 30 years in the Army, he knew his career was over, but he wasn't going to go quietly.**

**“I wanted to be an example to all soldiers,” he said. “My job was to take care of troops.”**

He went to find Danny Soto, the DAV representative at Walter Reed he'd heard so much about. “Danny is just an awesome guy. He took great care of me, but he should not have had to,” Bain says.

Soto is a patron saint to many soldiers at Walter Reed. He walks the halls, finding the newly injured and urging them to collect documents for their journey through the tortuous-and, to many, capricious-system.

Many soldiers are young, and after they have spent months or years recuperating, they just want to get home and are unwilling to argue for the rating they deserve.

**Even though he missed his wife and three children, Bain decided: “I’ve already been here two years, another one ain’t going to hurt me. Too many people are getting lowballed.”**

**With Soto’s help, Bain gathered detailed medical evidence of his injuries and went to face the board. They gave him a 70 percent rating for injuries related to the blast except for his hearing loss, which was not considered unfitting since he had a hearing aid.**

**Oddly enough, however, the board put him on the temporary disabled retirement list instead of the permanent list. “What do they think, that after three years, my arm is going to come back to life?”**

A lifetime of adjusting lies ahead for Bain.

“I can’t tie my shoes, open bottles of water, or cut my own food,” he says. “I have to ask for help.”

The 35-year-old veteran has found a new sense of purpose. He’s decided to run for Congress in 2008, and fixing the veterans’ system is his top priority. “I do not want this s-- to happen again to anyone. No one can communicate with each other. The paper trail doesn’t catch up.”

It’s a tall order, but the soldier says that he has “100,000 fights” left in him.

**A systemic fix doesn’t appear to be anywhere in sight. A March 2006 report by the Government Accountability Office found that Pentagon officials were not even trying to get a handle on the problem.**

“While DOD has issued policies and guidance to promote consistent and timely disability decisions,” the report concluded, “(it) is not monitoring compliance.”

But the GAO report did spur Army Secretary Francis Harvey, who was forced to resign last month in the wake of the Walter Reed scandal, to order the Army’s inspector general to conduct an investigation of the disability evaluation system.

After almost a year of work, the inspector general's office last month issued a 311-page report that begins to pierce the confusion and opacity surrounding the process. While it does not determine how many erroneous ratings were accorded to the nearly 40,000 soldiers rated 20 percent disabled or less since 2000, it does make three critical points: 1) the ambiguity in applying the ratings schedule should end; 2) wide variance in ratings is indisputable, even among the three Army boards, and 3) the Army's oversight body is not doing its job.

**The inspector general's team found that Army policy was not consistent with the policies of either the Pentagon or the Department of Veterans Affairs.**

It recommended that the Army "align adjudication of disability ratings to more closely reflect those used by the Department of Veterans Affairs."

For years, the Army has asserted that it has the right to depart from VA standards on grounds that it is assessing fitness for duty and compensating for loss of military career, not decreased civilian employability.

Veterans' advocates argue that federal law requires the military to use the Veterans Affairs Schedule for Rating Disabilities as the standard for assigning the ratings. But over the years, Pentagon directives on applying the schedule have opened up a whole new gray area by saying the schedule is to be used only as a guide.

And the services have interpreted them in different ways, engendering further discrepancies.

Soto, the DAV national service officer at Walter Reed, says that inconsistencies are especially prevalent in complex cases of traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder.

**"There is a saying going around the compound here," Soto says, "that if you are not an amputee, you are going to have to fight for your rating."**

**Finally, the report bluntly concludes that the system's internal oversight mechanism is not functioning. "The Army Physical Disability Agency's quality assurance program does not conform to DOD and Army policy," it says-the same conclusion the GAO came to a year ago.**

The inspector general's report adds evidence of just how little the watchdog is doing to ensure that cases are correctly decided.

**The agency is supposed to send cases to either of two review boards when soldiers rebut their rating evaluations, but from 2002 through 2005, the agency sent only 45 out of 51,000 cases to one of the boards. The other review board has not been used at all.**

**Veterans' advocates are skeptical that the administration or the military bureaucracy will make major changes anytime soon.**

In testimony to Congress last month, Veterans for America director of veterans' affairs Steve Robinson recommended taking the entire ratings process away from the



Pentagon and giving it to the Department of Veterans Affairs. "It's hard to ignore the fact that in time of war they are giving out less disability," he says. "Is it policy? I don't know. But it is a fact."

Congress has not responded to this problem.

Any solutions that call for transferring more responsibility to the Department of Veterans Affairs will have to be matched by enormous infusions of cash and staff. Already, the VA is reeling under a backlog of over 600,000 claims from retired veterans, which the agency predicts will grow by an additional 1.6 million in the next two years.

**Meanwhile, people like Danny Soto want to know who is going to stop the military boards from giving out ratings like the 10 percent given to one soldier for a skull fracture and traumatic brain injury, when the VA later assigned a 100 percent rating.**

Soto is also frustrated by a recent case in which a soldier whose legs had been severely injured in a blast in Iraq was given only a 20 percent disability rating for pain and by the treatment of a man who has a bullet hole through his eye and suffers from seizures.

As Soto sat with that soldier in front of the board, he asked why he had been placed on the temporary list. "At what point do you think he is going to fall below 30 percent?"

**Soto is unsparing in his criticism of the bureaucracy.**

"This system," he says, "is so broke."

**Old soldiers say the root of the problem is an Army culture that preaches a "suck it up" attitude.**

"If you ask for what you are due, you are perceived to be whining or trying to pad your pocket," says a retired command sergeant major.

"If you're not bleeding, you're not hurt. That's what we were taught."

**MORE:**

## **Command Discovers The Obvious [They're Real Good At Making Lists]**

March 19, 2007 By Kelly Kennedy – Staff writer; Army Times [Excerpt]

Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Richard Cody described the long list of problems he saw in the medical health care system after focusing "all of my attention" on it for two weeks:

Regulations that have not been updated for 50 years and are "needlessly cumbersome."

Information overload for soldiers trying to make their way through the disability evaluation system.

Overworked case managers with poor training.

Understaffed Medical Hold Unit employees.

Poorly maintained facilities with rooms that are not inspected for mice, mold or loose drywall.

No follow-up process with the soldiers' home units.

Too few liaison officers between the medical evaluation and physical evaluation boards, some of whom are only privates first class without the experience or rank to properly handle cases.

No top-level oversight.

**MORE:**

## **“The Disability System Cheats Those Who Sacrifice The Most In Service To Their Nation”**

**Troops endure months and years of administrative runaround while trying to secure benefits that should be awarded to them almost automatically. Instead, they are caught in a dehumanizing bureaucracy that devalues their sacrifices as it crunches numbers to minimize their benefits.**

March 19, 2007, Editorial, Army Times

The moldy walls and leaking pipes at Walter Reed Army Medical Center will surely be fixed — the whole world is watching.

But fixing squalid quarters is the easy part. The graver issue is how the disability system cheats those who sacrifice the most in service to their nation.

This problem is deep-rooted and institutional, and can't be plastered over.

**As staff writer Kelly Kennedy details in this issue of Army Times, wounded soldiers and Marines average lower disability ratings — and less compensation — than sailors or airmen.**

**Likewise, wounded enlisted troops are less likely to get a 50 percent or greater disability rating than are officers. One-third of injured Army officers get disability ratings of 50 percent or greater, compared to only 21 percent of enlisted soldiers.**

**These facts play into the worst stereotypes of military culture — that officers are a privileged elite and that the Army and Marine Corps, whose troops bear the greatest burden in battle, care the least for their people.**

**There is no acceptable reason for either.**

The medical disability system is unfair and broken. The individual services conduct their own disability ratings processes with little Defense Department oversight.

**Troops endure months and years of administrative runaround while trying to secure benefits that should be awarded to them almost automatically. Instead, they are caught in a dehumanizing bureaucracy that devalues their sacrifices as it crunches numbers to minimize their benefits.**

*It is notable that the budget for disability retirement pay hasn't increased in five years — even in the midst of a war. Can it be that disability ratings have been cruelly linked to budgeted resources?*

Fixing this will not be easy, nor inexpensive. But these men and women did their duty.

**Now the country, as a matter of honor, owes them more than a little whitewash on dirty walls.**

**It owes them a complete and immediate overhaul of the disability process — no matter how much it ends up costing.**

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## **While The Wounded Get Treated Like Shit, Top V.A. Bosses Took \$3.8 Million From V.A. Budget For Their Own Private Profit**

[Thanks to Pham Binh, who sent this in.]

5.3.07 By HOPE YEN, Associated Press Writer

Congressional leaders on Thursday demanded that the Veterans Affairs secretary explain hefty bonuses for senior department officials involved in crafting a budget that came up \$1 billion short and jeopardized veterans' health care.

Rep. Harry Mitchell (news, bio, voting record), chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs subcommittee on oversight, said he would hold hearings to investigate after The Associated Press reported that budget officials at the Veterans Affairs Department received bonuses ranging up to \$33,000.

"These reports point to an apparent gross injustice at the VA that we have a responsibility to investigate," said Mitchell, D-Ariz.

"No government official should ever be rewarded for misleading taxpayers, and the VA should not be handing out the most lucrative bonuses in government as veterans are waiting months and months to see a doctor."

**A list obtained by the AP of bonuses to senior career officials in 2006 documents a generous package of more than \$3.8 million in payments by a financially strapped agency straining to help care for thousands of injured veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan.**

Among those receiving payments were a deputy assistant secretary and several regional directors who crafted the VA's flawed budget for 2005 based on misleading accounting.

They received performance payments up to \$33,000 each, a figure equal to about 20 percent of their annual salaries.

**Also receiving a top bonus was the deputy undersecretary for benefits, who helps manage a disability claims system that has a backlog of cases and delays averaging 177 days in getting benefits to injured veterans.**

The bonuses were awarded even after government investigators had determined the VA repeatedly miscalculated — if not deliberately misled taxpayers — with questionable methods used to justify Bush administration cuts to health care amid the burgeoning Iraq war.

**Annual bonuses to senior VA officials now average more than \$16,000 — the most lucrative in government. All bonuses are proposed by division chiefs, then approved by Nicholson.**

According to the White House Office of Personnel Management, roughly three of every four senior officials at the VA have received some kind of bonus each year.

In recent years, the payment amount has steadily increased from being one of the lowest in government — \$8,120 in 2002 — to the most generous — \$16,713 in 2005.

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**REALLY BAD IDEA:  
NO MISSION;  
HOPELESS WAR:  
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW**



**4.30.07: A US soldier walks past a wall with writing on it that reads in Arabic, "Iraq is only for Iraqis," as he takes photographs of the site of a car bomb in Baghdad's Jadiriya district. (AFP/Ahmad al-Rubaye)**

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## **IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP**

### **Assorted Resistance Action**



Wreckage of a police vehicle where a car bomber targeted an Iraqi police patrol in Baghdad's Sadr City late 02 May 2007. (AFP/Wissam Al-Okaili)

May. 01, 2007 By Mohammed Al Dulaimy, McClatchy Newspapers & May. 03, 2007 By Jenan, McClatchy Newspapers & AP

Tikrit: Police found a chopped head of the captured police Brigadier Abdullah Mustafa near Beiji. Mustafa was captured two days ago from Beiji town near his house.

Kirkuk: Six bombs exploded in different areas of the city yesterday night. The bombings targeted homes of police officers and other governmental officials in Al Nasr neighborhood. The bombings caused damages to houses and cars. Police found and defused two bombs in the same area after the bombings.

Kirkuk: IED exploded at last midnight was targeting police convoy in Al-Riyadh neighborhood. The explosion injured one policeman and damaged police vehicle

A car bomber attack occurred at dusk near a police station in Sadr City. Three policemen were killed.

Ahmed Mohammed Ali, 31, who sells ice cream and cigarettes in Sadr City, said the blast sent a cloud of black smoke billowing into the air.

"I saw police and civilian cars on fire," Ali said.

"The explosions show the incompetence of the security plan," said Saif Abdul-Khaliq, 28, who owns a stationery shop near the Sadr City blast site.

**"We expected security from this plan, but the only thing we got was traffic jams and blasts."**

**IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE  
END THE OCCUPATION**

**GET THE MESSAGE?**



U.S. military vehicles move away as local residents rally against the U.S. military occupation in Kamaliyah neighborhood in Baghdad May 2, 2007. (AP Photo/Ali Kadim)

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## FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

One day while I was in a bunker in Vietnam, a sniper round went over my head. The person who fired that weapon was not a terrorist, a rebel, an extremist, or a so-called insurgent. The Vietnamese individual who tried to kill me was a citizen of Vietnam, who did not want me in his country. This truth escapes millions.

Mike Hastie  
U.S. Army Medic  
Vietnam 1970-71  
December 13, 2004

### **May 4, 1970: Dishonorable Anniversary: Unarmed Students Murdered By Ohio National Guard Scum**



[Thanks to Mark Shapiro, who sent this in.]

Carl Bunin Peace History April 30-May 6

**Ohio National Guard troops opened fire on anti-war protesters at Kent State University, killing four students and wounding nine others.**

The previous day, President Nixon had announced a widening of the Vietnam War with bombing in neighboring Cambodia. There were major campus protests around the country with students occupying university buildings to organize and discuss the war and other issues.



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**“U.S. Soldiers Growing  
Increasingly Opposed To A War  
They Have No Interest In  
Fighting”**

**Bush’s Approval Rating Reached  
Another All-Time Low Of 28 % But...  
“The Democrats Don’t Want To Stop The  
War On Iraq--No Matter How Many**



# People Die And How Many Lives Are Ruined”

May 4, 2007 Editorial, Socialist Worker [Excerpts]

**Bush’s approval rating reached another all-time low of 28 percent in a Harris poll last week. Richard Nixon, as he was about to resign the White House in disgrace because of the Watergate scandal, had an approval rating of 24 percent.**

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In the end, the Democrats’ talk about forcing the Bush administration to accept reality may shrivel into a few “benchmarks” for the Iraqi government to meet, if that--without any binding provisions on the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

**And according to the cold calculations of Washington politics, that would be fine with the Democratic Party leadership. They can claim to have taken action to oppose the war, while still using the Iraq catastrophe to challenge Republicans in the 2008 elections.**

**“We don’t want to own this war,” an anonymous party strategist told *New York Review of Books* contributor Elizabeth Drew. “It’s Bush’s war, and we want him to keep owning it.”**

This cynical attitude is every bit an indictment of the Washington political system as Bush’s contempt for the overwhelming sentiment to end the occupation.

**The Democrats don’t want to stop the war on Iraq--no matter how many people die and how many lives are ruined.**

**Ultimately, they want to use it as a political issue--and, once in charge, manage it differently.**

As enjoyable as it is to see the Bush White House taking heat--and to have a one-sided national debate on the war turned into a two-sided one--the truth is that the two mainstream parties agree on much more than they disagree on when it comes to Iraq.

Both are committed to projecting U.S. imperial power around the world and maintaining American dominance in the Middle East--the crucial source of the world’s most valuable commodity, oil. Iraq is critical to these plans, so a continued U.S. presence is a priority for all involved.

The differences are over tactics.

The occupation of Iraq won’t end if it’s left to the politicians to act.

**The real power to end the war lies outside Washington--with the Iraqi opponents of the occupation who want the U.S. to get out, with U.S. soldiers growing**

increasingly opposed to a war they have no interest in fighting, and with an antiwar movement that needs to step up the action.

**Troops Invited:**

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or send email [contact@militaryproject.org](mailto:contact@militaryproject.org):. Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Replies confidential. Same address to unsubscribe.

## OCCUPATION REPORT

# 60% Of Iraqis Want U.S. Troops Dead: Big Surprise



All adult males are rounded up at gunpoint for questioning and forced to sit in the dirt during an operation by foreign occupation soldiers from the U.S. 10th Mountain Division Mahmudiya, south of Baghdad April 21, 2007. REUTERS/Bob Strong

[U.S. sponsored polls reported recently that 60% of Iraqis favor killing U.S. troops. Iraqis feel about U.S. troops trampling them in the dirt the same way Americans felt about British troops trampling them in the dirt in 1776. They are right to resist. T]

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## CLASS WAR REPORTS

# **Welcome To Occupied America: They Really Do Hate Our Freedom; Filth In Police Uniforms Attack Crowd At Pro-Immigration Rally In L.A.**



This video image provided by KVEA/Telemundo shows KCAL cameraman Carl Stein on the ground during a police response during an immigrants rights rally, Tuesday May 1, 2007, in Los Angeles. Telemundo's video was shown on a KCAL news broadcast. (AP Photo/KVEA/Telemundo) [Thanks to Pham Binh, Traveling Soldier, who sent this in.]

03 May 2007 The Nation [Excerpt]

**All of a sudden it looked like the bad old days this week in Los Angeles. A peaceful pro-immigration rally in the downtown area Tuesday descended into chaotic violence as the LAPD charged in swinging with batons and firing more than 200 rounds of foam bullets.**

Local news stations and Youtube brim with videos showing the cops swarming into the park where nothing was happening except thousands sitting on the grass listening to speakers. Several journalists and reporters were also manhandled and clubbed sparking a chorus of outrage from professional press organizations.

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## “200,000 Activists Rallied Across The United States”



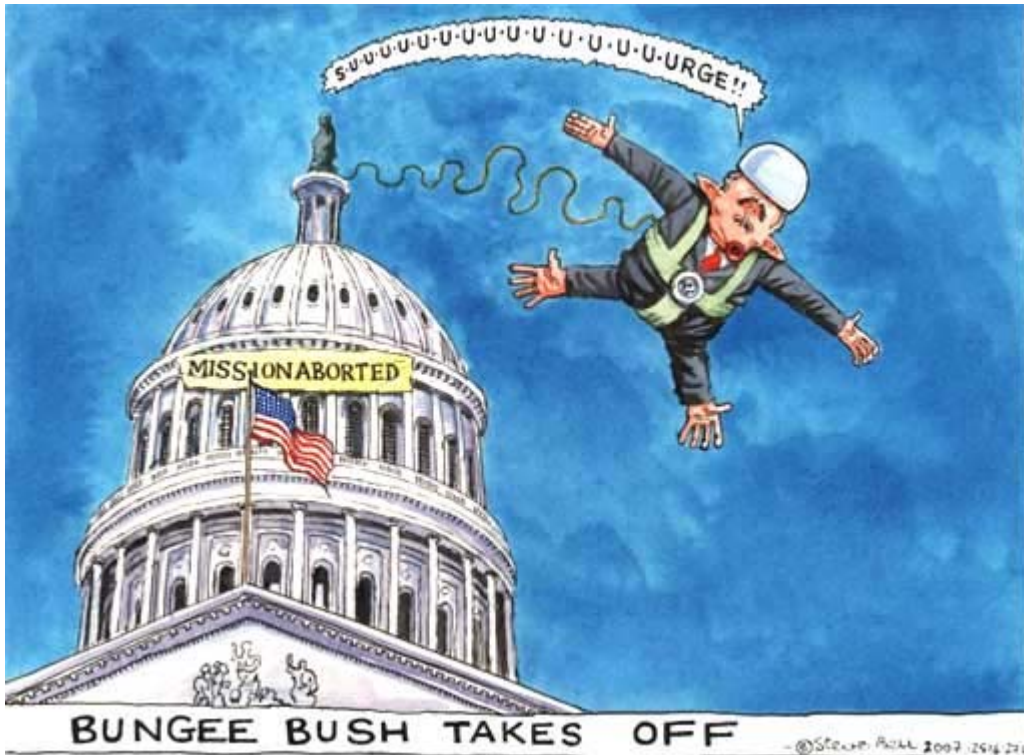
Immigration reform supporters march in downtown Los Angeles, 01 May 2007. More than 200,000 activists rallied across the United States on Tuesday, demanding an overhaul of immigration laws and greater rights for an estimated 12 million illegal workers. (AFP/File/Robyn Beck)

### **NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER**

Telling the truth - about the occupation or the criminals running the government in Washington - is the first reason for Traveling Soldier. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it's in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces. Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers.

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/> And join with Iraq War vets in the call to end the occupation and bring our troops home now! ([www.ivaw.org/](http://www.ivaw.org/))

## DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



[Thanks to NB, who sent this in.]

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### Received:

### **‘Non-Binding’ Bullshit**

From: Steve Vargo [Soldier For Peace]  
To: GI Special  
Sent: May 03, 2007  
Subject: RE: GI Special 5E3 Rats

The headline says it all-the Dems are totally gutless!

Their last ‘non-binding’ piece of bullshit was pathetic.

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