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*“Cutting Through the Fog of War”*

## VFP Mothers - Judi's Story

*By Mashaw McGuinnis*

Although Judi Rose's son served four years in the U.S. Navy (including one year in Afghanistan) he went into the service with some distinct advantages over many young people. His mother firmly believes his advantages made all the difference in her son's experience coping with military life during wartime. Sunny was already in his 20's, college educated and had come from a supportive, stable family.

Choosing to join only because he couldn't fund the remainder of his education, Sunny's news of enlistment came as a shock to Judi at first. "When he called from school in Colorado" Judi remembers, "he asked me if I was sitting down, but I thought he was going to say someone was pregnant"! She never imagined that a child of hers would even consider joining up. No one in her family had served, and J did certainly never glamorized war or military to her children growing up. But having raised her son and her daughter to be independent and confident making their own choices, she forced herself to put aside her doubts and fears and accept his decision.

Judi decided to keep her concerns under wraps so her child wouldn't have the added burden of a worrying mother to think about, but this proved extremely difficult at times. She remembers being really "pissed off" when Sunny was instructed to write a will as part of the preparations for deployment to Afghanistan. She recalled thinking "If they kill my son and bring him home in a box, then they damn well better not have a military funeral for him! I won't allow it". Judi shudders now when recalling the paperwork she received as he was completing boot camp, telling of burial options like flag draped coffins. "If they ever came knocking on my door telling me this, (that her son had been killed) then I'll slam the door in their face and tell them to burn their damn flag"!

Not wanting to give power to any anger or fear, Judi managed to find a productive way to cope with a son facing danger far from home. Acting on what she believes was "mother's instinct" Judi began mailing food, toiletries and supplies to Sunny's base in Afghanistan. Like any mother's natural response she worried if the military was able to provide her child with the nutrition he needed while he was fighting their war. "I just wanted to make sure he was getting enough food" she said and eventually he operation expanded to many other people. She began coordinating shipments with other family members and friends to assure the supplies arrived staggered, ensuring the necessary items would flow in to the base regularly. The plan was so successful that it became a running

joke on base about Sunny's care packages, and the large volume of food and supplies was distributed around because there was such an excess.

Beyond making sure a child has enough food, there wasn't too much else a mother could do. For the first two years this Navy mom lived relatively worry-free because Sunny was safe on a base in Italy, but then the day came when Judi was given the news that her only son would be sent to Afghanistan. Sensing that even her own family wouldn't be enough of a support system at that turning point, Judi attended her first Veterans For Peace meeting. "I joined because I figured if anybody knows about war and has an opinion that I respect, it's this group of people" Judi said. "They have been there (to war) and are saying 'it's not a good thing' "

Sadly, not all service members' parents understand that Veterans For Peace is there for emotional support. An acquaintance of Judi's whose son was sent to Iraq expressed concern that there would be people at VFP who would hold such strong opinions about the war that they would have harsh judgements against her son. Her belief that she would be confronted with criticism over his choice to enlist kept her away and instead she tried to start her own support group for mothers of military members.

But even mothers of service members who enlisted on their own can have pretty strong opinions about recruiters who give the strong sales pitch to young people. "I believe it is very important to keep recruiters away from minors" Judi says, "and at least give them a chance to gain life skills and a sense of themselves so they can make an educated decision about joining any branch of the military". When asked what age she thought would be an appropriate age for young people to enlist Judi says laughing "Well no age! But seriously, we don't even let them drink until they are 21, so why would we expect them to make a decision like that when they are still teenagers"?

Understanding that her son's experience was different than most, in that he was older and started out with more life experience, Judi is still very grateful she got to see him return home safely and adjust well in civilian life. She knows that many mothers of veterans see severe and traumatic changes in their children when they return from war. Sunny not only is back at school, working on his Masters degree but also volunteering as a Big Brother to a boy whose own father is in jail. Perhaps the positive influence he will have in the boy's life will better prepare him to make a sound decision about enlistment of his own someday.

**MONTHLY VFP 56 MEETING WILL BE HELD ON  
JANUARY 8TH AT THE LABOR TEMPLE,  
840 E STREET  
IN EUREKA, 7:00 PM**



## A Recipe For Corporate Success in Tough Times? SaladShooters, Adult Diapers, and Tactical Ammo

By Nick Turse

Is it possible that one of the Pentagon's contractors has a tripartite business model for our tough economic times: one division that specializes in crock-pots, another in adult diapers, and a third in medium caliber tactical ammunition? Can the maker of the SaladShooter, a hand-held electric shredder/dicer that hacks up and fires out sliced veggies, really be a top arms manufacturer? Could a company that produces the Pizzazz Pizza Oven also be a merchant of death? And could this company be a model for success in an economy heading for the bottom?

Once upon a time, the military-industrial complex was loaded with household-name companies like General Motors, Ford, and Dow Chemical, that produced weapons systems and what arms expert Eric Prokosch has called, "the technology of killing." Over the years, for economic as well as public relations reasons, many of these firms got out of the business of creating lethal technologies, even while remaining Department of Defense (DoD) contractors.

The military-corporate complex of today is still filled with familiar names from our consumer culture, including defense contractors like iPod-maker Apple, cocoa giant Nestle, ketchup producer Heinz, and chocolate bar maker Hershey, not to speak of Tyson Foods, Procter & Gamble, and the Walt Disney Company. But while they may provide the everyday products that allow the military to function, make war, and carry out foreign occupations, most such civilian firms no longer dabble in actual arms manufacture.

### Whirlpool: Then and Now

Take the Whirlpool Corporation, which bills itself as "the world's leading manufacturer and marketer of major home appliances" and boasts annual sales of more than \$19 billion to consumers in more than 170 countries. Whirlpool was recently recognized as "one of the World's Most Ethical Companies by the Ethisphere Institute." The company also professes a "strong" belief in "ethical values" that dates back almost 100 years to founders who believed "there is no right way to do a wrong thing."

In the middle of the last century, however -- as Prokosch has documented -- Whirlpool was engaged in what many might deem a wrong thing. In 1957, Whirlpool took over work on flechettes -- razor-sharp darts with fins at the blunt end -- for the U.S. military. While International Harvester, the prior Pentagon contractor producing them, had managed to pack only 6,265 of these deadly darts into a 90mm canister round, Whirlpool set to work figuring out a way to cram almost 10,000 flechettes into the same delivery vehicle. Its goal: to "improve the lethality of the canisters." (In addition, Whirlpool also reportedly worked on "Sting Ray" -- an Army project involving a projectile filled with flechettes coated in a still-undisclosed chemical agent.)

In 1967, an Associated Press report noted that U.S. troops were using new flechette artillery rounds to "spray thousands of dart-shaped steel shafts over broad areas of the jungle or open territory" in Vietnam. "I've seen reports of enemy soldiers actually being nailed to trees by these things," commented one Army officer.

On a recent trip to Vietnam, I spoke to a Vietnamese witness who had seen such "pin bullets" employed by U.S. forces many times in those years. In one case, Bui Van Bac recalled that a woman from his village, spotted by U.S. aircraft while she was walking in a rice paddy, was gravely wounded by them. Local guerillas came to the woman's aid and brought her to a hospital where a surgeon found a number of extremely sharp, three centimeter long "pins" inside her body. Medically, it was all but hopeless and the woman died.

A top player in lethal technologies back then, Whirlpool is now among the tiniest defense contractors. While, in recent years, the company has ignored requests for information from TomDispatch.com on their dealings with the Pentagon, records indicate that last year, for example, it received just over \$105,000 from the Department of Defense, most of which apparently went towards the purchase of kitchen appliances and household furnishings.

Similarly, Whirlpool's predecessor in the flechette game, International Harvester, is now Navistar International Corporation. Navistar Defense, a division of the company, remains one of the Pentagon's stealth "billion dollar babies." But while it did more than \$1 billion in business with the DoD last year, Navistar appears to have been building vehicles for the Pentagon, not creating anti-personnel weaponry. There are, however, companies that can't seem to say goodbye to lethal technologies.

### National Presto Industries

National Presto Industries traces its history to the 1905 founding of the Northwestern Iron and Steel Works in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, according to the Business & Company Resource Center. By 1908, the company was making industrial steam pressure cookers and, in 1915, began making models for home use. On the eve of the U.S. entry into World War II, the company entered the arms game when it scored a multi-million dollar contract to produce artillery fuses. Even with that deal in hand, it was reportedly on the verge of bankruptcy when its new president, Lewis Phillips, landed a series of other lucrative military contracts.

In the early years of the Cold War, about the time Whirlpool was getting into the flechette business, National Presto Industries had just introduced "a revolutionary new concept in electric cooking... a complete line of fully immersible electric cooking appliances employing a removable heat control" -- and was about to launch "the world's first automatic, submersible stainless steel coffee maker." The company was also still churning out war materiel.

In 1953, National Presto announced plans to build a multi-million



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dollar plant to produce 105mm artillery shells. In 1955, it was awarded millions to make howitzer shells for the Army, and the next year, millions from the Air Force for fighter-bomber parts. By 1958, company President Lewis Phillips would declare, "The future of this company in Eau Claire and hence the security of our jobs here is now almost wholly dependent upon defense contracts awarded by the U.S. Government." When the Army cancelled its contracts with Presto in 1959, Phillips lamented, "With little or no notice, this Government decision has forced us completely out of the manufacturing business here in Eau Claire."

The tough times didn't last. Soon enough, National Presto returned to the fray, benefiting from the disastrous American war in Vietnam. From 1966 to 1975, the company manufactured more than two million eight-inch howitzer shells and more than 92 million 105mm artillery shells. In Vietnam, 105mm shells would kill or maim untold numbers of civilians, but it was a boom time for National Presto, which took in at least \$163 million in Pentagon contracts in 1970-1971 alone for artillery shell parts. Finally shuttered in 1980, the company defense plant was kept on government "stand-by" into the 1990s, a sweetheart deal that earned Presto \$2.5 million annually for producing nothing at all.

As the Vietnam War wound down, National Presto turned back to the civilian market with a series of new kitchen gadgets: in 1974, the PrestoBurger, an electric, single-serving fast broiler for hamburgers; in 1975, the Hot Dogger; and in 1976, the Fry Baby deep fat fryer. In 1988, the company introduced its wildly popular SaladShooter, followed in 1991 by its Tater Twister potato peeler. When sales of its SaladShooters, corn poppers, pressure cookers, deep fryers, and griddles became sluggish, however, weaponry again proved a savior.

In 2001, National Presto decided to get back into the arms game. Months before 9/11, the company's chairman Melvin Cohen expressed fears that a future war might mean ruin for the company's kitchen appliance business. As a result, Presto purchased munitions manufacturer Amtec. In the years since, according to Securities and Exchange Commission filings, Presto has also "made other complementary acquisitions in the defense industry." These have included Amron, a manufacturer of medium caliber ammunition (20-40mm) cartridge cases and Spectra Technologies, which is "engaged in the manufacture, distribution, and delivery of munitions and ordnance-related products for the DOD and DOD prime contractors." Such types of ammunition are extremely versatile and are fired from ground vehicles, naval ships, and various types of aircraft -- both helicopters and fixed-wing models.

Additionally, in the months after 9/11, National Presto entered the diapers trade, setting up that business in its old munitions plant. In 2004, with Melvin Cohen's daughter MaryJo now at the helm, the company further expanded into the business of adult-incontinence products. "I spent a couple of days wearing them," the younger Cohen told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel at the time. "They're very comfortable."

In 2005, Presto's Amtec was awarded a five-year deal by the Pen-

tagon for its 40mm family of ammunition rounds. By the end of last year, it had already received \$454 million and was expecting the sum to top out, at contract's end, above \$550 million.

Just as 105mm shells of the sort produced by Presto were a nightmare for the people of Vietnam, so too has 40mm ammunition spelled doom for civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan. Earlier this year, the BBC reported on a typical joint U.S./U.K. attack on a home in Iraq in which insurgents had taken shelter. After exchanging ground fire, coalition forces called in an airstrike. According to the BBC, "The aircraft fired 40mm cannon rounds at the two houses, finally dropping a bomb on one of them. It collapsed. The other house was set on fire. The two insurgents in the house were buried but so were a number of women and children." Similarly, in August, news reports tell us, U.S. troops called in an airstrike by an AC-130 -- which packs 40mm cannons -- that helped kill approximately 90 civilians in the village of Azizabad in Afghanistan, according to investigations by the Afghan government and the United Nations.

As in the past, war time has been a boom-time for Presto. In 2000, before the start of the Global War on Terror, National Presto's annual sales clocked in at \$116.6 million. In 2007, they totaled \$420.7 million, with more than 50% of that coming from arms manufacturing. Earlier this year, Presto nabbed another 40mm ammunition contract (a \$97.5 million supplemental award) set to be delivered in 2009 and 2010. According to official DoD figures, from 2001 through 2008 National Presto received more than \$531 million, while Amtec has taken home another \$171 million-plus. Their combined grand total, while hardly putting Presto in the top tier of Pentagon weapons contractors, is still a relatively staggering \$702.8 million -- not bad for a company known for slicing and dicing vegetables.

#### Death is Our Business and Business is Good

These days, most civilian defense contractors aren't like Presto. General Tire and Rubber Company, for example, once lorded it over a business empire that produced not only car tires, but antipersonnel mines and deadly cluster bombs. Today, the company seems to have left its days of supplying the U.S. military with lethal technologies behind.

Dow Chemical classically drew ire from protestors during the Vietnam War for making the incendiary agent napalm that clung to and burned off the flesh of Vietnamese victims. Dow got out of the napalm business long before the war ended, but, due to widespread protests at the time, the company is still living down the legacy today.

At a 2006 Ethics and Compliance Conference, Dow's President, CEO, and Chairman Andrew Liveris recalled, "Believe me, we have had our share of ethical challenges, most of them very public... starting with the manufacture of Napalm during the Vietnam War... when suddenly we went from being a company that made Saran Wrap to keep food fresh to a kind of war machine... at least, accord-

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ing the characterizations of the time.” While Dow is still a defense contractor, its DoD contracts appear not to include the manufacture of weapons of any type. Instead, such companies have largely ceded the field to dedicated “merchants of death” -- weapons-industry giants like Alliant Techsystems (ATK), Lockheed Martin, and Boeing.

Right now, National Presto Industries may look like a throwback to an earlier era when companies regularly made both innocuous household items and heavy weapons. In a new hard-times economy, however, in which taxpayer dollars are likely to continue to pour into the Pentagon, could it instead be a harbinger of the future? Having proved that outfitting real shooters is even more lucrative than making SaladShooters, Presto has gotten rich in the Bush war years. It has, in fact, greatly outperformed the big guns of the weapons business. While the stocks of top defense contractors Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and Northrop Grumman have all lost significant value in the last year -- down 29.3%, 55.3%, and 50.1%, respectively -- National Presto’s stock price was up 28.1% as of mid-December.

It isn’t hard to imagine more civilian firms, especially ones which are already Pentagon contractors, getting into (or back into) the weapons game. After all, when the Big Three Detroit automakers were scrounging around for a bailout just a few weeks ago, they used America’s persistent involvement in armed conflict as one argument in their favor. For example, Robert Nardelli, Chrysler’s chief executive, told the Senate that the failure of the auto industry “would undermine our nation’s ability to respond to military challenges and would threaten our national security.” While that argument was roundly dismissed by retired Army Lt. Gen. John Caldwell, chairman of the National Defense Industrial Association’s combat vehicles division, it probably wouldn’t have been if the automakers made more weapons systems.

Will Presto be the back-to-the-future model for Pentagon contractors in the lean times ahead? Only time will tell. At the very least, it seems that, as long as Americans allow the country to wage wars abroad, require their salads to be shot, and have bladder issues, National Presto Industries has a future.

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Nick Turse is the associate editor of TomDispatch.com. His work has appeared in many publications, including the Los Angeles Times, the Nation, In These Times, and regularly at TomDispatch. His first book, *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives*, an exploration of the new military-corporate complex in America, was recently published by Metropolitan Books. His website is NickTurse.com.

*Submitted by Rich Gilchrist*

**DO SOMETHING THIS DAY  
WHICH THE WORLD MAY TALK  
OF HEREAFTER**

**ADMIRAL COLLINGWOOD**



## **America’s Child Soldiers: US Military Recruiting Children to Serve in the Armed Forces**

*By Sherwood Ross  
November 29, 2008*

In violation of its pledge to the United Nations not to recruit children into the military, the Pentagon “regularly target(s) children under 17,” the American Civil Liberties Union(ACLU) says.

The Pentagon “heavily recruits on high school campuses, targeting students for recruitment as early as possible and generally without limits on the age of students they contact,” the ACLU states in a 46-page report titled “Soldiers of Misfortune.”

This is in violation of the U.S. Senate’s 2002 ratification of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Pentagon recruiters are enrolling children as young as 14 in the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps(JROTC) in 3,000 middle-, junior-, and high schools nationwide, causing about 45 percent of the quarter of million students so enrolled to enlist, a rate much higher than in the general student population. Clearly, this is the outcome of underage exposure.

In some cities, such as Los Angeles, high school administrators have been enrolling reluctant students involuntarily in JROTC as an alternative to overcrowded gym classes! In Lincoln high school, enrollees were not told JROTC was involuntary. In Buffalo, N.Y., the entire incoming freshman class at Hutchinson Central Technical High School, (average age 14), was involuntarily enrolled in JROTC. In Chicago, graduating eighth graders (average age 13) are allowed to join any of 45 JROTC programs.

“Wartime enlistment quotas (for Iraq and Afghanistan) have placed increased pressure on military recruiters to fill the ranks of the armed services,” an ACLU report says. Trying to fill its quotas without reinstating a draft “has contributed to a rise in...allegations of misconduct and abuse by recruiters” that “often goes unchecked.”

The Pentagon also spends about \$6 million a year to flog an online video game called “America’s Army” to attract children as young as 13, “train them to use weapons, and engage in virtual combat and other military missions...learn how to fire realistic Army weapons such as automatic rifles and grenade launchers and learn how to jump from airplanes,” the ACLU reports. As of Sept., 2006, 7.5 million users were registered on the game’s website, which is linked to the Army’s main recruiting website.

And when Pentagon recruiters sign 17-year-olds into the inactive reserves under the Future Soldiers Training Program, (the idea being to let them earn their high school diploma), they frequently don’t tell the children they can withdraw with no penalty.

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“Over the years, we have had reports from students who were told that if they change their minds, they would be considered deserters in war time and could be hunted down and shot,” the New York City-based Youth Activists-Youth Allies said. One young woman was told if she backed out of her enlistment her family would be deported. And Bill Galvin, of the Center on Conscience and War, said one young man who changed his mind about enlisting and was told by his recruiter: “If you don’t report, that’s treason and you will be shot.”

Singled out by the Pentagon for intense recruitment drives are urban centers such as Los Angeles and New York. The latter, in which low-income students account for 51% of all high school enrollment and where 71% are black or Latino, contains three of the nation’s top 32 counties for Army enlistment. In Los Angeles, 91% of the students are non-white and 75% are low-income.

And the Coalition Against Militarism in Our Schools says the 30 JROTC programs in Los Angeles Unified School District (with 4,754 students) are “Located in the most economically depressed communities of the city.”

African-Americans make up 16% of the civilian population of military age but 22% of the Army’s enlisted personnel, the ACLU notes. It charges bluntly: “The U.S. military’s practice of targeting low-income youth and students of color in combination with exaggerated promises of financial rewards for enlistment, undermines the voluntariness of their enlistment...”

JROTC also runs a Middle School Cadet Corp for children as young as 11, that militarizes them even before they graduate elementary school. “Florida, Texas, and Chicago, offer military-run after-school programs to sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders...(that) involve drills with wooden rifles and military chants....and military history.” Children wear uniforms to school once a week for inspection.

While the U.S. claims “no one under age 17 is eligible for recruitment,” the Pentagon’s Joint Advertising Market Research & Studies database(JAMRS) scoops up data on eleventh graders, typically just 16. JAMRS has data on 30 million Americans between age 16 and 25 for recruitment purposes.

The ACLU says this data includes “e-mail addresses, grade point averages, college intentions, height and weight information, schools attended, courses of study, military interests, and racial and ethnic data” as well as Social Security numbers.

In the face of grim casualty reports from the Middle East, Pentagon recruiters appear increasingly desperate to make their quotas. About one in five, the New York Times reported in 2004, was found to have engaged in “recruiting improprieties” ranging from “threats and coercion to making false promises to young people that they would not be sent to Iraq.”

Given the Bush regime’s plunge into criminal wars of aggression

that defy international law and the Geneva conventions, there is no reason why military recruitment of any kind should be allowed on any college campus, much less in the secondary schools. If the United States truly wished to spread democracy, (rather than seize oil fields), it would be assigning vast numbers of Peace Corps recruiters to college campuses, and the budgets of the Peace Corps and the Defense Department would be reversed.

As Eugene Debs, the presidential candidate on the Socialist ticket that went to prison for speaking against World War One, (he polled 913,000 votes in 1920) once said: “I would no more teach children military training than I would teach them arson, robbery or assassination.”

The fact that the Pentagon is having such a daunting time these days filling its ranks as it wages an illegal war speaks very well for the intelligence of the American people. That’s no excuse, though, for the Defense Department to illegally recruit impressionable young children.

*Submitted by Jim Sorter*

## I’m Still Tortured by What I Saw in Iraq

*By Matthew Alexander*

I should have felt triumphant when I returned from Iraq in August 2006. Instead, I was worried and exhausted. My team of interrogators had successfully hunted down one of the most notorious mass murderers of our generation, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq and the mastermind of the campaign of suicide bombings that had helped plunge Iraq into civil war. But instead of celebrating our success, my mind was consumed with the unfinished business of our mission: fixing the deeply flawed, ineffective and un-American way the U.S. military conducts interrogations in Iraq. I’m still alarmed about that today.

I’m not some ivory-tower type; I served for 14 years in the U.S. Air Force, began my career as a Special Operations pilot flying helicopters, saw combat in Bosnia and Kosovo, became an Air Force counterintelligence agent, then volunteered to go to Iraq to work as a senior interrogator. What I saw in Iraq still rattles me -- both because it betrays our traditions and because it just doesn’t work.

Violence was at its peak during my five-month tour in Iraq. In February 2006, the month before I arrived, Zarqawi’s forces (members of Iraq’s Sunni minority) blew up the golden domed Askariya mosque in Samarra, a shrine revered by Iraq’s majority Shiites, and unleashed a wave of sectarian bloodshed. Reprisal killings became a daily occurrence,

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Amid the chaos, four other Air Force criminal investigators and I joined an elite team of interrogators attempting to locate Zarqawi. What I soon discovered about our methods astonished me. The Army was still conducting interrogations according to the Guantanamo Bay model: Interrogators were nominally using the methods outlined in the U.S. Army Field Manual, the interrogators' bible, but they were pushing in every way possible to bend the rules -- and often break them. I don't have to belabor the point; dozens of newspaper articles and books have been written about the misconduct that resulted. These interrogations were based on fear and control; they often resulted in torture and abuse.

I refused to participate in such practices, and a month later, I extended that prohibition to the team of interrogators I was assigned to lead. I taught the members of my unit a new methodology -- one based on building rapport with suspects, showing cultural understanding and using good old-fashioned brainpower to tease out information. I personally conducted more than 300 interrogations, and I supervised more than 1,000. The methods my team used are not classified (they're listed in the unclassified Field Manual), but the way we used them was, I like to think, unique. We got to know our enemies, we learned to negotiate with them, and we adapted criminal investigative techniques to our work (something that the Field Manual permits, under the concept of "ruses and trickery"). It worked. Our efforts started a chain of successes that ultimately led to Zarqawi.

Over the course of this renaissance in interrogation tactics, our attitudes changed. We no longer saw our prisoners as the stereotypical al-Qaeda evildoers we had been repeatedly briefed to expect; we saw them as Sunni Iraqis, often family men protecting themselves from Shiite militias and trying to ensure that their fellow Sunnis would still have some access to wealth and power in the new Iraq. Most surprisingly, they turned out to despise al-Qaeda in Iraq as much as they despised us, but Zarqawi and his thugs were willing to provide them with arms and money. I pointed this out to Gen. George Casey, the former top U.S. commander in Iraq, when he visited my prison in the summer of 2006. He did not respond.

Perhaps he should have. It turns out that my team was right to think that many disgruntled Sunnis could be peeled away from Zarqawi. A year later, Gen. David Petraeus helped boost the so-called Anbar Awakening, in which tens of thousands of Sunnis turned against al-Qaeda in Iraq and signed up with U.S. forces, cutting violence in the country dramatically.

*By Matthew Alexander*

## Gulf War Syndrome

*Reported by: Geoff Tyler*

Thursday, Nov 20, 2008 @11:20pm CST

For more than 15 years, veterans have been fighting to have Gulf War Syndrome recognized as a real sickness. Now that fight has been given some new life. A congressionally mandated report was released earlier this week, that admits that Gulf War Syndrome, long considered a made-up illness, is a genuine condition. Its taken them 6 years to finish the report. But all over the country families with members in the military, are breathing a sign of relief.

"The first thing I do when I get up is to see if my son is still alive," said Vic Sylvester, father of a Gulf War Syndrome sufferer. Since the day his son first came back from unloading ships during the first gulf war, Vic Sylvester has been fighting, fighting for his son's symptoms to be recognized as a real disease. "it didn't really have a title or a name at the time. I just knew something was wrong," said Gulf War Syndrome sufferer James Sylvester. He was suffering from persistent headaches, rashes, difficulty concentrating, and the other symptoms on this list. But now it does have a name: Gulf War Syndrome. "The report to the secretary of veterans affairs recognizing the problem.

Is the greatest validation, and signals that there is hope they may get help." According to Doctor Haley, there are more than a 100,000 troops who may be suffering from Gulf War Syndrome. and some former soldiers are afraid that it may have spread even further. "The wives in 92 and 93 were coming down with the same symptoms as the husbands. We don't know how widespead it is. If its become an epidemic," said Gulf War Syndrome sufferer James Sylvester The panel that issued the report found two possible causes for the disease: a drug used to protect against nerve gas and pesticides that were used during the war. But this report is considered a big step in the future treatment and care of gulf war veterans. "When they say the gulf war illness is real. Is one step closer to the united states honoring its contract with our soldiers. ," said Vic Sylvester, father of a Gulf War Syndrome sufferer. Next up, is an intense study on the illness, and then experimentation into possible cures.

*If you want to see the report, you can go to <http://www1.va.gov/RAC-GWVI> A list of symptoms of Gulf War Syndrome are: 1)Persistent Headaches 2)Widespread Pain 3)Cognitive Difficulties 4)Unexplained Fatigue 5)Skin Rashes 6)Chronic Diarrhea 7)Digestive Problems 8) Respiratory Problems*

## This is SO MUCH Bullshit

*From the Los Angeles Times*

*By David Zucchino*

Injured veterans engaged in new combat. In a little-noticed regulation change, the Pentagon's definition of combat-related disabilities is narrowed, costing some wounded veterans thousands of dollars in lost benefits.

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*So MUCH BULLSHIT:....Continued from Page 6*

Marine Cpl. James Dixon was wounded twice in Iraq -- by a roadside bomb and a land mine. He suffered a traumatic brain injury, a concussion, a dislocated hip and hearing loss. He was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Army Sgt. Lori Meshell shattered a hip and crushed her back and knees while diving for cover during a mortar attack in Iraq. She has undergone a hip replacement and knee reconstruction and needs at least three more surgeries. In each case, the Pentagon ruled that their disabilities were not combat-related.

In a little-noticed regulation change in March, the military's definition of combat-related disabilities was narrowed, costing some injured veterans thousands of dollars in lost benefits -- and triggering outrage from veterans' advocacy groups.

The Pentagon said the change was consistent with Congress' intent when it passed a "wounded warrior" law in January. Narrowing the combat-related definition was necessary to preserve the "special distinction for those who incur disabilities while participating in the risk of combat, in contrast with those injured otherwise," William J. Carr, deputy undersecretary of Defense, wrote in a letter to the 1.3-million-member Disabled American Veterans.

The group, which has called the policy revision a "shocking level of disrespect for those who stood in harm's way," is lobbying to have the change rescinded.

Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said the Pentagon's "more conservative definition" limited benefits for some veterans. "That was not our intent," Levin said in a statement. He added: "When the disability is the same, the impact on the service member should be the same no matter whether the disability was incurred while training for combat at Ft. Hood or participating in actual combat in Iraq or Afghanistan."

Pentagon officials argue that benefits should be greater for veterans wounded in combat than for "members with disabilities incurred in other situations (e.g., simulation of war, instrumentality of war, or participation in hazardous duties, not related to combat)," Carr wrote.

But veterans like Dixon and Meshell said their disabilities were a direct result of wounds suffered in combat. Dixon said he was denied at least \$16,000 in benefits before he fought the Pentagon and won a reversal of his noncombat-related designation. "I was blown up twice in Iraq, and my injuries weren't combat-related?" Dixon said. "It's the most imbecile thing I've ever seen."

Meshell, who is appealing her status, estimates she is losing at least \$1,200 a month in benefits. Despite being injured in a combat zone during an enemy mortar attack, she said, her wounds would be considered combat-related only if she had been struck by shrapnel. Meshell said the military had suggested that at least some of her disability was caused by preexisting joint deterioration. "Before I went over there, I was fine -- I was perfectly healthy," Meshell said. "This whole thing is causing me a lot of heartache."

Kerry Baker, associate legislative director of Disabled American Veterans, has accused the Pentagon of narrowing the definition of combat-related disabilities to save money. He said the change would reduce payments for tens of thousands of veterans -- those already wounded and those injured in the future.

In a letter to members of Congress, the Disabled American Veterans accused the Pentagon of "mutilating" the statutory definitions of combat-related disabilities as part of a "deliberate manipulation of the law."

The January legislation was aimed at allowing troops wounded in combat and combat-related operations to collect disability severance from the military and disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Disability severance is based on past service. Disability compensation is based on future loss of earning potential. Previously, veterans with combat-related disabilities received reduced monthly VA compensation until their severance money was recouped. That is still the case for those whose injuries are not deemed combat-related.

Years ago, Congress adopted a detailed definition of combat-related disabilities. It included such criteria as hazardous service, conditions simulating war and disability caused by an "instrumentality of war." Those criteria were not altered in the January legislation.

The Pentagon, in establishing an internal policy based on the legislation, in March unlawfully stripped those criteria from the legislation, the Disabled American Veterans said. "We do not view this as an oversight," Baker testified before Congress in June. "We view this as an intentional effort to conserve monetary resources at the expense of disabled veterans."

The Pentagon changes focused on "tip of the spear" fighters, or those "in the line of duty in a combat zone," said Eileen Lainez, a Pentagon spokeswoman. They comprise "a very special, yet limited, subset of those who matriculate through the Disability Evaluation System," Lainez wrote in an e-mail response to a request for comment.

In many cases, veterans say, they are not told why their disabilities are not considered combat-related. Dixon said he did not realize he had been put in a noncombat-related category until he began questioning his disability payments. It took more than six months of phone calls, letters and appeals -- plus help from the Disabled American Veterans and a member of Congress -- to overturn his designation. Navigating the Pentagon's bureaucracy was made more difficult because Dixon's brain injury resulted in short-term memory loss. He had to write everything down in notebooks and calendars.

"It was a nightmare," Dixon said. "Most veterans don't know how the system works, or how to fight it. They don't realize all the obstacles they put in your way to keep you from getting what you deserve."

*Submitted By Jim Sorter*





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# LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

If you would like to submit an article, opinion, comment or response to anything you have read which might interest the members of VFP-56, please e-mail it to [turtldncer@aol.com](mailto:turtldncer@aol.com), in word format, or mail to Jim Sorter at 1762 Buttermilk Lane, Arcata, CA 95521. Submissions will be included on a first come basis until the newsletter is full. Late arriving submissions will be archived for future issues.

## JANUARY 8th MEETING BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR VFP 56

*By John Mulloy*

Folks, put the coming meeting of VFP 56 on your highest priority list of "must do" activities. We need all of the support, advice, and involvement we can round up. We will address committee membership needs, dues and donations, and long term fund raising concerns. Join in the circle and participate.

As for dues, perhaps we should leave the current payment structure in place, thereby averting the bitter divisiveness that reared it's head at the last meeting. Instead, emphasis will be placed on donations. Those who can give will do so when they are able. I intend to pass the donation bucket on January 8th, restarting a tradition that we've neglected this past year or so.

The committee structure in the backbone of VFP 56. New members are needed so that current projects may be expanded and new ideas explored. We need you to get involved.

We shall have an in depth discussion of fund-raising ideas, especially those that do not involve food sales. Please attend with your thoughts and valuable insights. We will get 2009 off to a clear headed start, reaffirming our commitment to the causes of peace and social justice, as well as to each other.