

INSTITUTIONALLY IGNORING THE WOUNDED WARRIOR

1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

To determine whether active service groups, guard and reserves (SGs) are taking care of their wounded warriors; plus the exacerbation of their plight by a huge beaurachracy known as the Veterans Administration.

2 FACTS BEARING ON THE PROBLEM

1. The administration in concert with the Sec. Def. never considered the wounded in their crusade to bring democracy to Iraq nor the entire war on terror.
2. Thousands of wounded troops have come home to great medical care, but require extensive modifications to their previous life. These requirements are being orally addressed, but are not being met.
3. The service groups (SG) ie. Active duty Army, Air Force, Marines, etc. National Guard and Reserves have shown a “deliberate; entitlements mitigation effort” to be their standard course of action.
4. The SGs have an unwritten policy of “low balling” disability ratings. In almost every case the Michael J. Novosel Foundation (MJNF) has dealt with; the Airman, Soldier or Marine with problems, have been given disability ratings under 30%.
5. A culture of making a wounded warrior “persona non grata” has a common thread throughout the cases that the MJNF has encountered. Some troops have actually been harassed by their chain of command for having PTSD.
6. Some troops are delaying necessary surgeries due to their financial situation. They must work to feed their families. There is no pay forthcoming while getting their medical treatment and the recovery time necessary to complete their treatment.

7. Due to the agonizingly slow pace that the VA moves, our wounded warriors are loosing their homes, vehicles, electric and water service and in many cases their spouses (who also work.)
8. The system is in place, but it is not working.

3 DISCUSSION

1. Upon the start of the War on Terror, in an effort to “bring it on,” the [“Cake Walk” with “Flowers and Chocolates” Theory] was the one most adopted and embraced by the entire Administration. The Cabinet and most of the Congress also bought into that scenario. After the firing of General Shinseki and the placement of General Meyers as the Chairman JCS; even the services bought into this scenario. The problem is; there should have been No Wounded. There were. The administration and the services are still only paying lip service to the disposition of the Wounded Warrior. Only the politically connected or high profile (press) can resolve their individual cases.
2. The SGs are bringing forth many programs to show a movement toward taking care of our wounded warriors. The fact of the matter is that the individual Post/Base/Component commanders will talk about it, but basically doing nothing. In some cases (Fort Carson as an example) the facility commander actually influenced med boards to “get rid of the deadwood.” In one case, the MJNF came in contact with an E-6 who was a Wounded Families project manager for a 2 Star who had never met him; had a gauntlet of more than 15 people to run through to get even one word to the commander. The slots were made available, funded and people were in place. Any efforts by the Wounded Families Project Steward were thwarted by civilians, senior NCOs and “part timers” who didn’t agree with the precepts of the program. The E-6 is currently suffering from PTSD and awaiting courts martial for bogus

charges made by a Major who was jealous of his freedom of movement and perks. The E-6 was supposed to be lateral to the commander in the chain of command and have direct access to the commander. The project provides several paid active duty slots for “friends,” but is totally ineffective.

3. Upon return from active duty to either; medically retired status, “awaiting” a medical evaluation board or awaiting the disposition of their individual claims with the VA, the wounded warriors have NOTHING that can immediately relieve their plight to just live. These men and women are losing their homes, personal vehicles, and in many cases their livelihood (jobs.) Prior to being deployed, the companies only considered a few months, but tours then were up to 15 months in length. The troop’s jobs have gone away in that period of time. There needs to be a severance package that does not equate to the “Bonus” that most troops are told by their components, they are getting in a lump sum. A new severance package should be meted out on a monthly pay basis. The bonuses currently being given should be scrapped. These bonuses are SETTLEMENTS given to troops who have been hoodwinked by the deliberate cost mitigation efforts by the SGs. This is a scam perpetrated on our warriors by the services. A warrior cannot get VA entitlements until the “Bonus” is repaid. This is a pathetic method of cost savings. The decision to do this had to be made at the very least the 3 Star level. The services when faced with this may trot out an E-6 as a scapegoat or sacrificial lamb. Know now that someone is watching.
4. One method of cost savings perpetrated by the services is the low ball disability ratings given to a Wounded Warrior with full knowledge that the ratings eventually given by the VA will absolutely be much higher. The SGs will quote criteria; this is an obfuscation. The truth of the matter is that only thing gained by these ratings less than 30% is an increase in time to consider the eventual awarded rating. This low ball is a contributing factor to the increased suicide rate in returning veterans. A veteran suffering with PTSD, depression and possibly a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) may get so depressed with the loss of his previous life that suicide would seem to be the only and most obvious answer. This is why there has been an 18% increase in suicides. I submit that the current deliberate entitlements mitigation efforts by the services and VA

are responsible for this increase in suicides. The enclosed cases are of men who are suffering from PTSD, depressed and some cases have been diagnosed with TBI. Depraved indifference would be the civilian counterpart of this method of treatment of our men and women.

5. There is a thread running through all of the paragraphs in this study. That thread is the conscious effort to either deny or mitigate the responsibility of the services to their Wounded members. The decision for this modus operandi is not made at the post/base level; the cases are too similar to be considered coincidental. The decision must have been made at the cabinet level in the administration. On the military side, the JCS was handed the marching orders and carried them out (these acts of omission.) One other possibility could be that at the 3 star decision making level, the decisions were made to fit the current force budget instead of diverting precious funds for these wounded warriors. These funds should be a separate line item. This is not a new type spoon for a mess kit but the welfare of a very miniscule portion of the total force. It is expensive and is just as much a necessary cost as ammo and weapons.

4 FINDINGS

1. Wounded Warriors are not being taken care of in a timely manner, if being taken care of at all.
2. Systemically it is as if the leadership at the 3 Star level over the troop’s disposition are at a loss as to how to properly release these men and women from active duty other than “dumping.” (a practice by civilian institutions in an effort to promote higher profits at medical facilities.)
3. The SGs seem to be working in concert with the VA to mitigate the cost of properly dealing with Wounded Warriors.
4. Our Warriors are being treated with disrespect by the very service to which they pledged their lives.
5. The 3 Star level of leadership is not making the decisions to proceed prudently as far as wounded troops being released from duty are concerned.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A mandatory advocacy program should be instituted within each command. This advocate should

be at least a Master Sergeant who knows the system, can take these individuals and guide them through this gauntlet one on one. Their focus should be on ensuring that the troop knows and absolutely understands his rights and benefits. A pamphlet and/or a 2 hr. briefing is insufficient.

2. Immediately do away with the lump sum settlement and the act of calling it a "bonus." (Particular emphasis should be placed on the Marine Corps for this practice.)
3. Make the same amount available on a monthly basis to enable the departing Warrior a buffer with which to survive until they are properly installed into their individual communities.
4. Standardize the criteria with the SGs and VA and make the SGs give proper disability ratings so that there is no lag in the receipt of a Wounded Warrior's benefits. This transition should be seamless. A 5 year look would be appropriate to reassess the magnitude of help needed by the individual Warrior.
5. Use the current VA staff to take requests immediately if upgrades in magnitude are needed immediately by the Warrior instead of waiting through the 10% which should be 60% to fill up and slow the current system.
6. Immediately institute an evaluation of the entire 3 Star decision making staff to find non-supporters of Wounded Warriors needs. Replace these non-combat 3 Star General Officers by promoting from within; among senior combat experienced Battalion and Regimental Commanders.
7. Immediately stop the "dumping" of our Wounded Warriors. Retain them on active status for pay until their assimilation into civilian life is assured. In the case of a non-recoverable Warrior, insure that he is getting proper meaningful care before release.
8. Insure that the services show respect by their deeds instead of just empty words, for the selfless service that these fine men and women have voluntarily endured for all of us.