The Veteran’s Creed
1. I am an American Veteran
2. I proudly served my country
3. I live the values I learned in the military
4. I continue to serve my community, my country and my fellow veterans
5. I maintain my physical and mental discipline
6. I continue to lead and improve
7. I make a difference
8. I honor and remember my fallen comrades

This issue of the listserv includes Phantom Extremists; VA Help for Homelessness; Part of the Problem: Nearly Half of Homeless Female Vets Had Military Sexual Trauma; Virtual VA Care; Veterans Help Scams; Our Afghans Allies; Please Come Back; Military Poetry

See also Stats Section for military recruitment numbers.

Phantom Extremists
Extremism among veterans has been a subject of discussion since World War I and beyond. In Listserv #63, we noted a RAND survey which found that support for extremist organizations among veterans and for ideas like the Great Replacement Theory were, if anything, less among veterans than among the general public. This finding is in contrast with what many in the public think.

Subsequently, a report commissioned by the Pentagon and performed by the Institute for Defense analysis “found no evidence that the number of violent extremists in the military is disproportionate to the country as a whole. There were also fewer than 100 substantiated cases/year of extremist conduct which included a variety of views including white supremacy and others. There were fewer than 20 cases of “gang related” activity noted in military court martial since 2012. The IDA report did note something that has always been apparent “the participation in violent extremist activities of even a small number of individuals with military connections and military training, could present a risk to the military and to the country as a whole.” So, extremism among the military and veterans is something to watch but watch in an intelligent manner without biased assumptions.

In addition, of the more than 700 federal cases that devolved from the January 6th incident at the Capitol, fewer than 10 defendants were in the military at the time. The report noted that a recently improved definition of prohibited extremist activities should be developed in a clear message, i.e. that “the use of advocacy of unlawful force or violence to deprive individuals of their rights, or to achieve goals that are political, religious, discriminatory, or ideologic and nature” comprises extremism. Also specified
was that a punitive approach to all forms of prohibited extremism would risk alienating a significant part of the force. Therefore a consistent and carefully modulated approach to match the offense and take restorative interventions such as monitoring and counselling before punishment was recommended.

**VA Help for Homelessness**

For the second year in a row, VA programs for the homeless met their goal of permanently housing 38,000 veterans with financial problems and uncertain shelter options. Since the start of the program in 2022, more than 78,000 homeless veterans have been housed. According to VA Secretary Denis McDonough, “While we met our goals for 2023, we're not stopping here. We're going to peak pushing through the end of this calendar year and beyond until every veteran has a safe stable place to call home in this country they fought to defend.”

According to HUD, about 33,000 veterans do not have reliable housing options on any given night, and the number is dropping. VA's programs have helped nearly 192,000 veterans and family members avoid losing their homes for financial reasons and have seen about 93% of the individuals in permanent housing. In this effort, increased partnerships with local VA homeless programs have been most helpful.

**Part of the Problem: Nearly Half of Homeless Female Vets Had Military Sexual Trauma**

Almost 45% of women veterans in VA homeless programs last year had a documented history of military sexual trauma. According to the VA press secretary “Many MST survivors struggle with readjustment issues and disruptions in core areas of functioning and well-being, including ---homelessness ”and they may suffer in silence, feel alone and have trouble coping.”

Women are 10% of the veteran population. For them, homelessness rose 10% from 2020 to 2022 while overall veteran homelessness declined. A variety of unique factors for women may play a role in homelessness such as caring for children, domestic violence, difficulties with financial independence and ensuring employability. Women may not admit to difficulties finding housing because they could lose custody of their children. Untreated PTSD is of course another factor.

Twelve percent of the 38,847 veterans who secured permanent housing through the VA in 2023 were women and they represented only 8.3% of the 1450 veterans who return to homelessness after VA assistance.

**Virtual VA care**

Many experts (me included) opine that Virtual Medicine is the future of medicine. Virtual Medicine may be defined as “integrated web-based technology that combines self-management, data sharing, and communication between patients and professionals”. Over and above “telehealth” it potentially involves all sorts of testing and treatments in the home including, heart rate, blood sugar and blood pressure.
The VA, under its Office of Connected Care, and its veteran patients are unquestionably pioneers in this, area as they have been in many innovations in the past such as the Electronic Health Record and the Million Veteran Program. Like many medical changes, the COVID pandemic spurred it on. A recent article notes the many services that VA offers including video consultations (called “VA Video Connect”), remote monitoring of vital signs and symptoms in real time and the provision of interventions and treatments reducing the need for hospital readmissions and emergency room visits. Even virtual reality is being tested.

VA can connect the program via any computer, tablet, or mobile device to a virtual medical room where a veteran can participate in video healthcare visits as long as a conventional physical examination is not required. Satisfaction is high and Emergency Room visits and hospitalization are down. One important example is “telestroke” care using a telestroke cart specifically designed to transport connected audio visual equipment and medical devices to the bedside for stroke patients. Neurologists can then assess and diagnose patients and work with offsite providers.

In FY2022 over 2.2 million veterans (of the 9.2 million VA enrollees) have used some sort of telehealth. The VA is not the only system offering such services, but it is a pioneer. I have been most interested in this area of medicine, which, in my view, will revolutionize the way care is delivered.

**Veterans Help Scams**
The large VA disability system is a target for a variety of scams. For example, the VA’s $135 billion annual compensation in the PACT Act of 2022 is one lucrative target. According to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, individuals may present themselves as consultants or coaches, use aggressive tactics and false promises to pressure veterans into paying assistant fees which are often a percentage of future benefits.

The Disabled American Veterans has offered the following as cautions:
- A person who charges a fee for help with benefits
- A person who guarantees a large increase in a veteran service disability rating, which only the VA can make
- Payment in exchange for a healthcare provider’s promise of a diagnosis
- Demands that veterans sign contracts with membership fees, provide banking information and share accounts passwords. A claimant may have veterans file their own claim and then try to collect money after the VA makes a rating determination.

Veterans with disabilities have enough challenges without adding this twist.

**Our Afghan Allies**
The immigration into the US of Afghan interpreters and allies who helped our forces in the Afghanistan War is still highly problematic in a process that takes nearly two years on the average to complete. Amidst these difficulties there are horrific pictures of
Taliban reprisals, “public executions documented on cell phone videos, dragging of US allies through the streets, beating to death with rocks and forced to drink acid.”

Of 7000 visa applications, only 1% have been approved according to the organization Operation Recovery. Another organization, No One Left Behind states that 13,600 Afghans were surveyed in December, and it received 242 accounts of reprisal killings. One of the cases who was waiting to pick up a visa after a successful application and was shot in front of the Kabul embassy with his family watching. It was also claimed that the single legislation passed in August 2021 authorizing 4000 special immigration visas did little to offset the Afghans feeling of abandonment.

The widely supported Afghan Adjustment Act that would expand special immigrant visas. Advocates have also requested greater transparency and the current processing system and more priority categories for these visas. We surely need to help those who have risked their lives for us.

Please Come Back
With a challenging AVF recruiting situation for the services (see Stats Section below), the Air Force will reopen a recall program to fill up to 1000 mid-career commissioned and enlisted jobs including pilots, combat system officers, recruiters, air traffic controllers and more in the Voluntary Retired Return to Service Program. The purpose is of course to “embrace experienced talent” among line officers and also enlisted. The Air Force last opened such a program in 2017 for applications between 2017-2021. It has also offered many incentives to keep service persons in uniform from retention bonus to basing flexibility.

Military Poetry
Below is a passage from a poem, “Horatio,” by Thomas Babington McCauley written in 1842 during the long era of high British confidence and nationalism. The poem is about a Roman soldier, Horatius Cocles who defends a bridge (the Pons Sublicus) against the invading Etruscan army allowing his fellow soldiers to demolish the bridge behind him protecting Rome. It is thus a story of bravery, sacrifice, and loyalty to the state. The poem was very popular in English public schools of the time and was also prominent in the movie “Darkest Hour” about Winston Churchill in World War II.

XXVII
“Then out spake brave Horatius,
The Captain of the gate:
‘To every man upon this earth
   Death cometh soon or late.
And how can man die better
   Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers,
   And the temples of his Gods,

XXVIII
‘And for the tender mother
   Who dandled him to rest,
And for the wife who nurses
   His baby at her breast,
And for the holy maidens
   Who feed the eternal flame,
To save them from false Sextus
   That wrought the deed of shame?”

Joel Kupersmith, M.D.
Professor of Medicine

The Listserv is available as an archive on the Georgetown University Library website under the title “Veterans Interest Newsletters.

Stats Section

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<th>Military Recruiting Numbers FY2022-2023*</th>
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| FY  | Goals | Attained | %   | Diff |
|Army | 58,038 | 43,634   | 75.1 | -14,404 |
|Navy | 34,543 | 27,326   | 79.1 | -7,217 |
|Marines | 24,623 | 24,910 | 101.1| +287  |
|Air Force | 25,138 | 22,181 | 88.2 | -2,957 |
|Space Force | 492   | 536    | 109.1| +45   |

*On Target/Shortfalls

Military recruiting numbers were more alarming in FY 2023 than in the previous year. In FY 2022, the Army was short by a full Division. In FY 2023 the Army, Navy and Air Force were all significantly short, while the Marines were still OK. Many reasons have been put forth, and some remedies, but no solution is in sight for this national security issue.