

The Words Say 'Welcome Home, Vets'...

Written by Alex Baer

Monday, 12 November 2012 15:00 - Last Updated Monday, 12 November 2012 18:09

With the exception of flag officers having ego management problems, no veteran ever alive has expected to come home down a red-carpeted aisle. Confetti, cheering crowds, and marching bands were never in the daydream, either.

But, then -- a backhanded cuff, a knee to the groin, and a karate chop to the jugular wasn't supposed to be part of the plan, either.

It's not quite what we do, and have been doing for decades, but it's figuratively close. Of course, it gets worse than that, too. Far, far worse.

Take the story of one man, Christopher DeLara, who filed for disability after his tour in Iraq: The Army said it could find no records of him having been overseas.

After five years of fighting -- this time at home, against the military, and after tangling with these paperwork tigers, proving his case -- DeLara had divorced, was briefly homeless, and was escaping into drugs and alcohol.

Welcome Home, Soldier!

DeLara's story has a happy ending -- finally, at last, and after much effort he should not have had to expend. How many are still fighting those same paper tigers -- how many have given up?

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Nice of us, too, to make sure that the burden of warfare -- ten solid years and far more -- has been imposed on volunteers, rather than being shouldered by an entire nation.

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While we have been out shopping or to the movies, catching a bite with friends, or just parking our well-larded butts on the couch in front of *Dancing with the Surviving X-Idol*, or whatever, one small spear-point of the population gets jabbed and jammed into hot spots, slammed into meat grinders, over and over. And over.

Families crumble under the strains of multiple deployments that keeping coming back around without stop. Parents fail to see their children grow. Children have friendly strangers who reappear in their lives every now and again.

Whether deployed or home-stranded and apart, vets and their families try to live the lives that are in front of them, and try not to lean too hard on the twin crutches of booze and drugs. *Try.*

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You know, this all-volunteer approach works so well -- been real dandy for the past decade and more of our multiple wars -- we should disband all these fire and police departments around the country.

Instead, let's just keep throwing a few, select volunteers into the fray, over and over again. Great idea, or what?

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Fewer than one percent of the American population has been on active duty in the last decade. The rest of us had other, more important things to do.

Politicians are relieved there is no draft, as in Vietnam -- it is the only thing politicians have ever learned about having, and not having, wars.

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By now, someone in this sort of discussion usually wants to know *what's the big deal*.

Assorted geniuses mostly take the same avenue of attack: *Hey, it's not like we don't pay them, right?*

Why, yes -- they *are* paid, that is true. It sounds like you think that's thanks enough, being able to draw a check.

So, tell me, geniuses: What is a good rate of pay for always missing your family and friends, while you keep getting chucked into harm's way over and over again, told that it's kill-or-be-killed time again, hoping you get to come home with your body and mind somewhat intact, hoping to come home with all the bits and pieces that you left with?

I'm willing to bet *your* number is way north of their *actual* checks. *Bet?*

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If we're not even able to get the voting processes right for military members, what makes you think much more complex processes are getting the attention they deserve?

How about access to clean water, for example? Nope. Water's been contaminated for decades around those military bases. If your vote's not safe, why would your water be? *Sorry about your luck.*

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The good news on homeless veterans: Their number is down 12 percent or so, and there's a plan to end the problem of homeless vets by 2015, maybe.

The not-so-good news: There are 67,495 veterans sleeping on America's streets. Think about that as you crawl into your PJs tonight after shutting off the teevee, heading for your bed.

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Well, at least vets have some schooling benefits they've saved up and were matched, or something, right?

Sure -- and, if you're one of a quarter-million student veterans battling to prove they are in fact residents of their own states, they'll keep having to pay the higher non-resident tuition rates in the meantime. *Some battles never end.*

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As for jobs -- well, by a two-vote margin, Republicans earlier this fall blocked a jobs bill for returning vets. It would have created a Veteran's Job Corps -- up to 20,000 jobs for vets who have come home.

The bill's main sponsor, Senator Patty Murray of Washington state, had this comment: "It's both shocking and shameful that Republicans today chose to kill a bill to put America's veterans back to work."

She added, "At a time when one in four young veterans are unemployed, Republicans should

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have been able, for just this once, to put aside the politics of obstruction and to help these men and women provide for their families.

If you hadn't noticed, Republicans are fantastic at giving out free, patriotic, lip service. You know, like focusing on flag lapel pins, waving little plastic flags, and putting yellow magnetic ribbons that say, "Support the Troops!" on their monster SUVs.

Then, they vote to kill or trim veterans benefits, or lobby for same. *All in a day's hypocrisy.*

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The Grand Obstructionist Party also blocked a cost-of-living adjustment for vets, too. Probably cost vets and their families about \$500 next year, said one expert. Executive Director of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Bob Wallace, said, "It is outrageous that disabled American veterans are once again being held hostage to partisan politics."

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Republicans talk a good patriotic game, but are often all just empty bluster and blocking filibuster. When it comes time to honor vets and their families for their sacrifices, Republicans have no honor -- although being a Republican politician was at one time an honorable profession.

To find one today, it might seem you'd have to go all the way back to Lincoln, but you'd only have to go back as far as Eisenhower. He was a veteran himself, as you might remember. *Interesting coincidence?*

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Number of war veterans who have been to Iraq and Afghanistan: 834,463.

Number of these same veterans diagnosed with PTSD: 247,243 -- almost one in every three.

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Happy Vehicle Inventory Reduction, Furniture Blowout, Deep Electronics Discounting, Once-in-a-Lifetime Housewares and Clothing Sale, Major Home Appliance Spectacular Fireworks Savings Day.

And, if you happen to think of it and can squeeze it in, Happy Veteran's Day, too.

Paperwork tigers:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2012/11/10/174326/missing-documentation-complicates.html>

Fewer serving:

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/25/us/civilian-military-gap-grows-as-fewer-americans-serve.html?_r=0

Unsecured vote:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2012/11/04/173547/pentagon-unit-pushed-email-voting.html>

Safe water:

<http://www.stripes.com/news/marine-corps/sen-demint-blocks-bill-for-marines-lejeune-water-victims-1.183239>

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Homeless vets: http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/number-of-homeless-vets-down-12-percent-report-says/2011/12/12/gIQAZnJzqO_story.html

and: <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/05/24/how-should-the-us-support-returning-veterans/to-cut-veteran-homelessness-cut-the-red-tape>

Schooling is for residents:

http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2012/10/22/14565761-home-but-not-a-resident-some-student-veterans-fighting-to-stay-on-gi-bill

Jobs bills are for GOP blocking:

<http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/19/veterans-jobs-bill-blocked-in-the-senate/>

GOP blocked COLA, too: http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/gop-blocked-cost-of-living-adjustment-for-veterans-sen-murray-says/2012/09/27/2f250c98-08d4-11e2-a10c-fa5a255a9258_story.html?wprss=rss_politics

PTSD, by the numbers:

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/10/21/nearly-30-of-vets-treated-by-v-a-have-ptsd.html>

Veteran's Day: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veterans_Day