

# ROLLING THUNDER® XXII

## MESSAGE POINTS

### Continued Focus on Finding Live POWs/MIAs

There is a desire on the part of many in the government (and the public) to put the entire POW/MIA issue to rest. Noteworthy in this regard is the U.S. Navy's recent efforts to re-classify Capt. Scott Speicher from Missing/Captured to MIA, clearing the way to have Capt. Speicher declared dead and remove him from the POW/MIA list once and for all. President Obama signed an executive order (reversing President George W. Bush's EO) to open up previously restricted presidential records and documents. It is possible that these records may provide information about the government's dedication and commitment to the search for live POWs/MIAs. We call on the new administration to make public documents that might shed new light on the status of efforts to locate and return live POWs/MIAs. Families of these missing service personnel deserve closure.

### "Personality Disorder" Discharges

Rolling Thunder strongly opposes the Department of Defense's aggressive practice of discharging ("separating") military personnel due to what the DOD terms is a pre-existing personality disorder, including Immature Personality Disorder (IPD). In fact, many of these service men and women are suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). IPD and similar classifications render service personnel ineligible for VA benefits or compensation and impose psychological stigmas to these men and women that make it difficult to obtain employment, qualify for other benefits, and lead normal post-service lives. Worse yet, those suffering from PTSD fail to receive the treatment they need and deserve. Since the Sept. 11 attacks, more than 28,000 service members have been discharged for personality disorder. We believe that these classifications are being imposed to save money and that is unacceptable.

A revised Defense Department instruction (No. 1332.14), which took effect Aug. 28, 2008, allows "separation" for personality disorder for members currently or formerly deployed to imminent danger areas only under certain specific conditions that require corroborating evidence, endorsement by the Surgeon General, and proof that the diagnosis took into account possible PTSD or other war-related mental injury or illness. We urge the Defense Department to follow this instruction to ensure that those who have served their country are not discharged with incorrect diagnoses for the convenience of the government.

### Veterans' Healthcare

The current war has resulted in hundreds of thousands of veterans who are returning with a variety of physical and mental issues that will require even more money and support than those returning from Vietnam. There are issues of adequate and convenient VA medical care, classification of and compensation for disabilities, high suicide rates, lack of financial and other support for military families, and more. Now there is much discussion within the VA about having veterans, particularly retired veterans, pay for their own healthcare. Many veterans of the Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom have been sent medical bills for treatment they received while serving their country. Our government has made a contract with its military personnel: in return for serving their country, often giving the ultimate personal sacrifice, our armed forces will be provided with healthcare benefits. Our government has slowly reneged on key parts of that contract over the past 35 years, with changes to the Tricare healthcare program being the latest givebacks. Our government must keep its promise to those who have kept their promise to lay down their lives for the defense and protection of our country.

### Commencement of Veterans Benefits After Separation

Too much time elapses between discharge from the military and the continuation of benefits through the VA. The Defense Department and the VA are not working closely enough together. There should be seamless transition from active military service to coverage under the VA.

### Characterization of Military Personnel as "Terrorists"

There is a growing trend in the media and in some political circles to label or characterize those serving one's country during wartime as "terrorists" or "baby killers" or "torturers." This kind of labeling first surfaced during the Vietnam War. It did not apply then and it does not apply now. Serving one's country in war or peace is an honorable endeavor. Being profiled as a terrorist is not.