

# UNION VETERANS

AFL-CIO

## 1. Iran Hostage Rescue Mission Remembered April 25, 2010

### The White House Commission on the National Moment of Remembrance

On Sunday, April 25, David Kolbe, Political and Legislative Director of the Ironworkers (U.S. Army) represented the Union Veterans Council at the 30th Anniversary Remembrance Ceremony Honoring Iran Hostage Rescue Mission Casualties: Arlington National Cemetery, Section 46

A Remembrance Tribute honored the eight American servicemen who died during the 1980 attempt to free the 53 Americans held hostage in Iran. The ceremony marked the 30th Anniversary of the tragedy. An all-volunteer military mission to rescue the American hostages was planned for April 25, 1980. On that day, three Marines and five Air Force servicemen were killed when a helicopter and a transport plane collided on the ground during a refueling operation in Iran's Great Salt Desert, after the ill-fated rescue mission had been aborted.

The eight servicemen honored are: MAJ Richard L. Bakke, USAF; SGT John D. Harvey, USMC; George N. Holmes, Jr., USM; SSGT Dewey L. Johnson, USMC; MAJ Harold L. Lewis, Jr., USAF; TSG Joel C. Mayo, USAF; MAJ Lyn K. McIntosh, USAF; CAPT Charles T. McMillan, USAF

During the Iran Rescue Mission, the eight Air Force Special Operations/Air Commando crew members sacrificed their lives at Desert One Iran so that many of their comrades could survive. After a Marine RH-53 helicopter collided with their C-130 aircraft, their individual actions contributed to the survival of over 53 mission personnel trapped in the cabin of the aircraft.

## 2. Machinists Union (IAM) Pledges Money for Upkeep of Vietnam Veterans Memorial Grounds

The [AP](#) (5/12, Zongker) reports the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, a labor union based in Maryland, is "pledging \$50,000 for upkeep of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial grounds on the National Mall." The union "also plans to restore a bronze sculpture of three soldiers at the memorial."

## 3. Obama signs law to protect Tricare

(Military Times, 26 Apr 10)?Rick Maze

[http://www.militarytimes.com/news/2010/04/military\\_tricare\\_healthreform\\_042610w/](http://www.militarytimes.com/news/2010/04/military_tricare_healthreform_042610w/)

The Tricare Affirmation Act, aimed at protecting people in the military health care program from being penalized for not having private insurance, was signed into law Monday by President Obama.

The new law provides a specific exemption for Tricare beneficiaries and for nonappropriated-fund civilian employees of the Defense Department from a requirement of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that will require people without minimal health cover to either buy private insurance or face a \$750 penalty.

Tricare health insurance is specifically defined by the law signed Monday as minimal essential coverage, which provides an exemption from the penalty.

Rep. Ike Skelton, D-Mo., the House Armed Services Committee chairman who opposed the national health care reform law but was a key sponsor of the Tricare Affirmation Act, said he hopes this resolves questions by active-duty family members, retirees and their families about how national health reform might affect them.

Signing the new law “reinforces that military health care coverage will not be adversely affected by the health care reform law,” Skelton said.

Skelton’s committee will consider legislation in May that would extend to Tricare beneficiaries one of the provisions of the new health reform law that allows unmarried children to remain covered by a parent’s insurance until age 26. That legislation is expected to be included in the 2011 defense authorization bill.

#### **4. Vets Salute Obama on Funding**

Great article on President Obama keeping his campaign promises to Veterans—IN THE WASHINGTON TIMES NO LESS!!

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/apr/29/vets-salute-obama-on-funding/print/>

Please share as widely as possible.

#### **5. Obama Signs the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act**

On May 5, 2010, President Obama signed an important piece of legislation—the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act. As the President said:

“With this legislation, we’re expanding mental health counseling and services for our veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq, including our National Guardsmen and Reservists. We’re authorizing the VA to utilize hospitals and clinics outside the VA system to serve more wounded warriors with traumatic brain injury. We’re increasing support to veterans in rural areas, with the transportation and housing they need to reach VA hospitals and clinics. We’re expanding and improving health care for our women’s veterans, to meet their unique needs, including maternity care for newborn children. And we’ll launch a pilot program to provide child care for veterans receiving intensive medical care. We’re eliminating co-pays for veterans who are catastrophically disabled. And we’re expanding support to homeless veterans, because in the United States of America, no one who has served this nation in uniform should ever be living on the streets. Finally, this legislation marks a major step forward in America’s commitment to families and caregivers who tend to our wounded warriors every day. They’re spouses like Sarah. They’re parents, once again caring for their sons and daughters. Sometimes they’re children helping to take care of their mom or dad. These caregivers put their own lives on hold, their own careers and dreams aside, to care for a loved one. They do it every day, often around the clock.

As Sarah can tell you, it's hard physically and it's hard emotionally. It's certainly hard financially. And these tireless caregivers shouldn't have to do it alone. As of today, they'll be getting more of the help that they need."

Please share this important news with your Veterans and Military Family networks. Today is a victory for all Veterans, their loved ones and all who advocate on their behalf.

You can see the video of the President's speech here:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/improving-health-care-veterans>

You can read the transcript of the President's remarks at the bill signing here:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-signing-caregives-and-veterans-omnibus-health-services-act>

## **6. First Lady Michelle Obama Announces Presidential Directive on Military Families, May 12, 2010**

WASHINGTON, DC – First Lady Michelle Obama today announced that President Obama has directed the National Security Staff to lead a new 90-day review to develop a coordinated Federal government-wide approach to supporting and engaging military families. Building on work and expertise by the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs, the review will involve nearly twenty federal agencies as well as the White House Domestic Policy and National Economic Councils and the Offices of the Vice President, the First Lady, and Dr. Biden.

Specifically, the review will:

- Set strategic military family priorities for the next ten years and identify key military family concerns and challenges;
- Review a cross section of public and private programs to identify the most promising ideas and programs that positively support military families;
- Develop options for departments to integrate military family matters into their strategic and budgetary priorities;
- Examine opportunities for Federal policies and programs to stimulate new and support existing state and local efforts achieving military family readiness goals and meeting military family priorities;
- Identify opportunities to leverage the skills and experience of military family members in national and community life; and
- Strengthen existing feedback mechanisms for military families to voice their concerns and views on the effectiveness and future direction of relevant Federal programs and policies.

The review builds on the Obama administration's efforts to forge an enduring national commitment to support and engage military families. These combined national efforts will help ensure that:

- The United States military continues to recruit and retain the highest-caliber volunteers contributing to the Nation's security;

- Service members can have strong family lives while maintaining the highest state of readiness and focus on their military responsibilities;
- Civilian family members can fulfill their own potential while supporting service members; and
- The general population better understands military families and seeks more opportunities to support military families.

"With just one percent of our population—our troops—doing 100 percent of the fighting our military families are being tested like never before," said First Lady Michelle Obama. "This government wide review will bring together the resources of the federal government, identify new opportunities across the public and private sectors, and lay the foundation for a coordinated approach to supporting and engaging military families for years to come."

The First Lady made the announcement during an address to the National Military Family Association's summit – *When Parents Deploy: Understanding the Experiences of Military Children and Spouses*. Mrs. Obama addressed the state of America's military families today, outlined a vision of the nation supporting them over the long-term, and how, as a country, all segments of society can work together to turn that vision into a reality. The First Lady, along with Dr. Jill Biden, uses their platform to support military families by:

- Championing a national call to action that both addresses the unique challenges facing military families and recognizes and taps their skills, strength and commitment to service;
- Building stronger civilian-military community ties; and
- Engaging and highlighting the service and sacrifice of military families to ensure their voices are heard inside the administration.

## 7. VA to Participate In Florida "Stand Down" For Homeless Veterans

The [Winter Haven \(FL\) News Chief](#) (5/9, 10K) reports, "The Polk County Stand Down event for veterans and homeless veterans will be held Saturday, May 15, Armed Forces Day, at Joker Marchant Stadium in Lakeland, to provide all available services for veterans at one central location." There, "services will be provided by the Veterans Administration, Polk Veterans Council, Polk County Veterans Services, Social Security Administration, Blind Vets Association, Department of Health, Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, Florida Rural Legal Services, Paralyzed Veterans, Peace River, Polk Health care Plan, Polk Works, Tampa Crossroad, Tri-County and local veterans organizations."

## 8. Union Veterans Council Supports Mark Critz for Congress

This week the Union Veterans Council will make its first foray into politics this year. We polled the UVC officers and Executive Committee, and we have unanimous support for backing Mark Critz in the 12th Congressional District in Pennsylvania to fill the seat held by John Murtha in a special election next Tuesday. Mark Critz was Murtha's Chief of Staff for many years and carries with him Murtha's dedication to veterans. You can find out more about his positions on veterans issues on his website. Critz also has the backing of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO and many affiliates. <http://www.critzforcongress.com/home>.

Thursday, May 13, in Johnstown, PA, Phil Glover of AFGE will represent the UVC in an event with the candidate and other area veterans in a roundtable discussion when he will make the announcement of our support for Critz.

## 9. Book Recommendation: Sebastian Junger's 'War'

*Book review by Philip Caputo*

Sunday, May 9, 2010, Washington Post

WAR

*By Sebastian Junger*

The ambitiousness of Sebastian Junger's "[War](#)" is summed up in its title. It's a story about war that is much more than a war story.

As a correspondent for Vanity Fair magazine, Junger made five trips to Afghanistan's Korengal Valley in 2007 and 2008, embedded with the 2nd Platoon, Battle Company of the storied 173rd Airborne Brigade. "War" is the result of those journeys into a world so alien to civilians it might as well be a planet in some distant solar system.

The paratroopers' mission was to deny the valley to Taliban insurgents, and it proved difficult and costly. Junger and his photographer, Tim Hetherington, arrived utterly unprepared for the level of violence they experienced. The bloodshed was futile, it turns out. Last month, [U.S. troops were withdrawn from the Korengal](#), leaving it to the insurgents. I was reminded of the battle of Hamburger Hill in Vietnam, when a battalion from the 101st Airborne Division took heavy casualties in seizing the hill from the North Vietnamese army and then was ordered to abandon it.

Most of what we read and hear about the conflict in Afghanistan focuses on politics and strategy. Junger makes plain that he isn't interested in such abstractions but in the men we've sent far away to do our dirty work. I say "men" because this book takes place among the hyper-male front-line infantry, where women are prohibited from serving.

With his narrative gifts and vivid prose -- as free, thank God, of literary posturing as it is of war-correspondent chest-thumping -- Junger masterfully chronicles the platoon's 15-month tour of duty. But what elevates "War" out of its particular time and place are the author's meditations on the minds and emotions of the soldiers with whom he has shared hardships, dangers and spells of boredom so intense that everyone sits around wishing to hell something would happen (and wishes to God it was over when, inevitably, it does).

"War" is divided into three long sections: "Fear," "Killing" and "Love." In each, Junger makes us see the terror, monotony, misery, comradeship and lunatic excitement that have been elements of all wars since, say, the siege of Troy. He thus becomes a kind of 21st-century battle singer, narrating the deeds and misdeeds of his heroes while explaining what makes them do what they do. These reflections, drawing on his wide-ranging research into military history, biology and psychology as well as on his personal experiences, overreach once or twice. Otherwise, it's the best writing I've seen on the subject since J. Glenn Gray's 1959 classic, "The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle."

An eight-man squad caught in a Taliban ambush suffers 100 percent casualties. Their sergeant is mortally wounded. A team leader named Sal Giunta takes over and saves the unit from annihilation. The action appears chaotic but possesses an underlying choreography that requires each man to make "decisions based not on what's best for *him*, but on what's best for the group," Junger writes. "If everyone does that, most of the group survives. If no one does, most of the group dies. That, in

essence, is combat."

He points out that while all animals defend their young and some their mates, only human beings are willing to die for a cause. And for these paratroopers, as for most warriors, their most cherished cause, maybe their only one, is each other. It is understood that each soldier will give his life for his comrades, if necessary.

Here is a paradox of war: Comradeship redeems it from becoming total savagery; yet that sense of brotherhood, the fierce protectiveness it arouses, can make men savage -- or seem so. After a prolonged firefight, a Taliban guerrilla whose leg has been blown off is seen crawling on a mountain slope. When he stops moving and scouts report that he has died, the troops cheer. Their joy troubles Junger. "It seemed," he observes, "like I either had to radically reunderstand the men on the hilltop or I had to acknowledge the power of a place like this to change them."

He has to do a little of both when a soldier named Steiner explains that he and his comrades weren't being senselessly sadistic. What tore that wild whoop from their throats was knowing that "this guy could have murdered your friend . . . we just stopped someone from killing us. . . . That's where the fiesta comes in."

Junger's sketches of the men are deft, his ear for their quirky speech (aided by video recordings) spot on. A partial platoon roster includes Jones, a former drug dealer who joined the Army to avoid being killed on the streets; Moreno, an ex-prizefighter and prison guard from Texas; Murphy, a rich kid who went to etiquette school and wonders which side of the plate the sherbet spoon goes on; the supremely weird Sgt. Buno, a man of indeterminate ethnicity who wanders around listening to his iPod and muttering bizarre things (asked where he'd spent one night, he replies that he was in a village "killing werewolves").

The main character, so to speak, is Brendan O'Byrne. Pugnacious and hard-drinking, O'Byrne is very tough -- he humps up mountains carrying a machine gun as heavy as a jackhammer -- but also gifted with an ability to articulate thoughts his comrades can't or won't. He confesses to Junger that he prayed only once in Afghanistan, for a dying medic to live. "But God, Allah, Jehovah, Zeus . . . wasn't in that valley," he says. "Combat is the devil's game. . . . That's why our prayers weren't answered: the only one listening was Satan."

Junger thinks of O'Byrne as the platoon's collective mind and voice -- "a way to understand a group of men who I don't think entirely understood themselves." This splendid book should help the rest of us understand them -- and war itself -- a little better.

*Philip Caputo* is the author of "A Rumor of War" and, most recently, "Crossers," a novel.