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U.S. News

'Atomic veteran' seeks VA benefits

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FORT WORTH, Texas, Oct. 9 (UPI) -- One of America's "atomic veterans" says he wants help from the Veterans Administration for arthritis he links to exposure from atomic bomb testing in the 1950s.

About 400,000 American servicemen and civilians fell under the category of "atomic veterans" after being exposed to radiation following the U.S. atomic attacks on Japan that brought World War II to an end and during above-ground nuclear bomb tests. A number of soldiers such as former Marine James D. Tyler who were positioned within miles of the blast sites consider themselves "guinea pig ground grunts."

The 72-year-old Burlson, Texas, man was an 18-year-old member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, when he and the rest of his unit were moved from their base at [Camp Pendleton](#), Calif., to the Nevada Test Site northwest of Las Vegas, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram reported Saturday.

He and his buddies were placed a mere 5 miles away from the blast site in a 6-foot ditch with no more protection than their normal combat gear.

It was an experiment.

"I think they wanted to see what it would do to us," Tyler said. "I think they were trying to see how close they could put us to it and not kill us right then."

"These guys were sworn to secrecy," said R.J. Ritter, national commander of the National Association of Atomic Veterans. "For the official record, it didn't happen. They were told by a CID officer, 'What you saw and heard here today didn't happen.' Now after all these years they're free to tell their story, but they are hard-pressed to find someone old enough, including in the military, to understand that it happened."

Many "atomic veterans" try to get compensation in their old age but many decide the bureaucratic fight isn't worth it for "a couple of hundred dollars," Ritter said.

Tyler, who has arthritis and glaucoma, said, "I'm just mad. They've run me around for so many years."

The VA has rejected his requests for benefits.

"There is no biological plausibility to link radiation and arthritis," said Dr. Terry Walters, deputy chief consultant for post-deployment health in the VA's Office of Public Health in Washington.

Special ops and CIA first into, last out of Afghanistan

By Kimberly Dozier

Associated Press

Sunday, October 9, 2011

Bottom of Form

FORT BRAGG, N.C. (AP) - They were the first Americans into Afghanistan after the Sept. 11 attacks and will probably be the last U.S. forces to leave.

As most American troops prepare to withdraw in 2014, the CIA and military special operations forces to be left behind are girding for the next great pivot of the campaign, one that could stretch their war up to another decade.

The war's 10th anniversary Friday recalled the beginnings of a conflict that drove the Taliban from power and lasted far longer than was imagined.

"We put the CIA guys in first," scant weeks after the towers in New York fell, said Lt. Gen. John Mulholland, then a colonel with U.S. special operations forces, in charge of the military side of the operation. U.S. Special Forces Green Berets, together with CIA officers, helped coordinate anti-Taliban forces on the ground with U.S. firepower from the air, to topple the Taliban and close in on al Qaeda.

Recent remarks from the White House suggest the CIA and special operations forces will be hunting al Qaeda and working with local forces long after most U.S. troops have left.

When Afghan troops take the lead in 2014, "the U.S. remaining force will be basically an enduring presence force focused on counterterrorism," said National Security Adviser Tom Donilon in remarks in Washington in mid-September. That will be augmented by teams that will continue to train Afghan forces, added White House spokesman Tommy Vietor.

The White House insists this does not mean abandoning the strategy of counterinsurgency, in which large numbers of troops are needed to keep the population safe. It simply means replacing the surge of 33,000 U.S. troops, as it withdraws over the next year, with newly trained Afghan ones, according to senior White House Afghan war adviser Doug Lute

It also means U.S. special operators and CIA officers will be there for the next turn in the campaign. That's the moment when Afghans will either prove themselves able to withstand a promised Taliban resurgence, or find themselves overwhelmed by seasoned Taliban fighters.

"We're moving toward an increased special operations role," together with U.S. intelligence, Gen. Mulholland said, "whether it's counterterrorism-centric, or counterterrorism blended with counterinsurgency."

As outgoing head of U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Gen. Mulholland has been in charge of feeding a steady stream of troops to commanders in the field. He knows they need as many special operations troops as he can produce and send. Those special operations forces

under his command include U.S. Army Rangers, known for their raiding operations against militant targets, and U.S. Special Forces Green Berets, whose stock in trade is teaching local forces to fight a common enemy so the U.S. doesn't have to.

A foundation for special-operations-style counterinsurgency is already under way - staffed primarily by the Green Berets - with the establishment of hundreds of sites in remote Afghan villages where the U.S. troops are paired with Afghan local tribesmen trained by the Americans, Gen. Mulholland explained.

The program has been so successful in the eyes of NATO commanders that they've assigned other special operators such as Navy SEALs to the mission and even paired elite troops with conventional forces to stretch the numbers and cover more territory.

Senior U.S. officials have spoken of keeping a mix of 10,000 of both raiding and training special operations forces in Afghanistan, and drawing down to between 20,000 and 30,000 conventional forces to provide logistics and support. But at this point, the figures are as fuzzy as the future strategy.

Whatever happens with U.S. troops, intelligence officers know they will be a key component.

A senior U.S. official tasked with mapping out their role envisioned a possible future in which Afghan forces are able to hold Kabul and other urban areas, but the Taliban comes back in remote valleys or even whole provinces.

In that event, the official said, CIA and special operations forces would continue to hunt al Qaeda in Taliban areas the Afghan forces can't secure. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss planning for sensitive operations.

"If the CIA built an intelligence network that could provide special operations forces with targets, we could do the job," said Maj. Gen. Bennet S. Sacolick, who runs the U.S. Army's Special Warfare Center and School.

The only question will be which organization is in charge, and that will depend on the Afghan government, the senior U.S. official said. If Afghan authorities are comfortable with U.S. raiders continuing to operate openly, the special operations forces can lead, the official said. If they want a more covert presence, the CIA would lead, with special operation raiders working through them.

The other branch of special operations - the Green Berets and others Gen. Mulholland mentioned who specialize in training - would continue to support the Afghans in remote locations, trying to keep the Taliban from spreading.

The notion of a pared-down U.S. fighting force, consisting of a latticework of intelligence and special operators, plus the far-flung units in the field, has spurred some criticism on Capitol Hill.

"You cannot protect the United States' safety with counterterrorism waged from afar," said Rep. Mac Thornberry, Texas Republican, who is chairman of the House Armed Services Committee's emerging threats panel. His concern is that the White House has paid too little attention to how special operations and intelligence will keep the Taliban from overwhelming Afghanistan's remote terrain.

"I would like to know how many special operations forces they need and how many conventional troops they propose to support them," he said, "and a rough time line."

The smaller special operations footprint could work if it's part of a larger tapestry of counterinsurgency efforts, said retired Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, former commander of the Afghan campaign.

"I believe direct action operations are only effective when part of a holistic strategy," Mr. McChrystal said in an interview. "That does not necessarily imply large U.S. forces or responsibility, but it must include a spectrum of efforts that addresses root causes, partners with indigenous governments and efforts, and approaches the causes as well as the symptoms on extremism and/or terrorism."

In other words, diplomats and aid groups would have to replace the current military efforts at building Afghan government and services - and do it without a large footprint of U.S. forces to provide them security.

The smaller numbers would also put the U.S. troops left behind at greater risk, officials concede, with fewer support troops to rush to the rescue.

That's the mission a group of elite special operators was on in August, flying into a remote valley to aid another group of U.S. raiders on the ground, when the Taliban shot down their Chinook helicopter, killing 38 U.S. and Afghan forces on board.

Asked if it could happen again, Gen. Mulholland stopped and bowed his head, taking a long pause to think back to how it started.

"From the beginning, we accepted that risk," Gen. Mulholland said, remembering the early days when he sent load after load of special operations forces into Afghanistan, with no sure way to get them out.

He paused again. "We still do."

Stars & Stripes

Iraq's Maliki says U.S. military trainers might stay past December

October 10, 2011

Amid continued political wrangling that impacts several thousand U.S. troops, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said U.S. troops serving as trainers in Iraq might be able to stay in country beyond the December 2011 withdrawal date, even though Iraqi leaders have rejected giving immunity to any American soldiers, Reuters reports.

Currently, there are 43,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, most of whom will leave by the end of the year under a U.S.-Iraqi agreement.

Last week, [Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said U.S. troops would not remain in Iraq](#) if they were to be subject to the Iraqi criminal justice system.

[Maliki told Reuters U.S. troops could be attached to the existing U.S. embassy training](#) mission, the agency reports, or join a broader NATO training group instead of seeking a bilateral deal requiring U.S. immunity that would fail to pass Iraq's parliament.

Army Times

Rooting out toxic leaders

By [Michelle Tan](#) - Staff writer
Sunday Oct 9, 2011 9:52:13 EDT

Top of Form
Bottom of Form

Soldiers will now be asked - and expected - to rate their bosses.

Effective Oct. 1, officers will be required to assert that they have completed a 360-degree evaluation - where the officer is graded by his subordinates, peers, subordinates and superiors - within the past three years.

Requiring officers to complete 360-degree evaluations should encourage them to grow and, at the same time, weed out potential toxic habits among officers, officials said.

A recent survey of more than 22,630 soldiers from the rank of E-5 through O-6 and Army civilians showed that roughly one in five sees his superior as "toxic and unethical," while 27 percent said they believe their organization allows the frank and free flow of ideas.

THE 411 ON 360

For more about the Army 360 Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback, visit <https://msaf.army.mil>.

A Common Access Card is required to log in. Basic information and a section on frequently asked questions can be accessed without logging in.

To visit the Virtual Improvement Center, click on the "VIC" tab after logging in to the Army 360 MSAF website.

The survey, conducted by the Center for Army Leadership, also stated that rooting out toxic leadership from the ranks requires "accurate and consistent assessment, input from subordinates, and a focus beyond what gets done in the short-term."

Gen. Martin Dempsey, now chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said when he was the Army chief of staff that senior leaders must "change the culture of the Army to embrace 360s" and develop a culture where leaders want to know how they're viewed by their peers and subordinates.

The 360-degree evaluation now required of officers is called the Army 360 Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback. This addition to the Officer Evaluation Record is among a list of changes the Army is making to the officer evaluation policy. The changes apply to OERs with a "thru date" of Nov. 1 and later.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno said he believes "multidimensional feedback is an important component to holistic leader development."

"By encouraging input from peers, subordinates and superiors alike, leaders can better 'see themselves' and increase self-awareness," Odierno said in a statement to Army Times. "A 360-degree approach applies equally to junior leaders at the squad, platoon and company levels, as well as to senior leaders. The ability to receive honest and candid feedback, in an anonymous manner, is a great opportunity to facilitate positive leadership growth."

The MSAF program is not new but until now has been voluntary and was not tied to the OER, said Col. Thomas Guthrie, director of the Center for Army Leadership, which developed the MSAF.

Commander's Assessment Tool

In addition to the 360 MSAF, the Army is working on a Commander's Assessment Tool, which also is an initiative from Dempsey, Guthrie said.

The tool, which is being developed by the Center for Army Leadership, is similar to a 360-degree evaluation and will be used to inform a command selection board as it evaluates officers for command.

The Army this year has relieved four brigade commanders, the highest number since 2005. At least two of the firings had nothing to do with misconduct or battlefield performance, but were related to toxic leadership issues.

The goal is to launch a pilot program in fiscal 2012 to test the assessment tool in the brigade command selection board, Guthrie said. If things go well, the assessment tool will be implemented in fiscal 2013 and could be added to command selection boards at the battalion level, he said.

Since Jan. 1, about 10,000 officers and about 10,000 noncommissioned officers have chosen to complete a 360 MSAF, Guthrie said.

He said he anticipates the number of officers taking the evaluation to grow with this new requirement on the OER. However, officers only have to show that they have completed a 360 MSAF. The results of the 360 MSAF will not be part of their OER, Guthrie said.

"The Army is trying to get its leaders to be lifelong learners," Guthrie said. "If you check 'No,' [on your OER], it doesn't mean you'll be kicked out of the Army or get a bad OER. Right now, the intent is to encourage people to acknowledge they need to be self-developed."

Once every 3 years

However, in the future, Guthrie said he expects the 360 MSAF to be mandatory at least once every three years and be included in the Army regulation governing training and leader development.

"We don't want people rushing to an MSAF event just because they have an OER coming up in 45 days," Guthrie said. "Checking 'No' is not a discriminator right now, but certainly with it becoming mandatory, I would expect that unless under extreme circumstances, everyone will be able to check 'Yes' [on their OERs]."

Once all the responses are submitted, they are pulled together by the MSAF experts and a report is provided to the officer who's being evaluated.

Individual responses will not be available. Instead, the officer will see an aggregate of the responses from each category of soldiers - superiors, peers and subordinates, Guthrie said. That means the officer will not be able to attribute specific comments to a specific soldier, guaranteeing anonymity, he said.

The officer will then be able to compare the report with his self-evaluation, Guthrie said.

The officer being evaluated is the only person who receives a copy of the report, he said.

"It was designed to be for the individual's self-development, self-awareness and growth," Guthrie said.

Commanders receiving a unit MSAF also will receive, in addition to an individual assessment, a picture of how his command climate is viewed by the evaluating soldiers, Guthrie said.

As an officer reviews his report, he should find what Guthrie calls blind spots and hidden strengths.

"If you use how you view yourself as a baseline and you compare it, you should say, 'Hey, I rated myself very high on this attribute, but my subordinates rated me low.' We call that a blind spot," Guthrie said. "On the converse side, you may think you rate yourself pretty average on these few competencies and everyone else rates you as superior. I like to say you pat yourself on the back for the hidden strengths."

But don't stop there, Guthrie said.

For blind spots or areas where officers want or need improvement, MSAF offers coaches - retired senior officers and NCOs - who will work directly with an individual and provide advice or a developmental plan. Officers also can access the Army's Virtual Improvement Center for online workshops, videos and slides. These two resources, however, are voluntary and must be requested by the officer being evaluated, Guthrie said.

"Quite frankly, there are probably guys who look at [their report] and go, 'That was mildly interesting, and I disagree with what everyone said,'" Guthrie said. "But we're trying to encourage people to work on self-development."

Positive responses

Several officers contacted by Army Times found the evaluations valuable. Maj. Nate Palisca, an armor officer attending Intermediate-Level Education at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., said he has completed two 360-degree evaluations, one when he was a young captain and the second when he was preparing to attend ILE.

"I wanted to get an azimuth check of where I stood," Palisca said. "It's not always easy to see yourself, and I think that's the value of the MSAF, to get that take on how people see you."

"I don't mind honest feedback . but I'm glad to see the feedback given on the MSAF will not impact the OER," he said.

Palisca said that even if the MSAF was not required, he likely would continue seeking 360-degree evaluations. One of the lessons Palisca said he took away from his 360-degree evaluations was feedback that told him he didn't give enough recognition to subordinates for their contributions.

"I thought I was, but I've made a conscious decision to make a concerted effort to recognize the contributions of the people I'm working with," he said. "There's a reason you ask for feedback from subordinates, peers and superiors, because they look at you through different lenses."

Navy Times

1 in 4 sex assault hotlines fails in Navy audit

By [William H. McMichael](#) - Staff writer

Sunday Oct 9, 2011 10:12:33 EDT

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Naval auditors have found that one out of four test phone calls to Navy and Marine sexual assault hotlines either failed or were improperly handled, according to a recent report.

Specifically, one-quarter of the 147 test calls to hotlines, after-hours and victim advocate phone numbers showed some negative result, the Naval Audit Service found.

Still, a 25 percent failure rate was a "significant improvement," the service said in its August memo to Navy Undersecretary Robert Work. In a January audit, 44 percent of calls to the numbers listed on Navy and Marine Corps installation and reserve center websites failed. In June 2010, 52 percent of the audit service's test calls did not meet standards.

Causes of the August failures ranged from lack of voice mail or messages not being returned within an hour to failing to preserve the restricted reporting option, under which a victim can report the incident without initiating an investigation while availing themselves of Navy advocacy, medical and counseling services.

Auditors making the calls made clear the "nature and purpose" of the calls and did not pretend to be sexual assault victims, the service said.

The objective of the audits, the service said, is to verify that sexual assault-related phone numbers are listed on the websites, and that initial responses of calls made to those numbers "were timely and appropriate."

"When a call to one of the posted phone numbers is not properly handled, the sexual assault victim may not receive proper attention and guidance, and may be discouraged from reporting the incident," the service said.

Navy installations fared better, with 16 percent of calls to 55 installations not properly handled. The figures were 41 percent in January and 46 percent in June 2010. Twenty-five percent of the calls failed at 36 Marine Corps bases, with the earlier audits scoring at 28 percent and 60 percent, respectively.

Twenty-eight calls to Navy operational support center sexual assault phone lines had an 18 percent failure rate. A like number of calls to Marine Corps Reserve Unit hotlines failed at a 50 percent rate.

The reasons varied. On Navy bases, most of the failures - 7 percent - stemmed from the call not being returned in less than an hour after a voice mail message was left. In 2 percent of the calls, voice mail was not available. A failure to preserve the reporting option and the call being improperly handled after it was forwarded to another number each accounted for 4 percent of the failures.

On Marine bases, the major problem was lack of voice mail. This was the cause of 14 percent of the failures. Another 8 percent failed because a message wasn't returned within an hour. Three percent of the time, the service said the person taking the call "could not help" - apparently meaning that person could not refer the caller to the unit's victim advocate or sexual assault response coordinator.

Most NOSC failures, 11 percent, were due to a failure to promptly return the message. That accounted for 14 percent of Marine Corps Reserve Unit failures, with a like percentage due to the call being forwarded to another number at which the call was improperly handled.

The report did not make clear how call recipients failed to preserve the restricted reporting option.

In a statement provided to Navy Times, the Navy's top sexual assault prevention and response official acknowledged the shortcomings noted in the reports. Jill Loftus said that while perfection is a goal, "we may never achieve perfect results across all Navy and Marine Corps locations, especially in places where cell phone coverage isn't complete."

But she said that Navy and Marine Corps leaders have placed a "high priority" on support for sexual assault victims and that audit failures are now being reported directly to the No. 2 uniformed leaders in the Navy and Marine Corps.

Loftus also pointed to what she called a "substantial improvement" in report phone line responsiveness. While more work is needed, she said, "That is happening."

US soldiers in midst of equipment revolution

By Mathieu Rabechault | AFP - Sun, Oct 9, 2011

Kevlar underwear, enhanced night-vision goggles and portable [solar panels](#): the US military is seeing a gear revolution, thanks to the lessons learned during 10 years of [war in Afghanistan](#) and Iraq.

The M4 rifle remains the basic firearm of the American GI, but the addition of many gizmos now makes the soldier look more like Inspector Gadget than GI Joe: the typical gear kit includes 73 items, from clothes to weapons.

[Program Executive Office Soldier](#), the military unit responsible for inventing and producing army equipment, says some items are designed to better protect soldiers on the ground, while others help them understand the terrain.

Since 2004, every soldier has been issued a bulletproof vest with extra protection panels.

But the increased use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), responsible for more than half the deaths of US soldiers in [Afghanistan](#), has led to the development of new protective gear.

Over the next two months, "tens of thousands" of Kevlar outer garments to protect the pelvic area will be sent to US soldiers in Afghanistan, according to Colonel William Cole, who is part of the PEO Soldier unit.

"It protects soldiers if they step on an anti-personnel IED. It can really mitigate their injuries," he told reporters.

The protective outer garment is worn over the soldier's fatigues.

Soldiers in Afghanistan also will have a Kevlar undergarment, similar to a pair of biker shorts, which helps protect them against infections caused by dirt and stones kicked up in a blast.

"When you keep the wound area clean, you prevent follow-on infections," Cole said.

To combat the frequent traumatic brain injuries suffered by troops in both Afghanistan and Iraq, which doctors say often lead to cases of post-traumatic stress disorder, helmets are being tricked out with sensors.

"When a soldier is caught in an IED event, we will be able to immediately download the data from his helmet to determine what kind of impact the helmet got to help the medical community correlate that to what kind of brain injury he might have," Cole said.

Colonel Stephanie Foster, the program manager for the unit's Soldiers, Sensors and Lasers project, expresses her pride in the new "Individual Gunshot Detector" system, which will help soldiers locate hidden snipers.

"You can wear it on the shoulder or other parts of your equipment," Foster said of the IGD sensor, 5,000 of which are already being used on the ground.

"Basically you have the ability to have counter-sniper situational awareness. With its acoustic device, you'll be able to get the range and direction of the incoming fire."

For night-time combat, modern armies have the upper hand over insurgents thanks to night-vision goggles. The new-generation eyewear, which is just reaching the field, will allow troops to more easily detect enemy fighters.

Other gadgets in the works -- like the lightweight Joint Effects Targeting System -- will allow soldiers to use a laser target to guide an air strike.

The US military currently uses a laser designator weighing several kilos (pounds) which is mounted on a tripod.

The use of too many electronic gadgets can be cause for concern.

"When you're in an hostile environment, how do you recharge your batteries?" wonders Bill Brower, a deputy project manager, displaying a box as big as a pack of cigarettes.

"It's basically a power manager. With it, I can take power from virtually any source. If I come across an old car battery, I can plug this in."

If there are no power sources around, soldiers can always use a portable solar blanket covered with mini-solar panels, which can be used to charge up a small computer.

Private sector might have to do more to ease unemployment among military veterans

By ROB HOTAKAINEN

McClatchy Newspapers

Published: October 9, 2011

[Lightbox link](#) [Lightbox link](#)

WASHINGTON - Democrats and Republicans rarely agree on anything in the nation's capital, but there's a growing bipartisan sense on Capitol Hill that the private sector will have to do much more to help Congress ease chronically high unemployment among veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

In August, President Barack Obama called on the nation's businesses to hire or train 100,000 unemployed veterans by the end of 2013, a challenge that Microsoft answered with a pledge to train 10,000 of them.

Now, as part of his \$447 billion jobs package, Obama wants Congress to approve a plan that would provide businesses a tax credit of \$2,400 to \$9,600 for each veteran they hire, depending on whether they're disabled and how long they've been unemployed.

One million veterans already are unemployed and more than a million are expected to leave the military by 2016. Julius Clemente, a 33-year-old Iraq veteran from Kirkland, Wash., told a congressional panel Thursday that there will be "systematic chaos" if more of them can't find jobs or get help going to college.

"The path we now face from the military to college - life is more complicated and challenging than what I thought," Clemente told lawmakers.

Congress appears eager to respond, although there's no consensus on a specific plan.

At a meeting of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, Democratic Sen. Patty Murray of Washington state, the committee's chairman, called veterans "the most employable group of people in the world."

"They know how to show up for work for time, they've got tremendous skills, and they have great attitudes," she said. "And they have just so much to offer to our country."

North Carolina Sen. Richard Burr, the top-ranked Republican on the panel, said that veterans "can't be that valuable to this country and not that valuable to American business."

"We've just got to find a way to highlight that to corporate America," he said.

Many members of Congress have long sympathized with returning veterans who have difficulty transferring their skills to civilian jobs, often because it's difficult for them to get the necessary certifications, even if their skills are similar.

Clemente, a naturalized U.S. citizen who's a native of the Philippines, served seven years in the military and was honorably discharged in 2005 after serving in Iraq. He enlisted in the Navy as a hospital corpsman and worked at a naval hospital in Japan, but he said he could not find a comparable job in the United States after he left the military.

"My certification, my experience in the military, faces a difficult challenge of transferring over to the civilian side," he said.

In 2007, Clemente enrolled in Bellevue College in Bellevue, Wash., where he helped form a group that supports other veterans. After graduating this year, he has a job as a medical assistant.

"I'd like to one day practice medicine and help veterans and foreign immigrants ... in Washington state," he told the committee members.

Murray, who became the committee's chairman in January, said the federal government needs to step up its training efforts for veterans. In June, the committee passed a bill introduced by Murray called the Hiring Heroes Act of 2011, which for the first time would require the government to provide job-skills training for all service members before they return home.

"We take a lot of time to train our military to be in the military, but we take no time to train them to be a civilian again," Murray said.

She said it would make financial sense for the government to do more training to make sure that more veterans land jobs as soon as possible.

"The Army alone last year paid almost a billion dollars in unemployment insurance," Murray said. "We're paying that cost already. If we would think like a business, we would say, 'How do we reduce that cost?' "

Brad Smith, Microsoft's general counsel and executive vice president for legal and corporate affairs, said the Redmond, Wash., company plans to team with the U.S. Department of Labor to offer 10,000 "technology training and certification packages" to veterans.

It's an expansion of Microsoft's existing efforts, increasing its spending on veterans-related training programs to \$12 million.

"If there's one thing that we at Microsoft know ... it's that veterans make great employees," Smith said. "They're smart, they're talented, they're dedicated, they work well as individuals and they work well in teams. And that's an amazing set of attributes."

For its part, the federal government has been increasing its hiring of veterans, as well. The government hired 2,000 more veterans in 2010 than it did in 2009, according to the most recent figures available from the White House.

Afghan Detainees Tortured, U.N. Says

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Published: October 10, 2011 at 7:04 AM ET

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) - The United Nations in Afghanistan says prisoners at some Afghan-run detention facilities have been beaten and tortured, but that the mistreatment is not the result of government policy.

A 74-page report released Monday found that detainees in 47 facilities in 22 provinces run by the Afghan National Police and by the Directorate of Security were subjected to interrogation techniques that constitute torture under both international and Afghan law.

It said Afghan security ministries cooperated with the investigation, and took measures to stop the abuse after being presented with the report.

NATO announced last month that it stopped transferring detainees to 16 of the facilities.

TRICARE Investigates Beneficiary Data Breach

By Donna Miles

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Oct. 7, 2011 - The TRICARE Management Activity is reviewing its data protection policies and procedures in the wake of a data breach involving personal health information of an estimated 4.9 million military clinic and hospital patients.

The breach potentially affects patients who received care or filled pharmacy prescriptions in San Antonio-area military treatment facilities from 1992 through Sept. 7, 2011, TRICARE spokesman Austin Camacho reported.

Other beneficiaries who received care elsewhere, but whose laboratory workups were processed in San Antonio military treatment facilities, also could be affected, he said.

Science Applications International Corp., a TRICARE contractor, reported the data breach Sept. 14. Backup tapes from an electronic health care record the military health system used to capture patient data since 1992 were lost, Camacho reported.

The exact circumstances of the loss are part of TRICARE's investigation, he said. Those results are expected to be published as soon as possible.

The tapes may include Social Security numbers, addresses and phone numbers, as well as personal health data such as clinical notes, laboratory tests and prescriptions, he said. No financial data such as credit card or bank account information is included.

Despite the information involved, TRICARE officials estimate the risk of harm to patients to be relatively low.

"Reading the tapes takes special machinery. Moreover, it takes a highly skilled individual to interpret the data on the tapes," Camacho said. "Since we do not believe the tapes were taken with malicious intent, we believe the risk to beneficiaries is low."

As TRICARE officials investigate the incident, they plan to notify everyone whose personal information may have been involved in the breach, Camacho said.

TRICARE and SAIC are working together to come up with that list of names, but because of the number of people potentially affected and the need to review multiple databases, Camacho said, individual notifications could take four to six weeks.

In the meantime, TRICARE officials encourage people who suspect they were affected by this incident to take steps outlined on the Federal Trade Commission website to protect their personal information. They also can monitor their credit and place a free fraud alert on their credit for 90 days using the FTC website.

Concerned patients may contact the SAIC Incident Response Call Center at no charge, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern time. Stateside, patients may call toll-free to 855-366-0140. Overseas, patients can make collect calls to 952-556-8312.