



**NGAUS**  
The National Guard Association of the United States

# Notes

May 9, 2008

**Your Voice in Washington Since 1878**

Volume 4, Issue 19

## Official: 1,000 Veterans Attempt Suicide Monthly

The number of suicide attempts each month among veterans in the care of the Department of Veterans Affairs may exceed 1,000, said the man who runs the department.

Dr. James Peake, VA secretary, told the House Veterans Affairs Committee this week that the figure used in an internal VA e-mail and released during a trial in San Francisco is probably accurate.

Two veterans groups allege that the VA hides suicide data.

"I can appreciate that the number of 1,000 suicide attempts a month might be shocking," he said, "but in a system as

large as ours ... and consistent with the literature, we might well expect a larger number of attempts than that."

The number cited includes all veterans.

Peake said of the nearly 500,000 veterans who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan and then left active-duty the military from 2002 to 2005, the number who had taken their own lives was 144. He said that exceeds the rate expected in the comparable general population, but not by a statistically significant amount.

But earlier in the week, the head of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) said in Washington, D.C., that

the number of suicides by recent veterans could top the number of deaths by combat.

Thomas Insel, NIMH director, said he based his statement on a study by the Rand Corporation and the suicide rates for patients who have substance problems and other complications of post-traumatic stress disorder.

"It's quite possible that the suicides and psychiatric mortality of this war could trump the combat deaths," said Insel.

He spoke at a meeting of the American Psychiatric Association.

## Third NGAUS Membership Workshop Set

State and territorial Guard association leaders will learn proven membership recruiting and retention practices when NGAUS hosts its third membership training workshop May 29 and 30 at the National Guard Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Representatives from more than 30 states and territories attended each of the first two workshops held last year.

The training is designed to assist states and territories with their ongoing NGAUS membership drives, said Lt. Col. Tracy L. Settle of South Dakota, association membership committee chairman.

Participants discover what enables some states to consistently reach 100 percent NGAUS membership. They also will review the NGAUS Web site, learn to clarify the benefits and value of joining and discuss a variety of membership committee initiatives.

The workshop's intent is to provide attendees with all the tools needed to go home and train unit points of contact.

He believes the training will help achieve his committee's goal of boosting overall NGAUS membership by 5 percentage points by the end of 2008. About 67 percent of Guard officers nationwide joined the association last year.

An added inducement to raise membership in 2008 is the one-year trial increase in the NGAUS dues rebate. The program will rebate 25 percent of collected individual national association dues to those state and territory associations that either meet their NGAUS-prescribed membership goal or maintain 100 percent membership.

NGAUS officials see the offer as a membership recruiting and retention tool. The association board of the directors will review results at the end of the year.

## Joining is Just the Beginning

- ◆ Keep up with critical issues
- ◆ Learn about NGAUS priorities
- ◆ Sign up for alerts and newsletters
- ◆ Write to Congress

[www.ngaus.org](http://www.ngaus.org)



### CALENDAR

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| May 26      | Memorial Day<br>Offices Closed                  |
| May 29 & 30 | Membership Workshop<br>National Guard Memorial  |
| June 12     | Colorado State Visit<br>National Guard Memorial |

You earned it, now use it:  
Affordable Health Care: [www.tricare.mil](http://www.tricare.mil)

# State Partnership Program Subject of Gathering in Bulgaria

The National Guard will hold a State Partnership Program regional workshop with 10 countries from southeast Europe next month in Sofia, Bulgaria.

State National Guard leaders and chiefs of defense staffs and appropriate civilian emergency management leaders from the European countries will attend the two-day conference beginning June 3 in Bulgaria's capital city.

Col. Randy Everett, director of the National Guard Bureau's Office of International Affairs, said the purpose of the workshop is "to bring together

National Guard adjutants general and partner country chiefs of defense to exchange information and ideas to strengthen their mutual security cooperation activities under the State Partnership Program and the U.S. European Command and promote stability and progress in southeast Europe."

Topics will include helping the countries' military forces achieve NATO standards, military support to civil authorities during disasters and improving civil security through education, legal, medical, science and business exchanges.

Lt. Gen. H Steven Blum, National Guard Bureau chief, and Lt. Gen. Galimir Pehlivanov, deputy chief of the general staff of the Bulgarian armed forces, will act as co-hosts.

The 10 countries that will take part already have partnerships with American states. Bulgaria is partnered with Tennessee. Other affiliations are: Albania-New Jersey; Bosnia and Herzegovina-Maryland; Croatia-Minnesota; Hungary and Serbia-Ohio; Macedonia-Vermont; Montenegro-Maine, Romania-Alabama and Slovenia-Colorado.

## Purple Heart for PTSD? Worth a Look

The Defense Department continues its effort to encourage combat veterans to seek help for mental health problems associated with their time in a combat zone.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates even addressed the idea of awarding a Purple Heart for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

"It's an interesting idea," Gates said when asked last week during a visit to Fort Bliss, Texas. "I think it is clearly something that needs to be looked at."

The Pentagon has already changed a question on a security clearance application that asks about treatment for mental health problems. It was seen as a barrier to seeking treatment by those who might want to maintain or obtain a security clearance.

Col. (Dr.) John Bradley, chief of psychiatry at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, mentioned a Rand Corporation study that found 20 percent of combat veterans experience some symptoms of psychological distress. The percentage increases with multiple deployments.

"The DoD recognizes that war is bad for your health. It's bad for your emotional health and it's bad for your physical health," said Bradley. "So we want to be very aggressive about opening up the doors to treatment for soldiers in distress."

The idea of awarding a Purple Heart, now limited to troops wounded or killed in a conflict, for PTSD sufferers is a good one, said John Fortunato of the Fort Bliss Recovery and Resilience Center, which uses a holistic approach to treating PTSD.

## NGAUS HISTORY

In the aftermath of anti-war demonstrations in Washington, D.C., a bomb explodes outside the National Guard Memorial on May 10, 1970.

At about 1:20 a.m., a charge which police said was about a 20-pound "satchel" of black powder, exploded along the west wall of the memorial.

Although the building was unoccupied, 70 of the 76 glass doors and windows were shattered. Shards were hurled across the Hall of States damaging many of the marble pylons on which state flags were mounted and the bronze bust of George Washington.

Police theorized that the charge was set by someone who pulled up in front of the building in a vehicle, placed the explosives, lit the fuse and then fled.

## THIS WEEK IN GUARD HISTORY

*May 11, 1846:* Washington, D.C.—Congress declares war against Mexico at the request of President James Polk. At the time, the entire United States Army numbered about 6,000 men. It would eventually expand to nearly 10,000 by war's end.

The bulk of the force will come from the uniformed volunteer militia of various states, forerunners of today's National Guard. Under the 1792 Militia Act, the militia could not be mobilized for a foreign war. So the president called for regiments of volunteers to serve in Mexico. Nearly 78,000 men served in volunteer units drawn from 24 states and the District of Columbia. The war was unpopular in New England. Only Massachusetts furnished any troops from that region.

Of the approximately 13,000 men who died during the war, only about 2,000 were killed in combat. Almost all others died of diseases such as yellow fever, malaria and dysentery.

