



## **TALKING POINTS**

**The Consequences of Churning:** *A State-by-State Account of the Toll of Deployments on Frontline Active-Army Units*

**Weekend Warriors to Frontline Soldiers:** *A State-by-State Account of the Toll of Deployments on National Guard Brigade Combat Teams*

By Veterans for America's Wounded Warrior Outreach Program

### **MESSAGE:**

- When General David Petraeus testifies before Congress on April 8-9, 2008, the voice of **our Soldiers must be heard**. There are limits on what men and women in uniform can say. This is why Veterans for America must convey their message that **“pausing troop withdrawals would have devastating consequences for our troops, given the great post-combat burden that they are bearing as a result of repeated exposure to high-intensity combat.”**
- The system of care designed to treat post-combat mental health injuries, the most common wounds of our current wars, is inadequate to the task and will be for the foreseeable future. The only step that can ease this burden is more time out of the fight to rest, re-train, and recuperate.

### **FACTS:**

- Active-duty Army Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) and Armored Cavalry Regiments (ACRs) – a subset of the already small portion of the U.S. population that has fought in Iraq and Afghanistan – have been repeatedly deployed to the frontlines, enduring high-intensity combat for extended periods with inadequate time at home between tours. Since 9/11, many of the 41 BCTs in the active-duty Army have endured a relentless series of deployments:

- 4 BCTs have been deployed four times
  - 10 BCTs have been deployed three times and
  - Almost all BCTs have deployed at least twice.
- On average, 21 Soldiers have been killed in action (KIA) per active-duty BCT deployment in Iraq – nearly twice the rate of all servicemembers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. This demonstrates that active-duty Army BCT’s consistently are exposed to high-intensity combat.
  - More than 42% of all U.S. servicemembers killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan were members of active-duty Army BCTs and ACRs.
  - BCTs based in Texas have been hit especially hard: seven of the eight BCTs based in Texas have at least one tour in which the unit suffered fatalities above the active-duty Army BCT average.
- According to multiple Army-led Mental Health Advisory Team (MHAT) reports, Soldiers who survive **high-intensity combat** are far more likely to suffer post-combat mental health problems than those who have faced low-intensity or medium-intensity combat.
  - MHAT IV found that 28% of Soldiers who had experienced high-intensity combat screened positive for acute stress (i.e., Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD). This is more than three times the PTSD rate for those who had seen low-intensity combat and more than twice the rate for those who had seen medium-intensity combat.
- **Multiple tours** are compounding the injuries of our troops. Department of Defense studies prove that with each deployment Soldiers are 60% more likely to develop severe post-combat mental health problems
- **Inadequate dwell time** correlates directly with higher rates of post-combat mental health problems. Where once the Army guaranteed two days at home for every one day deployed, it now fails to meet a 1:1 dwell-time ratio. One of MHAT V’s top recommendations is: "Ensure adequate dwell-time between deployments." According to MHAT V, which included data from focus groups held with troops in Iraq and Afghanistan in late 2007:

“There was...total consensus among all focus groups affected by the tour extension that the Army must lock in an equal amount of dwell time ...Soldiers were very anxious and concerned that the Army would not give them their equal dwell time, and by not

doing so, *would break a psychological contract with them* (emphasis added).”

- **Fifteen month tours** are profoundly devastating for our troops.
  - Extended tours have a corrosive effect on the morale of those deployed, according to MHAT V and Soldiers VFA has assisted. It has also sapped the spirit of our military families who share in the sacrifice made by our troops. In the words of MHAT V, “Among those in units affected by the tour extension while already deployed, there was near total consensus among focus group interviewees that the tour extensions had placed a burden on everyone: themselves, their colleagues, Soldiers, leaders and on their families.”

**The strain of ongoing operations is now severely felt by the Army National Guard.**

**FACTS:**

- As of December 31, 2007, 197,469 members of the Army National Guard have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Thirty-four Army National Guard BCT's and one National Guard ACR have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan as single units. Army National Guard members who deploy to Iraq and Afghanistan regularly see high-intensity combat. This is a dramatic change for units designed primarily for domestic missions.
  - Georgia's 48th National Guard BCT suffered 25 fatalities when it was deployed to Iraq from May 2005 – June 2006. The 48th BCT's fatality rate outpaced the average for active-duty BCTs and was more than four times that of the National Guard BCT Operation Iraqi Freedom fatality rate per deployment of six.
  - The Army-led MHAT reports show the direct correlation between high-intensity combat and higher rates of post-combat mental health problems.
  - Almost half of the National Guard members who have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan have returned from war with mental health problems. Members of the National Guard who have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan are almost a third more likely to develop post-combat mental health problems than active-duty Soldiers and almost 60% more likely to have post-combat mental health problems than active-duty Marines.
- Multiple deployments are becoming all too common among National Guard BCTs. In fact, some members of the Army National Guard deploy more often than their active-duty counterparts. While the Army traditionally provided Guard Soldiers five days at home for every one deployed, this norm has vanished for many Guard Soldiers.

- In March 2008, over 3,000 Soldiers from the Indiana National Guard's 76<sup>th</sup> BCT were deployed to Iraq – the 76<sup>th</sup>'s **third deployment** since 9/11. Five other National Guard BCTs have been deployed twice.
- Minnesota's 1<sup>st</sup> BCT/34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division faced the longest continuous deployment, post-9/11, in the U.S. military when it served 22 consecutive months, 16 of those in Iraq. This extraordinary sacrifice led the Minnesota National Guard to develop the "Beyond the Yellow Ribbon" program, specifically designed to assist Guardsmen reintegrate into their civilian lives and to help them find treatment for any medical or psychological issues. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 mandates that this program be implemented nationwide.
- New Jersey is preparing to deploy half of its National Guard this fall.