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## NEWS



### NORTHWEST CRACKDOWN ON FAKE VETERANS IN "OPERATION STOLEN VALOR" Phony Vets Scam More Than \$1.4 Million And Damage Image Of Honorable Veterans

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 21, 2007

U.S. Attorney Jeffrey C. Sullivan today announced some of the results of "Operation Stolen Valor," a year long effort to investigate and prosecute those who lie about their military service for financial gain or other reasons. Sullivan and Doug Carver, Special Agent in Charge of the Veteran's Affairs Office of Inspector General detailed eight prosecutions in the Veteran's Affairs Northwest Region in 2007.

"As a Vietnam Veteran, and the father of a decorated Army officer currently serving, I feel very keenly the damage done by Jesse Macbeth and these other fakes," said Jeff Sullivan, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Washington. "Macbeth's lies fueled hostility to our servicemen in Iraq and here at home. Those who falsely claim medals for heroism, cheapen the recognition of our true war heroes."

"The 'phony war hero phenomenon' plagues the American landscape and tarnishes the service of thousands of veterans who have served honorably. It strangles VA resources from providing critical care and benefits to deserving veterans returning from war," said Douglas J. Carver, Special Agent in Charge of the VA Office of Inspector General, Western Field Office. "It all boils down to this: these phonies submit claims to the VA for compensation and medical benefits they are not entitled to, and it takes away valuable resources from those who are entitled."

In a dozen cases under investigation in the northwest, the fraud totals more than \$1.4 million. Eight of the cases have been publicly filed and are in various stages of being adjudicated:

\*Jesse Macbeth, 23, Tacoma, Washington, sentenced today in connection with his fraudulent claims of military service. Macbeth sought medical benefits claiming to suffer from PTSD related to service in Iraq and Afghanistan, in fact, Macbeth was discharged from the Army about a month after he joined. Macbeth never traveled outside the U.S. with the Army. Macbeth duped reporters, claiming to be a decorated Army Ranger who had witnessed war crimes.

\*Reggie Buddle, 60, Puyallup, Washington, sentenced July 30, 2007, for Unlawful Wearing of United States Military Medals and Decorations. Buddle posed as a decorated Marine Corps Chaplain presiding over weddings, funerals and baptisms. Buddle was sentenced to 500 hours of community service and two years of probation.

\*Larry Lewis Porter, 52, Seattle, Washington, sentenced April 19, 2007, for Mail Fraud in connection with a scheme to fraudulently obtain disability benefits from Veterans Affairs. Porter was sentenced to 37 months in prison. Porter claimed he suffered PTSD from experiences in the Navy, however investigation revealed the events were fabricated. Loss Amount: \$134,000

\*Roy J. Scott, 71, of Port Angeles, Washington pleaded guilty August 31, 2007, to Use of an Altered Military Discharge Certificate to obtain VA Compensation and Medical Benefits, and Unlawful Wearing of United States Military Medals and Decorations. Scott claimed he had served in the Marine Corps in Korea, that he was wounded in combat in Korea, and that he had been awarded the Korea Defense Medal, Korea Star Medal, and a Purple Heart (due to alleged gun shot wounds sustained during combat in Korea). Scott claimed to be honorably discharged, when in fact, he never earned those medals, never served in Korea or any foreign country and was Court-Martialed out of the Marine Corps. Loss Amount: \$21,960.

\*Merrick K. Hersey, 64, of Vancouver, Washington, Hersey was indicted August 1, 2007, for Use and Possession of Forged or Altered Military Discharge Certificate and False Statements. Hersey is a fugitive and is being sought by law enforcement. Hersey applied for benefits claiming he served in 1967-68, was awarded two Purple Hearts (for wounds sustained in active combat) and the Bronze Star (awarded for heroism). Hersey claimed he suffered from PTSD and sought benefits. In fact, Hersey never served in the Marine Corps at all. Loss Amount: \$2,688.

\*Michael D. Heit, 58, of Harrington, Washington, pleaded guilty yesterday (September 20, 2007) in U.S. District Court in Spokane, Washington to Use and Possession of a Forged or Altered Military Discharge Certificate and False Claims of Military Medals. Heit claimed he was a Vietnam vet who was held as a

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prisoner of war. He claimed to have been awarded three Purple Heart medals and the Silver Star. None of that is true. Loss Amount: \$3,500

\*Elvin J. Swisher, 70, of Idaho, is charged with Wearing Unauthorized Military Medals, False Statements, and Theft of Government Funds. Swisher falsely claimed he was wounded in Korea and that he had been awarded the Silver Star, Purple Heart and other medals for valor. Loss Amount: \$95,000.

\*Carlos Riosvalle, 83, of Portland, Oregon, was sentenced April 9, 2007, in Multnomah County for multiple counts of Theft by Deception. Riosvalle collected benefits claiming to have been "shot down while a pilot in World War II." In fact Riosvalle never served in the armed forces. Loss Amount: \$22,818.

These cases were all investigated by the Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General VA-OIG. The VA Office of the Inspector General operates a HOTLINE for the public to confidentially and safely report crimes like "Stolen Valor" involving VA or its programs. Call 800-488-8244, or fax to 202-565-7936, or e-mail to [vaoighotline@va.gov](mailto:vaoighotline@va.gov), or write to VA OIG HOTLINE, PO Box 50410, Washington, DC 20091-0410.

The cases filed in the Western District of Washington are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Ronald J. Friedman. For additional information please contact Emily Langlie, Public Affairs Officer for the United States Attorney's Office, at (206) 553-4110.

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