

Verbal Agreements

Military should honor its recruiters' old promises

The federal circuit court of appeals in Washington, D.C., decided to return a dismissal of a case against the federal government. This case involves two veterans, William O. Schism and

Robert L. Reinlie, who sued the government for breach of contract.

The two joined the military during World War II, when recruiters promised them and their dependents free lifetime health care if they remained in the service for 20 years. But in 1956, Congress said the retirees could have the health care on only a space-available basis.

The military should honor its word and give these veterans what

the recruiters promised them.

The government argued that there are no laws backing the recruiters' promises and therefore, they are worthless.

While there may be no laws supporting the promises, the men entered into an oral agreement with the recruiters and the military, by joining the armed forces and completing their 20 years of service.

According to the appeals court,

"When the government forced the retirees to rely on Medicare, it breached the implied-in-fact contract." By denying these veterans health care, the military is tarnishing the ideals it teaches its members. One of the staples of the U.S. armed forces is honor, and, by not holding true to its word, the military is defiling one of its ideals.

Many say that the government does not treat its servicepeople well and that denying medical refunds to these veterans is another example of such poor treatment. Too often it is heard that the military is underpaid and that many members leave for better paying jobs, yet these veterans continued to serve America with the belief that they would be taken care of in retirement. The military failed to do that.

The military should repay these men not only with money, but with gratitude for their years of dedicated service.

While this decision applies only to Schism and Reinlie, the military should not wait for a class-action lawsuit by the remaining men who joined under the same terms. By being proactive, the government can save numerous extra costs that are part of fighting new claims.

The government should act quickly because these men and their spouses are not getting any younger. Many have already passed away, and many more will if the case is stretched over a period of years. It will be wrong for these retirees to die not knowing if their spouses' medical costs will be covered.

When the military gives its word through the recruiters that word should not be broken.

These promises were made in an era of "my word is my bond," and the recruiters' statements actually had weight. If the government continues to draw out this legal battle, it will be doing an even greater disservice to these men.

The government gave its word and should face the consequences for not honoring it. The best approach would be admitting the military was wrong and paying these men for their medical expenses over the years. The government should not stop with these two veterans — it should pay the some 6 million men and their spouses the benefits they have been denied for years.

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JOE PEDEN/THE BATTALION

Navy not tour guide

As the nation cautiously awaits the conclusion of an investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the Navy, questions as to what caused the collision between the U.S.S. Greenville and the Japanese boat Ehime Maru remain unanswered.



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The 360-foot nuclear submarine was on routine patrol south of Oahu, Hawaii, when it surfaced and collided with the Maru in early February. The collision spared the lives of 25 but presumably killed nine Japanese citizens as they fished the Hawaiian waters.

The submarine's failure to detect the fishing vessel above it has aroused intense criticism because 16 civilians were on board the Greenville at the time of the accident. It has not been clearly established whether the civilians were indeed a distraction, but nonetheless, the mere fact that they were on board raises serious doubts.

Details reveal that the Greenville was practicing a maneuver known as an emergency blow. Ideally, the crew is supposed to use several forms of highly sophisticated equipment to plot the location, speed and course of any vessel in an eight-to-10-mile radius before the maneuver propels the sub to the surface. Somewhere in these prescribed measures, a flaw occurred, and the crew failed to detect the Maru directly above it.

NTSB officials have said they will focus on the civilians on board as an indirect cause of the accident.

The 16 civilians were on board because as part of what the Navy calls its "most effective public relations tool." The Navy invites influential citizens, friends and family of sailors, and journalists onto ships to gain publicity and support for its programs. In this case, the civilians aboard the Greenville had donated money to a group that pays for the maintenance of the battleship Missouri.

In the court of inquiry that began this week, testimony revealed that the emergency drill was pushed back by almost 45 minutes because the civilians had to be fed in two shifts. Cmdr. Scott Waddle, second-in-command of the Greenville, apparently ignored procedure after spending quality time chatting with guests during lunch and ended sweeps by the sub's periscope five minutes early to make up for the delay. Regardless of this inexcusable mistake, others on the Greenville should have picked up the slack.

Another procedure that could have prevented the incident, a sonar plotter procedure that listens for sounds of other ships in the water, proved ineffective as well. A crew member had been tracking the Ehime Maru with the plotter less than an hour before the collision but stopped because of overcrowding in the control room.

John Jammerschmidt, a NTSB member said the crew member "was unable to finish his job plotting sonar blips because the civilians were in his way."

Despite these disturbing findings, the NTSB has said that crew members honestly thought "there was nothing near them when they did the emergency surfacing drill."

Maybe they should face the families of the victims who perished in the collision and see how their mistakes affected the lives of others.

Even more troubling, two civilians were allowed to sit at two of the three control stations, essentially controlling the rudder and levers that initiated the Greenville's ascent. Although the Navy adamantly says the civilians were under close supervision, Japanese officials were outraged.

"A civilian would not know what to do at the controls," said Ryoiichi Miya, first mate of the Ehime Maru. "It is absolutely unforgivable if a civilian was operating it!"

The mayor of Uwajima, Japan, alongside the families of those who were killed, vented his frustration with the United States for failing to prevent the accident.

"Common sense dictates that the rising submarine should have been watching for what was above it," said Mayor Hiroshi Ishibashi.

Although the onboard presence of civilians can be disregarded by some, Navy officials told CNN that, if it had not been for the civilians, the Greenville would not have been out there in the first place. The civilians had originally been planned to accompany the submarine on a trip several days earlier, but for some reason Waddle canceled it.

However, Waddle decided to go ahead with the trip when he learned that the civilians had already arrived in nearby Honolulu. Essentially, the decision to go on with the tropical cruise caused the submarine to be in the wrong place at the wrong time — at the expense of nine peoples' lives.

A disturbing revelation of ironic facts has additionally heightened the sensitivity of the tragedy among the people of Japan. The man who arranged for the civilians to be on board the Greenville happened to be the former commander of the U.S. forces in the Pacific, Gen. Richard Macke. Macke was forced into early retirement in 1995 after telling a reporter that the servicemen convicted for raping an Okinawan schoolgirl should have paid a prostitute instead.

Additionally, this tragedy struck at a time when the Bush administration has been vigorously vying for strong relations with the Japanese because of their importance in Asian affairs.

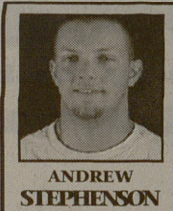
Although the Navy has barred civilians from the controls of U.S. nuclear submarines, they will still be allowed on ships pending the results of the investigation. Meanwhile, President Bush has asked Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to "review all policy regarding civilian activity during military exercises," according to CNN. Instead of doing their duty to the fullest of their ability, the Navy and crew members of the Greenville were too busy entertaining high-dollar VIPs and cramming civilians on the bridge of an already tightly packed ship, placing the lives of the civilians in jeopardy as well.

The Navy should put these civilian donors on a real cruise ship bound for the Bahamas instead of on a nuclear submarine. Perhaps there, they can live out their fantasies on board a glass-bottom boat with a professional tour guide.

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OPEC not to blame for high prices

Fuel prices worldwide have been on the rise. This price increase is usually blamed on the 11 countries that make up the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). OPEC produces about 40 percent of the world's oil and holds more than 77 percent of the world's reserves.



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A sizable portion of these countries are located in the Middle East, and, partly because of America's history in the region, OPEC makes a good scapegoat for higher oil prices. Blame for cost increases can theoretically be placed on OPEC, as the group supplies so much oil to the world. The only problem with blaming price increases on OPEC is that it does not have the effect on American gasoline prices that many oil companies try to claim.

Part of the problem is that, for the common consumer, high fuel prices are just another rising cost in an expensive world. For some portions of America, especially Texas, high fuel prices often strengthen the economy. Because of the state's close ties to the oil industry, the strength or weakness of the oil industry is a major economic factor for Texans to consider.

Since high prices are good for the oil industry, oil companies do their part to keep them high. They are aided by the fact that the public, especially Americans, never really fights the cost increases. Americans continue to pay whatever it may cost to drive, even as they buy larger and less-efficient vehicles. Many complain, but no effective protest is ever organized. Even during the height of the 1970s gas crisis, drivers waited in long lines for their chance to pay too much for fuel.

One of the current explanations for sustained high oil prices, even after last year's OPEC production increases, has been the supposed lack of reserves around the world and here in America. Surplus oil production capacity worldwide is

currently near its lowest level during a non-disruption period over the past three decades. It is close to its lows after such events as the 1973-74 Arab oil embargo and the Iranian revolution. Estimates of oil inventories worldwide, however, indicate that the question of world oil supply versus demand balances do not completely reflect the current state of the world oil market.

Despite the recent large increases in production compared to past smaller increases in consumption, world oil stocks have not increased. According to the OPEC fact sheet on the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) Website, "Official Energy Statistics from the U.S. Govern-

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ment," this fact implies that "production has been overestimated, consumption data has been underestimated, or that the stock data is incorrect." The EIA calls this the "missing barrels" problem.

The most reliable available stock data are for the industrialized countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). OECD stocks, believed to account for around half of total world oil stocks, "remained virtually unchanged in 2000 despite four increases in OPEC production quotas during the year," according to the EIA.

The balances available from the EIA for supply and demand suggest that OECD stocks should have increased by nearly 400,000 barrels per day during the year. "Since the stock data do not show this increase, these barrels have been characterized as 'missing,' with a further unknown amount not showing up in non-OECD stocks."

These so-called "missing" barrels, if they exist, would be very significant, as they totaled almost 150 million barrels last year. That

amount would be large enough to move OECD stock counts up from historically low levels into the average of their range over the past seven years.

OPEC has expressed its desire and commitment to maintain a price range of \$22 to \$28 per barrel for its oil. Any price higher or lower than that range warrants changes in production quotas.

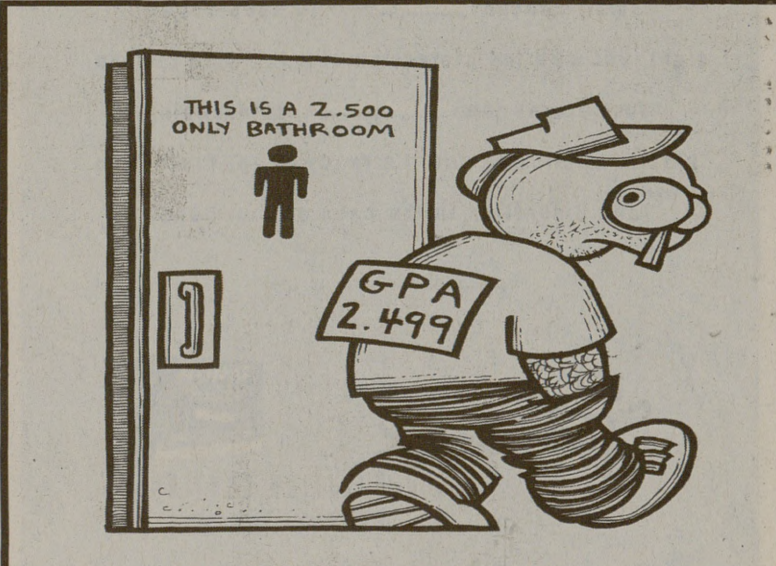
While OPEC has been better about maintaining its quotas in recent years, there are still countries that produce over their quota. The member nations of OPEC, while certainly not the best of friends to the United States, do not want high prices any more than the average driving citizen does. If fuel prices are consistent and reasonable, OPEC makes money. When there is a large increase in oil prices, more often than not, one or more of OPEC's members will get greedy and flood the market, attempting to make a quick profit. As the market becomes flooded with supply, the prices drop dramatically, and all of OPEC loses.

With many companies missing surplus supply that may or may not exist, OPEC can be portrayed as an evil oil empire controlling the price of fuel. But if these barrels were "found," these companies would be out of excuses and would have to pass the recent crude price drop on to the consumer. Many Americans seem to have completely missed that, despite OPEC's increase of quota in the summer of 2000, a corresponding drop in pump prices was never seen. OPEC is certainly not a perfect organization, but it does deserve more credit than it has been given.

In the end, it may simply come down to the fact that, throughout America, and especially in Texas, the better oil companies are doing, the better the economy as a whole is. Most people would not want to give up the relative prosperity the United States is currently enjoying in exchange for paying 20 cents less for gas.

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