

Campus vets say hotline can't replace rep

By SALLY HODGKINSON
Of the Emerald

The absence of a veterans' representative on campus seems to have stirred feelings of distrust between veterans and the Veterans Administration in addition to creating anticipated service problems.

The VA handed marching orders to Dwight Eakon, campus "vet rep," in August, curtailing services to more than 600 University veterans. The VA then set up a toll-free "hotline" with operators in Portland available to help veterans having trouble receiving their benefits.

But some veterans say this move was a mistake that widens the gulf between the VA and veterans by creating another bureaucratic set-up that veterans must work through to obtain benefits.

"It's so much better when you can talk to someone face-to-face," says Jesse Barton, a member of the University Veterans Association and chair of the Student University Affairs Board. There hasn't been a flood of problems because of the vet rep's move off campus, but "we have to recognize that we have a problem," Barton adds.

But John Vogel, regional VA director, says pulling the vet rep off campus has "worked very well. It's not as bad as we thought it would be."

Recalling the vet rep to the regional office in Portland was an economic necessity, although the VA knew that services to veterans would suffer, Vogel says. He adds that a 50 percent decline in the number of veterans enrolled in Oregon's colleges and universities, coupled with budget restraints, prompted a greater decline in the number of vet reps serving campuses: from 22 to one part-time rep currently serving Southern Oregon campuses three days a week.

But the "long-distance interest" of the hotline can turn veterans off, says Larry Kinyon, a VA work-study student who works at the State Employment Office in Springfield, finding jobs for veterans.

Vietnam veterans feel like they've been "played



Graphic by Tom Ettel

with and used as a pawn" by the government in the war, and those feelings crop up again when they deal with the VA — a government agency, Kinyon says.

Because of this distrust, veterans are more hesitant and suspicious of the VA. "You can only get slapped in the face so many times before you say 'hey, that hurts,'" Kinyon adds.

Pulling off the vet rep was a mistake, Kinyon says. "I think they should have waited for another two or three years," he says. "That eye-to-eye contact is valuable." He adds that the hotline creates more paperwork for a veteran and cuts off direct access. "It used to take three days to get an answer. Now it takes three weeks."

Because of these access problems, some veterans have used the congressional clout of U.S. Rep. Jim Weaver's staff in Eugene. If someone from the congressional office makes an inquiry about a veteran's benefits problem, the VA is obliged to respond within 24 hours. The hotline has no such obligation, says Barton.

"I don't see how they (hotline operators) can be as responsive," Barton says. Recently, he says, when a veteran asked for the name of the operator helping him, the operator refused to give it out.

"If someone refuses to give their name, to me that means they don't want to take responsibility for what they do," Barton says.

Vogel says he "hasn't heard" of any problem with the UVA.

"It's popular to be anti-establishment, and the VA is considered establishment," he says, adding that when veterans do work through the VA they usually are "pleasantly surprised" by the help they receive.

Vogel says the VA is interested in more communication with veterans groups such as the UVA and would like to be informed of veteran problems. The VA would also like to participate in or at least provide information to the groups, he adds.

Communication will improve as the VA becomes more responsive to problems Vietnam veterans have, Barton says, adding that recent VA outreach programs are a small step in that direction.

But currently, conflicts continue. Barton is fighting a VA decision last spring to cut VA work-study positions in Weaver's office. In a recent letter to Barton, Max Cleland, national VA administrator, says student work-study positions in congressional offices are not "valid outreach activities." Cleland backs this reasoning with a 1975 VA general counsel opinion.

Despite the disagreements with the VA, Barton advises veterans to use the hotline to solve benefit problems before trying other channels. For information and help with veteran benefits, contact the UVA in Suite 5, EMU, 686-4098, or Barton in Suite 4, EMU, 686-3728.

10 embassy hostages released

(AP) — Iranian militants holding the U.S. Embassy in Tehran announced late Monday that 10 more American hostages were being released. The hostages were expected to be flown out Tuesday.

Swiss radio said a Swissair jet was sent to Tehran for the four women and six blacks. A Swiss Foreign Ministry spokesperson said the empty DC-8 still was waiting at the airport at 2:30 a.m. Tuesday, Iran time (6 p.m. Monday EST.)

Earlier in the day, Katherine Gross, 22, of Cambridge

Springs, Pa., a secretary in the economics section of the embassy, and Sgts. William E. Quarles of Washington, D.C., and Ladell Maples of Earle, Ark., both black and 23 years old, were flown to Wiesbaden, West Germany, where they immediately called their families, U.S. officials said.

The State Department, which could not confirm release of the second group, issued a list of the 10 hostages who appeared at the news conference. Reports said the new group of hostages would be flown to Wiesbaden to join the others for observation in a U.S. military hospital.

During the news conference at the embassy, which has been occupied since Nov. 4, the 10 hostages sat under a banner accusing Pres. Carter of protecting "this national criminal," referring to the exiled shah, whom the militants want in exchange for the remaining 49 hostages.

Revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini ordered the release of female

and black hostages who "were not spies," and said Iran might put some of the remaining 49 hostages on trial for espionage if the United States did not return the ailing Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi from New York, where he is being treated for cancer.

In Washington, a White House statement said any such espionage trial of U.S. diplomats would be a "further flagrant violation" of international law.

The first three hostages freed flew by commercial airliner to Copenhagen, Denmark, where they appeared happy. They did not answer reporters' questions. They were transferred quickly to an American military plane and taken to a U.S. Air Force hospital in Wiesbaden.

The State Department said they would be questioned about the condition of the other hostages and debriefed, but Sherman said "the stay here will be very short and will only be a way-station on the way to their families."

Correction

Scott Bassett, ASUO president, along with vice presidents Dennis Mohatt and Mylene Simons, says the position of the ASUO was misrepresented in an Emerald article Monday.

Bassett says the group does not back either the Iranian students' political views or their boycott of immigration service interviews. The ASUO protests only the harassment of University students, Bassett says.

Mohatt says the ASUO will write letters to Pres. Jimmy Carter, Oregon's congressional contingent, University Pres. William Boyd, the Eugene Register-Guard and the Emerald protesting political harassment.

"We are still researching the letters," Mohatt says.

Monday's article said the ASUO executives will back the Iranian students in their boycott of immigration interviews.

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