

490,000

Number of service members "forward deployed," or based outside the U.S. That figure includes 234,000 personnel in Southwest and Central Asia, 139,000 in the Pacific, 96,000 in Europe and more than 4,000 in Central and Latin America.

FastTrack

UPDATES FROM WASHINGTON AND BEYOND



Say it ain't so, Joe: The original 1960s American hero will live on only in nostalgia — and in the closets of obsessive collectors.

LENNY IGNEZLI/
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FAMILIES

Free test-prep offer expands

WHAT'S UP: The offer of free SAT and ACT test preparation software worth \$200 for service members

and their families has been extended to veterans and their families. Victory Sports Group and eKnowledge Corp. sponsor the program for military families, with donations from professional football players. Service members and their families can find information about receiving

the software at <http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil>.

WHAT'S NEXT: Since the program began two years ago, \$16 million has been donated, and nearly 69,000 programs had been shipped to military families as of September,

eKnowledge spokesman Brandon Chatham said. Within a few weeks, the Department of Veterans Affairs will post information about the donation for veterans on its Web site, <http://www.va.gov>, on the education page, with a link for requesting the prep programs, Chatham said.

PAY & BENEFITS

Little-known honor for vets

WHAT'S UP: About 90 percent of deceased veterans are buried in private cemeteries. As a result, their families may not have been notified that they're entitled to presidential recognition of their loved ones' service, if they were honorably discharged. Aware-

ness of the engraved Presidential Memorial Certificate isn't a problem for the families of vets buried in national cemeteries, which routinely pass out information about the certificates. But some private cemeteries admit they do not, said Bob Manning, who works at Wood National Cemetery in Milwaukee and is part of a team trying to get the word out on behalf of the National Cemetery Administration.

WHAT'S NEXT: Families of deceased vets who'd like a Presidential Memorial Certificate — more than one can be provided to next of kin and loved ones — can call the closest national cemetery for more information. An online locator is at <http://www1.va.gov/directory>. A request form that can be downloaded and printed is online at <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA40-0247.pdf>. Veteran Service Officers and



DOUGLAS H. STUTZ/NAVY

Most veterans are buried in private cemeteries.

private funeral homes can contact the agency at pmc@va.gov.

REASSIGNMENT OF THE WEEK

One less American hero

As of 2009, G.I. Joe will no longer be a "real American hero."

In a Paramount movie expected to begin production early next year, the combat veteran and his battle buddies will be rechristened G.I.J.O.E., an acronym for Global Integrated Joint Operating Entity, and the icons of countless American boyhoods will become part of an international military force.

The JOEs will be part of a Brussels, Belgium-based special operations unit battling the evil Cobra army,

which is headed by a Scottish bad guy, according to Variety, the newspaper that reports on the film industry.

This will be a live-action film, but the role of Joe has not been cast.

The Variety report said de-Americanizing G.I. Joe, the Hasbro product long known as "A Real American Hero," is being done to broaden the movie's appeal for international audiences because America and its military are not too popular in some areas of the globe today.

CAREERS

Finding where the jobs are

WHAT'S UP: A Florida congressman wants the government to be more helpful to service members and

veterans looking for post-service employment by creating a searchable database that will show what jobs are available in various areas of the country. Rep. Cliff Stearns, R-Fla., got the idea after hearing from veterans in his congressional district in central Florida. They found,

after using veterans benefits to get certified in supposedly high-paying information technology specialties, that there are no IT jobs available in that area.

WHAT'S NEXT: Stearns' plan, pending before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, calls for the Labor

and Veterans Affairs departments to work together to create a list of jobs by location. Stearns says this would let veterans know about jobs in their areas — and where they could move if the jobs for which they are qualified are not in the immediate vicinity.



BRITISH MINISTRY OF DEFENCE/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

A convoy of British armored vehicles pulls out from Basra Palace in southern Iraq last month.

WEAPONS & WARFARE

The shrinking coalition

WHAT'S UP: Remember the coalition of the willing? It's now called simply the coalition, and while it is still supporting the U.S. war effort in Iraq, its

ranks continue to dwindle. During the March 2003 invasion, four nations sent troops to fight alongside U.S. forces, a number that grew and peaked at 38. But the number of non-U.S. coalition troops gradually declined between December 2003 and last May from 24,000 to 12,600, and the number of nations supplying troops

fell to 25, according to the Government Accountability Office.

WHAT'S NEXT: Great Britain, which has the most non-U.S. troops in Iraq — slightly more than 5,000 — has pledged to stay into 2008, but financial pressures in the U.S. to reduce war costs could affect the participation of other coali-

tion members; the U.S. has provided about \$1.5 billion in support to 20 of the nations that have supplied troops, the GAO said. Meanwhile, non-U.S. troop levels are down to 12,279, according to the latest State Department figures. That's a mere 7 percent of total multinational troop strength, not including Iraqi forces.