

INTERCHANGE ONLINE



THE OFFICIAL ONLINE NEWSPAPER OF THE
NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL

Vol. 28 Issue 02

Veteran's News that needs to be Read SUMMER 2018



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Military.com

Military Insider



IN MEMORIAM

VVA #20

Lawrence E. Garno

Augustine V. Dentino passed on May 12th 2018

Gary J. Colombo Passed 3/23/2018

Thomas Gleason (Life Member) Passed 3/23/2018 US Army

Jerry Donnellan

William D. Cappoli Jr. passed on March 31, 2018.

Stirlin Harris 1941 - 2018



VVA #72

Andrew Manicone

VVA-NYSC Service Officer

Ben Weisbroth—Coast Guard

MAY THEY REST IN PEACE



VVA-NYSC Meeting Dates 2018

June 29, 30, Jul 01

September 21, 22, 23

Make your Hotel Reservation Early

On-Line INTERCHANGE is the Bi-monthly publication of the VVA-NYSC. Comments and contributions are encouraged and can be sent to:

VVAINTERCHANGE@AOL.COM

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Queensbury, NY 12804

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of this organization. Individuals with different viewpoints and opinions are invited to submit them to the Chapter by the **deadline** of the **Third Friday** of each month. Editor reserves the right to edit for length, grammar and reject any libelous or obscene material.

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Francisco Muñiz III



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President's Report

Ned D. Foote

As we settled into our new digs at Tioga Downs most bugs have been worked out. I heard no complaints and that is unheard of with our bunch. The facilities are really nice, you cannot beat the lunch buffet that we provide to all and I heard some of you won some money (and lost some) in the Casino, I think all are pleased with this location. With that we are negotiating for next year and trying to nail down meeting dates. Grant takes care of all this and does a great job for us.

Back to meeting - Our attendance is up, and I think some are even staying over. We do want you to use this not only for meeting but for weekend getaway. We try to have speaker and April meeting we had Laura Stradley from the Rochester VOC. She did a great job teaching us what the VOC provides and not only in Rochester, but they keep reaching further away to help our Veterans.

We also had Jeff Gurel the owner of this facility stopped by to say hello. Jeff is a very big supporter of Vietnam Veterans and our new friend. He lost some good friends in Vietnam although he did not serve but was very disturbed on how we were treated coming home and does what he can to help us. Thanks Jeff.

You all are doing pretty well on your yearly reports but some of you still like to wait for whatever reason. February 28th has come and gone so you could have completed your Finance report which does not take very long to do. You no longer need to wait until your treasurer comes back from vacation. The new form does not ask your finances, and no one needs to sign. The President is still the person responsible to complete this. The 990N that you attach can be easy or as hard as you make it. If you read the IRS screen completely and follow it you should be done with it in no time and please, please wait 7 minutes to get updated acceptance 990N.

April is election month. Again, form is easy and usually, no changes in leadership, so copying last years and changing the date should not take long, so I ask, nicely please send to National and to me.

Next item is Leadership Conference. Nuff said here as I waste my breath trying to get anyone to go even though the future of VVA is at stake and will be discussed so in 2019 Convention and we will vote on where we are going, so hopefully. all of you start raising funds to send your delegates to Spokane WA. That is, if you want a voice in this.

I try to keep our website up to date on important info and will send to chapter contact list. We try our best to get issues out there and always invite comments on these but really do not get any communication back. So, all we can do is try our best and do our job you elected us to do. With that said we have elections this June for all positions on the State Council. Letters of intent go to Tom Harris: bkrdad@aol.com but if this Interchange does not come out before elections don't bother sending a letter.

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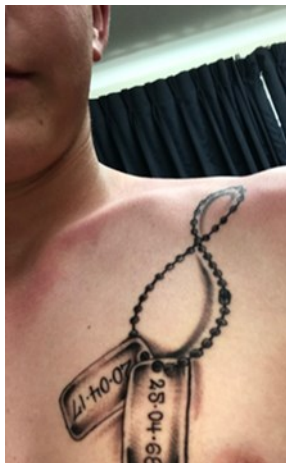
So, have a great summer because our Spring certainly sucked and next meeting is June 30th and again please check out www.nyvietnamvets.org. One last thing. I asked, beg, brow beat for those of you who do not receive this to send me email address.

Yes, I know, if they do not receive they do not know I'm asking so I'm asking you who do and know who doesn't but wants it to send it to me. nedvva@roadrunner.com. No, I will not sell it as some of you claim. You almost daily give your email out to whomever, but your own organization just wants to send our publication to you, you are reluctant to do??????

Proud of my Grandson

I'm taking a personal privilege here because I'm a bit overwhelmed by my grandson, E-3 Air Force Airman First Class Nicholas Maniacek. Although I am not a Tattoo person and discouraged my kids and grandkids from receiving them both my daughters have small ones.

My grandson who is now taking his San Angelo TX decided he will get a proud and honored that he thought that As you look at this picture of the dog is 20-04-17.



DOD fire training for the Air Force out in tattoo. I cannot be mad at him but super much of me.

tags the first one says 25-04-68 and the other

The first is the day I went into the Marine Air National Guard. I have tears in

marine Corps and then the day he joined the my eyes.

Editor's Note: E-3 Air Force Airman First Class Nicholas Maniacek does not know that he is still going to be CHEWED OUT when he gets back home by the Marine!

VVA-NYSC Officers, District Directors & membership sends their deepest condolences to Ted Wilkinson



On the loss of his Beloved Wife

Nyla

May She Rest In Peace

May he cherish memories and know she will always be in the minds and hearts of those that knew her.





New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation

We provide grants to Vietnam Veterans of America-New York State Council, (VVA-NYSC) a veteran's service organization that advocates for legislation at the State and Federal level of government to provide housing, education, health and mental care services to veterans and their families.

We provide funding for VVA-NYSC Veteran's Service Officer program that assist veterans with their military disability compensation and pension claims from the Veterans Administration.

We advocate for better Federal and State veteran's benefits and veteran preferences in government employment. VVA Chapters within New York State, assist widows, widowers, and orphans of our veterans. The organization organizes programs that enrich the lives of Vietnam veterans, as well as veterans from past, current wars, and their families.

We have an active Agent Orange committee that helps Vietnam veterans receive up to date information on prostate cancer, diabetes, and other chemically-related diseases.

We have an updated database of agencies that provide:

- Listings of Veteran Job Fairs offered by county or veteran service organizations;
- Counseling for veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD);
- Outreach programs that support returning veterans' reentry into civilian life;

For disabled veterans, this can be even more difficult than a tour of duty.

We do this all year long, but without your gift and the gifts of other supporters, nothing can be done to help those that are so deserving of it. However, we have much more to accomplish.

We, the New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation, have a mission to keep advocating for and helping these veterans. We ask you to join us in our mission to provide assistance, guidance, training, and education to all veterans of past, present, and future military conflicts.

So let us continue to work together to ensure our national heroes receive everything that they are entitled to receive for their sacrifice and service to our nation.

President
Francisco Muñiz III

Vice President
Ned D. Foote

Treasurer
Grant T. Coates

Secretary
Nick Valenti

Directors Sam Hall

Stan May

You can send your tax deductible donation, to the extent allowed by law, directly to the Foundation at NY Vietnam Veterans Foundation, 48 March Lane, Westbury, NY 11590-6302.

VA Household Goods Program Annual Variations

Nick DeLeo

VVA New York State Council Treasurer

New York State Household Goods Program has experienced variations of up to 35% during the past several years. During fiscal year 2017-2018 it had increased for a majority of Chapters by about 29%. For FY 2018-2019 it has decreased by 34% for most Chapters. This is mainly due to fluctuations in the thrift store business model that normally occurs on a year to year basis. It's a cyclical business in general for charities relying on this income as the not-for-profit benefactor.

The company Savers is contracted by VVA for New York and they have experienced difficulty in maintaining an advantage over their competition in this segment of the market. VVA National receives a percentage of funding from Savers and New York State Council receives 25%. There are several other charities that contract with this company as well making it a very competitive business across the United States working on behalf of charities. Bulk mailing and telemarketing are used to contact potential customers in cities and counties to donate mainly used clothing.

Donated items are sold in regional and state thrift stores operated by the contracting company. Unsold inventory of clothing items are then sold to a third party subcontractor that processes them into rags. This rag business has been depressed across the country for the past several years and has had a significant impact on the amount of income earned at all levels of VVA.

It's strongly suggested for Chapters to continue or start advertising in local newspapers that donating clothing items helps to raise funds for a VVA Chapter in this area. It must be stressed these donations support programs sponsored by VVA to assist not only Vietnam veterans, but all veterans in their community. Please remember VVA is in direct competition with numerous charities and several veteran service organizations throughout our nation for donations of household goods. Informing relatives and neighbors can assist in increasing this vital funding.

Membership Report

Ted Wilkinson, Chair

2017 wasn't the best year for membership growth in New York which has the reputation of leading the way in VVA. Membership had an increase of only 77 members for fiscal year 2017-18. A growth increase of 1.3% while VVA national average was 2.3% growth. If a chapter wants to be successful in membership growth they have to want to.

New York's largest chapter increased by 18 members and one of the more smaller chapters increased by 31 members; this shows size doesn't but rather the want and initiative is key. Between 77 Buffalo and 268 Lockport they accounted for 49 members of 77 membership growth, 64% from 2 chapters. Thank you.

On a brighter side New York passed the 6,000 member and continues to lead the way in VVA.

Western District Report**Mike Walker****VVA Chapters #20, #77, #193, #268, #459, #865, #978****VVA Chapter #77-- Events That Happened Since Jan 1, 2018****Ed Bodine - 1st Vice President**

Jan 2018 Peter Tyce Spaghetti Dinner. This is an annual even run by John Heffernon. We give out \$250.00 scholarships to local high school seniors. They are required to have good grades and write an essay about how a family veteran affected them. Last year we gave out 39. This year's goal is 40.

March Our AVVA assisted 7 local families giving out 19 Easter Baskets and 3 gifts to older children.

April We had our annual April Fools Dance featuring Crash Cadillac this was a very successful fund raiser

April The Buffalo News has Kids Day where they have organizations selling the newspapers for \$1.00 and all the proceeds going to charity. We had 350 papers to sell and with the good hearted people in Buffalo we were able to collect \$665.00

VVA Chapter #268**Gordie Bellinger**

March - Niagara County Hospice Spring Bouquet Sale, Chapter members delivered bouquets for four days;

April - (a) Town Hall Meeting on Agent Orange/Herbicides, over one hundred people attended. VVA speakers were Rick Weidman and Nancy Switzer;

(b) Ha a meeting with Congressman Chris Collins office about veteran's health and benefits. One of the main topics was HR 918 - Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Healthcare Act;

(c) Chapter Elections results (2 year) are:

President John Shepard, 1st Vice President Paul McAfee, Secretary Gary Heacox, Treasurer Gordon Bellinger:

Board of Directors: Frances Castro, Gary Hewitson, Edward Miller

(d) Visit us on our Facebook and Websigte; Facebook

VVA Chapter #268 - Lockport, NY - Home / Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/VVA268Lockport>

More from Pres. Ned Foote

It has now been I month since close of fiscal year and finance reports can be sent. I want to thank the following chapters who have complied on report and hope more of you will get this done sooner rather than later. Also April is election month for many of you so that report will also need be completed.

Chapters who have submitted with thanks are:

72, 79, 140, 268, 377, 459, 480, 896, 944, 978.

27 more to go!

Vietnam Veterans Day March 29, 2018

March 29, 2018 was the 45th anniversary of the end of combat operations in Vietnam for the United States military. Most units departed within 120 days of the end of combat and a small contingent of military personnel remained in country until the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.

Unfortunately the media and a majority of the American public turned away from the Vietnam War due to being weary of watching it on the nightly news for almost 10 years. Hollywood and all types of media portrayals of Vietnam veterans were overwhelmingly negative without cause.

A vocal segment of society blamed Vietnam veterans for the war using slurs such as psychos when mental problems experienced by these young men and women was actually PTSD. In early February 1968 shortly after the Tet Offensive Walter Cronkite, the most trusted man in America, turned against the Vietnam War. He greatly influenced public opinion about the war.

General Giap architect of the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and a central figure in the Lunar New Year attack throughout South Vietnam on January 30, 1968 said in his memoirs the North Vietnamese were ready to surrender after their devastating losses in their offensive if bombing of the north continued. However, they were encouraged by American media stating it was a monumental loss for the United States and knew they could outlast the western invaders.

Traditional Veteran Service Organizations also shunned Vietnam veterans due to a perception these former service personnel were responsible for the conduct of the war and withdrawal. In 1973 Tom Cray and several Vietnam veterans formed Veterans Outreach Center after funds were provided by the federal government to open Self Help store front operations for Vietnam veterans. This funding was appropriated through local not-for-profits such as Action for a Better Community in Rochester. In 1973 the VA didn't have very many services for Vietnam veterans.

VOC provided information for Vietnam veterans on items such as discharge upgrades, benefits, and counseling that were unavailable through the VA at that time. Most of the VA personnel were hostile to Vietnam veterans in the early 1970's since it was a general public perception.

In 1978 disabled veteran Bobby Mueller and a group Vietnam veterans formed a lobbying group to represent Vietnam veterans before congress. When applying for not-for-profit status they were encouraged to become a membership organization since a majority of veteran service organizations weren't accepting many Vietnam vets. It became Vietnam Veterans of America.

In 1980 VOC began an advertising campaign for Vietnam veterans to sign up for an Agent Orange Registry with the federal government due to severe health problems affecting the veterans and their children. It would be from this group of Vietnam veterans that would form the basis for VVA Chapter 20 in February 1981. Gary Beikirch, MOH, became the 1st President.

After the US Embassy hostages in Iran were released on January 20, 1981 and were hailed as heroes by the media Vietnam veterans everywhere were asking why they were never honored for their service and sacrifices. Since it was now 8 years after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords a vast majority of the public finally admitted Vietnam veterans were unfairly maligned and received respect for having served their country during a divisive and controversial war.

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At the first VVA National Convention in November 1983 in Washington, DC Congressman David Bonior proclaimed what became VVA's motto of "Never Again Shall a Generation of Veterans Abandon Another." This powerful statement resonates 35 years later as VVA has been tirelessly advocating for those young men and women who served in Afghanistan and Iraq for the past 17 years. VVA strongly encouraged congress to pass a comprehensive education bill for post 9/11 veterans to provide tuition, books and a monthly stipend for these young veterans to use for a college education. Recently the delimiting timeframe was removed to ensure there was enough time for these young men and women to receive a college degree instead of within 15 years.

In 1988 VOC started serving veterans from all eras since it was critical to providing programs for those who served our nation before and after the Vietnam War. Today Veterans Outreach Center has been modeled by veteran service agencies throughout the country and is the only one remaining of the original 19 that opened across the country in 1973. Vietnam veterans have assumed leadership positions in every segment of American society and have been working with younger veterans to pass the mantel of leadership to continue advocacy for all veterans. I would like to close with a "Welcome Home" to all Vietnam veterans for their service.

Nick DeLeo—VVA New York State Council Treasurer—West Henrietta, NY

Governor Cuomo Announces Dedication of New State Capitol POW/MIA Chair to Honor Prisoners of War and Servicemembers Missing in Action

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced the dedication of a Prisoners of War and Missing in Action chair in the New York State Capitol. As per tradition, the chair, which will be located in the State Street lobby of the New York State Capitol, will remain perpetually empty in order to honor those brave men and women who have not yet returned home or who have suffered unimaginable atrocities, ensuring that they are always kept in New Yorkers' thoughts.

"We must never forget or abandon those who have risked their lives and made the ultimate sacrifice to protect our nation and the principles we hold dear," **Governor Cuomo said.** "With the dedication of this POW/MIA Chair, we honor those heroes who have yet to return home and fulfill the promise that they are forever in the hearts and minds of New Yorkers."

"Throughout our country's history, families of service members who are missing in action or prisoners of war are the ones who have never forgotten their loved ones," **said Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul.** "But each of us who has slept more securely because of their willingness to fight for our nation also must never forget. This chair dedicated today is a visual reminder of that moral responsibility here in our State's Capitol."

POW/MIA Chairs of Honor can be found in public spaces ranging from professional sports stadiums to government buildings. The chair on display at the Capitol was selected from the Ogdensburg New York National Guard Armory. Soldiers from the Ogdensburg Armory, constructed in 1898, have served in almost every American war, including the Spanish American War, World War I, World War II, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Responding to the call of duty, New York Servicemembers have repeatedly risked their own lives to protect our country and uphold the founding values of freedom and democracy.

Since World War I, 6,995 New York Servicemembers are still currently unaccounted for. Nationwide, 142,000 Americans have been captured and interned as POWs. This dedication serves as just one way to remember the brave Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines who have been held captive or never returned home from war.

Central District Report**Nick Valenti****VVA Chapters #85, #103, #205, #296, #377, #480, #704, #708, #803, #827, #896, #944**

Things are really rolling along in Central District. Before we get into it I need to remind everyone how important it is to get our respective houses in order. Remember the IRS wants to hear from each of you. That 990-N, 990, 990-EZ and 990-T confirmation is an important document that keeps Big Brother off your back and wards off a Chapter being suspended. Last year we were ten (10) for ten (10). Looking forward to another 100% response. The new "VVA Annual Financial Report Form" really stream lines the process for all of us. Some Chapters have begun submitting their 990's through a Tax Service. This relieves the stress of grappling with the IRS website.

The new VVA cover sheets just want to know your State Council name; your Chapter Number, Chapter E-Mail address; and your Federal Employer ID Number (FEIN). Simply attach a copy of the confirmed 990 and e-mail to djohnson@vva.org or fax to 301-585-5542.

As for the election reports, that form can be mailed or e-mailed to: VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA, ATTENTION: Membership Department, 8719 Colesville Rd., Suite 100, Silver Spring, MD 20910; or simply e-mail to membership@vva.org.

It is that time of year that the Chapters begin to gear up for the summer months. You can tell by the extensive Central District Report. I would like to start off with VVA Chapter #704. On Wednesday, May 2nd they will field a Color Guard unit for the "Hometown Heroes Celebration." This event will honor our Law Enforcement, Fire Service, and EMS Responders. Location, 1879 W. Genesee Street Road., BOCES Campus, Auburn, New York. Equipment and apparatus display from 5 PM followed by a recognition ceremony at 7:30 PM sharp. Upon completion of the ceremony there will be a Dessert Bar for the attendees and their family members and the members of the public.

Chapter #704 will also again do their annual fundraising Poppy Campaign. This is a three- day event when the Chapter's handmade poppies representing the 27 Cayuga County warriors killed in Vietnam are given to the public. This year the dates will be Thursday, May 24 through Saturday, 26th. The location has been the same for over two decades, Walmart on Grant Avenue, Auburn, New York.

In June of this year, Chapter #704, under the leadership of President Lou Patti, the Chapter will field some volunteers to participate in a Veterans Appreciation Weekend. On June 22nd & June 23rd in Fair Haven, New York, the George Ingersol American Legion Post #658 under event chairman and VVA Chapter #704 member Larry Knoll will host a breakfast and fishing day for our brothers and sisters from the Canandaigua VA. These wounded warriors and veterans have a great time and our volunteers couldn't be happier to be part of it.

I would like all of us to set aside May 18, 2018 as a day to visit VVA Chapter #896. President Larry Holdridge and his wife Suzanne have worked for over a year to erect a Silver Rose Memorial at their meeting location in Endicott, New York. Just to remind everyone the significance of the "Silver Rose" is to honor the

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nation's "chemically-wounded" warriors and to educate the public regarding the extent and dangers of exposures. Deaths linked to Agent Orange (and other dioxin-rich defoliants) exposure from their service in Vietnam are ineligible for the Purple Heart. That led to the creation of The Order of the Silver Rose, a non-profit organization. The National Organization is on hiatus due to family illness. Chapter 896 worked through all the hurdles and overcame many roadblocks to make this work. If you can make the ceremony it will take place at: American Legion Post #1700, 350 Maple Street, Endicott, New York 13760 at 11:00 AM sharp. There promises to be some dignitaries present along with a lunch for all to attend. Larry and Suzanne need a head count for the luncheon. If you are planning to attend PLEASE call them at 1-607-748-0167. Way to go VVA Chapter #896.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #369, 5931 Scenic Avenue, Mexico, New York 13114 is hosting the "2018 Vietnam Vets Get Together." Friday evening, June 15th is the annual watch fire. If you wish to retire old and or damaged flags the start time is 6:00 PM. The fire starts about dusk. On Saturday, June 16th the Get-Together starts at noon. The same food and beverage as last year. Shirts, pins, Chinese raffles, etc. Ken Bundy and crew from Boonville will be giving a helping hand again this year. The VFW again is offering free camping - 100% self-contained campers only. There is no water, sewer or electric hookup. Campfires are ok. There will be raffle tickets available and a special commemorative quilt raffle will be held. All checks should be made payable to "VFW Post #369, P.O. Box 1001, Mexico, New York 13114.

I know this is early but I need to mention this several times before the date of the next "Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway of Valor Tribute Ride." This Ride is in its 10th year. It forms at the Owego Free Academy in Owego, New York and departs at 11:00 AM North on State Route 38 for the 100-mile ride. The first stop is in Groton, New York for food and gas before departing at 1:00 PM again North on Route 38 - The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway of Valor. When the Ride reaches Auburn, New York a few minutes are taken to give everyone a chance to tighten up the formation of riders for a safe Police escort through the middle of the City. At the formation location Vietnam Veterans Chapter #704 provides a Color Guard to greet the riders. This year they will be again be joined by the Carnicelli-Indelicato American Legion Post #1776 and its Color Guard. The Ride ends at the American Legion Post in Hannibal, New York. The Ride is FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. For more information call Harvey at 607-898-3507.

This annual Ride is an example of Vietnam Veteran Chapters working together to create something special. The Finger Lakes VVA Chapter #377, the Owego Chapter #480, the Auburn Chapter #704 along with Blue Knights Chapter #17 working as one. The Ride is really something to see and be a part of. Hold that date, Saturday, July 14, 2018.

I would like to give thank a you to Tom Buono and VVA Chapter #944. I really appreciate getting copies of their meeting minutes. Tom and his members have worked with and stayed in touch not only with each other but with: Military Oder of the Purple Heart, Disabled American Veterans, American Legion, Masonic War Veterans and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. They work very hard building bridges and alliances within their community. Thanks again for keeping me informed. It helps me spread the word about what is happening in Central District. For instance, did you know that on Saturday, April 28th at approximately 6:30 PM Syracuse Honor Flight #11 from Washington, D.C. will be landing at Hancock Airport? Many of us will be at the New York State Council meeting at Tioga Downs however it is good to know about what activities are going on in our neck of the woods.

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Speaking of Saturday, April 28th I want to put a shout out to our Chapters that our new digs, Tioga Downs, are really great. The whole atmosphere is such an improvement. Plenty to do, food and entertainment venues offer a wide variety of opportunities to have a great time. Plus, we have the added benefit of only being a few minutes away from Owego for those of us who liked visiting the local shops. I am absolutely sure that if you come by to check it out you will not be disappointed.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicholas C. Valenti—Central District Director: VVA-NYSC 315-252-4535

VVA Chapter #377 Report

Join us for **10th Annual**
Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway of Valor*
"Tribute Ride"



Saturday, July 14, 2018



The 100 mile ride is free and open to the public - motorcycles, cars, trucks, planes and helicopters welcome

- **Ride will Begin @: 11:00 am ...**

@ Owego Free Academy, Sheldon Guile Blvd. Owego, NY

(Register to ride between 8:00 & 10:00 AM on day of ride) (Police Escorted Ride)

Ride Ends: @ American Legion Hannibal, NY

Women Veterans History Month

VVA-NYSC Salutes Women Veterans for their Strength & Persistence

Throughout our history, women in our nation's defense cannot be overstated. Their perseverance, and one that is appreciated.

VA is dedicating Women's History Month to the remembrance of women who have served. This observance grants deserved recognition to and acknowledges the achievements of women as Veterans.



the important contributions of women and as part of the Veteran population. There is a story of great strength and has not always been recognized or

History Month in March to the reserved our nation throughout history. served recognition to- and acknowledge both women in the military and women

From women who served as cooks, seamstresses, and launderers during the Revolutionary War to

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women who toured Iraq and Afghanistan, and those on active duty today, are all an important part of America's history.

The skills and experiences women Veterans gain from their military service lead to achievements in their careers, contributions to their communities, and becoming public service leaders. VA is committed to recognizing and honoring these achievements and providing women Veterans with the benefits and services they earned and deserve.

For Women Veterans, VA is here.

VA's approach to care is unique for women Veterans. Women Veterans have a designated Women's Health Primary Care Provider who can provide general primary care and is specially trained or experienced in women's care.

Comprehensive health services are available to women Veterans, including primary care, specialty care, mental health care, and reproductive healthcare services. VA provides everything from mammography and breast and cervical cancer screening to military sexual trauma-related care and counseling. VA offers maternity care coordination and maternity and newborn services. Tele-health services such as tele-gynecology, tele-mental health, tele-wellness are also available.

At each VA Medical Center nationwide, a Women Veterans Program Manager is designated to advise and advocate for women Veterans. She can help coordinate all the services you may need, from primary care to specialized care for chronic conditions or reproductive health. Woman Veterans who are interested in receiving care at VA should contact the nearest VA Medical Center.

VA health care resources for Women Veterans

- **Women Veterans Call Center:** The Women Veterans Call Center (WVCC) staff is trained to connect women Veterans, their families, and caregivers with VA services and resources, including questions about Veteran status, Veteran ID cards, and benefits.
- **My HealtheVet:** Manage your health care online. Veterans can schedule appointments online, refill prescriptions, view their health records, and send secure messages.
- **Health Apps on VA App store, such as:**
 - Caring4WomenVeterans
 - Preconception Care
 - Mindfulness Coach

Veterans Incarcerated And In The Justice System Committee Report

Nicholas C. Valenti - Chair

The success of Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter #205 is measured by its impact in the Correctional setting and in the surrounding communities it reaches out to in pursuit of helping those who are most at risk.

This year #205 will begin another chapter in their money donations and crochet program. They along with Veterans of Modern Warfare Chapter #24 have already begun to build on the successes of 2017. Working as one unit these veterans groups have developed a successful working relationship and call themselves "Veterans Group of Auburn." The crochet squad generously gifted 800 adults and 250 children in need of winter items to St. Lucy's Church. These individuals are unable to afford hats, scarves, and mittens. In addition, when possible, stuffed animals are made. A new dimension was added when baby blankets were made for new parents at Ft. Drum, New York. There is something for everyone. The hand made items broke the 1,300 mark and things look great for 2018.

The following is a list of the monetary donations that were contributed by our veterans at Auburn Correctional Facility.

OBJECT OF EXPENSE	DATE OF CONTRIBUTION	AMOUNT OF CONTRIBUTION
DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS (D.A.V.)	January 6, 2017	\$100.00
WALL THAT HEALS	January 27, 2017	\$100.00
D.A.V.	June 23, 2017	\$100.00
D.A.V.	October 13, 2017	\$100.00
St. Lucy's Food Pantry	November 17, 2017	\$100.00
St Alphonsus Food Pantry	November 17, 2017	\$150.00
Salvation Army of Auburn Food Pantry	November 17, 2017	\$100.00
Lycoming UMC	November 17, 2017	\$100.00
Christmas Bureau Baldwinsville Center	December 1, 2017	\$100.00
First Universalist Church Of Central Square	December 1, 2017	\$100.00

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Community Cares	December 1, 2017	\$100.00
Genesee Elementary	December 1, 2017	\$100.00
D.A.V.	December 15, 2017	\$100.00
Creative Corrections Education Foundation	December 15, 2017	\$100.00

Projects being proposed for the current year include: Knitting group of advanced crochet; developing a curriculum for stress management that will deal with PTSD and Stress; and continued donations to outside community organizations. Building bridges, moving forward, and motivation to serve our country have contributed to the motivation of the veterans to give back to society as much as they can.

These men are a brotherhood dedicated to service. They are willing to work to better themselves and the communities outside the wall.

POW/MIA Chair Dedication in the Blue Room

New York State Capitol, Albany, New York on March 26, 2018

Grant T. Coates—VVA-NYSC Vice President

Thank you, Mr. Evans.

Lieutenant Governor Hochul, distinguished legislators, fellow veterans and all, welcome.

In 1993, while the issue of U.S. missing in action and prisoners of war in Southeast Asia was still front page news, Vietnam Veterans of America initiated a program to assist the United States government with relationships with the government and people of Vietnam. The program was called the Veterans Initiative (VI).

Called the V.I., the program started as a veteran to veteran project involving Americans and Vietnamese. The program through various media and news formats requested the U.S. veterans of Vietnam to contact the Veterans Initiative program with information and articles collected from the battlefield and brought home as mementoes. The items were reviewed for factual content and developed into cases. The cases were then taken to Vietnam and given to Vietnamese government and military agencies as well as veteran and non-governmental organizations. The cases contained the possible locations of burial sites of Vietnamese war dead.

The desired result of the Veterans Initiative Program was to keep the issue of the missing war dead of the Vietnam War in the forefront of both countries. The positive missions have resulted in a cooperative atmosphere with Vietnamese. Both veterans and witnesses have submitted information that resulted in locating and retrieving several U.S. personnel listed as missing in action.

During the 25 years of existence, the V.I. has completed 25 missions to Vietnam, taken 304 cases containing burial information of an estimated 14,000 bodies. Vietnamese officials have stated an estimated 1200 bodies have been recovered.

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Being in existence prior to formal normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and Vietnam in 1995, the Veterans Initiative Program has established relationships with agencies of the Pentagon, Vietnam, non-governmental and humanitarian organizations and other veteran organizations.

Recognized by the World Veterans Federation as the only successful program of the type, the veteran to veteran relationship of the Veterans Initiative Program has shown the world that Once Enemies – Now Friends concept aides the mission of recovering the missing from war.

During the 25 year life of the Veterans Initiative Program, many Provinces, cities, hamlets, fields, mountains and battle sites have been visited. The one word that appears at all of the locations is TIME. Time is the enemy for all that are involved with the issue of recovery of the war dead.

As time progresses, the eye witnesses are forgetting details or passing away. Progress is erasing the footprint of the battle. Buildings, roads, city expansion are altering the land. In some cases, the land has been altered, bones have been found and moved to a veteran's cemetery without notifying the proper authorities, and the event is lost to history.

Witnesses that are not local residents to battles many times do not have location knowledge but do have historical facts of a battle. During the fifty year time gap, veterans move, stories change, facts alter, locations get fogged, and artifacts get misplaced.

In Vietnam, the second and third generation now are the population base. Over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the population of Vietnam were born after 1975. Every family of Vietnam has a loss from the War involving the United States. While the U.S. missing from the war are 1,600, the missing war dead of Vietnam at the end of the war were in excess of 300,000. Today the estimate is 200,000 missing Vietnamese war dead.

Since the start of the twentieth century, with World War 1 records giving a figure of 4,500 prisoners of war and missing in action, an additional 82,389 service members still remain missing in action.

Of this number, 6,426 missing are from the state of New York.

The time has finally arrived when New York State citizens who went to war and never returned will be honored by the chair symbolizing remembrance of their last sacrifice. I thank the legislators that designed the bill, all that voted for the bill, the governor for signing the bill into law, and those that created the memorial of remembrance.

“NEVER AGAIN WILL ONE GENERATION OF VETERANS ABANDON ANOTHER”

The agenda for the day was: Joel Evans (NYS Division of Veterans' Affairs) greets the audience, introduces Grant Coates to speak; Grant Coates (Vietnam Veterans of America) speaks on his experience as a Veteran and his missions back to Vietnam on behalf of Service members Missing in Action and their families; Roann Destito (Office of General Services Commissioner) introduces Lieutenant Governor Hochul; Lieutenant Governor Hochul presents pen certificate, delivers her remarks and unveils the POW/MIA Chair; Daniel and Mary McLoone (American Legion) will conducted the traditional POW/MIA table ceremony.

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VVA-NYSC VP Grant T. Coates



POW/MIA Chair



(L - R) VP Coates, Vet Coord. Legislative Joanne Martin; Pres. Foote, Treas'r. DeLeo; EDD Hall

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(L to R) Rolling Thunder Chapter #5 Members, Lt. Governor Hochul, & VVA-NYSC VP Grant T. Coates

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-dedication-new-state-capitol-powmia-chair-honor-prisoners-war-and> .. and here's a link to a video of the entire event. It's the only one available, and you must enter an email address to sign in to view. Also, it is not user friendly.

> <https://spaces.hightail.com/receive/zWILGKKLC1/Q2hyaXN0YS5Hcm9tZUBvZ3MubnkuZ292>

Secretary's Report

Francisco Muñiz III

This VVA On-Line Interchange is published so that VVA Chapters throughout New York State could tell the whole VVA membership what is going on within their Chapters. Also, it means to inform other Chapters that they also could do the same project or events in their areas.

But, unfortunately, out of the 29 Chapters present at the last State Council meeting and of their Open Mike Chapter Report, ONLY two sent in their reports. Why? What does it take to send in that report to the E-mail: VVAINTERCHANGE@AOL.COM? Are your fingers that arthritic! Same goes for District Reports—only one District Report—does that mean that nothing happened in your area?

What about Committee Reports? Only three this time! What changes do you want on this publication?

Ending in a Positive Note: Welcome Home State Council A/O –Walter Schmidt = spent a year in hospital. And his VA claim is still open for the last 12 years!

More news from Pres. Ned D. Foote

To all,

As we explained at last meeting the HSGP took a big hit in NY. You also must recall we had a huge increase last year. This program does go up and down as more competitors and folks not donating so next year maybe we will see an increase.

But for now you have not received checks for March and April. Why this is, the first two months of new year we were paid at old rate until the reconciliation was completed. That produced an overpayment to NY. So to rectify they hold 2 months back.

You, we should be receiving check soon with new rate. Some of you took big hit and some even increased a little and some stayed the same. Overall NY took 37% loss this year but it is still money received without doing anything for it.

Memorial Remembrance Service

We had our Memorial Remembrance of our VVA-NYSC deceased members. Thanks to Sgt-at-Arms Mike Walker, bugler Jaybrook and Rev. Bob Lewis for his religious readings. Again, we ask that your Chapter send in the name of your deceased member to the secretary and to the National Office in a timely manner. Please include the date of birth and death as well as branch of Armed Forces the individual served with in the serviced. Please include the name of next of kin and address.

Government Affairs

Joe Ingino

–“Amid the flurry of contradictory media reports citing various unnamed sources, it’s a challenge deciphering the truth from the ‘Fake’ news. What remains constant, however, is VA Secretary David Shulkin’s firm stance to protect the VA from those who would like to see it handed over to the for-profit, private-sector health systems,” said VVA National President John Rowan. “Secretary Shulkin understands that veterans would be lost in the private sector...John Ulyot, the VA’s assistant secretary for public affairs, asked a senior aide at the House Committee on Veterans Affairs to persuade lawmakers to call the White House and say they wanted Shulkin out, said both individuals, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the situation.

Secretary Shulkin lost the battle and many names has been rumor around. “VVA applauds the White House nomination of Acting Secretary Robert Wilkie to serve as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. We are confident that Wilkie, a veteran of both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force, has the credentials and experience to lead the second largest government agency in this nation,” said John Rowan, VVA National President.

“The son of an Army artillery commander, Wilke has a wealth of experience, which he has evidenced in his

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current role as acting secretary. From his early at Ft. Bragg through his more recent positions at the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill, Wilkie has proven his commitment to the security of our nation and to those whom we send in harm's way.

Chairman Phil Roe, M.D. (R-Tenn.) released the following statement after the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs passed 16 bills out of committee, including the VA MISSION Act and the **Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act**, and assigned Rep. Conor Lamb (D-Pa.) to the Subcommittees on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs and Oversight and Investigations:

"The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs doubled down on our promise to build a stronger VA for our nation's heroes and ensure veterans are receiving the care and benefits they deserve by passing the VA MISSION Act, bipartisan, bicameral legislation supported by leading veterans service organizations, VA and the White House. This is a transformational, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reform VA, and I am so proud of the strong support this bill received in today's markup.

Following the announcement last night of the final text of the omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018, John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America, said: "We at VVA owe a debt of gratitude to Senators Murphy, Tester, and Schatz, and Congressmen O'Rourke and Coffman – and to Secretary Shulkin – for fighting to ensure that veterans with a bad-paper discharge despite otherwise honorable service will finally receive the VA services that they so desperately need.

"For far too long we've heard from veterans who were denied help from the VA for a lifetime because of an administrative separation. A key provision of the omnibus will help these veterans, from the Vietnam War to the current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as to future conflicts," Rowan said. "Once enacted, this legislation will save untold lives of countless forgotten heroes."

Book Review**"Long Daze at Long Binh,"**

Long Daze at Long Binh: The humorous adventures of two Wisconsin draftees trained as combat medics and sent off to set up a field hospital in South Vietnam by Steve Donovan & Fred Borchardt

This is a humorous memoir about the Vietnam War as seen through the eyes of two draftees who, like roughly 2.5 million other Americans, were sent to the war zone not as combat troops but as support personnel.

The authors met on the day they were inducted in 1965 and then proceeded to follow identical paths for the next two years. This included bunking side by side for a year in South Vietnam as Army medics with the 24th Evacuation Hospital.

Their stories were at times hilarious, at times horrific and at other times heart-rending. But every day was an adventure for these two young men who never knew what might be lurking around the next bend in the circuitous road of life.

Long Daze at Long Binh is a lighthearted but highly informative look at what life was like in a combat zone where there were no front lines and no clear distinctions between friend and foe. (Read reviews and view

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sample chapters at www.longbinhdaze.com.)

Our humorous memoir about the Vietnam War. If you have any questions about the book, you can visit our website at longbinhdaze.com or email your questions and comments to me at stdonova@sprynet.com

As you might have guessed, we're hoping you will find our book thoroughly enjoyable and will want to tell all your vet friends and associates-- plus maybe write us a paragraph or two about your impressions.

If you have any trouble opening this document, please let me know.

Happy reading!

Steve Donovan, co-author

"Long Daze at Long Binh" 24th Evac Hospital 1966-67

Website: www.longbinhdaze.com

Agent Orange Report

Walt Schmidt, AO Chair, VVA-NYSC

Sometimes It Feels Like They Just Want You to Give Up!

May 2018

We've (mostly) all been there; remember/learn...

Agent Orange May Be Responsible for More Veteran Deaths Than the Government Is Willing to Recognize
- By Eoin Higgins - 05/26/2018

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/agent-orange-may-be-responsible-for-more-veteran-deaths-than-the-government-is-willing-to-recognize_us_5b05b4f1e4b07c4ea1046787

Kate Naylor lost her husband, Pete, after his short battle with esophageal cancer. Pete, a stone mason, began having difficulty swallowing in the fall of 2014. He was diagnosed just after the New Year, in early January 2015. By April, he was dead at 68.

Pete and Kate were sure they knew the cause: Pete's exposure to Agent Orange during his time as a helicopter crew chief in Vietnam. They filed paperwork with the Department of Veterans Affairs, or VA, for disability payments. The federal agency sent its sympathies — but no money. Pete's medical bills, Kate said, were covered by a combination of Medicare and insurance through Kate's job.

Kate filed more paperwork a few months after her husband's death for spousal compensation. But the VA told Kate that it was denying her claim because in the agency's opinion, there is not enough evidence of a link between esophageal cancer and Agent Orange exposure.

The VA's policies on whether to recognize a disease as related to exposure to the defoliant are

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VVA News Update

Trump VA pick boosts hopes for reform

Nathaniel Weixel

The selection of Robert Wilkie to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is being praised by veterans groups...

Wilkie, who is serving as acting VA secretary, is a Washington insider with years of administrative experience who has previously worked on Capitol Hill as well as in the Pentagon for two presidents.

He's drawn praise from both Republicans and Democrats, and outside advocacy groups hope he will avoid getting mired in the same ongoing fight over privatization that beset his predecessor, former Secretary David Shulkin...

Trump has made reforming the VA a major political goal, and the ousting of Shulkin stoked speculation that the White House wanted to drastically expand veterans' access to private-sector health-care providers.

The agency is also experiencing a major exodus of senior staff that has reportedly accelerated since the ouster of Shulkin, as longtime civil servants clash with Trump administration loyalists.

Rick Weidman, executive director of policy and government affairs for the Vietnam Veterans of America, said he thinks Shulkin's downfall came about because he didn't have the full backing of the Oval Office.

"The problem wasn't that Shulkin couldn't control his staff, it's that the [White House] was ... backing up people who were defying Shulkin's orders," Weidman said.

If those loyalists can get behind Wilkie, Weidman said, he'll succeed.

In an op-ed published in The New York Times just hours after he was removed, Shulkin blamed his ouster on forces within the administration that he said are pushing hard for unfettered privatization.

"The advocates within the administration for privatizing VA health services ... saw me as an obstacle to privatization who had to be removed," Shulkin wrote.

Democrats and some veterans service organizations believe the White House is being influenced by Charles and David Koch, conservative billionaires who back the group Concerned Veterans for America (CVA), which is pushing to loosen current restrictions on veterans receiving private-sector care.

Dan Caldwell, executive director of CVA, said he thinks Wilkie won't face the same problems that ultimately doomed Shulkin...

In a 2016 campaign rally in Virginia Beach, Trump decried the VA as corrupt and inefficient.

"Veterans should be guaranteed the right to choose their doctor and clinics, whether at a VA facility or at a private medical center," Trump said. "We must extend this right to all veterans..."

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(Continue from pg. 22) VVA News Update

VoteVets, a liberal progressive advocacy organization, said current Deputy Secretary Tom Bowman should have been picked as acting secretary when Shulkin was fired. The fact that Trump deliberately passed him over to choose Wilkie speaks volumes about his views about the agency, they said.

Democrats and veterans' advocacy groups are concerned that the White House is taking calls for privatizing the VA system seriously, but the VA has denied that there is any such push.

"There is no effort underway to privatize VA, and to suggest otherwise is completely false and a red herring designed to distract and avoid honest debate on the real issues surrounding veterans' health care," the agency said in a statement last month.

Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.), chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, signaled last week that his panel will take up Wilkie's nomination next month.

In a potential boost for Wilkie's chances, the committee's ranking member Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.), said last week he thinks Wilkie is a "strong choice" to lead the agency.

"Right now I certainly don't have anything that would cause me not to support him. He's a solid guy," Tester said.

Wilkie's nomination follows the fall of Jackson, Trump's personal physician, who faced questions about his experience and ability to lead the second-largest bureaucracy in the federal government.

Jackson was ultimately forced to withdraw his nomination after allegations — publicly detailed by Tester — surfaced that he mishandled prescription drugs, drank on the job and created a "hostile" work environment.

Unlike Jackson, Wilkie has gone through an executive vetting process before when he was nominated for Pentagon posts under Trump and former President George W. Bush.

Link for full article: CVA—Concern Veterans of America— group in favor of privatization of VA

<http://thehill.com/policy/defense/389465-trump-va-pick-boosts-hopes-for-reform>

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based on biannual reports from the National Academy of Medicine. The academy's 2016 report found that evidence for a link between esophageal cancer and Agent Orange is "insufficient."

The VA says the evidence isn't there for esophageal cancer and 34 other diseases that Vietnam veterans have sought to have added to the list of recognized, service-related illnesses.

Kate, 66, now lives alone with her dog, Cabernet. "Cabby" was Pete's dog, an aging black lab that happily barks and gamely bounds to the door whenever visitors drop by.

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“We did everything the VA told us to do,” she said. “Now they have to own up to their responsibility.”

Sometimes, said Kate, it feels like “they just want you to give up.”

Pete Naylor died from esophageal cancer three years ago, and his wife Kate believes that his exposure to Agent Orange during his time as an Army helicopter pilot in Vietnam caused the cancer.

Pete’s oncologist, Dr. Michael DeLeo, said in an amended death certificate that he believes his “extensive Agent Orange exposure” during his time in Vietnam is the only thing could have caused his cancer. A review of Pete’s service records confirms the exposure to the defoliant.

DeLeo’s opinion could help Kate’s case. In a 2007 ruling, a VA review board found that the medical opinions of three doctors who believed another veteran’s exposure to the defoliant had caused his esophageal cancer were enough to tilt the scales in favor of recognizing his widow’s claim.

Yet, the fact that review boards have ruled in widows’ favor in the past doesn’t mean it’s a guaranteed to help current cases. Review boards are not required to consider precedent decisions, meaning there are no easy answers for people attempting to navigate the VA — the whole thing is somewhat of a crapshoot.

Many vets think the VA’s refusal to give esophageal cancer a blanket recognition is because the agency is less than enthused about the costs of adding more of them to the list.

Although a 2016 study said the link between Agent Orange exposure and esophageal cancer was “inadequate or insufficient,” the report did still acknowledge research that suggested a connection between the two. The report included information from studies published in 2013 and 2014 that focused on Korean veterans of the Vietnam War (South Korea sent around 300,000 troops to the fight alongside the United States.) The studies’ authors found that veterans with a higher rate of exposure to Agent Orange were 2.49 times more likely to develop esophageal cancer than those with lower levels of exposure.

But the academy said that, due to gaps in the rigor of the study, such as a lack of information on the test subjects’ smoking and drinking habits and their exact levels of exposure, it would not revise its interpretation of the linkage. Other new academic studies referring to esophageal cancer and chemical exposure similar to Agent Orange published in 2013 and 2014 were mentioned in the report but deemed irrelevant due to their lack of Agent Orange specificity.

The National Academy of Medicine’s 2018 report, which will rely on datasets collected up until 2016, isn’t due until this fall, said spokeswoman Dana Korsen.

The debate over whether there are definitive links between a particular type of cancer and Agent Orange exposure has been raging for decades. The Vietnam Veterans of America nonprofit has been working to expand the VA’s list of service-related illnesses for years.

It’s an uphill battle, said Maynard Kaderlik, the Minnesota-based chair of the Vietnam Veterans of America’s Agent Orange and Dioxin Committee. The legacy of the defoliant will outlast its immediate victims, said Kaderlik. A veteran of the Vietnam War, he has been working on issues

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It's an uphill battle, said Maynard Kaderlik, the Minnesota-based chair of the Vietnam Veterans of America's Agent Orange and Dioxin Committee. The legacy of the defoliant will outlast its immediate victims, said Kaderlik. A veteran of the Vietnam War, he has been working on issues relating to Agent Orange exposure since 1989.

"We have had to fight the fight for justice for what happened because of our exposure for a long time now," said Kaderlik.

The VA's resistance to adding diseases to the list of recognized conditions is part of a longstanding government pattern of dismissing soldiers from the Vietnam War, he added.

"In 1966 they told me, 'We will always take care of you,'" said Kaderlik. "That hasn't happened."

Until the late 1980s, the federal government claimed that the connection between the defoliant and the diseases veterans were developing was questionable at best.

But Navy Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, who had personally ordered the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam, delivered a report to the VA in 1990 arguing that the chemical was dangerous to everyone exposed to it — and that the government knew of the risks as far back as the 1960s. Zumwalt's son, also named Elmo, died of lymphoma and Hodgkin's disease in 1988. The admiral believed these illnesses were the result of his son's exposure to the defoliant during his time as a patrol boat lieutenant in Vietnam from June 1969 to August 1970.

In 1990, Zumwalt was then-Secretary of the VA Ed Derwinski's special assistant. Derwinski commissioned him to research and analyze the available evidence on veterans' service-related Agent Orange exposure and illnesses for the report.

What he found was explosive. Now known simply as the "Zumwalt Report," the document sent shockwaves through the political establishment.

"Shamefully, the deception, fraud and political interference that has characterized government-sponsored studies on the health effects of exposure to Agent Orange and/or dioxin has not escaped studies ostensibly conducted by independent reviewers," Zumwalt wrote, "a factor that has only further compounded the erroneous conclusions reached by the government."

The government could ignore blue-collar veterans, but an admiral was a different story. "It was quite a moment because they couldn't question his integrity," said Wilcox. "And what he found was that, obviously, the veterans had been telling the truth."

Twenty-eight years later, the VA says not all the claims in the Zumwalt report held up to scientific scrutiny, but it was "an important initial step in examining relationships among military environmental exposure and illness," said VA Public Affairs Officer Randy Noller.

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Even if the National Academy of Medicine's forthcoming report does find definitive evidence of a link between Agent Orange and esophageal cancer, that's no guarantee the disease will be added to the list of approved service-related illnesses.

Though the academy's past reports have recognized 50 diseases that fall under the "limited or suggestive" evidentiary category, the VA has only approved 14. Hypertension and bladder cancer are two examples of diseases the academy listed in its 2016 report as having some research suggesting a link with service exposure, but which the VA has thus far not added.

In some cases, the resistance to adding more to the list has not been the VA but rather the Office of Management and Budget. The federal agency, known as OMB, controls the VA's purse strings and has in the past been hostile to the idea of adding costs to the budget for veterans services.

March, 2018, now-dismissed VA Secretary David Shulkin told the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee that he had recommended adding a handful of conditions to the list in a request to OMB last fall, but the agency was still looking at data and reviewing financial estimates.

The National Veterans Legal Services Program has been working on Agent Orange cases since its founding in 1980, said Bart Stichman, the group's executive director. In 1986, the group helped bring the case of Beverly Nehmer, the widow of a veteran who died of an Agent Orange-related disease, to court in what later became a class action suit on behalf of all Vietnam veterans.

Nehmer v. Department of Veterans Affairs, which was resolved with a consent decree in 1991, forced the VA to address its responsibilities to veterans exposed to Agent Orange. Under the terms of the decree, the VA must re-hear cases it has previously denied if the veteran's disease is later added to the list of those officially recognized as stemming from Agent Orange exposure.

Since the Nehmer case, the VA has paid out more than \$5 billion in retroactive decisions, according to Stichman. That high cost is why many veterans advocates think the government has been so resistant to adding more diseases to the list.

But VVA's Kaderlik argues that even having a list is too restrictive. The federal agency's reliance on bureaucracy to determine who gets taken care of is antithetical to the stated principles of the American body politic, he said.

"You served your country. There shouldn't be a category for you to get help," said Kaderlik. "Any man or woman that's served who walks into the VA should be taken care of."

In late March, the Pittsfield Veterans Services and the local Vietnam Veterans of America chapter held an open meeting for veterans in western Massachusetts who have questions about Agent Orange exposure and navigating the VA bureaucracy.

About 40 people showed up to hear the speakers. Kate was among them, hoping to get some good news at last.

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But she didn't find an easy answer. Curtis Evans, a Boston-based claims examiner with the Veterans Benefits Administration, told the crowd that taking the initiative with the VA was essential to reaping benefits if and when policy changed. But Evans didn't offer many options for families like the Naylor's stuck navigating the system.

As Kate listened to the speakers, it became clear to her that she'd have to do more than just repeatedly file appeals with the VA. After Evans spoke, she made a beeline for his table outside the auditorium. The two spoke for about 10 minutes, and Evans suggested she ask for a hearing.

In April, she did. The VA informed her that it has received her request, and she is now waiting to hear whether she will get one.

Kate believes the fight is worth continuing. She sees the research noted in the National Academy's last report as an encouraging sign that the science may eventually come down on their side. But bureaucracy in Washington doesn't move fast enough for most veterans and their families.

For Kate, it's about the principle of the matter. What her husband would have wanted is for the VA to take care of those who served.

On the anniversary of Pete's death last month, Kate and her daughters gathered at the family home. Sitting with Meghan and Erin on the back wall Pete built from stones he collected over the years, Kate reflected on the journey so far and her hope for the future.

"Before Peter died, and after Peter died, he was my first thought in the morning and my last thought at night," said Kate, tearing up.

"It's not that I want to be some kind of a trailblazer for this cause," she said, "but perhaps it will help or encourage other vets and their families to pursue their claims."

And that goes for all of us. We're not trying to be some kind of a trailblazer, but perhaps it will help or encourage other vets and their families to pursue their claims.

We can only hope.

Flag Day
June 14, 2018



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