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PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

First of all I want to thank everyone for all your thoughts and prayers for Elayne. She is feeling better and continues to improve. I want to apologize to everyone for missing the last state council meeting and the National Convention in New Orleans, but we



Representing the California State Council at the National Convention, Dean Gotham, 1st Vice President, accepted the "State Council Newspaper of the Year" award.

were unable to travel.

Speaking of the National Convention in New Orleans, the California State Council newsletter, "The California Zephyr", was chosen by VVA National as the State Council newsletter of the Year. We now have an award winning newsletter. Since I wasn't at the convention I would like to thank Dean Gotham for accepting the award on behalf of CSC.

I want to thank Tom Hohmann for his dedication to putting the Zephyr together every three months, Ken and Sonja Holybee for getting the newsletter to the printer and in the mail and to all of the members who submit articles and photos to Tom for submission in the Zephyr. Please keep the articles coming. Remember, when submitting photos, to include the names of those in the photos.

Now is the time to start planning for the next VVA Leadership Conference. It will be held in Palm Springs from July 22 to July 30, 2018. If you have never attended a leadership conference now is the perfect time to do so. If you are a board member or are planning on running for a board position for your chapter or the state council, this is your opportunity to learn valuable information. Be advised there is more information than one person can absorb at these conferences so plan to have several of your chapter members attend. All are welcome to attend. You won't be disappointed.

Steve Mackey, President

AGENT ORANGE

THE VA TIES 14 DISEASES TO AGENT ORANGE. IT WILL DECIDE WHETHER

TO ADD MORE BY NOV. 1

By Tom Philpott

VA Secretary David J. Shulkin will decide "on or before" Nov. 1 whether to add to the list of medical conditions the Department of Veteran Affairs presumes are associated to Agent Orange or other herbicides sprayed during the Vietnam War, a department spokesman said Tuesday in response to our inquiry.

Any ailments Shulkin might add to VA's list of 14 "presumptive diseases" linked to herbicide exposure would make many more thousands of Vietnam War veterans eligible for VA disability compensation and health care.

Ailments under review as possible adds to the presumptive diseases list include bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson-like symptoms without diagnosis of that particular disease. But hypertension (high blood pressure) and stroke also might be embraced, or ignored, as part of the current review.

The process was sparked by the Institute of Medicine's 10th and final review of medical literature on health effects of herbicide exposure in Vietnam. The 1,100-page report concluded in March 2016 that recent scientific research strengthened the association between herbicide exposure and bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson-like symptoms. Specifically, the institute, or IOM, found "limited or suggestive" evidence of an association to herbicide versus its previous finding of "inadequate or insufficient" evidence of an association.

The IOM report also reaffirmed from earlier reviews "limited or suggestive evidence" of an association between herbicide sprayed in Vietnam and hypertension and strokes. That same level of evidence was used in 2010 by then-VA Secretary Eric Shinseki to add ischemic heart disease and Parkinson's disease to the Agent Orange presumptive list. Shinseki had stronger evidence, an IOM finding of "positive association" to herbicide for chronic lymphocytic leukemia, which he also added to the list that year.

Secretary Shulkin has authority to use IOM findings to add all five diseases to the presumptive list, or he can choose to look at other studies and scientific evidence to support adding fewer ailments or none at all.

The IOM, renamed the National Academy of Medicine last summer, delivered its Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 2014, to then-VA Secretary Bob McDonald 15 months ago. He immediately ordered a technical work group formed to review IOM findings and original studies it relied on, as well as any new science relevant to Agent Orange ailments. The work group's findings then were reviewed by a smaller strategic work group, followed by an internal task force of senior VA leaders.

"The entire VA response packet (with specific recommendations for action) from the IOM Task Force was delivered to the Office of the Secretary for consideration" on February 17, a senior official told us at the time.

Shulkin that month was confirmed as VA secretary. The previous 18 months, he was VA undersecretary for health and would have been familiar with the Agent Orange packet. So what has happened since then?

VA officials are lean on those details. A spokesman said VA continues to work "diligently to review the National Academy of Medicine report on potential new presumptions for Agent Orange and prepare the Secretary to make an informed decision. This includes everything from what the science is indicating, necessary regulations and a complete regulatory impact analysis. There is no delay in the decision process. Rather VA is taking appropriate time to ensure we are prepared to provide any benefits and services based on the secretary's decision."

Past VA secretaries had rigid timetables for accepting or rejecting IOM findings. They also had to adhere to certain standards and procedures in determining if more diseases should be presumed service connected, and to explain in writing if they declined to add IOM-identified conditions to the presumptive list.

But Congress allowed those provisions of the Agent Orange law to "sunset" Oct. 1, 2015, six months before IOM delivered its last report. Shulkin therefore is under no "statutory deadline nor required to do anything" with the IOM report, except whatever he

THE SHRAPNEL OF WAR

To him he was a failure
He could not face their eyes.
Too many of them had perished
So why had HE not died?

The days would linger on
But always turned to night.
When the loss of the fallen
Were never far from sight.

Not even the countless years
Could heal the wounds of his mind.
All the suffering of the nightmares
Still remained after all this time.

The wounds that he carried
Were a weakness not seen.
Yet every night they returned
To haunt his every dream.

His loved ones and many friends
Worked daily to calm his fears.
And his dog sat by patiently
While he tried to hide the tears.

Every day his mind would visit
The many who lay in their graves.
Every day he would remember
All the brothers he could not save.

Leif K. Thorsten
July 2017

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promised veterans and Congress, said Bart Stichman, co-director of the National Veterans Legal Services Program, a nonprofit that advocates for veterans and had lobbied to the Agent Orange provisions.

Many veterans know what’s at stake and have been pressing VA to add more diseases to the presumptive list. Also, thousands of sailors and Marines who served on ships in the territorial waters off Vietnam continue to press VA and the Congress to make Blue Water Navy veterans eligible for Agent Orange benefits.

“I’ve been doing everything I can to bug the hell out of Secretary Shulkin” on the latest IOM study, said Rick Weidman, executive director for policy and government affairs for Vietnam Veterans of America. Shulkin responds, Weidman said, that “he’s trying and it’s a process.”

Weidman said he suspects one big hurdle is the White

House’s Office of Management and Budget which likely resists saddling VA with sharply higher disability pay obligations for high blood pressure, bladder cancer or stroke contracted by any veteran who stepped foot in Vietnam during the war.

OMB tried to block Shinseki in 2010 from adding three ailments, including heart disease, to the presumptive list. Shinseki went around OMB and appealed directly to then-President Barack Obama who sided with veterans, Weidman said. The Congressional Budget Office calculated that within three years of that decision, ischemic heart disease, Parkinson’s and leukemia accounted for 280,000 additional compensation claims and \$4.5 billion in retro-active disability payments.

Beside resistance from OMB, Weidman said Shulkin is counseled by senior staff who run post-deployment health services and study environmental hazards for VA

and yet are skeptical of the science associating herbicide dioxins with higher incidence of various ailments. The Agent Orange “experts” they rely on, Weidman charged, haven’t published “one scientific paper in a reputable peer review journal. The whole crew should be fired and I’ve told the Secretary that.”

But is VA studying more than whether to add Agent Orange ailments? Anthony Principi,

The California
Zephyr
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Steve Mackey.
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Tom Hohmann

Published Quarterly to all members of California VVA and AVVA as part of their membership.

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The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the views of VVA, the State Council or its members.

Who Are The Vietnam Veterans Of America?
Founded in 1978, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. is the only national Vietnam veterans organization congressionally chartered and exclusively dedicated to Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA is organized as a not-for-profit corporation and is tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Service Code.

VVA’S FOUNDING PRINCIPLE
“Never again shall one generation of veterans abandon another.”

PURPOSE
The purpose of Vietnam Veterans of America’s national organization, the state councils, and chapters is:

To help foster, encourage, and promote the improvement of the condition of the Vietnam veteran.

To promote physical and cultural improvement, growth and development, self-respect, self-confidence, and usefulness of Vietnam-era veterans and others.

To eliminate discrimination suffered by Vietnam veterans and to develop channels of communications which will assist Vietnam veterans to maximize self-realization and enrichment of their lives and enhance life-fulfillment.

To study, on a non-partisan basis, proposed legislation, rules, or regulations introduced in any federal, state, or local legislative or administrative body which may affect the social, economic, educational, or physical welfare of the Vietnam-era veteran or others; and to develop public-policy proposals designed to improve the quality of life of the Vietnam-era veteran and others especially in the areas of employment, education, training, and health.

To conduct and publish research, on a non-partisan basis, pertaining to the relationship between Vietnam-era veterans and the American society, the Vietnam War experience, the role of the United States in securing peaceful co-existence for the world community, and other matters which affect the social, economic, educational, or physical welfare of the Vietnam-era veteran or others.

To assist disabled and needy war veterans including, but not limited to, Vietnam veterans and their dependents, and the widows and orphans of deceased veterans.

FUNDING
Vietnam Veterans of America relies totally on private contributions for its revenue. VVA does not receive any funding from federal, state, or local governments.



VA secretary in President George W. Bush's first term, argues for more sweeping changes. Like Weidman, Principi served in combat in Vietnam but believes the Agent Orange law went too far, forcing VA secretaries to build out lists of presumptive illnesses based only on suggestive links to their wartime service, and ignoring the effects of unhealthy lifestyles, heredity and aging.

Interviewed Tuesday, Principi said it doesn't seem fair that an elderly Vietnam veteran can begin receiving more disability compensation for heart disease at 75 or 80 than a young Marine receives who loses a leg fighting in Afghanistan.

Principi said he wants "common sense" changes to the Agent Orange law so that, for example, diseases on the presumptive list are deemed service connected only if diagnosed within 30 years of a veteran exiting Vietnam.

There's legal precedent if Shulkin were to propose such a rule, perhaps while adding hypertension to the presumptive list, said lawyer Stichman. In 1994, he recalled, Congress allowed such a "manifestation rule" for Agent Orange-related respiratory cancers. By 2001, however, it rescinded it on complaints by veteran groups that there was no science to support limiting benefits in that way.

Read more here: <http://www.thenewstribune.com/news/business/article165178667.html#storylink=cpy>

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Bills Currently On The Governor's Desk That The Vva-Csc Has Taken A Position On
Pete Conaty

For more information on these bills, go to:

<https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billSearchClient.xhtml>

For more information on CSC's legislative advocacy, contact:

Dean Gotham, Chairman, Government Affairs Committee, deang1968@gmail.com

Pete Conaty, CSC Legislative Advocate, pcontay@sbcglobal.net

*The Governor has until October 15 to sign or veto bills.

AB 153 AUTHOR: Chavez [R]

TITLE: Military Fraud

SUMMARY: Requires certain elected officers to forfeit their office upon the conviction of a crime pursuant to the federal Stolen Valor Act or the California Stolen Valor Act that involves a fraudulent claim, made with the intent to obtain money, property, or other tangible benefit, that the person is a veteran or a member of the Armed Forces. Provides for penalties.

Support

AB 296 AUTHOR: Cervantes [D]

TITLE: Task Force: Health of Women Veterans

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to create a task force to study the health of California women veterans comprised of members with specified qualifications. Prohibits task force from receiving compensation or reimbursement of expense for their service. Requires the task force to study the health care needs of women veterans in the state. Requires the task force to submit reports to the Governor.

AB 360 AUTHOR: Muratsuchi [D]

TITLE: State Bar: Pro Bono Legal Assistance: Veterans

SUMMARY: Requires the State Bar to administer a program to coordinate pro bono civil legal assistance to veterans and their families who otherwise cannot afford legal services. Requires the Bar to provide resources and educational materials to attorneys and the public by compiling a list of local bar associations, legal aid organizations, veterans service providers, and volunteer attorneys willing to provide pro bono legal services to veterans and posting the list on its Internet Web site.

AB 363 AUTHOR: Quirk Silva [D]

TITLE: Drivers Licenses: Veteran Designation

SUMMARY: Prohibits a fee from being charged for requests to have the word VETERAN printed on driver's licenses and identification cards, if made by a person who has been determined to have a specified income level or a person who can verify his or her status as a homeless person.

AB 365 AUTHOR: Muratsuchi [D]

TITLE: Pupil Instruction: Coursework and Graduation

SUMMARY: Amends an existing law which requires a school district to exempt certain pupils from coursework and other requirements in certain cases. Extends the exemption to children of military families.

AB 547 AUTHOR: Chavez [R]

TITLE: California Prompt Payment Act: Disabled Veterans

SUMMARY: Requires state agencies to pay an un-

disputed invoice from a certified disabled veteran business enterprise that is also a small business within a certain period of initial receipt. Requires a state agency to submit a claim on an undisputed invoice to the Controller for payment within a certain period. Requires the agency to pay penalties if it fails to submit a correct claim schedule.

AB 1249 AUTHOR: Gray [D]

TITLE: Property Taxation: Exemptions: Veterans Organizations

SUMMARY: Provides that the veterans' organization exemption shall not be denied to a property on the basis that the property is used for fraternal, lodge, or social club purposes to any portion of a property that consists of a bar where alcoholic beverages are served.

AB 1269 AUTHOR: Stone [D]

TITLE: Mobilehome Residents and Senior Protection Act

SUMMARY: Extends the application of certain enforcement procedures for the prevention and elimination of housing discrimination to apply to unlawful actions under the Mobilehome Residency Law against homeowners or residents of mobilehomes. Authorizes the Department of Fair Employment and Housing to investigate potential violations of the Mobilehome Residency Law that are discovered during the course of an existing formal investigation, without a formal complaint.

Oppose

AB 1365 AUTHOR: Reyes [D]

TITLE: Veterans Homes: Planning Strategy

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to submit to the Legislature and post on its website a financial report of the Veterans homes located in certain locations by a specified date. Requires the department to review the use of a Veterans home, using specified factors, no later than a specified period before the expiration of a specified use restriction imposed by federal law to determine the best continued, unrestricted use of the Veterans home.

AB 1403 AUTHOR: Obernolte [R]

TITLE: Military and Overseas Voters

SUMMARY: Authorizes a military or overseas voter to apply in person to the elections official for permission to register if he or she is released from services after the closing date of registration for an election, has returned to the county of his or her residence, and is not a registered voter. Allows a military or overseas voter who is required to move under official active duty military orders after the closing date of registration to apply in person after the closing date of registration.

AB 1710 AUTHOR: Veterans Affairs Cmt

TITLE: Prohibited Discrimination Against Service Members

SUMMARY: Amends existing law which prohibits various types of discrimination against an officer, or enlisted member, of the military or naval forces of the state or the US, because of his or her membership or service. Includes, within these prohibitions, discrimination in terms, conditions, or privilege of employment. Provides for remedies of violations.

SB 3 AUTHOR: Beall [D]

TITLE: Veterans and Affordable Housing Bond Act of 2018

SUMMARY: Enacts the Veterans and Affordable Housing Bond Act of 2018. Authorizes the issuance of bonds of a specified amount to be used to finance various existing housing programs, as well as infill infrastructure financing and affordable housing matching grant programs. Provides for additional funding of a specified amount for farm purchase, home purchase, and mobile-home purchase assistance for veterans.

SB 156 AUTHOR: Anderson [R]

TITLE: Military and Veterans: Transition Assistance

SUMMARY: Requires the veterans transition assistance program to provide information to noncitizens, who are leaving military service, where to acquire state legal assistance to acquire US citizenship. Requires the state National Guard to inform its members that it will assist noncitizen members in acquiring US citizenship as soon as they are eligible. Requires the state National Guard to assist a noncitizen member in filing all forms and paperwork necessary to become a US citizen.

SB 266 AUTHOR: Dodd [D]

TITLE: Armed Service Members: Consumer Loans

SUMMARY: Amends the Banking Law, the Credit Union Law, the Finance Lenders Law, and the Deferred Deposit Transaction Law to update references to the Military Lending Act. Makes changes concerning discrimination with respect to the terms of a loan or financing based on a person's membership in the military or naval forces of the state or of the United States.

SB 339 AUTHOR: Roth [D]

TITLE: Veterans Treatment Courts: Judicial Council

Assessment

SUMMARY: Requires the Judicial Council to report to the Legislature on a study of veterans and veterans treatment courts that includes a statewide assessment of veterans treatment courts currently in operation and a survey of counties that do not operate such courts that identifies barriers to program implementation and assesses the need for such courts in those counties.

SB 728 AUTHOR: Newman [D]

TITLE: State Public Employees: Sick Leave: Veterans

SUMMARY: Relates to the California Wounded Warriors Transitional Leave Act. Grants an additional credit for sick leave with pay to a state officer, or employee who serves as a member of the National Guard, or federal military reserve force who is called up to active military service and as a result sustains a service connected disability for the purpose of undergoing medical treatment.

SB 731 AUTHOR: Newman [D]

TITLE: Public School Employees: Veteran Leave of Absence

SUMMARY: Relates to leave of absence for public school employees. Includes both a certificated employee and a classified employee who is a former active duty member of the Armed Forces, or a former active duty member of the California National Guard. Requires credit for leave of absence to be credited to a qualifying certificated employee on the date of the employee's disability rating decision.

SB 776 AUTHOR: Newman [D]

TITLE: Corrections: Veterans' Benefits

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide one employee for every 5 state prisons, who is trained and accredited by the department, to assist incarcerated veterans in applying for and receiving any federal or other veterans' benefits for which they or their families may be eligible. Requires the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to give the Department of Veterans Affairs' employees access to the hardware, software, and those computer networks as are reasonably necessary. Support

MEDAL OF HONOR

VIETNAM MEDIC JIM MCCLOUGHAN PRESENTED WITH MEDAL OF HONOR

"Forty-eight years after former Spec/5 Jim McCloughan risked his life nine times to rescue, treat, and defend wounded and disoriented comrades, the former Army medic today is to receive the Medal of Honor, our nation's highest award for valor," said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America. "Forty-eight hours of close-quarter combat during the battle of Nui Yon Hill left dozens of his comrades killed, wounded, or missing in action. 'Doc' McCloughan, then a 23-year-old PFC, suffered wounds three times from shrapnel and small arms fire. Yet he refused medical evacuation because his comrades needed him, and his fellow medic there had



been killed," Rowan said. "I know I speak on behalf of all members of Vietnam Veterans of America when I say that this retired high school coach and teacher from South Haven High School in Michigan represents the very best of those of us who served with honor in the Vietnam War. I know, too, that Jim has said he is no hero, that 'the real heroes are not here with us,' but in a nation hungry for heroes, Doc McCloughan is the real deal," Rowan said. "Now he will add the MOH to the dozen decorations he'd previously been awarded," Rowan added, listing the Combat Medical Badge, two Purple Hearts, two Bronze Stars, the U. S. Army Valorous Unit Citation, the National De-

fense Medal, the Good Conduct Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, the Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, and the M16 Expert Rifle Badge. In 2009, his former platoon leader revived the effort to upgrade his Bronze Star with “V” device to a Distinguished Service Cross, and former Secretary of Defense Ash Carter saw fit to upgrade this to a Medal of Honor. Michigan’s two Senators, Amy Klobuchar and Gary Peters, and Congressman Fred Upton added language to the National Defense Authorization Act that passed in December and paved the way for the MOH to be awarded to the former medic.

FOREVER GI BILL

Pete Conaty

The President signed into law the “Forever GI Bill,” which will bring significant changes to Veterans education benefits and will allow more Veterans to use the GI Bill and more time to use it. Some of the changes will go into effect immediately, and some are written to go into effect shortly after.

Some new provisions that go into effect immediately include:

The 15-year time limitation for using Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits is eliminated for Veterans who left active duty on or after January 1, 2013, and qualifying dependents (Fry children who became eligible on or after January 1, 2013 and all Fry spouses).

Reservists who had eligibility under the Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) and lost it due to the program sunset provision will have that service credited toward the Post-9/11 GI Bill program.

Certain work-study is permanently authorized; previously it had to be re-approved by Congress every few years.

The Vet Success on Campus program will be available to students across the country

VA will help Veterans to more clearly identify schools that offer them priority enrollment

The majority of the changes enhance or expand education benefits for Veterans, Servicemembers, Families and Survivors.

THE VIETNAM WAR DOCUMENTARY:

DOOM AND DESPAIR

by Bing West

Ken Burns recently released a documentary entitled “The Vietnam War: An Intimate History.” The script concluded with these words, “The Vietnam War was a tragedy, immeasurable and irredeemable.”¹ That damning hyperbole neatly summarized 18 hours of haunting, funereal music, doleful tales by lugubrious veterans, and an elegiac historical narration voiced over a collage of violent images and thunderous explosions. In this telling, the anti-war protestors in the States are morally equivalent to the American soldiers who fought the war. Indeed, while the grunts seem soiled by the violence, those who evaded the draft and spat upon those who fought had the added satisfaction of seeing Soviet tanks manned by North Vietnamese soldiers roll triumphantly into Saigon.

A veteran is quoted at the end of the film saying, “We have learned a lesson...that we just can’t impose our will on others.” While that daffy aphorism sums up the documentary, in real life the opposite is true. Alexander imposed his will upon the Persian empire. Rome indelibly imposed its will upon Carthage. After the Civil War, the Federal government imposed its will upon the Confederacy. Following World War II, we imposed our will upon Nazi Germany and bushido Japan. In 1975, the North Vietnamese Stalinist government imposed its will upon the South Vietnamese. Forty-two years later, that same octogenarian, corrupt communist regime continues to oppress the south, while the country as a whole has become the Cuba of East Asia, bereft of economic dynamism.

The purpose of a film, however, is to stir emotions, not to convey a reasoned analysis. In emotive power, Burns succeeds. An audience with no prior knowledge of Vietnam will come away convinced this war was a colossal geopolitical error, a waste of lives on all sides and absolutely without redemption. Every fact and picture is accurate, and the cumulative process of selecting some facts and omitting others is devastating.

Burns forsook balance. For instance, my Combined Action Platoon (CAP) consisting of 15 Marines and 30 armed farmers lived for 488 days in a remote village of 5,000 Vietnamese. The two Marines who didn’t fit in were dismissed from the CAP. The rest of us slept in the houses

of the villagers, ate their food, fought and died side by side with the farmers. Seven of fifteen Marines were killed in the village. In 1966, the village chief, Trao, sent this letter to the parents of our squad leader:

“To Sgt. J. D. White family...Sgt. White and Sq. work to hard...never look tired...My people are very poor and when to see a marine they are very happy. When V.C. come to people, people come and talk to Sgt. White so Sgt. White can talk to P.F. (local Popular Forces) and marine to fight V.C. Maybe die...Jod bless you all.”²

You won’t find that sentiment in the documentary. Yet altogether, there were 118 CAPs and not one fell back to enemy control before the fall of Saigon. In 2002, I returned to the village with Charlie Benoit, who had also fought there. The villagers welcomed us back and asked by name after other Marines who had lived there. Charlie’s Vietnamese was impeccable, and between 1967 and 1970, on repeated trips for the Rand Corporation we traveled from one end of South Vietnam to the other. Often we were in villages without any other Americans. Yes, the North Vietnamese were hurling hundreds of thousands of disciplined soldiers into battles that were as savage and pitiless as shown in the documentary. Over that same period, however, there was progress throughout the farming lowlands. The rural population was not in revolt against the government.

American combat troops withdrew from the country in 1972. At that time, North Vietnamese units were still positioned in the jungles of South Vietnam. They had suffered staggering losses months earlier in a major assault that had failed after America had unleashed its B-52s to pound the enemy on the battlefield and in Hanoi. As the documentary points out, 100,000 North Vietnamese soldiers were estimated to have been killed, nearly all the armor provided by the Soviet Union had been destroyed and the North Vietnamese chief of staff warned another offensive could not be mounted for at least three years.³ The North agreed to a ceasefire and a truce that included the return of American prisoners of war. President Nixon promised to respond with force if the North attacked again.

Instead, U.S. Congressional legislation in mid-1973 cut off funds for combat “in or over or from off the shores of North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia.” The intent was to prevent President Nixon from deploying troops, naval gunfire or aerial bombing if the North Vietnamese persisted in attacking South Vietnam. Over the next two years, Chinese artillery and Soviet tanks poured into Hanoi. While we had promised to provide aid to the South Vietnamese, Congress instead cut our aid of \$2.8 billion in 1973 down to \$1 billion in 1974 and to \$300 million in 1975. When the North Vietnamese attacked in 1975, the South Vietnamese forces ran out of bullets. America had quit, plain and simple.

The Congress and most of the press, however, joined hands in blaming the collapse upon the South Vietnamese. The visceral effect of the Burns documentary is to provide ablation for that abandonment of an ally. The theme of the documentary is that unification under the communists was predestined and therefore the war was unwinnable. Of course, had a similar lack of fortitude guided us in 1953, we would have abandoned South Korea and the communist dictator Kim Jong-un would now be sitting on his throne in Seoul, shaking his nuclear fist at Japan.

Was the collapse of South Vietnam inevitable? Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, currently the White House National Security Adviser, does not think so. He wrote a book entitled *Dereliction of Duty*. Far from being an inevitable tragedy, he concluded that the loss of South Vietnam was “a uniquely human failure, the responsibility for which was shared by President Johnson and his principal military and civilian advisors.”⁴

What could have been done differently? Our basic goal was to force the north to cease attacking the south. Four steps could have been taken. First, beginning in 1965, a blockade by mining the harbors and bombing could have prevented the massive import of Chinese and Soviet military equipment. Without Chinese artillery and Soviet tanks et al, the North could not defeat the South. Instead, the Johnson administration chose not to strategically apply our overwhelming naval and air superiority.

Second, bomb the dikes sustaining the north’s rice paddies. Force the able-bodied men to leave the army and undertake subsistence farming. In our Civil War, Lincoln ordered Sherman to devastate the farms of the south and in World War II we systematically bombed German and Japanese cities. War is the act of applying violence—death and destruction—until your enemy agrees to your terms.

Third, grant the enemy no sanctuary. Encourage our commanders to attack on the ground anywhere they had an advantage in North Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia. Attack and withdraw, attack and withdraw. Do not allow the North to mass troops and supplies at places of their choos-

ing.

Fourth, establish joint boards with the South Vietnamese leaders to insure they promote competence and punish corruption. Granted this fringes upon their sovereignty, but our troops should not die for incompetents.

So yes, we could have fought a different kind of war, but the commander-in-chief, President Johnson, chose not to do so. He bullied and berated the generals, who to their discredit acceded a terrible, half-baked campaign of attrition, exchanging American for North Vietnamese lives. That “strategy” was a moral outrage.

When South Vietnam was in dire straits in 1975, I was serving in the Pentagon as the special assistant to Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger. Within the top level of the Ford administration, he received scant support in asking Congress to authorize bombing or military aid. So he personally invited to breakfast every member of Congress and he reached out for support from Democratic leaders like George Meany, president of the AFL/CIO. Schlesinger knew he was jeopardizing his own career. (And he was fired.) He did not succeed in gaining aid, but he did not give up. When South Vietnam did fall, he was the senior leader to whom our military turned for understanding.

What, then, should be the peroration for the war? Should it be the Burns’ documentary, “The Vietnam War was a tragedy, immeasurable and irredeemable.”

Or should it be what Secretary of Defense Schlesinger wrote to our two million troops, “Your cause was noble; your dedication was determined. You answered your country’s call.”

Biography:

Military historian F. J. “Bing” West is the best-selling author of ten books on strategy and battle. He served as assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs in the Reagan administration. A graduate of Georgetown and Princeton Universities, he served in Vietnam with Marine Force Recon and Combined Action Platoons. His articles appear in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*.

(Editor's Note: We welcome your views/thoughts on the Ken Burn's documentary "The Vietnam War" - please send them to us for inclusion in the next issue.)

JOURNEY TO NORMAL

Film By Julie Hera DeStefano

On August 24, 2017, I flew into Houston for the Women Veterans Summit-put on by the VA Womens' Center out of Washington, DC. There was tension in the air because Hurricane Harvey was literally sitting off the coast of Texas. Director Kayla Williams, was keeping us posted but she had not received word from central office to cancel any of the meetings. That first evening was a viewing of this new movie, *Journey to Normal*, followed by a panel discussion with the directors and one of the women featured in the film. I was sitting at a table with a few of us from the VVA national office and many women from around the country.

Journey to Normal: Women of War Come Home recounts the remarkable story of women who have served in theaters of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Filmmaker JulieHera DeStefano launched this project in 2013 in order to explore the psychological and social dynamics of their service, to follow their reintegration into civilian life, and to preserve their stories. *Journey to Normal* turns the narrative over to the film's true storytellers, the women themselves, and their stories reflect these changes in our society and will help to bridge the perceived gap between military and civilian culture. Learn more at: <http://vimeo.com/journeytonormal> Or at the Facebook page for *Journey to Normal*.

"The biggest thing to hit me was to see someone that you see on a daily basis, walk around your FOB [Forward Operating Base], pretty much reduced to a zip lock bag of human remains sitting in the back of your truck. That was, I think, the biggest eye opener of my entire life."

-- Corporal Samantha Villarreal, 1st Infantry Division

The nature of the United States military has changed. During our Vietnam time there were roughly 5% women in the military. Women have had a presence in the military officially since the civil war (some dressed as men to serve). However, the numbers have now reached unprecedented levels - over 15% of the total force.

Womens' roles have expanded well beyond the limited range of assignments available to them previously. Simultaneously the nature of armed conflict has fundamentally changed. No one can easily define a "combat zone," and gone are easy definitions of what it means to serve "in combat. Women today serve next to their men counterparts doing the same job. Our America of the 21st century has women service personnel who truly are combat

veterans, and those who have served in Afghanistan and Iraq now number over 280,000. All the women in the film were quoted as feeling uncomfortable by the civilians that come up to them when they are in uniform to say 'thank you for your service.' They said that they were just doing their job. This was the same sentiment by the younger women veterans at our table. My comment to them was to respond with "Thank you for your support." They were stunned..saying, "Oh..we can to that." My comment was that we Vietnam Veterans had worked so hard for these veterans TO BE RECOGNIZED IN A POSITIVE WAY!

The rest of the conference was cancelled and most were able to fly out on August 25, 2017. Our prayers were with Houston.

Kate O'Hare-Palmer
Women Veterans Committee Chair

CHAPTER NOTES

Chapter 446

Veteran friends, I was shopping at Bass Pro yesterday (Rancho Cucamonga) and received a 10% Veteran discount. Most Bass Pro stores offer the discount from the 16th to the 22nd of each month. The clerk informed me that the stores in Rancho and Las Vegas offer the discount all month. It doesn't include sale items or ammo, it's the manager's decision.



Bass Pro Shops Rancho Cucamonga
Open today until 9:00 PM
7777 Victoria Gardens Lane Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91739
(909) 922-5500
Bass Pro Shops Las Vegas
Open today until 9:00 PM
8200 Dean Martin Dr Las Vegas, NV 89139
(702) 730-5200

On another note. I was supposed to ask you to run the Chapter invitation to gather at the El Monte airport. Although, I'm discussing to making it the third Tuesday of the month. I'll let you know if we change it.

Here's another tidbit. The Chino Air Museum has a "Veterans Coffee and Donuts Klatch" at 8am the second Tuesday of each month. Dirk and I went in June it was good. They have some neat old airplanes. They also gather a bunch of old Veterans. We invite all veterans to join in, meet other veterans from the area and share whatever is on your mind. Planes of Fame Executive Director Jerry Wilkins will host, complimentary refreshments will be served and museum admission is waived for attending veterans and their guests.



The Kilroy Coffee Klatch will be held in the Maloney hangar at Planes of Fame Air Museum from 9-10 a.m. on the first Tuesday of each month. Planes of Fame is honored to serve as a venue for our veterans to

gather. We hope this monthly meeting will provide an enjoyable and meaningful exchange of ideas for our veterans.

Al Biernesser

Chapter 223

I have been very busy since last month. We had a successful dinner dance fundraiser. I would hope that more of you would join us next year. We had some very nice raffle and auction items. We raised over \$5,000 to help us assist veterans this next year.

The week following the dinner I was on the road for a personal trip. I went to Morrow Bay to meet a group of veterans attending the 2017 Gathering. These are gun truck and transportation members from Vietnam. Most people do not really understand the mission that we were on doing these jobs. It is easier to understand the infantry or supply room jobs than that of the transportation and convoy security. Any of our members that would like to sit down and talk about these jobs, just let us know and we can get together. We have a lot more transportation people in our chapter than like to admit it. There is no shame in the job, but the lack of understanding makes a lot

of members stay quiet. I followed this up with my high school 50th reunion. I did have a really good week.

Since I got back from goofing off I have gotten back to business. I do need to report that Alan Dalton, our chapter secretary has passed away. My next task is to find a replacement. If anyone is interested let me know. If you have been following the VVA Veteran magazine you will see that we have been losing a lot of members the last couple of years. Remember that they are all very good friends to many of us and will be missed by all.

We are beginning to get involved in the Veterans Treatment Court in Sonoma County. Brian McKeown is taking the lead on this and will be attending the mentor coordinator training in October. If you know someone that would like to assist in this project call the office or contact Brian. If we can assist veterans and keep them out of jail, we will be helping guide them into the future and helping them to meet their potential in life. Sometimes when someone takes a little time and lets a person know there is a sunny day ahead it can make a world of difference in a lot of lives.

Veterans day November 11th will be at the city hall. You will start to see a trend in what I am doing this year. Brian will be taking over this event and I will assist him in every way I can. We need to get the newer veterans involved in these programs or they will just fade away. If we cannot encourage the younger veterans



Willie Wong was one of the leaders in growing of Chapter 756 and was involved in many events the Chapter was involved in, He will be missed more to come on him . (RIP) Willie will surely go to Heaven because he spent his time in Hell (Hue 1968 Tet). The Land that God Forgot the Nam .



Objects taken from the battlefields of Vietnam are more than souvenirs or war trophies. Maps, stories, after-action reports, pictures, military items may have a story that could result in finding the location of missing war dead. Can you help?

Contact the Veterans Initiative at:
Veterans Initiative
Vietnam Veterans of America
8719 Colesville Rd., Suite 100
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
vi@vva.org

Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. LCpl William G. Camp Memorial Chapter 933

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Newsletter

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18th Biennial National Convention of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)

On July 23rd, my wife Henrietta and I departed Fresno, California on our yearly trip around the United States to visit family and friends. Our first stop was in Phoenix, Arizona to visit our son and his wife, as well as to visit a very close friend that we met in Newbury, England in 1968. After two days, we travelled to Colorado Springs, Colorado where we spent four days with friends we met while stationed at Ramstein, Germany. Our next stop was in Des Moines, Iowa to spend time with our oldest daughter and her husband. Over the next 14 days Henrietta and I travelled to Chicago, Illinois, Detroit, Michigan, and Cleveland, Ohio to visit my sisters and brother. After leaving Cleveland we visited friends in Beaver Creek, Ohio that we met while in England (1996) and Dayton, Ohio (1968). Our next stops were Atlanta, Georgia and Birmingham, Alabama to spend time with my nieces. Next to the last leg of our journey was to Selma, Alabama and Gulfport, Mississippi.

On August 7th, we arrived in New Orleans, Louisiana to attend the 18th Biennial National Convention of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA).

On the first day of the Convention, approximately 97 delegates registered, with more to follow. A new delegates' briefing was held to provide an overview of what was to be expected and presented throughout the convention.

On day two, all delegates were assembled in the Grand Ballroom for the beginning of the convention. A total of 816 delegates had registered. This is the largest number of

delegates to attend a VVA convention. The Louisiana National Guard presented the colors for the opening ceremony. To experience the feeling of New Orleans' Bourbon Street, beads were tossed to the delegates prior to the end of the ceremony.

The welcome address was delivered by President John Rowan. During his welcome address he discussed medical problems that plague our veterans, the Choice Program, and

toxic exposure. Throughout the next five days, these three topics were discussed. Vice President Marsha Four and Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards also welcomed members to the Convention, and invited all to enjoy visiting the city of New Orleans. He gave thanks to those who served in the military and acknowledged the sacrifices that they endured. The remainder of the day was primarily devoted to the Rules, Constitution (13) and Resolutions (140) Committees. Each resolution was reviewed, discussed, and then voted on. Over 95% of the resolutions were passed and

adopted. In addition, over a three-day period, seminars were scheduled on various committees (13) from POW/MIA through Government Affairs. Each seminar was filled to maximum capacity. I attended three seminars where all discussions were current, and updates were provided on problems that our brothers and sisters are experiencing in their daily lives from the effect of their Vietnam service. During each general meeting, a key topic of discussion was on the subject of suicide prevention and the ways we can assist in this area.



From Left: John J. Sturdivant, National President John Rowan, and Henrietta Sturdivant

John J. Sturdivant
President, Chapter 933



that have families and jobs to come out and join us in these events then we are not doing what we are meant to do. We must be the teachers and leaders of the people that will be taking over our mission.

Our annual Christmas party is coming soon. Friday December 1st will be here in no time. We need someone to take on the planning and leadership of this fun filled day so the children will not be disappointed. The last few years we have had over three hundred guests attending our party. I have lost count of the number of kids but it seems like a lot. We also have a raffle and auction. We do not look at making any money from this event but we have been able to break even on our expenses. The main thing that we do is have enough food to feed everyone and toys for all the children. Let's get together and put on a great party and make even me go home happy. It does not take

a lot of people but the more the merrier and some people sing and dance and there is food and stuff.

I believe that we will be taking a different direction on some things in the next year. We will be asking the members to assist us with working on issues with the city and county. We are working on trying to get free bus rides for veterans in Santa Rosa. This means working with the city council and showing them a need to assist the veterans that would benefit by this. Some of the benefits are for the veterans to be able to attend meeting, appointments and other things that get them out of their houses. Getting veterans to go outside and be with other veterans and other people can and will save lives. We all need to express to all our elected officials the importance of veterans in our communities. As most know less than one percent of the population today serves in the military, and eleven percent

of our county population are veterans. Some people forget this. The number of veterans will be always going down since we have a smaller military today, but the quality of care should never go down. We must remind the civilian population that the veterans that insure their way of live deserve the best of care.

I also attended a program in Sacramento that brings awareness to veteran mental health and suicide prevention and awareness. The popular thing to say is "22 a Day" when speaking about suicides in the veteran community. I think we should be talking about and thinking about every veteran as an individual and not just one of a number. We need to assist every veteran one at a time wither it is in the justice system, mental health, homelessness or any of the number of ways we are assisting veterans. Every veteran is an individual and has seen something that no one has seen

Throughout the convention, several individuals were honored, recognized, and presented with Awards. Senator Gary Peters, Congressman Mike Coffman, and Senator Richard Blumenthal were honored as Legislators of the Year. Each of the Legislators has been instrumental in supporting legislations that pertain to the Vietnam veteran.

During the Award Ceremony, Chapter 933 was recognized and presented the Vietnam Veterans of America "Chapter Newsletter of the Year" Award. It was an honor to accept this award on behalf of our Chapter. During my acceptance speech, honor was given to Chapter 933's Craig Meadors for his outstanding management, contribution, editing, composing, and distribution of each newsletter. Meadors' dedication was the backbone of this award and without him this would not have been possible.

Prior to the election, I had the privilege of speaking with President John Rowan, Treasurer Wayne Reynolds, and Sharon Hobbs. President Rowan assured the organization that he would continue to keep Vietnam Veterans' right and entitlements as a focal point. He also stated that more projects are on the drawing boards for our veterans, and that within the next few months more information will be forthcoming.

There were three breakfasts/luncheons held during the convention. During the Service Representative Breakfast, Mrs. Margarita Devlin spoke on the Camp Lejeune water contamination, and how a large percentage of over 54,000 claims have been denied. As a key factor, she stated, "If you have filed a claim and it was denied, you have right to refile because additional beneficial items have been added to the list that

was not previously listed before. To file a claim only the sponsor's DD Form 214 showing 30 days or more at Camp Lejeune is required. If sponsor is deceased, the spouse is eligible for benefits".

Scott Blackburn, Acting Deputy Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, spoke on improving suicide prevention care, because 32% of vets are taking their lives daily. He further stated, "The VA must improve care by providing 24 hour service, same day service, improved facilities, and taking actions on all claims in less than 30 days." Suicide Prevention month (September) should be the time to bring awareness to all veterans on ways to seek assistance in this area.

Election of officers was held. Incumbents President John Rowan, Vice President Marsha Four, Secretary Bill Meeks, Treasurer Wayne Reynolds, and Region 9 Dick Southern were elected.

The 18th Biennial Convention of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) was by far the best one that I have attended. It was conducted in an orderly and efficient manner. All topics were well presented, discussed, and then voted on. As the delegates were preparing to depart, only positive feedback and comments were given.

Chapter officers and delegates have now returned to their respective chapters where they will provide a briefing to their members. The information presented at the convention was very informative, and can be used as a stepping stone for chapters to provide more assistance to veterans. On behalf of Henrietta and myself, I would like to thank the members of Chapter 933 for allowing us to represent our chapter.



Photos by John Sturdivant

thru their eyes.
Ken Holybee

Chapter 201

Chapter 201 conducts approximately four community information and fund raising events each year. On July 15th and 16th, 2017, the Chapter held an event at the Commissary on the former Naval Base at Moffett Field in Mountain View, California. Information was provided on Agent Orange, PTSD and the Veterans Initiative to help resolve the issue of American and Vietnamese Missing In Action. Fund



raising was conducted to support Chapter events and activities such as scholarships for Vietnamese children under The "Dragoon Scholarship Fund."

Some of those participating at the Moffett Field Commissary in July included: Dave Sanders (Past President), Steve Thompson (Secretary), Mary Sessler (AVVA), Randy Sessler (Director), Jack Wells, Dennis Foggie, (Treasurer), John Hassenplug (Sergeant-At-Arms), and Gene Fanucchi (Vice President).

Member Jack Wells (LT Col, USMC, Ret) travels to Vietnam about twice a year and coordinates the Chapter's participation in the Children of Vietnam Dragoon Scholarship Fund. On the sixth of August this year he participated in the annual International Marathon event held in Da Nang. During this year's marathon, that included 5,000 runners from 40 different countries, Jack paid the entry fee for 13 boys and girls from the 5th

Dennis Witzel

Vietnam Veteran – Saugus Resident

By Bill Reynolds

Signal Director of Veterans Affairs

For over one year now I have had the wonderful opportunity of working with some wonderful and dedicated people at our SCV Signal newspaper and in our Veterans community.

So, I'd like to pause here for a moment and express my deep gratitude to Mr. Chuck Champion for reaching out to meet me and enticing me to join his fine team at The Signal.

Clearly, Chuck Champion is a major supporter of our Veterans and our military. It's been a sincere pleasure and how cool it is that I get to meet so many wonderful Santa Clarita Valley Veterans and patriotic Americans. Thank you Chuck Champion!

Word of Mouth

Often, word of mouth leads to another Veteran interview, but in this case I've known Dennis Witzel for as many years that I've been a Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 355 member here in Santa Clarita - and that's been quite a while now.

Dennis serves as Director of Membership with the VVA and he was recently selected to become a member of SCV's Veterans Memorial Inc., which facilitates our city's annual Memorial Day ceremonies.

He is truly one of the nicest and most generous men that you'll ever meet and I'm proud of having him as a friend.

Angel on my Shoulder

Dennis R. Witzel was born on Halloween, Oct. 31, 1946, in Huron, South Dakota (population 14,000), where he grew up graduating at age 17 from Huron High School on June 19, 1964.

Afterwards, he worked in a grocery store until he moved to La Puente, California in February 1965 where he landed a job driving a milk truck for Royal Dutch Dairy.

But in December 1965 he returned to his parent's home in Huron where a "Greeting Letter" from Uncle Sam awaited him and on Dec. 14, 1965,

Dennis entered the U.S. Army.

A week later, he was sent to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, for Basic Training and Advanced Infantry Training, but because Dennis had taken typing classes in high school he was assigned to clerk's school.

"There must have been an angel on my shoulder because otherwise I was headed to Vietnam as an infantry grunt," Dennis said.

WWII Troop Ship to Nam

After clerk's school, Dennis was sent by train to Fort Dix, New Jersey, expecting to be assigned to Germany, but no - that wasn't to be.

Dennis and a group of his fellow soldiers formed a new unit, the 518th Adjutant General Personnel Services Company where they trained six months for their new assignment.

Afterwards, the 518th went by train to Philadelphia, then flew to Oakland, California, and boarded a WWII troop ship in October 1966.

"That was my very first ocean cruise but it was definitely not a vacation," Dennis said.

Three weeks later, he was at Cam Ranh Bay, South Vietnam!

Dennis spent his entire tour of duty at Cam Ranh Bay as his unit's principle responsibility was managing financial and personnel records for every American military person who served in Vietnam; all of Vietnam.

Corporal Radar O'Reilly

Dennis became Company Clerk for the 518th and he enjoys referring to himself as "Corporal Radar O'Reilly of Vietnam" per the old TV show "Mash."

As Dennis' good fortune would have it, his replacement arrived in the 518th three months ahead of schedule so Dennis volunteered for a variety of base

Courtesy photos
(Above left) Upper right playing poker.
(Above right) Dennis Witzel Army Portrait.
(Right) At left with his pal James Remy.
(Left) 1st Logistical Command Patch.

camp duties such as driving a water truck and a trash truck. Not that he had to deal with trash as other soldiers had that unpleasant chore.

His truck driving assignments were part time so each day he had plenty of time for swimming and sun bathing at Cam Ranh Bay's beautiful beach. To this day, Dennis can hardly believe his good fortune.

Dennis read a statistic on Vietnam which reported that 20 percent of troops in Vietnam served in combat, while 80 percent served in support units. Dennis feels very fortunate for his participation in Vietnam though a bit uncomfortable that he was not a combat soldier.

Yet, he knows full well that it's a soldier duty to perform any task issued him by his superiors, hence he remains very proud that he served his Country and his fellow soldiers locked in combat.

A Charmed Life

Dennis' good fortune continued when his tour of duty in Vietnam ended, and, because he had less than 90 days remaining in his two year Army stint, he was Honorably Discharged with an early out at Fort Lewis, Washington, Sept. 21, 1967.

Returning back to Southern California, Dennis resumed working in an Albertsons grocery store in La Habra, as he knew that type of work very well.

Dennis met a lovely young woman

and they were married in October of 1968, which lasted only 10 years, but along the way they adopted two wonderful children.

Meanwhile, Dennis had taken a job at Nestlé's, the World's largest food company, and there he learned to make candy which is unbelievably fantastic.

His good fortune continued even further when he met Sheila Chovan in Nestlé's sales department, where he worked, and it wasn't long before they were dating and then had a quaint garden marriage in Santa Monica on Aug. 14, 1982. They're now going on 35 years.

Dennis and Sheila have lived in Santa Clarita since 1983.

"I've truly lived a charmed life," Dennis said.

Like a Box of Chocolates

Following retirement from his long career with Nestlé's, Dennis has been giving back to our community especially as it relates to our Veterans.

He feels strongly about supporting our local Veterans, and remains very active with the Vietnam Veterans of America - Chapter 355, SCV Veterans Memorial, Inc. SCV Veterans Collaborative, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars - Post 6885.

When Dennis finished serving with the U.S. Army 50 years ago he returned home and got busy pursuing his American Dream.

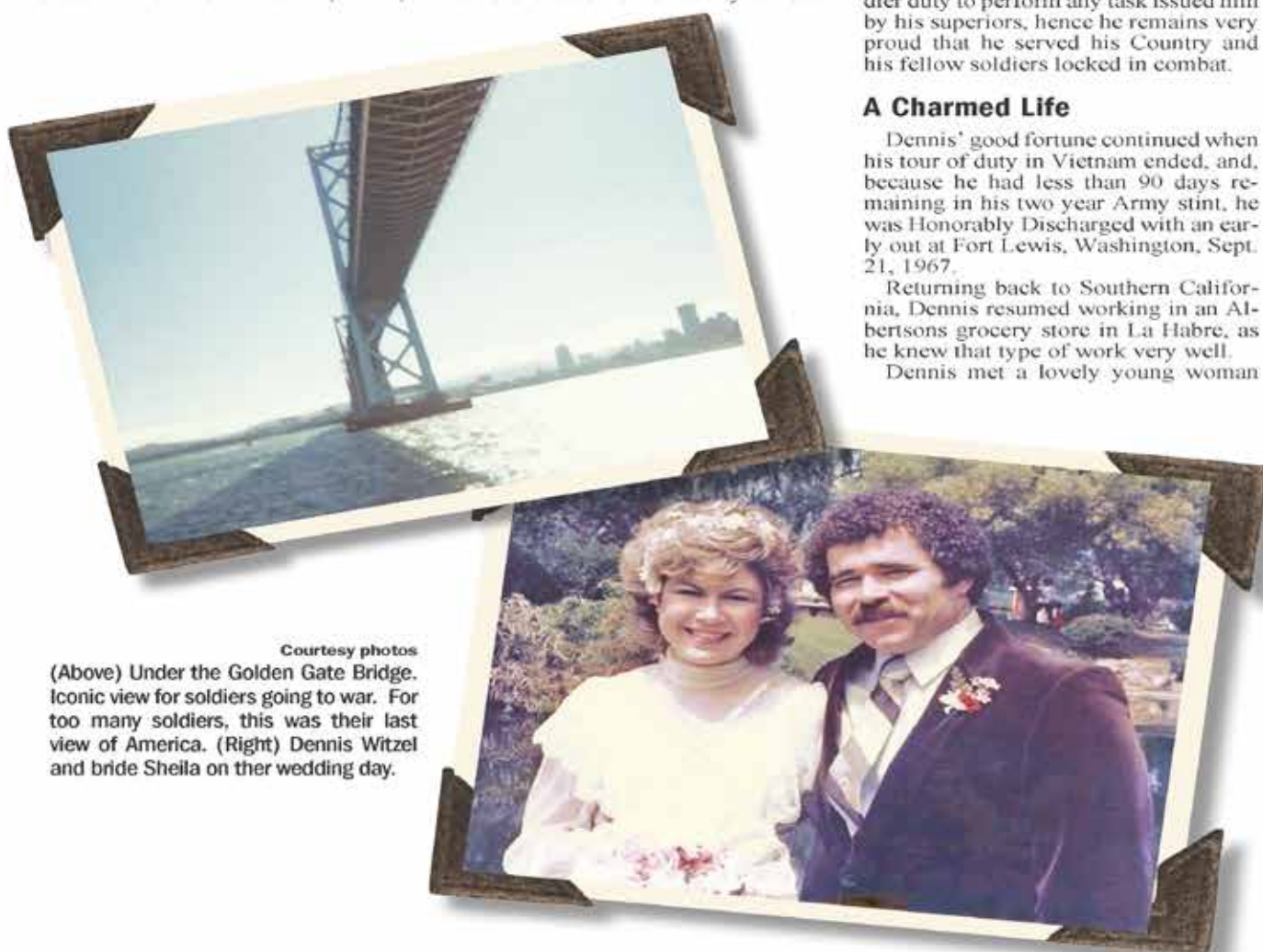
He simply did not have time or the inclination to carry a burden of negativity from the Vietnam War's intense unpopularity, nor the harassment he received from those who took their frustrations out on returning Veterans.

Dennis also enjoys serving as an advisor at College of the Canyon's Culinary Institute.

A cancer survivor, Dennis is a big supporter for "Relay for Life."

Dennis continues an active, comfortable life with his loving wife Sheila and aside from his Veterans activities he thoroughly enjoys making chocolate candy for his friends and man is it delicious.

It's no wonder that Dennis was inducted into NCSA's Candy Hall of Fame in 2013.



Courtesy photos

(Above) Under the Golden Gate Bridge. Iconic view for soldiers going to war. For too many soldiers, this was their last view of America. (Right) Dennis Witzel and bride Sheila on their wedding day.



House orphanage to run in four "fun run" races; marathon, 1/2 marathon, 10k and 5k.

Jack Wells graduated from the sixth Marine Basic Class in 1967 and, with his classmates, was sent to Vietnam. Jack served as a forward observer with the 7th Marines. In December 1968 he was the artillery advisor for the 21st Army of the Republic of Vietnam Ranger Battalion. He finished his Vietnam tour as the Executive Officer for Hotel Battery, 3rd Battalion, 11th Marines.

Jack Wells' Basic Class 6-67 sent more young Lieutenants off to war and suffered more officers killed or wounded than any other Basic School Class since the Korean War. In 2010, Jack Wells published his book "Class of 67" as a memorial to his 44 classmates who gave the ultimate sacrifice for their country (ISBN: 1439268088).

In 2014, Jack published the following article about a Navy veteran who returned to Vietnam for the International Marathon event that year.

RATS

by Jim Doyle



Between 1964 and 1975, "the Sixties," roughly 9 million young Americans experienced the endless demands on an individual's ability to retain focus while subjected to harsh physical, mental, and emotional hazing during grinding 20-hour days over a period of weeks. The Army called it Basic Combat Training. The Marines, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard call it by other names, but most refer to it simply as, Boot Camp. That is where we had our first taste of "Army Chow." Part of the drill was the food. Military chow.

The days when you slept in and Mom took orders for eggs, with bacon and toast, and asked, "what kind of jam would you like, honey?" were gone forever.

Reveille sounded precisely at 0530 hours and chow began serving at 0600.

A variety of items resembling food were scooped, ladled, tossed, and slopped onto our trays each morning. Different things on different days, but it always seemed the same. Powdered

eggs ala scramble, semi-cooked bacon sometimes, pancakes, real eggs on the grill, cooked to order as long as you ordered them partially-cooked and runny. Dry cereal, as well as white and chocolate milk were always available.



And then there were the grits. Always grits.

One-third of the 9 million served in Vietnam, and many of them spent their one-year tour, 13 months for Marines, eating "prepared" food in a lightweight cardboard box. Meal Combat Individual. C-Rations.

Each complete meal included a canned meat, bread, and dessert course, depending on how fast you could reach through the tangle of arms, all reaching for the, Beans, with Frankfurter Chunks in Tomato Sauce.

C-Rats ran the gamut from Turkey Loaf, Chicken and Noodles, and Beef Steak to Spaghetti and Meatballs, to Beef Slices and Potatoes with Gravy to Chicken, Boned. And for the braver among the troops, Ham and Lima's, known colloquially by a moniker unsuitable for the family hour.

If you were lucky you scored Pound Cake for dessert. With a little creativity, swapping and sharing, a bottle of Tabasco sauce, a chunk of C-4 explosive out of your Claymore mine for heat, you could cobble together a pretty good meal.

On a cold, damp morning in a remote ambush site, cut the top of the can off with one of the four P-38 can openers contained in a case of 12 C-Rats. Poke a hole in the center of

the Pound Cake, splash a little water in, add the jam from a B-3 Unit, light the C-4 and heat it up and you've got a half-assed replica of a warm Danish pastry. Mix up the instant coffee, pull a smoke out of one of the 4-packs of cigarettes in the ration box, and

Continued Below

except for a copy of the Sunday New York Times it's just like you're back in The World. Improvise, overcome, adapt.

The accessory packs were filled with useful items, typically unavailable out in the boonies. Toilet paper, a plastic spoon, matches, and candy-coated chewing gum resembling Chiclets. The toilet paper was useful in the most minimalist way. It consisted of four squares of 4"x4" pieces of sandpaper.

On the rare occasion we were extracted from the field and brought to the rear for a one- or two-day stand down, we typically had a hot meal in the Battalion Mess Hall, complete with steak, potatoes, vegetables, beer, sodas, and more beer.

I remember one trip to the rear after several weeks in the field.

Our company, understrength as always, had just begun to eat, half of us at tables and the other half in line when SSG Ruda, our Platoon Sergeant walked in

and at the top of his lungs hollered, "Saddle up! We need to be on the pad in 10 mikes."

Groaning, moaning, and bitching was like a soundtrack. Trays were slammed down on table tops, thrown into the trash, and generally thrashed. Everyone was pissed off.

Long story short - we waited on the helicopter pad for 3 1/2 hours, until it was dark. The choppers came in and we loaded up for our ride to wherever. No one had told us where or why we were going, but we were going somewhere. It turned out no one told the chopper pilots either because after lifting off, we circled the base camp at Di An and landed right back on the pad. 90 seconds later we lifted off again.

After about 15 minutes in the air we could see green and red tracers zipping back and forth across what was going to be our Landing Zone.

I hate when that happens.

VETERANS RETURN TO DA NANG FOR MARATHON

By Jack Wells

Tens of thousands of American veterans have never forgotten the tropical sights and smells of Da Nang they experienced stepping off their flights at the air base there during the war. Now they are sensing them again at a more peaceful time, when medals will be awarded not for valor in combat but for victory in a 26-mile race.

The Da Nang Marathon/Half Marathon and 5K fun run, in its third year and scheduled for August 30, has been attracting veterans like former sailor Dennis Zaborac, who served at the nearby naval patrol base in Hoi An in 1971.

When he heard about the Da Nang marathon, Zaborac thought, "Why as a Vietnam vet would I want to go back?" After all, "the last time I ran in Vietnam it wasn't a marathon; it was a midnight sprint to a sandbagged bunker after a mortar attack."

But the frequent marathoner decided to give the Da Nang run a try and signed up for the inaugural race on Sept. 1, 2013. "The heat and humidity of the marathon made it the toughest race I've ever run," he said "but see-



ing the warm friendly smiles of the Vietnamese made it the greatest race I've ever run."

Zaborac returned to Da Nang in 2014 to run the half marathon and 5K.

The 2013 event was organized by Dr. Khiem Ngo, a marathoner and sports injuries specialist in Houston who wanted to introduce the benefits of running to Da Nang's residents. He had been among the "boat people" fleeing Saigon in the years after it fell to the Communists in April 1975.

The second marathon and half marathon, on Aug. 31, 2014, brought in more than 300 runners from 18 countries, including three dozen from the United States. The 5K race had more than 3,000 runners, most of them from schools and universities in Da Nang. The races raised money for



the Da Nang Cancer Hospital.

This year's race is organized by Pulse Ltd., based in Ho Chi Minh City. The cancer hospital is again the designated charity.

Few Americans could have imagined such an event 50 years ago when the Marines landed at Red Beach, north of Da Nang Air Base, on March 8, 1965. They became the vanguard for more than 55,000 U. S. military personnel operating from Da Nang and surrounding areas by the end of 1968. When the fighting ended in 1973, the U.S. death toll was more than 58,000.

"I left Vietnam saying 'never again,'" Zaborac remembers, but the children he saw along the marathon route changed him. "As a runner whose war memories were burned away by the sunny smiles of these children, I now hope to return again and again."

Chapter 982

Well we're chuggin along here on the central coast. Thanks to our members that were able to attend the National Convention, they all made it back. September Chapter events were POW/MIA Day on the 15th - Arroyo Grande Harvest Festival parade on the 23rd and Los Alamos Old Days parade on the 24th. Our Color Guard led our Chapter in the parades. Thank you all for coming out. October 21st we have Santa Barbara County Standdown in Santa Maria. Ray Espinoza is chairman this year with help from our members. Also on the 21st is the Breast Cancer Walk in San Luis Obispo. On October 27th we are having a Chapter Birthday Bash with live music and a full bar. Time to party, should be great fun. Tickets are only \$15

so if you happen to be in the area give a call for tickets. Deek Sogovia 805-710-3115 - Jerry Kaufman 805-295-9139. Our big event is Veterans Day November 11th. We are hosting "We Honor Vets" event at the Madonna Expo in San Luis Obispo. This is a tribute to all post Vietnam Nam War Veterans. WWII, Korean, and Vietnam Veterans were honored the past 3 years by another group. Michael Knight is chairman of this event. Give him a call if you know of a Veteran of post Vietnam War, 805-689-2576. Thanks to our members pitchin in with trucks and trailers for a yard clean up to help a fellow member who is bed ridden. And a BIG congratulations to two of our members who just got hitched, Annie and Ray Espinoza.

Jerry Kaufman

GOLD STAR PEAK

Unnamed peak may soon honor 'Gold Star' families

By Amy Bushatz

An unnamed peak near Mount POW/MIA may soon receive a name aimed at honoring the families of fallen U.S. service members: Gold Star Peak.

"Gold Star" is the term traditionally used to recognize families of troops who have been killed while on duty, either overseas or stateside. The new name, submit-



ted by Anchorage resident and Army veteran Kirk Alkire to both Alaska's Historical Commission and the National Geological Survey (NGS) could become official early next year.

Alkire, who regularly maintains the POW/MIA and U.S. flags on Mount POW/MIA with a group of other veterans, got the idea for the peak during a visit to the Lake Tahoe, California area. He noticed a plaque commemorating a Gold Star Peak there, and knew he needed to find a way to have a similar peak honoring those military families in the Anchorage area.

Because of his familiarity with Mount POW/MIA, which he climbs several times per year, Alkire knew there is a currently unnamed peak that hikers must pass on their way to the POW/MIA summit. Now he hopes both the Alaska and federal naming boards approve the designation, giving those who view the mountain from the ground an extra chance to honor families who have lost service members.

"Especially someone from the Valley on that drive down the Glenn Highway, when they cross over the Knik bridge, they are staring right at it," he said. "Those in the 50,000 cars going over the bridge daily will be reminded."

While the mountain may not look particularly prominent from the ground, a fact some have used to question the peak choice, it's clearly a distinct peak when viewed from on the mountain, Alkire said.

He said the peak's proximity to POW/MIA is also appropriate — and important. Those who honor troops who are missing in action or prisoners of war and families of the fallen are often thrown together thanks to loss and service to America, he said.

"To me, the two are linked," he said.

Alkire has received a \$5,000 grant from the state that he plans to use for two memorial plaques. One will be placed on top of the peak, he said. The other will be placed at the Valley's Veterans' Wall of Honor, from which the newly named peak can be clearly seen. Alkire is hoping to get the help designing the plaque from local Gold Star family members.

The Alaska Historical Commission will meet in early December to consider new name proposals, including Alkire's. They'll then forward their decision on to the NGS, which has ultimate say on the naming.

In the meantime, Alkire is gathering letters of support for the designation from local state government and tribal leaders, Alaska's congressional delegation and Gold Star family members that both the state and federal boards will consider when making their final decision.

Members of the public can submit comments on his proposal to the NGS naming board by emailing BGNEC@usgs.gov or writing to Mr. Lou Yost, Executive Secretary, U.S. Board on Geographic Names/Domestic Names Committee, 523 National Center, Reston, VA 20192-0523.

DISCHARGE UPGRADE REQUESTS

By Lisa Ferdinando

The Defense Department released guidance today to clarify the liberal consideration given to veterans who request upgrades of their discharge saying they had mental health conditions or were victims of sexual assault or sexual harassment.

The new guidance clarifies that the liberal consideration policy includes conditions resulting from post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, sexual assault or sexual harassment, said Air Force Lt. Col. Reggie Yager, the acting director of legal policy in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

The policy is meant to ease the burden on veterans and give them a reasonable opportunity to establish the extenuating circumstances of their discharge, Yager said.

Cases involving invisible wounds such as PTSD or other mental health conditions, whether from combat or sexual assault, are some of the most complex and difficult cases to review, he said.

Liberal Consideration for Invisible-Wound Impacts

HOVEROUND®
Personal Mobility Solutions

MPV5®
Power Wheelchair

Bill Hodges <fdrdocent@comcast.net> wrote:

FREE!!

This unit was donated to Chapter 400, by the daughter/daughter-in-law of veterans. It was never used (or barely used), and has a retail of around \$3,000.

The batteries will probably need to be replaced, but other than that, it's immaculate.

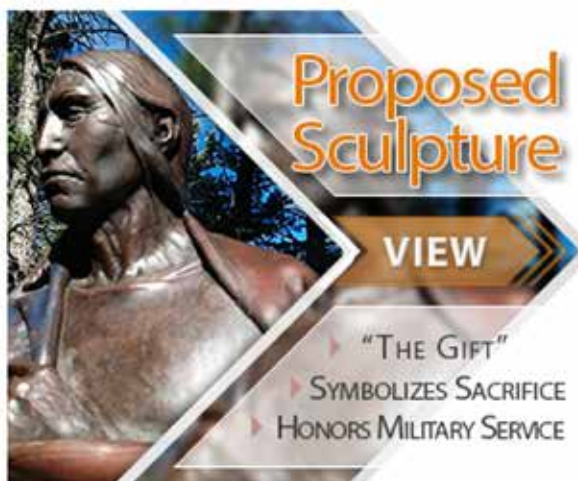
Recipient must arrange shipping/pick up.



Alameda had their annual Wine & Craft Park St. event, July 29-30, and Chapter 400 was there!

Andy Huntoon, Manny Sanchez, Arnold Dos Santos, Ray Will, Steve Rogers and Bill Hodges were on hand to "greet & meet" fellow veterans.

We met several prospective Chapter 400 members, and answered many questions about our well-deserved benefits.



SCULPTOR A. THOMAS SCHOMBERG

A. Thomas Schomberg is a world-renowned sculptor. Near the entrance to the Riverside National Cemetery stands a dramatic sculpture of Schomberg's creation, the **Veterans Memorial**. A lifeless body of an American warrior draped in a tarp, lies on a 13-foot pedestal. This symbolic piece of art transcends gender or specific branch of service as only combat boots and arms are visible beyond the shroud.

The proposed **American Indian Veterans Memorial** will also be completed by Schomberg and placed a short distance from the location of the **Veterans Memorial**. Schomberg drew up sketches of his proposed design after long deliberations and created a small-scaled version of the monolith for the **American Indian Veterans Memorial**.



For more information about A. Thomas Schomberg go to: www.schombergstudios.com

ALL PROPOSED DESIGNS ARE SUBJECT TO FINAL APPROVAL BY THE U.S. DEPT. OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.



Mental health conditions, including those from PTSD, sexual assault and sexual harassment, affect veterans in many different ways, Yager said. "Liberal consideration, in our view, is the right balance to ensure we are making fact-based decisions while also giving appropriate leeway to the challenges posed by these invisible wounds," he added.

It is unknown how many veterans could be affected, he explained, because the veterans most likely affected are those who did not disclose a sexual assault or sexual harassment during service, or their PTSD or other mental health condition was not diagnosed during their time in the military.

The Defense Department issued the liberal consideration policy in 2014. Today's clarification is available on the Defense Department's website.

Committed to Helping Veterans

Veterans from any era can seek an upgrade to their discharge or ask for reconsideration under the clarification, Yager said. "The department is committed to helping veterans and taking care of our veterans regardless of whether they currently serve or if they've served decades ago," he added.

Requests for upgrades are reviewed by military department discharge review boards or boards for correction of military records.

To find the forms to request an upgrade, veterans discharged less than 15 years ago can go to the website for the board for their specific service. Veterans who were discharged more than 15 years ago need to go to the board for correction of military records for their service, he said.

Veteran service organizations and military service organizations can provide assistance, Yager said, pointing out that legal counsel is not needed to request the upgrade.

Link Between Condition and Discharge

Veterans seeking a discharge upgrade need to give the board evidence of a diagnosis, or establish examples of evidence to establish the mental health condition, or show evidence that they experienced an event such as sexual assault or sexual harassment that affected their behavior in a significant way, Yager said. They also need to explain how the condition caused the basis for their discharge, he added.

The boards consider the severity of the behavior that led to the discharge, Yager said, noting that not every discharge warrants an upgrade.

The review boards will consider four points, Yager said:

- Whether the veteran had a condition or experience that may excuse or mitigate the discharge;
- If the condition existed or experience occurred during military service;
- If the condition or experience excuses or mitigates the discharge; and
- If the condition or experience outweighs the discharge.

The review takes up to a year on average, and a veteran who is denied an upgrade can appeal to the board for correction of military records, he said. A surviving spouse, next of kin or other legal representative can file an appeal on behalf of a veteran who has died or is incompetent.

FLU SHOTS

Flu Shots Start Tuesday: Beginning Aug. 15, all VA-enrolled veterans can begin receiving annual flu shots at their local Walgreens or Duane Reade pharmacies. While this immunization program is limited to just VA patients, Walgreens can provide flu shots to most VFW members and their families through other coverage programs, such as TRICARE, Medicare and most insurances.



A CELEBRATION OF LIFE IN
HONOR OF
JOSE GUADALUPE RAMOS



UNCLE JOE
SEPTEMBER 17, 1948 -SEPTEMBER 3, 2017

GOD grant me The SERENITY
To accept the things I cannot change
The COURAGE to change the things I can
and The WISDOM to know The Difference



Jose Guadalupe Ramos

Jose was born on September 17, 1948 in East Los Angeles to Augustine Ramos and Herminia Silva Ramos, and was the youngest of their children.

Jose is survived by his loving wife Sylvia Ann Ramos whom he was married to for 50 years, their children Joseph Eric Ramos and Jema Herrera, children in-law Wanda Lorraine Ramos and David Herrera; four grandchildren Dennis Ramos, Janelle Ramos, David C.J. Herrera and Jacob A.J. Herrera; and his brother Ray Ramos and sister, Conchita "Pili" Quinonez.

Jose served in the Army as a combat medic with the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam from 1967-1968 and received the Purple Heart.

Jose was a visionary: in 2002 he began a campaign to fix the past and to recognize the service, honor, courage and loyalty of those that served during the Vietnam War and his efforts paid off in the official recognition of March 30th as

Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed the day into law with Joe by his side.

On July 2011 Jose met Prince William and his wife Catherine, the Duchess of Cambridge, at a veteran's event in Los Angeles.

The prince came up to Jose and said, "You must be Mr. Ramos" he remembered the prince telling him. Jose's thought was "Oh my God".

Jose loved spending time with his family, his grandchildren, his nieces and nephews. Jose also loved sunrises, sunsets, cycling, fishing and gardening.

As he walks hand in hand with our Lord he leaves behind a legacy of love, courage, strength and strong family values.

He was greatly loved and will be deeply missed.



VVA CA State Council (contact info inside - page 2)

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To:

In this issue:
• Chapter Activities-Events/Photos
• Legislative News
• Veteran Info
And more...

VVA & CSC Meeting Dates & Events
October 27-29, 2017, Fresno, CA
January 26-28, 2018, Fresno, CA
April 27-29, 2018, Fresno, CA
August 24-26, 2018, Fresno, CA
Zephyr deadlines 5 weeks prior to each CSC meeting