



A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER VOLUME 17-9 SUMMER 2015

### **REGION 8/9 CONFERENCE**

I want to thank you for attending the VVA Combined Region 8/9 Pre-Convention Conference. The Silver legacy did an excellent job with everything they supplied from the Agent Orange Town Hall meeting on Friday night to the 5:00 p. m. closing of the conference on Saturday afternoon.



You will remember that the registration went smoothly and the coffee and pastries were a good way to get the morning going. I want to thank Carol Southern for taking care of the pre-registration by mail and the on-site registration as well. We had 75 attendees for the conference.

The opening ceremony from Chapter 989's posting of the colors to the moment of silence was highlighted by a very good presentation of the National Anthem by Allyson Lambert. Thanks go out to Linda Dickinson, President of Chapter 989, for her arranging the opening.



Glenn Carano (above photo), the GM of the Silver Legacy, with Gene Crego (above photo, right), AZ SC President. This photo is Glenn's ring.

Ken Holybee did a good job on some very difficult VVA National Constitution amendments. I presented the VVA Convention Resolutions and saw that there is some work needed on them before the convention.

Wasn't the luncheon buffet what we promised? Great food and lots of it! The General Manager of the Silver Legacy, Glenn Carano, dropped by to say a few words and show us his Super Bowl ring.

Region 8/9 AVVA held a meeting in the afternoon. I want to thank Elayne Mackey for the graphics that made the conference book look so good.

The candidate's forum was informative as the candidates did their short presentations. Many of the attendees were able to talk one on one during the breaks and lunch with the candidates.

It was from Chapter 223's Lou Nunez's lucky day as he walked away with **both** the 50/50 raffle money and the 2 nights/3 day stay at the Silver legacy.

The closing was done with a group picture. If you have any pictures that you took at the conference I would like to get copies and especially the group picture.

If you have any comments or suggestion on what can be done at the next Region 8/9 conference, please send them to me.

I want to thank Tom Owen, Region 8 Director, for his support for the weekend.

We will see you in Springfield.

Thanks again,

Dick Southern - southern@lodelink.com

### CSC President's Message

As you are reading this the 2015 VVA Convention has come to an end. I hope that those of you who attended had a great time and can take some useful information home to your chapters.

Thank you to all of you that were at the Convention representing CA. I appreciate your dedication.

For those of you who did attend you have already heard about the VVA Fire Sale for VVA Life Membership. If you could not attend the convention here is information about the Fire Sale.

Last April at the National Membership Committee meeting the committee decided to have a Fire Sale for VVA Life Memberships. Starting August 1, 2015 and continuing until December 31, 2015 all VVA Life Memberships will only cost you \$100.00. That is correct only \$100.00, no matter what age you are.

So now is the time for all of you who are still renewing every year to send in that application, a copy of your DD-214 and your \$100.00. What a deal! Never again will you have to renew your VVA membership. Your chapter will still receive their \$9.00 from VVA National for your membership. All regular members and 3 years members need to take advantage of this Fire Sale.

Now to answer some question that we know some of you are going to have. If I just renewed for one year in June for \$20.00, can I just send in \$80.00 to get my Life Membership? The answer is NO. It does not matter when you renewed your yearly membership, if you want the Fire Sale Life Membership for the \$100.00 you need to send in the application with \$100.00.

If last year I paid \$200.00 for my Life Membership can I now get a \$100.00 rebate since a Life Membership is only \$100.00? Again, NO. If you are already a Life Member you cannot ask for a rebate if you paid more than the \$100.00 for the Fire Sale.

Not only is this a way to get our yearly members and 3 year members to sign up for a life membership, this is a great way to get new members to sign up for life membership. How can you beat \$100.00 for a life membership? You can't. All the other Veteran Service Organizations charge a lot more than \$100.00 for a life membership. So \$100.00 is a great deal for anyone wanting to be a life member.

Also now would be a great time to recruit some new members. We all know a Vietnam Veteran that is not a member of VVA. So let's try to encourage them to join. If we each brought in a new member CSC would double in size. Let's get the word out about the Life Membership fee and see what we can do.

Steve

### DEAR AMERICA, LETTERS HOME FROM VIETNAM

By Cathleen Cordova

On June 21, 2015 I was privileged to attend the premier performance of Vietnam Veteran Bernie Edelman's book Dear America, Letters Home From Vietnam, adapted to a

State Council Officers	Address	Phone/Cell	E-mail
President - Steve Mackey	7401 Candlelight Dr.	951-681-9531	nebhuskfan@aol.com
ĺ	Riverside, CA 92509	951-231-7268	president@vvacalsc.com
1st Vice President - Henry Iasiello	1290 Tuck Rd.	707-459-8601	shiningraven@earthlink.net
	Willits, CA 95490-8827		vp1@vvacalsc.com
2nd Vice President - Dick Southern	PO Box 68 Tuolumne, CA 95379	209-928-3848	southern@lodelink.com vp2@vvacalsc.com
Secretary - Tom Hohmann	PO Box 3007	951-683-7251	tomh47@aol.com
Treasurer - Barry Schloffel	Riverside, CA 92519-3007 1244 Shaws Flat Rd.	209-532-6119	secretary@vvacalsc.com bshowful@att.net
,	Sonora, CA 95370-5433		treasurer@vvacalsc.com
District Directors	Address	Phone	E-mail
North District - Dean Gotham	15879 32nd Ave	707-350-1159	deang1968@gmail.com
	Clearlake, CA 95422-9353		north_district@vvacalsc.com
Central District - Richard Segovia	425 El Sueno Way	805-710-3115	rsegov11b@gmail.com
Canth District Miles Kannaday	Arroyo Grande, CA	000 000 0005	central_district@vvacalsc.com
South District - Mike Kennedy	14766 Foxfield Ln Fontana, CA 92336	909-899-0085	mike3sps@verizon.net south_district@vvacalsc.com
Director - Al Sickle	PO Box 1424	209-728-2138	leanin.al391@yahoo.com
~	Murphys, CA 95247-1424		director@vvacalsc.com
Committees	Chair	Co-Chair	E-mail
Membership	Mike Kennedy		mik3esps@verizon.net membership@vvacalsc.com
Public Affairs	Ponce Gonzalez		ponce408@yahoo.com
			public_affairs@vvacalsc.com
Government Affairs	Dean Gotham		deang1968@gmail.com
			government@vvacalsc.com
Legislative Lobbyist	Pete Conaty		pconaty@sbcglobal.net legslative@vvacalsc.com
Minority Affairs	Lou Nunez		scso610ret@gmail.com
			minority@vvacalsc.com
Constitution	Mike Kennedy		mike3sps@verizon.net constitution@vvacalsc.com
Resolutions	Richard Segovia		rsegov11b@gmail.com
			resolutions@vvacalsc.com
Women Veterans	Kate O'Hare Palmer		koharepalmer@gmail.com women_veterans@vvacalsc.com
Meeting Planner	Dick Southern		southern@lodelink.net
POW/MIA	Bob Johnston, Sr.		bobj201@yahoo.com powmia@vvacalsc.com
Zephyr	Tom Hohmann		tomh47@aol.com
—-F7-	2011 11011111111111		zephyr@vvacalsc.com
Legislative Affairs	Ken Holybee		holybee@comcast.net legislative@vvacalsc.com
PTSD	Henry Iasiello		shiningraven@earthlink.net
1 10 <i>D</i>	TICHLY TASICHO		ptsd@vvacalsc.com
Veterans Incarcerated	Bob Chaney		bkrbob@charter.net
		1	incarcerated@vvacalsc.com
CA AVVA Pres., Region 9 Dirsectdor	Elayne Mackey		mmm4evr1@aol.com avva_liaison@vvacalsc.com
Agent Orange	Ken Holybee		holybee@comcast.net
			agent_orange@vvacalsc.com
Veteran Benefits	John Weaver		j.weaver@cox.net
Convention Planning	Dick Southern	-	veteran_benefits@vvacalsc.com
	DICK SOUTHERS		southern@lodelink.com convention@vvacalsc.com
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The "soldier" cast of Dear America

The California Zephyr

**Publisher** Steve Mackey. **EDITOR** Tom Hohmann

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

> Contact us at: **VVA CSC** PO Box 3007 Riverside, CA 92519 http://www.vvacalsc.com

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, selfrespect, self-confidence, and usefulness of Vietnam-era veterans and others.

To eliminate discrimination suffered by Vietnam veterans and to develop channel 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 in troduced 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 publicpolicy 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 re lationship between Vietnam-era veterans and the American society, the Vietnan War experience, the role of the United States in securing peaceful co-existe 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 veteran including, but not limited to, Vietnam veterans and their dependents, and the widws and orphans of deceased veterans.

### **FUNDING**

play by Leslie Anne Coats of Paola, KS.

crew of the produc-

High School drama students who had competed at local, state, and regional drama competitions in Kansas, to win the opportunity to perform the play at the National Thespian

Festival 2015 in Lin-

The cast and

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



coln, Nebraska. It was quite an honor for these young students as they had competed against much larger schools across the country (with much larger budgets) to be able to perform. The students did everything from fund raising to pay for the trip, to building the set, and transporting all their equipment, to setting up and striking the set as needed. When I met them they were understandably nervous with some stage gitters, but all enthusiastic and eager to shine.

The only two civilian women whose writings were included in Edelman's book were Red Cross "Donut Dollie" Jeanie "Sam" Christie, and Army Special Services Club Director Cathleen "Cathy" Cordova, both VVA members of long standing. "Sam" was played by Rebekah Hadle, and Jessie White played "Cathy". Both Rebekah and Jessie are intelligent young women of talent with bright futures. Not unlike the many "Sam" and "Cathy"s of the 60's. The young men portraying the soldiers are also very reminiscent of the young men we worked with in Vietnam so long ago...most of them gung-ho 17 to 19 year-olds with little life experience, but ready to do their duty and serve their country. The performance was emotionally intense...one could actually hear sniffles from the audience when P.J. Capettini spoke veteran Charles Dawson's heart-wrenching lines; thankfully there was needed comedic relief included as well.

I must admit sitting in the audience on opening night brought back "goosebumped" poignant memories of the Vietnam War, but also feelings of great pride for all veterans, especially our Vietnam Veterans. I highly recommend the play and the book.

### LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATE'S RE-

#### **PORT**

By Pete Conaty

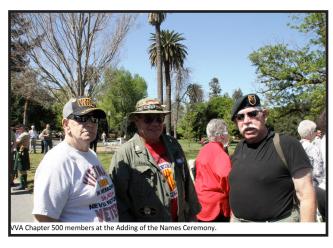
VVA CA State Council - it has been a busy and productive year so far for veterans issues at the State Capitol. The 2015-16 Legislative Session kicked off in January and as of this writing, we are tracking 80 Senate and Assembly bills for the VVA-CSC. The Council is sponsoring 1 bill, supporting 57, and watching 22. A comprehensive listing of these bills and their final status will be in the next issue of the Zephyr.



ne Names Ceremony

I would like to thank VVA-CSC Legislative Chair Ken Holybee for coming to the Capitol on numerous occasions to testify in support of legislation as well as to show the flag at key veterans events associated with the Legislature. VVA Chapter 500, Sacramento Valley, as always, has come through and supported every event and call for support we have worked on in and around the Capitol.

To date, in addition to legislation, the VVA-CSC has been involved in The Adding of the Names process and



ceremony for the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial, VVA Day at the Capitol, and the 8th Annual Veterans Recognition Luncheon. Also, the 3 year fight for funding for County Veterans Service Officers, of which the VVA-

CSC was a key supporter, was a success this year.

#### CALIFORNIA VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL Adding of the Names Ceremony

On March 29, the names of 32 California Veterans were engraved and unveiled at the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial. These names were added to the California memorial as a result of the efforts of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Honor Committee.

10 of those names were of California Veterans who were already etched into the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial located in Washington DC. 22 names were of California Veterans who died while aboard the USS Frank E. Evans when the ship sank in the South China Sea on June 3, 1969.

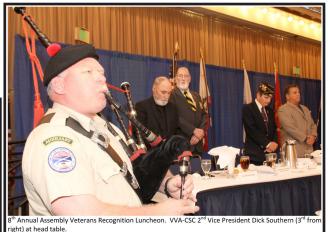
The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Honor Committee was created when Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. signed Assembly Bill 287 into law on September 6, 2013. The Committee is comprised of seven people and VVA members Al Sickle and Mike Kennedy serve on the committee. VVA member Lou Nunez serves as an alternate and Ken Holybee serves as Finance Chairman. I serve as an advisor to the committee.

The Committee is tasked with compiling a list of names of Vietnam Veterans from California to be added to the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The Committee is also tasked with including the names of California Veterans who later died as a result of illness or injuries, including physical or mental injuries documented by the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans

Affairs, or licensed medical professionals, that can reasonably be assumed to have resulted from military service in the Vietnam War. Under the provisions of the law, written by Assemblymember Jim Frazier, Jr., the Committee must compile a list of names to be added to the memorial by November 1 of each year.

#### VETERANS RECOGNITION LUNCHEON

The 8th Annual California Assembly Veterans Recognition Luncheon was held in Sacramento on June 25. Legislators from the California State Assembly choose



a veteran from their district to be honored as Veteran of the Year. Representing the State Council at this event were 2nd Vice President Dick Southern; District Directors Dean Gotham, Al Sickle, and Richard Segovia; and Legislative Committee Chair Ken Holybee; as well as Chapter 500 President Marty Snezek.

The VVA-CSC has been a major sponsor of this event since its inception. The California Veterans Benefit Fund has also been the funding coordinator for 7 years.

Over 65 legislators participated in this event. This raises the visibility of veterans issues amongst policy makers, as well as that of the VVA.

### **VVA DAY AT THE CAPITOL**

On May 13, the VVA-CSC joined with members of the California State Commanders Veterans Council for a combined All Veterans Day at the Capitol. We had a great representation of veterans from around the state and these attendees heard from legislative speakers and the leadership of the California Department of Veterans Affairs. In the afternoon, veterans circulated throughout the Capitol visiting their local legislators and delivering informational

packets regarding our positions on key veterans issues. The VVA-CSC also presented their 2014 Legislator of the Year awards to Senator Loni Hancock (D-Berkeley) and Assemblyman Marc Levine (D-San Rafael).

Senator Hancock was the author of SB 1227, which was subsequently signed into law by the Governor. SB 1227 allows for postponement of sentencing for veterans and military personnel for a misdemeanor charge until completion of treatment instead of prison under Penal code 1170.9.

Senator Hancock felt that this type of diversion program would reduce court and incarceration costs and help veterans avoid consequences of a conviction, including difficulty finding employment or housing. Should the defendant fail to complete the program, a judge could reengage the court's criminal proceedings.

Assemblyman Marc Levine, who earned his Master's Degree in National Security **Affairs** from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, authored AB 2098, which was signed into law by the Governor. AB 2098 requires judges to consider military



CSC 2014 Legislator of the Year.

status and mental health problems outlined in 1170.9 as factor in favor of granting probation. It also requires courts to consider military status and service induced mental health problems as a mitigating factor for offenses with determinate sentencing.

In crafting the bill, Levine noted that of the 2.6 million Americans returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan as many as 20% have PTSD, with the unfortunate consequence of an increased propensity for criminal behavior. He felt that there is a clear connection between PTSD and other combat related mental health problems and incarceration and as such the state must do more to recognize the role these mental health problems can play in criminal activity.

### Success, CVSO Funding approved!

The Governor signed the 2015-16 Budget on June 24. The permanent \$5,600,000 Local Assistance funding level for County Veterans Service Officers was approved. The VVA-CSC has been a strong supporter of this effort for the last three years. While we were successful in the last few years getting the funding for CVSO's raised to \$5.6 million, those allocations were for 1 year durations only. This year, due to the efforts of veterans statewide, the Legislature and the Governor decided to make this funding level permanent. The California Association of County Veterans Service Officers has asked me to convey their thanks to the VVA-CSC for their steadfast support in this effort.

This was a team effort and the following legislators and organizations are to be commended:

Assemblywoman Jacqui Irwin (D-Thousand Oaks), who as Chair of the Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs, carried AB 171 and moved the bill all the way to the Senate. AB 171 had 43 Senate and Assembly coauthors. Irwin and her staff were also able to secure 41 signatures on a letter to the Budget committees regarding support for the funding.

Speaker of the Assembly Toni Atkins (D-San Diego). Speaker Atkins understands the vital work the CVSO's do and has ensured that the Assembly has been in support of the funding increase since her tenure as Speaker.

Senator Jim Nielsen (R-Gerber) and Senator Ben Hueso (D-San Diego), Chair and Vice Chair of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs respectively, fought hard for us in gaining support in the Senate. The Senate had always been a hurdle for our past efforts to increase funding. Nielsen and Hueso went to bat for us by holding



Senator Loni Hancock (D-Berkeley) is presented with the VVA-CSC 2014 Legislator of the Year award by Ken Holybee, VA-CSC Legislative Chair.

an informational hearing on the good works that CVSO's do. In the final days of budget deliberations, Nielsen articulated the need for the funding in his role as one of the 6 members of the Legislature's Conference Committee, while Hueso worked with us to secure the signatures of 25 Senators from both parties on a letter of support for our efforts.

Veterans Service Organizations. The VSO's provided the grass roots, public support for the funding increase efforts. This is an extremely important point. The major Veterans Service Organizations such as the VVA-CSC, collectively represent well over a million Californian veterans and their dependents. Members of the VVA-CSC came to the Capitol numerous times to testify in support of our efforts. AB 171 was lobbied heavily during all of their Capitol Lobby Days. VVA members called, faxed, mailed, or e-mailed the Legislature and Governor at every stage of the process for the last 3 years on this subject. Widespread grassroots support is mandatory for budgetary allocations such as this.

CalVet. The California Department of Veterans Affairs supported this effort to the fullest extent possible and Acting Secretary Debbie Endsley and her team worked behind the scenes with the Governor's office to educate them on the importance of the CVSO's to California's veterans.

### **VIETNAM**

ONE OF THREE KINGDOMS OF INDOCHINA By Cathleen Cordova

After 40 plus years I return to Vietnam as a tourist, to tour the country and see the sights I was not permitted the



first time I was here during the war.

The tour begins with a cruise from Hong Kong to what used to be the communist held "North Vietnam" area of Hanoi and Ha Long Bay. I decide to go to Ha Long Bay instead of Hanoi as I do not intend to visit any of the locations or museums in Hanoi that remind me of the war, or that disseminate anti-American propaganda. I think it would be too sad and offensive to me still. I want to see the country, the people and the culture as it is today. From what I have seen already, it appears to be primarily a young, vibrant and capitalistic way of life, even if it is officially communist...how ironic.

Ha Long Bay is shrouded in fog and mist when we



arrive by bus to board our Junk boat for a tour of the bay. I wonder why they are called junks. It's early spring and the day is damp and chilly; not at all what I remembered Vietnam weather to be. I recall oppressive heat, and unrelent-

ing humidity. I'm glad I packed a jacket and warm scarf with me, I almost hadn't. The junk is crowded with tourists all jockeying for seats next to a window for a better view of the bay's unusual rock formations. Seen through the mist, the rocks look even more mysterious and wonderful than they do in travel posters. I am told that the word Long or Lang means dragon and the Vietnamese believe, according to folk lore, that they are descendants of a princess and a dragon god. And, the eerie rocks are said



to be a dragon that fell to earth and was turned to stone. A most enchanting tale...if you try, you can almost imagine the rocks being a dragon, or maybe a lochness monster? I'm the only one not to get out at the stop to explore a cave and grotto. The rocks look too wet and slippery to me, and I see no hand rails. I stay on board the boat with the hostess and enjoy the "bumper junk game" that goes on between all the junks trying to find a spot to park and wait. It's a wild ride as the junks ram each other with no mercy, bumping each other out of the way. The boats look old and made of timbers and I wonder how they can sustain such hard wear and tear. Many of them are scarred and gouged from their bumping skirmishes, but most are decorated with intricately carved dragon heads on the bow. While we wait for the other tourists to return, I'm served hot, sweet Vietnamese coffee, free of charge, while the crew haul out their woks and utensils and begin to prepare their lunch on board.

As I enjoy the warmth and aroma of my coffee I review my photos. I'm surprised...the junks and rocks look good in spite of, or perhaps because of the brooding weather conditions. I am pleased. I now have interesting photos to keep with my pleasant memories of this first day back in Vietnam, on a junk, in the middle of mysterious Ha Long Bay.

Now back to the cruise ship. Tomorrow it's Hue or Hoi An.

I opt for a visit to Hoi An instead of the ancient capital of Hue. Although I hear Hue is a gorgeous city, I prefer



to see a village. We board a bus and drive through the lush country side, past rice paddies and traditional village huts (more like the Vietnam I remember) to get to Hoi An located near the infamous Marble Mountain of war years. I'm told by an Army veteran that Hoi An was once a hot bed of Viet Cong activity, so I am surprised to learn that it was never bombed during the war and survives intact... a lovely little gem of a place. First stop is a silk factory where we are treated to the history of silk worm farming, and get to see the little creatures doing their thing before going on to see the hundreds of gorgeous skeins of colorful silk threads they produce. Then it's into the factory to watch the weaving of the threads into fine silk cloth. The silk will be used for clothing or embroidered into works of art by the army of young women seated at tables, bent over their handiwork, silk threaded needles in hand. I was taught to embroider as a child, but their work is truly intricate and exquisite. It makes me want to take up embroidery again.

On this lovely warm day as we leave the factory and go out into the sunny courtyard, I see a reminder of former days...a woman vendor in the traditional Vietnamese pointed hat, with baskets of beautifully carved fresh fruits, slung over her shoulders on a long pole. Forty years ago this would have been a common sight as everything seemed to be carted around in this fashion, from live ducks to children, but today it is a rare quaint sight. And behind her along the roadside was a row of brand new motorbike taxis on one side, and old fashioned cyclo-taxis on the other.

From the factory we proceed to the older section of Hoi An. We leave the bus behind to stroll down the narrow cobbled streets packed with motorbikes and pedestrians all in a hurry trying to avoid colliding into one another. Beep, beep! Look out you are about to be run over by a motor bike! This section of Hoi An is quite a busy commercial area lined with outdoor cafes, small hotels, clothing shops, and vending stalls offering all sorts of goods and souvenirs, from paper lanterns to freshly wokfried donuts. It's also the site of the 400 year-old Japanese bridge, the Chua Ong Pagoda and temple, and the Tan Ky ancient Vietnamese house. Seems Hoi An at one time had large populations of Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese all living in their own sections. The Thu Bon River flows through the village and is festooned along its banks by hundreds of colorful paper lanterns hung in the trees, and over the bridges that cross it. It's quite a cheerful sight. I want to sit in one of the cafes and enjoy the view with an iced Vietnamese coffee, but it's late and I need to start back to the bus.

"Hello Mamasan." I hear this from an older Vietnamese man wearing an O. D. green, old fashioned army jacket. I'm surprised and ask if he speaks English. He shyly smiles and shakes his head...apparently that is the extent of his English vocabulary, but signing he makes me understand that he will row me up river back toward my bus on his small rowboat. I wonder about that old army jacket he's wearing, was he at one time ARVN or Viet Cong? I'm intrigued, but finally I politely refuse his offer and walk back to the bus. It's waiting for me. I'm the last one to board. I regret having to leave Hoi An. It's been another wonderful experience. Next time, if there is one, I'd like to stay longer.

From here it's a short ride to a stately riverside villa/ restaurant overlooking a tropical garden for a delicious four course lunch; then on to Da Nang and a drive along resort-riddled China Beach. I learn that it is called China Beach because this is where the Chinese used to land when invading Vietnam in ancient times. It's also where the Marines landed. All that is left of that invasion is a few concrete structures at the side of the road that we're told used to shelter American military helicopters. China Beach is indeed a beautiful beach overlooked from a hilltop by a huge statue of Quan Yin, or the "White Buddha" as she is known here...the mother of Peace and Compassion. When we stop for photos, my traveling companion brings me a small baggie of sand, my souvenir of China Beach. (The

grains now rest in a tiny hand painted Chinese glass flask for safekeeping.) So ends another memory filled day in the kingdom of the dragons.

Tomorrow we visit a museum in Da Nang before cruising further South.

Da Nang is a city of busy highways and much new construction, most of it we are told financed now by Japan, but previously by the



Russians. The Cham Museum in downtown Da Nang houses the arts of the ancient Cham people of Vietnam. I see lots of pottery, stone carvings of dragons, gods, and temple dancers. They all seem to have been influenced more by art from India than China. The loveliest thing in the museum for me is in the courtyard. It's the fragrant and unusual-looking Frangipani trees. I've never seen one before. It's a strange tangle of branches with small soft flowers. Some of the petals are white, others slightly pink or lavender. My traveling companion picked a couple of blossoms for me and they smell heavenly. We're told the flowers are frequently used in making costly perfumes. Oh, to have a Frangipani tree on my patio!

Well, goodbye Da Nang. It's back to the ship now, and by tomorrow after breakfast it will be "Good Morning Saigon!"

Unlike other larger cruise ships, our smaller vessel is permitted to cruise right up the Mekong River and tie up at the Saigon docks. Yes, I know, it's now called Ho Chi Minh City, but it will always be Saigon to me...and to many of the locals as well as I will soon learn. I make it a point to be on the observation deck as we enter the harbor. Huge bridges, lots of land and river traffic, giant

warehouses can be seen along the shore. I don't recognize a thing, but my emotions are nonetheless strangely stirred as I come closer to the Vietnam of memory. I landed in Saigon the first time in 1968, in the middle of a war. But today, instead of M-16 toting young soldiers of yesteryear, I see young girls on the dock welcoming us. They are dressed in orange Aoi-Dais and bamboo hats... the traditional and very feminine attire of Vietnamese women that I remember. Unfortunately, this is the last I will see of that form of dress, as modern Vietnamese women now wear western fashions: tight jeans, high heels, T-shirts and sunglasses. Most drive brand new colorful motor scooters with matching helmets! The only other Aoi-Dai I see during my stay is on a baby girl at a temple. What a shame. The women used to look like petite fragile butterflies in their graceful Aoi-Dais. I used to envy their grace and beauty.

After docking we board brand new air-conditioned buses for a city tour of Saigon. I'm anxious to see how the city has changed, and if I recognize any of the places. I used to come to Saigon in "deuce and a half" armored truck convoys from nearby DiAn, or by armed Huey helicopters from Tay Ninh province. Once even having to ride on the outside, strapped in next to the gunner! About once a month, I or one of the other women I worked with at the Army Service Club, would hitchhike to Saigon by whatever means available to turn in our reports, and pick up supplies. It was only a day trip, but I always looked forward to getting into the noisy bustling city for PX shopping on base, and for wonder-

ful French food on the local economy. It was such a treat. Today we start with a stop at the Unification Palace Museum, once the palacial home of the former South Vietnamese Presidents, and the infamous Madam Nhu...also known as South Vietnam's "Dragon Lady." The palace looks very much the same from the outside. I'm surprised it is so modern inside—a lot of glass walls, marble interiors and modern plumbing. We are told it is all original. On the ground floor the throne room and conference rooms are sumptuously decorated in different styles. Those in Asian décor are my favorite rooms, especially the one with the



## THE COMEDY & MAGIC CLUB

### **South Bay Chapter 53 VVA**

www.vva53.org

**Present** 

A Night of "Fun & Laughter" Fundraiser

### Wednesday, 2 September 2015

Doors open at 6:30 P.M.

Must be seated by 7:30PM

SHOWTIME 8:00 P.M.





Two item minimum (e.g.: 2 drinks; 1 drink & 1 dinner) Minimum age 18 For seating and dinner, first come first serve!

Tickets must be purchased through Bob Chiota (310) 214-2014 or email: quaddipper@msn.com if you have any questions

Show Tickets \$20.00 Cash or Checks

Make checks payable to South Bay Chapter 53 VVA, a 501-C-19

### Deadline for Tickets 8/22/2015 by noon

YOU must call CMC, with your ticket number & name to complete your reservation!



THE COMEDY & MAGIC CLUB 1018 Hermosa Ave., Hermosa Beach, CA. 90254 (310) 372-1193

http://www.comedyandmagicclub.com

All ticket sale proceeds will support local Veteran and Community Activities Thank you to "The Comedy & Magic Club" for their support !!!

> red velvet and gold dragon carpet near the entrance. Dur- huge statue of two ARVN (South Vietnamese soldiers) ing the war years, the president and his family lived on that used to stand in the square has been replaced by one the upper floors of the palace, and the basement housed of Ho Chi Minh. And the old Continental Hotel where we the war room used by the military where you can still see their maps and old style communications equipment. Outside on the immense grounds surrounding the palace are parked the North Vietnamese tanks that "liberated" Saigon at the end of the war. Everyone wants to have their pictures taken in front of the tanks. No thanks, not me!

Now back on the bus to catch a traditional water puppets show. The museum is busy as the children from the Australian Embassy School are here on a field trip. After enjoying the splashy water show we're back on the bus headed for the old square, the center of Saigon where we get time to explore on our own for a while. I recognize the Notre Dame Catholic Cathedral although it appears to need some repairs on its bell towers. War damage perhaps? I am disappointed not to be able to go inside. I'm told there is a wedding about to begin, and indeed as I watch, the bride arrives in her white western style wedding dress. I was hoping she would be in the traditional red Aoi-Dai with the gold crown headdress, but I guess that is only worn for civil or Buddhist ceremonies nowadays. Too bad. The Post Office Bldg. looks the same from the outside, but inside it's an indoor market with beau coup shops and a huge portrait on the wall of "Uncle Ho." The used to sit in the open air cafe to enjoy French drip coffee and to people watch is now enclosed. The Continental along with the Caravelle and the Rex, which the military and journalists frequented in days gone by, are all renovated, luxury hotels today, with lobby shops the likes of Dior, Gucci, and Tiffany. That's a huge change, as are the myriad high rise apartment and commercial buildings all over Saigon...some even have helipads extending out the sides of the taller buildings. Amazing!



Summer 2015 page five

From the square we head out to the Chinese section of town called Cholon. During the war it was a dangerous place to navigate as it was known for its violence and frequent terrorist bombings. Cholon then as now, had many markets and inexpensive shopping; however, as Army employees, we were forbidden to shop there. Today it's a safe colorful market as crowded and vibrant as ever.

On our second day in Saigon we are given a choice of a free day to do as we wish, or another 12-hour tour by bus to the Mekong Delta. I have had my fill of bus riding for the time being so I opt to stay in Saigon. As I told my traveling companion, all I remember about Vinh Long and the Delta is the mud, bugs and snakes that live there, so I'm not enticed to see it again. Instead, I plan to take a leisurely walk through downtown Saigon, and enjoy a drink and lunch at the top of the Rex Hotel for old time's sake. The buses for the Delta leave at 6 am... I sleep in and have a leisurely breakfast on the ship before heading off to explore the motor scooter congested streets of Saigon. The spring day is gorgeous but hot and humid. I'm glad I'm wearing linen which is cooler than synthetic fabrics, but already I look wrinkled and rumpled as if I'd slept in my outfit. Oh well, it can't be helped. I window shop through the Continental Hotel arcade as there is nothing here I can afford--everything is too expensive for my budget. I notice that most of the affluent shoppers around me are Russian, Chinese or Japanese. I decide to head to the Rex Hotel and relax for a while in their air-conditioned, flower-filled lobby before finding the elevators to the famous (or perhaps infamous) outdoor garden restaurant on the roof. It is said that journalists and American Embassy personnel spent many evenings "at the top of the Rex" drinking and watching the war from a safe distance. Hard to believe perhaps, but I know it's true...got it straight from a friend who was an Embassy Secretary who partied there.

Today I am the only customer for lunch so far. I have the whole place to myself so I wander about looking over all four sides of the building taking photos as I go. In the corner on a small stage is a huge gold painted crown (insignia of the Rex no doubt) and a huge purple statue of a dancing elephant. With all the drinking and partying this place has seen over the decades, I wouldn't be surprised if sightings of pink elephants weren't more common, but purple?

It's time for a drink of my own before lunch. My friendly English-speaking waitress suggests I try a Blue Dragon or a Saigon Beauty. I order the Saigon Beauty; it arrives in a stemmed cocktail glass and is the color of sapphires. Don't know what's in it, but it tastes heavenly...I might have another one. Maybe my elephant will be blue, you think? I'd better order lunch: a small salad, shrimp in green curry sauce, mango ice cream and coffee for dessert. The food presentation was not only lovely to look at, but quite delicious...better than the food served on the ship.

By now my curious young waitress has learned that I was in Saigon over 40 years ago and wants to know what I think of it today. I tell her I am astounded at how modern it has become. Gone are the old bicycles, rickshaws, tiny French cabs, Aoi-Dais and street vendors that I remember. She smiles and says "Modern is better." Later with my bill she brings me a Blue Dragon "on the house." She says, "Thank you and welcome back. I hope your memories of Vietnam are good ones this time." "They are now" I reply. I am so glad I came back to see the country and the people as they are today, peaceful, happy, prosperous. I just hope that the two little abandoned Amer-Asian children I used to visit in the Tay Ninh orphanage are among them.

I return to the ship, in time to see the buses from the Delta tour unloading their tired, sunburnt, mosquito bitten passengers. "I told you so," I tease my friend as he shows me a photo of himself with a huge white snake wrapped around his neck. Yikes!

Tomorrow we depart Vietnam for Singapore. I am sad. I feel as though a part of me was lost here decades ago. What "it" is I'm not sure, youth, innocence? I don't know, but I must leave again without it. And, I admit it will be harder to go this time than last. Perhaps because I feel I may never return, or because even though I wanted to be simply a tourist this trip, I can't help thinking of times gone by—and of all the young soldiers whose blood is in the soil of this lush country. A beautiful country now at peace...I truly wish all Vietnam Veterans could experience peace for themselves in this exotic land of the dragons.

### **CHAPTER 756 ART CONTEST**

For the last nine years Chapter #756 has sponsored a Patriotic Art Contest at Woodbridge High school in Irvine and has donated \$1600.00 in scholarship money to students The 1st place winner and 2nd place winner and

the group picture of all involved and Chapter #1024 Greg Gillaspy, Betty Gillaspy and Max and Conrad











# VA unveils housing for 65 homeless veterans

The smile never left Keith Hudson's face, even when he spoke of his divorce and his descent into alcoholism and homelessness. In his blue dress shirt, tie and slacks, he could have passed for the paralegal that he once was and hopes to be again.

Hudson, 52, now has a home, a job and a future — all because of an effort launched more than a decade ago to convert an underused building on the West Los Angeles Veterans Affairs campus into residences for chronically homeless veterans in need of medical or mental health

treatment.

"When I walked into this building," the Army veteran said, "it was like one of those movies when you walk through a cloud and you're like: 'Whoa! Wow!' Everything was state of the art, brand new. It's like an apartment complex and a five-star hotel combined into one, with all the amenities."

After years of debate, inaction, funding delays and a high-profile lawsuit filed on behalf of veterans, Building 209 — the newest housing for veterans on the campus — finally had its unveiling last week.

It features a soaring atrium entrance, a fitness room, a large kitchen where vets can learn culinary skills, communal sitting areas, Wi-Fi and 55 single- and double-occupancy units that will house a total of 65 veterans. A few units on the upper floor have ocean views. Twenty women will live in a secure wing with an exit to a "serenity garden."

Leo A. Daly, a noted architectural firm, designed the \$20-million renovation and seismic upgrade of the 51,000-square-foot building, one of many on the campus that the federal government has deemed historic. The work took about two years.

Outside, stairways and ramps lead through a nascent garden to the entrance. The three-story building, which had long sat nearly empty, stands in stark contrast to much of the rest of the largely neglected campus.

Hudson's furnished one-bedroom apartment comes with a TV, a living room and a kitchen, where the amateur chef intends to spend much of his time perfecting recipes taught him by his Chinese, Cherokee and African American relatives.

Los Angeles County has long had the largest concentration of homeless veterans in the country — more than 4,300 in the latest count. Two-thirds of them live in the city.

Badly needed veterans home sits half empty; no kitchen is a problem

Badly needed veterans home sits half empty; no kitchen is a problem

Hudson routinely slept on benches in the western San Fernando Valley, counting on his martial arts skills to fend off danger. About a year ago, he entered a rehabilitation program at the VA and lived in a domiciliary with five roommates.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert A. McDonald, who attended the opening, said that after starting his job in July, he looked into the 2011 lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union and Public Counsel against the West Los Angeles VA. The suit alleged that the VA was failing to live up to its obligation to use the land to provide housing.

While serving as a Santa Monica city councilman, Bobby Shriver helped propel the litigation. McDonald, the retired chief executive of Procter & Gamble, and Shriver's brother Tim are friends, and McDonald said the family connection contributed to his interest.

"It didn't make sense," McDonald said of the lawsuit.
"We were being sued for not caring for veterans, which is our mission."

McDonald sat the two sides down and in January announced a legal settlement under which the VA agreed to transform the sprawling campus into a center of permanent housing for homeless veterans and to curtail the controversial practice of leasing VA facilities to corporations and other non-government entities.

The opening of Building 209 marked a tangible step forward, he said. Veterans staying at the facility will receive job training and supportive services, with the goal of moving into permanent housing elsewhere. And they will be paid for the work they do. Hudson, for example, is a housekeeper in the VA hospital on the campus.

Where are L.A. County's homeless?

Where are L.A. County's homeless?

Two nearby buildings -205 and 208 - are also to become transitional housing.

"Have we solved the problem of homelessness in Los Angeles? No," McDonald said. "Are we making progress? Yes."

Local and federal officials have made a commitment to ending veterans' homelessness in the county by the end of the year as part of a national goal led by the Obama administration.

On Friday, McDonald, Mayor Eric Garcetti and the United Way of Greater Los Angeles kicked off an effort to identify 1,000 new units this year for veterans in need of housing. In a statement, they said a commitment from market-rate landlords willing to accept veterans with housing vouchers would be the "critical last step" to housing veterans who are already on the streets and others who will become homeless.

More than a decade ago, Shriver helped lead the push

Summer 2015 page six





State of California



#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: June 30, 2015

HCD Contact: Evan Gerberding 916-263-7400

evan.gerberding@hcd.ca.gov

CalVet Contact: Paul Sullivan 916-651-2147

paul.sullivan@calvet.ca.gov

### Nearly 700 Homeless Veterans Expected to Benefit from 1<sup>st</sup> Round of Prop. 41 Grants

**Sacramento** – Nearly 700 low-income and homeless Veterans and their families will benefit from affordable housing opportunities announced today by three state agencies. Seventeen projects throughout California will receive funding through Proposition 41 and the Veterans Housing and Homeless Prevention Program (VHHP).

"With cities statewide pushing to meet the national goal of ending Veteran's homelessness, this funding could not have come at a better time," said HUD Regional Administrator Ophelia Basgal. "These targeted investments will leverage HUD housing assistance and VA support services to end the homelessness of hundreds of veterans and their families across California."

Today's announcement by the California Department of Housing and Community Development, the California Department of Veterans Affairs, and the California Housing Finance Agency represents the first round of funding through Proposition 41 and the VHHP and will be directed to 17 housing developments statewide (see list below). The majority of these developments have committed to providing intensive supportive services responsive to Veterans' individual needs, such as case management, drug and alcohol counseling, health clinics, disability benefit advocacy, as well as family and childcare services.

"California is moving a giant step forward in assisting our homeless Veterans," said California Department of Veterans Affairs Deputy Secretary Theresa Gunn. "This team effort will give more Veterans access to affordable, stable housing options."

A second round of awards is expected to be available this fall, providing additional opportunities to apply for and receive funds for the acquisition, construction, rehabilitation, and preservation of affordable multifamily housing for California's Veterans and their families.

"We are working to reduce Veteran homelessness all over California," said California Department of Housing and Community Development Acting Director Susan Riggs. "This funding focuses on the specific housing, financial challenges and other supportive services needed over the long term for low-income and homeless Veterans."

In October 2013, the Governor signed AB 639, which authorized \$600 million in general obligation bonds to provide for the acquisition, construction, rehabilitation and preservation of affordable multifamily permanent, transitional and supportive housing for low-income and homeless Veterans. In June 2014, California voters approved Proposition 41, providing funding for the program.

### Veterans Housing and Homeless Prevention Program Funding Awards Round 1, \$62 Million Awarded, June 30, 2015

Project Name	Project City & Zip Code	VHHP Amount	Sponsor Name
FLOR 401 Lofts	Los Angeles, 90014	\$5,715,639	Skid Row Housing Trust
Illinois Avenue Apartments	Beaumont, 92223	\$3,812,676	LINC Community Development Corporation
Liberty Lane Apartments	Redlands, 92374	\$2,619,328	A Community of Friends
Loma Linda Vets	Loma Linda, 92354	\$3,800,000	Meta Housing Corporation
March Veterans Village	March JPA, 92518	\$8,165,937	Coachella Valley Housing Coalition
Marina Veterans/VTC Phase 2	Marina, 93933	\$5,900,000	EAH Inc.
Mather Veterans Village Phase 2	Rancho Cordova, 95655	\$2,489,944	Veterans Resource Centers of America
Mission Cove Family 1	Oceanside, 92054	\$995,796	National CORE
Palo Verde Apartments	El Monte, 91732	\$3,505,710	Hollywood Community Housing
Park Avenue Veterans Apartments	Pomona, 91768	\$6,613,415	AMCAL Enterprises, Inc.
PATH Metro Villas Phase 2	Los Angeles, 90004	\$3,338,507	PATH Ventures
Poppy Gardens	Lancaster, 93536	\$1,325,000	Clifford Beers Housing, Inc.
Skid Row Southeast 1	Los Angeles, 90021	\$1,278,050	Skid Row Housing Trust
South West View Apartments	Los Angeles, 90016	\$2,340,000	New Directions Housing LLC
Tabora Gardens Senior Apartments	Antioch, 94509	\$5,246,781	Satellite Affordable Housing Associates
Valley View Senior Homes	American Canyon, 94503	\$2,813,562	Satellite Affordable Housing Associates
Whittier Place Apartments Phase 2	Los Angeles, 90023	\$2,916,686	East LA Community Corporation

to earmark Building 209 and two other underused struc-



tures on the campus for housing. At the time, he thought the transformation would be easy, but it took years to get just one up and running.

In a posting on Facebook, Shriver said he was thrilled to see the results but added that he felt sad and angry — "sad for all the vets who needed this housing over the decades that the building stood vacant.... Angry because political leaders had the power to make this happen decades ago!"

As Hudson surveyed his spacious, clean quarters, it was clear that sadness and anger had been replaced by relief and joy — and the possibility that he might soon return to the paralegal work he enjoyed in years past. "It feels so good," he said.

martha.groves@latimes.com

# VA MISMANAGED WEST L.A. CAMPUS, GAO SAYS BY MARTHA GROVES

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has mismanaged its West Los Angeles campus by under-billing for land use agreements and by improperly diverting funds, according to a Government Accountability Office report issued Wednesday.

The GAO found weaknesses in the billing and collection processes for so-called sharing agreements at three VA medical centers, including the sprawling, 387-acre campus between Westwood and Brentwood. The VA has leased portions of its land to theater operators, a hotel laundry service, a private school for use as tennis courts, UCLA for a baseball field and an entertainment company for set storage.

Saying that they were deeply disturbed by the findings, three Democratic lawmakers from California urged Robert McDonald, the new chief of the VA, to act quickly to bring all land use agreements into compliance with federal laws and policies, and to recover revenue that the West L.A. Veterans Affairs Medical Center did not collect, or misused, and ensure that it be used for veterans' medical care.

"It is clear to us that the West Los Angeles [VA] violated federal law and shortchanged veterans in Southern California," said Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer and Rep. Henry A. Waxman.

The GAO, the auditing arm of Congress, identified instances in which potentially millions of dollars in land use revenue went uncollected by the West Los Angeles VA. In addition, it found that the campus inappropriately coded some billings so that proceeds of more than \$500,000 were sent to its facilities account.

According to the facility's chief fiscal officer, the GAO report said, these proceeds were mainly used to fund maintenance salaries. That's a violation of VA policy, which requires that such revenue be deposited into the medical care appropriations account that benefits veterans.

The West Los Angeles VA initially told the GAO that sharing agreements produced about \$700,000 in revenue in fiscal 2012, but the GAO concluded that the agreements should have generated \$1.5 million.

"They couldn't figure out the number of active agreements or revenues," said Steve Lord, the GAO's managing director of forensic audits and investigative service. "In some cases, they didn't bill the entities correctly."

The report, which also looked at facilities in North Chicago and New York, is the latest blow to the veterans agency, which has been under intense congressional scrutiny because of reports that veterans had to wait months for medical appointments and that VA medical centers were covering up the delays.

The West Los Angeles VA has long been in the crosshairs of veterans advocates. In 2011, the ACLU Foundation of Southern California in Los Angeles and others filed suit on behalf of veterans, alleging misuses of the West Los Angeles campus and failure to provide adequate

housing and treatment for homeless veterans.

In 2012, a VA accountant pleaded guilty to theft of government funds after an investigation determined that \$681,000 of VA funds had been embezzled.

In August 2013, a federal judge ruled that the VA had abused its discretion by leasing land for purposes "totally divorced from the provision of healthcare." The VA appealed the ruling, as did UCLA and the private Brentwood School. The case is now in mediation.

The GAO report made six recommendations for improving billing, data reliability and monitoring of land-use agreements. The VA said it generally agreed with the report's findings and concurred with the recommendations.

A congressional hearing on the report is scheduled for Friday in Washington.

martha.groves@latimes.com

### **C-123 Crews & AO**

VA Expands Disability Benefits for Air
Force Personnel Exposed to Contaminated
C-123 Aircraft

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today published a new regulation that expands eligibility for some benefits for a select group of Air Force Veterans and Air Force Reserve personnel who were exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange through regular and repeated contact with contaminated C-123 aircraft that had been used in Vietnam as part of Operation Ranch Hand (ORH).

VA published this regulation as an interim final rule so that it could immediately begin providing benefits to eligible Air Force veterans and Air Force Reserve personnel who submit a disability compensation claim for any of the 14 medical conditions that have been determined by VA to be related to exposure to Agent Orange.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald made the decision to expand benefits following receipt of a 2015 report by the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine (IOM) on Post-Vietnam Dioxin Exposure in Agent Orange-Contaminated C-123 Aircraft. This VA-requested report found evidence that as many as 1,500 to 2,100 Air Force and Air Force Reserve personnel who served as flight, medical and ground maintenance crew



members on ORH C-123 aircraft previously used to spray Agent Orange in Vietnam were exposed to the herbicide.

"Opening up eligibility for this deserving group of Air Force veterans and reservists is the right thing to do," said Secretary McDonald. "We thank the IOM for its thorough review that provided the supporting evidence needed to ensure we can now fully compensate any former crew member who develops an Agent Orange-related disability."

Under this new rule, Air Force and Air Force Reserve flight, medical and ground maintenance crewmembers who served on the contaminated ORH C-123s are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides during their service, thus making it easier for them to establish entitlement for some VA benefits if they develop an Agent Orange-related presumptive condition. In addition, for affected Air Force Reserve crew members, VA will presume that their Agent Orange-related condition had its onset during their Reserve training. This change ensures that these reservists are eligible for VA disability compensation and medical care for any Agent Orange-related presumptive condition, and that their surviving dependents are eligible for dependency and indemnity compensation and burial benefits.

The interim final rule can be found on the Federal Register: www.federalregister.gov/public-inspection. VA will immediately begin processing claims and issuing benefits to eligible Air Force crew members.

VA encourages reservists who were assigned to flight, ground or medical crew duties at Lockbourne/Rickenbacker Air Force Base in Ohio (906th and 907th Tactical Air Groups or 355th and 356th Tactical Airlift Squadron), Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts (731st Tactical Air Squadron and 74th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron) or Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, International Airport (758th Airlift Squadron) during the period 1969 to 1986, and developed an Agent Orange-related disability to file a disability compensation claim online through the joint VA-Department of Defense web portal, eBenefits (https://

www.ebenefits.va.gov/).

VA also has identified several active duty locations where ORH C-123 aircraft may have been used following their service in Vietnam. Active duty personnel who served in a regular USAF unit location where a contaminated C-123 was assigned and who had regular and repeated contact with the aircraft through flight, ground or medical duties during the period 1969 to 1986, and who develop an Agent Orange-related disability, also are encouraged to apply for benefits. For more information on applying for these benefits, including the affected units, Air Force Specialty Codes and dates of service for affected crew members, and a listing of Agent Orange-related conditions, visit www.benefits.va.gov/COMPENSA-TION/claims-postservice-agent\_orange.asp.

In order to avoid unnecessary delay of benefits, claimants should annotate "(C-123)" after each Agent Orange related disability in Part II, Block 14 of VA Form 21-526 or Section I, Block 11 of VA

Form VA Form 21-526EZ when filing on eBenefits. Example: Diabetes (C-123). If claimants have any of the following documents, they should be attached to their application:

- \* Discharge, separation papers, (DD214 or equivalent)
- \* USAF Form 2096 (unit where assigned at the time of the training action)
- \* USAF Form 5 (aircraft flight duties)
- \* USAF Form 781 (aircraft maintenance duties)
- \* Dependency records (marriage & children's birth certificates)
- \* Medical evidence (doctor & hospital reports)

VA will process all claims related to C-123 exposure at the St. Paul, Minnesota, VA Regional Office. Claims not filed through eBenefits should be mailed to the following address (or faxed to 608-373-6694):

Department of Veterans Affairs

Claims Intake Center

Attention: C123 Claims

PO Box 5088

Janesville, WI 53547-5088

Individuals with specific benefit questions related to herbicide exposure on C-123s may call VA's special C-123 Hotline at 1-800-749-8387 (available 8 a.m. -- 9 p.m. EST) or e-mail VSCC123.VAVBASPL@va.gov.

### FEMALE VET SUICIDE RATE

SUICIDE RATE OF FEMALE MILITARY VETERANS IS CALLED 'STAGGERING'

By Alan Zarembo - alan.zarembo@latimes.com

New government research shows that female military veterans commit suicide at nearly six times the rate of other women, a startling finding that experts say poses disturbing questions about the backgrounds and experiences of women who serve in the armed forces.

Their suicide rate is so high that it approaches that of male veterans, a finding that surprised researchers because men generally are far more likely than women to commit suicide

"It's staggering," said Dr. Matthew Miller, an epidemiologist and suicide expert at Northeastern University who was not involved in the research. "We have to come to grips with why the rates are so obscenely high."

Though suicide has become a major issue for the military over the last decade, most research by the Pentagon and the Veterans Affairs Department has focused on men, who account for more than 90% of the nation's 22 million former troops. Little has been known about female veteran suicide.

The rates are highest among young veterans, the VA found in new research compiling 11 years of data. For women ages 18 to 29, veterans kill themselves at nearly 12 times the rate of non veterans.

In every other age group, including women who served as far back as the 1950s, the veteran rates are between four and eight times higher, indicating that the causes extend far beyond the psychological effects of the recent wars.

The data include all 173,969 adult suicides — men and women, veterans and non veterans — in 23 states between 2000 and 2010.

It is not clear what is driving the rates. VA researchers and experts who reviewed the data for The Times said there were myriad possibilities, including whether the military had disproportionately drawn women at higher suicide risk and whether sexual assault and other traumatic experiences while serving played a role.

Whatever the causes, the consistency across age groups suggests a long-standing pattern.

"We've been missing something that now we can see," said Michael Schoenbaum, an epidemiologist and military suicide researcher at the National Institute of Mental Health who was not part of the work.

The 2011 death of 24-year-old Katie Lynn Cesena is one of a dozen cases The Times identified in Los Angeles and San Diego counties. Cesena's death highlights two likely factors in the rates.

First, she had reported being raped by a fellow service member. The Pentagon has estimated that 10% of women in the military have been raped while serving and another 13% subject to unwanted sexual contact, a deep-rooted problem that has gained attention in recent years as more victims come forward.

The distress forced Cesena out of the Navy, said her mother, Laurie Reaves.

She said her daughter was being treated for post-traumatic stress disorder and depression at the VA Medical Center in San Diego and lived in fear of her purported rapist — who was never prosecuted — and his friends.

Cesena had started writing a memoir and shared the beginning on Facebook. "I would like to dedicate this



book to the United States Navy and all the men and women who have bravely served our country with humility and have been raped and were brave enough to tell someone, whether anything came of it or not," she wrote.

The second factor was Cesena's use of a gun, a method typically preferred by men.

In the general population, women attempt suicide more often than men but succeed less because women usually use pills or other methods that are less lethal than firearms. Female veterans, however, are more likely than other women to have guns, government surveys have shown.

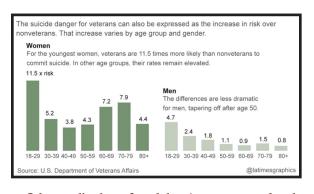
In the new data, VA researchers found that 40% of the female veterans who committed suicide used guns, compared with 34% of other women — enough of a difference to have a small effect on the rates.

Another area of interest to researchers is the backgrounds of women who join the military.

Female service members have always been volunteers, and their elevated suicide rates across all generations may be part of a larger pattern. Male veterans 50 and older — the vast majority of whom served during the draft era, which ended in 1973 — had roughly the same suicide rates as non veteran men their age. Only younger male veterans, who served in the all-volunteer force, had rates that exceeded those of other men.

The differences suggest that the suicide rates may have more to do with who chooses to join the military than what happens during their service, said Claire Hoffmire, the VA epidemiologist who led the research. A more definitive explanation would require information not included in the data, such as when each veteran served and for how long.

Hoffmire pointed to recent research showing that men and women who join the military are more likely to have endured difficult childhoods, including emotional and sexual abuse.



Other studies have found that Army personnel — before enlistment — had elevated rates of suicidal thinking, attempts and various mental health problems. Those studies did not break out the numbers for women.

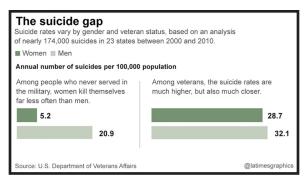
Though the U.S. military has long provided camaraderie and a sense of purpose to men, it has been a harsher place for women. "They lack a sense of belonging," said Leisa Meyer, a historian at the College of William and Mary in Virginia and an expert on women in the military.

The Pentagon capped the number of women at 2% of the total military until 1967. Women trained in separate units until the late 1970s. Historically, they were nurses, which in wartime meant exposure to trauma.

In Afghanistan and Iraq, where roadside bombs were

common, women suffered unprecedented numbers of casualties. But Defense Department data show their active-duty suicide rate did not rise — a sharp contrast to men, who saw their rate double.

The new data, which cover about half the veteran population, show that suicide rates rise sharply after ser-



vice members leave the military.

In all, 40,571 men and 2,637 women identified as veterans through military records killed themselves over the 11 years in the data. The overall results were published online last month in the journal Psychiatric Services.

Suicide rates are usually expressed as the annual number of deaths for every 100,000 people. For male veterans, that figure was 32.1, compared with 20.9 for other men.

The numbers were much further apart for women: 28.7 for veterans and 5.2 for everybody else.

A stratification of the data by age group — which was provided to The Times — shows that young veterans face the greatest risk.

Among men 18 to 29 years old, the annual number of suicides per 100,000 people were 83.3 for veterans and 17.6 for non veterans.

The numbers for women in that age group: 39.6 and

The differences between female veterans and other women are less extreme in older age groups but still considered alarmingly high by researchers.

The states in the study represent about half the nation's veterans but did not include California.

In the local cases identified by The Times, one pattern stood out: Several women had been discharged early for psychiatric or medical problems.

A back injury forced out Sara Leatherman in 2009 and continued to cause her pain. She was also suffering from traumatic memories of maiming and death she witnessed as a medic in Iraq, said her grandmother, Virginia Umbaugh.

Leatherman was 24, attending community college in La Mesa in San Diego County and receiving treatment for PTSD when she hanged herself in her grandmother's shower in 2010, Umbaugh said.

The war, however, was not the only factor. Leatherman had tried to kill herself with pills while stationed in Texas, before going to Iraq, said Umbaugh, who raised her. "I don't think there's any one answer," she said.

In other cases, veteran status seemed almost incidental, with decades passing since military service and no clear link to the broken relationships, financial problems, mental health troubles and other disappointments that can accumulate in the course of a life.

Linda Raney was 65 years old in 2011 and dealing with problems that mounted for several years: the death of her sister in a car accident, money and health difficulties.

She was living with an aunt in Acton and was disappointed that she didn't meet the financial requirements for the VA to help her get her own place.

"She didn't want to be a burden on her aunt," said her nephew, Kevin Pearcy. One afternoon, she called him to say goodbye, then committed suicide with prescription pills.

She had never talked much about her time in the Air Force.

"I don't know her specialty," Pearcy said. "She was very young."

### VVA NATIONAL CHAIR: PTSD/SUBSTANCE

### ABUSE COMMITTEE

"The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 1 million people die each year from suicide. What drives so many individuals to take their own lives? To those not in the grips of suicidal depression and despair, it's difficult to understand what drives so many individuals to take their own lives. But a suicidal person is in so much pain that he or she can see no other option.

Suicide is a desperate attempt to escape suffering that has become unbearable. Blinded by feelings of self-loathing, hopelessness, and isolation, a suicidal person can't see any way of finding relief except through death. But despite their desire for the pain to stop, most suicidal people are deeply conflicted about ending their own lives. They

wish there was an alternative to committing suicide, but they just can't see one." - Helpguide.org

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SUICIDE FALSE: People who talk about suicide won't really do it.

Almost everyone who commits or attempts suicide has given some clue or warning. Do not ignore suicide threats. Statements like "you'll be sorry when I'm dead," "I can't see any way out," - no matter how casually or jokingly said may indicate serious suicidal feelings.

FALSE: Anyone who tries to kill him/herself must be crazy.

Most suicidal people are not psychotic or insane. They must be upset, grief-stricken, depressed or despairing, but extreme distress and emotional pain are not necessarily signs of mental illness.

FALSE: If a person is determined to kill him/herself, nothing is going to stop them.

Even the most severely depressed person has mixed feelings about death, wavering until the very last moment between wanting to live and wanting to die. Most suicidal people do not want death; they want the pain to stop. The impulse to end it all, however overpowering, does not last forever.

FALSE: People who commit suicide are people who were unwilling to seek help.

Studies of suicide victims have shown that more than half had sought medical help in the six months prior to their deaths.

FALSE: Talking about suicide may give someone the idea.

You don't give a suicidal person morbid ideas by talking about suicide. The opposite is true - bringing up the subject of suicide and discussing it openly is one of the most helpful things you can do.

Source: SAVE - Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

No One is Immune

One of the greatest risks for suicide is experiencing depression.

Depression can affect ANYONE at anytime. The rich, poor, every race, every culture, every country, men, women, young, old...

1 in 10 Americans report having depression. -CDC

Depression affects more than 23 million Americans every year. -Depression/Bipolar Support Alliance

An estimated 350 million are depressed globally. -World Health Organization (WHO)

Learn from Others DEDICATED to Suicide Awareness:

.. A Family Story: General Mark & Carol Graham

The true story of a military family that lost two sons one to suicide and one in combat - and devoted their lives to fighting the military's suicide epidemic.

Major General Mark Graham is a decorated two-star officer whose integrity and patriotism inspired his sons, Kevin and Jeff, to pursue military careers of their own.

When Kevin and Jeff die within nine months of one another, Mark and his wife Carol find [http://ih.constantcontact.com/fs113/1102516344356/img/1408. jpg] themselves reeling after the loss of two of their three children. Kevin, a student enrolled in the University of Kentucky's Reserve Officers' Training Corps program committed suicide. Jeff, serving in the Arm as a second lieutenant, died as a result of an IED attack in Iraq.

As Mark & Carol Graham begin to gather their bearings and contemplate a life without their sons, they must also come to terms with the terrible stigma that surrounds suicide in the military.

The Grahams commit themselves to fighting the military's suicide epidemic and making sure that the families of troops are treated with dignity and compassion.

Their efforts put them in direct conflict with the entrenched military bureaucracy that considered mental health problems to be a display of weakness and that refused to acknowledge, until far too late, the severity of the suicide problem.

The Grahams refuse to back down, using the pain and grief from their sons' death to inspire them to fight as they work to change the institution that is the cornerstone of their lives and this country.

The Grahams Today...

Since their boys' deaths, the Grahams have remained an Army family with a mission and purpose to make the world a better place. Although still healing, the Grahams have become advocates for soldiers who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury and Suicide Prevention. They have also done tremendous work serving the families left behind following a loss of a son or daughter to suicide.

[http://ih.constantcontact.com/fs113/1102516344356/img/1410.jpg] Carol Graham

speaks regularly to share their message of hope and the couple remain committed to removing the stigma of mental health issues and operate as a force in the suicide prevention movement.

"I'm sad this is our story, " Carol said in a recent interview, "but I just have to believe in what we do with our story - maybe we can help save somebody else's child."

Major General Mark Graham said: "As an Army and as a Nation, we must get in front of suicide, work to prevent it by action, not just figure it out after the fact."

The Grahams work to change how the Army treats those with PTSD and to erase the stigma that prevents suicidal troops from getting the help they need before making the darkest of choices." -Amazon.com

The Grahams story and this look into the military suicide epidemic was penned by author Yochi Dreazen. Dreazen is one of the most respected military journalists in the country, with credentials that include The Wall Street Journal's youngest-ever bureau chief and senior national security correspondent at the National Journal. He is currently the deputy editor for news at Foreign Policy.

"This book begins fast and accelerates, telling an astonishing tale of contemporary America. When you read this book, you will likely come away feeling that General Graham and his wife Carol are American heroes-different types than we normally are told about, but true heroes still." -Thomas E. Ricks, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and author of Fiasco & The Generals

A First-Responder: Sgt. Kevin Briggs

From Sgt. Briggs TED talk (1.5 million views and counting) - "In a sobering, deeply personal talk Briggs shares stories from those he's spoken - and listened - to standing on the edge of life. He gives a powerful piece of advice to those with loved ones who might be contemplating suicide."

Sgt. Briggs is the 2013 recipient of the Jefferson Award, the Outstanding Officer Award (by ASIS) and the California State Senate Resolution Recipient. He is also known as "The Guardian of the Golden Gate Bridge" for the countless lives he's saved simply by being there.

"People who come to jump [off the Golden Gate Bridge] don't necessarily want to die," [http://ih.constantcontact.com/fs113/1102516344356/img/1401. jpg] Sgt. Briggs said, citing years of cold, rainy and fog-filled days when he approaches those who step to the edge of the bridge, looking down.

Sgt. Briggs began his career in 1987 and in 1990, he began his work on the Golden Gate Bridge, a prominent site for those seeking to end their lives. Each month, at least six souls wander to the rail, hoping to end it all.

\*\*\*Special Presentation Package: Kevin Briggs with Grateful Survivor, Advocate Kevin Berthia available! Responses to Sgt. Kevin Briggs Speaking Events

"This is single-handedly one of the most inspirational, powerful talks I've witnessed. Thank you for this. This is the hope that some feel is lost -- I certainly believe that this man's job saves lives, saves families, and saves hope."
-Brianna Lowry

"Thank you for a great presentation today. A great career of saving lives!" -R. Tucker via Twitter

"Just saw Sgt. Kevin Briggs on Steve Harvey. Thank you sir for all you do. You are a blessing to us all!" -K. Bliss via Twitter

"Kudos to Kevin Briggs and all others like him for doing such a hard job, trying to give hope where there is only hopelessness. I can't even imagine how hard it would be, and how much strength it would take." -Anita Saxena

Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem, so it is essential to get immediate help in the midst of a crisis.

This is a complex subject and while we can't expect the average person to be a trained therapist, there are some signs, skills and resources that can help save lives. Often family and friends are the first to notice changes in someone that might be considering suicide.

Suicide Warning Signs:

Talking About Suicide Any talk about suicide, dying, or self-harm, such as "I wish I hadn't been born," "If I see you again..." and "I'd be better off dead."

Seeking Out Lethal Means Seeking access to guns, pills, knives, or other objects that could be used in a suicide attempt.

Preoccupation with Death Unusual focus on death, dying, or violence. Writing poems or stories about death.

No Hope for the Future Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and being trapped ("There's no way out"). Belief that things will never get better or change.

Self-loathing, Self-hatred Feelings of worthlessness, guilt, shame, and self-hatred. Feeling like a burden ("Everyone would be better off without me").

Getting Affairs in Order Making out a will. Giving away prized possessions. Making arrangements for family

members.

Saying Goodbye Unusual or unexpected visits or calls to family and friends. Saying goodbye to people as if they won't see them again.

Withdrawing from Others Withdrawing from friends and family. Increasing social isolation. Desire to be left alone.

Self-destructive Behavior Increased alcohol or drug use, reckless driving, unsafe sex. Taking unnecessary risks as if they have a "death wish."

Sudden Sense of Calm A sudden sense of calm and happiness after being extremely depressed can mean that the person has made a decision to commit suicide.

Source: Helpguide.org

When Talking to a Suicidal Person

DO

Be yourself. Let the person know you care, that he/she is not alone. The right words are often unimportant. If you are concerned, your voice and manner will show it.

Listen. Let the suicidal person unload despair, ventilate anger. No matter how negative the conversation seems, the fact that it exists is a positive sign.

Be sympathetic, non-judgmental, patient, calm, accepting. Your friend or family member is doing the right thing by talking about his/her feelings.

Offer hope. Reassure the person that help is available and that the suicidal feelings are temporary. Let the person know that his or her life is important to you.

If the person says things like, "I'm so depressed, I can't go on," ask the question: "Are you having thoughts of suicide?" You are not putting ideas in their head, you are showing that you are concerned, that you take them seriously, and that it is OK for them to share their pain with you.

BUT DON'T:

Argue with the suicidal person. Avoid saying things like: "You have so much to live for," "Your suicide will hurt your family," or "Look on the bright side."

Act shocked, lecture on the value of life, or say that suicide is wrong.

Promise confidentiality. Refuse to be sworn to secrecy. A life is at stake and you may need to speak to a mental health professional in order to keep the suicidal person safe. If you promise to keep your discussion secret, you may have to break your word.

Offer ways to fix their problems, or give advice, or make them feel like they have to justify their suicidal feelings. It's not about how bad the problem is, but how badly it's hurting your friend or loved one.

Blame yourself. You can't "fix" someone's depression. Your loved one's happiness, or lack thereof, is not your responsibility.

### WOMEN VETERAN SURVEY

Survey: Women struggle to be seen as 'real'

**VETERANS** 

By Leo Shane III, Staff writer

Women already facing discrimination issues in the ranks confront similar challenges being accepted as "real veterans" in their post-military life, according to a new study released by officials at The Mission Continues on Monday.

The survey of women fellows in the group in April found that about two-thirds did not feel "respected and valued as veterans," because of a lack of respect of their service or assumptions they must be spouses instead of former service members.

That feeling in turn hurt their sense of identity and ability to connect with others.

Paired with a shortage of female-specific services at the Department of Veterans Affairs and other military outreach efforts, the struggles left 70 percent of the women surveyed with significant difficulties forming strong relationships after their military lives ended.

"There are limited structured opportunities for women veterans to connect with others who can relate to their experiences and support them during their reintegration," the report states.

"The relatively small number of women veterans can make it even more difficult for them to connect with each other. This can have a negative impact on women veterans' mental health and their successful reintegration into to civilian life."

The 71-person survey does not carry any scientific or statistical weight for the veteran population as a whole, but does offer a snapshot of some of the specific challenges subgroups of veterans face transitioning back into a civilian society that often has only a partial understanding of overall military culture and lifestyle.

Female veterans make up about 16 percent of the

country's veterans population, the highest rate in U.S. history. But advocates have long complained that too many veterans services and resources are still geared toward men only, without enough flexibility or knowledge to fully assist those millions of female veterans.

The Mission Continues officials said the report is part of a larger yearlong effort to highlight women veterans and post-military successes, including work as volunteer fellows with the group.

The organization's stated goal is to help veterans with their military-to-civilian transition through community service, with a host of subsidized fellowship programs and volunteer teams nationwide.

Nearly all the women in the April survey reported feeling stronger connections to the community and to fellow veterans as a result of that volunteer work, leading to less overall stress and a better sense of identity.

Report authors say the report findings indicate more focus on the issue of women veterans reintegration, including "greater recognition and respect to women veterans" in the country at large.

### VETERAN ID CARDS

### CONGRESS PASSES LAW CREATING ID CARD FOR VETERANS

Congress has approved the creation of a veterans' identification card, making it easier for veterans to prove military service without having to produce a military service record or some other valuable document.

The House had already passed the bill in June and sent it on to the Senate. The Senate also passed the legislation, but a minor clerical amendment required a second House vote, which it took late Tuesday afternoon.

"Today is a good day for our nation's veterans," said bill sponsor Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Florida. "This bill is a prime example of what we can accomplish when we put partisanship aside and the needs of the country first."

Both House votes and the Senate vote were unanimous. The bill now heads to the White House where President Obama is expected to sign it.

Buchanan currently serves on the House Ways and Means Committee, but previously served on the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

Currently, individuals needing to prove military status routinely have to provide a DD-214, a Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, to prove their status, said Vietnam-era veteran Donald DiNunzio of Florida.

"I have been asked many times to prove that I am a vet but carrying around my DD-214 form is difficult and impractical," he said. "My DD-214 form is a large 8.5 x 11 carbon copy, delicate, old and quite brittle and thin. Having a permanent veteran ID card would be a much simpler way of proudly proving my veteran status."

A number of states, and even counties, will issue veterans ID cards. Among the states that do so are Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Texas, North Carolina, Virginia and Michigan, which retailers and restaurants will accept when offering veterans' discounts, according to The American Legion.

The bill text references these kinds of benefits to veterans, but also notes its usefulness in proving veteran status "without having to carry and use official Department of Defense form DD-214 discharge papers."

Retired service members have long been issued IDs. The Veterans Affairs Department issues IDs to veterans who are enrolled in VA health care.

The veteran ID card had support from a number of veterans' organizations, including AMVETS, Vietnam Veterans of America and Concerned Veterans of America.

But the Veterans of Foreign Wars believes demand for the new card is unnecessary and will only burden an already backlogged VA bureaucracy, which is the agency designated to issue the cards.

VFW national spokesman Joe Davis said there will now be a new demand on the VA to process and issue the cards to millions of veterans who do not require or need VA care. That means time and manpower devoted to verifying honorable discharges.

"The states have the authority to indicate veteran [status] on driver's licenses and voter IDs," Davis said. "It would have been far simpler to have left the responsibility with them."

Bryant Jordan - bryant.jordan@military.com

### BRAIN BANK - PTSD RESEARCH VA-LED CONSORTIUM LAUNCHES BRAIN BANK FOR RESEARCH ON PTSD

WASHINGTON - A consortium led by the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) National Center for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has launched the first brain tissue biorepository (also known as a "brain bank") – to support research on the causes, progression and treatment of PTSD affecting Veterans.

The national brain bank will follow the health of enrolled participants during their lifetime. Participants in the brain bank will donate their brain and other body tissue after their death. The donated tissue, along with each Veteran's health information, will provide crucial information for use in research on PTSD and related disorders.

"Although we have learned a great deal about abnormalities in brain structure and function from brain imaging research, there is no substitute for looking at the neurons themselves," said consortium director Dr. Matthew Friedman. "Understanding the cellular and circuit contributions to abnormal brain activity in PTSD is critical in the search for potential biomarkers of susceptibility, illness and treatment response and for developing new treatments targeting the conditions at the cellular level."

Dr. Friedman also is the founder of the national brain bank, and former Executive Director and current Senior Advisor to the National Center for PTSD. The national brain bank will investigate the impact of stress, trauma and PTSD on brain tissue in order to advance the scientific knowledge of PTSD, particularly the identification of PTSD biomarkers. Participating sites are located at VA medical centers in Boston, Massachusetts, San Antonio, Texas, West Haven, Connecticut, and White River Junction, Vermont, along with the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences at Bethesda, Maryland (USUHS).

PTSD is a significant mental health concern among Veterans. In 2013, 533,720 Veterans with primary or secondary diagnosis of PTSD received treatment at VA medical centers and clinics. PTSD is a serious mental disorder resulting from exposure to direct or indirect threat of death, serious injury or physical violence, including sexual violence.

The national brain bank is seeking Veterans with PTSD to participate in research about PTSD that affects Veterans. Veterans without PTSD are also eligible to participate in the brain bank because it is important to study Veterans without PTSD to compare the impact of stress, trauma and PTSD on brain tissue. Veterans interested in learning more about enrolling in the brain bank are encouraged to call its toll-free number 1-800-762-6609 or visit its website http://www.research.va.gov/programs/tissue\_banking/PTSD/default.cfm

### VIETNAM SISTER CITY

RIVERSIDE VETS OBJECT TO VIETNAM SISTER CITY
PLAN - FORMER MAYOR AND A COUNCILMAN HAVE
PROPOSED FORMING TIES WITH CAN THO
By Alicia Robinson arobinson@pe.com

Riverside city officials and local dignitaries say they were welcomed warmly on a recent trip to Can Tho, Vietnam, to explore a sister city relationship.

But reactions back home have not all been positive, with some critics questioning the need to form ties with a communist country that the U.S. fought.

The debate has extended to city staff. In an e-mail, Councilman Chris Mac Arthur's aide came out against the proposal, making comments that another councilman considers out of line.

Riverside now has eight sister cities in countries including China, Japan and Germany. Its friend- among the oldest such ties in the U.S. and led residents here to raise about \$590,000 in aid after the Japanese city was hit by an earthquake and tsunami in 2011.

After a July visit to Can Tho, a city of 1.2 million people in southern Vietnam, Ron Loveridge and Paul Davis proposed ideas for educational and cultural exchange and business development between the two cities. A Thanksgiving-week visit from a Can Tho delegation is planned to formalize the relationship.

The Vietnamese city's several colleges and universities and its focus on environmental sustainability make it a good match for Riverside, Loveridge wrote in an Aug. 14 report to the council.

But others see key differences they think make the proposed relationship untenable. Among them is Glenn Waggoner Jr., an Army veteran who served in Vietnam. He e-mailed Davis to object.

"I can't understand why there is such a need to have a sister city in Vietnam that is a communist nation," Waggoner said Thursday, Aug. 23.

"I hold the (local) Vietnamese community in high regard, but I just don't understand the politics of it."

"The current Vietnam government is a very brutal communist regime that has no respect for human rights and that severely restricts freedom of expression and freedom of the press."

PHAT BUI GARDEN GROVE CITY COUNCILMAN

Can Tho was the site of intense military conflicts between U.S. troops and the North Vietnamese Army, Waggoner said. His e-mail noted there are U. S. prisoners of war and missing troops still unaccounted for in Vietnam.

Mac Arthur's aide,

Chuck Conder, who served in the Air Force, was blunt in an e-mail he sent to another local veteran. Conder called it "disturbing" that the Can Tho party was invited during Thanksgiving, suggested they contact others to oppose the sister city move, and commented, "These socialists are nuts," though it's not clear who he was referring to. Conder couldn't be reached for comment Thursday or Friday.

Davis called Conder's remarks, sent with his city email address, "completely inappropriate." As a city resident, Conder can say whatever he wants, Davis said, but, "He is staff. He's not there to make policy."

Davis said Vietnam veterans and others he has talked to have supported the sister city proposal, but Mac Arthur said he has gotten the opposite response.

An e-mail to constituents sent Wednesday has brought in about 30 responses, Mac Arthur said, and "Right now it's running about 80 percent against."

One concern is extra costs to the city during tough economic times, but the main issue is consideration of U.S. veterans, he said.

"I think that for a lot of veterans that have served it's still a very emotional issue, and I think their concerns need to be heard," Mac Arthur said.

He rejected Davis' criticism of his aide's remarks. "I think Chuck was speaking as a veteran to other veterans, certainly not in his role as a legislative field representative."

San Francisco, Seattle and New Haven, Conn., have sister relationships with cities in Vietnam, according to the website of Sister Cities International, a nonprofit organization that promotes international friendships. But strife and soul-searching are not uncommon when those bonds are proposed, said Charles Ward, executive director of South Carolina based nonprofit Vets With a Mission.

Ward wrote a long and heartfelt message to Waggoner, Davis and others in the e-mail chain after receiving their comments from Vien Doan, a Vietnamese American doctor and Riverside resident. Doan is on the board of advisors for Vets With a Mission and was part of Riverside's delegation to Can Tho.

Some U. S. veterans welcome new relationships with Vietnam, others are indifferent, and a third reaction can be quite negative, Ward said.

"They're thinking of Vietnam as it was when they were there, and of course it's not that way anymore," he said. Today, "The Vietnamese truly like and appreciate Americans, and they have gotten past the war."

The issue could still lead to greater understanding, or at least dialogue. Doan suggested a meeting with Waggoner, which in turn became an invitation for Doan to speak in October to the Riverside chapter of Vietnam Veterans of America and other local veterans.

Doan said he appreciates what Vietnam veterans have done and he has wanted to reach out to them.

"Actually it's a welcome opportunity, and I plan to speak to them on it and listen to their concerns and share my view on it and see where we go from there," Doan said.

"I think there's a good possibility this (sister city proposal) can go forward and heal our local communities."

EASING AHEAD WITH SISTER-CITY PLAN
SOME VETERANS DISFAVOR TIE-IN TO VIETNAMESE CITY, BUT RIVERSIDE OFFICIALS
HOPE TO BUILD SUPPORT

Riverside officials are not abandoning plans to form a sister city relationship with Can Tho, Vietnam, but they're moving slowly in hopes of overcoming the objections of some local veterans.

The nonprofit International Relations Council, which administers Riverside's friendships with eight cities around the world, will take the lead in explaining the Vietnam sister city proposal to the community and building support before it comes to the City Council for a decision in 2013, city and International Relations Council officials said after a Wednesday, Nov. 21, meeting on the issue.

Vien Doan, a local Vietnamese American doctor who counts Vietnam veterans among his patients, suggested the idea of having a sister city in Vietnam. A delegation that included Doan and Ron Loveridge visited Can Tho in July and returned supporting the plan. But some local veterans opposed it, citing Vietnam's communist government and unresolved issues with missing or captured U. S. troops.

After hearing from Doan and discussing the issue in October, members of the Chapter 47 of Vietnam Veterans of America voted Nov. 17 not to support the sister-city proposal. Bill Gavitt, a member of the veterans group who is on the International Relations Council, said most veterans at the chapter meeting abstained from voting, which tells him they don't feel passionate about the issue either way.

The privately-funded International Relations Council pays for and organizes most sister-city endeavors, but the city of Riverside must vote to endorse the relationship and is typically involved in minor ways.

The city appears to be downplaying its involvement after some people complained that the plan was being driven by the mayor.

"The impression has been given ... that this thing starts at the top of the city and is being forced down the

throats of the (community), "when it actually was researched and brought to the city by the International Relations Council, Gavitt said.

Daryl Lee, president of the International Relations Council, said the group will seize upon community interest in the sister-city plan as an opportunity to help people get to know the country and people of Vietnam, and to encourage dialogue about it. He cited the example of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who created the sister-city program in 1956.

"We are following President Eisenhower's leadership to go out into the world and establish more people-to-people relationships," Lee said.

The group will meet later to decide how best to reach out to the community. Doan said he will continue meeting with veterans and has offered to accompany any who want to go back to Vietnam.

Zack Earp, a Marine Corps veteran who served in Vietnam in 1967-68, said he favors the sister-city plan as "an avenue of healing" for veterans and the community.

The objections he has heard have to do with the appearance of supporting a Communist government and U. S. troops that are unaccounted for.

"I think that's where the (International Relations Council) can help educate us," Earp said. "What does that really mean to us now? For me, the war was 44 years ago. A lot of things have changed."



### Vietnam Veterans of America

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Send To: Vietnam Veterans of America, P.O. Box 64299, Balti	more, MD 21264-4299			

### FROM ONE FRIEND TO ANOTHER

Please take a moment and read all the way to the bottom: \*\*If you will take the time to read these. I promise you'll come away with an enlightened perspective. The subjects covered affect us all on a daily basis.

Written by Andy Rooney, a man who had the gift of saying so much with so few words. Enjoy.....

- \*I've learned .... That the best classroom in the world is at the feet of an elderly person.\*
- \*I've learned .... That when you're in love, it shows. \*
- \*I've learned .... That just one person saying to me, 'You've made my day!' makes my day\*
- \*I've learned .... That having a child fall asleep in your arms is one of the most peaceful feelings in the world. \*
- \*I've learned .... That being kind is more important than being right. \*
- \*I've learned .... That you should never say no to a gift from a child. \*
- \*I've learned .... That I can always pray for someone when I don't have the strength to help him in some other way\*
- \*I've learned .... That no matter how serious your life requires you to be, everyone needs a friend to act goofy with. \*
- \*I've learned .... That sometimes all a person needs is a hand to hold and a heart to understand\*
- \*I've learned .... That simple walks with my father around the block on summer nights when I was a child did wonders for me as an adult. \*
- \*I've learned .... That life is like a roll of toilet paper. The closer it gets to the end, the faster it goes. \*
- \*I've learned .... That we should be glad God doesn't give us everything we ask for. \*
- \*I've learned .... That money doesn't buy class. \*
- \*I've learned .... That it's those small daily happenings that make life so spectacular. \*
- \*I've learned... That under everyone's hard shell is someone who wants to be appreciated and loved. \*
- \*I've learned .... That to ignore the facts does not change the facts. \*
- \*I've learned .... That when you plan to get even with someone, you are only letting that person continue to hurt you. \*
- \*I've learned .... That love, not time, heals all wounds. \*
- \*I've learned .... That the easiest way for me to grow as a person is to surround myself with people smarter than I am. \*
- \*I've learned .... That everyone you meet deserves to be greeted with a smile. \*
- \*I've learned .... That no one is perfect until you fall in love with them. \*
- \*I've learned... That life is tough, but I'm tougher. \*
- \*I've learned .... That opportunities are never lost; someone will take the ones you miss. \*
- \*I've learned .... That when you harbour bitterness, happiness will dock elsewhere\*
- \*I've learned .... That I wish I could have told my Mom that I love her one more time before she passed away. \*
- \*I've learned .... That one should keep his words both soft and tender, because tomorrow he may have to eat them. \*
- \*I've learned .... That a smile is an inexpensive way to improve your looks. \*
- \*I've learned .... That when your newly born grandchild holds your little finger in his little fist, that you're hooked for life. \*
- \*I've learned .... That everyone wants to live on top of the mountain, but all the happiness and growth occurs while you're climbing it. \*
- \*I've learned .... That the less time I have to work with, the more things I get done. \*
- \*To all of you.... Make sure you read all the way down to the last sentence. \*

It's National Friendship Week. Show your friends how much you care. Send this to everyone you consider a FRIEND, even if it means sending it back to the person who sent it to you. If it comes back to you, then you'll know you have a circle of friends. HAPPY FRIENDSHIP WEEK TO YOU!!!!! \*\*YOU ARE MY FRIEND AND I AM HONORED!

Now send this to every friend you have!! And to your family.



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VVA CA State Council contact info inside - page 2

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То:	

In this issue:

- Activities-Events/Photos
- Legislative News
- Useful Veteran Information
- Region 8/9 Pre Convention Info

And more...

VVA & CSC Meeting Dates & Events

CSC Full Council - August 7-9, 2015, Fresno, CA CSC Full Council - October 23-25, 2015, Fresno, CA Meetings following October To Be Announced