



The California Zephyr

Official Publication of the VVA California State Council
An Organization Chartered By The U.S. Congress



A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 17-1

WINTER 2013

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

On behalf of the CA State Council, I would like to wish everyone a Happy New Year. Let us hope that 2013 will be a year safe from harm for this great nation of ours. Please keep Dennis "Doc" Croucher in your thoughts and prayers as Doc has had a rough few months with his health.

I am foregoing my usual President's message and replacing it with a great writing from Henry Iasiello, Chapter 547 and a past Northern District Director. I agree with Henry's message so much, I decided to use it as the opening page of the Zephyr.

Steve Mackey God Bless America

SELLING VVA ...

As you all know the 'economic crisis' hit us all pretty hard and the VVA CA State Council (CSC) also saw a significant drop in revenue. We depend on the VVA National 'household goods program' used to run our CSC programs and distributed to Chapters for attending CSC quarterly meetings.

As a result Chapters in particular are reviewing their budgets and some, with limited resources, will question their ability to send delegates to the CSC meetings. Let me tell you why attendance is important.

The VVA CA State Council connects us statewide and, with VVA National. Delegates report what is happening, and needed on the local level and have access to all our state and national resources. If you remember being alone, if you understand what VVA stands for... the benefits of belonging to a national membership should be obvious.

Together, we have brought many veterans out of the cold; given them social support, monetary support and, the opportunity to use our individual and collective voice to advocate for all veterans. I won't re-count our many accomplishments here but I will remind you that VVA has provided many members the opportunity to stand, often for the first time and address an assembly of their peers.

Being a membership organization there are now many voices and we don't always agree. Reaching agreement is often a time-consuming, messy and contentious process but everyone is heard... that is, everyone who shows up. You see,... a membership organization requires participation.

Participation in any organization is often difficult for many Vietnam War veterans but without it we have little or no influence on events and decisions that directly effect our lives. Participation is work,... it takes effort, and the first step is to show up. Vietnam War veterans are a wary lot and for good reasons but VVA is a proven organization. What makes VVA work is it's dedication to one single purpose; advocacy for veterans,... all veterans.

As anyone who has ever been a Chapter President, a Chapter BOD member or any Officer can tell you; the moment we stray from that single purpose we get into trouble, become embroiled in controversy and, lose members.

Because of it's size, CA has a significant issue with travel. Distance and travel budgets make attendance at State Council meeting an added effort and, as we grow older there are also health issues to consider. Yes, there is much that can be and is communicated via electronic networking but there really is no substitute for the delegates sitting together with Directors, attending Committee meetings, seminars and training sessions, considering issues and making decisions. The Chapter delegates are a very important link. Without them Chapters can easily slip into isolation, feel neglected and disassociated from the larger organization, become uninformed and ineffective.

There are real benefits from being a part of the larger organization... reasons why we became members in the first place. The State Council is well aware of the financial issues facing Chapters and is doing everything in it's power to assist them as, without them and without their participation there will be no State Council. The State Council is a valuable resource... see you there.

Henry Iasiello

VIETNAM VETERANS MONUMENT - No. CAL.



The Monument "HOPE", the centerpiece of the Monument, is a concave bullet-shaped cast bronze sculpture designed by local artist and Vietnam combat veteran, Gideon Carl Turner III.

Depicting a dramatic action moment during the war, cutout silhouettes feature an inbound Medivac helicopter and two soldiers running under fire while carrying a stretcher with a wounded comrade.

The sculpture is pierced by three bullet holes and encircled by a bas relief of a rice paddy. When completed, it will stand 20' tall, 12' wide, and weigh 4,000 lbs.

Future proposed plans include a Meditation Site, a small replica of

the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall and an Information Kiosk. All of these elements will be tied together with the Cemetery Memorial Trail.



For More Information Contact: Mike Wiley 530-472-1279 Carl Turner 530-921-9333 veteransmonument@gmail.com 13885 Kitty Hawk Ln Redding, CA 96003

VIETNAM VETERANS REMAIN HOPEFUL ABOUT RAISING FUNDS FOR MONUMENT

By Jenny Espino



With the economy what it is, Vietnam War veterans raising funds for a bronze sculpture to honor their comrades say they are feeling pretty good about the response they have gotten from supporters.

"Hope," the headstone-shaped monument planned at the Northern California Veterans Cemetery in Igo, has received \$20,000 — about half of it raised last month at a spaghetti dinner hosted by Klassique Cafe's Kathie Steers and Millie Ellis.

The project, nonetheless, has a huge fundraising hill to climb. It needs \$271,000, and the

amount raised to date represents more than a year's work by the veterans.

The veterans are undaunted by the task.

"Slowly it's building. We started from scratch in the middle of difficult times, so we're pleased," said Mike Wiley, who with Carl Turner, the local artist who designed the 20-foot sculpture, is leading efforts. "We've been out there for a while. But it's only been a year since we've been promoting it. We were not experienced in the fundraiser thing. We're looking for folks who can help us with grants."

Meanwhile, Turner and Wiley are reaching out to state lawmakers so that "Hope" can be designated as a certified Vietnam veterans monument. They were working with Doug LaMalfa's state Senate office but since he's moved on to Congress, they are looking to work with his replacement early next year.

Both are confident the project will receive certification, giving the project more exposure than they say it already is getting.

Turner said he would like to place his order with the Artworks Foundry in Berkeley next year so the sculpture can be raised on Veterans Day, but he acknowledged that might be too ambitious.

"If we get lucky, it will happen. If not, we'll just plan for next year," he said.

In the meantime, a website with information about the project is getting traffic. It features one of the fundraising activities, the sale of dog tags.

The next step is to set up a PayPal account.

Entering through the cemetery's front entrance, "Hope" will be situated at the northeast corner of Section 1. It will include a memorial walkway, to which Turner said he is hopeful the business community will contribute.

Wiley, 67, a Navy retiree who has been a volunteer at the cemetery for more than five years, said the work he is doing on the project's behalf keeps him and other volunteers busy on a daily basis.

They wouldn't have it any other way, he said.

"We are working on something that is bigger than ourselves," he said, explaining how the project has forced many to come out of their reclusiveness, and as the population ages, there is this urgency to pay tribute to them.

For more information about the project, visit www.billbra.com/vvmonument.

© 2012 Record Searchlight. All rights reserved. This material is being republished with permission.

AVVA - CA STATE COUNCIL



Blessings, good health and happiness to you all in 2013. I hope we all take a moment to remember those we have lost this past year, those that have had health problems and those that are dealing and hopefully coping with difficulties in their lives.

When I look at the CA AVVA logo, it always reminds me of Ch. 391 VVA member George Eldridge. AVVA designed the logo but it was 2 separate pieces. I asked George if he thought he could make it one solid logo. Of course he said yes and proceeded to the finished product. Now remember that George had problems with his eyesight and liked to do all of his graphics large and emailed them that way too.

State Council Officers	Address	Phone/Cell	E-mail
President - Steve Mackey	7401 Candlelight Dr. Riverside, CA 92509	951-681-9531 951-231-7268	nebhuskf@aol.com president@vvacalsc.com
1st Vice President - Dennis Croucher	3684 Highway 140 Catheys Valley, CA 95306	209-966-2292 209-769-3757	orland123@yahoo.com 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 Riverside, CA 92519-3007	951-683-7251	tomh47@aol.com secretary@vvacalsc.com
Treasurer - Barry Schloffel	1244 Shaws Flat Rd. Sonora, CA 95370-5433	209-532-6119	bshowful@att.net treasurer@vvacalsc.com
District Directors	Address	Phone	E-mail
North District - Dean Gotham	15879 32nd Ave Clearlake, CA 95422-9353	707-350-1159	deanvva951@mediacombb.net north_district@vvacalsc.com
Central District - Richard Segovia	2849 Balboa St. Arroyo Grande, CA		rsego11b rsego11b@yahoo.com central_district@vvacalsc.com
South District - Mike Kennedy	14766 Foxfield Ln Fontana, CA 92336	909-899-0085	mikesps3@verizon.net south_district@vvacalsc.com
Director - Al Sickle	PO Box 1424 Murphys, CA 95247-1424		leanin.al391@yahoo.com director@vvacalsc.com
Committees	Chair	Co-Chair	E-mail
Membership	Don Barnard		db_vv@yahoo.com membership@vvacalsc.com
Public Affairs	Ponce Gonzalez		ponce_g@hotmail.com public_affairs@vvacalsc.com
Government Affairs	Ken Holybee		holybee@comcast.net government@vvacalsc.com
Legislative Lobbyist	Pete Conaty		pconaty@sbcglobal.net legslative@vvacalsc.com
Minority Affairs	Jerry Yamamoto		n9140y@ca.rr.com minority@vvacalsc.com
Constitution	Mike Kennedy		mike3sps@verizon.net constitution@vvacalsc.com
Finance	Dan Brown		dabrown@mlode.com finance@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 zephyr@vvacalsc.com
SDIT Liaison	Mike McCoy		mikebmccoy@netscape.com sdit_liaison@vvacalsc.com
PTSD	Henry Iasiello		shiningraven@earthlink.net ptsd@vvacalsc.com
Incarcerated Veterans	Bob Chaney		bkrbob@charter.net incarcerated@vvacalsc.com
AVVA Liaison	Elayne Mackey		cysticfib@aol.com avva_liaison@vvacalsc.com
Agent Orange	Bill Hodges		fdrdocent@comcast.net agent_orange@vvacalsc.com
Veteran Benefits	John Weaver		vscjweav@vba.va.gov veteran_benefits@vvacalsc.com
Convention Planning	Dick Southern		southern@lodelink.com convention@vvacalsc.com

THE CALIFORNIA ZEPH-

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

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

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

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

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

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



When George emailed me the finished logo, I opened it and it sure did catch my eye. I teased him and said, “Darn George, that is supposed to be the dove of peace flying from CA. hopefully spreading goodwill across the nation – not flying off with the whole state! From then on that became a joke that we often referred to. George is remembered!

CA AVVA State Council is very proud of the year 2012 and we look forward to an even better 2013.

- Over the year;
- We added a new AVVA CSC Board Director, Penny Chamouis Ch. 982 AVVA.
 - Formed the Secondary PTSD group chaired by Nina Schloffel – AVVA CSC Secretary

- Donated hundreds of dollars to various groups
- Planned a very successful AVVA Luncheon during the state convention
- Maintained our AVVA membership to remain # 1 in the nation.
- And much more...

Sue Hodges VVA Ch. 400 introduced us to a friend of hers in Australia, Peter Moore. Peter was an Australian Vietnam veteran who was instrumental in forming the first Vietnam Veterans Art Group in Australia in 1984 and has paintings, drawings and books in the Australian War Memorial, at Canberra.

Peter also donated works to charities and has raised thousands of dollars over the years.

CA. AVVA formed a bond and friendship with Peter

and he donated many beautiful, meaningful paintings to us for fund raising. Some of the art work is on display during the CSC meetings at the AVVA sales table.

Peter Moore recently succumbed to cancer, after being in remission for quite a while. He, once again, fought a long, hard battle.

CA AVVA has many good memories from

2012 – a most important one is - all of you, our Vietnam Veterans. As our logo says – “Together Always.”
Blessings to you all and Welcome Home!

CHAPTER 582

CHAPTER & SPONSORS WELCOME HOME NATIONAL GUARD 649TH EN CO (HZ)

The Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 582, The Oakmont Independent Living Facility Chase Bank, & 40Plusleap welcomed home the California National Guard 649th Engineer’s Company with a huge family Christmas dinner, dance, music by decades and a santa claus visit for the 649th engineer’s company and their family members at the Paradise Elks Lodge, in Paradise CA. on December 1, 2012.

With over 375 people in attendance, including national guard members, their families, VVA 582 members, their families, Chase Bank sponsors and their families as well as local community residents, it was an event to be remembered.

The Oakmont executive chef Angelica Williams, a retired Marine Corp 2nd lieutenant, and her staff prepared a “Standing Prime Rib” dinner with all the trimmings.

President of VVA 582, Carl “Butch” Frederickson awarded the 649th with the prestigious M.A.D.E. (Making America Different Everyday) Medal for the entire unit and



their work in Afghanistan. Stephen “Tank” Konstenius, Secretary VVA 582 served as Master of Cermonies, Larry Wahl, VVA 582 member and Butte County Supervisor welcomed the 649th home & Harold Hagans of Chase Bank also welcomed the California 649th engineers home.

There were numerous door prizes, drawings, plenty of gifts for all the children and of course their visit with Santa Claus.

CHAPTER 472

Three thousand patriots attended the Miramar National Cemetery laying of the Wreaths Across America event. The new national cemetery in Miramar area has the distinction of first laying to rest local Vietnam veterans who passed in ceremonies beginning in 2010. The laying of the wreaths is now an annual event at all national cemeteries across the United States. There were many Patriot Riders and many other groups present to assist in placing a wreath on each marker in the cemetery.



The largest ever Agent Orange TownHall meeting was held at the Veteran's Museum & Memorial in Balboa Park with over 100 guests who were given the most recent developments concerning Agent Orange and it's effects on Vietnam Veterans. Speakers included Mark Barrett an authority on AO from the VA's perspective, Dale Willoughby, VA LaJolla, Hon. Bob Filner on his travels to Vietnam, Dr Karen Schoenfeld-Smith from the VetCenter, LT Vicki Nenner, a nurse who treated AO survivors and wounded while stationed in Japan. Ruth Sterling, La Mesa, Ca. councilwoman, Will Hays, Executive Director of the

VMMC and President of the VVA472, Don Barnard. Not pictured: AVVA liaison officer China Cooper, who was co-host and planner of the event as well as Brian Auker, with the outdoor Vet bus.



Chapter 472 Color Guard joined 26 other Color Guards in the 57th Annual Massing of the Colors in Balboa Park. Sponsored by the Military Order of the World Wars and leader John Harkin, the Chapter joined other guards from reserve units, high schools, boy and girl scouts and foremost the Daughters of the American Revolution, who have been attending this annual event since 1957. The Marine Corp Band and a seven member USMC Rifle Team were on hand in witness of the excellent speakers of the day. Included was the soon to be elected mayor of San Diego, the Hon. Bob Filner and other dignitaries.



CHAPTER 391

VVA of Tuolumne County, Ca., will celebrate Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day on Friday, March 22, 2013.

Working with the Special Events Committee of the Tuolumne County Chamber of Commerce and Black Oak Casino, Sheri Langley and Frank M. Smart have organized the event. Langley is the Chairperson of the Chamber’s Special Events Committee and is employed at the Casino in Risk Management.

The event, which will be held at the Willow Creek Lounge at the Casino, located in Tuolumne, Ca., on that day as to not conflict with Easter weekend.

The Casino is fully supporting the event allowing the lounge for free, providing hors d’oeuvres and music by The Boys of Summer, an Eagles tribute band.

While the casino is picking up the tab for the entire event there will be a charge of \$15 per person at the door. This money will be split between Chapter 391 and the Chamber’s Special Events Committee.

There will be a special guest speaker and a slide show presentation by Vietnam veteran Bill Chamberlain who is asking members and non-members alike to send him a photo of themselves in Vietnam with all the pertinent information. Chamberlain served with the First Infantry Division and spent many years in radio.

“In past years we had our Welcome Home Parade, brought the Traveling Wall to Sonora but this year, 2012, we failed to do anything for Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day. This event will allow over 200 of our veterans and their significant others to come together and celebrate the day,” said Smart, who is the principal co-founder of Chapter 391.

Anyone from out of the area interested in attending should make plans early as seating is limited. Smart can be contacted at: fsmart@rocketmail.com or 209.536.0439 or 559.1908.

CHAPTER 400

Chapter 400 was fortunate to be the recipient of a tidy sum of money from the estate of a Vietnam

Veteran. While we can't recall ever having met him, we found out enough that he was very involved with the community.

He donated to schools and charities. In this light, we have been making donations to the type of charities he gave to.

Just this month, we've written checks to the following: \$2,000/St. Mary's Center



Blue Star Moms/\$2,000 each to two organizations
Fisher House/\$1,500 each to two locations
Yountville/\$1,000



Pathway House/ \$1,000



A year ago, we wrote checks to these and other organizations worthy of our benefactor's donations.

The time spent at old Navy was fruitful in several ways. In addition to the coat and monetary donations, we



made contact with a few brothers and may have helped some in several ways. I settled up with Missy, the manager at Old Navy on Wednesday. She reimbursed our parking expenses which will be put back into the chapter coffers and presented us with the coats, 8 bags of them. It was nearly a full load for my truck, by volume, not weight As shown by assistant manager Ian. They were then put into the hands of the Marines, 4th Force Recon Co. and secured in the Dive Locker at their Alameda base. The Marines not only have the means to distribute them to the family's of active duty personnel but too, have the Toys for Tots program to disperses any surplus. Thanks again, all, for your participation and have a wonderful holiday season.

God Bless America, Andy Huntoon
Chapter 400, Treasurer

CHAPTER 756

Old Navy Project - Carson Blvd. - Long Beach



These were what we noted:



1. No outside window signing for event.



2. No inside signing such as banner, etc. for event.

3. Employees not aware of program.

4. Should have been from a Thursday thru Sunday, customers were disappointed that we were not there on Sunday; although Tuesday thru Saturday the chapter was there.

5. Customers asked why no schedule was posted that the event would take place.

6. Nothing on web site or facebook to let customers know of event.

7. Customer were excited to to help if they were more aware of this event.



8. Lack of communication on this event caused lack of sales and clothing, customers wanted to HELP, but were caught off guard by walking in unaware of the event, and if they were aware they would have brought in outer ware they had at home.

9. If there was special couponing if you brought in a item plus discount on new item would have created more excitement and sales for both Old Navy and the chapter would have received more outer ware.

10. Donations came down to about \$500.00 in apparel and about \$300.00 of donated apparel.

11. Flyer didn't contain much, needed to communicate with information on a flyer about two weeks in advance in the Old Navy store(s) ad or hand outs at the locations.

Customer wanted to be involved is my final point and in the future this could be an exciting event and could help increase sales at you local Old Navy. Sales are King!!

Conrad Gomez, Chapter 756, Long Beach
tizi82@aol.com - 1-562-882-1374

CHAPTER 1065

As always being a long time member of Vietnam Veterans of America and Chapter Member of IVVA 1065, California, it always strikes me, although not surprising, the requests for assistance received from incarcerated veterans across the country.

In 2004 Ed Munis and Doc Piper, two incarcerated Vietnam Veterans, developed the Correctional Training Veterans Service Officer Service Center as an advocacy base for incarcerated veterans and families in obtaining and protecting those earned benefits we are entitled from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Careful consideration should always be given when attempting to navigate the precarious mine fields of corrections, consider your options and implement them with the best possible basis of support, (the key) from staff who are in positions of authority, Warden first then the others.

Here at the CTF-VSO we have been successful developing legislation already in place be Congress as it applies to the VA. In 2009 we helped draft legislation that was later introduced by State Senate Member Wright, SB 285. It reads as follows;

SB 285, Wright Disability benefits: attachment.

Existing law prescribes the procedures to obtain a writ of attachment and to determine the amount that maybe attached.

Existing Federal law prohibits payments or benefits due to a disabled veteran, as specified, from being assigned or liable to attachment, levy or seizure by or under any legal or equitable process.

This bill would provide that benefits awarded to veterans for service connected disabilities, as provided, shall be exempt from the claim of creditors and shall not be liable to attachment, levy or seizure, as provided, except as otherwise authorized under federal law, as specified.

This bill would declare the intent of the Legislature to conform to existing federal law. (38 USC 5301, in this specific instance.)

WE THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. It is the intent of the Legislature to enact legislation to confirm to existing federal law, which provides that payments or benefits due to a veteran for service connected disability shall be exempt from creditor claims, and shall not be liable to attachment, levy or seizure by and under any legal or equitable process.

Section 2. Section 483.013 is added to the Code of Civil Procedure, to read;

Section 483.013. Notwithstanding Section 483.010, federal disability benefits awarded to veterans for service connected disabilities pursuant to chapter 11 of Title 38 of the United States Code shall be exempt from claims of creditors and shall not be liable to attachment, levy, or seizure by or under any legal or equitable process whatsoever, as provided by federal law. This section does not apply to that portion of service connected disability benefits that are subject to child and spousal support enforcement under Section 659 (b) (1) (A) (ii) (V) of Title 42 of the United States Code.

Another viable option is to file suit in the appropriate Superior Court, citing Title 38, Section 5301 as your authority against the discriminatory acts of your Facility Trust Office.

The VVA is known nationwide for its fine attorney members and a little Pro Bono effort on their part would bring great meaning to the phrase "Strength in Numbers and Unity of Cause."

Use the system don't be used by it.

In Comradeship

The Veteran Service Office Service Center of Correctional Training Facility.

Soledad, California 93960

Ed, Doc and Mike

CTF-VSO Veteran Representatives, Incarcerated Vietnam Veterans who are "helping ourselves by helping others."

CAL VET WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Deputy Secretary, Women Veterans, Lindsey Sin opened the one day conference with a call to all attendees with hopes to gain the tools and information to empower leadership skills for women veterans in our community. There was a keynote speaker, a dynamic women of service panel, emerging trends of women veterans in the justice system, a speaker on domestic violence and inter-partner

violence and then an afternoon of "how to" workshops with a variety of topics including caring for yourself, strengthen your community, organize for change, be your own boss, and stand up for stand down.

Zoe Dunning, CMNDR, USN(RET) gave the keynote address. Ms. Dunning graduated from the U. S. Naval Academy in one of the earliest classes to include women. She served as a Supply Corps officer for six years of active duty before transitioning into the Navy Reserves. In 1993, while a student at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, she publicly came out as a lesbian in protest of the ban on gay military service. Ms. Dunning successfully won her prosecution under the "don't ask don't tell" law and continued to serve as the only openly gay member of the U. S. military for the next 13 years. She retired in 2007 at the rank of Commander. President Obama honored Zoe by asking her to stand next to him as he signed the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010.

She told us how the Naval Academy taught her inner reserve and survivor skills. She told of the days of 'witchhunts' for gays and lesbians in the service and searches amongst private belongings and harassment threats at all times.

Over 13,000 service people were discharged due to their inappropriate sexual orientation under the 'don't ask don't tell' law. 39-45% of those were women. This is a high percentage when looking at the total armed services percentage of women is 15%. One of the humorous lines in her talk was "if you don't have a seat at the table...you are probably on the menu."

Commander Dunning is the former Co-Chair of Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, a national non-profit with the mission to strengthen military culture by securing equal opportunity, equal protection and equal benefits, without threat of harassment or discrimination, for LGBT service members and veterans. She is the First Vice Chair of the SF Democratic Party. In her private sector career, she is an accomplished change management strategist, helping organizations prepare for and successfully adopt major changes to their markets, strategy and operations.

CALVET ANNOUNCES NEW COALITION TO SUPPORT CALIFORNIA WOMEN VETERANS

SACRAMENTO – The California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls, and California State Library have formed a coalition to help women veterans connect to their state and federal benefits and the local veterans services available to them. A recent survey of the needs of California women veterans found that many programs available to veterans are unfamiliar to women and as a consequence go underutilized.

The statewide survey of more than 900 women veterans, conducted by the California Research Bureau (CRB) of the State Library, is believed to be the first of its kind by any state. The survey was requested by CalVet and the Commission.

Five briefs, highlighting data from the survey, are being released this week by CRB and indicate that California's women veterans experience levels of unemployment, military sexual trauma and mental health concerns at rates higher than reported by national sources. Yet, despite a wide range of available services, many women veterans are unaware of the services or unsure how to tap into them.

"The formation of this coalition represents a solid commitment to California women veterans," said CalVet Deputy Secretary for Women Veterans Affairs Lindsey Sin. "By using our collective offices and resources, we will continue to identify the most pressing issues women veterans and their families face, create effective solutions for those issues and increase awareness and outreach to women across the state."

"When the Governor created the Interagency Council on Veterans, this was the kind of intergovernmental collaboration he was seeking to develop," said CalVet Secretary Peter J. Gravett. "Women veterans have served this nation and state honorably and without hesitation so we must all work together to ensure they receive the services and assistance they need to successfully return to their families, their homes and their civilian lives. This new coalition will help us achieve that goal."

The members of the coalition are committed to taking concrete steps in the coming year to improve the lives of women veterans. Each partner will focus on strategies to help build leadership and empowerment in the women veteran community.

The Commission on the Status of Women and Girls is announcing an outreach and education campaign designed specifically to target women veterans. This effort will coordinate voluntary initiatives involving business, non-

profit and community-based organizations, community colleges and local government. The initiatives will be designed to secure commitments from different sectors of our community to provide direct information about the services available to our women veterans.

CRB and the State Library will continue to support CalVet's efforts with substantive research about women veterans and the key issues they face. "Our survey breaks new ground by asking women veterans about their needs and experiences," said Brian R. Sala, Acting Director of CRB. "The partnership is a great opportunity for us to share this information with other agencies."

CRB and the California State Library have made the following briefs available on-line:

California's Women Veterans and Military Sexual Trauma: <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/12/S-12-004.pdf>

California Women Veterans and Mental Health: <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/12/S-12-005.pdf>

California Women Veterans and Employment: <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/12/S-12-007.pdf>

California Women Veterans' Benefit Utilization: <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/12/S-12-008.pdf>

California Women Veterans At A Glance: <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/12/S-12-009.pdf>

CHILDREN OF AO VETS:

Are You Or Someone You Know A Child Or Grandchild Of A Vietnam Veteran?

- 22 Million Gallons of Herbicide were sprayed

TAILINGS OF AGENT ORANGE

By Bill Hodges, CSC Agent Orange Committee Chair

I volunteered (!) for this position largely because it was unfilled. I thought, what the hell, we practically got this problem solved. The chemical companies and the Veterans Administration settled on a large sum of money that would take care of all that ails our Vietnam veterans.

Case closed.

Well, guess what? It looks like we're just starting. Those originally covered only had to prove they had served in areas that were sprayed.

Then, our find feathered friends in Washington, D.C., disclosed as how AO also contaminated the water in the streams, rivers and lakes, from where we got some of our drinking, bathing and cooking water.

So, after going back to court, those covered for exposure to AO also included anyone who stepped foot in-country.

Of course, AO was also sprayed in Laos and Cambodia. Only problem there was that a number of vets who served there didn't have that listed in their DD-214, as they weren't "officially" there.

And that's still only the beginning. Seems as though AO (or related dioxins) were used in the good ole US of A at our bases, thereby expanding the vets exposed.

Our pals in the Australian government commissioned a study as to possible AO exposure by the "Blue Water" Navy. AO runs down the creeks, streams and rivers into the bays and ocean.

The evaporators in special ships pull water in and remove the minerals so that the water can be used in the ship's boilers. The problem here is this process condenses the dioxin thereby increasing its potency.

Sailors were using this water for bathing, brushing their teeth, drinking and cooking.

EXECPT! Our lovable US government refuses to recognize what the Aussies claimed. The explanation was that the ship builders were different.

I encourage you to write your local Congress "critters" and Senators to keep our fight going. There are those who represent us who want to end all funding. Democrats and Republicans alike.

Another aspect of AO is the legacy of the "giving" that it has as it is passed on from GI to children and grandchildren.

VVA National has published a great pamphlet on Agent Orange, and they will be available at the Veterans Building in Alameda.

Be sure to check out the VVA National web site (www.vva.org) and click on "Faces of Agent Orange."

It's absolutely heartbreaking and the stories are real. I've heard first hand the stories from the veterans, their spouses and children.

I will be publishing more about this insidious chemical, but before I do, know also that some of our genetically modified crops contain traces of dioxins designed to fend off weeds.



in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. • Many Vietnam Veterans are passing away prematurely or are seriously ill due to their service connected, herbicide exposure during the war. • Vietnam Veterans have voiced their concerns about their offspring having many types of birth defects and serious illnesses that have no prior family history. • Vietnam Veterans have reported their wives and partners have had multiple miscarriages. • The U.S. Government refuses to fund the needed research for children and grandchildren of Vietnam Veterans who have debilitating birth defects and illnesses.

Current U.S. Government Stance • Currently, the U.S. Government acknowledges 18+ Birth Defects in the Children of FEMALE Vietnam Veterans (Only 6-8 thousand served). They are quick to state these birth defects were caused by the women's service in Vietnam and not Herbicide. What caused the birth defects? • Currently, the U.S. Government acknowledges only one birth defect in the Children of MALE Vietnam Veterans (2.8 MILLION men served). They acknowledge Spina Bifida (NOT OCCULTA).

GET INVOLVED Write your representatives supporting research and compensation for the Children and Grandchildren of Vietnam Veterans who suffer from Birth Defects and Illnesses related to the Vietnam Veteran's herbicide exposure. • Talk to families of Vietnam Veterans about Agent Orange and Herbicide exposure. • Join the COVVA email list to stay abreast of current issues and articles at WWW.COVVA.NET - Children Of Vietnam Veterans Health Alliance • COVVA has gathered and published a data base of over 700 illnesses the Children of Vietnam Veterans are currently dealing with on a daily bases. • COVVA has created a private support community for Children of Vietnam Veterans • COVVA has created a public support community for the Caretakers of Agent Orange Survivors and a Widows, Wives and Partners of Agent Orange group. • COVVA is educating the population on the very current issues surrounding Vietnam Veterans and their families. • COVVA is working closely with others in hopes of forcing the Veterans Administration to recognize the birth defects and illnesses in the offspring of Male Vietnam Vets and their families.

Learn More At www.covva.net

FIFTY YEARS LATER...

U.S., VIETNAM DEAL WITH AGENT ORANGE
clarionledger.com

HANOI A jungle raid in January 1962 in which U.S. helicopter pilots ferried South Vietnamese troops to attack soldiers from the North was one of America's first major operations in the Vietnam War.

This year, the U.S. government and war veterans are commemorating the war's 50th anniversary. In Vietnam, people remember other dates.

Among the anniversaries they marked this year for "America's War," as it is known here, was the 51st anniversary in August of the U.S. Army's first use of the herbicide Agent Orange.

The U.S. military sprayed millions of gallons of the herbicide over forested terrain in Vietnam to kill leaves and plants and deprive the enemy of cover to conceal fighters. Vietnam's state broadcaster called it "the largest chemical warfare campaign in the history of humankind."

Vietnam claims the herbicide caused dozens of illnesses in millions of Vietnamese, from cancer to infertility to heart failure and birth defects. The United States has said there is no proof the traces of

dioxin have done this and refused for years to discuss the issue.

As the hard feelings between the two countries have softened, so, too, has the U.S. stand on Agent Orange. The United States recently began a \$43 million joint project with Vietnam to clean up the site of the former American air base in the central port city of Danang where Agent Orange was loaded onto helicopters and planes for spraying.

"Agent Orange remains among the most sensitive issues in U.S.-Vietnam relations," says U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam David Shear. "However, U.S. engagement has succeeded in changing the tone of dialogue," and joint work has strengthened relations, he says.

About 3 million Vietnamese and approximately 58,000 Americans died in a decade-long war to prevent communist North Vietnam from conquering the Republic of South Vietnam. The war ended in 1975 with a victory for the North and defeat for the United States, whose troops abandoned the country two years beforehand.

Lingering health claims are not all that was left unresolved between the two sides in the war's aftermath.

The United States has spent millions of dollars searching for the remains of 1,500 of its servicemembers who were declared missing in action during the war. Vietnamese families saw about 300,000 soldiers go missing in action.

Today, some families resort to spirit mediums to find their loved ones, commonplace in a society that often consults fortune-tellers.

Nguyen Huy Cueng, 67, says he consulted a psychic who shut her eyes, prayed in a soft voice and invited his brother's spirit into her body. Then she sketched the location of his brother's grave.

"She's found over 900 bodies, and the government supports her," he says, clutching a worn map that marks the spot where the psychic said his brother lay after being killed in combat in 1967.

Family members have spent months digging without success, but he's encouraged that the Vietnamese army, after a government decision last year to help locate the dead, is searching the same location. Cueng has searched for seven years.

"We must find his body or bones and bring them home, to feel closure and relief that he'll be close to his relatives," says Cueng, a veteran of the war.

The lack of government help in his long quest has not caused Cueng to turn against the Communist Party, of which he is a member.

"Vietnam has had to prioritize economic development, and too many people died in the war; they were chaotic times," he says. "There's a lot to fix in Vietnam, but that doesn't mean our one-party system is wrong."

He has not changed his view of America much either.

"I watched the Americans. They were very tall, white and handsome. But I had to kill them. I hated the U.S. government, not the people," he says.

Cueng has enjoyed meeting U.S. war vets, describing them as "polite and friendly," but he remains wary of the U.S. government, he says. The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi hopes that will change over time and with more help from the United States.

For years, the U.S. Embassy has funded support in Vietnam for people with disabilities, regardless of cause. The U.S. Congress has appropriated \$63 million to help Vietnam locate spots where Agent Orange was used, assess environmental effects and help with cleanup.

Among the projects will be an environmental assessment of the former Bien Hoa base in the south, Ambassador Shear says. Although Vietnam says Agent Orange has caused diseases, the United States maintains that scientific evidence does not exist to show the ailments were caused by unintentional traces of dioxin in Agent Orange.

At 103 Military Hospital in Hanoi, Maj. Gen. Hoang Manh An has been treating those who say they have illnesses from exposure to Agent Orange.

"Millions of victims have received no treatment to date and are in dire need of help," he says. "Most of them are very poor and can't afford transportation to hospital," let alone medical bills.

An has been treating patients using the "Hubbard method," a detoxification program of sauna sessions, exercise and vitamins named for Church of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard. Adherents claim it improves one's quality of life, and An says patients "feel happier and healthier." There is no scientific evidence it works.

Tens of thousands of U.S. veterans were also exposed to Agent Orange. Many claim they, too, were sickened by the dioxin in the herbicide, saying Parkinson's, heart disease and lung cancers were brought on by it. The evidence is problematic.

Dioxins are chemical byproducts from the combustion of organic matter, such as the burning of trash or forest fires. Some studies found that heavy exposure to dioxins can come with an increased risk of birth defects and cancer. No definite link has been established regarding trace amounts in Agent Orange.

"Virtually every aspect of the effects of Agent Orange on Vietnam is infused with uncertainty and/or controversy," according to "Vietnamese Victims of Agent Orange and U.S.-Vietnam Relations," a report in August by the Congressional Research Service in Washington. "There is limited information about the long-term effects of Agent Orange on the environment and people of Vietnam."

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recently ruled that numerous ailments are presumed to have been caused by Agent Orange among the Vietnam veterans who have them. The ruling meant these veterans would qualify for certain benefits that had been denied.

Medical groups, such as the American Diabetes Association, say the evidence of a link between exposure to Agent Orange and the ailments listed was "modest." Well-known advocates for veterans, such as Republican Sens. John McCain and Tom Coburn, said the presumptions went too far.

Apart from the herbicide controversy, the U.S. Embassy is working on other fronts to help Vietnam overcome other leftover hazards of the war.

Unexploded bombs and land mines present a constant danger in Vietnam. In central Quang Nam province, more than 1,000 people have been injured or killed since 2004, according to the Mines Advisory Group. The United States funds the group's implementation of a \$1.6-million effort to clear the province of mines.

Some veterans say Washington and Hanoi must step ups assistance.

Nguyen Ba Dang is one of several disabled war veterans who transport goods around Hanoi on three-wheeled auto rickshaws.

"The government support is barely enough to eat each month, so we must find other work," says Dang, 60.

In September, Dang signed up for a medical program, run by Vietnam but funded by the United States, to assess his war injuries.

"I have often heard the USA will do this and that, but nothing has happened yet for me," he says. "The Vietnamese government should also do more to help us. We should learn from the USA; they take care of veterans' families, too."

The U.S. efforts to smooth the relationship have won some converts.

"I hated Americans when I was young," says Tran Thi Nguyen, 30, a waitress in Hanoi's old quarter, recalling TV documentaries and the stories of older relatives. "I feel better about America now. They now know what happened before was bad, and now they try to fix it."

Copyright 2012 USATODAY.com

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

By Pete Conaty:

Summary: Veterans & Military Legislation of the 2011/2012 Legislation Session

This has been a very busy but rewarding 2-year legislative session (2011/12) for California's military and veterans even though it doubled the amount of work I have been doing on the State Council's behalf at the State Capitol.

To recap, in this two year session, 165 bills and resolutions were introduced which dealt with veterans or military issues. Along the way some of these bills were changed into other subjects or were duplicative of other bills. Other bills did not make it through the Legislature because of costs involved to the state during this fiscal crisis such as full funding for CVSO's and for all veterans homes.

Of the 165 bills and resolutions that were introduced, 78 were signed into law by Governor Brown. An interesting fact is that most of the veterans bills signed into law were not in the Military and Veterans Code, but were in over 13 different California Codes ranging from the Business and Professions Code to the Vehicle Code. This shows the width of the areas that affect veterans and the military.

These bills and resolutions supported by the State Council often required my office to testify in no less than 4 different committees and in some cases as many as six different committees as the bills moved through the process. There was one day in which my office testified on 18 veterans bills in 6 different committees.

Each year the workload has increased in this area and is likely to continue to do so for the next five years as the Afghanistan war winds down and veterans return

to California and before the general public forgets about veterans, as usually occurs after every war.

I want to thank the Vietnam Veterans of America-California State Council for allowing me to represent you at the state Capitol. Together we are all making a tremendous difference for all of California's nearly 2 million veterans and we will continue to do so as long as I have your support.

I have attached a list of the 78 bills and resolutions and a list of which code section the bills were in. To access this legislation and all of the associated documents (committee analyses, votes, etc), please go to <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html> and make sure to select the 2011/12 session.

Additional legislative information on Chaptered Veteran Bills at: http://www.vvacalsc.com/pages/subpages/legis_issues.html

VETERANS IN THE CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATURE'S 2013-14 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The California State Legislature met on December 3, 2012 to convene the 2013-2014 Legislative Session. The recent election brought in 39 freshmen legislators who will need to be educated on veterans issues. This turnover comprises almost half of the Assembly. The Senate has only one new member who had not previously served as an Assemblymember, retired Air Force Major General Richard Roth. In addition to new legislators, there will be some new staff members and new committee memberships. This is why it is so important for veterans organizations to have a well attended Day at the Capitol event! We need to articulate the importance of veterans issues, the good work your organization does in helping veterans, and how the Legislature can help you to do this.

During the June 2012 Primary, a proposition was passed that altered California's term limits. Legislators can now serve a total of 12 years in either house or a combination of both houses. Furthermore, the election brought some increased revenues (Prop 30) and a 2/3 super majority of Democrats in the Senate and Assembly. It is unclear how exactly this will play itself out, but it is certainly a new dynamic which could bring about new ways of conducting legislative advocacy at the Capitol.

This election brought in 4 new legislators who are military veterans, one in the Senate and three in the Assembly.

Senator Richard Roth (Democrat, Senate District 31, Riverside)

Major General Roth was commissioned in June 1972. He attended Emory University School of Law, graduating with a Juris Doctor degree in 1974. General Roth entered active duty in February 1975 and served with Strategic Air Command and Pacific Air Forces units in Arizona, Okinawa and California. Upon his release from active duty in April 1979, the general transferred to the Air Force Reserve and was assigned as an individual mobilization augmentee with Strategic Air Command bomb and refueling wings from 1979 to 1985. He subsequently served three times as a staff judge advocate at the wing and group levels in Air Force Reserve Command, then served as the mobilization assistant to the Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Air Force, Washington, D.C. He retired in 2007.

Assemblyman Rocky Chavez (Republican, Assembly District 76, Oceanside)

Colonel Chavez worked his way through California State University in Chico and earned a BA degree. He then served over 28 years as a United States Marine. He was subsequently appointed Chief of Staff for the 4th Marine Division. Upon retirement from the Marine Corps, he went on to spend nearly a decade on the Oceanside City Council. In 2009, Colonel Chavez was appointed by Governor Schwarzenegger as Undersecretary of the California Department of Veterans Affairs in Sacramento, later serving as Acting Secretary.

Assemblywoman Susan Eggman (Democrat, Assembly District 13, Stockton)

After graduating from high school, Susan Eggman served four years as a medic in the U.S. Army. She then attended California State University, Stanislaus, where she earned a B.A. in psychology and a master's in social work. Susan worked as a mental health provider and a medical social worker, before receiving her Ph.D. from Portland State University. Ms. Eggman most recently served on the Stockton City Council. While there, she successfully lobbied the federal Veterans Administration to build their new facility in San Joaquin County.

Assemblywoman Melissa Melendez (Republican, Assembly District 67, Lake Elsinore)

Melissa Melendez entered the United States Navy upon graduating high school. She attended the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, Calif., where she spent a year and a half in a Russian language course, becoming a fluent Russian speaker. She then became one of the

first women approved by the U.S. Navy to fly aboard an Orion EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft overseas, conducting intelligence-gathering operations in partnership with our allies. She served as a Russian translator for ten years during the Cold War, as well as during Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm. While serving in the Navy full-time, Melissa also attended college and received her BA in History and Political Studies from Chaminade University in Honolulu, Hawaii. After the Navy, she then formed her own successful transcription company, contracting with the Chief of Naval Operations and the Secretary of the Navy. Her husband is a Navy veteran, having served 10 years on active duty as a journalist and public affairs officer. Ms. Melendez is a member of the American Legion.

LEGISLATORS CONTINUING IN OFFICE WHO ARE VETERANS

Senator Steve Knight (Republican, Senate District 21, Lancaster)

Senator Steve Knight is the son of the late Senator Pete Knight; Vietnam veteran, combat pilot, test pilot, and astronaut. Steve Knight was born at Edwards Air Force base and has lived in the Antelope Valley for most of his life. After graduating from Palmdale High School, Steve served in the U.S. Army from 1985-1987 as a track systems mechanic in Friedberg Germany and in the Army Reserve from 1987-1993. Steve also served as a police officer in the Los Angeles Police Department for 18 years. He served on the Palmdale City council. While in the Assembly, Knight was awarded the American Legion's Legislator of the Year in 2011.

Senator Ted Lieu (Democrat, Senate District 28, Torrance)

Senator Lieu's family immigrated to the United States when he was three years old. Ted went on to attend Stanford for his undergraduate degrees in Computer Science and Political Science, then Georgetown University, where he received his law degree. Recognizing the great opportunities America had given to his family, he joined the United States Air Force, where he served as a prosecutor in the JAG corps. After serving on active duty for four years, he wanted to continue to serve his country and joined the reserves. He continues to serve in the JAG corps and was recently promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. Ted has received numerous medals for his outstanding military service, including the Air Force Humanitarian Service Medal and two Meritorious Service Medals. He has authored many bills dealing with veterans issues and has served on the Assembly and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees. Lieu has been awarded Legislator of the Year by the American Legion and the Vietnam Veterans of America.

Assemblyman Paul Fong (Democrat, Assembly District 28, Mountain View)

Assemblyman Fong enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and because of a knee injury he was honorably discharged in 1973. Prior to being elected to the State Assembly, Assemblymember Fong served on the Foothill-De Anza Community College District Board of Trustees and the Foothill-De Anza Foundation Board of Directors, and served on the Board of the California Community Colleges Trustees. Assemblymember Fong was also a political science professor at Evergreen Valley College.

Assemblymember Fong holds two degrees from San Jose State University; a B.A. in Sociology and a M.P.A. Also, he holds a MAEd. from the University of San Francisco.

Assemblyman Jeff Gorell (Republican, Assembly District 44, Camarillo)

A third generation navy man, Jeff currently serves as a Lieutenant Commander (intelligence officer) in the United States Navy Reserve. He has completed two one-year tours to the Middle East and Afghanistan and was decorated for his leadership in a combat zone. In 2002, Jeff led a combat camera team in Bagram, Afghanistan, and from 2011-2012, he commanded a targeting cell embedded with the U.S. Marines in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Jeff is the grandson of a Navy Seabee who fought in the Pacific during World War II, and the son of a career naval officer and Vietnam veteran. From 1999-2006, Jeff Gorell was a Ventura County Deputy District Attorney where he served as a trial prosecutor in the major narcotics and violent felony units.

Assemblywoman Shannon Grove (Republican, Assembly District 34, Bakersfield)

Shannon Grove was raised in Arvin California, where she graduated from Arvin High School. Shortly after high school, Shannon joined the United States Army serving at 5th Corps in Frankfurt, Germany. After her service in the military, Shannon returned to Bakersfield and worked for several employment agencies. In 1993, she and her sister-

in-law formed Continental Labor and Staffing Resources and today Shannon presides as Chief Executive Officer.

BUDGET PANEL EYES END TO VA CARE FOR 1.3 MILLION VETS

The House Budget Committee, chaired by Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), has told a veterans' group it is studying a plan to save \$6 billion annually in VA health care costs by cancelling enrollment of any veteran who doesn't have a service-related medical condition and is not poor.

Committee Republicans, searching for ways to curb federal deficits and rein in galloping VA costs, are targeting 1.3 million veterans who claim priority group 7 or 8 status and have access to VA care.

Priority group 8 veterans have no service-connected disabilities and annual incomes, or net worth, that exceed VA means-test thresholds and VA "geographic income" thresholds, which are set by family size.

Priority Group 7 veterans also have no service-connected disabilities and their incomes are above the means-test thresholds. But their incomes or net worth fall below the geographic index. In other words, because of where they live, in high cost areas, they likely struggle financially.

Joseph Violante, national legislative director for Disabled American Veterans, said he first learned of the committee's interest in possibly narrowing access to VA clinics and hospitals from a DAV member from Wisconsin, chairman Ryan's home state.

Violante and other DAV officials arranged their own meeting with a staff member for the committee. He confirmed growing interest in a cost-saving initiative to push priority 7 and 8 veterans out of VA health care.

As this budget committee staffer reminded Violante, proponents for opening VA health care to all veterans had argued it would be cost neutral to VA. That's because VA would charge these vets modest co-payments for their care. Also VA would bill these veterans' private health insurance plans for the cost of their VA care.

That argument from 1996 turned out to be wrong. Co-payments collected from low-priority veterans and private insurance plan billings today cover only 18 percent of the cost of care for group 7 and 8 veterans. By 2009, the annual net cost to VA to treat these veterans totaled \$4.4 billion or 11 percent of VA's annual medical appropriation.

The figures come from the Congressional Budget Office's annual report to Congress, "Reducing the Deficit: Spending and Revenue Options." Among options it presented this year to the new Congress for reducing VA spending is one to close enrollment in VA care for all veterans in groups 7 and 8 and to cancel the enrollment of veterans currently in two low priority groups.

CBO said this would save VA \$62 billion in the first 10 years, from 2012 to 2021. But the net savings to the government over the same period, CBO said, would be about half that amount. That's because many of the veterans bumped from VA are old enough or poor enough to use Medicare or Medicaid, which would drive up the cost of those programs.

We asked a committee spokesman for comment, both by e-mail and voice mail, but none came in time for this column's deadline.

Until the mid-1990s, VA had denied health care to priority 7 and 8 veterans. Congress changed that during the Clinton administration, enacting the Veterans' Health Care Eligibility Act of 1996. The law directed VA to build many more clinics across the country. To ensure enough patients to fill these clinics, the VA secretary was given authority to expand care eligibility.

The ban on group 7 and 8 veterans was ended by 1999. Over the next three years their enrollment climbed to 30 percent of total enrollees. By 2003, then-VA Secretary Anthony Principi stopped allowing any more group 8 enrollments, saying their numbers strained the system for higher priority veterans, including wounded returning from Afghanistan and Iraq.

It's possible that, in sharing what the budget committee eyed do to lower VA health costs, the professional staffer assumed DAV would embrace cancellation of 7 and 8 enrollments because few DAV members would be impacted. But Violante said DAV is concerned, for two reasons.

One, some DAV members separated from service with disabilities rated at 0 percent do have access to VA health care as group 7 or 8 veterans.

A bigger concern for his members, Violante said, is that tossing 1.3 million veterans from VA care would leave the system without the "critical mass" of patients needed to provide "a full continuum of care."

DAV officials worried that an initiative to narrow VA enrollment would be included in the House Republican budget plan unveiled this week. Ryan titled it "Path to Prosperity" and the full committee endorsed it on a straight party line vote April 6. The budget package, however, doesn't mention any change to enrollment eligibility nor call for significant cuts to VA budgets. Violante said DAV wants to talk House committees out of taking any action to reduce VA enrollment.

CBO presented pros and cons for cancelling 7 and 8 enrollments. An advantage is VA could refocus services on "its traditional group of patients -- those with the greatest needs or fewest financial resources."

It noted 90 percent of group 7 and 8 enrollees had other health care coverage, either Medicare or private insurance. So the "vast majority" cut loose would have ready access to other coverage. Those who don't could be eligible for health insurance exchanges to be set up in the future said CBO.

One disadvantage is that many veterans who have come to rely on VA for at least part of their medical care would see that care interrupted.

The Obama administration and Congress actually had been moving in the opposite direction, to expand VA enrollment, until Republicans won the House. As Obama took office in 2009, VA announced that up to 266,000 veterans with no service-connected health conditions would be allowed to enroll in VA health care. Rep. Chet Edwards (D-Texas) had fought successfully to add \$350 million to the 2009 VA budget so income thresholds controlling priority 8 enrollments could be raised 10 percent.

Edwards lost his reelection bid last year. And new priority 8 enrollees haven't rushed to join the system as VA officials had expected.

Group 8 and 7 veterans using VA care pay \$15 per outpatient visit and a little more for specialty care. Inpatient fees also are modest. The most popular benefit for many enrollees is discounted prescription drugs. The co-pay usually is \$8 for a 30-day supply.

Tim Tetz with American Legion said his organization and many veterans groups would strongly oppose tossing out group 7 and 8 veterans. He credits their enrollment since 1999 as helping to improve VA care.

"If as great of a health care system as we have, shouldn't we let all of our veterans have access to it, in some manner," Tetz asked.

While deficit hawks weigh this issue, VA still is enrolling new group 8 veterans who fall below its income thresholds. Those without dependents and living outside high-cost areas, for example, must have income below a means test threshold of \$32,342. More information on group 8 enrollment is online at www.va.gov/healtheligibility or call (877) 222-VETS (8387).

VETERAN HOME RECRUITMENT CALVET ANNOUNCES RECRUITMENT EFFORT FOR REDDING AND FRESNO VETERANS HOMES

The California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) has begun recruiting to fill hundreds of positions at the Veterans Homes of California in Redding and Fresno. Throughout 2013, CalVet will work to fill positions in nursing, medicine, pharmacy, mental health, social services, speech and physical therapy, dietetics and food service, sanitation and janitorial, plant operations, grounds keeping, security, accounting, human resources, medical billing, contracts, clerical, health care analysis and IT management.

"Caring for elderly and disabled veterans at our beautiful state-of-the-art Veterans Homes of California isn't a job, it's a privilege," said Robin Umberg, Undersecretary, Veterans Homes of California. "These men and women who served our country have sacrificed so much. We're looking for caring, compassionate, and talented staff to help ensure that the veterans in our Homes live the highest quality of life with dignity and honor."

CalVet is currently scheduling the examinations necessary to create employment eligibility lists and is posting job announcement bulletins for open positions. To find current Veterans Homes and other CalVet job and examination announcements, go to www.calvet.ca.gov/AboutUs/Jobs/Default.aspx.

In January, CalVet will host recruitment fairs at the Redding and Fresno Homes. The fairs will offer information about positions available at each Home, the State of California testing and job application process, and the mandatory background check required for certain types of Homes employees. More information about these fairs will be made public as the events draw near.

CACVSOs In Action

(California Association Of County Veterans Service Officers)

BEYOND VETERAN'S DAY DISCOUNTS

Pete Conaty

As Veteran's Day came and went we saw more and more stores and restaurants are offering discounts to veterans. The problem is that California's almost 2 million veterans do not walk around with their DD-214's in their pockets. The DD-214 is a standard 8.5x11 piece of paper that is the veteran's official discharge paper and most veterans don't even have a copy, let alone carry it with them.

There is no universal veteran ID card in the nation or in California. If you are in the military, a military retiree, or are receiving benefits from the federal Veterans Administration (VA), you have a valid identification card that can be used for these discounts.

If you belong to one of the many veterans service organizations (VSO's) in California like the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the American Legion, AMVETS, or the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), most establishments will accept those membership cards as proof that you are a veteran.

That still leaves about 1.25 million California veterans without veteran ID cards. But help is on the way. Recently 3 California counties' Board of Supervisors have authorized their County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO's) to issue veteran ID cards for veterans in their counties.

CVSO's primarily help veterans file claims with the VA. They also get involved in anything having to do with providing help or services for our California military members and veterans and they also work closely with local VSO posts or chapters in their counties.

The 3 counties which are currently issuing veterans' ID cards are Shasta, Solano, and Kings Counties. Shasta County started issuing cards in late 2010 and has issued over 1,500 ID cards to date. Solano County followed and has issued about 1,000 cards in one month. Kings County just started and has already issued 400 ID cards in less than a month.

"We really need to thank the Boards of Supervisors in these counties for letting us do this. It is starting to take off" stated Joe Wright, the Kings County CVSO. According to Bob Dunlap, the Shasta County CVSO, "I have identified over 150 business in the Redding area who give discounts to veterans - and not just on Veteran's Day".

Most importantly, by offering these cards, CVSO's are able to make contact with veterans that come into their offices for the first time. After reviewing or helping the veteran obtain their DD-214's, the CVSO then helps these veterans file claims with the federal VA for benefits based upon their military service which they may be eligible for. "We have a tremendous amount of veterans in California who are not even aware that they may be eligible for these federal entitlements they earned by virtue of their military service" stated Ted Puntillo, Solano County CVSO.

Bob Dunlap estimates that 75% of the veterans who have received an ID card through his office have filed a VA claim for the first time. Joe Wright reports that he has had numerous Vietnam veterans come in who were unaware that they were eligible for benefits because of Agent Orange chemical exposure. When the DD-214's are reviewed for issuance of the ID card, the CVSO talks to them about any war time health issues they may have from Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan. CVSO's also see many World War II and Korean war veterans and their family members who may be eligible for benefits".

Why does this matter? California has more veterans than any other state in the country, but constantly ranks below the national average percentage of veterans receiving VA benefits. Currently the Department of Veterans Affairs annual expenditures in California are over \$10.3 billion dollars annually and have been growing.

CVSOs, who have been in existence for the most part since World War II, continue to bring in significant economic benefits to California.

According to Pete Conaty*, "while it would be great to get one check from the federal government for the \$4.5 billion for compensation and pension benefits due to California's veterans, CVSO's must find veterans one at a time because each claim is different". Veterans benefits are not like filing for Social Security, not all veterans are eligible for benefits. The California Department of Veterans Affairs has issued reports to the Legislature that show CVSO's have brought over \$3 billion in new veterans benefits for California veterans since 1995.

CVSO's receive no funding from the federal government and only minor funding from the state through local assistance grants. The county's fund over 90% of the cost of their CVSO's even thought the counties

are not required to maintain a CVSO office. The Boards of Supervisors have continued to fund CVSO's during these difficult financial times because they recognize the moral obligation to help California's veterans. All 3 CVSO's agree, "if we didn't have the support of our Board of Supervisors to fund our efforts, California veterans would not be getting as many benefits", stated Joe Wright, Kings County CVSO.

For more information, you may contact:
 Kings County CVSO Joe Wright: (559) 852-2659
 Shasta County CVSO Bob Dunlap: (530) 225-5616
 Solano County CVSO Ted Puntillo: (707) 784-6590

RETURNED VIETNAM DIARY GIVES SON GLIMPSE OF FATHER

clarionledger.com

LONG XUYEN, Vietnam (AP) -- Vu Dinh Son was 18 months old when his father left home to fight American forces in Vietnam, and just 2 when the man was killed in a foxhole encounter with U.S. Marines. But the son now has fresh glimpses into the life of the father he never knew thanks to a wartime diary, returned to him courtesy of the United States.

The pocket-sized book was brought to Vietnam in June by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, who, in return, was handed a bundle of letters written by an American soldier that had been kept in Vietnam. The high-level exchange of artifacts symbolized a joint desire for closer ties by the former enemies, who now share concerns over China's rise.

U.S. Marine Robert "Ira" Frazure took the diary from the chest of Son's father, Vu Dinh Doan, in March 1966 and then took it home with him, presumably as a war souvenir. Earlier this year, he asked the sister of a fellow Vietnam vet to track down Doan's family in Vietnam to return the diary. She did that with the help of the PBS television program "History Detectives," which tracked down Doan's family earlier this year.

"When my father left for the battlefield, I was too small to know anything, I was not even able to call out 'Dad,'" Son said Friday after a tearful ceremony outside his house during which the diary was returned, along with a photo of him and two bank notes.

"Whatever he wrote in his small diary will make us extremely happy," Son said. "We are tremendously proud of him, and in our heart he is a tremendous hero."

The red book is hard to decipher in places, but gives a flavor of the life of a North Vietnamese soldier at the beginning of the war: Entries talk of a 15-day march by Doan, hunger staved off with a meal of rice, salt and shrimp paste, and a vow to destroy "eight planes and five tanks."

The artifacts were placed during the ceremony next to a photo of Doan, whose body was recovered four years ago, in his uniform in front of burning incense. Above him was a photo of revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh. Afterward, the family went to pray at his grave, which is in a cemetery reserved for war dead a short drive from the family house.

The United States and Vietnam normalized relations in 1995, 20 years after the end of a war that resulted in the deaths of an estimated 3 million Vietnamese and 58,000 U.S. soldiers. They have largely agreed to move on from the war, though tensions remain over effects of dioxide sprayed by the United States and Vietnam's human rights record. The U.S. relies on Vietnamese cooperation in its hunt for the remains of American soldiers in the country. The two countries have exchanged artifacts before, but never at such a high level. Rarely, if ever, has the Vietnamese army invited the media to cover the events.

The United States is seeking to boost its military and economic ties with Vietnam and other Southeast Asian nations, in a so-called "Asian Pivot" to contain China's influence in the region. Many of the countries, including Vietnam, share U.S. concerns regarding China and are looking toward Washington for diplomatic and military support.

Friday's ceremony, which took place a short drive east of Vietnam's capital, Hanoi, was attended by a representative of the U.S. military, but was organized by Vietnam. Its army is keen to show that it is trying to track down the possessions of dead soldiers, not to mention their bodies. There are still some 300,000 Vietnamese soldiers whose remains have yet to be found.

"This is a chance to remind the country of its tradition of fighting foreign aggressors and liberating the country," Col. Nguyen Xuan Nang said after the ceremony. "It reflects warming relations between the U.S. and Vietnam."

Copyright 2012 The Associated Press. All rights

reserved.

WAR VETS FIND SOLACE IN FOUR-LEGGED FRIENDS

By Elliott C. McLaughlin , CNN

(CNN) -- He was antisocial and difficult to work with at first. He'd clearly been abused by his father as evidenced by the deep, round scab near his shoulder. He hadn't been eating well.

And he was so skittish that the slightest noise or motion set him off. But Army veteran Jeff Wilson needed a new dog, and this pound puppy -- a border collie-German shepherd mix -- was it.

He named him Lobo, and it wasn't long before Wilson, 44, realized they had the same issues.

"We were kind of kindred spirits," he said. "I think it really helped deepen our connection because he wasn't just helping me; I was helping him. I was helping him get past the same obstacles that I had. I had to recognize it in myself and get past that to help him."

Wilson is a former tank commander and flight engineer who isn't at liberty to speak about his time in Iraq other than to say he manned a machine gun while hanging out of the door of a helicopter. He can also say that he was often "exposed to very dangerous situations" during his 14 years in the service.

He has been diagnosed with depression and anxiety from post-traumatic stress disorder, and he's not alone. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, 11% to 20% of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans are suffering from PTSD.

Wilson said his depression turned him into a hermit. He would "curl up and not talk to anybody," and his anxiety made it difficult to go into public.

If he did leave the house, he was hypervigilant. If someone walked up behind him or dropped something that emitted a clatter, it triggered the "fight or flight" mechanism he'd groomed in the military.



Inside the mind of an Iraq combat vet



Top 10 CNN Hero: Mary Cortani

The anxiety was so bad that before he was diagnosed with PTSD, he went to the emergency room four times because he thought he was having a heart attack. He "self-medicated" so heavily with booze that it strained the relationship between him and his now-wife of two years.

"I was having to drink to numb all my senses and be quasi-normal," he said.

But today, with Lobo by his side, Wilson is finding it easier to cope.

The two have been working with Operation Freedom Paws, a nonprofit in Gilroy, California, that helps veterans train their own service dogs. It is run by Mary Cortani, a veteran and one of the top 10 CNN Heroes of 2012.

Veterans in Focus: Celebrating, honoring veterans

When veterans train "their own service dog, there are immediate benefits right off the bat," Cortani said. "They have a mission and a purpose again. It gives them something to focus on and to complete. It gives them a sense of security and safety. ... They know they're not alone. They've always got their buddy at the end of the leash."

Now Wilson tells Lobo, "Watch my back," and his four-legged friend stands behind him and gives him a

nudge if anyone approaches. When something stokes Wilson's anxiety, Lobo senses it, jumps up and puts his paws on Wilson's chest so he can redirect his focus.

"Knowing he's there makes me comfortable," Wilson said. "I'm not worried about the attacks. I still think about them, but I'm not hampered by them. I can go to the movies."

A study on hold

The Veterans Affairs Department recently put a study on hold that would determine the effectiveness of canine therapy for troops suffering from PTSD. Until that study is complete, the VA will continue providing dogs for a variety of ailments, but not PTSD.

Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Georgia, co-sponsored the 2009 legislation that kicked off the study. He was inspired by the strides that dogs helped his mother make from 1995 to 1998 after she was stricken with Alzheimer's.

"She wasn't very fond of dogs at all, but when she developed Alzheimer's, they became a key part of her therapy," the senator said. "She was unable to really communicate at that time, but you could easily tell, emotionally, the calming effect the service dogs had."



The hidden wounds of combat



Gen. Chiarelli on treating PTSD and TBI



Service dogs help war veterans recover

Dogs: A medicine for mental health problems?

Isakson said the VA is rewriting the parameters of the study to take into account the dogs' temperaments and the importance of matching the trainers, not just the dogs, with the patients.

Yet not everyone is convinced "the VA has the right stuff" to conduct the necessary experiments, said Corey Hudson, CEO of Canine Companions for Independence and president of the North American chapter of the umbrella organization, Assistance Dogs International.

Hudson said he hopes the study will be large enough to consider the broad gamut of symptoms associated with PTSD, as well as the anecdotal evidence suggesting canine companions can help tug the disorder's sufferers from their shells.

"There's something mystical and magical about dogs and people and placing them together," said Hudson, who has "worked with and against the VA" during his 22 years of experience with assistance dogs. Canine Companions for Independence has more than 900 puppy raisers and works to pair veterans with dogs regardless of whether the VA shells out for it.

Hudson doesn't cite scientific studies, such as the one that says canine interaction increases a human's level of oxytocin, a hormone that reduces anxiety and blood pressure.

Instead, he speaks about how dogs love unconditionally and don't judge. He explains how they naturally spark social interaction -- "Cool dog; can I pet her?" -- and how

ownership precludes people from locking themselves in their homes, away from society.

"You can also use them as an excuse to get out of things or leave early," Hudson said.

Case in point

Shadow is one pooch accustomed to being used for such occasions.

The 2-year-old Labrador-Bernese mountain dog mix is the inseparable pal of Jennifer Haeffner, a seven-year Army veteran who had been housebound for about five years before meeting Shadow in the summer.

"He's a very active dog. It makes me do things. I don't have the option of hiding in the house. I have to go out," said the 41-year-old Ripon, California, resident.

Share your story, honor a veteran

During Operation Desert Storm, where she served for about nine months between 1991 and 1992, she was sexually assaulted on multiple occasions by other service members, she said. It's a fairly common occurrence that befalls about one in four women in the military, according to the VA.

It left her feeling alone in the world. She wanted to disappear. She forgot how to deal with people and eventually became a recluse, considering it a "good month" if she got out just once to shop for groceries.

She didn't attend any of her large family's gatherings. Too many people and too much noise, she said. It terrified her.

"For years after that, I would go out and wander the streets late at night, just hoping someone would kill me because I wasn't brave enough to kill myself," she said.

About five months ago, her therapist recommended that she meet Cortani.

Cortani recalls Haeffner wouldn't look her in the eye when they met. Her leg bounced when she spoke, and she pressed her fingernails into her arm. Her boyfriend was constantly by her side.

"You could just tell the pain and the anguish that even meeting me for the first time was causing," said Cortani, an Army veteran herself.

Who's your CNN Hero of the Year? Vote now

Operation Freedom Paws teaches participants to train their own dogs, to customize their behavior. First, the dogs learn to sit, then heel -- the basic stuff.

Shadow now knows how to pick things up for Haeffner so she doesn't put stress on her bad back and hips. He acts as a barrier, physically putting himself between her and any new people she meets.

When she wakes up feeling gloomy, he lets her stay in bed and pet him until she's ready to face the day. If she hears a sound during the night, he stays by her side as she checks it out, and Shadow is quick to snap her out of nightmares.

"He'll breathe on me or lay his head across mine to wake me up," she said of her 55-pound companion. "If I'm in a bad mood, he'll come over and insist I play with his toy or lay his lead in my lap or lick my feet -- cheer me up."

Cortani said the difference between the Haeffner of five months ago and the Haeffner of today is like "night and day."

She builds friendships. She's been to the aquarium. She's gone horseback riding. She goes places without her boyfriend.

"She's creating her own new normal," Cortani said.

Added Haeffner: "I'm much better now. I'm happier."

CNN's Christie O'Reilly contributed to this report.

SEPARATING THE WAR FROM THE WARRIORS

By Jan C. Scruggs



RALPH APPLEBAUM ASSOCIATES
The Vietnam Wall's new Education Center will display some of the nearly half-million items left at the Wall over the past 30 years.

The past decade has not been a pleasant time for many who serve in our armed forces.

Many recall holidays deployed in danger zones far from home. Places like Fallujah, Kandahar and Bagdad brought our troops many challenges. America has had over 50,000 wounded, nearly 7,000 dead. Others have injuries like PTSD, tinnitus and Traumatic Brain Injury.

Wars have costs — often profound — for the warriors.

Many Americans actually do not know anyone who has been deployed in the military. It used to be very different. During the Vietnam War it sure was. I volunteered at age 18 for a two-year stint in 1968.

Most of those I served with were drafted. I liked the idea of getting it over with right out of high school. The Army made me an infantryman. They were losing hundreds on a weekly basis. I ended up in Vietnam, seeing combat here and there. Thanks to the skill of a North Vietnamese RPG team, I got shot up badly enough to get a free education. I ended up with a master's degree in counseling psychology from American University in Washington D.C.. And later a law degree. So it was a fair trade.

Flowing from all of this education, I became an authority on PTSD, writing articles and testifying to the U.S. Congress. Then came the idea of a national memorial honoring Vietnam veterans. A lot of people helped considerably, especially some dedicated and skilled graduates of West Point. One was Robert Kimmitt, who went on to become the U.S. ambassador to Germany. There were a lot of them, several with MBAs from Harvard. I was just a former E-4 with an idea, energy and audacity.

The effort to create the Wall was action packed with thrills and spills and controversy, but the entire effort — legislative, funding, design competition and construction — was completed in three years. As decades moved on, "the Wall that heals evolved into the Wall that educates." These are actually the words of Brian Thacker, a Medal of Honor recipient. In 2000, with help from a lot of VIPs like Senators Chuck Hagel, John McCain and John Kerry — we started work on the Education Center at the Wall. The Memorial gave the veterans of the Vietnam War society's recognition. The Center would teach that society about what the veterans did.

A ceremonial groundbreaking for the center was held November 28, 2012.

We are breaking ground for some real VIPs who are pretty busy right now — fighting in Afghanistan or getting ready to deploy. They and many other Americans have been fighting for a long time. The recent veterans of these wars will one day get a memorial, but that's at least a decade off. Until then, the center can serve as a place where they will be honored, and where their fallen friends will be remembered.

The Education Center will be a place to celebrate values like Honor, Courage, Integrity, Duty and Service. The exhibits will consist of some of the 400,000 items left at the Wall arranged to highlight these values. Visitors will be greeted in a corridor introducing them to a Legacy of Service — acknowledging all those who have served since 1775. At the end of the tour, photos of those Americans who fell in Vietnam will be displayed, driven by software...and visitors. We now have more than 32,000 photos of the 58,000 who never came home.



RALPH APPLEBAUM ASSOCIATES
This rendering shows how those killed in the nation's post-9/11 wars will be honored at the new Education Center.

How will our more recent veterans be honored? We are planning to display their photographs as well. We have assured Congress, the White House and the families that this will be done. We now have the team in place, including former chairmen of the Joint Chiefs, congressional leaders, and celebrities like Jimmy Buffett. We make no judgment on the wisdom of fighting in places like Vietnam, Iraq or Afghanistan. That debate is for others — for historians and policy-makers — elsewhere. The Wall's mantra has always been to separate the war from the warriors.

Come help us do that at 10 a.m. this Wednesday at the

Wall. Bring your photographs.

VIETNAM SERVICE “PRESUMPTIVE” DISABILITY BENEFITS

VA presumes that specific disabilities diagnosed in certain veterans were caused by their military service. VA does this because of the unique circumstances of their military service. If one of these conditions is diagnosed in a veteran, VA presumes that the circumstances of his/her service caused the condition, and disability compensation can be awarded. The following health conditions are presumptively recognized for service in Vietnam. Veterans with one or more recognized conditions do not have to show that their illness is related to their military service to get disability compensation. VA presumes that their condition is service-connected.

Conditions include chloracne, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, soft tissue sarcoma, Hodgkin's disease, porphyria cutanea tarda, multiple myeloma, respiratory cancers including cancers of the lung, larynx, trachea, and bronchus, prostate cancer, acute and subacute transient peripheral neuropathy, type 2 diabetes, and chronic lymphocytic leukemia.

Recently added conditions include B cell leukemias such as hairy cell leukemia, Parkinson's disease and ischemic heart disease.

Certain conditions are also recognized for the children of Vietnam veterans. Covered birth defects include a wide range conditions. Eighteen defects are specifically included and others not specifically excluded are covered.

Vietnam veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam between 1/9/62 and 5/7/75, and later contracted any of these conditions, or have children with birth defects, should apply for disability compensation benefits. There are no time limits to apply.

Contact an accredited veteran service officer if you need to apply.

PTSD "CURE"?

DOCTOR: INJECTION CAN 'CURE' PTSD IN VETERANS

By Alex Crees

A federally-approved injection is offering new hope to veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The injection, which takes approximately 15 minutes to administer, has led to dramatic improvements in some veterans who suffer from the disorder.

With 23,000 soldiers set to withdraw from Afghanistan this year, somewhere between 11 to 20 percent of them will suffer from PTSD, according to estimates from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

PTSD is an anxiety disorder that typically follows exposure to a traumatic event such as combat, disaster or assault. Symptoms include nightmares, jumpiness, paranoia, irritability and aggressiveness. It is often accompanied by depression, substance abuse or other anxiety disorders.

To address the soldiers who aren't finding relief from standard therapies, Dr. Eugene Lipov, medical director of Advanced Pain Centers in Chicago, director of pain research at Northwest Community Hospital and medical director of Chicago Medical Innovations, is championing a little-known treatment called Stellate ganglion block (SGB).

According to Lipov, PTSD sufferers who have been administered the block have reported relief from symptoms in as little as 30 minutes.

Lipov has received a waiver from the FDA to perform SGB and is currently recruiting participants for a clinical trial. SGB, which has also been used in the past to treat depression, schizophrenia, psychosis, and other mental health disorders, is not backed by the Department of Veterans Affairs for treating PTSD in soldiers.

For the treatment, local anesthetic — commonly used in epidurals during labor — is injected into a collection of nerves in the neck known as the stellate ganglion. These nerves are connected to various parts of the brain, including the amygdala, which are thought to be associated with PTSD.

One theory behind the development of PTSD suggests that when a person is under massive stress, the level of nerve growth factor (NGF) in his or her system increases. NGF prompts the growth of new sympathetic nerves, which release a hormone called norepinephrine.

Norepinephrine underlies the "fight-or-flight" response in the body and directly increases heart rate and blood pressure. Researchers such as Lipov believe high levels of NGF in people with PTSD are directly responsible

for their heightened sensitivity to environmental stimulus. SGB essentially “turns off” the NGF activity, leading to the decline of norepinephrine in a person’s system. “As long as NGF continues to be active it maintains the extra growth of [sympathetic] nerves, or ‘leaves,’” Lipov said. “NGF is the fertilizer for these leaves, so the procedure takes away the fertilizer.” “I’ve seen soldiers going 120 miles an hour before the block, and 30 minutes later in the recovery room, they’ll say, ‘I’m chilling now; I’m ok,’” he added.

"Butcher's Bill"

The butcher’s bill is high today,
Brothers so briefly known.
They know the cost but never fail,
And proudly head for home.

Our weary souls, our battered bodies
Our sleepless tortured night.
We fight for what no one knows
We fight for what is right.

The reason sits in every heart
Now stilled beneath the ground.
Every soldier fighting now,
Within them too it's found.

You who sleep in warm soft bed
You who run your race
Don’t you know the price that’s paid?
The cost to keep the pace?

Of course you don’t
You’ll never know
The aching hearts who die
The men who give their lives with pride
Never asking why.

They know, they know
The cost is high, the balance drawn in red
The forsaken love, the embittered spouse
Silent tears that must be shed.

How many nights in foreign land
With ne’er a friend to find
Does warrior brave with heart so strong
Refuse to leave a man behind?

And in that act his own death bring
A sacrifice for all.
That he should give his own breath now
That fewer brethren fall?

You mock, you sneer, you judge and convict
A man you do not know.
You sentence him without ever knowing
Of the road he has to go.

It is not his hand that drew the bill,
Not God’s will that he should die.
Darker forces draw this bill,
With ink never running dry.

I’ll take that bill, I’ll sign my name
And from afar I see
The candle lit in warmth and love
The candle lit for me.

The butcher’s bill is high today,
And I am paid in full.

by M. Henderson



So far, Lipov has treated 65 patients from 25 states and one person from New Zealand. The cost of the injection is approximately \$1,000 and is fully covered by his non-profit Chicago Medical Innovations.

Lipov said the procedure works in 70 percent of patients, and they show at least 50 percent improvement in symptoms.

“The most marked improvement is in sleep –the nightmares going away,” he said.

Living with PTSD
For some PTSD sufferers, like Raleigh Showens, 65, of McHenry, Ill., the injection is a last resort measure to find relief – and literally, a matter of life or death.

Showens, who was a MedEvac for 19 months, said while he never saw combat in Vietnam, he witnessed the horrific results.

“I saw the death and destruction, and I was just 19,” Showens said. “We flew in Easter Sunday of ’67, and we were loading a lot of bodies in...I was sick, and I had a nurse come up, put her arms around me and say, ‘Soldier, you’re going to have to get tough.’”

While Showens learned to block out things he saw during the war, when he returned home a year and a half later, he had trouble re-adjusting to civilian life.

“My family and friends all said, ‘You’re not the same person,’ and it bothered me,” Showens said. “I could see the difference, too. I was short-tempered and on edge all the time, but I didn’t know what to do about it.”

Showens turned to alcohol to bury his problems. The VA also prescribed him various medications to help with his depression and sleeping problems.

Iraq veteran Chris Carlson, 41, from Lombard, Ill., did two tours in Afghanistan and one in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and reported similar experiences when he came home.

“I started reliving some of the experiences and what I saw,” Carlson said. “I had horrible nightmares and would wake up in cold sweats. It got worse and worse as time went on.”

Carlson said he would wake up and start drinking alcohol. “Instead of coffee, I’d be drinking beer first thing in the morning,” he said.

Last resort
Showens lived with his symptoms for more than 40 years until December 2010, when he met Lipov at a political rally. At the time, Showens was contemplating the idea of committing suicide.

“I was tired of living that way,” he said. “I was tired of putting my family through it.”

The injection was a last ditch attempt to cure his PTSD. “If it didn’t work, nobody could look at me and say, ‘You should have tried this, and you didn’t,’” Showens said. “I didn’t even think about it or hesitate. What difference would it make? I already had my destiny planned.”

Showens went in for the injection on December 20. Despite his expectations, within a half hour, he felt relaxed. But something even more remarkable happened later that night.

“I had had nightmares – pretty much destroyed the house every night since 1968,” Showens said. “I can honestly say that night was the first time I slept all the way through the night without a nightmare.”

He added when his nightmares returned a week later, he had to go back in for a second injection. Since then, he’s been living without PTSD symptoms and off medications.

“We don’t know why sometimes it takes more than one block to [relieve PTSD symptoms],” Lipov said. “I think sometimes the first doesn’t take away enough NGF. Sometimes, we have to do five or six injections.”

Carlson experienced drastic improvements as well after his first injection.

“I was skeptical,” Carlson said, “Like, a needle in my neck, how will that help me? But immediately I felt so much better physically, mentally and emotionally.”

Carlson ultimately required a second injection, like Showens, but said he has been symptom-free for 10 months. He has also stopped drinking.

“It’s really hard to explain,” Carlson said. “I was in this deep depression, hearing things, always looking out windows or under doors...but now all that stuff isn’t affecting me. I just feel so much better.”

Standard therapies
Standard treatments for PTSD include psychological approaches such as cognitive behavioral therapy and a class of medications called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), often used in conjunction with one another.

However, according to Dr. Paula Schnurr, deputy director at the National Center for PTSD, only 30 to 40 percent of patients officially go into remission from these treatments.

The actual remission rates may be higher, according to Schnurr, but it can be difficult to gage success in a rigorous, scientific study.

The VA and Department of Defense fund select experimental treatments for PTSD, not including SGB, which Schnurr said they choose based on evidence supporting the treatments and outcomes of the patients.

“In the field, we’ve got more treatments but also challenges to make them better and more efficient and more effective in patients,” Schnurr said. “We’re not 100 percent there yet.”

A MEMORABLE ENCOUNTER

By Steve Mackey

Being President of Vietnam Veterans of America, California State Council, I have to travel to Washington DC twice a year for the National Board meetings. Since my wife and I don’t like to fly we drive back to DC. We just got back from our October meeting. While driving home we stopped at a gas station just east of Amarillo, Texas.

I pulled up to the pump, gas was \$3.49 a gallon, and stopped. As I got out of my vehicle I saw a pickup truck pulling up behind me. I did not pay much attention to the truck until the driver, a male, exited the vehicle and started walking towards me like he was on a mission. I stopped what I was doing and put all my attention on the male walking towards me.

The male, who was Asian, stopped at the rear of my car. He asked me if I was a Vietnam Veteran. I said yes. He asked where I served in Vietnam. Looking at him, then hearing his accent I realized the gentleman was Vietnamese. I told him where I served and asked him if he served in Vietnam. He said he did. I asked him if he was VC or ARVN. He started laughing and said “No VC, No VC”. He served near Saigon.

I shook his hand and welcomed him to America. As we were shaking hands he thanked me for what we did for his country during the Vietnam War. He was very thankful for the American Soldier. I asked him what he did during the war. He was a South Vietnam Infantryman. When the North took over the country in 1975 he went into the jungle and continued to fight the north. He was able to avoid capture for 13 months. Once he was captured he spent 17 months in prison. When the North thought he was rehabilitated, they released him from prison.

He spent the next 8 years trying to talk his family into leaving Vietnam. His family did not want to risk trying to flee the country so in 1986 he set off in a boat with 35 other refugees and spent 32 days in the ocean until they were picked up by another country’s ship. He made his way to America and started his new life.

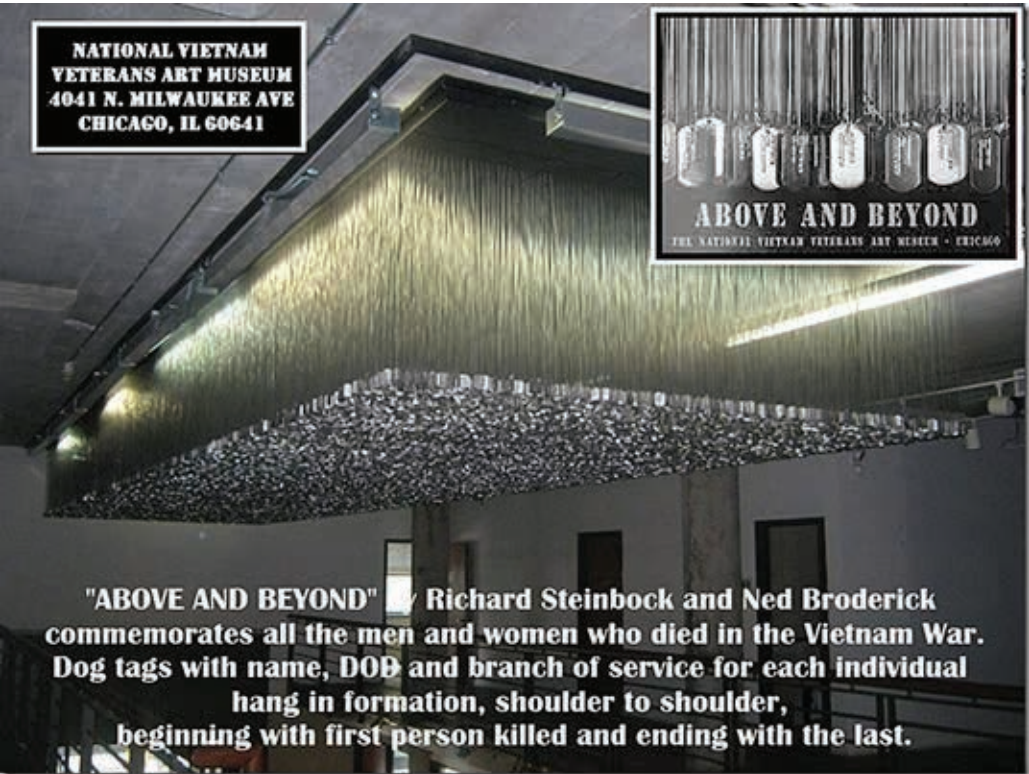
What a wonderful talk we had. Now if we flew to DC and back for our meetings we would never had met this fine man. This was one of a number of people we met while traveling home from DC. What a treat.



VVA accepts donations of all kinds, but we especially need clothing.

- Clothing of all types & sizes (men’s, ladies, children’s, baby’s)
- Clothing accessories
- Shoes (all kinds)
- Baby items
- House and glassware
- Books, toys, bikes
- Stereos, radios, portable TVs
- All bedding, draperies, curtains
- Kitchenware
- Usable small furniture & rugs
- Small appliances
- Tools (all kinds)
- Jewelry and cosmetics
- ALMOST ANYTHING!
- (888) 518-VETS (8387)
- Visit: <http://www.vvadonations.org>





"ABOVE AND BEYOND"

When visitors first enter this museum, they will hear a sound like wind chimes coming from above them and their attention will be drawn upward 24 feet to the ceiling of the two-story high atrium.

Dog tags of 58,226 service men and women who died in the Vietnam War hang from the ceiling of the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum in Chicago. The 10-by-40-foot sculpture, entitled “Above & Beyond,” was designed by Ned Broderick and Richard Steinbock. All these metal dog tags are suspended 24 feet in the air, 1 inch apart, from fine lines that allow them to move and chime with shifting air currents. Museum employees using a kiosk and laser pointer help visitors locate the exact dog tag with the imprinted name of their lost friend or relative. The dog tags are displayed in chronological order as they are on The Wall and each one has the name, branch of service, and date of casualty.



VVA Chapter 223 - Postal Permit
PO Box 1583
Santa Rosa, CA 95402

VVA CA State Council contact info inside - page 2

NON PROFIT ORG
NON PROFIT
US POSTAGE PAID
Santa Rosa CA 95402
Permit # 679

To:

In this issue:

- Chapter Activities-Events
- Legislative Information
- Veteran Benefit Information
- Agent Orange Information

And more...

VVA & CSC Meeting Dates & Events
CSC Full Council Meeting - January 25-27, 2013, Fresno, CA
CSC Full Council Meeting - May 3-5, 2013, Fresno, CA
Region 8/9 Conference - June 7-9, 2013, Reno, NV
National Convention - August 14-18, 2013, Jacksonville, FL
CSC Full Council Meeting - August 23-25, 2013, Fresno, CA
CSC Full Council Meeting - October 25-27, 2013, Fresno, CA