



The California Zephyr

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



A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 17-7

WINTER 2015

CSC PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

First let me say I hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving, a very Merry Christmas and a safe and sane New Year's Eve.

This coming year is going to be a busy one as most of the California chapters have elections in April. VVA constitution says;

"The annual meeting of the members of the Chapter, held after December 31, 1986, shall be held in April of each year on a day and at a time and place to be determined by the Board of Directors of the Chapter for the purpose of electing Officers, each for a one-(1) or two-(2)-year term as determined by the Chapter; Election Committee members, each for a one-(1), or two-(2)-year term as determined by the Chapter; Directors, each for a one-(1), two-(2), or three-(3) year term as determined by the Chapter; State Council delegates, who shall be elected for a term of two (2) years at the annual meeting occurring in each even-numbered year; and for the transaction of such other business as may properly come before the meeting."

If your chapter has their elections this year then a chapter election report needs to be filled out and sent to two separate locations. One to the National Membership Department and the second one is to be sent to the CSC secretary. I know the report is not due until July 15, 2015 but since our elections occur in April there is no reason to wait until July 15th to send the report in.

Plus, this year is our National Convention which takes place from July 21-July 25 in Springfield, MO. If your chapter is planning on sending delegates to the convention it will make it much easier on National VVA and the CSC if we get our reports in early. So please send your election reports to National and CSC Secretary right after your chapter elections.

The election form is on the National VVA web site, www.vva.org, under forms. It is a four-page form and is easy to fill out. Please use THAT form. (Editor: You can even file it electronically - look for a story in next issue about how this can be done).

Also the end of the fiscal year is February 28th. The chapter's annual finance reports are due by July 15th, but again this year being a convention year we need to get the finance reports in early. So please get them done as soon after February 28th as possible. Also remember to send the 990 acceptance card from the IRS along with your finance report. The reports go to National VVA Membership Department and a copy to the CSC treasurer.

Send them in early.
Steve

THE WALL THAT HEALS

...IS COMING TO THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA
VOLUNTEERS AND SPONSORS NEEDED

The Wall That Heals, a half-scale, traveling replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, will be available for public viewing April 9-12 at Golden Gate National Cem-

Traveling Wall That Heals

Half-Scale, Traveling Replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

is coming to the Bay Area

April 8-12, 2015, at Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Bruno

Volunteers and Sponsors Needed

* * * How You Can Help * * *

Event Volunteers

- 50+ volunteers needed.
- Meetings held at 10 a.m., 1st & 3rd Saturdays, Jan 17 through April 4, at Golden Gate National Cemetery.

(650-704-2985, Keith@Blackey.net for details)

Event Sponsors

- Cash donations and Gifts-in-Kind are needed.
- Sponsors will be listed in promotional material and invited to special viewings and recognition.
- 501(c)(3) receipts provided.

(650-704-2985, Keith@Blackey.net for details)

To learn more about volunteering and donating contact Keith Blackey

650-704-2985 (Mobile) * Keith@Blackey.net

Traveling Wall courtesy of Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (www.vvmf.org)

This is the kickoff event for the Bay Area's three-year commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War (www.vietnamwar50th.com)

Keith@Blackey.net, Mobile: 650-704-2985

Updated 29 December 2014

etary, San Bruno (Near San Francisco).

Each year, millions visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which honors those who served their country during the Vietnam War. Myriad of Americans, young and old, have not been able to visit what has become known to many as "The Wall." Some haven't been able to make the journey to our nation's capital and many others may find the war's legacy easier to confront while at home in their own communities.

One way to honor the fallen and reflect on the service of Americans who came before is to visit The Wall That Heals. This exhibition features a 250-foot replica of the original memorial in Washington, D.C., and travels across America. Since its inception in 1996, over 2 million people have visited the traveling exhibit as it made stops in nearly 250 U.S. locales.

Volunteers are being sought now to serve on a committee to prepare for the Wall's arrival. Committee meetings will be at 10 a.m. first and third Saturdays from Jan. 17 to April 4 at Golden Gate National Cemetery (call 650-704-2985 or Keith@Blackey.net for directions).

Financial and in-kind sponsors are also needed to cover expenses related to bringing the Wall to the Bay Area and help fund the Vietnam Veterans Memorial operating costs and planned Education Center. Sponsors will be hosted to a private viewing, recognized during the various ceremonies, and listed in all promotional material.

The Volunteer and Sponsor flyer is available at
http://www.vvacalsc.com/files/twth_volunteer_sponsor_flyer.pdf

To volunteer, sponsor and get more information and directions call Keith Blackey, VVA Chapter 464, at 650-704-2985 (mobile) or Keith@Blackey.net.

INCARCERATED VETERANS

Over the past couple of years two bills have been passed to help the Incarcerated Veteran. The first on AB2490, was to establish a Veteran Service Officer in every institution. The Bill reads in part

AB 2490, Butler. Veterans: correctional counselors.

Existing law establishes the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is responsible for administering various programs and services for the benefit of veterans. Existing law also authorizes each county board of supervisors to appoint a county veterans service officer to perform specified veterans-related services, including assisting veterans in pursuing claims for federal or state veterans' benefits.

This bill would require the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to develop guidance policies to assist veterans who are inmates in pursuing claims for federal veterans' benefits, or in establishing rights to any other privilege, preference, care, or compensation provided under federal or state law because of honorable service in the military. The bill would authorize the department to coordinate with the Department of Veterans Affairs and county veterans service officers or veterans service organizations in developing the policies.

This bill would have established a counselor position as a Veteran Service Officer. This bill sounded great, but it was never implemented or funded.

The bill which was passed and signed by the governor this year was as follows:

VETERANS SERVICE ADVOCATE: CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

AB 2263, Bradford. Veterans service advocate: correctional facilities. Existing law establishes the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is responsible for administering various programs and services for the benefit of veterans, and the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, to oversee the state prison system. Existing law also authorizes each county board of supervisors to appoint a county veterans service officer to perform specified veterans-related services, including assisting veterans in pursuing claims for federal or state veterans' benefits. Under existing law, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is required to develop guidance policies relative to the release of veterans who are inmates with the intent to assist veterans who are inmates in pursuing claims for federal veterans' benefits, or in establishing rights to any other privilege, preference, care, or compensation provided under federal or state law because of honorable service in the military. In developing those policies, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is authorized to coordinate with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the county veterans service officer or veterans service organizations.

We need Veteran Service organizations: VFW, American Legion, Vietnam Veterans, AM Vets, etc. that are located in the area of the institutions to work with the county veteran service officer and the institution and establish these positions.

At this time CTF Soledad is the only institution that has recognized service officers. They have been doing a fantastic job over the years. In fact they tell me they get letters for Incarcerated Veterans form not only all over the state but form other states too.

I am hoping someone from each institution will let me know if anything is being done on either of the above bills. And if you would like the full text of the bill please let me know and I will mail you a copy.

Contact me at.
Bill Hodges, Veterans Incarcerated Chair
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The California
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Published Quarterly to all members of California VVA and AVVA as part of their membership.

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

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

VVA'S FOUNDING PRINCIPLE
"Never again shall one generation of veterans abandon another."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



LEGISLATIVE REPORT

By Pete Conaty, VVA-CSC Legislative Advocate

SAVE THE DATE, VVA-CSC CAPITOL DAY: MARCH 25, 2015

The Vietnam Veterans of America-California State Council's Annual Day at the Capitol event will be on March 25, 2015 at the State Capitol. This day-long event in Sacramento is the best opportunity we have to introduce ourselves to the 34 new legislators who were recently sworn into office for the 2015-2016 Legislative Session. There will also be a Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans

Day observance at the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Capitol Park.

SAVE THE DATE, NAMES TO BE ADDED TO THE CA VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL, MARCH 29, 2015, SACRAMENTO

The California Vietnam Memorial Name Committee, created when Governor Brown signed AB 287 in 2013, is tasked with adding names to the California memorial of men and women killed during the Vietnam War. The Committee is also charged with reviewing the names of men and women whose service connected deaths resulted after returning from service in Vietnam. 31 California Veterans who died while serving our country in the Vietnam War will be added and then unveiled during a ceremony in

Capitol Park on March 29.

PLEASE SAVE THESE DATES AND SPREAD THE WORD TO ALL CHAPTERS AND MEMBERS! THE NEW LEGISLATORS

The California Legislature is comprised of two houses; the Senate with 40 members and the Assembly with 80 members. Senators serve 4

year terms and Assembly members serve 2 year terms. Many legislators will be under the new term limit rules of 12 years which can be served in either house exclusively or a combination of the two. The November 4th election brought in 27 brand new Assembly members and 5 brand new Senators without legislative experience. Also, some former Assembly members were elected to the Senate (4) and two Assembly members from some years ago are returning as Senators. This means that over one fourth of the Legislature will be brand new. Also, there will be many new legislative staff. The result is that we will need to educate and inform new legislators and new staff on we are and what we do. We will also need to reacquaint ourselves with those we worked with in the past and remind them who we represent. Add into the mix that 4 currently sitting Senators were elected to Congress. Therefore, they will soon resign their seats and 3 special elections will be called to elect their replacements. Often this results in sitting Assembly members running for those Senate seats, thereby setting off special elections for new Assembly members. The Legislature is always changing as the special elections occur throughout the year. New Assembly committee chairs have been appointed. Also, the committee membership changes as many legislators are assigned to different committees by the Senate and Assembly leadership.

THE NEW LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The California Legislature operates in 2 year sessions. The 2013-14 legislative session ended November 30. On December 1st, newly elected Senators and Assembly members were sworn in for the 2015-16 legislative session. I have already met most of them when they were candidates. The legislators then go back to their home districts for the Holidays and return on January 5. January 30 is the last day to submit bill requests to the Office of the Legislative Counsel (the Legislature's lawyers who format the draft language into a bill). Therefore January is mainly consumed by everyone getting their bill ideas solidified and suitable for drafting. February 27 is the last day for bills to be introduced. This means that the bill's sponsor will take the language crafted by the Office of the Legislative Counsel and find a legislator to introduce the bill before the 27th. After this, the bills begin to move through the committee process in the house of origin. If they make it out of the house of origin, the bill goes to the other house and works its way through a similar committee process. If the bill starts in the Assembly, it ends up going through the same process in the Senate and vice-versa.

SENATE AND ASSEMBLY SUPERMAJORITIES GONE

The November 4th election denied the Democrats a 2/3rds supermajority in the Senate or the Assembly. In the Senate, 27 seats are needed for a supermajority and the election raised the Republican's share of the 40 member Senate to 14; a one vote margin. The Democrats had hoped to win enough seats in this election to retain that supermajority. A Republican in the Central Valley held on to his seat and a newcomer from Orange County won a formerly Democrat seat. This is important to the majority party because a supermajority of 2/3rds allows them to pass bills without the support of the other party. This is especially true during the state budget process. In the Assembly, 54 seats were needed to retain the supermajority, but the Democrats lost three seats; one in the Antelope Valley, one in Orange County, and one in Torrance. The Democrats still control both houses of the Legislature, the Governor's office, and all statewide Constitutional officers, however they will need some Republican votes to pass 2/3rds bills.

TRACKING LEGISLATION

Once the legislative process really begins to move along next year, anyone with a computer can access the Legislature's bill tracking web-site to read and track the progress of bills if you are interested. All versions of the bill and its amendments, committee analyses, committee votes, and floor votes can be accessed at: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html>

DIOXIN INFO

Tell EPA Not to Expand Uses of Enlist Duo—Again!

Despite overwhelming opposition, this fall EPA gave Dow AgroSciences the green light to release Enlist Duo™ on a new wave of genetically-engineered (GE) crops in six states (IL, IN, IA, OH, SD, WI). At the same time, EPA announced that it was accepting comments on the expansion of Enlist Duo's registration to 10 additional states (AR, KS, LA, MN, MO, MS, NE, OK, TN, ND).

Join the fight against the expansion of new GE crops and their toxic pesticides! Submit a comment to EPA today ([http://www.regulations.gov/#!submitComment;D=EPA-](http://www.regulations.gov/#!submitComment;D=EPA-HQ-OPP-2014-0195-2469)

[HQ-OPP-2014-0195-2469](http://www.regulations.gov/#!submitComment;D=EPA-HQ-OPP-2014-0195-2469)).

A combination of the herbicides 2,4-D (a legacy chemical that was one-half of Agent Orange) and glyphosate (the herbicide responsible for widespread "superweed" resistance), Enlist Duo™ poses significant health and environmental threats.

2,4-D is associated with increased cancer risks, especially for non-Hodgkin lymphoma. It is also a potent neurotoxin and hormone-disruptor. Studies show that exposure to 2,4-D is associated with an increased risk of Parkinson's disease, reduced sperm count, and birth defects.

2,4-D also has a tendency to drift, and despite claims by Dow that the version of 2,4-D used in Enlist Duo™ is less prone to move off-site, the risk from increased 2,4-D use threatens non-GE and organic crops, endangered species, and increased drift and runoff will contaminate water and non-target sites.

Though environmental and human health groups like Beyond Pesticides have joined together and filed legal challenges (<http://www.beyondpesticides.org/dailynewsblog/?p=14339>) to the registration of this toxic chemical in the first six-states, EPA continues to move forward without adequate assessment of Enlist Duo™'s human health and environmental impacts.

An unprecedented increase in 2,4-D would inevitably pose risks to public health, farmers, and the environment.

Tell EPA To DENY Expanded Uses of Enlist Duo™! (<http://www.regulations.gov/#!submitComment;D=EPA-HQ-OPP-2014-0195-2469>)

EPA is currently taking public comment on the expanded use of Enlist Duo™ until December 15th. (<http://www.regulations.gov/#!submitComment;D=EPA-HQ-OPP-2014-0195-2469>)

SAMPLE COMMENT TO EPA: (PLEASE PERSONALIZE!)

I oppose EPA's expanded registration of Dow's "Enlist Duo™" herbicide. Allowing increased pesticide use in agricultural communities nationwide increases our dependency on failed cropping systems that the agency should be rejecting as unreasonable, not facilitating. Approving "Enlist Duo™" on 2,4-D-resistant genetically engineered crops will lead to rampant weed resistance, as has already occurred with glyphosate-tolerant crops. Adverse impacts on human health, organic and conventional farmers, and wildlife and endangered species should preclude the agency from expanding approval of this toxic chemical cocktail before registration review is concluded and legal challenges resolves.

Inevitable increases in 2,4-D use will wreak havoc on



our health and environment. 2,4-D is associated with increased cancer risks, especially for non-Hodgkin lymphoma. It is also a potent neurotoxin and hormone-disruptor. Studies report that exposure to 2,4-D is associated with an increased risk of Parkinson's disease, reduced sperm counts, and birth defects. It is also a threat to farmworkers and their families who continue to be disproportionately affected by pesticide use.

Also concerning is the indiscriminate nature of GE gene contamination among crops, especially organic crops; 2,4-D drift has long been a known problem to off-site locations, impacts on endangered species and non-target crops, as well as the threat of dioxin contamination. 2,4-D and 2,4-D GE crops are not the solution for Roundup-resistant weeds spawned by Roundup Ready crops and failed GE technologies.

EPA has a statutory obligation to protect human health and the environment. I urge you to reject 2,4-D GE crops and instead focus on safer, sustainable, long-term solutions that utilize organic methods of production, including

crop rotation, so that we can end the toxic treadmill for farmers and consumers alike.

Sincerely,

Send your comment now! <http://www.regulations.gov/#!submitComment;D=EPA-HQ-OPP-2014-0195-2469>

For additional data and science to help you craft your comments to USDA, click here for Beyond Pesticides' (<http://www.beyondpesticides.org/gmos/documents/NexGenGECrops24DFinal.pdf>) fact sheet on new GE crops, or read Beyond Pesticides' (http://beyondpesticides.org/gmos/documents/24dGEcomments_2014-finaldraft.pdf) comments to USDA on 2,4-D corn, filed last month.

VIETNAM WOMEN'S ERA STUDY

By Kate O'Hare-Palmer

Last October, at the Women Veterans Committee at the national VVA meeting, I invited Dr. Kathy Magruder to speak about this third study that has ever been done on Vietnam era women veterans. She is one of the clinical researchers on the study. It is not complete. The study was done with a written questionnaire followed up by a phone interview. There were almost 15,000 women in the study. The goal was to compare women who had served in the military in- country, around Southeast Asia, and in parts of the US. There are two parts to the study. One is to determine the lifetime and current condition of PTSD in female veterans and, secondly, to determine the status of women's health related to cardiac disease, hypertension, diabetes, ALS, MS, Parkinson's Disease, and cancers related to brain, breast, and ob-gyn areas, and General Health. The study is not complete.

The mortality figures have been completed. They have shown that compared to the US women, those who served in VN, and those who served near VN have shown higher mortality rates related to motor vehicle accidents, cancers of the soft tissues(sarcomas) PTSD, and mental disorders. The nurses who served in VN also show a higher incidence of Cancers of the Pancreas and Brain, and of motor vehicle accidents. For those of us who have kept in touch with our friends and coworkers from Nam, these statistics are no surprise.

There was also a section of questions related to sexual harassment and trauma. Across the board, all women surveyed came out answering at around the 50% level. It didn't matter where they served.

The level of PTSD related to this statistic of military sexual trauma/harassment is still being worked on. The level of PTSD being reported in this study is higher than the original study done in the 80's on both men and women. There are some interesting findings in this. The higher prevalence of PTSD in VN women veterans is NOT due to pre-service trauma. It was also found that IF the age of enlistment was older, the incidence was lower. Another variable was the length of service. Those that immediately came home from Vietnam and discharged from the military had a higher incidence of PTSD than those that stayed in the military.

We are looking forward to the health findings related to those of us still on the planet. These statistics would be helpful for our health providers in reviewing all of our medical status. If we look at these findings compared to the men, I think that we don't find that much difference. Our organ cancers, reproductive systems, and our mental health are all involved. We came away with more wounds than we realized. But the knowledge of this will help us and those that are currently in the military to recognize and plan the medical health care needed.

WOMEN VETERAN OUTREACH

CALVET RELEASES WOMEN VETERANS OUTREACH TOOLKIT FACTS, BEST PRACTICES, AND RESOURCES IN NEW BOOKLET

Sacramento – On Veterans Day, the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) released our new Women Veterans Outreach Toolkit to educate government, business, education, healthcare, and community service organizations about the unique challenges facing the nearly 200,000 women Veterans in the Golden State.

“While female Veterans face many of the same challenges as their male counterparts, some are unique to women,” said Lindsey Sin, CalVet Deputy Secretary for Women Veterans Affairs. “Our Toolkit offers very specific ways organizations can support our female Veterans in their efforts transitioning to civilian life – a process research shows remains more difficult for women.”

Created in response to requests for guidance by service

providers, our CalVet Toolkit offers facts about women Veterans, best practices, a “to do list” of actions to assist women Veterans, plus links to state and national resources. The publication is the first-ever toolkit published in the nation designed to provide resources for groups assisting women Veterans.

On Veterans Day, the Sacramento Bee published an article about the challenges our women Veterans face. The article profiled two local women who exemplify their strength and resolve to succeed after military service.

“I commend CalVet for providing this much-needed Toolkit,” said Major Ophelia Alvarez-Willis, M.D., Commissioner, California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls. “CalVet’s Toolkit is an extraordinary improvement in our state’s efforts to assist leaders and advocates committed to ensuring women Veterans obtain healthcare, employment, housing stability, and safety.” CalVet’s toolkit is endorsed by the California Association of County Veterans Services Officers, CalVet’s partner in serving our Veterans.

To view the Women Veterans Outreach Toolkit, go to <http://bit.ly/1xxQHsa>. To read the Sacramento Bee articles about women Veterans and the CalVet Toolkit, go to <http://bit.ly/1wYrUgN> and <http://bit.ly/1EHvApM>.

ZERO TOLERANCE ?

MSA UPDATE

By Cathleen Cordova

Col. Don Christensen, a 6th generation military man, and chief prosecutor of US Air Force sexual assault cases was on his way to Italy in Aug. 2012, to try a court martial. The accused was a high ranking officer which called for an experienced prosecutor, as it was generally known that these men enjoyed their own set of rules in the military justice system.

Lt. Col. J. Wilkerson, Avino AFB Inspector General and fighter pilot, was accused of sexually assaulting 48 yr. old AF civilian Kim Hanks. Wilkerson was eventually found guilty, sentenced to one year in jail, and dishonorably discharged from the military. However, the verdict was totally overturned by his commanding general. General Craig Franklin released Wilkerson, and returned him to duty with full rank and benefits reinstated.

Col. Christensen, who started his career as a defense attorney readily admits that he consistently exploited ignorance of PTSD as the result of sexual assault to win acquittals of men he often suspected of being sexual predators. This bothered his conscience enough that in 2000, he switched sides and became a JAG prosecutor at an Air Base in Kuwait. His new job would include investigating thieves, drug dealers and murderers, but he was drawn to cases involving men who forced themselves on women and men they often out ranked...with no fear of retribution. Over a period of 12 years of his military career, Christensen personally tried 40 sexual assault cases and supervised the prosecution of 300 more. He came to be regarded as an expert on sexual crimes. Christensen was committed to helping victims of such crimes as he knew commanders often did not have the best interest of the victims at heart. Instead commanders worried about the loss of trained personnel, of turmoil in the ranks, and how sexual assault crimes would reflect negatively on their own careers. So time after time, Christensen had witnessed commanders demonstrating support for the accused and upsetting the scales of justice. Commanders could and did select the court martial juries, meted out light sentences, argued for retention of convicted officers, and in some cases canceled court martial trials altogether without explanation. Nevertheless, Christensen was shocked when on Feb. 26, 2012, General Craig Franklin brazenly dismissed Wilkerson’s sentence, ignored the jury’s verdict and reinstated Lt. Col. Wilkerson to duty.

A month later, Christensen met with Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and recommended that Article 60 of the Military Code of Justice (which gave General Franklin the authority to do as he did) be repealed. The measure was signed into law by President Obama in Dec. 2013. Since the problem of military sexual assaults has become public, there have been other minor reforms. But the real question remains...are these changes enough to actually reduce the number of sexual assaults perpetrated; to encourage victims to come forward, and most importantly to ensure justice is done when they do. Military leaders claim there is “zero tolerance” for sexual assaults. They talk the talk, but have yet to walk it.

Representatives Niki Tsongas and Jackie Speier, Senators Kirsten Gillibrand, Claire McCaskill, Barbara Boxer and others on Capitol Hill are not so sure minor changes are sufficient. Favoritism by commanders exhibited toward the accused, and lack of empathy and

assistance toward those who report sexual crimes is still quite common. Lt. Col. Wilkerson’s case is only one of many recently reported in the media (i.e. Lt. Col. Jay Morse, Lt. Col. Jeff Krusinski, Lt. Col. Stuart Newberry). In addition, 62% of victim’s surveyed reported retaliation against them for having reported the sexual assault. In a system and culture where sex offenders go free with no accountability, and where victims are punished for reporting, we can no longer trust the military to police itself. We need to remove prosecutorial authority in sexual assault cases from the chain of command, and place it instead with an independent body. To that end, Senator Gillibrand will once again introduce legislation to do just that...and she needs our support.

What of Col. Christensen? Well, as you might expect he received a downgraded performance review for his efforts on behalf of victims and for bucking the system. Christensen retired shortly thereafter to start a new job as President of “Protect Our Defenders”, a non-profit advocacy group for victims of Military Sexual Assault. He recruits pro-bono lawyers for victims, helps write legislation, and serves as chief critic of the military justice system he worked for the past 23 years. Bravo Col. Christensen!

Protect Our Defenders, 20 Park Road “E”, Burlingame, CA 94010

Adapted from Robert Draper’s article “In The Company Of Men”, Nov. 30, 2014

MST INFO

VA EXPANDS ELIGIBILITY FOR VA HEALTH CARE RELATED TO MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

EXPANSION CLOSES A GAP IN HEALTH CARE ELIGIBILITY

Washington, DC – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), under authority from the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (“VACAA”), today announced expanded eligibility for Veterans in need of mental health care due to sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurred during their military service. This trauma is commonly known as military sexual trauma (MST).

This expansion, which primarily pertains to Reservists and National Guard members participating in weekend drill, gives the authority to offer Veterans the appropriate care and services needed to treat conditions resulting from MST that occurred during a period of inactive duty training.

“VA simply must be an organization that provides comprehensive care for all Veterans dealing with the effects of military sexual trauma,” said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. “Our range of services for MST-related experiences are constantly being reexamined to best meet the needs of our Veterans.”

Secretary McDonald met last week with Ruth Moore, a Navy Veteran and MST survivor for whom the Ruth Moore Act of 2013 is named. Ms. Moore will be working with VA to ensure that survivors are treated fairly and compassionately, and that Veterans with MST can access fair compensation exams and access health care practitioners who are trained in understanding and working with MST issues.

VA works closely with trauma survivors to ensure a full continuum of health care services are provided to assist Veterans recovering from experiences of MST. Recognizing that MST survivors may have special needs and concerns, every VA health care facility has an MST Coordinator who serves as a contact person for MST-related issues. Every VA medical center and Community-based Vet Center offers MST-related outpatient counseling.

Currently, all VA health care for mental and physical health conditions related to MST is provided free of charge. Veterans do not need to have a service-connected disability or seeking disability compensation to be eligible for MST-related counseling and care. Veterans also do not need to have reported such incidents to the Department of Defense or possess documentation or records to support their assertion of having experienced such trauma. The determination of whether a Veteran’s condition is MST-related is strictly a clinical determination made by the responsible VA mental health provider. Finally, Veterans need not be enrolled in VA’s health care system to qualify for MST-related treatment, as it is independent of VA’s general treatment authority.

In addition to treatment programs, VA also provides training to staff on issues related to MST, including a mandatory training on MST for all mental health and primary care providers. VA also engages in a range of outreach activities to Veterans and conducts monitoring of MST-related screening and treatment, in order to ensure

that adequate services are available.

Veterans can learn more about VA’s MST-related services online at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp and see video clips with the recovery stories of Veterans who have experienced MST at <http://maketheconnection.net/conditions/military-sexual-trauma>

CALVET CALENDAR

CALVET SEEKS EVENTS FOR OUR ONLINE CALENDAR

Sacramento – Our California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) online calendar lists events related to Veterans, families, and stakeholders.

For example, CalVet shares information about Veteran service activities, fundraising events, meetings, webinars, conferences and other interesting items.

Calendar listings are free and viewable by anyone who visits our CalVet website. CalVet also publishes select events in our monthly newsletter.

To request a CalVet calendar listing, send your information to PAO@calvet.ca.gov and include the following:

- Date of event
- Name or type of event
- Start and end times
- Name of sponsoring organization
- Venue name Venue address
- Contact person plus phone number or e-mail address
- Cost of admission

If pre-registration is required, please provide a link and the registration deadline.

To view the CalVet calendar, go to <https://www.calvet.ca.gov/home/Calendar>

FORMER VIETNAM POW

The following article (obituary) is about what Edwin A. Shuman III did as a POW showing how important it was for him and the other POW’s to have church services while they were prisoners of the North Vietnamese.

Edwin A. Shuman III, Former Prisoner of War Who Defied Hanoi Hilton Guards, Dies at 82

Lt. Cmdr. Edwin A. Shuman III was held prisoner for five years during the Vietnam War.

By Richard Goldstein

As Christmas 1970 approached, 43 American prisoners of war in a large holding cell at the North Vietnamese camp known as the Hanoi Hilton sought to hold a brief church service. Their guards stopped them, and so the seeds of rebellion were planted.



Lt. Cmdr. Edwin A. Shuman III



The 19th-century Hoa Lo prison was known as the Hanoi Hilton by the Americans confined there.

A few days later, Lt. Cmdr. Edwin A. Shuman III, a downed Navy pilot, orchestrated the resistance, knowing he would be the first to face the consequences: a beating in a torture cell.

“Ned stepped forward and said, ‘Are we really committed to having church Sunday? I want to know person by person,’ ” a fellow prisoner, Leo K. Thorsness,

recounted in a memoir. “He went around the cell pointing to each of us individually,” Mr. Thorsness continued. “When the 42nd man said yes, it was unanimous. At that instant, Ned knew he would end up in the torture cells.”

The following Sunday, Commander Shuman, who died on Dec. 3 at 82, stepped forward to lead a prayer session and was quickly hustled away by guards. The next four ranking officers did the same, and they, too, were

taken away to be beaten. Meanwhile, as Mr. Thorsness told it, “the guards were now hitting P.O.W.s with gun butts and the cell was in chaos.”

And then, he remembered, the sixth-ranking senior officer began, “Gentlemen, the Lord’s Prayer.”

“And this time,” he added, “we finished it.”

The guards had yielded.

Everett Alvarez Jr., who was the first American pilot captured in the Vietnam War when his Navy plane was shot down in 1964, said in an interview that the defiance Commander Shuman engineered was emulated by senior officers in other large holding cells.

“It was contagious,” said Mr. Alvarez, who was in another cell during the first prayer service. “By the time it got to the fourth or fifth cell,” he said, the guards “gave up.” He said the prisoners were also singing patriotic songs.

Commander Shuman remained incarcerated at the Hanoi Hilton for more than two more years. But by then the prisoners’ right to collective prayer had been established.

“From that Sunday on until we came home, we held a church service,” Mr. Thorsness, an Air Force pilot and recipient of the Medal of Honor for heroics on a mission in 1967, wrote in his memoir, “Surviving Hell: A POW’s Journey” (2008). “We won. They lost. Forty-two men in prison pajamas followed Ned’s lead. I know I will never see a better example of pure raw leadership or ever pray with a better sense of the meaning of the words.”

Edwin Arthur Shuman III was born in Boston on Oct. 7, 1931, the son of a marine architect and Navy officer. Growing up in Marblehead, Mass., he began to sail at age 5. He graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1954 and arrived in Vietnam in September 1967.

On his 18th mission, his A-6 Intruder fighter was shot down just north of Hanoi, the capital, in the early hours of March 17, 1968, during a low-level attack on a railroad yard. He bailed out, together with his bombardier-navigator, and both men were captured.

He spent 17 months in solitary confinement. On one occasion, when he violated regulations, he was beaten for hours with a whip.

After United States special forces raided a small prison camp at Son Tay on Nov. 20, 1970, only to find no captives there — they had been transferred out months earlier — the North Vietnamese consolidated their prisoners, who had been held at several camps. They were taken to the large Hoa Lo prison, a 19th-century structure that was built by the French in central Hanoi and christened the Hanoi Hilton by American prisoners during the Vietnam War. The North Vietnamese felt the prisoners could be more securely guarded there and grouped them in large cells, which, as it turned out, made mass prayer sessions possible.

Commander Shuman was freed in March 1973 as part of a mass release of remaining P.O.W.s. He retired from the Navy as a captain 11 years later. His commendations included the Silver Star for his resistance to brutal treatment.

He returned to North Vietnam in 1991 as part of a three-week humanitarian medical mission, mainly out of curiosity about what had become of it.

“I didn’t view this as a healing process,” he told The Baltimore Sun when he came back. “I never had a nightmare.”

He said that he liked the Vietnamese people, whom he found to be hardworking.

Most of the prison was demolished in the mid-1990s.

Mr. Shuman died in Annapolis, Md. His wife, Donna, said the cause was complications of surgery on a leg he broke on Nov. 22 when he fell in his small boat while preparing to hunt geese. He lived in Annapolis.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by two sons, Edwin IV and J. Brant, and a daughter, Mary Dana Giardina, from his first marriage, which ended in divorce; a stepson, Robert Borte III; nine grandchildren; a great-grandson; three sisters, Mary Russell, Sally Smyth and Ann Mills; and two half brothers, William and John Boeckeler.

After returning from Vietnam, Mr. Shuman was in charge of the Naval Academy’s sailing program. In August 1979, he commanded the Alliance, the program’s aluminum sloop, in the Fastnet race off England and brought his crew back safely amid a storm in the Irish Sea that left 15 other sailors dead.

“I have often compared ocean racing in bad weather with being a prisoner of war, an environment with which, unfortunately, I have some experience,” he wrote in the U.S. Naval Institute magazine Proceedings, in 1999. “Harsh conditions, cramped quarters, bad food and diverse personalities. Instead of the guards beating on you, mother nature takes over.”

“You can’t get out so you make the best of it,” he

continued. “It’s a character-builder.”

A version of this article appears in print on December 25, 2013, on page A20 of the New York edition with the headline: Edwin Shuman, 82, Dies; Defied Hanoi Hilton Guards.

DIABETES INFORMATION

VA Implements National Hypoglycemic Safety Initiative Empowering Veterans to Personalize their Diabetes Care

As part of the Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) ongoing effort to improve Veterans’ access to healthcare, VA is announcing the launch of a national Hypoglycemic Safety Initiative (HSI) to encourage diabetic Veterans receiving VA care to seek support to lower the risk of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). The new initiative will enable Veterans living with diabetes to work more closely with their VA clinicians to personalize health care goals and improve self-management of the disease.

“The Hypoglycemic Safety Initiative is designed to enable Veterans and their families, partners and caregivers to create a personal plan for blood sugar management based upon the Veteran’s unique health goals,” said Dr. Carolyn Clancy, Interim Under Secretary for Health. “Our objective is to change how diabetes is managed in VA and the United States, and to help patients improve their personal well-being, not just manage their numbers.”

Diabetes is one of the most prevalent diseases among older Americans, with one in four Veterans suffering from the disease. Recent clinical studies indicate that when diet, exercise and stress reduction are not successful, the benefits of achieving intensive blood sugar control with medication are less effective. This is especially true for hypoglycemic agents (pills or insulin) used for those patients who have had diabetes for many years and those who have additional serious health conditions.

HSI’s key elements emphasize shared decision-making and universal health literacy to ensure Veterans understand the health information provided by their VA health care team. This includes the “teach back method” where Veterans and their caregivers are asked questions to be certain they understand and can act on key elements of self-management, including diet, exercise, glucose monitoring, managing medications, and insulin injections. The focus of the HSI is to help raise awareness among patients who may be at risk.

“Hypoglycemia has only recently been prioritized as a national public health issue, but Federal agencies are taking a leadership role in addressing the problem. We are proud to note the collaboration of VA with Department of Health and Human Services in aggressively addressing this problem,” Dr. Clancy added.

For more information about VA health care, please visit <http://www.va.gov/health/>.

ANTHEM VETERANS MEMORIAL

The Anthem Veterans Memorial, located in ACC Community Park in Anthem, AZ is a monument dedicated to honor the service and sacrifice of our country’s armed forces. This pillar of pride provides a place of honor and reflection for veterans, their family and friends, and those who desire to show their respects to those service men and women who have and continue to courageously serve our county. Five Pillar Significance



- The five pillars represent the unity of the five branches of the United States military serving steadfast together.
- They are staggered in size with their appropriate military seal placements on each pillar based upon the Department of Defense prescribed precedence.
- At precisely 11:11 a.m. each Veterans Day (Nov. 11), the sun's rays pass through the ellipses of the five

Armed Services pillars to form a perfect solar spotlight over a mosaic of The Great Seal of the United States. Additionally, the brick pavers within the Circle of Honor are inscribed with the names of U.S. servicemen and women, symbolizing the 'support' for the Armed Forces. The pavers are red, the pillars are white, and the sky is blue to represent America's flag. The circle represents an unbreakable border.

Honors To date, the Anthem Veterans Memorial has received the following honors and awards:

- Arizona Historic Landmark Designation 2012 – Arizona Historical Society

• Arizona Public Works Project of the Year Award 2012 – Arizona Chapter of the American Public Works Association (APWA)

• ACEC 2012 Grand Award – Best Engineering and Environmental Consulting Project – American Consulting Engineers Companies

A MOTORCYCLE ODDSEY

Northern Cal., to Cripple Creek, Colo. & Back (maybe)

Hitting the road alone, with a direction known, is not enough! You better have Plan B and the ability to use it on the fly. After leaving Winnamucca, Nevada, on the morning of the second day out, School was in session. You better take notes and you better remember them! Just because your map shows lots of exits, with town names, Do Not



think you will have a place to reload when your tank needs it, at one of those exits, especially in Utah. Otherwise, you will come face to face with an indiscriminate number of those exit sign announcing, " No Services " Enough of



Road Schooling. This is about a Special Little town high up in The Rockies, Cripple Creek. Getting there was the greatest riding time of my life !

I still had one piece of business, before heading to



Colo. I was originally going to Wichita, Kansas to attend a Vietnam Veterans of America, National Leadership Conference. I liken this bi-annual National gathering to the best corporate management Schools. I am presently a Calif. State Council and Vice president of Chapter 391, in Sonora, Ca. and this event is very beneficial to the representative Officers of every State and their new Chapter officers.

About the time I rode The loop around Salt Lake City, I realized I was arriving in Wichita a day early. Nah! Time for another Plan B. So I turned left and went



to Sturgis. This was an even better good time. I met up with 3 guys, also going to Sturgis and was welcomed to join them. Like all riders, I heard stories of what it was like on the Open Road, and we were loosing them fast in Ca, Up into Northern Utah, I followed Richard, Lane and



Chuck, on 2 lane Highways, fairly absent of cars, but not of motorcycles. Across Wyoming and then South Dakota, through some of the most beautiful Country imaginable. The next day, we parted ways and I turned North East into the Black Hills, towards Deadwood and on to Sturgis.



I gotta tell you, if you ever have a chance to ride in the Black Hills, and don't go, there is something seriously wrong with you. Having ridden through my extra day, I spent 4 hours there, plenty of time to know that I will be



going back !!!

With the business of Wichita completed, it was time to pick more 2 lane Highways, and head for the Main



Event of my journey: The Salute to America's Veterans Motorcycle Rally and Festival.

Before leaving Wichita on the 11th of Aug., I broke out my Road Bible, which was part of my National membership in the H. O.G. organization. This is a book of



State Maps compiled by riders for riders. Not just maps, but highlighted roads in every State, Province in Canada, and State of Mexico, seemingly designed with motorcycles in mind. Man, what Big fun they are to ride! Anyway, Highway 50 loomed large as the way to go. Did I mention I was developing a thing about Open Roads. Wichita to Pueblo, Colo. unfolded 538 miles of really fast riding, and a Grand total of 12 other vehicles besides mine on the road, and 11 of them were traveling the other way. It was a roadgasm of epic proportions! As you might suspect, that all ended with the fast approaching suburbs of Pueblo, Colo. Having Monday night and Tuesday morning to kill, I threw my stuff in a hotel room and immediately left for The Outpost Harley Davidson dealership to see if I could dig up the H. O.G. Chapter President from there.

One of the Chapter members working there, supplied me with name and number. Kevin Nunn, the President, called me back and we made arrangements to meet after he was finished with work. He met me at the hotel where we proceeded to talk for a couple hours. Very interesting, and a great guy! He brought me a T-shirt from one of his Chapters' premier events. Now, remember where I am when I tell you that this event takes place on January 1st every year! They get 300 to 400 bikes to their Annual "Brass Nuts Run"!! That's right, January 1st at approx. 5000 feet! IN COLORADO!! These guys are nuts, but I love 'em for the brass nuts they have. I mean this guy(Kevin), wears a loop of wire with at least 20 brass nuts strung on it! These guys are ROAD DOGS!! Next morning took me up to "The Springs" as the locals refer to it.

The next 5 days at Cripple Creek were about to move me more than any other event I have ever attended.

I unpacked my 2005 FX Dyna and went about half a mile to Pikes Peak Harley Davidson where I fount the local H. O.G. Chapter Pres., Britton Fletchall, hard at work behind the counter. He had 4 more hours of work, so he directed me to the second floor where there is a "Unique Motorcycle Museum. He wasn't kidding. I took the elevator to the 2nd floor, stepped out and found a small corner of Harley and Indian heaven where I spent about 2 hours and took a ton of pictures.

Back at the sales counter to thank him and that's when he told me about the weekly "Bikers Night Party", Thursdays, at "Hooter's". Hhhhhmmm!!!

Wednesday afternoon I went up the hill to take a look at Cripple Creek. A 54 mile climb from 6500 to 9750 feet! There were motorcycles everywhere along the way. A beautiful ride and Spectacular scenery!! Rounding the final curve, a nice little valley opened up below me and the beginnings of the setup for the Rally were under way. Once there, I found that the Veteran's Travelling Tribute Walls were being set up at the High School. I pulled up and parked. The wall was being unloaded and constructed by the local Combat Vets Chapter, led by "Rick", the Combat Vets' State Representative, assisted by 4 chapters of American Legion Vet Groups, who ride annually, 500 to 700 miles from Chapters 136: Mulvane; 408: Derby; 214: McPherson and 192: Canton, KS.

Among these Vietnam Vets was A. J. Tholkes, who had a very special reason for his 13 years of doing this. His Graduating High School Class of 13 people total, had 6 members killed in action!! (Thursday, August 14th, I went back to the Vietnam Vets Wall to quietly Honor 5 of my High School friends who, like me, went in right after Graduation!)

Friday, the 15th, the fun began! Chapter 3-3 of the Colorado Combat Vets, held their annual 105 Mile High Altitude Poker Run: ALL of it above 10,000 feet!! Back roads, through small towns, and, the most beautiful, High Country Valleys you could ever imagine, replete with large herds of cattle and horses as far as the eye could see. Another day of Ridegasmic Proportions!

Saturday morning, 5000 to 6000 Veterans and other riders pulled into Woodland, Colo. High School parking lot to sign up for the largest POW/MIA Honor Ride Anywhere! Approximately 34 miles, two bikes to a row, in a parade 8 to 10 miles long, right down the center of Cripple Creek to the "Veterans Remembrance Ceremony" at a park built with proceeds from the "Rally"!

Then it's live music and great food. Vendors all day, with a great Street Dance on Saturday night. Winding up with Sundays' Cry Inducing, 5 bagpipe Playing, Ceremony, adding 10 more names to the Veterans Memorial on the outskirts of town. (Also built with proceeds from the Rally.)

The producer of this event, Jim Wear, who is not even a Vet, started this thing 27 years ago, along with Roy Box, who is a Vietnam Vet, and Jerry and Barb Manka(The "keepers" of the Veteran Signing wall, which resides at the Museum I spoke of earlier) Make No profit from this event. Any Monies left after all bills are paid, are given to any needy local Vets. Likewise, all the money gained from

the Poker Run and the Honor Ride! The Combat Vets give to the Rifle Veterans Home!

Jim and his crew run this huge Salute to America's Veterans like clockwork, smooth and on time. I have never seen such a large event run so well before. His people are so well trained, and enjoy what they do(right down to the cleanup) that they never leave the company. I know what I'm talking about. I run the stages for Blues Festivals all over Northern California.

You don't have to be a Veteran to participate in this Salute. If you want to honor the men and women who fought for your right to Ride Free, then by all means, you should ride to Cripple Creek, Colo. next year and join me in Honoring my Brothers and Sisters. I'm going even if I am strapped to a gurney behind my lady's bike !!!

Leanin' Al Sickle
Article and Photos
Contact: Leanin. Al391@yahoo.com

TWO LAWS WILL HELP CALIFORNIA VETERANS IN 2015

Bills that refund property taxes and sales taxes take effect today.

Veterans in California who have had a delay in getting a 100 percent disability rating will be able to go back eight years for their property tax exemption under a law that goes into effect today.

The bill, SB1113, authored by state Sen. Steve Knight, a Palmdale Republican who has been elected to the 25th Congressional District, increased the exemption time from four years.

The bill was sponsored by Board of Equalization member and former state Sen. George Runner.

Delays by the Department of Veterans Affairs in making a final determination for 100 percent disability rating sometimes outran the previous four-year period.

"Disabled veterans should not miss out on tax benefits to which they are entitled just because the federal government, for whatever reason, is unable to give them their 100 percent disability rating in a timely manner," Runner said in a statement in May.

Veterans must have a service-connected disability or disease and have been honorably discharged to be eligible.

Another bill affecting California veterans that takes effect today is AB919.

It refunds sales tax, interest and penalties paid from 2002 to 2010 for small sales by "qualified itinerant veteran sellers," many of whom have some disability challenges, according to the bill's author, 37th District Assemblyman Das Williams, a Carpinteria Democrat.

Veterans in the itinerant vendor category, such as hot dog cart operators, believed they were exempt from paying the sales taxes under the Business and Professions Code, Williams said in a statement.

But the Board of Equalization in 2002 ruled the veteran itinerant vendors were liable for the money, which they had not collected from customers.

A qualified veteran vendor needs to submit a written claim before Jan. 1, 2016. The reimbursement is capped at \$50,000 but can be appealed.

"These veterans served our country and were rightfully exempt from paying these fees," Williams said in September, after the law was signed. "Now that it has been made right in the law, these veterans will now be entitled to reimbursement."

Contact The Writer:
951-368-9573 or rdeatley@pe.com

CAN THE VA REDUCE YOUR DISABILITY BENEFITS?

When you are awarded a VA Service-Connected Disability rating, the VA retains the right to reexamine you to determine if your disability is still present and warrants the original rating. In short, it is possible for the VA to increase, reduce, or terminate, disability benefits based on a reexamination. But don't let this scare you: not every veteran's disability rating is scheduled for a reexamination, and not every rating will change.

For example, some service-connected disability ratings are considered protected, and will not be changed. Veterans with a P&T Rating (Permanent and Total) will usually not be scheduled for a reexamination. The same thing goes for injuries that are considered permanent or static. These include injuries that will never change, such as a missing limb.

Let's take a look at VA Reexaminations to better

CHAPTER 982

Christmas 2014



understand the details of why, when, and how, the VA reexamines disability ratings, and whether or not your rating will be reviewed in the future. And if your VA disability rating is reviewed, keep in mind reviews work both ways: they can increase or decrease your rating, depending on supporting evidence and documentation.

WHY THE VA REEXAMINES VETERANS WITH A SERVICE-CONNECTED DISABILITY RATING

The why is easy to answer. Not all medical conditions are permanent. Some injuries heal over time, at least to some degree. The VA wants to ensure they are compensating you for your injuries at an appropriate rate. When you are assigned a disability rating, the VA also determines

Helping a veteran: Dozens of volunteers team up to improve home for legally blind man



OCTOBER 26, 2014 12:00 AM • JENNIFER BEST
JBEST@BESTFAMILYADVENTURES.COM

Dozens of volunteers scraped, painted, poured, plumbed and more Friday in fulfilling a laundry list of home improvements for Vietnam War veteran Ernest "Ernie" Serrano. Representatives of Home Depot stores from Paso Robles to Lompoc converged on his rural Arroyo Grande home to make a difference.

"I'm in shock," said Serrano, a Guadalupe native and graduate of Righetti High School. "I didn't expect it. I'm grateful for anything they do for me. That's cool."

The effort by Team Depot, an employee-led volunteer program, couples volunteers with suppliers to work side-by-side in creating a meaningful impact in veterans' communities. Volunteers work with local nonprofit organizations to improve the homes and lives of thousands of deserving veteran families across the nation with projects from retrofitting a wounded warrior's home to helping make a housing facility move-in ready.

The Serrano project began more than a year ago when John Archuleta, vice president of Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 982, sought a grant to provide some \$7,000 in improvements to the home Serrano shares with Josephine, his wife of 42 years.

The initial request included painting the Serrano home interior, installing two toilets compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, grab bars, rain gutters, repairing windows, dry rot, roof and deck, pouring a concrete path and installing a shade cover over the landing outside the bedroom.

"The grant is for the supplies," Archuleta said. "The work is all provided free by these employees who don't get paid for this day volunteering. It's quite a program."

Archuleta singled out Serrano for his U.S. Army service. Serrano said he served from 1968 through 1970 during which time the soldier was awarded three Silver Stars, two Bronze Stars for Valor and five Purple Hearts. Archuleta said Serrano has also been nominated for a Medal of Honor.

After his return from military service, Serrano worked in the lettuce fields, then completed the Veterans in Piping program offered by United Association of the Plumbers and Pipe Fitters Union Local 304. He worked as a welder and pipe fitter until he medically retired in 1995.

"I'm as legally blind as you can get," Serrano said.

if they will want to reexamine you in the future. This typically only happens for injuries that have a reasonable expectation of improving over time. Reexaminations are usually scheduled within two to five years after the initial examinations, or they can take place any time there is material evidence in your change of condition. You will receive a Reexamination Letter detailing what will take place, and when.

NOTICE OF REEXAMINATION

The VA must send you a reexamination letter before they can change your service-connected disability rating. It's essential that you attend this appointment, or work to reschedule it for a better time. If you don't attend the appointment or provide supporting evidence for your case, the VA can reduce or terminate your benefits. The Notice of Reexamination should include contact information where you can reschedule your appointment if necessary.

The VA may send a Notice of Reexamination at pre-scheduled interval (such as the aforementioned two to five years), or when they have material evidence there has been a change in your medical condition. This could be evidence that your situation has improved or disappeared. You have 30 days to request a hearing if you wish to contest the VA decision, and you have up to 60 days to submit evidence that a reduction in your rating is not warranted.

Keep in mind, the VA cannot reduce your service-connected disability rating without first sending you notice. Failure to do so on their end should result in a full reinstatement of your benefits.

WHEN THE VA WILL NOT SCHEDULE YOU FOR A REEXAMINATION

The VA will typically not request to reexamine your rating under the following conditions:

- The veteran is over age 55.
- The disability is static (such as a loss of limb).
- The disability is considered permanent and is not expected to improve (e.g. blindness, deafness). The disability is already at a minimum rating for that particular disability.
- Reducing an individual rating would not affect the

total combined disability rating.

These conditions are significant. The VA will not schedule a reexamination for permanent and static disabilities, so you can safely assume those ratings will remain the same. Age 55 is significant because it represents an age at which the VA assumes the veteran is too old to reasonably reenter the workforce (keep in mind VA disability ratings represent your ability to perform work at the level you were able to before you had the injury while you were serving in the military).

Finally, the VA will not look to reduce your VA disability rating when reducing one rating wouldn't have a material impact on your overall disability rating. This applies to veterans with multiple medical conditions and disability ratings.

If you have been contacted by the VA to have your case reexamined and you meet any of the above criteria, then contact them with the phone number listed on your Notice of Reexamination and explain why you do not believe you should be reexamined. You may be able to have the reexamination canceled. The VA will not usually be able to reduce your disability rating without a reexamination, so your rating should be safe if you meet any of the above criteria.

PROTECTED VA DISABILITY RATINGS

Certain VA disability benefits are considered Protected Ratings, according to the VA (though others say the term "protected" is a misnomer). This is where it helps to be able to find and read the appropriate regulations, or find an expert who can help you through the task. Here is a document that quotes some of the ratings protections for the 10 and 20 year rules (Word doc on VA site).

- 5 year rule: If the rating has been in effect for 5 years, it cannot be reduced unless your condition has improved on a sustained basis (The VA must have documentation supporting this is a permanent improvement).
- 10 year rule: A service connected disability rating cannot be terminated if it has been in effect for 10 years. Compensation can be reduced if evidence exists that the condition has improved. The sole

- exception is if the VA can prove fraud, in which case the VA can terminate the benefits.
- 20 year rule: If the rating has been in effect for 20 years, it cannot be reduced below the lowest rating it has held for the previous 20 years. The only exception is if the VA can prove fraud.
 - 100% rule: The VA must prove your medical situation has materially improved and as a result, you are able to perform substantial work.

What do these protected ratings mean? Basically, if you have had a VA service-connected disability rating for 5 years or more, the VA must prove your condition has improved on a sustained basis before they can reduce or terminate your disability rating. After 10 years, the VA can only reduce your rating; they cannot terminate it (absent proof of fraud). After 20 years, your rating cannot be reduced below the lowest rating you have held for the last 20 years.

These distinctions are important, because some ratings can vary over the years, based on the medical condition.

For example, let’s say you have a knee injury that warrants a 30% disability rating when you complete your initial VA evaluation. After 5 years, the VA cannot reduce this rating below 30% unless they can prove the injury has healed on

a sustained basis. If it has improved to the point the injury warrants a lower rating, or the injury no longer exists, the benefit can be reduced or terminated. After 10 years, the benefit can no longer be terminated, but it can be reduced if the VA can document substantial sustained health improvements. After 20 years at that rating, your benefit can no longer be reduced below its lowest rating or terminated (unless there is proof of fraud).

The 100% rule is much more difficult to have decreased. The VA must prove your health has materially improved, and you are now able to perform substantial work. If all of your injuries still leave you unemployable, then it is likely your benefit will not be reduced. Most veterans with a 100% rating have one or more major service-connected medical conditions, and possibly additional multiple less-severe injuries. The VA must prove the veteran is able to perform substantial work even with this assortment of medical conditions.

REDUCING YOUR DISABILITY RATING – VA MUST PROVE CHANGE IN CONDITION

The VA needs to establish substantial evidence of a change in condition before any change can occur to your service- connected disability rating. This puts the onus of the work on them. But you still need to be proactive to protect your rating. If the VA sends you a Notice of Reexamination, you need to show up for your scheduled appointment, or reschedule it, if possible. If you miss your scheduled appointment, the VA can reduce or terminate your rating without additional warning. Reestablishing your rating could take some time, or may be impossible, barring a legitimate reason for missing the appointment.

You can also request a hearing if the VA wishes to reduce your rating. You may find it helpful to enlist the help of a lawyer or your own medical professionals. You will want to ensure you have sufficient documentation to support your claims – whether you believe the rating should remain the same, or if it should be increased.

A REEXAMINATION IS NOT THE END OF THE WORLD

A Notice of Reexamination can actually result in an increased disability rating if the situation warrants it. The VA will not go out of their way to increase your benefits rating for you. However, if the situation is warranted by your examination, then they will increase your disability rating. Keep this in mind if you are scheduled for a reexamination. It’s also important to understand that requesting an increase in disability ratings can result in a decrease if the VA can prove your medical condition has improved over time.

Bottom line: A VA disability rating is not always a static rating that will remain unchanged over the course of your lifetime. Your rating may remain unchanged, but it could also increase or decrease, depending on circumstances. If you feel there is a problem with your rating, it is best to find someone who specializes in VA disability claims and see if you can get them to help you with your claim.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS SECRETARY McDONALD UPDATES EMPLOY-

RANDOM THOUGHTS AS WE AGE...

- Wouldn't it be great if we could put ourselves in the dryer for ten minutes; come out wrinkle-free and three sizes smaller
-
- Last year I joined a support group for procrastinators. We haven't met yet.
-
- I don't trip over things, I do random gravity checks!
-
- Old age is coming at a really bad time!
-
- When I was a child I thought Nap Time was a punishment... now, as a grown up, it just feels like a small vacation!
-
- The biggest lie I tell myself is ... "I don't need to write that down, I'll remember it."
-
- Lord grant me the strength to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can & the friends to post my bail when I finally snap!
-
- I don't have gray hair. I have "wisdom highlights". I'm just very wise.
-
- My people skills are just fine. It's my tolerance to idiots that needs work.
-
- If God wanted me to touch my toes, he would've put them on my knees.
-
- The kids text me "plz" which is shorter than please. I text back "no" which is shorter than "yes".
-
- I'm going to retire and live off of my savings. Not sure what I'll do that second week.
-
- Even duct tape can't fix stupid... but it can muffle the sound!
-
- Why do I have to press one for English when you're just gonna transfer me to someone I can't understand anyway?
-
- Of course I talk to myself, sometimes I need expert advice.
-
- Oops! Did I roll my eyes out loud?
-
- At my age "Getting lucky" means walking into a room and remembering what I came in there for.
-
- Chocolate comes from cocoa which is a tree... that makes it a plant which means... chocolate is Salad !!!

Happy New Year

EES ON MyVA REORGANIZATION PLANS

Washington, DC – On November 10, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Robert McDonald sent the following message to all VA employees:

In the last few months as your Secretary, I have met and heard from Veterans and family members about how we can better serve Veterans. I’ve also traveled to VA facilities across the country and have had the extraordinary opportunity to meet with you, the men and women who work on the front lines and behind the scenes to care for and serve Veterans every day. These opportunities have informed my thinking as we work to plan for the future of the Department. Already, more than 2,000 VA employees at 20 facilities serving 1.4 million Veterans have shared their perspectives on how we can improve this Department, and have provided insightful and thoughtful feedback about how VA should be organized to better serve Veterans. It is clear that our shared mission is important to you and your colleagues. It’s also clear that you share my goal of making VA easier to navigate for Veterans. I am grateful for your contributions, and your support in this endeavor.

As we have been considering changes to VA, we have also met with Veterans, Veterans Service Organizations (VSO), NGOs, and other stakeholders. We have used your feedback, and the common themes we heard in all comments, to begin shaping the way forward for VA. Soon, we will begin implementing changes to VA, to better structure our organization to meet Veteran needs. Our new alignments may change some of our processes, but our employees remain valued members of the team.

Our shared goals are to ensure that Veterans have a clear understanding of VA and where to go for what they need within any of our facilities; that employees are empowered with the authority, knowledge and tools they need to solve problems and take action; and that the products and services that we deliver to Veterans are integrated within the organization. The changes we plan to make are as follows:

Establish a new VA-wide customer service organization to ensure we provide top-level customer service to Veterans. A Chief Customer Service Officer who reports to the Secretary will lead this effort. The mission of the new office will be to drive VA culture and practices to

understand and respond to the expectations of our Veteran customers. Establishing a single regional framework that will simplify internal coordination, facilitate partnering and enhance customer service. This will allow Veterans to more easily navigate VA without having to understand our inner structure. Working with our partners to establish a national network of Community Veteran Advisory Councils to coordinate better service delivery with local, state and community partners. Expanded public-private partnerships will help us coordinate Veteran-related issues with local, state and community partners, as well as VA employees. Identifying opportunities for VA to realign its internal business processes into a shared services model in which organizations across VA leverage the same support services, to improve efficiency, reduce costs and increase productivity across VA. Right now, we’re looking at options used in the private sector to enhance our rapid delivery of services, and also at our own business processes that are suited for shared services. Please keep in mind that this is a long-term process and we are just beginning to plan how this will all unfold. As we move forward with these changes, your feedback, ideas and perspective will be invaluable. To gather your suggestions, we have launched an intranet web tool, the My VA Idea House, where employees from across VA can submit ideas online to improve services, streamline processes and solve issues for Veterans and their families. Employees can also vote on submissions from your colleagues across VA. Sponsors will select ideas and create topic-related groups to encourage collaboration and help make the ideas a reality. The Idea House website will officially open for submissions tomorrow, Veterans Day, Nov. 11. I encourage you to go to vaideahouse.ideascale.com to submit your ideas and proposed solutions to the challenges you are seeing.

I know there are a lot of questions about this effort, and I know that there will be concerns. We don’t have all the answers right now, and that’s why we are reaching to you for your thoughts. This will be a fair and deliberate process, and we need your help to make sure our decisions are the right ones for Veterans.

As we collect input and work together to design an employee-led, Veteran-centric VA, we have a great opportunity to make significant progress toward our goals in the near term. Thank you for the work you are doing each day to make VA a stronger organization for

America's Veterans.

DISCHARGE UPGRADES?

DoD willing to reconsider discharges of Vietnam vets with PTSD

By Andrew Tilghman, Staff writer

The Defense Department has agreed to reconsider the bad-paper discharges for thousands of Vietnam-era veterans who may have suffered from combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder but were kicked out of the military in the era before that became a diagnosable condition.

In a new rule announced Wednesday, the Pentagon said veterans from the Vietnam era and other past wars with other-than-honorable discharges will be given "liberal consideration" if they seek to correct their military records and provide some evidence of a PTSD diagnosis that existed at the time of their service.

Upgraded discharges could result in the restoration of some benefits, such as disability pay, separation pay or GI Bill benefits from the Veterans Affairs Department, which are typically denied to vets who receive other-than-honorable discharges. Health care in the VA system is typically provided to veterans regardless of their discharge.

In today's military, PTSD is considered a mitigating factor for misconduct and behavioral problems. The military services are required to grant a medical evaluation to any service member who claims PTSD before finalizing a bad discharge.

The Pentagon's new rule comes in response to a federal lawsuit filed on behalf of several veterans in March that claimed the Defense Department was wrongfully denying discharge upgrade applications from veterans with claims and evidence of PTSD. The new policy was applauded by the Yale Law School Veterans' Legal Service Clinic, which is spearheading the federal lawsuit.

"DoD appears to be taking a significant step to correcting a longstanding injustice," said Jennifer McTiernan, a student intern involved with the lawsuit.

However, she said, it's too early to tell how the new rule will be implemented and the lawsuit is likely to continue.

For years, the military services have rejected PTSD claims from Vietnam-era vets with what McTiernan called "Catch-22-like denials" that say changes cannot be granted without a diagnosis of PTSD from the 1970s — even though PTSD did not become officially recognized by the medical profession until 1980.

And for many veterans, fixing their official discharge document, known as a DD 214, is about more than VA benefits.

"Having an other-than-honorable discharge is a stigma. When someone has a DD 214 with an other-than-honorable discharge on it, it leads employers to possibly not hire them, it leads to discriminatory treatment in other aspects of their lives, it negatively affects their life prospects," McTiernan said.

"These are veterans who honorably served their country and have a psychological wound of war and they should be recognized for having served honorably, not stigmatized and discriminated against," she said.

The Sept. 3 memo was signed by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, a former Army sergeant who earned two Purple Hearts for combat injuries he suffered in Vietnam. Hagel, a longtime veterans' advocate and former top official at VA, played a key role in finalizing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

The lawsuit estimates that a quarter-million Vietnam-era veterans were separated with other-than-honorable discharges and up to 80,000 of them may have suffered from PTSD. The Pentagon's new rule will apply to all veterans with discharges prior to the formal recognition of PTSD in 1980. The vast majority of those are likely to come from the Vietnam era.

The Pentagon is also ordering the four military services to mount a "public messaging campaign" this year and next year targeting veterans who may be affected by this policy change.

The new guidance is focused on veterans with low-level misconduct that may have resulted in administrative discharge. It is unlikely to affect veterans who were court-martialed for serious misconduct and kicked out with a bad-conduct discharge or dishonorable discharge.

One defense official familiar with the policy change said the aim is to strike a balance between addressing concerns from veterans who suffered from a legitimate psychiatric disorder without eroding the respect derived

Vets benefit from treatment courts

In courtrooms around California, including Santa Maria, many of our state's veterans and military personnel are getting a vital second chance. Both our veterans and communities are benefiting.

I was honored to attend the recent graduation of eight men from the Santa Maria Veteran's Treatment Court. These courts, in 20 counties of this state, are serving veterans who come through the criminal justice system and are suffering from conditions resulting from combat, including post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, traumatic brain injury and sexual trauma. These combat-induced conditions are at the root of the crime and self-destructive behaviors that have brought them into the justice system.

As the result of a groundbreaking California law passed in the 2006, judges can steer veterans facing these conditions through a rigorous and highly demanding treatment process in place of jail time. Very often these veterans are facing a DUI conviction or an offense involving domestic violence. Most had never been in trouble with the law before being deployed.

Often working in collaboration with volunteer veteran mentors, and support and services offered through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, these courts promote sobriety and recovery through accountability and frequent court appearances. In exchange for completing a rigorous, often 12-18 month process, defendants can earn a sentence reduction and, in some



Guest Commentary
Hannah-Beth Jackson

cases, a dismissal of charges.

There are conditions that must be met. Not all military personnel are eligible. A defendant's condition must stem from time in combat. Veterans who commit very serious crimes are not eligible.

Yet the ultimate goal — returning defendants back to the community with the skills to be law-abiding citizens — is proving to be remarkably within our grasp. At a time when county resources are stretched thin and jails are overcrowded, Veteran's Treatment Courts are addressing veterans' underlying conditions, saving millions of dollars in taxpayer money, preventing unnecessary jail time, and providing second chances to those who have served our country.

A recent study of Veteran's Treatment Court graduates in San Diego County showed no recidivism among its 27 graduates. That's what I call stopping crime and destructive

behavior in its tracks.

Veteran's Treatment Courts are close to my heart. My husband, retired Judge George Eskin, started the first Veteran's Treatment Court on the South Coast, and I have been moved by the successes of this and similar programs. Just this year, I authored a bill signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown to ensure that defendants are notified at arraignment, the first stage of the court process, that if they are current or former members of the military, they may be eligible for Veteran's Treatment Courts.

But being able to continue and replicate the success of Veteran's Treatment Courts won't be possible unless we remain committed to them. As California gears up to begin its budget process in January, adequately funding our courts, and Veteran's Treatment Courts in particular, needs to be a budget priority.

Many of us will participate in events this Veteran's Day to honor those who have served our country. One of the most important ways we can honor veterans is to support them as they re-adjust to civilian life. More than 2 million Americans have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and California is home to the nation's largest population of veterans. Committing to our veterans' well-being is a commitment to the safety and health of our entire community.

Sen. Hannah-Beth Jackson represents the 19th Senate District in the California Legislature.

from honorable service and the millions of veterans who earned it.

"This is not a get-out-of-jail-free card," the defense official said.

In effect, a veteran seeking a revised discharge will have to prove three elements: that he or she suffered from PTSD at the time of service, that the cause was related to military service and that the symptoms were a factor in the misconduct underlying the other-than-honorable discharge.

The memo is directed toward the Army's and Air Force's Boards for Correction of Military Records and the Board for Correction of Naval Records, which handles requests from sailors and Marines.

The memo says: "Liberal consideration will be given in cases where civilian providers confer diagnoses of PTSD or PTSD-related conditions" and there is further evidence that the disorder existed at the time of service.

"Liberal consideration" will be granted in cases where any document — military or otherwise — can substantiate the existence of one or more symptoms of what is now known as PTSD.

However, in cases involving "serious misconduct," the boards will "exercise caution" and carefully consider the likely causal relationship of symptoms to misconduct, the memo says.

Scrutinizing records that are now more than 40 years old will be a challenge, especially since some of them were destroyed in a massive 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis.

The last time the Pentagon issued forcewide guidance for service-level records corrections boards was in the wake of the 2011 repeal of the "don't ask don't tell" law. That guidance allowed former service members to seek changes to their military records if their separation was related to the military's 17-year ban on gays serving openly in uniform.

FORMER US REP LANE EVANS, VETERANS ADVOCATE, DIES

By Jason Keyser - AP

CHICAGO (AP) — Former Illinois Rep. Lane Evans, a Vietnam War-era Marine who fought for veterans' rights during his 24 years in the U.S. House, has died after a long fight with Parkinson's disease.

The Democrat died Wednesday at a nursing home in East Moline, Illinois, said his former congressional staffer,

Michael Malmstrom, who also was one of Evans' legal guardians. He was 63.

"In the early days of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Lane was one of the first members of Congress to take on issues like PTSD and TBI," said Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America CEO Paul Rieckhoff, referring to the acronym for traumatic brain injury. "He helped put our issues on the map."



Evans joined the Marines at age 17, and had orders for Vietnam. But he served in Okinawa, Japan, as a security guard because his older brother was already deployed in the war.

As a congressman, he fought for the rights of veterans and became the senior Democrat on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. He pushed legislation to help those exposed to Agent Orange and to give former service members rights to judicial review in pursuing benefits claims.

He also campaigned for veterans grappling with post-traumatic stress disorders and other health problems, as well as those having trouble finding employment.

View galleryThis Aug. 12, 2012 photo shows former Illinois Congressman …

This Aug. 12, 2012 photo shows former Illinois Congressman Lane Evans in Davenport, Iowa, during a v ...

Evans was first elected from his western Illinois district in 1982, when he was a 31-year-old attorney, and went on to serve 12 terms. He worked for more than a decade after his Parkinson's diagnosis, but announced in 2006 that he wouldn't seek re-election because of his deteriorating health.

Evans was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 1995, but he didn't publicly announce the diagnosis for three years, worried the revelation would stigmatize him. He first

realized something was wrong when he couldn't wave his left hand during a parade.

Still, he maintained a hectic congressional schedule. But toward the end of his time in office he was briefly hospitalized and missed votes, committee meetings and hearings.

In a statement announcing his retirement, Evans acknowledged his "window of opportunity is now closing." He left office in January 2007.

President Barack Obama has credited Evans with aiding his own political rise, saying once that he wouldn't have made it to the U.S. Senate without early support from his fellow Illinoisan.

Obama has also called Evans "one of the most gracious, best humored and hardest working people that I've ever had the pleasure to know."

Recently, Evans required round-the-clock care. Faced with mounting medical bills, friends and member of Congress raised \$80,000 to help.

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois said Thursday that a disease "trapped his body but never restrained his great spirit."

Democratic U.S. Rep. Cheri Bustos, who represents the district Evans served, recalled first getting to know him as a newspaper reporter.

"Lane will be sorely missed by all who he touched, but his legacy of service will never be forgotten," Bustos said.

Evans is survived by three brothers.

VETERANS DAY PARADE

Kate O'Hare Palmer

Top - Lily Adams, nurse at 12th evac Cu Chi 1968 and Kate; other side of the car...Breese Baker.. medic in Japan (60's), Moira, Navy (20 yrs and Rose Noyak-Air Force..

we had fun!!



Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.

Region 8/9 Pre-Convention Conference

June 27, 2015

The Silver Legacy Resort Casino ~ Reno, NV.

Announcement

- **VVA Registration Fee** _____ **\$45.00**
- **AVVA and/or spouses Fee** _____ **\$40.00**
- **Children 16 & under** _____ **Free (no meal)**
- **Luncheon Only** _____ **\$30.00**

Add \$5.00 fee for registration on the same day as the conference begins.

**REGISTRATION FEE INCLUDES:
CONFERENCE HANDBOOK & A BUFFET
LUNCH**

For hotel reservations:

Silver Legacy Resort Casino

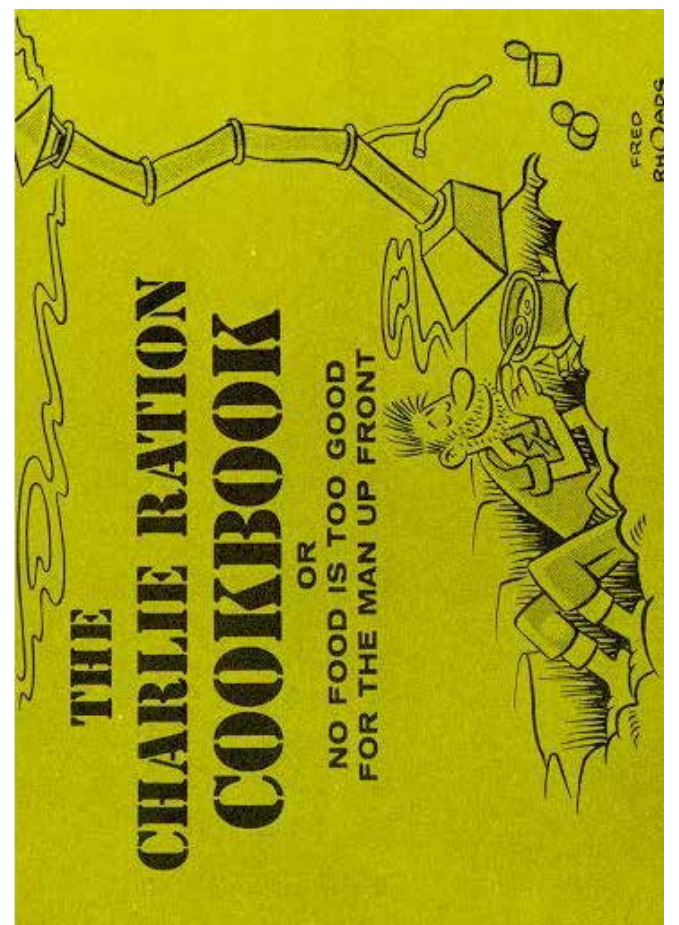
800-687-8733

Group Code: MTVVA15

Registrations received after May 26, 2015 will be accepted on a space and rate availability basis.

Reservation cut-off date: May 26, 2015

This is a firm cut-off date. Get your room early!



CA AVVA would like to wish you all a Happy New Year filled with good health, love and many blessings.

We thank you for your support in 2014 and look forward to working with you in 2015.

You can always count on our support.

~ CA Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America

CHAPTER 765

Veterans Day 2014 (elow) Blind Center Plaque at Long Beach VA following



Region 8/9 Pre-Convention Conference

June 26-28, 2015

Silver Legacy Resort & Casino

Reno, NV.

SAVE THE DATE ~ June 26 - 28, 2015

SAVE THE PLACE ~



SAVE THE TIME

June 25-30, 2015 ~ ROOM RATES

Room Type:

- Single/Double Midweek Rate (Sun-Thurs) \$65.00
- Single/Double Weekend Rate (Fri-Sat) \$95.00

- VVA Registration Fee - \$45.00
- AVVA and/or spouses Fee - \$40.00
- Children 16 & under - Free (no meal)
- Luncheon Only - \$35.00

Add \$5 for registration the day of the conference

REGISTRATION FEE INCLUDES A
BUFFET LUNCH & CONFERENCE
HANDBOOK

The Reno/Tahoe International Airport (RNO) is only 4 miles from the resort and takes only 12-15 minutes to arrive at the hotel.

Hotel Airport shuttle for arrival and departure

More information will be sent at a later date!

Some back ground on this flag.

Walt Peters, a 70 year old blind Vietnam war veteran and member of Sumner County Tennessee Chapter 240 has made it his mission to place a plaque of the American flag embossed with the Pledge of Allegiance in Braille in every veterans hospital in the United States. In March 2014, Peters presented the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Nashville with the first such Braille flag in Tennessee. The plaque was placed at the VAMC's Low Vision Clinic, and dedicated with a small ceremony.

Walt's phone number is 912-210-0332 The price to make one and ship it to the west coast is \$350.00





VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA CALIFORNIA STATE COUNCIL

For immediate release
December 22, 2014

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VVA-CSC ANNOUNCES SENATOR LONI HANCOCK AND ASSEMBLYMAN MARC LEVINE AS 2014 LEGISLATORS OF THE YEAR

The Vietnam Veterans of America, California State Council (VVA-CSC) has named Senator Loni Hancock (D-Berkeley) (below left top) and Assemblyman Marc Levine (D-San Rafael) (below left bottom) as their Legislators of the Year for 2014. The VVA-CSC Legislator of the Year award is bestowed upon legislators who have supported California's veterans and their families during their service as California legislators.

Senator Hancock currently represents the 9th State Senate District, which includes the cities of Alameda, Albany, Berkeley, El Cerrito, Emeryville, El Sobrante, Hercules, Kensington, Oakland, Piedmont, Pinole, Richmond, Rodeo, San Leandro and San Pablo.



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

According to Ken Holybee, VVA Legislative Chair, "if a justice involved veteran with service connected mental issues completes a diversion program satisfactorily, the provisions of SB 1227 would allow a court to dismiss criminal charges".

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



Assemblyman Marc Levine was elected in November 2012 to represent the 10th Assembly District, comprised of the communities of Sausalito, Tiburon, Larkspur, Mill Valley, Corte Madera, San Anselmo, Kentfield, San Rafael, Fairfax, Novato, West Marin, Petaluma, Cotati, Penngrove, Sonoma, Sebastopol, and parts of the City of Santa Rosa. Levine earned his Master's Degree in National Security Affairs from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA,

In 2014, Assemblyman Levine authored AB 2098, which was signed into law by the Governor. AB 2098 requires judges to consider military status and mental health problems outlined in 1170.9 as factor in favor of granting probation. It also requires courts to consider military status and service induced mental health problems as a mitigating factor for offenses with determinate sentencing.

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

VVA Legislative Advocate Pete Conaty noted that "the veteran's community is fortunate that legislators like Assemblyman Levine are willing to tackle complex issues like PTSD and the legal system in order to help those who served their country".

Senator Hancock and Assemblyman Levine will be presented their awards at the VVA-CSC's Annual Capitol Legislative Day event on March 25, 2015. This is a day when VVA-CSC leaders and members alike travel to the State Capitol to advocate on issues of importance to veterans and to educate legislators, consultants, and staff.

The **Vietnam Veterans of America, California State Council** has over 4,700 members and is the California unit of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). VVA was founded in 1978 to promote, support, and aggressively advocate on the full range of issues important to Vietnam veterans, the next generation of America's war veterans, and to also serve our local communities. The Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is the only national Vietnam veterans organization congressionally chartered and exclusively dedicated to Vietnam-era veterans and their families. Nationwide, the VVA has over 74,000 members.



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VVA CA State Council contact info inside - page 2

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To:

In this issue:

- Activities-Events/Photos
 - Legislative Information
 - Useful Veteran Information
 - Region 8/9 Pre Convention Info
- And more...

VVA & CSC Meeting Dates & Events

CSC Full Council - January 23-25, 2015, Fresno, CA
CSC Full Council - April 24-26, 2015, Fresno, CA
Region 8-9 Conference, June 2015, see page 11
National Convention, July 21-25, 2015, Springfield, IL