



Probe slams VA over \$6M conference tab including parody video, official resigns

An Obama administration appointee has resigned in connection with another bombshell report detailing the waste of taxpayer money at feel-good conferences -- this time, at a pair of Veterans Affairs summits in Orlando that cost more than \$6 million.

John Sepulveda, who as assistant secretary for human resources and administration was the agency's top HR official, resigned just as the VA Office of Inspector General released its 150-page report on the conferences, held on his watch in July and August 2011.

The report said he "abdicated his responsibilities" in overseeing the conferences, leading to "numerous examples of excessive costs, and unnecessary and unsupported expenditures."

The resignation follows that of General Services Administration chief Martha Johnson, who stepped down following a report on a 2010 Vegas conference for GSA that cost taxpayers more than \$800,000.

The Veterans Affairs conferences were far costlier, with the planning described as "dysfunctional" by the IG report.

And the IG report included allegations that Sepulveda made a false statement to investigators, and that other VA employees broke federal law and conduct policies by accepting improper gifts from hotels during the selection process.

The conferences for the department's human resources employees included a litany of expenses covering everything from whimsical videos to karaoke to hors d'oeuvres, including artisan cheese displays.

One of those expenses, a video parody of the movie "Patton" in which an actor pep-talked the audience about HR "mission imperatives" in the style of the original movie's opening scene, had already drawn lawmakers' attention earlier this year when the nearly \$50,000 expense first surfaced.

The IG report, though, documented another \$16,500 video expense for a so-called "Happy Face Video." This was a daily video recap of the prior day's conference events, which according to the report was "improperly authorized."

The report specifically flagged \$762,000 in "unauthorized, unnecessary, and/or wasteful expenses" -- which included the "Patton" video, as well as \$43,000 in awards paid to staffers "for their roles in the management of these conferences."

The IG's office tallied \$6.1 million in total costs, though acknowledged the full price tag could be even higher.

Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, decried what he called a "lack of leadership" and called for accountability.

"It is blatantly clear that VA does not know how much it spends on conferences," he said. "This sort of funny money accounting must stop, and will no longer be tolerated, especially in today's tight fiscal climate."

The report further alleged that Sepulveda gave a "false statement" in claiming to investigators that he hadn't seen the Patton video until the first day of the conference.

"However, several individuals testified that Mr. Sepulveda in fact viewed the videos before the conferences took place," the report said. The IG's office said the Department of Justice declined to prosecute the alleged false statement.

The VA announced a series of departmental changes in response to the investigation.

"While the IG report makes clear that 'VA held these conferences to fulfill valid training needs' and 'offered legitimate, substantive training courses at the conferences,' this does not excuse the misconduct of even a few individuals," the department said. "Misuse of taxpayer dollars is completely unacceptable. The actions cited in the report represent serious lapses in oversight, judgment, and stewardship."

The VA said other employees will have allegations of wrongdoing reviewed for appropriate administrative action. Two employees, the VA said, were placed on administrative leave pending review.

"Employees who have misused taxpayer dollars or violated VA standards of conduct will be held accountable," the department said.

The IG report also found 11 department employees in charge of managing the conference "improperly accepted gifts from contractors seeking to do business or already doing business with VA." These ranged from lodging to meals to helicopter rides to massages.

Further, the report said one unnamed employee tried to get Marriott to give him and his family "additional lodging benefits."



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TSC President Report

My Brothers and Sisters, It seems like a long time since we have seen each other. It will be 10 months in April. When we get on the new schedule it will be more even between Meetings. I am looking forward to seeing everyone in Kerrville. This will be a very busy meeting as we will be giving out our Scholarships and our Awards. We will be seating Delegates from our newly formed Chapter # 1069 in El Campo, Texas. They will be our 37th Chapter. Big thanks to Mike Dawson who has resigned as Chapter Start-up Coordinator after presenting 1069 with their Charter. Mike wants to take a break and Vice-President Donnie Kennedy has volunteered to take over as Chapter Start-up Coordinator.

In March our State Council Officers and several of our members will be attending the Ground **Breaking Ceremonies in Austin for the Texas Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Capital Grounds. Some of us will be honored to read the names of those from Texas who were killed in action. The names will be read on Sunday, March 24th at the LBJ Library and Ground Breaking Ceremony will be Monday, the 25th,, On the Capital Grounds.** I urge all Vietnam Veterans that are able to attend these Ceremonies.

Semper Fi,
Buster

Next VVA Texas State Council Meeting

Kerrville, Texas at the Y.O. Ranch Hotel & Conference Center April 5-7, 2013 hosted by VVA Chapter 863 Kerrville.

Chapter delegates from across the State of Texas will meet to conduct VVA business.

Room rates are \$89.00 plus tax

Reservation cut-off date is March 29, 2013 call 877-967-3767 for reservations.

- Friday afternoon the Vietnam Veterans Assistance Foundation of Texas, Inc [VVAFT] will meet at 4 pm
- Friday AVVA State Council meeting 7 pm
- Friday evening delegates will attend the Host Chapter hospitality room
- Business Session Saturday – 9 am -5 pm
- Saturday Awards Night Banquet -7 pm -???.

VVAFT President's Report

Bill Meeks, Jr.

The 8th Annual Operation ED-U-CATE Project is funded by VVAFT's "Lucio Moreno Educational Fund" and will be a contest between Texas VVA Chapters to achieved excellence in their overall general operation and each applicant must have accomplished the following contest criterion to be eligible for the final grant awards:

1. Must be in "Good Standing" with VVA, the VVA Texas State Council, State and Federal regulations
2. Must meet the submittal deadline
3. Must provide chapter web site address or three copies of their chapter newsletter or both for evaluation
4. Must provide a five-hundred (500) word essay on a community or veteran based program the chapter has established and provide minimum of two photos of chapter participation in the program
5. The contest entry (chapter program) must be a current event in the previous 12 months prior to the deadline (April 1, 2013)

Submittal Deadline: On or By April 1, 2013

Postmark Delivery: 29419 Fox Run Blvd, Spring, Texas 77386

E-mail Delivery: VVAFT1@aol.com

All entries will be judged by the VVAFT Board of Directors. The content of the chapter applicant's web site or newsletters or both and the merit of their chapter program will determine the final grant awards. The top two awardees will have their essay and photos published in the Texas VV News for recognition of their outstanding work.

Grant Awards:

- **1st Place - \$500**
- **2nd Place - \$300**
- **3rd Place - \$200**
- **4th Place - \$100**
-

The decision of the grant awards by the VVAFT Board of Directors are final and will be announced during the '2013 Spring Meeting of the VVA Texas State Council.

AVVA State President Report

AVVA President's Corner

The Holidays are all behind us for another year. I hope everyone had great times with the family and friends. We are all starting a New Year.

I know we have all had sickness, health issues, deaths this past few months. Rita Metzler (923), AVVA Texas Chaplain is having lots of health problems and has been in the hospital and now a Rehab Center in New Braunsfel. Please keep her in your prayers. Merle Morris (278) is also having some health issues, been in the hospital a couple of times, so also keep her in your prayers.

AVVA business information, the elections for Chapter Representatives are coming up in April. I sent out an email to the Chapters that need to have their election. Please follow the rules. The Texas State Council meeting in Kerrville, TX is approaching, April 5-7. I look forward to seeing everyone. Our Project A.M.I.G.O. recipient for this State Council Meeting is "K-Star". On the bottom of the Registration Form is the information on what they need.

The National Convention is going to be in Jacksonville, FL, August 13-18. The National AVVA Election is going to be held. Election for the National Officers. This is the FIRST TIME EVER for the AVVA Chapter Rep's can vote in the election. We have fought for this for a long time, so I do hope to see LOTS OF THE CHAPTER REP'S FROM TEXAS THERE TO CAST THEIR VOTES.

To all AVVA members, lets get involved. Come to the State Council meetings and the National Conventions.

See you in Kerrville, TX.

Marilyn Rose

VVA Urges All Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange Be Screened for Prostate Cancer

(Washington , D.C.) "Veterans exposed to Agent Orange are at least twice as likely to develop prostate cancer; their recurrence rates are higher; and recurring cancers are more aggressive," noted Dr. Thomas Berger, Executive Director of VVA's Veterans Health Council, before today's Congressional Men's Health Caucus Prostate Cancer Task Force. Berger urged his fellow Vietnam veterans to get screened, noting "it's worth the fight."

Said Berger, "Some three million veterans served in Southeast Asia , and no one knows for sure how many of these veterans were exposed to Agent Orange." In 1996 the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences concluded there is "limited evidence of a positive association between prostate cancer and exposure to herbicides used in Vietnam , including Agent Orange." As a result of IOM's findings, Jesse Brown, then-Secretary of the Veterans Administration (VA), issued the final rule, recognizing prostate cancer as a service-connected, presumptive disease associated with exposure to Agent Orange and other phenoxy herbicides during military service, allowing such exposed veterans to become eligible for VA disability compensation and health care.

In 2008, University of California-Davis Cancer Center physicians released results of research showing Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange have greatly increased risks of prostate cancer and even greater risk of getting the most aggressive form of the disease as compared to those who were

not exposed. The research was also the first to use a large population of men in their 60s and the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test. More than 13,000 Vietnam veterans enrolled in the VA Northern California Health Care System were stratified into two groups, exposed or not exposed to Agent Orange between 1962 and 1971. Based on medical evaluations conducted between 1998 and 2006, the study revealed that:

- twice as many Agent Orange-exposed men were identified with prostate cancer than non-exposed;
- Agent Orange-exposed men were diagnosed two-and-a-half years younger than non-exposed; and
- Agent Orange-exposed men were nearly four times more likely to present with metastatic disease than non-exposed.

Further buttressing this link, in 2009, a study of 1,495 veterans in five cities who underwent radical prostatectomy to remove their cancerous prostates showed 206 exposed to Agent Orange had a near 50 percent increased risk of their cancer recurring, despite the cancer seeming nonaggressive at the time of surgery. And the cancer came back with a vengeance. The time it took the prostate-specific antigen, or PSA, level to double – an indicator of aggressiveness – was eight months versus more than 18 months in non-exposed veterans.

I Was A Soldier, I Am A Veteran
 by Colonel Daniel K. Cedusky, AUS, Retired

I was a Soldier or I am a Veteran: That's the way it is, that's what we were...ARE.

We put it, simply, without any swagger, without any brag, in those four plain words.

We speak them softly, just to ourselves. Others may have forgotten They are a manifesto to mankind; speak those four words anywhere in the world -- yes, anywhere -- and many who hear will recognize their meaning.

They are a pledge. A pledge that stems from a document which said: "I solemnly Swear", "to protect and defend" and goes on from there, and from a Flag called "Old Glory".

Listen, and you can hear the voices echoing through them, words that sprang white-hot from bloody lips, shouts of "medic", whispers of "Oh God!", forceful words of "Follow Me". If you can't hear them, you weren't, if you can you were.

"Don't give up the ship! Fight her till she dies... Damn the torpedoes! Go ahead! . . . Do you want to live forever? . . . Don't cheer, boys; the poor devils are dying." Laughing words, and words cold as January ice, words that when spoken, were meant, .. "Wait till you see the whites of their eyes". The echo's of I was a Soldier.

You can hear the slow cadences at Gettysburg, or Arlington honoring not a man, but a Soldier, perhaps forgotten by his nation...Oh! Those Broken Promises. You can hear those echoes as you have a beer at the "Post", walk in a parade, go to The Wall, visit a VA hospital, hear the mournful sounds of Taps, or gaze upon the white crosses, or tall white stones, row upon row. But they aren't just words; they're a way of life, a pattern of living, or a way of dying.

They made the evening, with another day's work done; supper with the wife and kids. A Beer with friends; and no Gestapo snooping at the door and threatening to kick your teeth in.

They gave you the right to choose who shall run our government for us, the right to a secret vote that counts just as much as the next fellow's in the final tally; and the obligation to use that right, and guard it and keep it clean. They prove the right to hope, to dream, to pray, and the obligation to serve. These are some of the meanings of those four words, meanings we don't often stop to tally up or even list.

Only in the stillness of a moonless night, or in the quiet of a Sunday afternoon, or in the thin dawn of a new day, when our world is close about us, do they rise up in our memories and stir in our sentient hearts And we are remembering family & buddies, who were at Iwo Jima, Wake Island, and Bataan, Inchon, and Chu Lai, Knox and Benning, Great Lakes and Paris Island, Travis and Chanute, Bagdad, Kabul, Kuwait City, and many other places long forgotten by our

civilian friends.They are plain words, those four. Simple words.

You could carve them on stone; you could carve them on the mountain ranges.

You could sing them, to the tune of "Yankee Doodle."

But you needn't. You needn't do any of those things, for those words are graven in the hearts of Veterans, they are familiar to 24,000,000 tongues, every sound and every syllable.

If you must write them, put them on my Stone.

But when you speak them, speak them softly, proudly, I will hear you, for I too,

I was a Soldier, I AM A VETERAN.

Inspired By "Creed" I am an American by Hal Borland
Use as needed, post on web sites, forward, use in a speech, put in Post Newsletters, send to your local media...

It's official; DD-214's are NOW On-line.

The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) has provided the following web site for veterans to gain access to their DD-214's

on-line: <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/>

This may be particularly helpful when a veteran needs a copy of his DD-214 for employment purposes. NPRC is working to make it easier for veterans with computers and Internet access to obtain copies of documents from their military files.

Military veterans and the next of kin of deceased former military members may now use a new online military personnel records system to request documents.

Other individuals with a need for documents must still complete the Standard Form 180, which can be downloaded from the on-line web site. Because the requester will be asked to supply all information essential for NPRC to process the request, delays that normally occur when NPRC has to ask veterans for additional information will be minimized. The new web-based application was designed to provide better service on these requests by eliminating the records center mail room and processing time.

Please pass this information on to former military personnel you may know and their dependents.



Save Our Benefit: Commissary and exchange benefits continue to be the target for budget cutters. Repeated attacks on the military resale benefit threaten to eliminate the taxpayer subsidy for commissaries, consolidate the commissary and exchange systems, and raise prices. Some members of Congress propose giving active duty service members a \$400 cash allowance in lieu of the benefit - retirees, Medal of Honor winners, and survivors would get nothing. This would impact adversely on the millions of service members and their families who rely on commissaries and exchanges to stretch their household budgets. Under the present system the average military family of four can save \$7,000 a year. In remote and overseas locations, it is often the only affordable shopping opportunity available. In metropolitan areas, where prices are consistently higher, commissaries and exchanges help keep prices affordable. For some junior enlisted military families and fixed income retirees, savings are the difference between making ends meet and filing for public assistance.

The commissary and exchange benefit continues to rank as one of the most important benefits for military families and is stronger today than ever. While the cost of other federal defense programs have doubled or even tripled in the past five years, the cost of commissary programs have remained constant and are a bargain for the taxpayer. However, if the taxpayer subsidy for commissaries and exchanges is eliminated, to compensate for the loss of funding, commissaries and exchanges would have to raise prices and cut services which could lead to a collapse of the military resale system. Military families and the Nation cannot afford for this to happen. The military resale system is too important of a benefit to lose. Last year it saved military families \$5.6 billion and contributed billions of dollars to the military communities they support. The military resale system also employs 100,000 working Americans, is the largest employer of military families in the world and the leading employer of veterans in the Nation.

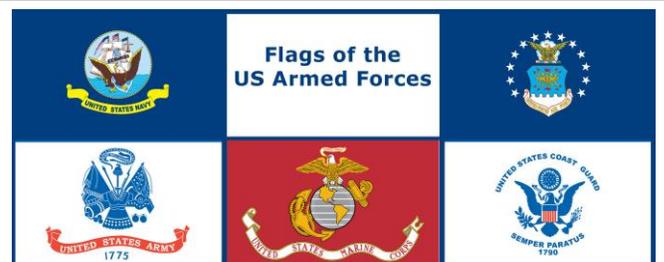
In MAR 2012 a coalition of military families, advocacy groups and American industry called Save Our Benefit formed to preserve shopping privileges on military bases. They applied for and were approved as a non-profit organization under the name "The Coalition to Save our Military Shopping Benefits". Their mission is to preserve and strengthen a 150-year-old benefit that provides thousands of dollars in annual savings on household necessities, billions of dollars in added employment income for military families and underwrites other billions of dollars in vital on-base community programs and facilities. Their purpose is to provide advocacy and support for military resale programs, which contribute more than a trillion dollars to our economy. Several misguided proposals put forth during the budget debate have called for radical restructuring and diminishment of these benefits under the false notion of saving taxpayer dollars. The Coalition aims to ensure that nothing happens to destroy these benefits and to educate key policy makers about the consequences of moving forward with these proposals.

Touting the significant household savings that commissaries and exchanges bring to military families, the Coalition aims to take a series of measures to insulate from budget reductions what is considered the most efficient and effective benefit provided to military people. For example, over the past five years, costs of commissary programs have remained constant, while the cost of most other Defense programs has doubled and tripled. In order to boost these savings even further, the Coalition aims to ensure that all eligible patrons know they can save 20 to 50 percent by using their benefit. As sales increase and a broader shopping base establishes, prices will be continually driven down, giving military patrons an even greater incentive to utilize their local commissaries and exchanges.

The Coalition brings together military members, partner associations, business and community leaders, and the public to support the continued funding and operation of military commissaries and exchanges. They provide information on the operation of the resale system, improve business conditions, and serve as a focal point to address the mounting threats against this critical military benefit. You can join the Coalition at <http://saveourbenefit.org/register.html> to receive the latest news, alerts, best deals, promotional events and take action on timely issues that impact the availability of this benefit for all those who are serving our nation. There are no fees or obligations associated with joining. [Source: <http://saveourbenefit.org> Dec 2012]

VA Suicide Prevention Update

The Department of Veterans Affairs in Texas will conduct a mortality study to track causes of death for veterans putting together a model that could allow similar data to be gathered nationwide. The department's decision came two months after an Austin American-Statesman investigation found that nearly as many Texas veterans died from prescription medicines as from suicide. The newspaper says it used autopsy and toxicology reports, inquests and accident reports from more than 50 state agencies to determine the causes of death for 266 Texas veterans who had been receiving disability benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs when they died. The department says its study will look at veterans who served in combat. The VA officials declined to say how the study would be used nationally. [Source: Associated Press article 23 Dec 2012]



Texas State Council Scholarship Announcement

Dear Texas VVA Members:

The Vietnam Veterans of America, Texas State Council, wishes to award the Alberto Rodriguez and the Robert Spencer Memorial Scholarship to a Vietnam Veteran, current spouse, his/her child or grandchild.

Applications will be sent via email and mailed to chapter without an email address in January, 2013.

The completed application must be postmarked no later than **March 31, 2013**. Please send all completed forms to:

VVA Texas State Council
Scholarship Chair
100 Elmwood
Fritch, Texas 79036

If you have any questions, please contact me (Percilla Newberry) at home 806-857-0409.

Sincerely,
Don Kennedy, Chairman Percilla Newberry, Co-Chair

ALBERTO RODRIGUEZ AND ROBERT DALE SPENCER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Scholarship Criteria

What is it?

Vietnam Veterans of America, Texas State Council, offers a scholarship for veterans of the Vietnam War, their children, step-children, grandchildren, current spouses and widows who have not remarried who reside in the State of Texas and attend a fully accredited Texas College or University*, enrolled in 12 credit hours or more or will be graduating seniors in high school. (*Texarkana VVA Chapter will have exceptions due to the location).

Who was Alberto Rodriguez?

He was a member of VVA 457. He helped to start the VVA organization in San Antonio. He also helped establish the Vet Centers in San Antonio, Kerrville and San Angelo. He signed on for a two year stint in 1967, reaching the rank of Specialist 4. He was a senior scout observer with the Reconnaissance Platoon of Company e, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, 11th Infantry Brigade, Americal Division. Albert was awarded the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, the Army Commendation Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal and the Silver Star, awarded at the direction of the President in lieu of five Bronze Stars. He also served on the West Texas POW/MIA commission and directed some campaign seeking medical benefits for Vietnam Veterans exposed to Agent Orange. After fighting the Viet Cong., 42 year old Alberto Rodriguez lost his final battle to cancer on November 4, 1989.

Who was Robert Dale Spencer?

Robert was a Sergeant with the rank of E-5. He was in D Co, 1st Bn, 22nd Infantry, 4th Inf. Division, USARV. Robert was born on February 23, 1948 and was killed on August 3, 1970 in Binh Dinh Province, South Vietnam. His home town was Texas City, Texas. He was 22 years of age at the time of his death. Prior to serving his country he was an artist.

How the Scholarship may be used?

This scholarship money must be applied toward tuition, books and other fees.

How do I apply?

- Fill out the application
- Attach all of the requested support documents
- Write the essay
- Completed entries must be postmarked on or before March 31, 2013.

What About the Essay?

- The topic – THE LAST CHOPPER OUT (Discuss the events of the last days of the war. How did it affect the South Vietnamese people and the Vietnam Veteran)
- Minimum of 1,500 words
- Judged on Content, Appearance, Grammar, Originality and Punctuation.

[Editor's NOTE:] Due to the length of the scholarship application, and if your chapter has not received the application by email from the scholarship committee please contact Don Kennedy, Percilla Newberry or Jim Boyd and request a copy by email:

Don Kennedy Badmoonrisin69@aol.com or Percilla Newberry Luther844@aol.com or Jim W Boyd jimwboyd@swbell.net

VA Eligibility Verification Report (EVR):

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced 20 DEC it is cutting red tape for Veterans by eliminating the need for them to complete an annual Eligibility Verification Report (EVR). VA will implement a new process for confirming eligibility for benefits, and staff that had been responsible for processing the old form will instead focus on eliminating the compensation claims backlog. Historically, beneficiaries have been required to complete an EVR each year to ensure their pension benefits continued. Under the new initiative, VA will work with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) to verify continued eligibility for pension benefits. "By working together, we have cut red tape for Veterans and will help ensure these brave men and women get the benefits they have earned and deserve," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. VA estimates it would have sent nearly 150,000 EVRs to beneficiaries in January 2013. Eliminating these annual reports reduces the burden on Veterans, their families, and survivors because they will not have to return these routine reports to VA each year in order to avoid suspension of benefits. It also allows VA to redirect more than 100 employees that usually process EVRs to work on eliminating the claims backlog.

"Having already instituted an expedited process that enables wounded warriors to quickly access Social Security disability benefits, we are proud to work with our federal partners on an automated process that will make it much easier for qualified Veterans to maintain their VA benefits from year to year," said Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security. "The IRS is taking new steps to provide critical data to help speed the benefits process for the nation's Veterans and Veterans Affairs," said Beth Tucker, IRS Deputy Commissioner for Operations Support. "The IRS is pleased to be part of a partnership with VA and SSA that will provide needed data quickly and effectively to move this effort forward." All beneficiaries currently receiving VA pension benefits will receive a letter from VA explaining these changes and providing instructions on how to continue to submit their unreimbursed medical expenses. More information about VA pension benefits is available at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/pension> and other VA benefit programs on the joint Department of Defense—VA web portal eBenefits at <http://www.ebenefits.va.gov>. [Source: VA News Release 20 Dec 2012]

POW/MIA Update

"Keeping the Promise", "Fulfill their Trust" and "No one left behind" are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II (73,000+), Korean War (7,900+), Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,655), 1991 Gulf War (0), and OEF/OIF (6). Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home. For a listing of all personnel accounted for since 2007 refer to http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/accounted_for . For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703) 699-1420. The remains of the following MIA/POW's have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:

Family members seeking more information about missing loved ones may call the following Service Casualty Offices: U.S. Air Force (800) 531-5501, U.S. Army (800) 892-2490, U.S. Marine Corps (800) 847-1597, U.S. Navy (800) 443-9298, or U.S. Department of State (202) 647-5470. The remains of the following MIA/POW's have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:

Vietnam – None / Korea -1 / World War II – None

DPMO announced 18 DEC that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing in action from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Sgt. 1st Class Harold M. Brown, 20, of Winston-Salem, N.C., was buried Dec. 22, in Hamptonville, N.C. was last seen. In the identification of the remains, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, such as radiograph and mitochondrial DNA—which matched Brown's aunt and cousin. Using modern technology, identifications continue to be made from remains that were previously turned over by North Korean officials. Today, more than 7,900 Americans remain unaccounted for from the Korean War.



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VA Claim Denial Update

A new report on an old problem contains some sad statistics about veterans' benefits claims:

- Thirty-one percent of claims filed with the Veterans Affairs Department are likely to be denied — and 60 percent of those denials will be erroneous.
- Sixty percent of claims will take longer than 125 days to be processed, more than 7 percent of claims will be misplaced, and 4 percent will be completely lost.
- A veteran calling VA's benefits hotline has just a 49 percent chance of being connected to someone and receiving a correct answer.

The report, "The Veterans Disability System: Problems and Solutions," was released 12 DEC by the nonprofit National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA). Based on a review of the 870,000 benefits claims pending before VA in 2011 — a number that has climbed to about 900,000 pending claims today — the report says the pile of pending claims has grown despite the fact that VA is processing more claims than ever before and using a variety of new efforts to work faster and more accurately. Even faster claims processing might be possible by contracting out administrative services or transferring claims processing from the federal government to states, the report says. It recommends expanded pilot programs to test those ideas. The nonpartisan National Center for Policy Analysis, which specializes in retirement and health care programs, is skeptical about VA's stated goal of eliminating the claims backlog by the end of 2015. VA "is barely able to process current claims," the report says, "and has exhibited little to no progress toward their stated goal of 125 days and 98 percent accuracy for processed claims by 2015." The federal government, in general, does a poor job of administering disability benefits and services, the report says, as evidenced by the state of Social Security Disability. But the Veterans Benefits Administration appears to be far worse.

The Veterans Affairs Department is fighting back against an independent study that concluded 60 percent of disability benefits claim denials were done in error. A report by the nonprofit and nonpartisan National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA) released last week says 31 percent of VA claims are likely to be denied and that 60 percent of those denials are likely to be erroneous. VA officials, however, said Monday that only 10 percent of veterans filed notices of disagreement last year and that only 1.2 percent of all VA decisions were reversed on review.

In a statement, VA said the report's errors are the result of using outdated data and reaching "inaccurate conclusions" based on very small samples. That does not mean VA isn't worried about the state of claims. "We know that too many veterans have to wait too long to get the benefits they have earned and deserve," the statement says. "That is unacceptable, and we are implementing a robust plan to fix the problem."

VA is on track to finish calendar year 2012 with about 900,000 pending claims, with slightly more than two-thirds of those claims being older than 125 days. This is about 20,000 more claims than VA had on hand at the start of the year, and the number of claims older than 125 days — VA's processing goal — climbed from about 560,000 at the start of the year to about 607,000 by year's end. While the pile of claims is growing, the VA statement expressed confidence that improvements were coming. "VA is aggressively building a strong foundation for a paperless, digital disability claims system — a lasting solution that will transform how we operate and eliminate the backlog. We are 100 percent confident that this plan will ensure we achieve the secretary's goal of eliminating the backlog by the end of 2015," the statement said. VA says the estimation that 60 percent of claim denials are in error appears to have come from a "flawed" 2009 study of the appeals process.

VA Enhances Blue Button

Week of February 04, 2013

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has released an enhanced VA Blue Button, adding several new categories of information from the VA Electronic Health Record. Blue Button is the personal health record inside the My HealtheVet self-service platform and through My HealtheVet, VA Blue Button enables Veterans to download an electronic file that contains their personal health information. Veterans can now also access VA OpenNotes, which 'opens' clinical notes, allowing Veterans to read their health care team's notes from appointments and hospital stays. These features are available to Veterans who have an upgraded or Premium My HealtheVet account, which is easily obtained at no cost through the My HealtheVet website at www.myhealth.va.gov.

For more updates on veterans benefits, visit the Military.com Benefits Center.

Benefits of a VA Loan in Today's Market

Contrary to what many Americans think, it's a very good time for servicemembers to refinance or purchase a home. With mortgage rates continuing to hover at all-time lows and many homes selling at significantly discounted prices, it's possible for those with good credit and income to purchase a great home.

One of the unique benefits afforded to military personnel is access to the Veterans Affairs Home Mortgage Loan program. This program offers tremendous mortgage benefits to active-duty servicemembers, veterans, and some surviving spouses. A VA home loan can be used for a number of purposes, including purchasing or building a new home, refinancing a current mortgage, repairing or improving your existing home, or installing home efficiency measures.

While a conventional loan might seem like a great bargain because of an advertised lower rate, keep in mind that you often need a high credit score of 720 or above to qualify for these best rates. VA home loans are backed by the government, meaning banks can assume less risk with the loan and possibly price it lower than a rate you would qualify for from a bank. But even without a lower rate, there are a number of other compelling benefits that make the VA home loan program a better overall alternative.

Program Benefits

The VA program won't deny a loan based solely on a low credit score, and most lenders don't tier interest rates for better scores. The VA program usually looks at only the previous 12 months of credit history, unless bankruptcy, a tax lien or a collections situation factors into your situation.

The VA home mortgage loan doesn't require a down payment. This can save consumers up to 20 percent of the loan value when compared to a conventional loan.

Borrowers can often refinance to a lower rate within the VA program without re-qualifying for the program through the VA Streamline Refinance Loan.

If the borrower has a service-related disability, they may qualify for the lender to waive the funding fee, further reducing closing costs.

Starting the Process

You can begin the application process at any lender that offers a VA home loan. At some point, you'll be required to obtain a Certificate of Eligibility. This document will verify that you're qualified for the program and outline your benefits level. Potential borrowers can go online to <https://vip.vba.va.gov> to apply for the program and obtain their COE.

Once you have determined your eligibility, you can move forward with the home buying process. This generally involves finding a VA-approved lender (if you haven't already), pre-qualifying for a loan, choosing a home, having it appraised, and then closing on the loan and property.

Mortgage Tips

Be sure to review your credit report before you begin the process to correct any errors. Your lender will use this to make a decision about your eligibility and interest rate, so be sure that you put your best foot forward. You can request a free copy at www.annualcreditreport.com. You should also check your credit score so you know what range you fall into before you speak with a lender.

With interest rates at all-time lows, it makes sense to consider all your options. Those servicemembers who will be in a home for a short period of time might want to consider an adjustable rate mortgage to keep payments as low as possible. For those who have extra disposable income, plan to stay in their home for a long time, and can afford a slightly higher monthly payment; it makes sense to look at a 15-year fixed term loan. This will help you pay off your loan faster and save money on total interest paid on the loan.

It also makes sense to get pre-approved on your loan amount so that you know what range of house you can afford. This will save an immeasurable amount of time and stress in your home search. It will also provide you with credibility when dealing with sellers who know you are pre-approved at that dollar amount.

For more information about using your VA Loan to buy a home, visit Military.com's VA loan section.



VVA National Convention

August 13-18, 2013

Hyatt Regency Jacksonville-Riverfront
225 E. Coastline Drive Jacksonville, FL 32202

Phone (904) 588-1234

Room Rate - \$79.00 + 1% City surcharge + 13% tax

Go to www.VVA.org

To download a registration form, click on Events
 And scroll down to VVA Convention, click on
 Registration folder.

The preponderance of the competent evidence of record demonstrates that there is a medical nexus between the service-connected diabetes and the current sleep apnea on the basis of aggravation

Study Demonstrates Clear Inverse Relationship Between OSA and Diabetes

A recent study conducted at the University of Chicago "demonstrates for the first time that there is a clear, graded, inverse relationship between OSA (obstructive sleep apnea) severity and glucose control in patients with type 2 diabetes," writes lead author, Renee S. Aronsohn, MD. The study also confirmed that undiagnosed OSA is common among patients with type 2 diabetes.

Aronsohn and colleagues recruited 60 patients with type 2 diabetes from outpatient clinics to participate in the study. The researchers found that 77% of participants had OSA, but only five had been previously evaluated for the disease, and none were undergoing treatment. Of the study sample, 38% were classified as having mild OSA, 25% had moderate OSA, and 13% had severe OSA.

More severe OSA was associated with poorer glucose control. Relative to patients without OSA, the presence of mild, moderate, or severe OSA significantly increased mean adjusted HbA1c values (the main clinical marker of glycemic control in diabetes) by 1.49%, 1.93%, and 3.69%, respectively. According to the study authors, these effect sizes are comparable to those of widely used hypoglycemic medications, meaning that having OSA may negate the beneficial effects of antidiabetic drugs.

"Our findings have important clinical implications as they support the hypothesis that reducing the severity of OSA may improve glycemic control," said Aronsohn. "Thus effective treatment of OSA may represent a novel and nonpharmacologic intervention in the management of type 2 diabetes."

The findings appear in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine.

TET '68 and siege at Khe Sanh
Two of the battalions at Khe Sanh
were 1st and 3rd Battalions 26th
Marine Regiment.

The scenes from the video clip are
from the siege, Hue City fighting
and fighting around the American
Embassy in Saigon.

A long, long time ago, in a place
far, far away!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-DkyMXTo5Q&feature=related>

There are also other Vietnam War videos at this
Site most with 60's music



Helping Veterans Cope with PTSD

By The Partnership for Public Service

When Matthew Friedman began his career working with veterans nearly 40 years ago, not a single person had been diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. In fact, the term had yet to be invented.

Today, as the executive director for the National Center for PTSD at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Friedman is widely known as a pioneer in the field of traumatic studies. His career has been devoted to identifying the causes of and treatments for PTSD and advocating for those whose psychological well-being has been harmed by stresses of war and other jarring experiences.

"He was there from the very beginning and the extent of his impact is great," said Dr. Robert J. Ursano, the chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Neuroscience at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences. "He is a leader in all capital letters."

After years of distinguished work in the field, Friedman was named as the first executive director of the National Center for PTSD in 1989, and carried out his vision of creating a consortium of seven centers located at VA medical centers connected with strong university programs devoted to research and education on the prevention, understanding and treatment of traumatic disorders.

In the process, Friedman overcame skeptics both inside and outside of the VA. He built partnerships, created a loyal following in the government, academia and Congress, and steadily established a premier institution that has produced authoritative medical standards and educational materials used for the diagnosis and treatment of PTSD.

"The national center is widely regarded not only in the U.S., but internationally, as the mother ship for research, training and clinical care on PTSD," said Dean Kilpatrick, professor of clinical psychology at the Medical University of South Carolina.

PTSD is a severe anxiety disorder that can occur after a traumatic event such as combat or military exposure, a terrorist attack, a sexual or physical assault, a serious accident or a natural disaster. Symptoms can include anger, fear, nightmares, hopelessness, shame and despair.

Approximately 6.8 percent of Americans will experience PTSD at some point in their lives, but it is more common in "at-risk" groups such as those serving in combat. About 30 percent of those who served in Vietnam experienced PTSD. Estimates for the Gulf War are as high as 10 percent, while between six to 11 percent of those who have served in Afghanistan and 12 to 20 percent who served in Iraq have been impacted by the disorder.

While PTSD is now recognized as a serious affliction, Friedman had to take on his share of doubters in the early days of his work. "He had to convince the world that veterans had this disorder, and even convince veterans it was okay to say they had this disorder," said Ursano.

Years before the national center was established, Friedman was among the first VA clinicians to recognize the depth of the traumatic stress faced by returning Vietnam veterans, and in 1973 set up one of the early groups specifically designed to provide the former soldiers with mental health assistance.

At the time, the symptoms that Friedman later helped identify as PTSD were lumped into one non-clinical term—Post-Vietnam Syndrome—and there was little understanding of what these veterans were actually experiencing, or why many of them turned to drinking and drug use, and were unable to hold jobs.

In 1979, Friedman helped found the nation's first community-based Vet Center in Vermont for Vietnam Veterans with readjustment problems, while also leading and encouraging new research to more fully understand traumatic stress disorders.

Five years later, Congress appointed Friedman to chair a special panel that conducted an unprecedented survey of 450,000 veterans' outpatient mental health visits. The study identified enormous differences in the way that hospitals treated veterans, and uncovered a bias against diagnosing and treating mental health disorders. His recommendations led to 172 hospitals implementing special clinical programs for PTSD.

After the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and Hurricane Katrina four years later, Friedman and others provided a "psychological first aid" manual to authorities so they could help the victims of these tragedies. He has worked with the Justice Department to help victims of violence; the Department of Transportation to assist families who have lost loved ones in plane crashes; the Pentagon to plan guidance for current service members; and provided assistance to counterparts around the world.

At age 71, Friedman shows no signs of slowing down. He still heads the national center where greater emphasis now is being placed on prevention of PTSD. He also serves as a professor at Dartmouth Medical School, treats patients, and frequently publishes articles and books.

"There is something so compelling and worthwhile and so important about trying to help people whose lives have been changed by their willingness to make a sacrifice," said Friedman of his primary work with veterans. "Some have suffered greatly because of this willingness and are no longer the same person that they were. I just wanted to help them pick up the pieces."

Vietnam War - Resource list

I am passing this along because it is probably the best search list ever compiled about the Vietnam War. As many of us were drafted or enlisted during the Vietnam War (1964-1975); we are still drawn back to that time period from time to time. Whether you were there or not here is a resource that provides you the broad based facts as well as the details. Additionally, it provides you information which regarding things you did not know. It is really detailed...not just one sided either for ground actions/operations - to air force operations; and naval operations. Then there are some others things which you might have heard of but could not get the information....

Below is a web site that provides a lot of information.

This simply has to be shared with anyone who ever served in Vietnam, in the armed forces during that era, or is simply interested in that War. It would easily take months (more like years) to look at everything this site offers:

<http://www.cc.gatech.edu/fac/Thomas.Pilsch/Vietnam.html>

VA Claims Backlog Update

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced 20 SEP that the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), which oversees the delivery of disability compensation and other benefits to the nation's Veterans, processed over one million disability claims during fiscal year 2012, marking the third year in row VBA claims processors have exceeded the one million mark. "We have made great strides, but we realize much work remains to be done to better serve Veterans," said Undersecretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey. "Too many Veterans still wait too long. That's unacceptable, and that is why VA has begun implementing a paperless, digital disability claims system- a lasting solution that will transform how we operate and eliminate the claims backlog." In August, VA had its most productive claims processing period in its history, completing a record 107,462 claims and surpassing the previous monthly record of 103,296 set in 2010. This high level of production is accompanied by an increase in the overall accuracy of rating decisions, which has risen from 83 to 86 percent since September 2011, as determined by VA's national quality assurance program.

The department is administering pensions for World War II veterans while handling new claims from Vietnam veterans struggling with the multiplying ailments of age. Indeed, nearly a third of all pending new claims are from Vietnam-era veterans, roughly equal to the number from Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans. Thanks to superior battlefield medicine and armor, those Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have survived combat at a higher rate. As they return home with more wounds, and perhaps more savvy, the ones who file for disability compensation are claiming on average nearly 10 disorders or injuries each, compared with 6 for Vietnam veterans and fewer than 4 for World War II veterans. Their complex claims are often more time-consuming to process, adding to the backlog. At the same time, a higher percentage - nearly half - of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are filing for disability compensation, partly because of the weak economy. That is double the rate for previous wars.

While claims production is at historic highs, incoming disability claims have increased nearly 50 percent since 2008, outpacing VA's current claims processing capacity. "Our employees are working very hard to sustain this level of production," said Hickey. "This is a testament to their dedication to meeting the increasing needs of our Veterans." VA's goal is to process all disability claims within 125 days, at a 98 percent accuracy level, and eliminate the claims backlog in 2015. On 17 SEP the department reported it had 895,248 compensation and pension entitlement claims pending, with 592,792, or 66 percent, pending for more than 125 days. This year, VBA is beginning a nationwide organizational transformation to increase its claims decision output by retooling procedures and deploying paperless data systems that will speed claims processing and improve quality. All 56 VBA regional offices will be operating under the new organizational model by the end of 2013. [Source: VA News Release]



VA Homeless Vets Update

The Department of Veterans Affairs announced 19 SEP it has approved \$28.4 million in grants to fund 38 projects in 25 states and the District of Columbia that will provide transitional housing to homeless veterans. Among these 38 projects, 31 will provide temporary housing to homeless veterans with the goal that they will retain the residence as their own. "As we drive toward our goal to end homelessness among veterans by 2015, VA continues to find innovative ways to permanently house veterans who were formerly homeless," said Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. "Under President [Barack] Obama's leadership, we have made incredible strides in creating programs to aid these brave men and women who have served our Nation so well." Thirty-one of the grants were awarded through VA's Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program's "Transition in Place" model. The program allows veterans the opportunity to take over payment of a lease instead of moving out after using VA services—substance use counseling, mental health services, job training and more. Other VA programs require veterans living in transitional housing to move out after 24 months.

On a single night in 2011, a national count of homeless veterans totaled 67,495, which is 12 percent lower than 76,000 in 2010. As part of the government's five-year plan to eliminate veteran homelessness by 2015, VA has committed almost \$1 billion to strengthen programs that prevent and treat the many issues that can lead to veteran homelessness. The award of grants follows closely with a notice VA published asking interested organizations to submit a nonbinding letter of intent to the Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program to apply for initial and renewal supportive services grants by Sept. 28, 2012. The SSVF Program in the first 10 months of operation has assisted more than 28,000 veterans and their families to prevent or rapidly end homelessness. [Source: VA Press Release]

