



TEXAS Vietnam Veterans NEWS



Volume 3 Issue 1

June/July/August 2013

TVC Continues To Help Alleviate the VA Backlog with Irving Event

The Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) hosted a “Beating the VA Backlog” event in Irving on July 13 in order to provide specific, one-on-one guidance to Texas Veterans, family members and survivors with pending disability claims from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This event took place at the Westin Dallas Ft. Worth Airport from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

TVC holds backlog events in order to serve Veterans through the State Strike Force Teams, which were created by Gov. Rick Perry, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, and House Speaker Joe Straus last summer to help reduce the backlog of disability claims in Texas where the two VA Regional Offices had the third and fourth highest numbers of pending claims in the country.

“Since the TVC State Strike Force Teams were authorized by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the House, we have already helped almost 19,000 Veterans with their backlogged claims, and provided over 5,000 cases to the VA for action,” said Thomas Palladino, TVC Executive Director. “This ‘Beating the VA Backlog’ event is one of several events that the TVC is holding around the state as we try to help Texas Veterans get the benefits they deserve.”

In addition to the work the Strike Force Team has been doing in the VA Regional Offices, the team and TVC claims counselors have also served over 1,760 Veterans at these events across the state, including Houston, Harlingen, El Paso, Arlington, Austin, Amarillo, Corpus Christi, and twice in San Antonio.

The success of the State Strike Force Team, as well as the Fully Developed Claims Team, and the continued need to serve Veterans, led the 83rd Legislature, through the leadership of Lt. Gov. Dewhurst, Speaker Straus, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Tommy Williams and House Appropriations Committee Chairman Jim Pitts, to continue funding through the 2014- 2015 biennium for these initiatives and also authorized additional funding to increase the number of counselors for these teams.

The “Beating the VA Backlog” events are open to all Veterans, their families and survivors, and all services are free of charge. Preregistering will give staff an opportunity to research your claim prior to the events and provide you with the ability to select an appointment time. Walk-ins are allowed on a first-come, first-served basis as time allows. For details regarding future events, contact information and registration, please visit: <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us/Beating-the-VA-Backlog.aspx>.



Thank You For Serving

The 83rd Texas Legislature Makes Unprecedented Investment in Texas Veterans

The Texas Veterans Commission acknowledges the Texas Legislature and Gov. Rick Perry for making significant and meaningful commitments to Texas Veterans, their families, and survivors during the 83rd Regular Legislative Session. Both the state budget and bills passed this session benefit programs and services that help Texas Veterans.

“The unprecedented investment in Veterans and their families shows that the State of Texas understands that the sacrifices our Veterans have made to serve do not go unnoticed,” said Thomas P. Palladino, Executive Director of the Texas Veterans Commission. “We thank our state legislators and Gov. Perry for improving the quality of life for those who served.”

Due to the leadership of the state’s principal budget writers, Sen. Tommy Williams, Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, and Rep. Jim Pitts, Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, the state’s new 2014-2015 budget increased funding to some specific programs providing services to Texas Veterans.

One of the programs began last summer at the Texas Veterans Commission, when Gov. Perry, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, and House Speaker Joe Straus committed over \$1.5 million to a one-year State Strike Force and Fully Developed Claims Teams initiative to help address the backlog of federal claims in Texas.

In January 2013, state leaders committed an additional \$500,000 to the effort. The 83rd Legislature continued these initiatives through the 2014-2015 biennium, appropriating an additional \$4 million over the next two years to help address the backlog and file fully developed claims.

The Legislature also continued its commitment to providing funding for non-profit and local government organizations that provide housing services for Veterans by allocating another \$3 million to the Housing4TexasHeroes grant program. Since the program’s inception, the Texas Veterans Commission has awarded ten Housing4TexasHeroes grants.

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Texas VV Newsletter – is the official publication of the VVA Texas State Council. All VVA members, Chapter and other interested parties are invited to submit articles, pictures and opinions for publication on subject matter that is relevant to veterans' affairs issues. The newsletter staff reserves the right to edit for length and grammar only, and reject any material that is libelous or obscene.

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www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml .

TEXAS VVA STATE COUNCIL CHAPTERS

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
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| VVA Chapter 292 Beaumont | VVA Chapter 297 Amarillo |
| VVA Chapter 343 Houston | VVA Chapter 348 Orange |
| VVA Chapter 366 San Antonio | VVA Chapter 379 Big Spring |
| VVA Chapter 404 Borger | VVA Chapter 457 San Angelo |
| VVA Chapter 574 El Paso | VVA Chapter 685 Galveston |
| VVA Chapter 734 Conroe | VVA Chapter 844 El Paso |
| VVA Chapter 854 Hallettsville | VVA Chapter 856 Harlingen |
| VVA Chapter 863 Kerrville | VVA Chapter 870 Schulenburg |
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| VVA Chapter 991 Palestine | VVA Chapter 1000 Killeen |
| VVA Chapter 1009 Corsicana | VVA Chapter 1010 Waco |
| VVA Chapter 1013 Grand Prairie | VVA Chapter 1029 Yorktown |
| | VVA Chapter 1069 El Campo |

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TSC President Report

Buster Newberry

My Brothers and Sisters, It is time to get ready to go to the National Convention in Jacksonville, Florida. We will be electing new National Officers and Board Members for the next two years. It looks like we will have about 40 delegates this year even though we are allowed to have over 80. Our Region 7 Director, Allen Manual, tells me that Region 7 is going to have a record number of Delegates.

If you have never been to a National Convention you don't know what you are missing. Vietnam Veterans from all over the United States come together for camaraderie and to conduct the business of the Corporation.

For Chapters who need financial assistance to send their Delegates, the State Council will fund half of your expenses.

It is also time to start planning for our October State Council Meeting in San Antonio. Some of our people have had trouble making reservations at the El Tropicano Riverwalk Hotel.

Hopefully their people at the registration desk will get their act together or I will sic Bruce on them. There is a mistake on the registration form where it states we will have an Awards Banquet. We will give out Awards in April at Kerrville.

If you need a registration form, please let me know. I am looking forward to the Meeting as Chapter 366 always hosts a good meeting. If there is a topic you wish to have on the agenda, please let me know before our Executive Board Meeting in Jacksonville.

Semper Fi
Buster Newberry

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, 2014

**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 '2014 Spring Meeting of the VVA Texas State Council.

AVVA State President Report

The VVA National Convention in Jacksonville, Florida is coming up pretty soon, August 13-18, 2013. AVVA National is having their election in conjunction with VVA. This is a FIRST for AVVA Chapter Rep/Alternate Rep will be able to VOTE in the National Election for the National Officers. We, the AVVA members have fought this for years and it is finally coming about. I am really excited about this Convention. This is why I have pushed and pushed for all AVVA members in Texas affiliated with a VVA Chapter in Texas to elect a chapter rep. Texas has 37 VVA Chapters and out of that AVVA has 22 Chapter Reps and has 10 Alternate Reps. The Chapter Reps going to National is 5 Chapter Reps and 4 Alternate Reps and me voting for the State which is a total of 10 Voting people for Texas. SAD!!!! 10 PEOPLE OUT OF 37 CHAPTERS.

The next Texas State Council meeting is being held in San Antonio. The date is October 4-6, 2013. I look forward to seeing everyone there. Our AVVA meeting will be held on Friday night at 7 PM. I will be sending out email to all members, that I have email addresses for, on the upcoming State Council Meeting.

Marilyn Rose

AVVA Texas State President

TVC Continued from page 1

The Veteran Entrepreneur Program at the Texas Veterans Commission, a new program to foster and promote Veteran entrepreneurship and business ownership throughout the state, was formally created by the passage of Senate Bill 1476, authored by Sen. Royce West. The legislation was sponsored by Rep. Ralph Sheffield, who successfully secured funding in the state budget for this new program. The program is based upon a highly successful pilot project launched in April 2012. With a single dedicated staff member, the project provided assistance to over 1,000 veterans through a statewide seminar series, moving those Veterans closer toward entrepreneurship.

In the waning hours of the regular session, state leaders passed Senate Bill 1158 and Senate Bill 1159, both authored by Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, Chair of the Senate's Veterans Affairs and Military Installations Committee. Both bills focus on sustaining Texas' commitment to Veterans education by:

- Creating a Permanent Fund to defray the cost of the Hazlewood exemption to institutions of higher education across the state;
- Moving administration of the Hazlewood Exemption program to Texas Veterans Commission;
- Establishing a network of Veteran Education Counselors to assist Texas Veterans in maximizing their educational benefits and to assist institutions of higher education in expanding services offered to Veterans and their families;
- Establishing the Veteran Education Excellence Recognition Award to recognize institutions of higher education that meet or exceed standards for providing specific services to Veterans; and
- Directing a study of the sustainability of federal and state Veteran education benefits in Texas.

The Legislature also passed House Bill 633, spearheaded by Rep. Joe Farias and Sen. Wendy Davis, which allows Texans to make donations to the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance (FVA) when applying for or renewing a drivers' license. Sen. Davis authored similar legislation during the 82nd Legislature which created an option for Texans to donate to the FVA when registering their vehicle with the Department of Motor Vehicles. Since the passage of that legislation, that revenue source has generated over \$600,000 in donations to the FVA. It is anticipated that the new revenue source created by House Bill 633 will yield similar results.

The Legislature also recognized the need to expand and enhance mental health services available to Texas Veterans. The passage of House Bill 2392, led Rep. Jose Menendez, Chair of the House Defense and Veterans Affairs Committee, and Sen. Van de Putte, formalizes and strengthens the state's Veteran Mental Health Program within the Department of State Health Services. State budget writers allocated an additional \$4 million to the program, in effect doubling its size and capacity throughout the state. Sen. Van de Putte was also able to secure, through emergency appropriation, additional mental health resources for the Texas National Guard.

The Legislature also passed significant legislation affecting a number of critical issues and services for Veterans including mental health services, professional and occupational licenses and certifications, state contracting preferences for service-disabled business owners, discounts on utility bills for certain disabled veterans and property tax exemptions for surviving spouses of service members killed in action.

For a more complete list of Veteran-related bills passed during the 83rd Legislature, please visit <http://www.tvc.texas.gov/Legislative-Update.aspx>.

Decorated, wounded Marine treated 'shamefully' by security screeners

By Patricia Kime Staff writer / Jul. 5, 2013



Retired Marine Cpl. Nathan Kemnitz was subject to extra TSA screening because he was wearing 'too much metal.'

Wearing the uniform of the Few and Proud doesn't rate preferential treatment from the Transportation Security Administration or California capitol security officers, retired Marine Cpl. Nathan Kemnitz recently found.

Kemnitz, severely injured in 2004 in a roadside bomb attack in Fallujah, has limited use of his right arm and cannot lift it above his head. So when security guards at the state capitol building in Sacramento, Calif., asked him to remove his dress blue blouse "because he was wearing too much metal," and TSA asked him to raise his arms above his head for the full-body scanner at Sacramento International Airport, he could not comply.

"My right arm doesn't work. It's a lot of hassle for me to do that," Kemnitz said.

At the state capitol, the Marine's refusal to remove his uniform top grew into a heated exchange between Kemnitz, a friend who was accompanying him and security officers.

At the airport, bystanders stared as the TSA security screener looked under Kemnitz's medals, ran his hands under the Marine's waistband and swabbed his shoes for explosives.

"What does a uniform and heroism represent if our own citizens — in this case employees of the TSA and security personnel — have no regard for them?" wrote Kemnitz's escort, Patricia Martin, to Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki following the incidents.

Martin took photos and disseminated them to family, friends and members of the media.

"I feel so strongly that you need to know just how shamefully even a Purple Heart recipient/disabled veteran can be treated by some TSA and security employees," she said.

Kemnitz said after the incidents that he was not as annoyed with TSA officers as he was with a security screener at the California state capitol, whom he described as rude and unapologetic.

Kemnitz was visiting the building to be honored as his legislative district's veteran of the year.

"At some places I'm treated like royalty and at some like a terrorist. There's got to be something in the middle," he said.

The incident was not the first to spark similar outrage. In January, NBC journalist Luke Russert tweeted his irritation at an enhanced security screening at Reagan National Airport of a troop wearing a prosthetic.

"Making Wounded Warriors with prosthetic legs go through extra explosives screening. #fail," Russert wrote.

In March, bystanders notified Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif., about what they perceived to be maltreatment of a double amputee by TSA screeners at Phoenix's Sky Harbor Airport.

VA Processes Nearly All Disability Claims Pending Over 2 Years Moves to Complete Those Older Than 1 Year

by Donnie La Curan / Veteran News / June 20, 2013

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that as a result of the initiative launched in April to expedite disability compensation claims decisions for Veterans who have waited a year or longer, more than 65,000-claims – or 97 percent of all claims over two years old in the inventory – have been eliminated from the backlog.

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) staff will now focus their efforts on completing the disability claims of Veterans who have been waiting over one year for a decision, while completing the final batch of oldest claims in progress.

"Over the past two months, VA has been dedicated to providing earned benefits to the Veterans who have waited the longest," said VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. "Thanks to our hard-working VBA employees, we have completed nearly all claims that have been pending two years or longer. We've made great progress, but know much work remains to be done to eliminate the backlog in 2015."

"The success of this phase of the effort was due in part to the implementation of mandatory overtime for the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) claims processing staff, as well as the dedicated support of physicians from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), who expedited exams to provide medical evidence needed to rate these pending claims," said Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey. [Cont page 6](#)

VA Claims Continued from page 5

The remaining two-year-old claims will be finalized in the coming days except for those that are outstanding due to unique circumstances, such as the unavailability of a claimant for a needed medical exam, military service, vacation, or travel overseas.

In May, VA announced that it was mandating overtime for claims processors in its 56 regional benefits offices to increase production of compensations claims decisions, which will continue through the end of FY 2013. Today, VA has the lowest number of claims in its inventory since August 2011 and has reduced the number of claims in the VA backlog – claims pending over 125 days – by 10 percent since the initiative began.

Under this initiative, VA claims raters may make final or provisional decisions on the oldest claims in the inventory, which will allow Veterans to begin collecting compensation benefits more quickly, if eligible. Veterans are able to submit additional evidence for consideration a full year after the provisional rating before VA issues a final decision. If no further evidence is received within that year, VBA will inform Veterans that their ratings are final and provide information on the standard appeals process, which can be found at www.bva.va.gov/. If a Veteran disagrees with a final decision and chooses to appeal, the appeal is entered into the appellate processing system, and is not reflected in the claims inventory.

VA continues to prioritize disability claims for homeless Veterans, those experiencing extreme financial hardship, the terminally ill, former Prisoners of War, Medal of Honor recipients, and Veterans filing Fully Developed Claims, which is the quickest way for Veterans to receive a decision on their compensation claim (www.benefits.va.gov/fdc/). Claims for Wounded Warriors separating from the military for medical reasons will continue to be handled separately and on a priority basis with the Department of Defense through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES). Wounded Warriors separating through IDES currently receive VA compensation benefits in an average of 61 days following their separation from service.

VA's inventory is comprised mostly of supplemental claims from Veterans already receiving disability compensation who are seeking to address worsening conditions or claim additional disabilities. Regardless of the status of compensation claims, Veterans who have served in combat since Nov. 11, 1998, are eligible for five years of free medical care for most conditions from VA. This eligibility was enacted through the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008.

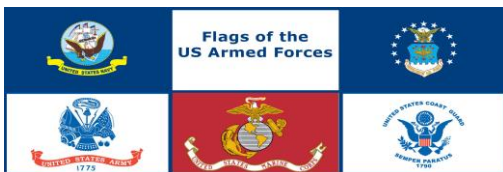
Veterans can learn more about disability benefits on the joint Department of Defense/VA web portal eBenefits at www.ebenefits.va.gov.

VA Mileage Reimbursement

A U.S. Treasury mandate that federal agencies stop handing out cash and paper checks is hitting some veterans hard. Patients who go to Veterans Affairs doctor appointments or classes have always been able to collect their travel reimbursement in cash on the spot at the V.A. hospital or clinics. For many low-income vets, the cash meant gas for the tank — or bus fare home. But no more since 1 MAR, Veterans Affairs Medical Centers and its clinics have been complying with the Treasury mandate. That means requiring V.A. patients to accept direct deposit into their checking accounts or, if they have Direct Express Debit MasterCard, that receive disability payments, into those accounts. The problem said a Vietnam era-veteran, is the money is not landing in the bank or on the debit cards fast enough. A spokeswoman for the VA medical centers, acknowledged there have been delays in the early weeks of the change. "Going from paper to an electronic system is a process, and with any change there is a transition period," she said. "We are working hard to streamline that process and get veterans paid as quickly as possible.

VA SITREP: As we approached the tenth anniversary of the start of the Iraq War, some were asking how the Department of Veterans Affairs is caring for today's Veterans. Contrary to recent press reports, the reality is:

- Veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are accessing VA services at an unprecedented rate. Accessing health care has never been simpler. Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans have the option of walking into one of 1,700 VA sites of care across the country, VA medical centers, community outpatient clinics or Vet Centers and signing up for five years of free health care. Not only can they do this, they have. With over 55% of returning Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans utilizing VA health care, it's a rate of utilization greater than any other generation of Veterans.
- Education benefits have never been greater. The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides for enlisted, officers and some family members up to 36 months of benefits, an allowance for books, and a monthly housing stipend. The Post-9/11 GI Bill has helped over 900,000 Veterans and their families —more people than currently serve in the active U.S. Army and Navy — pursue undergraduate, graduate and technical degrees.
- And for those Veterans in crisis, the responders at the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 Press 1, chat online or send a text message to 838255) are there to help 24/7. Every day in fiscal year 2012, responders answered approximately 530 calls and rescued nearly 18 Veterans and family members in crisis. Or if a Veteran wants to speak with a fellow Veteran, they can call the Combat Call Center at 1-877-WAR-VETS.



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 or mailed to a chapter without an email address in January, 2014.

The completed application must be postmarked no later than **March 31, 2014**. 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 – To be announced in January
- 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 or Percilla Newberry and request a copy by email:

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

PTSD Update

Operation Feeks' Fires is a Connected Warrior Foundation program that was established in honor of Navy SEAL Special Warfare Operator Petty Officer 1st Class Patrick Feeks. Edgewater, Maryland native Feeks was tragically lost in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan in August 2012. The Operation Feeks' Fires program provides Kindle Fires and Nexus tablet devices to combat veterans with PTSD—located in military hospitals and elsewhere. Eligibility extends to honorably discharged combat veterans who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan wounded emotionally and suffering from PTSD. Provision of DD Form 214 (Report of Separation) or Military Campaign medal is required. To apply complete the online form at http://connectedwarrior.org/feeks_application.pdf and email it along with a copy of your DD Form 214 or your Military Campaign medal to kbradley@connectedwarrior.org. For information on the Connected Warrior Foundation refer to <http://connectedwarrior.org>.

VA Secretary Update

The national commander of the nation's largest war veterans organization is outraged that a TIME magazine columnist has called for the resignation of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki. "Freedom of the press isn't a license for Joe Klein to twist reality about someone who has volunteered virtually his entire life to serve his country," said John E. Hamilton, who leads the 2 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries. Klein's column, entitled "Ten Years After: A National Disgrace," is posted on the magazine's website and is being published in its March 25 edition. "Secretary Shinseki has one of the toughest jobs in America," said Hamilton, a combat wounded Marine Corps rifleman in Vietnam. "It is his responsibility to heal, help and care for our wounded, ill and injured veterans from all generations. What he doesn't need is criticism from those who have little or no understanding of the real issues or challenges facing his department."

In his column, Klein criticizes Shinseki for being quiet and reserved, as if the secretary of the nation's largest integrated healthcare network and second largest federal department has time for a publicized social life. Klein hides behind a so-called "legion" of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who say the secretary lacks the creativity and leadership skills to run the VA, plus sympathizes with their complaint of not being moved to the front of the line ahead of other — but older — disabled veterans. Still worse, Klein accuses Shinseki of not capitalizing on the mass murder allegedly committed by an Army staff sergeant in Afghanistan. "The Department of Defense and the VA expend an enormous amount of resources on programs and outreach to provide mental health counseling to those in need, but you can't mandate any program that first requires someone to voluntarily step forward and ask for help. **Continued page 9**

VA Appeals Update

A federal judge lashed the Department of Veterans Affairs last week for denying veterans certain due-process rights while seeking benefits. He also threatened penalties against the embattled federal agency, saying "it seems that sanctions may be needed to motivate VA in the future. The unwarranted denial of benefits means real-world consequences to veterans," wrote S. Jay Plager, a U.S. circuit judge and veteran of the Navy. "Promises of hypothetical relief do not pay for food or provide needed medical care." By design, the VA is supposed to be veteran-friendly. Officers considering veterans' claims are expected to point out documents they might be missing and help them receive any money they are entitled to, including disability payments and pensions.

But in 2011, the agency instituted a new rule: Stop giving veterans a hand through the bureaucracy if their appeals are not in the region where they originally filed the claim. In other words, a veteran from New Jersey who appeals a denial in St. Petersburg may not get help from an agency appeals judge.

When veterans advocates challenged the rule, the VA promised the federal court it would stop enforcing it immediately. But it did not. In 2012, a whistle-blower inside the agency tipped off attorneys for the veterans advocates that the VA was still using the rule, which led to Plager's order. "That's a pretty big deal for the court to come in and sanction a government agency," said Matthew Hill, an Orlando attorney on the board of the National Organization for Veterans' Advocates, or NOVA, which challenged the VA. Sanctions are not guaranteed. Plager ordered the VA to make its case. The VA did not respond to an interview request, but issued a statement. "The Department of Justice represents VA in this matter, and our counsel's office is working with them to ensure an appropriate response to the court's order," a spokesman said.

It is unclear exactly how many veterans were affected by the rule, where they appealed their claims and whether they lost their benefits because they were denied due process. The VA keeps all of that information. But a Washington, D.C.-based attorney representing NOVA compiled a list of 60 cases just from March 2012 in which VA appeals judges cited the rule.

The judges, he said, appeared not to realize the rule had been nixed. The harsh lecture from Plager was modest vindication for critics of the troubled agency. A steep backlog of claims has drawn greater attention in recent months, as veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan and find themselves at the back of a long line of World War II veterans, Korean War veterans and others. More than 1 million veterans are waiting for decisions on their claims or appeals nationally, the VA reports. More veterans are waiting on the St. Petersburg office, which handles Florida claims, than any other in the country.

VA Secretary Update continued from page 8

That same limitation also confronts all of us who are in this battle to end military and veteran suicides. "And regarding the columnist's personal attack, just because the secretary prefers a lower profile to someone who might 'Tweet' their every movement doesn't mean he doesn't care. It just means he's too busy doing his job, and that's to fulfill our nation's promise to her veterans."

For years the VFW has testified before Congress about the lack of funding for the VA's Veterans Benefits Administration, especially in the areas of automation and proper staffing. Hamilton said the secretary did the absolute right thing to grant additional presumptive service connections for Vietnam and first Gulf War veterans, but he acknowledged that organizations like the VFW and others who employ service officers to help veterans file their claims knew that the increased workload would overwhelm the existing system. Thanks to the president and Congress, the VA now has the necessary resources to automate the claims processing system. This means the VA is moving in the right direction, said the VFW national commander, but after years of neglect, the fix will not come overnight. "We want the VA to succeed, and that's why we work closely with Secretary Shinseki and his staff to help identify and correct problems in a professional manner from within, not by enlisting the media to sensationalize issues the great majority of Americans and, quite frankly, many veterans don't understand," said Hamilton. "The VFW helped to create the VA in 1930. We will not let it fail. We will also continue to take strong issue with people who blindly criticize the organization or its secretary, who is a combat wounded veteran who understands what it means to serve and sacrifice. Secretary Shinseki gets it, and America should be very appreciative that he volunteered to stay for another tour — the VFW is." [Source: VFW News]



VA Secretary - "No veteran should have to wait for claims," Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki says, taking head-on the criticism about the growing backlog of claims for disability, pension and educational benefits that have overwhelmed his department. "If there's anybody impatient here, I am that individual," Shinseki told CNN's Candy Crowley in an interviewed aired Sunday on "State of the Union." "We're pushing hard." Part of the problem with the crushing inventory of claims, Shinseki said, is the fact that the Veterans Affairs Department lacks a digitized records system and instead has relied on paper files – sometimes filled with thousands of pages. "We're a paper process, have been for decades," he said. "This has been decades building and we need to go digital, and we're in the process of doing that." The backlog issue has become a point of embarrassment for the department, and bitterly frustrated veterans groups have taken to Capitol Hill to complain of the delays, some even suggesting that Shinseki himself should resign. Asked whether believed he'd lived up to the promises he made when taking the VA helm, Shinseki said his commitment hasn't changed. "I took this job to make things better for veterans. I don't know them individually. I know them as a group. I've served with many of them," the retired Army general said. "The commitment hasn't changed, and we're going to fix this." "No veteran should have to wait for claims as they are today. We have a fix for this. We're open for business and we will end the backlog in 2015," he added.

Vet Gun Control Update

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs said it will not comply with the provision of New York's new gun control law requiring mental health providers to report potentially dangerous individuals to state authorities. The Secure Ammunition and Firearms Enforcement Act calls on doctors and therapists to alert county health officials to patients they deem "likely" to engage in conduct that will result in serious self-injury or harm to others. Once notified of potentially harmful individuals, the state will check their names against a new state database of licensed gun owners. If there's a match, local law enforcement will be authorized to remove weapons if their owner does not voluntarily surrender them. Mark Ballesteros, spokesperson for the Department of Veterans Affairs, said in an email statement that "federal laws safeguarding the confidentiality of veterans' treatment records do not authorize VA mental health professionals to comply with this NY State law." Veterans determined mentally incompetent to handle their own affairs by the VA are reported to the federal National Instant Criminal Background Check database. While the background-check database will be used under the New York law to screen firearms sales, the information on veterans' mental health is not included in the data viewable by states, according to the VA.

VA Fraud Waste & Abuse Update

Thousands of veterans are waiting for government help ranging from benefits approvals to education and job training, and the VA's inability to stop \$2.2 billion in errant payments in 2012 only short changes those vets still waiting in line. Already saddled with long waits and a massive backlog of beneficiary claims, the Department of Veterans Affairs is also struggling to manage its money properly, handing out an astounding \$2.2 billion in mistaken payments last year. And despite increased attention from the agency's internal watchdog and its fiscal managers, the VA's percentage of errant payments actually jumped substantially from 2.65 percent in 2011 to 3.4 percent in 2012, according to the department's own fiscal records. To put the figure into perspective, the VA's improper payments amount to more than half the money the Navy was asked to cut from its budget as part of the sequester. The improper payments mean less money was available for deserving veterans, many who remain languishing in the system awaiting help on everything from medical care to education and job training.

The VA, the second largest federal agency, insists it is making progress, noting the costs of the erroneous payments dropped in 2012 by \$200 million even as the percentage of mistakes rose. But it also acknowledges the department remains years away from getting a handle on the core problems that have plagued its payment systems. "Although much has been accomplished at VA to control improper payments, much more remains to be done," the department says in its most recent fiscal statement to Congress. A report released 15 MAR by the VA's internal watchdog, the inspector general, paints a portrait of an agency still struggling to create systems that will catch erroneous payments before they are sent and to comply with a federal law known as the Improper Payments Elimination and Recovery Act (IPERA). "VA did not comply with four of seven IPERA requirements in FY 2012," the inspector general noted. In fact, one major office in the VA, the Non-VA Care Fee program that covers veterans' medical expenses outside the VA system, had an erroneous payment rate of about 12 percent last year, well above the 10 percent limit set by the IPERA law. VA official blamed the high-rate of mistakes on an antiquated payment system that is "manual nature" and significantly "decentralized."

One silver lining was that three other programs that had been above the red-flag 10 percent level for mistaken payments in 2011 fell below that level in 2012, though only slightly. Still, the inspector general report found widespread concerns for worry, including whether the numbers the VA is currently reporting are even accurate. For instance, the watchdog said:

- The Veterans Benefit Administration, a large office inside the VA responsible for determining payments for medical, death and retirement benefits, "used methodologies that were not statistically valid to estimate improper payments for two of its three reported programs."

- Auditors were unable to determine the error rate for the VA's pension program because "because VBA combined the Compensation and Pension programs in reporting on improper payment rates
- The VBA did not properly account for some of the monies it tried to recover from improper payments.
- The VA was late in filing two required IPERA-related reports to Congress and had to correct a third report because of errors.

The inspector general has spent significant time pressing the VA to improve its financial management, especially on the issue of erroneous payment. One reason is that once a mistaken payment is made, the VA's ability to recover the money is substantially constrained, both by law and capability. Of the \$2.2 billion in improper payments in 2012, VA was only able to recover less than one percent, or \$18.6 million, after the fact and it stopped just \$11.1 million in improper payments before they were sent. The erroneous problems are the latest problem to hamper the much-maligned and overburdened VA. Over the last six months, the Washington Guardian has highlighted numerous other problems.

President Obama has failed to make good on his promise to eliminate a backlog of benefits claims at the VA. As of Nov. 5, the day before Obama won reelection, 558,230 of the 820,106 veterans seeking disability coverage had their claims pending for more than the 125-day target. That's a whopping 68.1 percent, or nearly double the 36 percent backlog rate in the summer of 2010.

VA officials took trips to conferences in the vacation Mecca of Orlando, Fla., that cost taxpayers more than \$6 million.

The VA wasted more than \$5 million buying encryption software it never used.

An audit found veterans at the VA's Memphis hospital had been left waiting an average of 10 hours for emergency room admission, with little done by management to improve the situation

The VA says it is taking the erroneous payment problem seriously, forming a task force governed by its Chief Financial Officer last year that has already held several summits "to increase our knowledge of improper payments – types of improper payments, what types are avoidable, what types aren't, and root causes." "These actions will set the stage for our work in the coming years," it added. [Source: Washington Guardian | John Solomon]



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 – None / World War II - The DPMO announced 28 MAR that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing in action from the Korean War, were recently identified and are being returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army 1st Lt. John E. Terpnig, of Mount Prospect, Ill., will be buried on April 3, in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington D.C. On May 7, 1944, Terpnig was a pilot of a B-24D Liberator that departed Nadzab, New Guinea on a bombing mission. Due to mechanical troubles, the B-24D was delayed in departing the airbase and was unable to join the formation after takeoff. Neither the aircraft, Terpnig, nor the nine other crewmen aboard the plane were seen. In 1946, the War Department declared all ten men to be presumed dead. In 1973, a Papua New Guinea Forest Department official reported a wartime aircraft in the mountains northeast of the city of Lae. In October 1973, a team of Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) responded to the report and visited the site, where they found aircraft wreckage that corresponded to that of a B-24D. At that time the RAAF recovered possible human remains, which were transferred to the U.S. Army Mortuary in Tachikawa, Japan; however, given the limited technology at the time, no human remains were individually identified. In 1974, the remains were buried as a group at Arlington National Cemetery. In April 2008, a Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) team was sent to investigate and survey the crash site. The team recovered aircraft wreckage, including a radio call sign data plate that matched the aircraft, from a B-24D and additional remains. To identify the remains, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools such as dental comparisons and mitochondrial DNA, which matched Terpnig's brother.

[Source: http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/news/news_releases

Stolen Valor Update 85:

On 14 MAR, Jeffrey Scott Kepler, age 53, of Altoona, Iowa, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge John A. Jarvey to one year and one day in federal prison, to be followed by three years of supervised release. Kepler pleaded guilty on 7 SEP 2012, to federal charges of health care fraud. As part of his plea agreement, Kepler admitted to submitting a false United States Department of Defense form, known as a "DD Form 214, Certificate of Release And Discharge From Active Duty," to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical center in Des Moines in AUG 2007, in which he falsely represented his military service in an effort to fraudulently obtain VA medical benefits to which he was not entitled. Between 2007 and 2010, Kepler received over \$100,000 in VA health care benefits for which he was not eligible. He also attempted to obtain VA disability benefits to which he was not entitled, but was caught.

Notes of Interest:

- COLA. Inflation rose for the second straight month in FEB, and the Consumer Price Index is back above zero for the fiscal year. The February CPI of 228.677 is 0.8% above the FY2013 COLA baseline of 226.936.
- DeCA. Defense Commissary Agency announced that commissaries will close on Mondays instead of Wednesdays as a means to save money due to sequestration. Many commissaries around the world already close on Mondays. If so, they will close the additional day on Tuesdays. Closures are scheduled to begin in mid-April.
- COLA. the Senate passed an amendment as part of their budget resolution (S.Con.Res.8) for fiscal year 2014 prior to formally adjourning back to their home state offices. The amendment ensured that cost-of- living adjustments, or COLA, for disabled veterans and Social Security beneficiaries would still be calculated equitably in the future.

Military Trivia 71: B-52's Over Vietnam

1. How many crew members were on a typical bombing flight during missions over Vietnam? 4|6|8| various
2. How many engines are on a B-52-B? 4|6|8|10
3. How many bombs could a fully loaded B-52-D carry? 32|58|108|112
4. From how many bases did B-52 aircraft fly to drop bombs over Vietnam? 1|2|3|4
5. What B-52 model was the most heavily used during bombing missions over Vietnam?
B-52-A | B-52-D | B-52-F | B-52-G
6. What was a typical bombing altitude during Linebacker II over Hanoi?
1500 feet | 10,000 feet | 20,000 feet | 30,000 feet |
7. How many B-52 aircraft were lost to enemy action during the 'Christmas Bombing' campaign? 0|6|15|27
8. At which U.S. Air Force base were all B-52 crew members trained during the 1960's and 1970's?
Plattsburg AFB New York | Barksdale AFB Louisiana | Castle AFB California | March AFB California
9. In which seat position did the Electronic Warfare Officer sit on a B-52? - Lower deck, left side | Upper deck, left rear | Upper deck, right front | Lower deck, right side
10. What magnetic compass system was the PRIMARY magnetic compass system for the B-52?
J-4 Compass | NAV 12 Compass system | ANG 1 - Astrotracker | N-1 Compass
11. In 1963, just prior to the Vietnam War buildup, the U.S. Air Force had the largest number of B-52 aircraft in its fleet. How many B-52's did the U.S.A.F. possess at that time? 456 | 650 | 725 | 1091
12. The B-52 was produced at two different sites in the U.S. One was at Wichita, Kansas. Where was the other? Atlanta | Los Angeles | Seattle | Long Island
13. What was the function of the ANALE24 system as it was used on the B-52? Radio Telecommunications | Bombsite mechanism | Chaff dispenser | Radar navigation set
14. During an actual bomb run, which crew member (other than the pilot) sometimes handled steering of the aircraft? Co-Pilot | Electronic Warfare Officer | Radar navigator | Navigator
15. During the Christmas bombing effort (1972) how many B-52 aircraft were lost to MIG Jet fighters? 0 | 2 | 5 | 7

Answers

- 1) 6
- 2) 8
- 3) 108. The load for 500 lb. bombs could be 24 on external wing mounts (12 per side) and 84 in the bomb bay. This was not a common configuration during most bombing missions.

- 4) 3 These were Okinawa, U-Tapao, Thailand and Guam. Okinawa was only used for a short time.
- 5) B-52-D. The D model was an older model but was very effective in electronic counter-measures (it used an electro-mechanical ECM system) and was better than the F model. The G model carried fewer bombs than the D model.
- 6) 30,000 feet
- 7) 15
- 8) Castle AFB California
- 9) Upper deck, left rear. In the B-52-D the EWO was the only occupant of the upper deck, rear (the front had the co-pilot and the pilot) but in the G model, the tail gunner sat at the upper deck, right side.
- 10) N-1 Compass. The flux valve for this compass was located on the end of the left wing. The J-4 was a backup system on some B-52 models.
- 11) 650
- 12) Seattle
- 13) Chaff dispenser. The B-52 carried 8 of these for a total of 1135 chaff bundles. They were used to confuse enemy radar.
- 14) Radar navigator. He steered the aircraft via the autopilot using bomb mode.
- 15) No aircraft were lost to MIG fighters. All 15 downed B-52's were lost to SAM (surface to air) missiles.
[Source: <http://www.funtrivia.com/playquiz/>]

Scam ~ FBI Logo: A new virus called the "FBI Green Dot Moneypack Virus" is surfacing on the internet. According to Wcop.com, this new type of online extortion, referred to as "ransomware," is known to lock up PC computer screens with the FBI logo. The falsified FBI alert will claim an illegal website has been visited via your computer, and as a result, the computer will remain locked until a fine of \$200 is paid. Jennifer Werner, a victim of this scam, rightly became suspicious when the alert instructed the fine be sent by a reloadable debit card from a drugstore. If this happens to you, be sure not to immediately believe it. Do some research on another computer or phone to find a fix, or call a tech company. A step-by-step removal procedure is available at http://www.pcmri.com/virus_page_cleaner.php?virus_name=FBI%20virus&utm_campaign=FBI%20Virus&utm_term=Fbi%20moneypak%20scam&source=Google&gclid=CK-QrMCb_7UCFYk7MgodIDUAhw. Wcop.com urges you to "assume any email or online notice from the government is a scam, especially if it doesn't include your name specifically in the notice." [Source: BBB Alert]

Scam ~ Army CID: If you get an email that appears to come from "US-Army-Criminal- Investigation-Command@usa.com," it's a phishing scam. The real Army Criminal Investigation Command, also known as CID, is warning the public that criminals are posing as Army law enforcement officials in an email that is making the rounds. to report receiving it. CID is asking that recipients of emails claiming to be from "Office of the Division of Criminal Investigation" take the following steps:

- Do not respond to the email.
- If you have responded to the email, stop all contact.
- Report the email to Army CID via usarmy.belvoir.usacidc.mail.crime-tips@mail.mil

"By reporting this crime one can assist CID and other law enforcement officials across the United States in their investigations and help bring those responsible to justice," said Christopher Grey, CID's chief of public affairs.

The email purports to be from the Office of the Division of Criminal Investigation, but no such organization exists within Army CID, according to Grey. The email is signed with the fake-sounding name "Michael Opium" and is rife with grammatical errors and misspellings, telltale signs of a phishing scam. In the email, the phony agent asks for the recipient to provide financial and personal information under the ruse that the recipient — ironically — has been the victim of a fraudulent company. "Our job is to recover all the money paid to these fraudsters and charge them to court thereafter in order to decrease crime rate all over the world," the email says. Grey said the email was first reported by someone not affiliated with the military who was trying to determine if it was real. "At this point, we do not know how widespread this particular email scam is, but we felt it prudent to notify the public right away to help protect them from becoming a victim," he said.

More generally, phishing is when cyber-criminals create phony email messages that mimic bank, credit companies or other official entities in order to solicit money, financial information or personally identifiable information. The messages can include a link inside the email that takes the recipient to a realistic-looking website, where the person is asked to provide passwords, account numbers, user IDs or access codes. The links can also lead to a malicious program being downloaded onto the recipient's computer. Phishing scam attempts are often unsolicited, contain misspelled words, punctuation and grammatical errors, and tend to ask for money, financial information or personally

Scam ~ FTC Consumer Complaint:

A new phishing scam is making the rounds disguised as a consumer complaint notification from the FTC. You get an email that appears to be from the FTC with the subject line: "Notification of a Consumer Complaint." The email states that a complaint has been filed against your business and a formal investigation has been initiated. As a result you need to review and respond to the allegations. If you don't and are ultimately prosecuted and found guilty you can be fined up to \$50,000 and receive up to two years imprisonment . The email provides a link for you to supposedly click through to the FTC website and download a PDF of the complaint details. The link really goes to a third party website, and the file you download is actually malware that scans your computer for personal and banking information. If you receive it, just hit "delete." [Source: BBB Alert]

NPRC continued

"It's like a MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] unit," Marta O'Neill, who heads the National Personnel Records Center's Preservation Lab, said during a telephone interview. "There may be 15 different routes that a record could take so we can still preserve the information and get the benefits to the veteran."

The July 12, 1973, fire destroyed up to 80 percent of the 22 million records of veterans of the Army, Army Air Force and Air Force who served between 1912 and 1963, reported William Seibert, senior archivist and chief of archival operations at the National Archives in St. Louis. About 85 percent of the records of soldiers discharged between 1912 and 1959, including veterans of World War II and the Korean War, went up in smoke. In addition, about 75 percent of the records of airman with last names beginning with "H" through "Z" who left service between 1947 and 1963 were lost. The true extent of the loss remains a mystery, because the center had no central registry of its holdings at the time, explained Seibert. Even if it was physically possible to reconstruct every single missing document, nobody knows for sure which ones they are, he said. Records are being tracked down and, when necessary, restored, by request. And four decades after the fire, requests for documents from the burned holdings or "B-Files" continue to roll in at the rate of 200 to 300 every day, O'Neill said. Some come from veterans needing a record of their service to receive federal health-care, home loans or other veterans' benefits, she said. A homeless veteran, for example, may need a copy of his or her DD-214 discharge certificate to qualify for Department of Veterans Affairs-sponsored shelters or meals.

NPRC Lost Records Update 02:

Forty years ago on 12 JUL, an enormous fire erupted at the National Personnel Records Center in suburban St. Louis. Burning uncontrollably for almost 24 hours, it destroyed some 16 million to 18 million military personnel records including official documents veterans need to apply for the benefits they've earned. Today, a team of about 30 people continues to put the pieces back together. They use the latest restoration techniques so reference technicians can gleam details from charred and water-damaged documents.

Continued page 14

NRPC continued

Sometimes requests come from veterans' families, needing the records to apply for entitlements on their loved one's behalf, or to have them buried in a national cemetery. In some cases, family members may need the records to qualify for scholarships or other benefits based on their family's military affiliation. Other requests also come from historians or genealogists trying to piece together their own family histories. Fulfilling those requests can be as straightforward as tracking down one of the estimated 6.5 million records recovered from the fire, all now stored in temperature- and humidity-controlled conditions at the new National Personnel Records Center outside St. Louis. The effort can become slightly more difficult if it requires cross-referencing of other official records to ferret out and verify the information needed. But in other cases, fulfilling a records request involves the painstaking and time-intensive process of reconstructing a document blackened by fire, soaked with water or tainted with mold.

This is highly detailed work that O'Neill said demands both patience and a steady hand. In addition to a fulltime staff of 24, her team of technicians relies on the help of college interns eager to get hands-on experience in document preservation. Donning gloves to handle the fragile materials, they use special equipment and techniques to clean documents of debris and mold, separate pages stuck together for the past 40 years and piece together brittle fragments into more complete documents. State-of-the-art digital technology now helps them reconstruct documents once considered beyond repair, O'Neill said. "You can't reverse ash," she said. "But you can use scanners and digital software to enhance the document so the text on the burned part can be lifted and revealed. Basically, you look at a piece of ash, and when you digitally enhance it, you can see the writing on it." Regardless of what it takes, O'Neill said she and her staff get tremendous gratification from their mission -- as preservationists, archivists and human beings. They delight in taking something badly damaged and making it, although not like new, better than most people could ever imagine possible, she said.

From the archival perspective, they enjoy reconstructing history, one document at a time. Since 1999, official military personnel records are now among the small percentage of government records now maintained permanently, based on their historical significance, she noted. But the biggest reward of the mission, she said, is being able to recover documents that can make a real difference in someone's life. "We are helping so many people in so many ways," she said. [Source: AFPS | Donna Miles | 2 Jul 2013]

H.R.1171 & S.573 VSO Support:

By a vote of 387-1, the House of Representatives passed a bill that would allow veterans service organizations (VSOs) to obtain, at no cost, federal surplus property such as computers, vehicles and appliances. The Formerly Owned Resources for Veterans to Express Thanks for Service (FOR VETS) Act of 2013 (H.R.1171) was introduced last March by Rep. Dan Benishek (R-MI.) The legislation would amend Title 40 of the U.S. Code "to improve veterans service organizations access to Federal surplus personal property." American Legion National Commander James E. Koutz sent a letter 9JUL to Sen. Thomas Carper (D-DE) asking him to move the Senate version of the FOR VETS bill (S.573) forward so that it can be voted on before Congress recesses in August. Carper, an original co-sponsor of the Senate bill chairs the Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee, where the measure is being considered. In his letter, Koutz wrote that the bill would enable VSOs "to gain increased opportunities to Federal surplus property to educate, train, and improve the quality of life for veterans, their families, and communities in which they live." Rep. Mark Sanford (R-SC) was the sole member of the House to oppose the FOR VETS Act of 2013. A former governor of South Carolina, Sanford is an Air Force Reserve captain serving with the 315th Airlift Wing at Charleston Air Force Base. He won his House seat in a special election on May 7.

VA's Fully Developed Claims Program: The Fastest Way to Get Your Compensation Claim Processed

Posted on July 23, 2013 by Donnie La Curan in Veteran News

The Fully Developed Claims (FDC) program is an optional new initiative that offers Veterans, Service Members and survivors faster decisions from the VA on compensation, pension, and survivor benefit claims. With FDC, Veterans submit all required records and documentation at the time they make their claim and certify that they have no further evidence. VA can then review and process the claim more quickly. Learn more:

www.benefits.va.gov/fdc