PATRIOT DAY - September 11
POW/MIA DAY - September 17
AIR FORCE BIRTHDAY - September 18
GOLD STAR MOTHER’S AND FAMILY’S DAY - September 26
THE ITALIAN AMERICAN SPORT CLUB HAS LIFTED ALL COVID RESTRICTIONS. WE WILL BE HOLDING OUR MEETINGS AS USUAL, WITH NO RESTRICTIONS. HOWEVER YOU MAY WEAR A MASKS IF YOU CHOOSE.

THANK YOU.
VAL GATTO
CHAPTER 20 PRESIDENT
Draper, William Michael 9-3-1947
Michalik, Willy R. 9-4-1947
Albanese Jr., John Ernest 9-5-1946
Sweet, James Newton 9-8-1945
Lesure, Ernest Estell 9-8-1946
Riccione, Steven Blaine 9-8-1947
Brady, Michael Edwin 9-8-1949
Kohlrusch, William Frederick 9-9-1931
Green Jr., Richard 9-9-1942
DeWispeleare, Rexford John 9-9-1945
Costanza, Kenneth David 9-9-1948
Marshall, James Alfred 9-12-1940
DeLooze, Jerald Frederick 9-13-1943
Hentschel, Robert Edward 9-16-1948
Zornow, Robert Lawrence 9-17-1949
Bullock, Gary E. 9-18-1942
Matteson, Thomas William 9-18-1947
Beck Jr., Edgar Peter 9-18-1950
Ehrmentraut Jr., John E. 9-19-1945
Davis, John Powers 9-20-1934
Robles-Miranda, Jose Anton 9-20-1941
Luckenbach Jr., Richard M. 9-24-1948
Crowley, John Edward 9-25-1949
Ottman, Todd Whitney 9-27-1948

Memorial Tours & Presentations
Persons interested in on-site tours or presentations at schools or organizations, contact Chuck Macaluso at 585-225-8288 or Chuckmac66@yahoo.com

Friends of the Memorial
To be placed on the volunteer contact list, contact Chuck Macaluso at 585-225-8288 or Chuckmac66@yahoo.com
There are currently no new reports from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), the National League of Families and the DOD that no service members have been recovered, returned or identified this month. The total number of Americans who are still missing from the Vietnam War still stands at 1584.

There are reports of the recoveries and identifications of individuals from the following wars:

- Sgt. Elwood M. Truslow, US Army was lost December 12, 1950 in North Korea. He was accounted for on June 11, 2021.
- Tech Sgt. Arthur W. Countryman, US Army was lost November 20, 1944 in Hurtgen, Germany. He was accounted for on June 17, 2021.
- Cpl. Charles E. Lee, US Army was lost July 20, 1950 in South Korea. He was accounted for on June 18, 2021.
- 1st Lt. Jack K. Wood, US Army Air Corps was lost August 1, 1943 in Ploiesti, Romania. He was accounted for on June 18, 2021.
- Sgt. Bernard J. Sweeney Jr., US Army was lost December 16, 1944 in Germany. He was accounted for on June 21, 2021.
- 2nd Lt. Anel B. Shay Jr., US Army Air Corps was lost August 1, 1943 in Ploiesti, Romania. He was accounted for on July 1, 2021.
- Pfc. Morris E. Swackhammer, US Army was lost November 22, 1944 in Fraize, France. He was accounted for on July 6, 2021.
- Pfc. Glenn F. White, US Marine Corps was lost November 22, 1943 in Tarawa. He was accounted for on July 6, 2021.
- Chief Water Tender Claude White, Fireman 2nd Class Randolph H. Barber, Fireman 1st Class Leroy K. Barber and Malcolm J. Barber, Fireman 1st Class Walter S. Belt Jr., Seaman 1st Class David F. Tidball, Seaman 1st Class Donald A. Stott, Chief Machinist Mate Ralph A. Derrington, Storekeeper 1st Class Harry E. Walker and Seaman 2nd Class Arthur R. Thinnes, US Navy were all lost on December 7, 1941 on board the USS Oklahoma at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. They were accounted for from June 15th to July 6th, 2021.

UNTIL ALL OUR MISSING SERVICE MEN AND WOMAN HAVE BEEN ACCOUNTED FOR.
WE WILL NEVER GIVE UP HOPE
“WELCOME HOME BROTHERS AND REST IN PEACE”
Saturday, September 18, 2021
at 4:30pm

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Highland Park

If weather issues occur, a shorter service will be performed. Also due to the Covid 19, social distancing and face masks are recommended but not mandatory.

For more information, Contact Joe Peck
Volunteers for the reading of the names are always needed.
Member Application

For new members, print this membership form and complete, then mail with your payment and a copy of the DD214 form. Renewal members may complete and print the form and mail it with your payment. Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter #20, P.O. Box 12580, Rochester, NY 14692

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As of October 20, 2018, there will be one paid class of membership.

1. **LIFE MEMBERSHIP: $50.00**
2. All 3-year members who have paid $50 will automatically become a life member.
3. All one-year members will continue as an individual 1-year member until their membership expires, one-year members will then be required to pay $50.00 to remain a member of VVA.
Good day to all the BTL faithful followers. I am hoping that you will enjoy the beginning of western New York’s fall season coming upon us now. As I turn the calendar again, I can see the autumn equinox starting about 9-22-21, ending the damp summer weather for this year that has kept my grass green and growing all the time. Now I certainly enjoy all the bountiful things that come with harvesting from gardens or road side stands to eat during the fall. Fall flowers like the mums are starting to show up at the local nursery stores too. It is again time to watch high school, college and NFL football rivalries. As old grad Hank Wallace (USMA class of ’65) would say, “GO ARMY BEAT NAVY, BEAT AIR FORCE TOO”! And I always have high hopes for the Buffalo Bills, and this year is no exception. So, with Monday, 9-06-21 being the Labor Day holiday, I’m hoping for a great weather weekend to cook out, and that the grandkids will be heading back to their school’s full time, for in person learning. Also, I want to recognize a few dates in September that I feel are important to all of us. Labor Day of course, but let us not forget the 20th anniversary date of September 11th, 2001, now called Patriot’s Day, to honor and remember those who died that day in NYC, the Pentagon, or Shanksville, Pa. (Never Forget). The 3rd Friday of September is set aside to honor and remember National POW/MIA Day, this year on 9-17-21. And to our brothers and sisters who have served in the US Air Force, best wishes on your 74th anniversary, (as Ken Allocco likes to say Air Force Blue Ticket) recognized on 09-18-21. While serving my year’s tour in Vietnam, I recall that in early September 1969, Ho Chi Minh passed away, the leader of North Vietnam. His passing really didn’t stop or slow down his followers from still trying to harm the hairs on my head while stationed along the DMZ. I guess it was wishful thinking on my part, eh! Health wise, September call outs are about awareness for Blood Cancer, Childhood Cancers, Suicide and Alzheimer’s as very complex and serious health issues. Some funny silly stuff happening in September revolves around National Beer Lover’s month, a day set aside for Ice Cream Cones (09-22-21), Self-Improvement month, National Po-tae-tow month, or Pa-tat-tow month, and if you are so inclined to step out, it’s also National Square Dance month. So many causes, so many things to participate and enjoy, so don’t sit around the house get out and do something with your family and friends. Before we know it, the calendar will turn to much colder weather and we will wish we did get out more, so do something while you can. Because of the recent events happening in the Middle East (Afghanistan in particular) it reminds me of “de ja vu” all over again as Yogi Berea would say. I for one felt pain and was tormented by the lighting speed at which the war-torn country of Afghanistan fell to the Taliban. My mind was actively recalling the TV images of Saigon’s fall in April ’75 and my very raw and confused feelings back then. Therefore, I would like to give my sincere thanks and heartfelt gratitude to the many men and women in our community who have served our nation’s military both in Iraq and Afghanistan since the attacks on our great country back on that fateful Tuesday, 09-11-01! Thank you, really does begin to cover my appreciation for your willingness to stand and serve to protect us all. But, know that you made a difference in your service to our country, and I will always be here to listen, or help if needed. Finally, another date to keep in our minds, and to reflect on the sacrifice of our Gold Star Mothers (and families) that we should honor and keep their loved ones in mind, especially on Sunday, 09-26-21.
Read and pass along if you wish the following articles about Sarcoma vs other cancers. Suggested follow on legislation to help the VA Crisis Hot Line. PTSD, why getting help is the first step towards getting well! The VA appeals backlog updates, and check out, is your house creating health issues for you and family. CO2 monitors and how to keep safe this fall. As always, no claim is intended, use info for informational purposes.

Respectfully submitted by,

Jerry McDermott, Chair Health Affairs

How to Protect Your Family From Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poison gas that is a by-product of appliances, heaters, and automobiles that burn gasoline, natural gas, wood, oil, kerosene, or propane. It has no color, no taste, and no odor.

Each year, around 20,000 people go to the emergency room for carbon monoxide poisoning, and nearly 500 people die from it.

When your child breathes CO, it harms the ability of his or her blood to transport oxygen. Although everyone is at risk for CO poisoning, it is particularly dangerous for children because they breathe faster and inhale more CO per pound of body weight.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) encourages families and communities to work together to protect children against carbon monoxide poisoning, especially in times of a crisis or disaster. The risk of carbon monoxide poisoning increases after disasters when gasoline- or diesel-powered generators are used to supply alternative sources of fuel or electricity for heating or cooking. This can cause CO to build up in a house or garage.

Carbon monoxide detectors
To protect against carbon monoxide poisoning or exposure, your home should have at least one carbon monoxide detector on each floor. If you have a battery-operated detector, remember to change the batteries every 6 months. Keep in mind that plug-in detectors might not go off if there is a carbon monoxide leak while your power is out.
If your detector alarm goes off, leave the house immediately, and call 911. If it is cold outside, you can wait at a neighbor’s house or in your car until the fire department arrives. If you wait in a car, make sure it is parked outside, as carbon monoxide fumes from the car’s exhaust can quickly fill up a garage, even if the garage door is open.

**CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) POISONING**

Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Tips to prevent problems with carbon monoxide in the home & other environments
The largest group that suffers from CO poisonings are homeowners. Reduce your family’s exposure to CO by following the recommendations below.

**Fuel-burning appliances**
- Forced-air furnaces should be checked by a professional once a year or as recommended by the manufacturer. Pilot lights can produce CO and should be kept in good working order.
- All fuel-burning appliances (e.g., gas water heaters, gas stoves, gas clothes dryers) should be checked professionally once a year or as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Gas cooking stove tops and ovens should not be used for supplemental heat.

**Fireplaces & woodstoves**
- Fireplaces and woodstoves should be checked professionally once a year or as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Check to ensure the flue is open during operation. Proper use, inspection, and maintenance of vent-free fireplaces (and space heaters) are recommended.

**Space heaters**
- Fuel-burning space heaters should be checked professionally once a year or as recommended by the manufacturer.
• Space heaters should be properly vented during use, according to the manufacturer’s specifications.

**Automobiles & other motor vehicles**

• Regular inspection and maintenance of the vehicle exhaust system are recommended. Many states have vehicle inspection programs to ensure this practice.

• Never leave an automobile running in the garage or other enclosed space; CO can build up in a home even when a garage door is open.

**Generators & other fuel-powered equipment**

• Follow the manufacturer’s recommendations when operating generators and other fuel-powered equipment.

• When the power goes out, keep your generator outside. Portable back-up generators produce CO.

• Always set up a generator at least 20 feet from your house.

**Barbecue grills & hibachis**

• Never use barbecue grills or hibachis indoors.

• Never use barbecue grills or hibachis in poorly ventilated spaces such as garages, campers, and tents.

**Boats**

• Be aware that CO poisoning can mimic symptoms of sea sickness.

• Schedule regular engine and exhaust system maintenance.

• Consider installing a CO detector in the accommodation space on the boat.

• Never swim under the back deck or swim platform as CO builds up near exhaust vents.

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**SARCOMA CANCER VS. SKIN CANCER**

It’s difficult to know the difference between specific cancers when there are no early symptoms. This is true for sarcoma versus other forms of cancer, especially those that are related to the skin.

Some Veterans may receive VA service-connected disability if diagnosed with certain sarcomas that research indicates are directly related to toxic herbicides exposures, like Agent Orange, which was used during the Vietnam War.

Reno VA plastic surgeon Dr. Karla Werninghaus notes that even after exposure to Agent Orange while in or near Vietnam, cancerous sarcomas among Veterans is very rare.

“There are no standard screenings conducted periodically for sarcoma like colonoscopies for early detection of colon cancer or mammograms for breast cancer,” she said. “But, if a Veteran detects a new hard-like lump on the thigh or buttocks area, get it checked immediately.”

**Sarcomas deemed service-connected if exposed to Agent Orange**
Reno VA plastic surgeon Dr. Karla Werninghaus

According to the Sarcoma Foundation of America, doctors diagnose less than 200,000 new Sarcoma cases each year in the United States.

Sarcomas listed as presumptive by VA will automatically be deemed a service-connected disability if the Veteran served in or near Vietnam during the Vietnam War. That is because it is assumed they were exposed to Agent Orange. If that Veteran is diagnosed with an illness directly connected to Agent Orange exposure, military service-connection is automatically determined.

More information about service-connected conditions

For more information about presumptive conditions (VA recently added three new illnesses to this list) related to Agent Orange exposure, please click here.

Sarcomas related to military exposure affect the soft body tissues. Those tissues include muscle, fat, blood and lymph vessels, and connective tissues.

Other sarcomas not considered presumptive to Vietnam-era military exposures are:

- Osteosarcoma – affects the bone.
- Chondrosarcoma – affects the cartilage.
- Kaposi’s sarcoma – caused by a rare virus that leaves tumors in the lining of blood and lymph vessels.
- Mesothelioma – affects the lining surrounding the lungs, stomach, heart, or testicles. Currently, the only known cause is exposure to asbestos.

Skin cancer most common cancer in U.S.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, skin cancer is the most common cancer in the U.S. Skin cancer is an abnormal growth of skin cells. Also, cancer is the second leading cause of death after heart disease.

Dr. Werninghaus also recommends patients mention to their provider – during annual exams – any changes on their skin. If you are prone to new moles and sunspots, see a dermatologist annually.
The American Cancer Society provides more information on skin cancer and ways to prevent it.

If doctors diagnose you with sarcoma or skin cancer, it is important to seek consultation. A Veteran Service Officer or VBA representative can help you file a claim for VA disability.

Just because a condition is not deemed presumptive does not mean that it won’t be considered related to military service.

If your military job or orders means your possible exposure and doctors diagnose you with an illness, you may be eligible for VA compensation for that illness.

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**House Health**

**Ways Your House Might Be Making You Sick**

Most of us understand that asbestos and lead are quite harmful substances that could end up in the homes of many individuals, however, they may not understand that there are other chemicals that could be in the house, that are man-made and naturally occurring, which could cause illnesses. The substances could pollute food, water, air, and maybe even the cleaning products that are used in the home. Symptoms of sick building syndrome could include irritated skin, throat, nose, or eyes, confusion, fatigue, and breathing difficulties; illnesses associated with the building might include long-term conditions such as allergies and asthma. Plus, there are chemicals that disturb hormones and kickstart cancer. Below highlights some things that individuals could do in order to create a healthier home and decrease the risks.

**Toxic Dust**

The dust that has settled on top of the furniture or is in hard-to-reach places could cause more harm than simply a sneezing fit, it could actually be toxic to individuals. Scientists from the George Washington University examined samples of dust data from all over the United States and discovered forty-five potentially toxic chemicals that were hiding inside, ten of these chemicals turned up in ninety percent of the samples. A repeat culprit was TDCIPP, which is a flame retardant regularly located in furniture and various other household items which are considered to be the source of cancer; phenols, which are frequently used in products for cleaning, as well as phthalates, which are normally found in vinyl flooring and toys, were found in high quantities as well. Reducing the dust by vacuuming regularly and frequently wiping down surfaces.

**Air Fresheners**

Some people are absolutely fixated on keeping a house smelling fresh, this obsession could be impacting their health. Scented sprays, plugin fresheners, oil diffusers, and scented candles might consist of phthalates, chemicals that might disturb the endocrine system by disrupting the hormones. Phthalates could play the role of a synthetic hormone in the body. When humans have synthetic chemicals, which disrupt the natural processes, they begin to worry about health-related issues. Individuals can freshen their homes safely by simply opening windows, purchasing flowers, or by using natural essential oils.

**Bleaching Your Shower**
When you clean your bathroom with bleach, it leaves the surfaces clean and sparkling, however, if there is mold using bleach could actually worsen the situation. In tile grout, bleach can actually get rid of the mold, however, as bleach has a very caustic property, while grout is quite permeable, the bleach can eat away at the grout as time passes and create in it tiny holes for the mold to grow in. Attempt using solutions of water and hydrogen peroxide in order to fight against mold spores, ensure that the bathroom has adequate ventilation in order to reduce the humidity that allows mold to thrive, plus use a sponge to wipe down the walls in the shower in order to eliminate excess water remaining after bathing.

There Is Wall To Wall Carpeting
If not properly taken care of, wall-to-wall carpeting could be a huge issue as it becomes a home for all types of contaminants. Pet dander and dust could settle into the fibers and lead to allergic reactions. Plus, if shoes are not removed at the door prior to walking through the house, contaminants, such as heavy metals, pesticides, dirt and the list go on, could be tracked into the home from outside. Then the pets or children could get it all over them. Carpets and rugs should be frequently vacuumed and washed.

Upholstery That Is Ancient
Many people hold on to certain furniture for sentimental reasons and if this is the case, take a look at the white tag and see if it says TB117, if this is the case, then individuals could be in serious trouble. Carcinogens which are flame retardants, and generally found in the upholstery of furniture, were mandated under TB117 of the California law. During the year 2013, California passed the law which no longer required the use of flame-retardant chemicals, therefore, products that have been manufactured after that date states TB117-2013 on the white tags. Individuals ought to confirm that the labels on their furniture says TB117-2013, and that it clearly states that no flame retardants were used in the manufacturing of the furniture.

Pantry Is Loaded With Canned Goods
Canned goods could make for an inexpensive meal, but a serving of toxins could also be on the menu. Several canned foods are lined with a compound that consists of BPA, and this chemical has the capacity to transfer onto foods, specifically the foods which were hot or acidic as they were being packaged. Cans like these are substantial sources of exposure to BPA, yet they are staples in the homes of practically every household. Many manufacturing companies vow not to use dangerous chemicals in the manufacturing process of their products and several of them have started packaging these foods such as tomatoes, soups, and beans in boxes.

Too Much Plastic in the Kitchen
Harmful chemicals such as BPA are often placed in plastic storage containers, this could attach itself to the food as it is being reheated or by placing hot leftovers into the containers. Polycarbonate plastic products, which are hard and promoted as shatter-resistant, such as beverage jugs, drinking cups, and water bottles often consist of BPA, which has the potential of interfering with the hormones in the body and possibly increase the chance of developing diabetes and cancer. Also, do not allow BOA-free on labels to outwit you, several manufactures simply substitute the BPA with another chemical with a similar molecular structure, which could be just as horrible. Plastic should be stayed clear as much as possible, instead utilize stainless steel water bottles and storage containers made from glass.
There Are Houseplants
Brightening your home is not all that houseplants could do as they could also decrease the amount of air pollution in the home. Scientists have discovered that plants such as Chinese Evergreen, Bamboo Palm, Gerbera Daisy, and English Ivy are very effective at removing and absorbing dangerous pollutants such as carbon monoxide from out of the air.

[Source: The Outdoor Wear Team | May 18, 2021 ++]

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PTSD
Update 01: Seeking Out Mental Health Care Is the First Step to Wellness

Service members, family members and veterans who suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may repeatedly re-experience their ordeal as nightmares, flashbacks or frightening thoughts, especially when exposed to events that remind them of their original trauma, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They also may experience overanxious watchfulness or a tendency to withdraw or avoid situations and people that remind them of their traumatic experience, CDC said.

About 93,346 service members received care for PTSD in the MHS between fiscal year 2016 and fiscal year 2020, according to the Military Health System (MHS) Management Analysis and Reporting Tool (M2). "Of that group, 19,114 were diagnosed prior to any deployment, and 74,232 were diagnosed during or following deployment," said Holly O'Reilly, a clinical psychologist and acting section chief for Implementation Clinical Care at the Psychological Health Center of Excellence in Silver Spring, Maryland. Data available from the MHS Data Repository show that in 2019, approximately 1.8% of active-duty service members had a PTSD diagnosis, O'Reilly said.

The Department of Defense patient-centered medical home (PCMH) initiative includes mandatory annual screening for PTSD (among other mental health conditions) for all beneficiaries of the MHS. "Recognizing that you may have symptoms of PTSD and reaching out for treatment is a sign of strength," O'Reilly said. Medical providers and family members should be alert to the following symptoms that require attention:
• Pronounced desire to avoid other people that continues for weeks or months
• Increased jitteriness or jumpiness that does not go away after an initial transition home
• Unsettling memories or flashbacks to wartime events that do not resolve after the transition home
• Chronic headaches, unexplained personality or cognitive changes that could indicate a Traumatic Brain Injury
• A pervasive sense of sadness, guilt or failure that does not improve
• Angry outbursts, irritability, escalating family arguments or physical fighting that is uncharacteristic or prolonged
• Changes in alcohol use
• Risk-taking behaviors
• Thoughts of death or a death wish (Call 9-1-1 immediately)

The DOD has been at the forefront of developing effective, evidence-based treatments for PTSD that reduce the severity and duration of PTSD symptoms. "Improvement of symptoms can be seen relatively quickly," O'Reilly explained, with "many people noting a significant improvement after 5-6 sessions depending on the type of treatment and type of trauma." "To relieve symptoms of PTSD, it's important to process the trauma and/or learn to think differently about the traumatic event," O'Reilly said. "Evidence-based trauma-focused treatments can help you navigate through the traumatic memories and lead you to symptom improvement." Some of these first-line treatments include: prolonged exposure, cognitive processing therapy, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing, brief psychotherapy, narrative exposure therapy and written narrative exposure, O'Reilly said.

• First-line treatments for PTSD "typically lead to symptom reduction or resolution with 8-16 sessions using various combinations of exposure or cognitive restructuring."
• Second-line treatment recommendations include drug treatment, or individual non-trauma-focused psychotherapy, such as stress inoculation training, present-centered therapy, and interpersonal psychotherapy, she

The COVID-19 pandemic also may have had a negative impact on those with PTSD symptoms, O'Reilly said. "Many service members have been social distancing and complying with stay-at-home orders. The social isolation may contribute to feelings of alienation and disconnection," O'Reilly said. "For some, feeling disconnected or alienated may contribute to PTSD symptoms through loss of social support or lead to a negative interpretation of other’s behavior." O'Reilly also said that for other people with symptoms of PTSD, "they might feel more anxious than usual. COVID-19 has serious health consequences and for many the stressors of the pandemic have been unpredictable and at times overwhelming."

When the pandemic began last year, many DOD mental health clinics quickly pivoted to provide telehealth treatment, she said. Now, "as the pandemic restrictions are beginning to lift, some have returned to face-to-face treatment. Please reach out to your local clinic to see if telehealth options are available," O'Reilly suggested.

Air Force Capt. Felicia Keith, a staff psychologist in the mental health clinic at the Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, said that the stigma of mental health care has had an impact on getting PTSD sufferers into treatment. "Often times, the concern about how mental health care can negatively impact their career
keeps them from self-referring to the mental health clinic," she said. "Anecdotally, I have noticed that the older population within active duty is more hesitant to seek care," she said, "while I believe for younger (populations) it seems more socially acceptable to be in therapy." In her experience, "it is usually the older population that believes that they don't need therapy, or they can "tough it out." The younger generation seems to be more willing to come for help. "However," Keith added: "That does seem to depend on the younger (service member's) cultural and familial background in that younger service members who come from families who do not "believe" in mental health treatment tend to struggle to ask for or accept treatment when needed."

"If you have PTSD, there is hope," O'Reilly stressed. "First-line treatments can lead to symptom reduction even if treatment begins years after the traumatic event. Please don't hesitate - seek help, and talk to a mental health provider if you have symptoms of PTSD.” [Source: Health.mil | Janet A. Aker | June 28, 2021 ++]

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**VA Appeals Backlog**

**Update 11: VA Will Miss Its Original 2022 Deadline for Resolving Legacy Appeals**

The Department of Veterans Affairs will no longer meet its initial goal of resolving all legacy appeals by 2022 after the pandemic slowed its progress, officials told Congress 13 JUL. There’s no doubt VA has made progress in recent years. The department reduced the legacy backlog from a high of 472,000 appeals in November 2017 to fewer than 135,000 today, VA said. VA promised Congress it would resolve all legacy cases by 2022 when it worked with lawmakers to modernize the appeals program back in 2017, which gave veterans more options.

But the pandemic slowed portions of the disability claims process, making it more difficult for the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Board of Veterans Appeals to collect data and evidence needed to review an appeal. VA hopes it can resolve the legacy backlog sometime in 2023. “We don’t have the timeline yet. We’re working to set that,” Cheryl Mason, chairman of the Board of Veterans Appeals, told the House VA Committee Tuesday. “The delay in exams and records is impacting the VA’s ability to complete legacy remands and return those to the board. Currently, the board has approximately 102,000 legacy appeals that we are working through.”

VA’s previous appeals process was confusing, complicated and time-consuming for veterans. Veterans in 2015 waited an average of five years or longer for a decision on their appeals. The board infamously spent at least 25 years and 27 separate times adjudicating one appeal. Today, veterans have three options for pursuing an appeal. They can submit their appeals to an experienced adjudicator, who will take a fresh look at their case, or they can file with a VA regional office, which will review and assist
with developing new evidence to support the claim. Veterans can expect to receive a decision within 68 and 82 days for the first or second appeal options, respectively. Veterans can pursue a third option by appealing directly to the Board of Veterans Appeals. The board takes less than two years to issue a decision through this avenue.

These changes stemmed from conversations that began back in 2016, when VA convened a group of veterans service organizations, legislative staff and other advocacy groups to design a new, streamlined appeals process for the future. Congress used that feedback to write new legislation in 2017, known as VA Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act. The department implemented those changes back in 2019, and VA is learning more about what veterans prefer. Nearly 60% of veterans are choosing to appeal to the board through the new process, said Rep. Elaine Luria (D-Va.), chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. “It seems that a higher-than-anticipated number of people are actually choosing the hearing option than when this was originally put in place,” she said.

Veterans have told the board they see hearings as their only chance to be truly heard within VA. “We completely understand that,” Mason said. “I’ve been a judge for a long time, so I understand that.” Still, that’s creating pressure on the board, which is trying to meet the demand for hearings and juggle both the legacy appeals and claims through the new VA process. The board schedules about 1,000 hearings each week, the majority of which are virtual, Mason said. But just 60% of veterans actually show up for those hearings, and that presents another challenge for the board. Mason said she wants to gather VA officials, veterans service organizations and members of Congress for another summit to discuss those challenges, similar to the conversations the group initially held back in 2016.

The board held 15,669 virtual tele-hearings and adjudicated a record 102,663 appeals decisions in fiscal 2020. Still, the board today has a backlog of 91,000 pending hearings. The board hopes it can bring on more judges and support staff next year, if Congress approves additional resources. The White House recently approved the addition of 20 new judges for the board, which should also help alleviate workload pressures, Mason said. In her testimony, Mason said she set a stretch goal for the board to hold 50,000 hearings in 2021.

In addition, lawmakers, auditors at the Government Accountability Office and veterans services organizations are all concerned the department doesn’t have a definitive plan just yet for tackling the legacy appeals backlog. VA recently announced plans to automatically review claims from veterans who previously filed and were denied benefits for one of three presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange, which include bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinsonism. Those claims will generate new appeals and more work for VBA and the board, and lawmakers are worried VA isn’t prepared to handle sudden “shockwaves” to the system.

“If the board and VBA doesn’t have a plan put in place to address the issue now, we’re going to see a backlog that will continue to grow over time,” Shane Liermann, deputy national legislative director for Disabled American Veterans, told the subcommittee. “Three years from now we may be looking at a 150,000 hearings backlog.” [Source: Federal News Network | Nicole Ogrysko | July 14, 2021 ++]
Two lawmakers introduced a bill 30 JUN in response to multiple watchdog reports of deaths after calls were mishandled by the Veterans Crisis Line. The bill, titled the **Revising and Expediting Actions for the Crisis Hotline (REACH) for Veterans Act**, would require an independent agency to evaluate the training for Veterans Crisis Line responders. It would also require responders to be retrained on how to handle high-risk callers, and it aims to increase oversight of calls. The leaders of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) and Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS) introduced the legislation. “We’ve got to do more to make sure no veteran who reaches out for lifesaving assistance through the Veterans Crisis Line falls through the cracks,” Tester said.

The VA Office of Inspector General released two reports within the last year that found fault with how the Veterans Crisis Line handled high-risk callers. One report focused on a veteran who died July 4, 2018, after speaking to two crisis line responders. The responders failed to consider his or her risk for overdose and didn’t contact local authorities. In the other case, a Montana veteran shot and killed a family member after speaking to a responder with the Veterans Crisis Line in 2019. In its report this April, the IG said the responder “failed to take action” to contact authorities. “While Congress has made substantial improvements to the Veterans Crisis Line in recent years, deficiencies remain that must be addressed to ensure every veteran receives the care they deserve when in crisis,” Moran said in a statement.

In addition to retraining responders and increasing oversight, the bill aims to help the Veterans Crisis Line transition to 9-8-8 as the new national suicide prevention hotline. Congress passed a measure last year that establishes 9-8-8 as the universal number for mental health crises and suicide prevention. The number is expected to go into effect in July 2022. Tester and Moran’s bill requires the VA secretary to seek input from veterans’ service organizations about how to best transition to the new 9-8-8 number to avoid confusion among veterans and service members. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Nikki Wentling | June 30, 2021 ++]
You have questions. VA has answers.

Call VA today.
1-800-MyVA411
(1-800-698-2411)

The number to call when you don’t know who to call.

You only need to remember one number for information on VA care, benefits, and services or to speak to a live agent for assistance!

1-800-MyVA411 serves all members of the Veteran and service member community seeking information or assistance.

Call for helpful information on:

- COVID-19 general information and updates
- Health care eligibility and enrollment
• VA benefits, such as disability, compensation and pension, education programs, caregiver support, insurance, home loans, and burial headstones and markers, among others
• The nearest VA medical centers, benefits offices, or cemeteries to Veterans
• Directory assistance and connection to all VA contact centers and VA Medical Centers
• Technical support for VA.gov
• Debt and payment options
• Immediate transfer to the Veterans Crisis Line or the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans

Will I be able to speak to a live agent?

Yes!

When you call 1-800-MyVA411 and press 0, you will reach a live agent for immediate assistance or connection to the right VA experts.

The VA Welcome Kit

A simplified guide to help you get the most out of your VA experience

Inside you will find an overview of VA benefits and services, important phone numbers and resources, and “Quick Start Guides” on specific programs, services, and topics.

Quick Start Guides

These handy “Quick Start Guides” will help you navigate your VA benefits and services, with checklists to keep you organized and on track to apply for them.

• Apply for VA health care
• Get started with mental health services
• Get started with health services for women Veterans
• Understanding community care
• Accessing urgent care
• Apply for a disability rating
• Apply for education benefits
• Apply for burial in a VA national cemetery and for memorial products
• Understanding the modernized decision review process
• Get started with services for Veterans ages 65+
• Get started with Veteran state benefits and services
• Get started with Vet Center services
• Get started with caregiver benefits
• Apply for survivor benefits
Explore VA.gov to learn about your benefits

VA is here for you.
1-800-MyVA411 (1-800-698-2411) is always the right number for information and assistance.

Or call directly:
Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, Chat, or Text 838255
Homeless Veteran Resources: 1-877-424-3838 or Chat
White House VA Hotline: 1-855-948-2311

The Chaplain’s Corner

Brothers and Sisters of VVA Chapter 20:
Due to the length of our separation, (due to Covid-19), I have received very few notices of our members hospital visits or (God forbid) their passing from this life to the next. Please be my eyes and ears and let me know if any of our members are struggling with health issues (or worse). It is important for all of us to stay in touch, call for a “Buddy Check”, to pop over for a visit, or go out to eat. Our mental health is as important as our physical health!

If you hear anything please call me at 585-227-3426, or email me at tpuff@frontiernet.net.

If you cannot reach me then call Val Gatto at 585-259-9605.

Thank you! God Bless and Stay Well.!!!!!!

Your Brother,

Tom Puff.
Highlights of the August Membership Meeting

Ray Melens was presented with a 2020 Award by Jack Madigan and Dan and Rita Hasenauer. (left) Val congratulated Ray on the Award and thanked him for his service.

Joe Peck received an award for his work with POW/MIA. Val presented the award.

Additional Award Recipients included: Tony DeBellis, Bill Arble, Bill Nittle, Bill Tortonce, John Fahner-Vihtelic, Emil Anderson, Belinda Miller, Jerry McDermott and Fred Elliott
Nick Stefanovic was the guest speaker at the meeting. He spoke about the improved returns on the new claims, 1-1½ months turn around. Appeals taking 1½ years. Nick spoke about the last approved presumptive claims for Parkinsons disease, Bladder cancer and Hyperthyroid. And lastly Nick spoke about the groundbreaking event on September 11 at 9am for the War on Terror memorial for Afghan, Iraq, Beirut, and Samolian veterans.
From Ken Alloco, regarding the Flag Giveaway for September:

In Honor of the U.S. Air Force’s birthday, tickets for the flag drawing will be $5.00/ticket.
To support a local comfort care home (hospice home) in Penfield, a foursome is being sponsored at their upcoming Golf Tournament. Any member of VVA Chapter 20 may claim a spot in the foursome for a day of golf absolutely free to them!

Monday, September 13, 2021
Shadow Lake Golf Club

The day will start at 10:30 with registration and includes lunch at the snack bar, round of golf (including cart), followed by a steak and potato buffet dinner.

Contact Kathy Gleason to save your spot - the first four golfers will get it!
The Historical Archives of Chapter 20 Newsletters
By Joe Peck

After several years of searching and digitizing all of the newsletters published by Chapter 20, the historical archives of the Forward Observer and the Between the Lines is now available for viewing on the Chapter 20 website.
This is our history from 1981 to our present day.
In addition to this, hard copies of all these publications with the permission of the donors will be donated to the Vietnam Veterans history section of the Rundle Library in downtown Rochester for future generations to view and get an insight of the history of Chapter 20.

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Message from Lynn Gursslin,

The Chapter gear is for sale. We have limited inventory at this time but will try to fill your order as best we can.

T-shirt $12.00  Sweatshirt $20.00  Hoodie $30.00  Chapter hats $15.00
POW hats $10.00

If you are interested in purchasing Chapter gear please call or send an email to me at: lynngursslin@gmail.com - Cell # 737-0976. I will need your size and the color and will let you know if we have it in stock. I will work with you for pick up.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Board Meetings</th>
<th>Membership Meetings</th>
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**Monthly Membership Meetings start at 6:30 pm**

*At the Italian American Sports Club, 1250 Buffalo Road, Rochester*

**Driving Directions to the Italian American Sports Club:**

The Club is located at 1250 Buffalo Road close to the intersection of Howard Road, directly across from the stone quarry, next to the Eagles Club and the Catholic Diocese of Rochester.

From the East: Heading west on 490, exit Mt. Read Blvd. and turn left; south on Mt. Read to Buffalo Road circle, turn right, west on Buffalo Road, 1.4 miles, the Italian-American Sports Club is on the right side.

From the West: Heading east on 490, exit 33 east, Buffalo Road (Gates Center); head east on Buffalo Road; continue past Howard Road; the Italian-American Sports Club will be on the left side in about .5 mile.

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**ReHouse Architectural Salvage**

Sally Kamprath

469 West Ridge Road
Rochester, NY 14615
585-288-3080
skamprath@ReHouseNY.com
www.ReHouse.com

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Your business card could be here. Contact Chapter Treasurer, Richard Pearce [rpearce046@gmail.com](mailto:rpearce046@gmail.com), for details.
In Memory Donations

When the simple act of placing flowers on a casket or placing stones on a headstone does not seem to be enough to honor the memory of a special someone who has passed away, one may choose to make a donation in his or her honor to commemorate the values and beliefs of the deceased. Chapter 20 VVA is committed to recognizing the sacrifices made by all military personnel in every branch of the armed forces. The memory of the deceased veteran is honored in the continuous work and service carried out by the dedicated Chapter members and associates. The monetary donations sent by individuals help make it possible to continue serving veterans and their families. The combined efforts of donors, lawmakers, members, and associates have far-reaching effects on the quality of all our lives.

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 20 offers several ways of commemorating a special person. One of those ways is the Memorial Walk at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at Highland Park. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Walk is a pathway of bricks inscribed with the names of individuals who have served their country with valor. Their names will forever remain a reminder of the dedication and tenacity demonstrated by the thousands of men and women who have served in the U. S. Armed Forces.

If you wish to make a monetary donation directly to Chapter 20 in support of all the functions and services they provide to veterans and their families, send your check or money order payable to Chapter 20, VVA:

Vietnam Veterans of America
Chapter 20
P.O. Box 12580
Rochester, NY 14612
Rochester VA Outpatient Clinic

Rochester Calkins VA Clinic
260 Calkins Road
Rochester, NY 14623
585 463-2600

Hours of Operation for Rochester VA Clinic:
Monday – Friday
8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Extended hours by appointment

Parking is free and the Clinics are handicapped accessible.

Rochester Calkins VA Clinic offers:

Primary Care
Pharmacy
Podiatry
Respiratory/Sleep
Psychiatry
Eye Care
Radiology
Cardiology
Dental
Laboratory
Prosthetic
Home Based Primary Care
Audiology/Speech Pathology
Dermatology
Women's Health
Gastroenterology (soon to be opened)

Community Resources
Monroe County Department of Human Services / Office for the Aging *
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NYS VVA PRESIDENT
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VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS AND INFORMATION
Greater Rochester Vietnam Veterans Memorial  753-7275
(enter 9; enter 2 to leave a message)
VA Outpatient Clinic  260 Calkins Road  463-2600
Veterans Outreach Center  459 South Avenue  546-1081
VA Vet Center  232-5040
Veterans Administration  800-827-1000
Monroe County Veterans Service Agency  753-6040
e-mail: serviceofficer@yahoo.com

VA Veterans Benefits Hotline  800-827-1000
Women Veterans Call Center  888-829-6636
VA Medical Center in Batavia  297-1000
VA Hospital in Buffalo  716-834-9200
VA Medical Center in Canandaigua  394-2000
VA Medical Center in Bath  607-664-4000
Vietnam Veterans of America National Office  800-882-1316
Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund  202-393-0090
National League of Families
POW/MIA Updates  202-223-6846
Richards House at VOC  506-9060
The Resource Center at VOC  546-4250
Stars & Stripes – The Flag Store  546-3524
National Caregivers Support Line  855-260-3274
Homeless Hotline  877-424-3838
Crisis Hotline  800-273-8255

VVA New York State Council  www.nyvietnamvets.org
Honor Flight  www.HonorFlightRochester.org