This Issue of the BTL is dedicated to all those who attended the August 13 – 17, 2013 VVA National Convention. Whether they were there as a delegate for VVA, AVVA, or just as an observer, we thank them for their participation.

It has been 30 years since VVA held its first convention in 1983, in Washington, D.C. Chapter 20 was well represented then and now.

Left to Right : Dan Corona, Alan Frisa, Diane Corona, Karen Frisa, Marie Elliott, Fred Elliott, Pat Pudetti, Ida Gatto, Joe Peck, LuAnn Peck, Val Gatto, Mike Sanfillipo, Jerry McDermott, Ron Trovato (MIA – Lynn Gurrslin, Don Nealon, Rosemary Rossi-Williams, Hank Wallace) Chapter 20 members Nick DeLeo, Wayne Miller, and Ken Moore were attending as delegates for the New York State Council.
On Tuesday wreaths were presented by VVA and AVVA and placed at the local veterans’ memorial in Jacksonville. Notice that the memorial was dedicated in 1974, making it one of the oldest (if not the oldest) in the nation.
The flight going to Jacksonville, Florida I did not have any control. It was a small ordeal. We all arrived about 1PM safe and sound.

Each day on the Convention floor was a challenge with all the different Resolutions that we voted on. I forgot to mention this was the largest Convention so far with 799 delegates attending. The first National Convention was started in 1983 with about 200 members.

During the day, different delegates attended different committee meetings. At night we attended Region 2 Caucuses to listen to each candidate on what they had to say and answer questions put to them by delegates.

From the beginning to the end in planning the 2013 Vietnam Veterans Convention in Jacksonville, Florida the cooperation that I received from the 12 delegates and the four Ladies: My wife Ida, Karen Frisa, Lu Ann Peck, and Diane Corona was tremendous. I want to thank all of them.
I was asked to attend the National Convention to fill the vacant delegate spot left by the untimely death of our brother Jim McDermott. This was my first ever convention for anything. It was an interesting experience and great to be around fellow veterans. I even spent some time in a hospitality room with the Louisiana State Council eating Cajun food. It would have been a happier event if our own Fred Elliott would have been re-elected as National Vice President. Fred and Marie work very hard for the VVA. I am sure we will not see the last of Fred. I would also like to mention that Nancy Switzer, the President of AVVA, decided not to run for re-election this year after many years of involvement with the AVVA. Nancy and her husband Rick have been members of our Chapter 20 family for many years.

I attended the two and a half hour membership affairs committee session and it turned out to be a complaint session about problems the chapters are having getting new memberships processed. Some chapters complained that existing members have been dropped for no reason. It seems that there are many problems in the membership part of the VVA on the national level. National says that the local chapters and state councils need to communicate more. The National Secretary said “going to try to resolve membership problems” and “things will get better AFTER the elections”. It was brought up that membership renewals should be sent out well before the expiration date. The National Secretary urges the chapters to call national with their chapter problems. The VVA currently has 70,000 members. I will pass on some information to Mike General that pertains to membership.

It was good to see the head of the VA, General Shinseki, attend the Convention and mention that steps are being taken to resolve the backlog on claims. He also said Obama Care will not affect veterans who are signed up for VA Health Care. He urged all veterans to sign up.

Arlo Guthrie was at the banquet to get an award for something, but Ron Trovato and I had to admit that we were more the Jimi Hendrix type than folk music type. Go Jimi!
I was one of the delegates who attended the 16th annual VVA Convention. May I begin by thanking our President Val Gatto, for one heck of a job orchestrating the complete planning of this event for our Chapter 20 entourage. It seemed to me, that no stone went un-turned in his attempt to ensure that the delegates and their company made it down and back with a very smooth flow. Accommodations and pre-registrations for the Convention seminars, meetings and State caucus get-togethers for political agendas were met without strife. The actual seating for Constitutional Amendments and Resolutions voting went exceptionally well. We had a very fine opening ceremony, with VVA President, John Rowan presiding, several Congressional speakers and a grand rendition of our National Anthem, by Country singer Jolie Holiday.

As a new delegate, I joined others like myself for an orientation so as to learn what our mission and objectives for the convention would be. Our primary mission was to represent You, the Chapter 20 Body of Members, in a vote to secure the new leaders of the National VVA, for the next two years.

Each of us from the Rochester delegation took the opportunity to attend several of the lectures on many of the topics which affect the Veterans of our generation and those facing the present returning veteran population. We split up the lectures and I attended the POW/MIA and Health Care Committee forums.

I came away from these meetings with a renewed fervor, knowing that there are many supporters of these areas of concern throughout the country, and within every state delegation, promoting these agendas and fighting for our rights and that of our missing comrades in arms.

There was quite an area for vendor solicitations for medals, patches, headgear, clothing and the like and I personally was able to find headgear from my own Vietnam Unit.

We spent two nights listening to candidates for office and received a slew of bios from them, so as to make the right choice for the upcoming election. I was saddened to learn that our State President did not endorse the sitting Vice President who is none other than Fred Elliott, one of our own. I have found Fred to be an honest, hard working, forward thinking vet, with integrity to match, who could have carried these values with him during the next two years, but alas, it was not to be.

Although the election process went by the book, a culture predicated by politics resulted in a newly elected board of National Officers, whom I hope will carry out their responsibilities well, although some of the other candidates running, if elected, would have had an even greater positive effect on our path forward.

We were able to see St Augustine, visit an old Spanish Fort, eat some yummy Southern BBQ, take in some shopping and visit a beach all in one afternoon of free time, under the guidance of Hank Wallace.

Our closing activities included a banquet in the Grand Ballroom of the Hyatt Regency, with more awards given out and speeches rendered. I was glad to return home, but will remember for a long time the opportunity I was given to represent Chapter 20 and You. I hope we all honored that commitment to you and each other.

This was my 4th convention, the 1st over twenty years ago. It was nice to see some familiar faces including Mary Stout. She was national president when I attended my 1st convention. I was disappointed in the election outcome, but I know Marsha Four will do a good job as Vice President.
I learned a great deal about the frustration of our Puerto Rican veterans over their treatment. They voted for statehood over a year ago but their governor has refused to submit the paperwork to apply for statehood. They have several thousand veterans served by a 200-bed hospital and their service officer died and has not been replaced.

*These are the delegates that represented Chapter 20 at the 2013 Vietnam Veterans Convention in Jacksonville, Florida.*

Left to Right: Jerry McDermott, Rose Rossi -Williams, Pat Pudetti, Wayne Miller, Ron Trovato, Hank Wallace, Joe Peck, Mike Sanfilippo, Dan Corona, Don Nealon, Alan Frisa

Front: Lynn Gursslin, Valentino Gatto
Watch out Marching Unit, Val and Hank really liked these uniforms!

**CONVENTION REPORT BY RON TROVATO**

I want to thank Chapter 20 for sending me to the National Convention in Jacksonville, Florida, where I was one of the 799 delegates present on the convention floor. This was the best attended VVA Convention in terms of delegates, and it was obvious from all the walkers and wheelchairs that we are all slowing down. Despite the fact that Fred lost the Vice President’s election, it was a productive convention for me and the other Chapter 20 delegates. It is my personal feeling that politics at the State Council level contributed to Fred’s defeat and I am giving considerable thought to resigning as NYS Veterans’ Incarcerated Chair, inasmuch as they provide me with no funds and it is a job title only. It is what it is and it left a bad taste. I will of course be glad to fill our Chapter’s Incarcerated Committee and I am grateful for your financial and moral support. That being said, I would like to share information on the committee hearings that I was able to attend.

Veterans Incarcerated Committee – this Hearing was chaired by National Committee Chair Terry Hubert, who continues to visit prisons, most recently at Soledad Prison in California. Terry addressed the suspensions of incarcerated VVA Chapters across the country. He noted that there are three (3) Incarcerated Chapters in the State of Florida and he awarded a new charter at the Hearing to Chapter 1080 at the Union County Correctional Facility near Raiford, Florida. The discussion also dealt with VVA’s involvement with transitional services for parolees, as well as the progress being made by the Incarcerated Chapter at Angola in Louisiana. This included the “Death with Dignity” burial program for indigent incarcerated veterans who died there. The lesson driven home by Terry, who was the superintendent of a prison in Nevada, was that everyone benefits from incarcerated veterans occupied and engaged in meaningful programs and many problems are eliminated. Attending delegates brought up the fact that VVA leadership seminars seldom addressed developing leadership for the Veterans Incarcerated Committee and hopefully this will be changed at the 2014 Leadership Conference.
Further discussion was about Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Re-entry Specialists who are supposed to be active at every prison and the fact that the VA continues to have the resources to assist in the transition of veterans back into society. There are 51 prison systems presently in operation in the U.S. (50 State and the Federal Bureau of Prisons) and the disparity in their treatment of veterans runs the gamut. The Committee agreed to continue five (5) adopted resolutions. Terry Joiner from Angola Prison was awarded the honor of Incarcerated Veteran of the Year for all of his hard work on behalf of VVA at that facility.

Homeless Committee – this Hearing was run by Committee Chair, Sandy Miller who has 16 years’ experience working with homeless vets. The Hearing was very well attended and quite lively. Three new resolutions were discussed as well as initiatives to prevent veterans from becoming homeless and the dignified burial of unclaimed remains of homeless veterans. This varied from state to state, although it was universally supported by funeral directors. California, New York, and Florida are states with the greatest amount of homeless veterans. The VA has a vested interest in keeping veterans in their homes and avoiding foreclosure. The difficulty of working with homeless women veterans, because of sexual trauma related issues, was also discussed. Additionally, asking the VA for help with the homeless often times paid off as they may indeed respond to state programs requesting help.

**CONVENTION REPORT BY JOE PECK**

This year’s VVA National Convention held in Jacksonville, Florida included 12 delegates from Chapter 20 who attempted to arrive on time to participate in all the scheduled events. This was not to be the case. There were a number of mix-ups in the air travel which resulted in visiting 5 different airports and several shuttle rides; all this was compliment of United Air Lines. The entire group of 16 flying together originally had an estimated time of arrival of about 11am. Unfortunately, our travel day finally ended at 5:30pm. I guess some things never change.

Our group finally completed registration and the convention started with the usual military honors, guest speakers, and entertainment. One of the guest speakers was David Bonior who attended the very first convention of over 200 delegates in Washington, D.C. in 1983. He spoke about all the changes that have taken place over the last 30 years and how the VVA has paved the way for benefits and recognition of all our veterans today. He was also honored for coining the phrase; *never again shall one generation of veterans abandon another.* After a small break, we finally settled in for the business at hand. Interestingly enough, on the first order of business, there was great discussion on decorum item 7H which prohibits all firearms at this or any other VVA convention. Many agreed that this should be the case but on the other hand, many stated that it was their constitutional right to carry a registered firearm, which is
probably legal to do in the state of Florida. The issue was passed as presented by a majority vote. This was a new one for me.

Later that day, I, Lynn Gursslin, Don Nealon, and Alan Frisa attended the POW/MIA Committee Hearing hosted by Grant Coates and Richard DeLong. This was very interesting and informative. They talked about the POW/MIA chain starting with JPAC, then the DPMO, and finally the National League of Families. They also talked about the process that occurs from the initial investigation of a site to the actual excavation, recovery, and identification at the labs here in the U.S. and of course the connection with the families of the missing. They also spoke of current efforts being made to help find our missing as well as providing the Vietnamese Government information on finding their more than 10,000 missing. Our aging veterans today are constantly providing information as well as personal items that were taken, to be returned to the families of the Vietnamese so they may have closure. As we help them, they in turn open up and help us to locate and recover our missing.

I also attended the Health Care Committee Hearing hosted by Pat Bessigano. There were no new resolutions being presented, but she did talk in great detail about getting your medical service records (C-File) from NARA at St. Louis, Missouri. In fact, she recommended that everyone should keep a copy for themselves in case they are needed in the future to help with one’s VA claim or to help with problems that may arise later on.

There were 16 resolutions brought forward to the assembly on Thursday; out of them 9 were passed and 7 were not. One interesting resolution that passed was VB-19 of the Veterans Environmental Health Effects, that VVA calls upon the DoD, the VA, and the Department of Health and Human Services to vigorously pursue the diagnoses of exposure to petrochemicals, depleted uranium, substances of burn pits, all herbicides, tetrachloroethylene, and other toxic chemicals as well as parasites and bacteria such as burkholderia pseudomallei used in medicines. This is very important as it could also include those who were affected on bases here in the U.S. instead of just the predestinated areas overseas.

The caucuses for delegates running for the VVA officers and directors positions began Wednesday evening and continued on to Thursday. These very politically charged events at times involved backstabbing and favoritism. The positions that each of the running candidates presented were valid and precise and the decision to select any one at times was very challenging.

Our own candidate for Vice President, Fred Elliott, did an excellent job answering questions and addressing comments that came from the delegates of all nine Regions. Fred had the upper hand with the experience, distinction and knowledge needed to run as a successful Vice President, which he had already proven from his last two years in office.

Friday was Election Day. The final day that all promises and support that were made during the campaign was to make its mark on the ballot sheets. Four officers, 10 at-large directors, and finally 9 regional directors would be selected to the VVA National Organization to work on behalf of all Vietnam Veterans throughout this great country. After the polls had closed, the final Convention business finished off the day.

Saturday, the election results were presented to the convention body. Sadly, Fred Elliott had lost to his opponent, Marsha Four from Pennsylvania. The Chapter 20 delegation was devastated by the loss and again, John Rowan won yet another election term thus returning his crew to business as usual. The National VVA Organization, whether they realize it or not, has lost a valuable asset. Fred and Marie will recover from this and have stated that they will dedicate more time to the Chapter and Agent Orange issues here at home. The whole week ended after the banquet on Saturday night with the usual fanfare and awards presentations. Sunday was our day to travel home and recollect on all the events that took place over the five days of this year’s convention. Time will tell if the newly elected officers and directors will indeed fulfill their commitments and promises to our Vietnam Veterans.
CONVENTION REPORT BY PAT PUDETTI

All in all the convention was OK. Considering all of the past ones that I have attended, this was very different from the first ones. We were done with the business in two days, Wednesday half a day Thursday and a little on Friday in the AM that was it. It was nice to see a lot of old friends that I haven’t seen in many years.

My first assignment was attending the Health Care Committee and the chairperson is Pat Bessigano. She covered the different things and gave us some information that was available to the committee. She did mention to try getting copies of all your medical records for the past 7 years. It seems that a lot of the medical centers are destroying records after the 7 year time frame? Also there seems to be some problems when it comes to Medicare “B” and the V.A. Health Care? That is something that we should look into and make sure we as veterans are receiving the best medical care we can. What service is best for us?

All of your medical records are very important. You should try and get a copy of them for your records if possible. Also pass them down to your family members so they have them in case you have any problems with your health. Or your kids come down with a certain disabilities that may be related to Agent Orange.

Pat did mention that as of now, there are no Resolutions that came up for change for this year’s convention.

She did mention to check out the web site (VVA.Org) to register for Agent Orange information to be sent to you. If your go for the A.O. exam at the V.A. they will keep your name in the system and send out information to you when it becomes available. C.O.P.D. is still in research and will continue on with information that informs the veteran into the future of any changes that come along. It was brought up that 2/3 of veterans do not use the V.A. Health Care system. It would benefits all of us to tell the veterans to start to sign up at the VA’s to get their names on board to show that the VA is a main source of Health Care for the Veterans.

The Veterans Health Care Council is noticing that more and more companies are interested in becoming involved with the V.A. system.

Just a side note, veterans should look into filing a claim for Tinnitus (Ringing in the Ear). That is one of the many claims that are being applied for at the V.A. Health Care Centers.

Something you should all think about...If you are in the V.A. Health Care program or receiving Medicare/Medicaid at this time, you should be OK. If not, you fall may fall under the Obama Health care which may or may not come about soon? Did you know that you can file a secondary condition as part of your claim for Prostate Cancer? Ask a service Officer for more details. Bottom line is File the Claim....

Benefits Committee was next and the chair is John Margowski. John went over the 14 resolutions from Judicial Review to VB-29 Extent filing due date for VA Pension Eligibility Verification Reports (EVR). The only thing that was put into play was change the date from March 1st to March 31st for the dead line to have the claim submitted. One of the good resolution was this one regarding the removal of the 5% annual Deductible for VA Pension Eligibility. This is setup for the Pensioners who have to take 5% of their income, subtract that from their total income and if the remained is under the VA income limit, then that person would be eligible for Pension. Now what they are saying is that drop the 5% and just go with the income. This is for out of pocket Medical expenses. There is more to this I’m sure but the best way is to touch base with a service officer and get the updated on this.
Another important fact that was covered was Upgrade of discharges. A good point stated that the 15 year statute of limitations for the Discharge review should be waived and a meaningful access to the boards provided to all veterans.

**Veterans Benefits System (VB-11)**, the original compensation claims take an average of 127 days to decide (If all paperwork and evidence is sent in with the claim). The backlog in Compensation and Pension service went from 391,743 in FY 91 to 411,589 in FY 99. VVA in put the following request: 1. To initiate an honest assessment of what is needed, in terms of personnel and equipment, 2. To legislate mandatory spending to ensure adequate support, both in personnel and equipment, 3. That congress set and VBA meet timely standards for benefits delivery. Last, that congress expands entitlement accounts to fund VBA functions to provide timely and quality delivery of authorized benefits. The main purpose is to obviously speed up the process of filing claims and receiving hopefully benefits for the veteran or his family.

This one is simple but may be harder to get is: Reduction of DIC Survivor waiting period. Currently the time frame is about 10 years waiting period. (I think that is a bit to long, a couple of years, but still a long time.) The VVA is urging Congress to pass appropriate; legislation to have the waiting period for D.I.C. Compensation reduced from 10 years to 1 year. Some cases do take a long time to come up with the benefits, but a one year time frame would be very helpful to the survivor.

**Agent Orange Committee:** One of the big issues that came up was, Blue Water Veterans exposed during the Vietnam War. (AO-XX) This is a hot issue for veterans during the Vietnam War. It is saying, that even the veterans that where on the Blue Water, off the coast of Vietnam and have a disability that is related to Agent Orange should be given a service connection for that disability. Provided they have illnesses or disabilities related to the delayed effects of exposure to the ingredients in Agent Orange and other toxic herbicides used primarily in Vietnam. The VVA wants the Congress to move swiftly to enact H.R. 543 the Blue Water navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2013. This I feel is a large step forward in helping veterans who have disabilities that are related to Agent Orange, but are not seen by the VA as a service related condition because they were not in Vietnam.

In closing I’d like to thank the Chapter for choosing me as a delegate to attend this year’s National Convention. I was proud to represent the Chapter and its members at this year’s convention. It gave me some time to meet and talk with veterans that I have not seen in a while as well as getting the undated information on disabilities that affect our veterans. As always, the experience is one that is always helpful in working with our veterans in our community.

Arrived on August 13, about 6 hours later than we were supposed to. As our luck will go, we missed a connecting flight in Washington D. C. Val had to strong arm the airline into getting us a flight from Reagan international. We were at Dulles, so we had to get a shuttle there and we got a flight to Charlotte, then to Jacksonville.

The opening ceremony was kind of low key compared to what I have seen before. We all had chosen particular committee groups to sit in on. The idea here is that we get to hear whatever Resolutions have been proposed or modified by the committee and if needed, vote on them to go to the entire group of delegates. Later we went to caucus rooms to hear the candidates speak and let us know what their plans and/or ideas are for the VVA.

In the general session we listened to the proposed Constitutional Amendments and voted on them. Awards were handed out to various chapters and state councils.

The elections for officers and directors were a disappointment to me. Fred did not get re-elected and several of the directors that I thought would be good for the VVA did not win either.
My reflections about the National Convention recently held in Jacksonville, Florida can be summed up by paraphrasing the words of Charles Dickens in his writings of A Christmas Carol, “... it was the best of times and the worst of times.” Please allow me to explain. First, Jacksonville is no Rochester, NY, and I don't mean the people in this regard, but the weather. Can you say HOT, HOT, HOT?? So who goes to the northeast coast of Florida in mid-August for a convention? Well, 799 delegates do, and they represented the largest convention registration in VVA history.

Many of these participants were first timers, and there were many spouses attending also. Certainly there is a huge veteran population in the southeast region of our country that contributed to the attendance numbers. That was a good thing to see how many people of VVA were willing to attend and address the issues facing our generation of veterans and advocating for access to earned veteran benefits and services. Additionally, there seemed to be more women veterans in attendance at this convention over the past two that I attended. Women veteran issues, whether health services, job availability, homeless, or other issues affects not only our generation of veterans but others coming up behind us. Their needs have been ignored for a very long time and deserve attention.

The convention business is a very tiring and long process. Things like travel (which took way longer than planned going down), registration, attending day long sessions, evening caucuses, and finding time to eat in between is always a challenge and at times frustrating to deal with. Participating in activities outside of your normal routine can have their own set of challenges, so a convention setting just adds to the drama of getting things done in a timely manner. Add hot, humid weather and the challenges get a little more interesting to accomplish.

The convention business was set in a hectic pace, blocks of time were set aside to attend the needed committee meetings to review the old/new resolutions and make recommendations for votes on the convention floor. I attended the Agent Orange, Veteran Health and Government Affairs Committee sessions. Questions were brought up and addressed in all three meetings and recommendations were made to vote as needed during the floor sessions pertaining
to such committee resolutions. Nothing I attended was a serious issue that deviated from the ongoing efforts to address the very important committee issues. I’m sure that in future “Veteran” publications recaps of the 2013 convention resolutions will be published for all to read.

Of course, the convention had its share of guests, one being former Michigan Congressmen David Bonior, a Vietnam Era Air Force veteran, who back in the 1970’s gave support to our fledging organization and helped coin our mission statement, “...that never again will one generation of veterans abandon another...” Mr. Bonior gave some remarks to open the convention.

At our closing session, we were surprised by a visit and remarks from Eric Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, who recapped his agency's efforts to deal with numerous veterans' issues. He addressed the claims backlog issues, funding for more mental health care professionals, increases to the VA budgets for health, training, jobs, homelessness, and education programs. The task to go to a 21st century level of paperless filings for claims and medical records, and to ensure that all veterans obtain the highest level of quality health care and to know their options for health care services and support is daunting. He encouraged all of us to work toward spreading the word to veterans back in our home towns and to educate and inform all veterans that may not currently be enrolled in the VA Health Care system to come into the local VA facilities and learn about their earned benefits.

As at any convention, awards and commendations were given to very deserving people, some within our own NYS and Chapter # 20 delegation. NYS Council won honors for electronic newsletter and website; congratulations to all involved. So, now to the worst of times reference...sadly our very own Fred Elliott, incumbent National Vice President was defeated in his re-election bid at the convention. Fred and his lovely wife, Marie, have worked tirelessly for many years at the local, state, regional and national level for all veterans. For me and the rest of the Chapter # 20 delegation, the air leaked out of the balloon, so to speak, when we learned the results of the voting. Certainly nothing was taken for granted in Fred’s re-election bid, he has sterling credentials and a proven record of accomplishments to his credit, but this election was different. I have the utmost respect and admiration for what Fred Elliott has done not only for me but other veterans along his advocacy travels. There is frustration in this loss, but in my mind there would be more to lose if Fred Elliott had never put himself out there to continue to advocate for veterans issues that he has since his involvement with VVA. Personally, I want to say thank you to Fred and Marie for all of their time and effort on behalf of veterans everywhere.

So to close, the 16th VVA National Convention is in the books and with it my bitter sweet memories. Yes, it was a great honor and privilege to attend and represent Chapter #20. Yes, it was great to see some old friends from other states who came to Jacksonville for the 16th Convention. And it was great getting to know more about my fellow delegates and their spouses from Chapter #20, especially Mike Sanfillipo as my roommate. I returned to Rochester, NY with a renewed interest and spirit to work very hard and get the word out concerning benefits to all veterans, spouses and their families in our community. We must remember our motto, “...that never again will one generation of veterans abandon another.” Seek out that veteran you know and inform him about his earned benefits, gained from his service to our country, or have him call me! Welcome Home!
CONVENTION REPORT BY HANK WALLACE

The trip to Jacksonville was as depressing as the Jaguars football team. Our trip down was an all day, five airport misadventure. We arrived too late for the conference registration desk. Only the hotel was willing to take us in.

The opening session (Wed. AM) was, as usual, impressive and great. I especially like the standing when the flag of our branch of service is presented. As usual, we all stand for the Coast Guard (least represented and smallest service).

My observation is that we spend too much time on visiting dignitaries and politicians. The only one I valued was the head of the VA. Wednesday morning was a general session with committee meetings in the afternoon. Thursday was more general sessions followed by presentations by the officer candidates. The evenings were meet-the-candidates session in groups. We were with the folks from NJ. And PA.

Friday morning was time to vote (monitored by the local League of Woman Voters). As there were no sessions needed on Friday afternoon, a group of us went to nearby St. Augustine for lunch and time to wander around the stores and sites. That was cut short by a tropical rain and we followed the beach up toward Jacksonville.

Saturday morning was the announcement of the election results. In my opinion, the only good officer selected was the re-election of the Treasurer. There were also regional reps, most unopposed. Also elected general reps from all over. That was followed by the announcement of awards.

Saturday afternoon was largely a waste of time (my opinion again) followed by an evening banquet. I noticed a lot of folks leaving on Friday afternoon, saving the cost of two nights in the hotel and the cost of the banquet. I think Chapter 20 might consider that if we don't have any candidates.

Fred Elliott addressing the Region 7 delegates. Allen Manuel, the Region 7 Director is in the background.
The lift bridge over the St Johns River at night.

Alan Frisa out for his nightly jog.

A check is presented to the "5 Star veterans Center" from AVVA and VVA

A delegate from Florida accepts an award from VVA’s Minority Affairs Chair, Jerry Yamamoto, on behalf of the Seminole nation.
West Virginia State Council President, Dave Simmons receiving VVA's Commendation Award

Former Region 3 Director, Bruce Whitaker, thanking the body for his Commendation Award

Chapter 20’s own Nancy Switzer, AAVA President, giving her farewell address to the delegates

Betty Mekdeci, Executive Director at Birth Defects Registry for Children, speaking at the AVVA luncheon
Flying sucks! I have a 3:00 am wakeup to board a 6:00 am flight. Then there’s the TSA—an attitude, a pair of rubber gloves and a dream. Talk about never having to say you’re sorry. Heading to the Convention, we are loaded into cattle class on the torture chamber known as United Flight #5758. Missed connections and a shuttle ride between airports in DC put Chapter 20 delegates into a perpetual state of exhaustion. We finally arrive in Jacksonville 14 hours after having spent more time in airports than hero weasel Eric Snowden.

I’ve gone from rooming with Kenny Moore which is like bunking with Keith Richards but with less sleep, to rooming with Pat Pudetti which is like being with Perry Como…….only much more unnerving. A Marine through and through, Pat sleeps at attention and lines up his Q-tips while I’ve brought one set of combination underwear-bathing suit-banquet shorts. I talk to my new bride each evening for an hour and after awhile I’m suspecting Pat knows I left my charger at home. The vaunted VVA blue shirt Praetorian Guard security team has totally sold out. Small mans’ complex in an old mans’ body. These wanna-bees make the TSA look like pikers, poking and prodding the delegates who are mostly in the “Help Me! I’ve fallen down and can’t get up” stage of life. And they’re getting money from somewhere because they’re wearing Gucci combat boots and carrying more equipment than a D-Day paratrooper.

As usual, the delegates are bogged down in the pointless, draining, mind-numbing minutia of the amendments and resolutions. Change a comma here, add a semi-colon there, and insert a smiley face over yonder. First timer Lynn Gursslin soon loses his will to live and is drooling into his convention packet. He repeatedly slams his head on the table throwing splinters into my coffee. The psychological damage is significant too and he retires to the hotel bar where he begins pounding shots of his flight anxiety medicine. Joe Peck mercifully programs the VA Crisis Hot Line number into Lynn’s phone………………The New York delegation is hopelessly split over the two Vice Presidential candidates. “Marsha! Marsha! Marsha! the State Council reps coo like the Brady Bunch on steroids. Fred Elliott and Chapter 20 slog uphill through the devastation and rubble of 1942 Stalingrad. Fred, aka “The Great Satan”, addresses a mostly stacked and hostile Region 2. He deftly avoids the batteries and bricks tossed his way as he answers loaded questions. He reminds me of Davy Crockett at the Alamo except with less of a chance. We are rightfully proud of him even as Santa Ana’s Mexican Lancers overwhelm him in the vote tally.

A letter from President Obama is read to the delegates on the convention floor and Don Nealon quickly passes out the last of his Vicadin. Jerry McDermott borrows Lynn’s phone and speed dials the crisis hot line. The Godfather, Valentino Gatto, is displeased with the NYS Council and asks Mike Sanfilippo and I to make the problem go away. We go to the Hyatt Regency gift shop and put two shovels, several bags of cement and a baseball bat on the chapter credit card. I make a mental note to check the visiting hours at Sing Sing.

I finally arrive home after another punishing flight. After this grueling convention it is so good to be in the bosom of my loving family. Hey….where’s Joanne and the furniture???
AT SATURDAY NIGHT'S BANQUET

Ida and Val Gatto

Joe and LuAnn Peck

Alan and Karen Frisa

Diane and Dan Corona

Rosemary Rossi-Williams and Lynn Gursslin

Hank Wallace and Jerry McDermott
The Vice President’s table at the banquet on Saturday night
L to R: Representatives from U-Haul, Marie Elliott, Fred Elliott, Judy Guidry, Author H. Lee Barnes, Bruce Whitaker, Regina Whitaker

VVA Secretary Bill Meeks, Jr & his wife, Suzie
VVA Treasurer Wayne Reynolds and his wife, Carol.
Spence Davis, Georgia State President. He and Fred Elliott served in the 2nd Battalion, 4th Artillery, 9th Infantry Division.

Emma Stembridge, Susie and Allen Harvey - from Georgia

L to R: Larry Googins and Bill “Duckman” Laughner from Chapter 862 in Pennsylvania

If you need help tying a real bow tie – who better to ask than National Treasurer Wayne Reynolds
L to R: Elaine Simmons, Connie and John Jones, Rodney Farley - all from West Virginia

L to R: Mitch Carte and Cecilio Bezares from West Virginia

Kathy Andras of Louisiana received the President’s Commendation Medal at the AVVA luncheon

Elayne Mackey of California received the President’s Commendation Medal at the AVVA luncheon
Your delegates hard at work!

These are the men that make a difference!
Jerry, Mike, & Dan attended the Agent Orange Committee. Agent Orange was the most attended by the delegates.

Alan, Joe, Don, & Lynn attended the POW/MIA Committee.

Pat and Rose attended the Veterans Benefits Committee.
Hank attended the PTSD and Substance Abuse Committee.

Ron attended the Veterans Incarcerated Committee

And a Good Time Was Had By All!