

INTERCHANGE ONLINE



THE OFFICIAL ONLINE NEWSPAPER OF THE
NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL

Vol. 33 Issue 01

Veteran's News that needs to be Read

SPRING 2023



To All of our Members & Supporters
Wishing You Peace and Joy This Holiday Season.

May You Be Guided By God's Wisdom Throughout Life's Challenges

From

The Officers and District Directors
Of Vietnam Veterans of America—New York State Council

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Please forward your deceased members
with photo, obituary, cause of death to:

Secretary@nyvietnamvets.org

membership@vva.org

Lin4456@msn.com

Rev. Phil Salois at National



In Memorial
May They Rest In Peace

VVA Chapter #459
Daniel Polowy

VVA Chapter #704
Lou Patti

Yolanda Lopez, the Gold Star mother of Manny Lopez VVA #333





VVA-NYSC Meeting Dates 2023
 April 28, 29, 30
 June 16, 17, 18
 September 29, 30, Oct. 1

On-Line INTERCHANGE is the Bimonthly publication of the VVA-NYSC. Comments and contributions are encouraged and can be sent to: **VVAINTERCHANGE@AOL.COM**
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The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of this organization. Individuals with different viewpoints and opinions are invited to submit them to the VVA-NYSC by the **deadline**. Editor reserves the right to edit for length, grammar and reject any libelous or obscene material.

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President's Report

Ned D. Foote

Spring already? Winter has just started in my area late January. Figures though as we had to move meeting to February 4th and I will assume we had good turnout as we usually find winter meetings our best attended for whatever the reason.

I say assume because I needed to write my report before this meeting. I will be going in VA on the 7th for knee replacement. I have put this off for maybe 3 years as I am scared to have this done. Most people who have had it are happy and glad they did but does hurt for a while. I appreciate that but I only have one knee and cannot wrap my head around on how I will be able to maneuver as all my weight goes to my real knee which now will be newly replaced knee.

Oh well, I have been beat up before and I'm sure will come out of this fine. So, let's get to VVA business and not my issues. Things have been fairly quiet over the winter. Not allot going on at National. We did have a big event in Washington for Veterans Day. The massing of colors from 37 States of VVA led by our Grant Coates was a very emotional event seeing all those flags. Great job Grant, and kudos to Chapter 11 who represented our State Council in the massing.

Other news from National side: We are still waiting for the VA to accredit the Vietnam Voices of America (VVOA) Foundation to start taking claims. We hope this comes soon because it will be a few more years for Service Officer programs transitions and we can move toward that light switch. We need to move faster because the numbers of our members are passing away too fast. Just in our state we saw many pass and too many leaders have. With few of our member willing to take on leadership positions our chapters are failing. Our Chapter 896 closed this year. We have a couple more going that route.

It was said that three more conventions we will be closed. I am more skeptical thinking less than that. Much work will be needed to turn those lights out. Maybe 98% of our members can just walk out the door with no problem. The other 2% like me and our BOD have way too much to do and cannot just walk away.

Right now, there are too many questions and not enough answers. Some of our chapters say they want to keep going once National and our State is done. They can but not sure how and what the function of those chapters will be but that is up to the chapters. Hope to have answers before anything happens.

So we will be having our Convention in August in Orlando I hope most of our chapters will attend. We used to have the biggest delegation at conventions but have dropped a notch or two. Let's show VVA we are still number one!

Later,
Ned

A HEALTHY & PROSPEROUS & HAPPY NEW YEAR!



New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation

We provide grants to Vietnam Veterans of America-New York State Council, (VVA-NYSC) a veteran's service organization that advocates for legislation at the State and Federal level of government to provide housing, education, health and mental care services to veterans and their families.

We provide funding for VVA-NYSC Veteran's Service Officer program that assist veterans with their military disability compensation and pension claims from the Veterans

Administration.

We advocate for better Federal and State veteran's benefits and veteran preferences in government employment. VVA Chapters within New York State, assist widows, widowers, and orphans of our veterans. The organization organizes programs that enrich the lives of Vietnam veterans, as well as veterans from past, current wars, and their families.

We have an active Agent Orange committee that helps Vietnam veterans receive up to date information on prostate cancer, diabetes, and other chemically-related diseases.

We have an updated database of agencies that provide:

- Listings of Veteran Job Fairs offered by county or veteran service organizations;
- Counseling for veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD);
- Outreach programs that support returning veterans' reentry into civilian life;

For disabled veterans, this can be even more difficult than a tour of duty.

We do this all year long, but without your gift and the gifts of other supporters, nothing can be done to help those that are so deserving of it. However, we have much more to accomplish.

We, the New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation, have a mission to keep advocating for and helping these veterans. We ask you to join us in our mission to provide assistance, guidance, training, and education to all veterans of past, present, and future military conflicts.

So let us continue to work together to ensure our national heroes receive everything that they are entitled to receive for their sacrifice and service to our nation.

President Francisco Muñiz III Vice President Ned D. Foote

Treasurer Grant T. Coates Secretary Nick Valenti

Directors Sam Hall Stan May

You can send your tax deductible donation, to the extent allowed by law, directly to the Foundation at NY Vietnam Veterans Foundation, 48 March Lane, Westbury, NY 11590-6302.

NOTE: The Foundation has lost its fundraising contract and is in need of funds to support our Service Officer's Program. Please send donation to the above address.

Membership Affairs Committee

Ted Wilkinson, Chair

VVA Region 2 Director-DE,NJ,NY,PA

Email: yankeeted@aol.com

Phone 585-322-6722

Welcome 2023 and a goodbye to 2022!

2022 was not a good year for membership. I lost count of how many times I have had communications with national by phone, email, or in person and all I can say is national membership is like a box of chocolates; *you never know what you're going to get.*

Throughout 2022 some of the reports coming from national would be ridiculous. One monthly report had taken away one of our chapters and listed all their members as *at large*; this blunder was done in minutes, but it took months to straighten out! Another report had New York membership listed at over 12,000 members!

Many reports kept listing an active member as deceased for months even after several attempts by many people (including myself who even went so far as to contact our vice president trying fix this blunder, which was finally rectified by a couple of members making in person visit to membership office.

NY chapter 896 dissolved in August but wasn't taken off roster and transferring members for months even after several requests to get this done.

New York started the year with 6,222 members and ended the year with 6,239 members for a slight increase of 17 members while 65% of New York's 28 chapters declined in membership. 18 chapters went down in membership, 2 chapters just remained the same, while only 8 chapters were able to increase their membership.

New York started 2022 with 29 chapters but with the dissolution of chapter 896 Endicott ended the year with 28 chapters.

All New York chapters are required to attend a minimum of 2 state council meetings . VVA constitution Article II - Section 3 – Paragraph A-2

chapters attendance	<u>4 meetings -- 10</u>	<u>3 meetings -- 9</u>	<u>2 meetings -- 1</u>
	<u>1 meeting -- 3</u>	<u>0 meetings -- 5</u>	

Eligibility Guidelines Date: The eligibility date has been revised to accept an entry date as early as: November 1, 1955. These revisions have been made to the Membership Application and all documents that reflect the eligibility guidelines. We ask that you download the current documents online to replace the ones you may currently use within your chapter.

The PO Box where new member applications are sent to be processed has changed. Please download the new member application for new members to complete.

Revise and/or replace any chapter correspondence with PO Box 49030, Baltimore, MD 21297-4930.

This only applies to the NEW MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

To contact the Membership Department: Phone: (800) 882-1316 option 3;

email: VVAMembership@vva.org Fax: VVA Region 2 Director-DE,NJ,NY,PA

Email: yankeeted@aol.com Phone 585-322-6722

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Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Recruitment Strategies

When free meals for Veterans Day. I.E. *Applebee's* ask to have a membership table

Retention Strategies

- *Membership chair needs to know the VVA eligibility requirements
- *Chapter offers membership discounts and picks up the difference
- *Send the chapter newsletter to prospective members with a personalized note inviting the prospect to join
- *When prospects attend a meeting make sure they are introduced to the membership
- *Attend local fairs and events Ask for booth show the large map of wartime Vietnam
- *Get permission to set up a VVA information table at VA clinics
- *Pay towards membership for new members
- *Have a chapter recruitment contest
- *Have business cards with Chapter info for all members to carry for recruitment purposes
- *Be involved in local community volunteer events – let the community see the Chapter as local resource

Retention Strategies

- *Have food before or after the membership meeting
- *Have a 50/50 drawing at every meeting with proceeds going to offer discounts for Life Memberships
- *Display the map of wartime Vietnam at meetings
- *Have fund raiser breakfasts or dinners at local restaurants (*Applebee's* and *Bob Evans* were suggested)
- *Have interesting guest speakers at meetings – VA staff, politicians (inviting them to speak to the Chapter does not constitute an endorsement), active and retired military members who can speak on topics of interest to the membership, VVA officers and board members, local community leaders, business owners with products or services of interest to the membership
- *Get involved in local community volunteer events
- *Make all meeting attendees feel welcomed at every meeting

**2022 VVA
Members by
Age Group**

	March '22	Nov. '22	
AGE GROUP	COUNT	COUNT	CHANGE
59 - under	2	2	0
60 - 65	30	28	-2
65 - 69	4469	4,596	127
70 -74	29,958	30,268	310
75 - 79	39,426	39,526	100
80 - 84	8,406	8,274	-132
85 - 89	1,993	1,896	-97
90 - over	781	712	-69
unknown	4,035	3,942	-93
TOTAL	89,100	89,244	144

Secretary's Report

Francisco Muñiz III

I am sorry that I was not able to attend the last VVA-NYSC meeting due to having the Covid 19 virus. I survived so many exposure but it finally got to me. Physician put in in quarantine so that I would not expose any of my family members including delegates at the meeting.

Even though I did not attend the meeting, Ned blame me for his positive results. He stated that he had spoken with me over the phone!

Sorry for the delay in the first edition of the year but we did not have a January meeting so things got behind in production.

Thanks to all who sent in their reports in a timely manner. Hope to see at the next State Council meeting.

Please let me know if the content of this newspaper is what you are looking for or give me some input on how to improve our publication. Thanks for your support

Agent Orange Report PLEASE READ AND SHARE

Bill Paton – Chair



You might have recently learned that the [PACT Act](#) could impact your care and benefits. But did you know it also expands health care eligibility for many Veterans? The PACT Act began one of the largest expansions of VA benefits in history.

If a Veteran you know hasn't enrolled in VA health care before, here are some details you can share to help them get the care they've earned and deserve:

Vietnam Era Veterans

*Vietnam Era Veterans who served in these locations and time periods are eligible to apply for enrollment now:

*Republic of Vietnam between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975

*Thailand at any U.S. or Royal Thai base between January 9, 1962, and June 30, 1976

*Laos between December 1, 1965, and September 30, 1969

*Certain provinces in Cambodia between April 16, 1969, and April 30, 1969

*Guam or American Samoa (or their territorial waters) between January 9, 1962, and July 30, 1980

*Johnston Atoll (or a ship that called there) between January 1, 1972, and September 30, 1977

SAVE THE DATE**VIETNAM VETERANS REMEMBRANCE DAY****WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 2023**

Legislative Committee Report

Bing Markee

Re: 2023 New York State Legislative Session

Dear President Foote,

Allow me to reiterate, once again and as always, that it is my distinct honor and privilege to represent VVA-NYSC as your lobbyist at the state level in New York. I am humbled to have been your representative at the state government since 2007, embarking on our 17th legislative session together!

I have attached a copy of our letter of authorization, which has been duly filed with the Commission on Ethics and Lobbying in Government. As you are aware, this authorization is required by law for the two-year period beginning with each odd-numbered year.

The New York State Legislature's 2023 scheduled legislative session commenced on January 4. As a result of the fact that there were numerous freshmen legislators elected in November, the allocation of offices and staff for both the senate and assembly has yet to be completed as of this writing. Further, because in odd-numbered years all legislation that has not passed must be re-numbered if the sponsors wish to re-introduce it, bill drafting has been working feverishly, and as of this writing there are more than 7,000 bills in print.

Senator Brooks, who served as Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Veterans, Homeland Security & Military Affairs for the last four years, lost his bid for re-election. Assembly member Didi Barrett, who served as Chair of the Assembly Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs for the last four years, was named chair of the Assembly Standing Committee on Energy.

Senator Brooks has been replaced as chair by newly-elected Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton, assembly member Barrett has been replaced as chair by Assemblywoman Kimberly Jean-Pierre (Please note that women legislator may choose between the titles of "Assemblymen" or "Assemblywoman: to precede their surnames, which explains the disparity in the titles of the former and current assembly chairs named in the previous sentence.)

With respect to Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton: I have know Senator Scarcella-Spanton since before her election, as she was a staff member for former Senator Diane Savino, a personal friend and ally of mine for more than 20 years. I have met with the new chair and her staff several times since the beginning of session.

With Respect to Assemblywomen Kimberly Jean-Pierre: I did not know Assemblywoman Jean-Pierre personally before her ascendancy to the chair. Several of my colleagues from my other clients have had more interaction with here since her first election several years ago, and have nothing but good to report. Nonetheless, I have had several meetings with her staff since the beginning of session.

As we have promised them, historically, when new chairs were named to the respective veterans' committees, they have both assured that you will meet with them as soon as practicable; further, I have assured them of VVA-NYSC's commitment to all veterans, regardless of when or where they served, and that we will assist with any and all veteran-related legislation. Additionally, **(Continue on pg. 9)**

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as we have done historically, formal letters of welcome were delivered (by me, by hand) to each of them.

The governor's executive budget proposal was submitted Wednesday, February 1st. We will be writing formal request letters shortly to each chair seeing funding in the final FY2023-24 budget for VVA-NYSC. As you know, over the past several years we have successfully increased what was a long-standing \$25,000 annual amount allocated to VVA-NYSC significantly, to \$100,000, and hope to continue that.

As the legislative session progresses, I will apprise you of legislation and initiative VVA-NYSC should support, formally or informally.

I look forward to working with the new veterans' committee chairs, both of whom are eager to move veteran-related issues forward.

Very truly yours, and Semper Fidelis!

Bing Markee - President

Bing Markee & Company, Inc.

Legislative Advocacy

PTSD COMMITTEE REPORT

Tom Harris - Chair

Depression-what a downer of a topic....

First, my apologies for not being here in real life, again. I'm realizing that with all the stuff going on in our world today, Covid, wars, storms, getting older, that those suffering from PTSD maybe having a much more difficult time.

Today's topic is depression. As you all know from years of my reports depression is a symptom of PTSD. But, what is more prevalent is guys our age just being depressed with the PTSD kicker.

Researching the causes of depression will lead you in all sorts of directions depending on what you read or who you talk to you. I also believe there are many levels of depression ranging from a case of the blues' to being almost paralyzed to face the world.

Some of the signs of depression include sadness, memory problems, anxiety, hopelessness, helplessness and irritability. If you're like me today, you can probably check off at least half of those boxes. But you're not alone, one in ten older vets is diagnosed as depressed. Major Depression was the leading cause of disability in the USA and veterans with depression account for 14.3% of the total VA health care costs.

Personally I have found myself trying to figure out just what's been going on with my thoughts and moods for the last few years. I know that depression can be genetic and I always knew that could bite me in the ass someday. Second, this whole Covid pandemic has taken a toll on my family. NOT that we have had covid but just the fear that we could get it. (It wouldn't be a simple mild symptoms and get over it.) Third, I personally ran into a gauntlet of health issues that remind me that I'm not longer invincible. Fourth, after doing a lot of research, I learned that half of the medications I am/was taking have a side effect of depression or mood changes.

So, with all this knowledge you'd think I would figure out how to decrease the power that depression has on my life. Wrong. But I'm work at it. Since its winter in upstate NY I also recognize that SAD is real. Seasonal Affective Disorder. I try to get outside every day and take in some sunshine. **Continue on pg. 10)**

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When I'm feeling down I may take a deep dive into what's bugging me, sometimes I may even write stuff down (I eventually throw these self-notes away). When I think about what's got me down solutions often appear. If this doesn't work I remind myself that there are some chemistry things going on in my brain that I just can't control right now. I accept that and move on...I'm fortunate enough to share every day with a toddler who just keeps me laughing (seriously, not all the time). For some of you talking to people close to you about anything helps. Lastly there's meds and therapy when you really need to get passed a rough spot.

Basically, the message here is depression can be just an intermittent case of the blues or an all-out attack on your being. You're not alone in this. It's what makes us normal. Don't let it control you, recognize it and find a solution that works for you.

Health/Aging Veteran Committee Report

Tom Harris—Chair

About Doctors...

Bet you're all really tired of hearing about Covid, RSV, Flu, vaccines and treatments. SO, I just won't bring up those topics and how they affect older guys like us.

But what I'll share is an adventure that I'm going through (last year or so) that has taught me some lessons. (I've been playing whack-a-mole with a team of doctors)

Okay, don't even let me start talking about all my ailments.

What I've learned to do when going to doctors' appointments is:

1. I read articles about what's wrong with me so when the doc starts talking I know what he's saying, I hate surprises. I ask my wife to join me if I know I can't hear a particular doctor well or if it's important decision making appointment.
2. I go in with a list of questions and notes that I want the doc to hear. Although several of my docs share the same computer system, I don't trust that they've read anything the others have reported. I bring the test results or reports with me. I used to feel like a fool but I'm older and wiser now. I've also recently learned to say "No, what's plan b". I realize that I'm going to get maybe 15 minutes with a doc and don't waste a second of time (actually I do).
3. Medications, I hate meds, especially when the doc says you need to take this forever. My problem is with side effects. I was schooled by one doc years ago about 'side effects'. I guess if the side effects work for me than I'm cool with that; but more often than not the side effects (not to be confused with adverse reactions) I get are in the negative column. (I'm trying to remember, did I promise to NOT make this report about me, the Chief Whiner. Anyway, back to the doc, he told me that you just have to suck it regarding some side effects.
4. Still on side effects: I was taking a steroid for bronchitis. The same one I've taken three other times in a year. But this last time the dose was higher and longer. Don't you know, I became a super jerk, guess they call it "mood swings". Well mine didn't swing. Others call it 'roid rage'. I was horrible. I knew what was happening but couldn't change it. Anyhow, we all lived through that episode and lesson learned. Know the possible side effects when you're taking drugs.
5. Read the warnings and goggle the reviews on drugs if you are unsure or if it's new.

To be honest, I'm scared about my health lately. People depend on me. I make it a priority to be cautious and consider what's important.

In closing, please be smart about your own health, control your health care and take care of each other.

Peace, tom h

Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America (AVVA) NEWS

Lori Paton - President, NYS AVVA

On January 25th of this year, NYS AVVA lost our past president, Kathy Penfield. Kathy served as NYS president for six years. Please remember her and her family in your thoughts and prayers.

According to the membership report dated 12/31/22, NYS has 706 AVVA members. Region 2 has a total of 1,841 members. If your chapter has an AVVA chapter, please encourage a representative to attend a state meeting. It is also important, at this time, for all AVVA chapters to think about incorporating in NYS. Region 2 director, Bobbie Morris, is the incorporation chairman and she will help you through the process.

National AVVA is starting a new program called "Heartbreak to Hope". The seminar teaches how to start a grief support system in your area.

On a local level, AVVA Chapter 77, had a busy year in 2022. We became the first chapter in New York to be incorporated. In October, we had our first fundraiser which was very successful. At Christmas, we provided 129 gift bags and 117 lapghans to veterans in nursing home facilities. With help from a local parish, we were able to distribute gifts to 54 children from 19 veteran families, all of which were clients of VVA Chapter 77's food pantry.

In closing, I hope that everyone stays healthy and that all AVVA chapters continue to prosper. See you in April!

Government Affairs Committee Report

John Rowan – Chair

Item 1 : New Legislative Chairs in NYS Legislature

The new Chair of the NYS Assembly Veterans Committee is Assembly Member Kimberly Jean-Pierre from the 11th District in Babylon, Long Island. She is of Haitian-American descent.
(jeanpierrek@nysassembly.gov, 631-957-2087)

The new Chair of the NYS Senate Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs Committee is Senator Jessica Scarcella-Spanton from the 23rd Senate District which covers North Staten Island and parts of South Brooklyn including Ft. Hamilton and Brighton Beach. Her husband is an Army 100% disabled Afghanistan Veteran. (spanton@nysenate.gov, 718-721-9426)

Please let me know if you have any contact with either of these legislators.

Item 2: PACT Act Implementation

The VA is now taking claims for any of the new presumptions for Post 9/11 Veterans, as well as VN era presumptions for VN era vets in Thailand, Cambodia, etc.

VN vets are now covered for long term care. Contact a VSO for details.

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Any veteran, no matter the type of discharge, can get help for PTSD at no charge.

Item 3: Aging Veterans

VVA National's Government Affairs Office is preparing a "white paper" on aging veterans (us). In 2020 almost 9 million veterans were 65 or older, over 2 million are Vietnam veterans. Not surprisingly older veterans are in worse health, "The VHA has been providing quality care for older veterans for decades."

The VA is learning to adjust to providing more home care, especially to VN veterans.

Maintaining their staff levels is proving difficult for the VA. (This is true for the private sector also. The nurses' union in NYC went on strike for a few days on the issue of staffing as much as increased pay. JR) Also like the general health care services the VA is having trouble serving the rural community, thus the need to increase the number of clinics (CBOCs).

Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) Report

Danny Friedman – Chair

VA New York Harbor Healthcare System:

VAVS has been renamed and rebranded as the VA Center for Development & Civic Engagement (CDCE). This is nationwide.

New York Harbor is still without a permanent director or CDCE chief. Both positions have been re-posted. I was honored to be asked to represent the VSO's by being on the interview panel for the CDCE Chief position (Voluntary Service Officer).

VAVS Representatives and Assistant Reps are still meeting quarterly via video conferencing. Staffing remains the major issue for almost all positions.

The Domiciliary on the Brooklyn Campus remains closed since the onset of COVID.

VA Finger Lakes Healthcare System (via Jerry McDermott)

The VAVS Reps have not been meeting. In place they are sent a report from management and all who receive it are marked as present. There is a section for feedback.

Many events around the holidays were cited and it appears that traditional VAVS services continue.

No other reports were received.



Veterans Incarcerated and In the Justice System Committee Report

Nicholas C. Valenti - Chair

The crochet squad at the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Service Facility located in Auburn, New York is in dire need of yarn in order to continue functioning. If you have yarn you wish to donate you can call my home phone at 315-252-4535. If no one answers simply leave a voice message or email me at nickvalenti46@yahoo.com. If that doesn't work for you there is a third-way we can do this. Just bring your yarn donation to the State Council meeting at Tioga Downs this upcoming meeting. This would be April 29th in Nichols, New York. Just give me a heads up that there will be yarn there. I have made almost every Council meeting for the past decade. If you cannot make the April meeting there are two (2) more meeting dates scheduled for the calendar year: June 17th and September 30th. Looking forward to seeing you..

The ability of the successor veteran organization to VVA Chapter #205 – the Veterans Group of Auburn (VGoA) - has been seriously hurt by their inability to produce items for their annual giveaway. This group, in order to function, could use as many as sixty (60) skeins per week. The items they produce include toys, stuffed animals and baby blankets to name a few. In 2022 there was no giveaway program at Auburn Correctional. It is the first time in recent memory that has occurred. I have been working with incarcerated veterans in Auburn and attending the giveaway program for approximately twenty (20) years. If we can get supplies donated to the crochet squad, they in turn will produce the items to be donate for the 2023 Giveaway Program. Just as a reminder to all, the **BANNED** colors are BLUE, BLACK, GREY, ORANGE and MULTICOLORED yarn.

It has been a long, rough time for all New York State Correctional Facilities. Overcoming the pandemic and cessation of so many socially interfacing groups like veterans organizations and group initiatives like the crochet squad – giving back to local communities - have had a negative impact on those incarcerated who are attempting to do something more with their lives than mark time. There is so much that needs to be reinstated. The more time it takes, the harder it becomes. The best we can do is to keep going forward and continue to be a force for our veteran brothers and sisters who are incarcerated.

Our motto remains intact: “Never Again Will One Generation of Veterans Abandon Another.”

New York State Division of Veterans' Services

The New York State Division of Veterans' Services (DVS or Division) advocates on behalf of New York's Veterans and their families, as individuals and as a group, to ensure they receive benefits granted by law for service in the United States Armed Forces.

The Division provides free benefits advising. Experienced and dedicated advisors — each a Veteran — work in a network of field offices across the state and offer Veterans and their families with professional help to resolve social, medical, and economic matters.

Veterans Benefits Advisors assist the claimant — whether a Veteran, spouse, child, or parent — in completing applications, obtaining necessary documentation, and filing claims for a broad spectrum of federal, State, local, and private Veterans' benefits. Veterans Benefits Advisors also assist by responding to follow-up correspondence and, appealing an unfavorable ruling.

By working closely with other State, federal, local, and private agencies, the Division of Veterans' Services utilizes the expertise and resources of others to help Veterans and their families with specific needs, such as economic, employment, rehabilitation, medical treatment, home health care, education, and tax exemption.

TALK TO A BENEFITS ADVISOR

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If you need assistance, or just want to learn more about the benefits and services you may be eligible for, schedule an appointment with one of our Veterans Benefits Advisors, all veterans themselves.

Call 1-888-838-7697 to speak to an advisor.

Team Members:

Director Viviana DeCohen

Appointed in December 2021, Viviana DeCohen became the Director of the New York State Division of Veterans' Services.

A veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, Viviana DeCohen previously served as the Commissioner of the Mount Vernon Veterans Service Agency, and Associate Pastor at Mt. Vernon Heights Congregational Church.

She has dedicated her time and talent to assisting veterans, ensuring food, shelter, clothing, education, employment, and a little motivation, earning her the affectionate title of "Mama V."

Her military service allowed her to earn a Bachelor's in Behavioral Science, and a Master's in Health Service Management, both from Mercy College where she received her start formally working with veterans and developing programs to enhance their academic and overall wellness.

She is currently pursuing her Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Gerontology, at Concordia University, Chicago.

Executive Deputy Director Joel Evans

Joel Evans is the Executive Deputy Director for the New York State Division of Veterans' Services. In his current role, he oversees the daily operations of the agency throughout the State and works closely with both the director and executive staff to ensure the highest quality services and programs are available for veterans, service members, and their families. He has been with the agency since November 2007 when he was hired as a State Veterans Benefits Advisor.

Mr. Evans joined the U.S. Navy in 1984 and served as a torpedoman until 1996. He participated in Combat Operations during Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm. In 1996, he started his Naval Recruiting Career. His last four years of service were in the Hudson Valley working in Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess, Ulster, Sullivan, Rockland, and Orange Counties. He retired from the Navy in August 2007 as a Chief Petty Officer. Mr. Evans is a native of Brooklyn, New York.

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Deputy Director Michael Bocchini

Michael Bocchini is a Deputy Director of the New York State Division of Veterans' Services. In this role, he supervises teams of Veterans Benefits Advisors and support staff throughout the eastern region of New York State. He joined the agency in 2017 after serving as Chief of Staff at the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service. Prior to this, he worked for several labor unions including the United Food and Commercial Workers Union and the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association. He has also held an adjunct faculty position at George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management. He currently resides in the West Village.

Deputy Director of Administration Jason Chakot

Jason Chakot is the Deputy Director of Administration for the New York State Division of Veterans' Services. In this role, he assists with ensuring a productive workflow, execution and tracking of Human Resources and fiscal matters within the agency. He joined the agency in September of 2010 and served in multiple roles. As a U.S. Army veteran, he takes pride in the fact he continues to serve Veterans, Service members and their families.

Veterans Education Program Manager William Clarke

William Clarke is the Veterans Education Program Manager for the New York State Division of Veterans' Services, Bureau of Veterans Education. In this role, he facilitates the efforts of the agency in promoting and safeguarding quality education and training programs, ensuring greater education and training opportunities, and protecting the integrity of the G.I. Bill for veterans.

Mr. Clarke joined the Navy in 1982 and served as a Storekeeper Chief Petty Officer on several submarines until he retired in May 2006.

Deputy Director Paul Romesser

Paul Romesser is a Deputy Director of the New York State Division of Veterans' Services. In this role, he leads the teams of Veterans Benefits Advisors and support staff throughout the Western Region of New York State. He joined the agency in 2013, where he served as a State Veterans Counselor and Associate Training Technician prior to assuming the duties as Deputy Director.

Mr. Romesser is a retired Marine Master Sergeant. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1986 to 2008. As a Marine, he served as an infantryman, personnel administrator, and career recruiter. Upon retiring from the U.S. Marine Corps, Paul served for five years as the Dean of Students at Western New York Maritime Charter High School. Paul is married with three children. His oldest son is a U.S. Marine Corps Osprey pilot and his daughter is a U.S. Army Quartermaster Officer & Jump Master.

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Special Assistant for Outreach Activities Morgan Woodson

Morgan Woodson is the Special Assistant for Outreach Activities for the New York State Division of Veterans' Services. In this role, she leads a team that supports public programming and initiatives for the veterans of New York State and their families. In addition, in addition to traditional outreach activities for veterans, her team is increasing efforts to reach women, minorities, and faith-based veterans.

Ms. Woodson joined the U.S. Air Force in 2007 and served as a pharmacy technician at Travis AFB, CA. She medically retired in 2011 after returning home from Afghanistan.

As a native of WNY, she earned her bachelor's degree in business administration from Medaille College and her master's degree in Public Administration from Hilbert College.

Western District Report

Bill Paton

VVA Chapters #20, #77, #193, #268, #459, #865, #978

Western District Report

Bill Paton – Western District Director

All is not quiet in the Western District. We mourn the passing of Kathaleen Penfield past President of New York State AVVA. Our prayers are with her husband Walter (Skip).

Scott Dieter, President of Chapter 193 in Warsaw has been in the hospital battling a bacteria and is just now on the upside of mending and looking forward to rehab and possibly going home before you read this.

Reverend Bob, Chapter 978 was looking forward to coming to the meeting and ran into the darn flu bug before he could get out the door. Hopefully he's feels much better by now.

Mixed feelings on hearing Jerry McDermott and his wife Linda were moving to Florida. Jerry was always very informative and gave me some inspiration on a bad meeting day, which will stay between us. His contributions just in Chapter 20s newsletters were outstanding. He will be missed.

Some people keep asking the same question what does the future hold. I will give the same answer. As of now no one knows, so we continue on working as hard as we can to bring everything together. I'm sure at our next meeting in April, there will be a better turn out and a more positive tone as we head into a convention year!

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VVA Chapter 268 Report

Gordon Bellinger Treasurer

March 2023 is the 50th anniversary that the Vietnam Veterans Prisoner of War (POW's) came home from the prisons of North Vietnam, the Vietnam Veterans of America, Niagara County Chapter 268 will be honoring General George E. "Bud" Day and Master Sergeant John T. Anderson there last state side address was Niagara Falls, New York before being capture by the North Vietnam Army.

Honors to General Day and Master Sergeant Anderson will be on display at the Niagara County Court house, Lockport, New York, March 1st until March 31st.

General George E. "Bud" Day



In 1942, Col. Day joined the U.S. Marine Corp, serving in the Pacific during WW II. He then served in the Army Reserve, the Iowa National Guard and the U.S. Air Force beginning in 1951. He was flying F-84 fighter jets in Korea. Col Day was also an accomplished attorney in Iowa. Remaining in the Air Force, he served with the 107th Tactical Fighter Squadron in Niagara Falls, NY, flying F-100 fighters before being assigned to Tuy Hoa, Vietnam.

On 26 August 1967, Colonel Day was forced to eject from his F-100 aircraft over North Vietnam when it was hit by ground fire. His right arm was broken in three places, and his left knee was badly sprained. He was immediately captured by hostile forces and taken to a prison camp where he was interrogated and severely tortured. After causing the guards to relax their vigilance, Colonel Day escaped into the jungle and began the trek toward South Vietnam.

Despite injuries inflicted by fragments of a bomb, he continued southward surviving only on a few berries and uncooked frogs. He successfully evaded enemy patrols and reached the Ben Hai River, where he encountered U.S. artillery barrages. With the aid of a bamboo log float, Colonel Day swam across the river and entered the demilitarized zone. Due to delirium, he lost his sense of direction and wandered aimlessly for several days. After several unsuccessful attempts to signal U.S. aircraft, he was ambushed and recaptured by the Viet Cong, sustaining gunshot wounds to his left hand and thigh. He was returned to the prison from which he had escaped and later was moved to Hanoi. Col. Day

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served 5 years and 3 months in captivity.

Col. Day, after serving in three wars, is the most highly decorated aviator in American history. His decorations include the Congressional Medal of Honor presented to him on March 26, 1968 by President Gerald R. Ford.

Col. Day died on July 27, 2013 and is buried in the National Cemetery in Pensacola, Florida. He was posthumously awarded the rank of Brigadier General on March 27, 2018.

March 2023 is the 50th anniversary that the Vietnam Veterans Prisoner of War (POW's) came home from the prisons of North Vietnam, the Vietnam Veterans of America, Niagara County Chapter 268 will be honoring General George E. "Bud" Day and Master Sergeant John T. Anderson there last state side address was Niagara Falls, New York before being capture by the North Vietnam Army.

Master Sergeant John T. Anderson



John T. Anderson enlisted in the Army National Guard at his hometown of Niagara Falls, New York on May 16, 1947 at age 16. He went on active duty with the U.S. Army on December 31, 1947, ultimately serving as a broadcast specialist.

On 2 February, 1968, Sgt. Anderson was serving as the Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge of Detachment No. 5, American Forces Television Station, Hue, South Vietnam. That day the enemy attempted an armed attack upon Hue and the Detachment 5 quarters. This was part of the Communist "Tet Offensive". Sgt. Anderson, without hesitancy, courageously took an uncovered position in the quarters living room. Armed with a shotgun he defended this position for more than 16 hours against several enemy attempts to gain entry into the house. During this period, he was severely wounded by enemy grenade fire and was under constant exposure to enemy small arms fire. Throughout the ensuing battle, Sergeant Anderson was instrumental in warding off several enemy attempts to overrun the detachment's position. His position was later overrun and he was held as a Prisoner of War until his release on 5 March 1973, after spending 1,858 days in captivity in very harsh conditions. Sgt. Anderson was awarded two Silver Stars for his heroic actions.

While in captivity, Sgt. Anderson was able to make three escape attempts. First, he made it about a mile, then passed out because of his wounds. The second time he managed to get farther but walked right into the middle of an enemy military camp. The last time he was nearly beaten to death with bamboo clubs by women in a North Vietnamese village.

When Sgt. Anderson returned home to Niagara Falls in 1973, he was greeted with a large welcome ceremony and a parade through the city.

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In December 1985, the Army renamed its annual "Journalist of the Year" award the "MSgt John T. Anderson Military Journalist of the Year" award.

John Anderson died on April 1, 1988 in Niagara Falls, while working for the U.S. EPA and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Eastern District Report

Sam Hall

VVA Chapters #8, #49, #79, #140, #333, #541, #869

VVA Chapter #333 Report

Ray Furlong - President

Our Vice President Donnie Pillar continues to struggle with the effects of Covid ,although there is some improvement in his condition. Al Dagistino our Veteran of the year and Hall of Famer had Covid as well. Al called me yesterday to let me he is in the hospital recovering from surgery to have his appendix removed from a recent attack of Appendicitis. Lets hope our brothers have a speedy recovery and will be back in action soon.

Roy Tushudy

ldtrt16@aol.com

For your next article regarding the Interchange newspaper. VVA Chapter 333 has ended our Hand cycle program after a ten year period that began in 2013. Unfortunately the rising costs for these particular items have almost tripled in cost since the inception of our program which makes our task in fund raising endeavors almost impossible to keep up with.

So, we as a committee have chosen to now make this program part of our legacy, a program that over those years provided 13 Hand cycles, two Trike Bikes, one Outrigger Canoe, One Kayak and two Mountain Bikes.

Chapter 333 has spent well over \$100,000 on these items along with personal gear for the recipient veterans. These veterans were all properly vetted prior to receiving their wish, veterans both male and female and from all corners of our wonderful Country.

It should be noted our first recipient is from New York State, Freddy De Los Santos, and our final candidate is Dexter Alejandro who resides in Florida. The final cost of the Hand cycle for Dexter was \$12,137.00 and that was courtesy of a financial discount to us. Chapter 333 will continue to fund raise for other endeavors as well, there are many worthwhile causes for us to assist and contribute to. On a personal note to you Francisco, it was my pleasure to have met you and become friends.

I thank you, Ned, and the board for all the hard work you perform for not only our State chapters but veterans as a whole.

I hope we may be able to meet again at some other venues in the future, be well and God bless.
Your Friend, Roy Past president (2020-22) VVA Chapter 333

Southern District Report**John Rowan****VVA Chapters #11, #32, #72, #82, #126, #421****Southern District Report**

See Government Affairs report on page 11 in this issue.

VVA Chapter 72 Report – Brooklyn, NY

Danny Friedman - President

Since the onset of COVID, VVA 72 lost our meeting space at the Brooklyn VAMC. Richie Chan, our Secretary and Membership Chairman organized Zoom meeting for the next two years, which help keep us together. In 2022 we were invited to meet in the Memorial Hall of VFW Post 107 in Gerritson Beach, Brooklyn. Initially we planned on it being a temporary fix, but now it is our permanent meeting space. We still have office space at the Brooklyn VAMC which remains our official Chapter mailing address.

For this past holiday season Chapter 72 focused on supporting our hospitalized and homeless veterans, which is our primary mission. The inpatient substance rehab ward of the Brooklyn VAMC (15 West) has been our adopted ward for over 30 years. We provided Pizza parties for them in September, October and November. In September we purchased about \$1500.00 in new clothing and sneakers for hospitalized and homeless veterans distributed in conjunction with VAVS. In December we had a holiday party for 15 West, with 6-foot heroes, beverages and clothing to help get them through the winter. We also provided similar gifts to the 48 veterans at the SUS Homeless Veterans Shelter in Bushwick, Brooklyn. Also in December we celebrated the holidays as well as our Chapter's 40th Anniversary with a good time at our new home.

We apparently have been reenrolled in the VVA Household Goods Program. They have started advertising and picking up in Brooklyn for a few months now, which is good, except nobody told us. We still wouldn't know about it if some of our members didn't receive their post cards or see their truck. We are told it is on a trial basis so we will see how it plays out.

We have not forgotten our VVA brothers and sisters in Kentucky and Florida who have suffered horrific damage from floods and hurricanes. Our Chapter, as well as many individual members, has sent significant donations to our State Councils there.

We look forward to working with the new director of New York Harbor Health Care System, Timothy Graham, who came on board two weeks ago. We are still waiting on the Harbor to fill the position of Chief of VAVS (now called CDCE). They had to re-announce the position.

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VVA Chapter #82 Report

Rich Guevara 1st Vice President

Chapter 82 Accomplishments Spring 2023

On November 7 members of Chapter participated in the Veterans Day Parade in New York City.

On the same day members of the Chapter provided the firing detail and spoke at the Hicksville Veterans Day ceremony.

On November 9 we provided the color guard to the Nassau County “Salutes Women Veterans Past and Present” ceremony at the county Supreme Court Building.

On December 5 our color guard opened the Town of Oyster Bay’s holiday celebration at the Tillis Center.

On December 7 our color guard and members of our chapter provided the color guard for the Dropping of the Roses ceremony. These roses were loaded on a plane in Farmingdale and dropped off the waters of the Statue of Liberty in remembrance of Pearl Harbor.

On December 3 we provided the color guard for the Nassau County Chamber of Commerce annual breakfast.

On December 10 our color guard participated in the Gary Breiton football game at Bethpage High School.

On January 10, 2023 Arturo Edwards, an active member of Chapter 82, was awarded by the Town of Oyster Bay the Martin Luther King, Jr. “Distinguished Service Award” in recognition of his outstanding leadership.

On January 10, 2023 members of Chapter 82 presented our annual donation to the Hagedorn Little Village School for Special Children. This school is highly regarded for providing outstanding educational and therapeutic services for children with developmental disabilities.

On January 17, 2023 the Chapter presented college scholarships to 15 well deserving high school students.

Vietnam Vets Visit the Hagedon Little Village School for Special Children

HLVS was the recipient of a donation from VVA Chapter #82 – Nassau County. Chapter #82 has been bringing Holiday Cheers and donating to HLVS for the past 40 years.

This year they will utilize the donations to purchase additional items for their new “ Activity Center Room.” This room is utilized by all of the classes in the Center, enabling all of our students the opportunity to use these highly requested toys and activities.

Present for the donation was Chapter President Steve Bonom, 1st Vice President Rich Guevara, Chapter member Kevin Carpenter.

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CHAPTER MEMBER PROFILE**VVA Chapter #82 Member****Arturo J. Edwards: The Honorable Life of a Farmingdale Veteran**

Spend some time in Farmingdale, and you just might bump into one Arturo Jerome Edwards. This humble man with a gentle smile has lived in Farmingdale for 8 years, and is notable for his soft voice and thoughtful words. Keen observers might notice he dons a “Vietnam Veteran” hat, hinting at the unexpected turn his life would take, and subsequent years of honor, sacrifice and service.



Edwards was born and raised in Panama, Central America. He immigrated to New York in 1964 around the age of 18 with his cousin, Joseph Wallen. Merely a year later, both were on their way to Vietnam; they had been drafted into the war. At the time, Edwards was not nervous, mostly confused. “I was new. I just came from Panama, and I knew very little when I was drafted.” Still, he went on to serve during a period of great danger and conflict. After two years, Edwards returned home without much ceremony. His cousin Joseph did not, killed in 1966 at the age of 19.

Edwards fought in Vietnam from May 1966 to November 1967. He achieved the rank of staff sergeant and would remain an active member of the United States Army Reserve for another 16 years. Following his time in Vietnam, Edwards joined the New York City Police Department, and served with distinction for almost 20 years before retiring to Farmingdale.

On April 20, 2019, Edwards was celebrated at a homecoming more than 50 years overdue. At the Cradle of Aviation Museum, the Long Island Air Force Association held their 28th medal ceremony to honor veterans that have been under- or unappreciated since their return from service. Edwards was one of 32 local Vietnam veterans honored.

At the event, then-state Senator John Brooks of Seaford addressed the audience, “The men we honor today are heroes in every sense of the word. They did the duty that they were called upon to do, but sadly upon their return they were not welcomed home the way they should have been.” On June 22 of the same year, Edwards’ name was unveiled along with 260 other Veterans on the Walls of Honor at Veterans Plaza in Eisenhower Park, East Meadow.

In June of 2022, Edwards was able to pay respects to his cousin when he flew to Washington D.C. and visited the Vietnam Memorial. Joseph’s name was engraved among the over 58,000 **(Continue on pg.23)**

who lost their lives during service. The trip was sponsored by Honor Flight Long Island, who, until that June, had only been flying out WWII and Korean vets.

Edwards was also the recipient of the 2023 Martin Luther King Jr. Distinguished Service Award. According to Town Supervisor Joseph Saladino, “This prestigious award is presented each year to noteworthy recipients in recognition of their outstanding leadership, achievement, adherence to the principles of a just society and continued involvement in support of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream.” It was clear Edwards was the perfect candidate, even though he at the time had no idea he was nominated.

Upon finding out he had been selected for such a notable honor, Edwards was thrilled. “‘That’s fantastic,’ I said. I didn’t put in [an application] for it, the Town of Oyster Bay Board wanted to give it to me.” Saladino continued, “Mr. Edwards is dedicated to the service of fellow Americans, to his nation and our town. This prestigious recognition reflects upon the incredible leadership and courage of Martin Luther King Jr. and also on the contributions being made every day in our community by incredible people – people who make a difference day after day.”

Edwards’ years post-retirement have been heavily devoted to his fellow veterans. He belongs to a number of groups, including Amvets Post 21, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2952, and the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 82. He also serves as a Town of Oyster Bay Distinguished Veterans Advocate. Occasionally, Edwards does research and lectures for other veterans, and enjoys one-on-one sessions to really get to know one another. It is common to spot him at summer veterans events across Long Island, especially during Memorial Day or the Fourth of July.

Edwards has felt overall positively about having the ability to interact with fellow vets. It can be difficult and isolating after returning home from service, and communal support – especially from those who know what it’s like to go through the same or a similar experience – is crucial. And he has been able to find a lot of support within his community. There is a VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) organization in Farmingdale, which he has been to and quite likes. Edwards joined another VFW in Plainview when a good friend invited him, and has been able to form many close connections there.

However, Edwards does note that there is always room for improvement in veterans’ support. In particular, mental health and housing are services which fall short for Vietnam vets. “Veterans need these things, and there are ways to help them, but we still have a long way to go. Working on the mental health of veterans, and helping them find housing, are super important,” he says.

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Another issue stemmed from the nature of the Vietnam war, which created a lasting ostracization felt by many of its veterans. Vietnam veterans have not historically had the homecoming experiences of their WWII and Korean War counterparts. Many veterans went underground upon their return to the United States and are still unaware of the services that are available to them. This is a big concern of Edwards. “We need to help get the word out to veterans. Many of them still do not know they are eligible for the services that are out there.”

Thankfully, Edwards has seen public attitudes towards Vietnam veterans changing in recent years. Non-veteran attendance at honors or memorial events has increased substantially. “I get more positive responses these days, from the public, good responses. Most people say that we deserve it –“ respect, recognition, so on – “people acknowledge it, not like years ago, and they will listen to you and your stories now, which is a good thing.” Edwards and other veterans have risked their lives, and he hopes people will not forget this, regardless of their personal feelings about a particular war. He has lived an unexpected life, but a very rewarding one. “I am proud to be a Veteran,” Edwards says. “It’s been an honor for me to serve this country.

Retired United States Army Staff Sergeant Arturo Jerome Edwards was awarded the Martin Luther King, Jr., Distinguished Service Award.

VVA Chapter #421 – Staten Island, NY

Salvatore Napolitano

Our Chapter President Gene DiGiacomo delivered his end of year message:

Once again, the Holiday Season is upon us and the new year to follow. It is the time when we can enjoy our loved ones, both family and friends, in the traditional way this beautiful country has afforded us. I guess it is safe to say that we are all now well into our senior years. Yes, I know that hurts especially when those words “Golden Years” pop up. I personally take exception to them especially when my grandson calls me out to throw the football around or the wife says it’s time to go outside and put out all the Christmas decorations. What used to be easy now takes deep thought and hard planning along with whatever meds needed to soothe the aftermath.

On the brighter side look at what we have accomplished. Despite what Mother Nature and Uncle Sam have thrown at us “WE ARE STILL HERE”. And because of that, look at what we have, family, friends, and ourselves, brotherhood included.

So, my message is short. We were not afforded a pause or stop button so let us enjoy what we have.

We have all made our marks in life, so it is time to encompass that and enjoy what we have.

Always put some time aside to remember the ones that are no longer with us.

Do not let the past consume you, enjoy the now and leave the future to the young, it is their turn now.

God Bless and remember - **ALWAYS BROTHERS**

On September 9th we had a renaming of fields at MacArthur Park in honor of SSGT James Cooney and PFC John Tamburri.



Mark Kelly, Joe Skinner, DA McMahon, Walter Warren, Frank Russo

On the 18th we held our annual POW/MIA ceremony attended by local Dignitaries including Congresswoman Malliotakis.



Frank Russo, Gene Digiacomio, Walter Warren, Nicky Castoro

VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park on Staten Island was first erected in 1988 on New York State owned property named Memorial Park.

It was the State's responsibility to maintain the grounds, but that didn't happen. Our Chapter was limited to what it could or could not do with respect to maintenance of the park. As such, time was taking its toll on the park.

In 2012 with the help of State Representative Michael Cusick we were able to secure the rights to the grounds. It was at that time that the grounds was renamed to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park.

This past year we completed the beautification of the park. The various construction stages of the project were recorded. Not only were they recorded but they were turned into a documentary video which I feel should be shared with you.

At the February 27 meeting there will be a special showing of this video to our Chapter member. **I invite all of you**, to look back into the past when the Memorial was first completed and witness the amazing transformation of this beautiful park.

The video can be seen on our website <https://vva421.org> à MEMORIAL PARK à Memorial Park Historical video.

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Photo by Marie Russo



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- February 4th is the Legion of Honor awards
- March 5th Staten Island St. Patrick's Day parade
- March 26th FDNY celebration of 102 year old firefighter Mr. Joseph Aquaro
- March 29th Wednesday Richmond County District Attorney Michael E. McMahon and Staten Island Borough President Vito J. Fossella VIETNAM VETERANS WELCOME BREAKFAST



Central District Report**Nick Valenti****VVA Chapters #85, #103, #377, #480, #704, #708, #803, #827, #896, #944****Central District Directors' Report**

Nicholas C. Valenti

The Wall That Heals, has been updated to a three-quarter scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial along with a mobile Education Center. This teaching and healing exhibit is coming to Auburn, New York at the City of Auburn Falcon Park Baseball Complex and will be open 24 hours a day and free to the public. The Wall That Heals honors the more than three million Americans who served in the United States Armed Forces in the Vietnam War and it bears the names of the 58,281 men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam.

These exceptional and outstanding healing and teaching resources for our citizens and school children will be open to the public beginning on Thursday, September 14, 2023 through 2:00 PM on Sunday, September 17, 2023.

The Wall That Heals will arrive by Special Escort to Auburn on Tuesday September 12, 2023. Volunteer are being sought to help with the set up of The Wall on Wednesday, September 13, 2023 starting at 8:30 AM.

The three-quarter scale Wall replica is 375 feet in length and stands 7.5 feet high at its tallest point. Visitors will experience The Wall rising above them as they walk towards the apex, a key feature of the design of The Wall in Washington, D.C. Visitors are able to do name rubbings of individual service member's names on The Wall.

The mobile Education Center exhibit includes: digital photo displays of "Hometown Heroes" – service members whose names are on The Wall that list their home of record within the area of a visit.; digital photo displays of Vietnam veterans from the local area honored through the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Foundation's (VVMF) In Memory program which honors veterans returned home from Vietnam and later died because of their service in Vietnam; video displays that teach about the history and impact of The Wall; educational exhibits told through items representative of those left at The Wall in D.C.; a replica of the In Memory plaque; a map of Vietnam and a chronological overview of the Vietnam War. The exhibits tell the story of the Vietnam War. The Wall and the time surrounding the conflict are designed to put American experiences in Vietnam in a historical and cultural context.

There are two other sites in New York State that will host The Wall That Heals in 2023: New York City, from September 28th – October 1st and Lindenhurst (Long Island) from October 5th – October 8th. There were more than 100 communities seeking the opportunity to host in 2023. VVA #704 Auburn, New York is proud to have been chosen.

We are looking forward to seeing our brothers and sisters from upstate New York visit us and share comradery.

Unfortunately, not all was good news for #704 since the December District Report. We lost another member and former Chapter president Lou Patti. Lou died on New Years Eve, December 31, 2022. He was our longtime president who brought stability and a gentle hand to the Chapter members. A kind thoughtful person,

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Lou lent his support to other Chapters such as #377 out of Dryden, New York. That Chapter travelled to Auburn to pay their respects to a man that showed that you can be a leader without a lot of noise. Chapter #704 wishes to thank #377 and its members for joining them in paying respect to Lou and his family at the wake and having a color guard for the interment at Sampson Veterans Cemetery in Romulus, New York. The men and women of the Dryden Chapter have endeared themselves in the Vietnam Veterans family. Their president Gary Napieracz leads by example and he has established himself as the heart and soul of the Chapter. Thank you once again VVA Chapter #377.

The Chapters that make up Central District are: #085 Oneonta, #103 Syracuse, #377 Dryden, #480 Oswego, #704 Auburn, #803 Elmira (home of the Vietnam Veterans Museum), #827 Herkimer, and #944 Utica. Each of these Chapters is keeping their fingers on the pulse of the veteran community while very publicly living by the motto "Never Again Will One Generation of Veterans Abandon Another. Their presidents are men who help keep our light burning bright. We have seen Chapter #896 Endicott close as well as Chapter #205 Auburn Correctional Facility. I still stay in contact with these chapters and work with them as much as they want.

Our issues are the very issues that plague the veteran community in every nook and cranny of our State. They include but are not limited to substance abuse – the substance is either alcohol or any drug depending on availability and access. Homelessness is a much talked about issue despite the VA dedicating resources to help Veterans in crisis. Calling the Veteran Homelessness Hotline can bring resources to bear on the problem. In addition to Veterans, we need to encourage working with surviving spouses of Veterans who have not remarried to see if they could be eligible for benefits from the VA. The new presumptive conditions identified in the PACT Act opens the door for more inquiries.

One of the most frustrating hurdles to overcome is finding Veterans who are either misinformed or uninformed about benefits that they could use and seeing if anything has been changed and what is available. Where the resistance comes from is uncertain, but it is there and very difficult to overcome.

The main reason for outreach is to prevent small issues from becoming big issues. If a Veteran seeks assistance a crisis may be averted. We are dependent on the Veteran being receptive so that there can be a desired effect.

It goes without saying each Chapter works hard to make it work. I would greatly appreciate hearing from them even if it is in bits and pieces. We need to make our presence known until such time as the next way of veteran advocates, takes over.

For More Information / Assistance:

Veterans Suicide Hotline: call 988 press 1 or text 838255 or chat online through the VA Mental Health Website: <https://www.va.gov/health-care/health-needs-conditions/mental-health/>

Homeless Vet Hotline: 877-424-3838

VA Health Benefits: 877-222-8387. <https://www.va.gov/health-care/>

VA Dental Benefits: <https://www.va.gov/health-care/about-va-health-benefits/dental-care/>

Women Veterans Call Center: 855-829-6636. <https://www.va.gov/health-care/health-needs-conditions/womens-health-needs/>

Legal Resources: <https://www.va.gov/OGC/LegalServices.asp> also, <https://www.nysda.org/page/AboutVDP>

Domestic Violence Assistance: <https://caphelps.org/programs/programs/>

NYS Veteran Employment Assistance: <https://dol.ny.gov/services-veterans>

Water Assistance: <https://otda.ny.gov/programs/water-assistance/>

VA Education Benefits: 888-442-4951. www.va.gov/education/

Low Income Energy Conservation Assistance: 1-877-NYSMART. <https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/All-Programs/EMPower-New-York-Program>

Other Energy Conservation Programs: <https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/All-Programs#category=homeowners>

Origin of quoted information and assistance is the Cayuga County Veterans' Service Agency.

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LOU PATTI PAST PRESIDENT VVA CHAPTER #704

Lou was a president whose strength lay in his willingness to guide others in a low key but decisive manner. He never raised his voice nor used his position to make people do what needed to be done. He led by example. When he asked a Chapter member for help in completing a task – he already knew what it took to do that task. A quiet leader, he conducted a lot of business at his dining room table with grandchildren happily playing around the house. It was at one of those afternoon sessions that he lent his ideas on the development of the Cayuga County Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Also present was our Chapter Chaplain Jerry Fulmer and myself. We brought our ideas to the Chapter membership and they were enthusiastically supported. He allowed for a fluid exchange of ideas and embraced everyone's vision. In a nut shell "he allowed things to happen." Prior to Lou's tenure as Chapter president, we produced our own poppies. Without hesitation his home became the center for making these homemade items as they became the focal point of our fundraising initiatives.

A separate poppy was made for each of the 29 Cayuga County Vietnam casualties. The information included name, rank, branch of service, date of death and the panel location of their respective names on the Washington, D.C. National Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

He worked with the Quilters of the Finger Lakes and arranged the passing out of blankets to any veteran from any service year in recognition of their military contribution to America. This joint venture saw some 500 quilts distributed throughout the county at so many venues that I cannot begin to remember. Lou was a supporter of VVA #377 and attended numerous events that included but not limited to the annual Fire Watch at Myers Park in Lansing, New York. He also enjoyed working with Chapter president Gary Napieracz. He attended several fundraisers conducted by #377 and when time allowed he would commit to going to some of their special meetings.

Lou died on New Year's Eve, December 31, 2022. He found yet another way for us to remember him. His love of God, family and country helped to move VVA # 704 forward and be a force in the Veteran community he loved so much. Lou will be remembered and thought of fondly by those who met, worked or collaborated with him. Until we meet again rest in peace brother and warrior.

Nicholas C. Valenti Member, VVA Chapter #704

Wreath Across America

Members of Chapter 377 Vietnam Veterans of America from Dryden, New York, participated in Wreaths Across America at Sampson Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Romulus, New York on Saturday December 17, 2022. Participating members were Jim and Patty Jones, Fred Dexter, Ron Dexter and Dale Van Benschoten, and Cheryl Wunder.

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VVA National News

For more than 40 years, VVA has lived up to our founding principle, “Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another.”

We are especially proud to see that our fight to change the public perception of Vietnam veterans has paid off, and our newest generation of veterans is coming home to a warm welcome from a very supportive country.

With your support we can continue to honor all veterans and ensure they receive the respect and the gratitude they so rightly deserve.

Our brothers and sisters; sons and daughters—*our grandchildren*—all benefit from our efforts. The future of our nation is dependent on the young men and women who raise their hand to uphold our Constitution.

As Vietnam veterans, we fought for the first laws assisting veterans suffering from Agent Orange. We are ecstatic about the recent passage of the *PACT Act*, the most comprehensive bill to date that addresses the health effects of Military Toxic Exposures.

We have come a long way, but much remains to be done. Thank you for joining VVA in supporting veterans, communities, and those serving in harm’s way.

Jack McManus

VVA National President

Are the sacrifices of the veterans lost in the Beirut Barracks or at the Embassy in Benghazi any less a sacrifice than those lost in Fallujah, Iraq, or Khe Sanh, Vietnam?

To divide one veteran’s service, based upon its distinction in time or location at the expense of another veteran’s equally honorable service, is an injustice to all veterans.

For more than 40 years, VVA has lived up to our founding principle, “Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another.”

And for more than 40 years, support from generous and patriotic Americans has helped ensure millions of veterans receive the respect and benefits they earned through their service.

VVA’s work is grounded in a principled belief: The willingness with which our young men and women are likely to serve in any war is directly proportional to how they perceive veterans in the past, and today, are treated and appreciated by the nation.

Let all those who have served in our nation’s defense be known simply as American veterans. We are the honored and proud few.

Jack McManus

VVA National President

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**Vietnam Veterans of America Bids
Farewell to the National League of Families,
Stands With the Families of the Missing**

(Washington, D.C.) – “Since its charter in 1970, the National League of POW/MIA Families has been an indomitable force in its determination to achieve the return of all Prisoners of Wars, the fullest possible accounting for the missing, and the repatriation of all recoverable remains,” said VVA President Jack McManus. “It is with heavy hearts that we receive the news of the dissolution of this fine organization. The League has changed the course of history, and the way, we, as a nation, deal with the accounting of our war missing.”

“To the families of our missing and unaccounted for comrades, we stand with you. As Vietnam veterans, we will not allow the families of the missing to lose their voice in Washington, D.C., in Southeast Asia, and elsewhere around the globe,” said McManus. “VVA’s most solemn priority remains the fullest accounting for those last-known alive, those known to be in captivity who were not returned at the end of the War, and those missing from the battlefield.”

“Time is of the essence,” noted McManus. “We cannot afford to lose sight of our mission. “Witnesses are dying, remains are disintegrating, the landscape is changing. In the absence of the League, we must double our efforts for the families of those who have not yet returned from home. We will continue to ensure that funding is allocated on Capitol Hill and that repeated delays in funding don’t interfere with putting recovery teams in Vietnam and Laos—ensuring that the recovery of Vietnam War losses remain the Number One priority.”

“In March, Vietnam Veterans of America will convene a POW/MIA summit with our VSO and MSO partners on behalf of the families of our fellow combatants who are still not home from our long-ago war,” said McManus. “VVA will be here for them until we are gone.”

Summary of Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations for Veterans Affairs, Programs and Related Agencies

The Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies bill (H.R. 2617, (P.L. 117-328). The FY2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act) for fiscal year 2023, provides the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and related agencies with \$135.2 billion in non-defense discretionary funding, as well as \$168.6 billion in mandatory funding. This is \$34 billion above fiscal year 2022 levels. The bill further provides advance appropriations for fiscal year 2024, including \$128.1 billion for veterans' medical care and \$155.4 billion for veterans' benefits.

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) – \$134.7 billion in discretionary appropriations for VA, an increase of \$22.5 billion above the fiscal year 2022 enacted level and \$328.7 million below the President’s budget request:

*\$118.7 billion for **Veterans Medical Care**, an increase of \$21.7 billion above the fiscal year 2022 enacted level and equal to the President’s budget request. This will provide care for 7.3 million patients expected to be treated by VA in fiscal year 2023. This amount includes:

\$13.9 billion for **Mental Healthcare, including \$498 million for suicide prevention outreach. This will support the nearly 2 million veterans who receive mental health services in a VA specialty mental health setting, as well as support suicide prevention services like the Veterans Crisis Line.

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*\$2.7 billion for **Homeless Assistance Programs**. This funding will enhance VA's ability to reach homeless veterans.

*\$337 million **Rural Health**, \$10 million more than fiscal year 2022, to support improved access to care, including expanded access to transportation and telehealth.

*\$1.9 billion for **Caregivers**, \$493 million more than fiscal year 2022, to help VA implement this program consistent with Congressional intent.

*\$840.5 million for **Women's Health**, equal to fiscal year 2022, for gender-specific healthcare services, as well as initiatives and improvements to healthcare facilities.

*\$183.3 million for **Substance Use Disorder** programs. This funding will help support care for the over 540,000 veterans who had a substance-use disorder diagnosis in 2021. Additionally, \$663 million is for opioid abuse prevention, an increase of \$41 million above the fiscal year 2022 enacted level and equal to the budget request.

*\$86 million for **Whole Health Initiatives**. This will enable VA to expand and improve a program that focuses on veterans' overall health and well-being.

Additionally, \$128.1 billion in advance of fiscal year 2024 funding for Veterans Medical Care, equal to the President's budget request. This funding will provide for medical services, medical community care, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities.

VA Non-Medical Care Programs - VA non-Medical Care programs, which are \$1.2 billion above the fiscal year 2022 enacted level. This amount includes:

*\$916 million for **Medical and Prosthetic Research**, an increase of \$34 million above the fiscal year 2022 enacted level and equal to the President's budget request. This funding will allow VA to fund approximately 2,697 total projects and partner with more than 200 medical schools and other academic institutions.

*\$1.76 billion for **VA Electronic Health Records Modernization**, to continue implementation of the VA Electronic Health Record Modernization initiative, \$741 million below the fiscal year 2022 enacted level and equal to the President's budget request.

*\$3.86 billion for operating expenses of the **Veterans Benefits Administration**, an increase of \$409 million above the fiscal year 2022 enacted level and equal to the President's budget request, to ensure the prompt processing of disability claims and efforts to continue reducing the disability claims backlog.

*\$2.1 billion for **VA Construction** programs, equal to the President's budget request. Within this amount, \$1.45 billion is for Major Construction and \$626 million is for Minor Construction.

*\$150 million for **Grants for Construction of State Extended Care Facilities**, an increase of \$100 million above the fiscal year 2022 enacted level and equal to the President's budget request. This increase will allow VA to provide more grants to assist states in constructing state home facilities, for furnishing domiciliary or nursing home care to veterans, and to expand, remodel, or alter existing buildings.

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*\$5 billion in new mandatory funds for the **Cost of War Toxic Exposures Fund**, established to support costs related to providing veterans and their families with the benefits and care associated with the eligibility expansions included in the Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-168).

*Additionally, \$155.4 billion in advance mandatory funding for VA benefit programs.

Related Agencies - \$442.7 million in discretionary appropriations for related agencies, an increase of \$8.5 million above the fiscal year 2022 enacted level and \$700,000 above the President's budget request. This amount includes:

*\$156 million for **Arlington National Cemetery**, including \$60 million to continue the urgently needed Southern Expansion project that will create 80,000 additional burial spaces. This is equal to the President's budget request.

*\$87.5 million for the **American Battle Monuments Commission**, equal to the fiscal year 2022 enacted level and \$700,000 more than the President's budget request. This will support continued maintenance of the graves of 124,000 American war dead in overseas cemeteries, as well as visitor and education services for the more than 3 million visitors expected to visit these sites in fiscal year 2023.

*\$152 million for the **Armed Forces Retirement Home**, \$75 million above the fiscal year 2022 enacted level and equal to the President's budget request. This will support the needs of the over 800 residents at the two retirement home campuses and invest in life and safety infrastructure improvements, including construction funds for the renovation of the main resident building on the Washington campus.

*\$46.9 million for the **Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims**, \$5.2 million above the fiscal year 2022 enacted level and equal to the President's budget request. This increase supports the planned temporary expansion, which will improve the court's capacity to adjudicate appeals in a timely manner.

Additional Veterans Bills

Cleland-Dole Act – The Joseph Maxwell Cleland and Robert Joseph Dole Memorial Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2022 will:

*Expand eligibility for VA hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care to include all veterans of World War II.

*Establish a clinical pathway for prostate cancer, along with increased research.

*Cut bureaucratic red tape for veterans who receive clothing allowances. These veterans will no longer need to reapply annually.

*Increase oversight of health care providers to ensure veterans receive high quality care.

*Improve measurements of wait times for the community care program and pilot scheduling.

*Extend eligibility for GI Bill and Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E) during national emergencies so educational benefits are not left unused.

STRONG Veterans Act - The Support the Resiliency of Our Nation's Great (STRONG) Veterans Act of 2022 is a comprehensive mental health package that addresses mental health care provided by the VA, including provision to:

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Strengthen VA's mental health care workforce, expand care options, and support mental health research at the Department.

*Improve the Veterans Crisis Line's (VCL) staff training, management, and response to veteran callers at risk of suicide.

*Strengthen the Solid Start program, which was created by VA in 2019 to contact every veteran three times by phone in the first year after they leave active duty service to check-in and help connect them to VA programs and benefits.

*Designate one week per year as "Buddy Check Week" to organize outreach events and educate veterans on how to conduct peer wellness checks.

*Expand VA's peer specialist support program, established through the VA MISSION Act, to all VA medical centers.

*Expand Vet Center eligibility for counseling and related mental health services to family members of servicemembers or veterans of the Armed Forces who died by suicide.

*Require VA to report to Congress on the Department's Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL) program and assess the number of VA medical centers, institutions of higher learning, non-college degree programs, and student veterans supported by the program.

*The package also includes provisions to improve mental health outreach to Native American veterans and minority veterans, bolster VA's outreach to justice-involved veterans, expand Vet Center eligibility to student veterans, and allow Native American tribes to participate in VA's Governors' Challenge veteran suicide prevention program.

*Please go to [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) to view Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations for Veterans Affairs, [H.R. 2617](https://www.congress.gov/bills/117/2617), (P.L. 117-328)

Final phase of the SBP-DIC Offset Phased Elimination is February 1, 2023

Beginning on February 1, 2023, surviving spouses will receive their full Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) payment from DFAS and their full Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payment from the VA. This is because February 1, 2023 will be the first SBP annuity payday after the SBP-DIC Offset is fully eliminated, which takes effect January 1, 2023.

Source: [Defense Finance and Accounting Service > RetiredMilitary > survivors > SBP DIC News \(dfas.mil\)](https://www.dfas.mil/retiree/survivors/sbp-dic-news)

Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts: A Look at the Next Army Enlisted Leader's Combat Record Military.com | By [Steve Beynon](#)

Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Weimer is set to become the [Army's](#) next top enlisted leader in August, replacing Michael Grinston, who is due to retire shortly after the handoff.

Weimer brings a significant amount of combat experience to the position, some details of which are being publicly reported here for the first time, including details on multiple [Purple Hearts](#) and Bronze Stars for valor.

He takes the role as the service transitions from two decades of the Global War on Terror to what would superficially appear to be peacetime, with Army planners having given themselves a self-imposed deadline to shift equipment and doctrine to be ready for large-scale conventional warfare by the 2030s.

The service's top enlisted leaders all have come from combat arms roles, mostly with infantry, cavalry or artillery backgrounds, and typically have thick combat resumes, going back to the service's first top enlisted leader, William Wooldridge. Wooldridge landed on French beaches on D-Day and was later awarded two Silver Stars, one for actions during the Battle of Aachen in Germany and another during the Battle of the Bulge.

Details of Weimer's awards come from their respective citations, which were reviewed by Military.com, though most contained limited specific information on operations.

All awards were for actions in Iraq, where Weimer appears to have served with 7th [Special Forces](#) Group, based on a review of his official bio and the years he was with that unit. Weimer was not made available for an interview ahead of this story's publication.

On April 2, 2003, Weimer, a sergeant first class at the time, received a Purple Heart and Bronze Star medal with "V" device for valor while serving as an assault team member and team breaching specialist -- the soldier typically in charge of taking down doors and other obstacles as part of raids on buildings, often with explosives.

"Sergeant First Class Weimer demonstrated extreme courage in the face of the enemy assault," the bronze star citation reads. "During the course of the battle, Sergeant First Class Weimer courageously completed his tasks despite the hail of enemy fire impacting all around him, the arduous terrain, and a nebulous threat environment that posed at considerable risk in order to eliminate the threat to his teammates and members of his unit."

For actions on Sept. 4, 2004, Weimer, a master sergeant at the time, earned the Joint Service Commendation medal with "V" device for valor.

"Master Sergeant Weimer displayed the highest degree of professionalism, sound judgment, and technical and tactical competence during the extremely sensitive Secretary of Defense directed operation," the award says. "His exceptional leadership and his untiring pursuit of excellence were major factors in his element's ability to successfully accomplish its mission."

It is unclear what operation Weimer participated in that earned him the Joint Service Commendation, but 2004 was an especially bloody time in the war in Iraq. That same September week is when [U.S. fatalities topped 1,000](#).

On April 11, 2005, Weimer, still a master sergeant, was a part of a helicopter assault on a "well defended" enemy position as he and his team came under heavy fire. During that fight, Weimer killed multiple enemy personnel, including a suicide bomber, earning him a Bronze Star with valor device, according to the award citation.

Just a month later, on May 2, Weimer and his team came under heavy fire while in a helicopter. He later organized treatment for multiple wounded soldiers, earning him another Bronze Star with "V" device.

"Master Sergeant Weimer came under an intense enemy attack on his unit's helicopter," according to the citation. "He displayed valorous courage, sound judgment, and exceptional proficiency while conducting treatment and triage of four wounded comrades, his actions were paramount to ensuring mission success and the safety of the wounded, through his distinctive accomplishments."

Weimer was wounded again, two years later on Jan. 1, 2007, earning another Purple Heart, though the citation has no specifics behind the injuries or mission.

Weimer will be the first top enlisted leader to have served his entire career in [special operations](#), earning

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his green beret in 1996 and serving as a weapons sergeant. He spent most of his career with 7th Special Forces Group and various roles in Army Special Operations Command.

Out of the 16 sergeants major of the Army so far, three others have some experience in special operations but all spent a significant chunk of their careers or started out in the conventional Army.

Glen Morrell, who served as sergeant major of the Army in the mid '80s, initially served in artillery units before moving into Special Forces and deploying twice to Vietnam with 5th and 8th Special Forces Group as a heavy weapons sergeant; he later worked in intelligence.

Richard Kidd, who was the sergeant major of the Army in the early '90s, was a Green Beret but spent the bulk of his career in regular units and overseeing training programs. George Dunaway, the second sergeant major in the Army, sitting in the role from 1968 to 1970, served in 1st and 5th Special Forces Group during the Vietnam era, after spending the first half of his career in the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions.

-- Steve Beynon can be reached at Steve.Beynon@military.com. Follow him on Twitter @StevenBeynon. Printed with Permission Military Times

Court Overturns Ruling That Would Have Given Some Vets Extra GI Bill Money for More School Military.com | By Patricia Kime

A federal court has overturned an earlier decision that would have allowed veterans to receive up to an additional year of education benefits under the Montgomery and Post-9/11 GI bills, a judgment that will be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, the plaintiff's attorneys say.

Last month, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit [reversed a 2021 ruling by a three-person Federal Circuit panel](#) that would have let [Army](#) veteran James Rudisill receive the maximum amount of education benefits stipulated in the GI bills.

Attorneys argued that Rudisill, who served as an enlisted soldier in the Army from 2000 to 2002 and as an officer from 2007 to 2011, was entitled to the maximum allowed by law from the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#), up to 48 months from both programs.

The VA's attorneys have asserted that the law creating the [Post-9/11 GI Bill](#) limits entitlement to one program or the other, based on what the veteran selects.

A three-judge panel sided with Rudisill in July 2021, but the federal government petitioned for the case to be heard by the full court. In its decision, handed down Dec. 15, the court ruled that the law states that if a person has some used benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill program and elects to receive benefits under the Post-9/11 program, the benefits will be limited to one month, or a partial month, of entitlement under the Post-9/11 GI Bill for each month of unused benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill.

The statute is "unambiguous," the judges wrote.

But Rudisill's attorneys say the decision "upends traditional understandings of veterans' educational benefits being earned for specific qualifying service." Since Rudisill had different periods for which he qualified for different benefits, he should be able to use them both to the maximum allowable amount, they said.

"[The decision] really turns the whole thing on its head," said Timothy McHugh, an attorney for law firm Troutman Pepper who has taken the case pro bono. "It turns how GI Bill programs as a whole have worked over the years on its head by disregarding qualifying service and saying no, the thing that matters is whether you are entitled to one benefit or the other."



The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 greatly expanded education benefits for veterans and their families over the Montgomery GI Bill, increasing coverage for tuition and fees, housing, books and more, and also allowed for transferability to dependents.

In 2021, 73% of veterans served by the VA for educational benefits used the Post-9/11 GI Bill, at a cost of \$9.1 billion. About 58,000 veterans used either the active-duty or Selected Reserve version of the Montgomery GI Bill, totaling \$268 million.

Rudisill used 25 of his 36 months of eligibility under the Montgomery GI Bill early in his career to earn his undergraduate degree so he could return to the Army as an officer. He did not use any of his Post-9/11 GI Bill after earning his commission.

After Rudisill left the Army, he decided to return to the service as a chaplain and applied to use his Post-9/11 GI Bill to attend Yale Divinity School. He believed that he was entitled to 23 months of additional benefits, to max out at 48 months. The VA said he was entitled to nine additional months, for a maximum of 36.

According to data provided to Rudisill's attorneys under the Freedom of Information Act, 2,099,627 veterans received Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits and gave up some other form of educational benefit in the process.

Another 650,000 were limited to accessing their Post-9/11 benefits until after they exhausted their Montgomery GI Bill benefits.

McHugh said his team will file a writ of certiorari in February petitioning the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of his client and all affected veterans.

"This was meant to be something designed specifically in recognition of wartime service and, specifically, arduous service," McHugh said. "It was meant to be an expansion or an additional benefit on top of the Montgomery GI Bill and not something that was either/or."

-- Patricia Kime can be reached at Patricia.Kime@Military.com. Follow her on Twitter at [@patriciakime](https://twitter.com/patriciakime).

VA publishes new Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry data

All 50 states, District of Columbia and five other jurisdictions

Recently, VA launched a new webpage that shows the number of [Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry \(AHOBPR\) participants by state and congressional district](#).

The current webpage contains breakouts as of Sept. 12, 2022, for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five other jurisdictions (Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, United States Virgin Islands and Northern Mariana Islands). The data will be updated biannually.

Section 808(b)(2) of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022 (PACT Act) requires VA to make information public about the number of participants in the [Airborne Hazards](#) and Open Burn Pit Registry (AHOBPR) by State and congressional district.

The [PACT Act](#) expands health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, among other toxic substances.

About the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry

The [AHOBPR](#) is designed to collect data from eligible Veterans and service members about their exposures and health during service. Information provided through this registry helps VA better understand whether long-term health conditions may be related to military exposures.

Eligible participants can complete an online questionnaire and have the option to have a free health evaluation to discuss health concerns regarding military exposures. More than 346,544 participants have joined since the launch of this registry in 2014.

To learn more about the registry, visit <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/participants.asp>.

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My Vietnam War Slide Show

Slideshow sent to me

-----Original Message-----

https://youtube.com/watch?v=OpnHRmmL4_4&feature=share

Vietnam helicopter pilots describe the war from the cockpit

<https://youtu.be/6toXHd0xGdg>

The Vietnam War - 1st Infantry Division Full Length Historical Documents

<https://youtu.be/3TmrudvpXv0>

Helicopter Door Gunners in Vietnam - The Shotgun Riders | US Army Documents

https://youtu.be/I8KFprP8G_Q

Screaming Eagles in Vietnam | The 101st Airborne Division | US Army

<https://youtu.be/YDzNQ771RLQ>

DWYER Hosts a New Radio Show “Thank You for Your Service” on WRCR 1700 AM. It will be aired on the 4th Monday of each month at 9:30am. It will be hosted by Rockland Dwyer Director Mark Woods and our next show is scheduled for Feb 27th. We will discuss Veteran issues with special invited guests and promote various Veteran events in and around Rockland County. Veterans can call in and ask questions about Veterans issues. The number to call in is: 845-429-1700. Please tune in to listen and spread the word throughout our Veteran community!

Archived episodes can be listened to at:

<https://www.bridgesrc.org/programs-services/vet2vet/> or <https://open.spotify.com/episode/43jD5NLPAPdTQdi9tz5Ngp>

Click on Links to view video. Thanks to Roy Tushdy from VVA #333

"Here's to us who fought for it,
the sheltered shall never know the price,
or glory, of freedom"
by an anonymous Vietnam soldier.



PACT Act Fraud Prevention

Have you recently been contacted by a company aggressively seeking to legally represent you in filing presumptive VA claims authorized by the [PACT Act](#)? If so, be wary as the company might be seeking a portion of your VA benefits.

Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022 (PACT Act) represents the biggest expansion of Veteran benefits in history, and many Veterans may be eligible to receive compensation for their service. The PACT Act adds 23 burn pit and toxic exposure-related conditions to VA's list of service presumptions, including hypertension, with the expansion of presumptions related to Agent Orange exposure by including Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Guam, American Samoa, and Johnston Atoll as locations for Agent Orange exposure.

While this legislation brings great promise to Veterans, it's also a monumental opportunity for fraud. VA has received multiple reports of unaccredited law firms or companies targeting Veterans to offer their services to file claims for presumptive conditions. Unaccredited law firms and companies are reaching out to help for a fee as high as 40% of the Veteran's retroactive payment and 40% of the Veteran's first year of entitlement payments.

VA is committed to help protect Veterans from predatory entities, by educating Veterans, their families, and all partners about the types of activity and tactics being used against them.

To avoid being a victim of these schemes, here are some helpful tips to remember:

Apply directly to VA. You may submit your application securely [online](#) via [VA.GOV](#) or in person at any regional office. You may file your claim directly with VA, and VA will help you gather the necessary evidence to support it. There are no costs or hidden fees to apply. Do not agree to pay an unaccredited individual or organization a percentage of your disability compensation payment or retroactive entitlement. If you need help filing a claim, there are [accredited representatives](#) to assist you.

- **Be cautious of aggressive law firms or companies.** Firms may use frequent communications (phone, text, and media messages) to establish a sense of urgency.

Be cautious of for-profit companies that use VA's name. They may alter their name to create a false association with VA and establish legitimacy. Examples include a website such as [VAclaimsassistance.com](#) that incorporates VA into its name.

- **Review all legally binding documents thoroughly.** Never sign a blank form someone else will fill out later or give them full discretion to act on your behalf. See the contents before you sign and keep a copy for yourself.

- **Be wary of media advertisements regarding legal representation for presumptive VA claims.** Companies advertising legal services may be predatory and financially motivated to obtain your VA benefits.

If a company or individual is projecting misinformation or has questionable business practices regarding VA entitlements, file a complaint with the [Federal Trade Commission](#) at and the [Better Business Bureau](#).

To report suspected fraudulent activity, please contact the VA Office of Inspector General ([OIG Hotline](#) [\(va.gov\)](#)).

Veterans and survivors who think they might be eligible should apply for PACT Act benefits right now. Go to [va.gov/PACT](#) or call 1-800-MYVA411 for more information.

By protecting Veterans' benefits against fraudulent activity, you can help honor their service and sacrifice.

Investments in veterans' health: Veterans are [twice as likely](#) as their civilian counterparts to experience food insecurity. Particularly since the onset of the pandemic, New York has developed creative ideas to address veteran food insecurity, including programs to deliver free meal kits to veterans and their families across the State. Now, Governor Hochul has announced plans to expand the FreshConnect program, which provides checks for veterans experiencing food insecurity to get fresh produce and other food items from farmers markets. That's another great initiative.

Yet perhaps the most critical issue facing New York's veteran community, [veteran suicide](#), wasn't addressed in the State of the State. Suicide rates among veterans are twice as high as among the civilian population. And although the rate of veteran suicide in New York State appears to have stabilized in recent years, warning signs suggest that progress is fragile: rising drug overdose deaths, firearm use in suicides, and nationwide increases in suicide deaths overall indicate that veteran suicides could again be on the rise. Ongoing efforts like the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Veterans and New York State's Suicide Prevention Task Force are focusing energy, attention, and financial resources to address the problem; community-based organizations are also doing important work to prevent veteran suicide. Now is not the time to take our foot off the gas; instead, this is the moment to redouble efforts to produce a genuine and sustained decline in veteran suicide rates.

F.Y.I.

It is a noted fact and point of interest that a few states provide a full property tax exemption to veterans who are rated at 100% disability, NEW JERSEY being one of them. As I have previously reported, NEW YORK STATE provides NOTHING! It is the local Jurisdictions who decide to either grant to do so or not, the state of N.Y. passes the buck.

Assemblyman Ken Zebrowski is working in conjunction with a Senator to write and submit a Bill that would provide same relief as N.J. I have just now visited Mr. Zebrowski's website and filled out the required contact form, I wrote to him explaining the need for N.Y.S. disabled veterans to have same respect and relief as N.J. for property tax relief. Thanking him for his work and the hope he can have said Bill submitted and passed by the Senate.

One must keep in mind that politics is always at play whether we like it or not, it is a fact. The N.Y.S senate is controlled by a Democrat majority of which Ken Zebrowski is a member. No matter your part affiliation, this should not be a partisan issue, it should be simply about disabled veterans. However, if and when an elected Democrat in office submits this Bill, it would have a much better chance than if submitted by another party. I respectfully request that all veterans interested in this also contact Assemblyman Zebrowski or your own Assemblyman/woman via Google or any search engine, then submit same request as stated.

Thank you, Roy VVA #333

Editor's Note: Check with VVA-NYSC President Ned Foote in regards to writing about this issue. We have a Legislative Advocate in our behalf at the State government. We want to speak with one voice.

Inspire change

End Racism

Accept Diversity/Differences

Your attitude determines your direction

If you accept the call to leadership,
you must be willing to be misunderstood,
criticized, opposed, accused,
and even be rejected.



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