



THE OFFICIAL VOICE OF DAV AND AUXILIARY

**MARCH APRIL 2013**

# MAGAZINE



## New Law Establishes **Burn Pit Registry**

page 16



**Pg. 3** | FROM THE NATIONAL ADJUTANT

**Pg. 7** | *INDEPENDENT BUDGET* SETS PRIORITIES FOR VA

# 2013 Department Conventions

DATE	STATE	CITY	HEADQUARTERS	BANQUET DATE
April 19-21	Puerto Rico	Caguas	Four Points Sheraton-Caguas	April 20
April 19-21	R.I.	Warwick	Crowne Plaza	April 20
April 26-28	Maine	Bangor	Four Points Sheraton	April 27
April 26-28	N.D.	Mandan	Seven Seas Hotel	April 27
April 28-30	Nev.	Mesquite	CasaBlanca Resort & Casino	April 30
May 1-4	Idaho	Lewiston	Red Lion Hotel	May 3
May 2-4	Minn.	Duluth	Holiday Inn	May 3
May 2-4	Conn.	Cromwell	Courtyard by Marriott	May 4
May 3-5	S.D.	Deadwood	The Lodge at Deadwood	May 4
May 3-5	Wyo.	Casper	Ramada Plaza	May 4
May 8-11	Iowa	Emmitsburg	Wild Rose Casino/Hotel	May 10
May 8-11	Ore.	Springfield	Holiday Inn	May 9
May 15-17	Colo.	Denver	Doubletree Hotel - Denver	May 17
May 16-19	La.	Alexandria	Best Western Inn	May 18
May 16-19	S.C.	Columbia	Doubletree Hotel by Hilton	May 18
May 17-19	Vt.	Jay Peak	Jay Peak Resort	May 18
May 29-June 1	Md.	Ocean City	Princess Royale Oceanfront	June 1
May 29-June 2	Fla.	Lake Mary	Orlando/Lake Mary Marriott	June 1
May 30-June 1	Utah	Provo	Courtyard Marriott	May 31
May 30-June 2	Alaska	Fairbanks	Westmark Fairbanks Hotel & Conv. Ctr.	June 1
May 30-June 2	Ala.	Montgomery	Renaissance Montgomery	June 1
May 30-June 2	Ga.	Macon	Holiday Inn - North Macon	June 1
May 31-June 2	Mo.	Jefferson City	Capitol Plaza Hotel	June 1
June 4-8	Wash.	Yakima	Howard Johnson Plaza	June 7
June 4-9	Va.	Suffolk	Hilton Garden Inn Suffolk Riverfront	June 8
June 5-8	Ariz.	Prescott	Bucky's Casino	June 7
June 5-8	Calif.	Sacramento	Woodlake Hotel	June 8
June 6-8	Mont.	Great Falls	Hilton Garden Inn	June 7
June 6-8	N.M.	Albuquerque	MCM Eleganté Hotel	June 7
June 6-9	N.C.	Raleigh	North Raleigh Hilton	June 8
June 7-9	Hawaii	Hilo	The Hilo Hawaiian Hotel	June 7-8
June 7-9	Kan.	Mayetta	Prairie Band Casino & Resort	June 8
June 7-9	Mich.	Sault Ste. Marie	Kewadin Casino Hotel	June 8
June 7-9	N.H.	North Conway	Red Jacket Mountain View Resort	June 8
June 7-9	Texas	Austin	Doubletree Hotel	June 8
June 13-15	D.C.	Washington	Holiday Capitol Inn	June 15
June 13-15	Ind.	Indianapolis	The Marten House	June 15
June 13-16	Ill.	Springfield	Northfield Inn & Suites	June 15
June 13-16	Wis.	Appleton	Radisson Hotel - Paper Valley	June 15
June 14-16	Neb.	Columbus	New World Inn	June 15
June 19-22	Pa.	New Cumberland	Holiday Inn	June 21
June 20-22	Tenn.	Murfreesboro	Doubletree by Hilton	June 22
June 20-23	Mass.	Leominster	Four Points by Sheraton	June 21-22
June 21-22	Ark.	North Little Rock	Wyndham Hotel	June 22
June 21-22	Del.	Dover	Sheraton Dover Hotel	June 22
June 21-23	Ohio	Columbus	The Doubletree Hotel	June 22
June 21-24	Miss.	Meridian	Quality Inn	June 22
June 23-26	N.Y.	Ellenville	Honor's Haven Resort and Spa	June 25
June 27-30	Ky.	Lexington	Embassy Suites	June 29
June 28-30	Okla.	Oklahoma City	Biltmore Hotel	June 29
June 28-30	W.Va.	Daniels	The Resort at Glade Springs	June 29

## From the NATIONAL COMMANDER LARRY A. POLZIN



### The Strength of Unity

**A**mong DAV's greatest strengths is our unity of fellowship — a trait that permeates our personal history as members of the armed services and our heartfelt belief in veterans helping veterans. The camaraderie of our members is legendary, and our passion that no veteran is left behind lies at the heart of our organization.

That strength and unity shine brightly year after year at our National Convention and the annual Mid-Winter Conference in Washington, D.C.

It's amazing and exhilarating to watch our members at the Mid-Winter Conference go to Capitol Hill to meet personally with members of Congress and their staffs, urging their full support for our legislative initiatives. They fill a Capitol Hill hearing room to vocally cheer and support the presentation of our legislative plan. They support our DAV members who cannot be there, and they fight for injured and ill veterans everywhere.

DAV is tightly bound together by unity in our message, which echoes to the farthest reaches of our nation. DAV exists to fulfill the promises made to the men and women who served our nation and who paid a costly price for their freedom.

Wherever DAV is supporting veterans — at homeless standdowns or Harley's Heroes events, working as Transportation Network volunteer drivers or helping other veterans through the Local Veterans Assistance Program — we work together.

DAV's Commander's Action Network (CAN) gives our community the tools to reach out to members of Congress in support of our legislative program using modern electronic communications. Our members also call, write letters and send e-mails urging lawmakers to support

legislation needed by injured and ill veterans. DAV CAN empowers the members of DAV to have an impact on our nation's laws and policies that affect us every day.

Our unity extends beyond legislation to include basic human kindness to the most ill and injured veterans. Our thousands of volunteers perform a wide range of duties. Some enjoy direct contact with patients at VA medical centers, participating in recreational programs and other activities on the hospital wards. Others assist the VA's professional staff in administrative tasks. DAV volunteers at VA medical centers can provide something as basic as a cup of coffee or a popcorn snack to waiting patients or family members, but most importantly, they are a friend in the trying days of illness and therapy. DAV volunteers offer a touch of home and personal contact with the world outside the hospital walls. It is the strength of unity that veterans feel and appreciate — being a part of the veterans community.

For our newest generation of veterans, contact with DAV links them with history. Spending time with veterans of World War II, Korea, Vietnam and other wars unifies them with what has gone on before and the torch that ultimately will be theirs to carry.

As we have throughout our history, DAV offers the promise of high-quality lives for our veterans, as well as the respect they have earned.

Of course, we owe much to National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson and our professional staff for keeping us unified and focused throughout the years. Under Art's leadership, we have never strayed from our core belief of serving veterans with dignity, and we have done it all together — in unity — our greatest strength.

## CONTENTS

- 1** National Commander Larry A. Polzin hails DAV's strength through unity ahead of this year's Mid-Winter Conference.
- 3** National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson urges DAV members to take part in the 2013 National Convention.
- 5** DAV works with VA to resolve claims payment problem in time to avert veteran's home foreclosure.
- 11** Congressional leadership appoints members of veterans' committees.
- 12** Now's the time to make plans to attend 92nd National Convention in Orlando Aug. 10-13.
- 13** National Service Director Garry Augustine stresses veteran's vital role in claims process.
- 17** Hearing loss, tinnitus affect rising number of veterans.

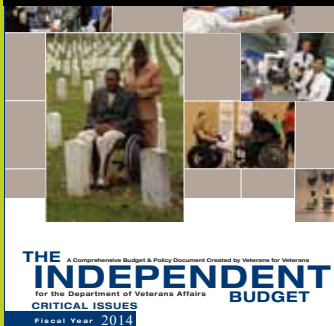


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## FEATURES

7



The Independent Budget provides blueprint for meeting veterans' needs.

16



New law establishes DAV-backed burn pit registry.  
*(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Francis O'Brien)*

20



Volunteers sew custom clothing for injured veterans.

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## From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT ARTHUR H. WILSON



### We Need Your Voice

**D**AV's 92nd National Convention in Orlando, Florida, is Aug. 10–13, and those dates will be here before you know it. So the sooner you make your travel plans, the better. (See page 12.)

As the supreme power of our organization is vested in the annual event, National Commander Larry A. Polzin and I urge as many of you as possible to be a part of determining DAV's mandates and resolutions that will be adopted.

Your voice is also needed to help determine the shape of DAV's legislative agenda for the year. And your vote will help select DAV's National Commander and the other Line Officers who will lead the organization in the coming year.

The many educational seminars will help you become more informed about important issues affecting disabled veterans and their families. You'll become more valuable to your fellow disabled veterans and their families, and by getting more actively involved in DAV's grassroots effort, you will be key to protecting and improving veterans benefits and services.

The largest and most critical of the many seminars at the convention is the Service and Legislative Seminar. Washington insiders, VA officials and Capitol Hill staffers will give you their unique insights on important veterans issues. You'll also have the opportunity to submit questions about the policies and regulations that govern the benefits and services available to veterans and their families.

Another highlight of the National Convention is the opportunity to celebrate and recognize the accomplishments of our dedicated volunteers, membership recruiters and, of course, the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year.

You'll help build a stronger DAV. Whether it's recruiting new members, developing your leadership skills or delivering our message to your members of Congress, your commitment to your fellow disabled veterans and their families is vital.

And when you return home from Orlando, you'll have lots to share with others. So be sure to share your experiences and what you learned with others in your Chapter and Department who weren't able to attend the 92nd DAV National Convention.

Remember, there will be a lot of very important business to be accomplished and a limited amount of time to do so during those four days. So if you wish to take advantage of the many extracurricular activities the area has to offer, we encourage you to either arrive ahead of time or extend your stay after the convention. You can still book accommodations at the Hilton Orlando at the special DAV rate. If you do, we sincerely hope you and your family and friends enjoy yourselves. After all, a little vacation time couldn't hurt.

At any rate, the members who participate in the National Convention are absolutely crucial to helping set the course for our organization's service and advocacy efforts on behalf of our nation's more than 3 million injured and ill veterans, their families and survivors. Again, we urge you to join the action and make sure your voice is heard.

## ■ LETTERS

### Hiring Barriers

Congratulations on the article in the *DAV Magazine* (page 10 in the November/December 2012 issue), "Survey Finds Barriers to Hiring Veterans." Well done. I am a retired Veterans Employment Representative with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor. The part of the article that was surprising to me was that only 13 percent of human resource professionals knew to contact the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment Representative to recruit qualified candidates for their job openings, and what was absolutely shocking to me was that only a third of government agencies did. I spent 29 years shouting from our Department of Labor building's rooftop about hiring veterans from our pool of veteran applicants, and if the employers weren't even considering looking at what we had in our files, they were perhaps missing out on the most qualified applicants to fill the opening. **Vince Darcangelo, Hermitage, Pa.**

### DAV Service

I want to say thank you on behalf of my husband, Bill, and myself

*DAV Magazine welcomes letters. However, due to the volume of mail, we are unable to acknowledge every letter. Letters can be sent to DAV Magazine, 3725 Alexandria Pike, Cold Spring, KY 41076. Readers can also comment via email through [feedback@dav.org](mailto:feedback@dav.org). Letters are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety. Letters involving individual claims are referred to the DAV Service Department.*

for what DAV does. When Bill initially filed for disability through the VA, another veterans service organization (VSO) represented us — sort of. It took three years for a decision. In the meantime we heard nothing from that other VSO. When we learned of DAV and Bill went to meet with a National Service Officer, we figured we had nothing to lose in designating DAV as his representative. When Bill needed to request further disability, we saw that DAV was there every step of the way. It is clear that DAV lives its mission of supporting our nation's veterans in the ways that matter most. **Terry DeVan, Perrysville, Ohio.**

### Usage Fees vs. Taxes

For years, disabled persons have been straddled with the extra cost of DME (durable medical equipment) necessary for a relatively active lifestyle. As a way of showing support for the plight of the disabled community, states removed the sales tax on DME. Recently, Washington state decided to levy a usage fee on anything above \$600 that wasn't taxed. The usage fee is exactly that of the sales tax. Now, they didn't publicize this, so for the past several years, companies that sold motorized wheelchairs and vans weren't aware of these usage fees and never passed them along to their clients. With the state coffers now suffering due to poor spending habits, they have decided to audit these businesses and demand payment, even levy fines, for the nonpayment of these fees. **David Lingenfelter, Spanaway, Wash.**

### DAV's Transition Services

Garry Augustine's article about Transition Service Officers (page 12 in the November/December 2012 issue) reminded me of the great experience I had in 2006 in San Diego during my transition/retirement. I am grateful to DAV and my TSO for their dedicated work in advocating for my fellow

service members and me. Thank you, DAV. **Pete Zoretic, USMC (ret.)**

### VA Services Uneven

Thank you for helping me with my VA claims. I am a life member and get the magazine. My comment is this: The magazine seems to have three parts: 1) a story about a successful DAV representative and his case, 2) an article highlighting the recent comments of a VA official as to how hard they are working on the benefits side and they just cannot make their goals and 3) an article about the DAV appearing in front of some committee and pleading the case of the veteran and how slow the VA system is. Bottom line for me is the VA health side has been very helpful for me, and I just joined last year. The VA benefits side is a national joke. **Richard McHenry, Wexford, Pa.**

### Friendlier Skies

I would like to tell you what happened to me at Philadelphia airport. We were on our way to my Marine Corps Vietnam reunion in September in San Antonio. My girlfriend wheeled me to the ticket booth. I always wear my Marine Corps hat. I asked how big the two seats are for us to sit. The guy said he will see what he can do. After a little while, he called me over and gave us back our tickets. He said, "Thank you for your service," and put us in first class. We never flew that way. He was so nice to do that. Thanks to US Airways. Also thanks to DAV. **William W. Witmier, Sinking Spring, Pa.**

### Correction:

*A photograph in the January/February issue misidentified Cincinnati VA medical center Director Linda D. Smith as U.S. Rep. Jean Schmidt (R-Ohio). We regret the error. Smith presented DAV Northern Hills, Ohio, Chapter 115 Senior Vice Commander Pamela Harris the Greater Cincinnati Woman Veteran of the Year Community Service Award.*



*Detroit, Mich., National Service Office Supervisor Douglas Wells Jr., right, discusses the delay in VA benefit payments with veteran Timothy Lake.*

# DAV Service Gets Benefits to Veteran in the **Nick of Time**

By Thom Wilborn

**G**ulf War veteran Timothy Lake was caught in a federal bureaucratic vise when he called DAV for help. The VA had granted service connection for his disabilities, but his compensation was tied up because of a federal law that limits deposits to prepaid credit and money cards, and he was facing a looming deadline for losing his home and car for nonpayment.

Detroit National Service Office Supervisor Douglas Wells Jr. received Lake's call for help. "Tim said that he was going to have to move his mobile home from the rented lot within two weeks, and his car was being repossessed," Wells said. "His VA benefit check had been sent as an electronic funds transfer instead of a

check, which Lake had requested, and it had been rejected."

Lake's wife, who suffers from a debilitating illness, had lost some of her federal benefits, and soaring medical care costs for her and two of their four children had exhausted their financial reserves. The former U.S. Army infantry staff sergeant had served for more than 15 years and was struggling after falling months behind in rent and car payments.

"We were behind in everything — electricity, gas," he said. "It was a lot of debt that I planned to repay with my retroactive disability compensation." The problem was a federal law that limits deposits to credit or money cards. Daily deposit limits for such cards range from \$500 to \$9,500, and maximum deposit balances from \$2,500 to \$10,000.

Under the law, when a direct deposit exceeds the federal limit, it is returned to the issuer, such as the VA. Once denied, the VA stops payment on retroactive compensation and any additional benefits Lake would have received. By September, Lake had only days to pay his debts with limited income, and his disability benefits stalled.

"We always place a high level of importance on our veterans' needs, but his was critical," Wells said. "It makes you want to knock on every VA door to make something happen.



*Tim Lake as a young soldier*



We did that, and made VA aware of this veteran's personal needs. We even talked to the assistant service center manager of the regional office in order to get payments to Lake."

When seeking a check for Lake, DAV found it would arrive too late to help the veteran avoid losing his home and car. Lake had to open a traditional bank account for the direct deposit. By then, a routine VA direct deposit of benefits would have been too late to help, and the significantly greater retroactive benefits were still being withheld by VA.

Wells and his staff worked with the VA as days dwindled for Lake to make payments. Through the extraordinary efforts of Wells and his staff, the VA expedited the funds transfer two days later and, with one day left, all the benefits were deposited in Lake's new account.

"These prepaid money cards have led to a lot of new problems," Wells said. "These accounts have resulted in the VA stopping any payments from going to veterans until they meet the federal regulations."

"Initially, after the retroactive payment had been denied, I was facing months to clear it up," said Lake. "We were working hard, but medical bills had taken the greatest share of our income."

"Just as faithfully as DAV represented me in my claim, they chased down the payments and got the funds into my new account. I was touched by all they did," Lake said.

"We are hearing that many veterans are encountering problems with VA benefits going to these prepaid cards," said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "It's usually best for a veteran to have a traditional checking or savings account that can streamline direct deposits by the VA."

"All our National Service Officers are being made aware of the problems and lengthy delays that can result," National Service Director Garry Augustine said. "They will be advising

veterans how to best set up an error-free payment system for their earned benefits."

"Helping Tim was a gratifying experience," said Wells. "Whenever you can help someone save their lifestyle, especially when their problems are based on service-connected injuries or illness, you want to do everything possible to help. He earned his benefits, and he waited 18 months going through the claims process."

"DAV worked when no one else seemed to want to," said Lake. "We had spoken to others in seeking help, but DAV took the process over and made it easy."

"I thank DAV, and I can say they work harder and better than anyone else," he said. "Doug Wells was on point."

"When you transition from the military to the VA, there's a big cultural shock. There's no one to ask a question. DAV gives you someone you can talk to."

Today, Lake and his family are doing well, and he's an enthusiastic DAV member. "If it wasn't for DAV, we would be in real trouble."

"We are gratified by Tim Lake's kind support," Jesinoski said. "It is our mission to do our best for the men and women who served our nation."

"The service and support given by our NSOs is superb and only an example of what they do every day to help veterans," added Augustine. "They are the best advocates veterans can have facing the daunting VA benefits system. They stand by our veterans and go the distance for those we represent."

What Lake admired most was that he was treated with respect and dignity. "DAV is a personal program," he said. "Not only does DAV take care of me, but they are taking care of hundreds of thousands of other veterans — each on a personal basis. It's really an outstanding organization." ■

*Staff Sgt. Tim Lake with his wife, Teresa*





# The Independent Budget: A Blueprint for Veterans' Future

By Thom Wilborn

**T**he *Independent Budget* (IB), annually compiled by DAV, AMVETS, Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Paralyzed Veterans of America, is being carefully read by members of Congress and the administration as a guide to building a better VA. A logical, insightful review of the funding needs for nearly every veterans program operated by our federal government, the IB has become the much-referenced blueprint.

It's a no-frills review of supply versus demand and the reasonable funding needed to maintain these programs while meeting the needs of our veterans. Far from pie-in-the-sky budget requests, the authors of the IB have, over the years, applied their skill to developing reasonable funding scenarios based on actual need.

DAV's primary concerns, although there are many, are VA health care and benefits. "Further, we make policy recommendations to meet the needs of veterans," said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. "For example, we are urging the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to work closely with veterans service organizations (VSOs) to reform and improve claims processing. Operating decisions must be based on the knowledge and skills of VSOs rather than what would amount to a stab in the dark."

The IB, presented to Congress in February, addresses the huge claims backlog by asking the VBA to continue to improve quality and increase annual training, as well as strengthen certification examinations taken by VA's veterans service representatives. "This would include developing accountability measures to ensure that claims are decided correctly the first time," said National Legislative Director Joseph A. Violante.

"An environment should be created that focuses on quality and accuracy, rather than speed and production," said Violante. "Pushing claims out the door resulting in a hasty error is wasteful and only prolongs the decision-making process and adds to the claims backlog."

To reduce the huge backlog of claims, the IB recommends

that Congress require the VA to give deference to private medical evidence that is competent, credible and adequate for rating purposes. "Congress should also ensure that the VBA receives sufficient funding to complete the development of the modern electronic Veterans Benefit Management System, as well as to pay for the digital conversion of active paper claims files," said Violante. "It's time to update the system to one that's consistent with modern digital operations."

With the increase in claims for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) submitted by veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the IB argues that VA should accept a diagnosis of PTSD from a competent private mental health professional, not just a VA mental health professional. "If Congress cannot make this change, lawmakers should require a VA study to determine how often examiners failed to confirm a diagnosis of PTSD," Violante said. "Accountability is the key."

Another area of concern is dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) benefits paid to surviving spouses of veterans. "The current rate of compensation to the survivors of certain deceased veterans and service members is inadequate and inequitable," Violante said. "Congress should increase the DIC rates paid to survivors of veterans and service members who die while on active duty. In either case, the survivor faces the same financial hardships once the veteran dies and compensation is halted."

Further, the IB recommends Congress repeal the offset between DIC and the Survivor Benefit Plan payments. "There is no duplication between these two benefits, and the offset is wholly inequitable," said Violante.

In the arena of health care, the VA anticipates more than



91 million outpatient visits to its medical facilities in 2013 and 94 million in 2014. Many of those patients are older, sicker and have a higher rate of mental health problems. The IB's funding recommendations seek to enhance and strengthen the VA's health care system.

"We must have sufficient funding for veterans health care," said Violante. "It is the responsibility of Congress to provide needed VA health care funding, and our veterans should not suffer spending cuts after they served our nation."

"The administration's budget for VA was \$4 billion less than recommended in *The Independent Budget* in fiscal year 2013; most of the shortfall was in maintenance and infrastructure," he said. "We believe the funding provided through the appropriations process today remains insufficient to meet the demand for VA health care."

Of great concern is the delivery of mental health care to veterans. Veterans receiving mental health services have increased 35 percent over the past five years. But a 2011 survey of VA mental health providers found that nearly 40 percent could not schedule a new-patient appointment in their clinics within 14 days. Further, 70 percent reported their clinics lacked either sufficient staff or space to meet demand.

"Ten years of war have taken their toll on the mental health of our nation's service members," said Violante. "Combat stress, PTSD and other mental health conditions are prevalent among veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and in many cases, multiple combat tours."

Those mental conditions, coupled with debilitating traumatic brain injuries (TBI), have placed huge demands on VA's mental health care system. Substance abuse, suicides and other symptoms associated with PTSD and TBI are manifestations of the suffering experienced by our veterans.

"The needs are clear," said Violante. "Congress should require VA and the Department of Defense to ensure that veterans and service members receive adequate screening for their mental health needs. When problems are identified, veterans should receive early treatment to mitigate the further development of chronic mental illness and disability."

*The Independent Budget* recommends that VA assess the availability of care, including services for PTSD, identify sites where care doesn't meet needs and allocate the resources necessary to provide the best care.

"The VA offers superior mental health care," said Jesinoski. "It is the access to care that is deficient, and that must change if we are to fulfill the promises made to the men and women who served."

In addition to PTSD, VA must address military sexual trauma (MST) suffered by veterans. More than 86 percent of military sexual assaults go unreported, and records of such cases are usually destroyed by the military services after two to five years, leaving gaping holes in MST claims history.

VA screening of veterans found that 23 percent of women and one percent of men experienced MST. Although PTSD is common with MST, it is not the sole diagnosis. Observers have noted that women suffering MST usually receive a lower disability rating from VA than ratings for men.

"The IB recommends that VBA properly train its claims staff to assist in producing fully developed claims and comply with an Institute of Medicine recommendation to collect gender-specific data on MST claims decisions," Jesinoski noted. "In addition, VA should ensure that these claims are adequately researched and resolved."

Among the most crucial IB issues is ensuring veterans' timely access to VA health care. "It's a major indicator for evaluating the performance of the VA health care system," said Violante. "Delays in delivering health care result in higher costs and increased risk for worsening health conditions."

Since the VA no longer reports the number of veterans waiting for a medical appointment, the IB is asking that this information be made public in an effort to make VA's performance more transparent and make the administration more accountable.

"Accordingly, we're recommending that VA create an electronic system to track medical appointments and health care delivery," Violante said. "The VA should also include the



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timeliness of care standards for veterans who receive care from the private sector that is paid for by VA.”






*The Independent Budget* was given to Congress before the White House released its fiscal year 2014 budget, allowing lawmakers to compare what funding levels are needed and what legislative or administrative actions are needed in support of veterans programs.

“It is truly a blueprint for the future,” Jesinoski said. “If IB recommendations are ignored, VA fiscal needs will increase in the future due to inattention. If the recommendations are acted upon, Congress and the administration can save

billions while improving the health care and benefits for veterans in a timely fashion.”

“The IB is also a warning of growing problems within the massive VA health care and benefits systems,” said Violante. “It’s like the saying: ‘You can pay me now or you can pay me more later.’

“Efficient use of budgeting and legislative insight can do much more than resolve problems,” he said. “It means that our nation is honoring the service and sacrifice of our nation’s men and women by efficiently providing them their earned benefits and health care.” ■

VA Accounts FY 2014 (Dollars in Thousands)				
	FY 2013* Appropriation	FY 2014** Administration	FY 2014 Independent Budget (IB)**	FY 2015 IB Advance Approp.
<b>Veterans Health Administration (VHA)</b>				
	Medical Services	41,354,000	43,557,000	47,412,078
	Medical Support and Compliance	5,746,000	6,033,000	5,844,255
	Medical Facilities	5,441,000	4,872,000	5,570,433
	Subtotal Medical Care, Discretionary	52,541,000	54,462,000	58,826,766
	Medical Care Collections	2,966,000	3,051,000	
	Total, Medical Care Budget Authority (including Collections)	55,507,000	57,513,000	58,826,766
	Medical and Prosthetic Research	582,674		611,000
	Total, Veterans Health Administration	56,089,674		59,437,766
<b>General Operating Expenses (GOE)</b>				
	Veterans Benefits Administration	2,164,074		2,390,400
	General Administration	416,737		430,560
	Total, General Operating Expenses (GOE)	2,580,811		2,820,960
<b>Departmental Admin. and Misc. Programs</b>				
	Information Technology	3,327,444		3,391,770
	National Cemetery Administration	258,284		263,057
	Office of Inspector General	113,000		115,053
	Total, Dept. Admin. and Misc. Programs	3,698,728		3,769,880
<b>Construction Programs</b>				
	Construction, Major	532,470		1,100,000
	Construction, Minor	607,530		1,000,000
	Grants for State Extended-Care Facilities	85,000		100,000
	Grants for State Vets Cemeteries	46,000		51,000
	Total, Construction Programs	1,271,000		2,251,000
	Other Discretionary	158,160		161,007
<b>Total, Discretionary Budget Authority (including Medical Collections)</b>		<b>63,798,373</b>	<b>68,440,613</b>	

\* FY 2013 appropriations amounts for health care reflect advance appropriations that were provided in the FY 2012 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill.

\*\* The FY 2014 Administration health care accounts reflect the advance appropriations recommendations included in the FY 2013 budget request released in February 2012.





## VA Compensation, Pension Rates Increase

**T**he nation's more than 3 million service-disabled veterans and their survivors received a 1.7 percent increase in monthly compensation beginning in January.

The increase in disability compensation, dependency and indemnity compensation and pensions for 2012 matches the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in Social Security benefits, but is rounded down to the next lower whole-dollar amount.

In addition to veterans receiving compensation for disabilities incurred or made worse during their military service, the COLA applies to wartime veterans who are totally disabled from civilian-life causes and who receive a pension under an income-based program.

The increase also applies to survivors of veterans who died in service or from a service-connected condition and those who are served by an income-based program for survivors of wartime veterans.

\* Surviving spouses of veterans who died on or after Jan. 1, 1993, receive \$1,215 a month. For a spouse entitled to DIC based on the veteran's death prior to Jan. 1, 1993, the amount paid is based on the veteran's military pay grade. Add \$258 a month to the basic rate if the deceased veteran had been entitled to receive 100% service-connected compensation for at least eight years immediately preceding death and the surviving spouse was married to the veteran for those same eight years. Additionally, the monthly allowance rate for each dependent child under age 18 is \$301.

### Service-Connected Disability *Compensation data is based on a monthly rate.*

Basic Compensation Rates		
Disability Rating	2012	2013
10%	\$ 127	\$ 129
20%	251	255
30%	389	395
40%	560	569
50%	797	810
60%	1,009	1,026
70%	1,272	1,293
80%	1,478	1,503
90%	1,661	1,689
100%	2,769	2,816

Special Monthly Compensation Rates		
	2012	2013
K	\$ 99	\$ 100
L	3,446	3,504
M	3,803	3,867
N	4,326	4,399
O or P	4,835	4,917
R1	6,909	7,026
R2	7,925	8,059
S	3,100	3,152
Clothing Allowance	741	753

Dependency and Indemnity Compensation		
Pay Grade	2012	2013*
E-1 thru 6	\$1,195	\$1,215
E-7	1,236	1,257
E-8	1,305	1,327
E-9	1,361	1,384
W-1	1,262	1,283
W-2	1,312	1,334
W-3	1,351	1,373
W-4	1,429	1,453
O-1	1,262	1,283
O-2	1,305	1,327
O-3	1,395	1,418
O-4	1,478	1,503
O-5	1,627	1,654
O-6	1,834	1,865
O-7	1,980	2,013
O-8	2,175	2,211
O-9	2,326	2,365
O-10	2,551	2,594

# 113th Congress Veterans' Affairs Committees Roster

## House of Representatives

Rep. Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) continues as chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, and DAV expects to continue our strong relationship with him in his duties as our Chairman and leader. Given the departure of Rep. Bob Filner from the House, the Democratic Caucus selected Rep. Michael Michaud (D-Maine) as the new Ranking Member of the Committee.

"Representative Michaud has been a champion of DAV issues during his years of service on the Committee, and we have the highest regard for his bipartisan and empathetic approach to veterans issues in the finest traditions of the House of Representatives," said National Legislative Director Joseph Violante. "We believe he and Chairman Miller will become an excellent team to serve the best interests of veterans."

## Republicans

Jeff Miller, Fla., Chairman  
Gus Bilirakis, Fla., Vice Chairman  
Doug Lamborn, Colo.  
David P. Roe, Tenn.  
Bill Flores, Texas  
Jeff Denham, Calif.  
Jon Runyan, N.J.  
Dan Benishek, Mich.  
Tim Huelskamp, Kan.  
Mike Coffman, Colo.  
Mark Amodei, Nev.  
Brad Wenstrup, Ohio\*  
Paul Cook, Calif.\*  
Jackie Walorski, Ind.\*

## Democrats

Michael H. Michaud, Maine, Ranking Member  
Corrine Brown, Fla.  
Mark Takano, Calif.\*  
Julia Brownley, Calif.\*  
Dina Titus, Nev.\*  
Ann Kirkpatrick, Ariz.\*  
Raul Ruiz, Calif.\*  
Gloria Negrete McLeod, Calif.\*  
Ann McLane Kuster, N.H.\*  
Beto O'Rourke, Texas.\*  
Tim Walz, Minn.

\* New member

## Senate

Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) has replaced Patty Murray (D-Wash.) as chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. She assumed the chair of the Senate Budget Committee in January.

"Chairwoman Murray has been a magnificent leader on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, leading on a number of key proposals that are now law," said Violante. "She will be missed, but in her new capacity DAV is confident Sen. Murray will protect the gains in VA that she shepherded into place in her tenure as chair of the veterans committee."

## Democrats

Bernie Sanders, Vt., Chairman  
Mark Begich, Alaska  
Richard Blumenthal, Conn.\*  
Sherrod Brown, Ohio  
Mazie Hirono, Hawaii\*  
Patty Murray, Wash.  
Jay Rockefeller, W.Va.

## Republicans

Richard Burr, N.C., Ranking Member  
Johnny Isakson, Ga.  
Mike Johanns, Neb.  
Jerry Moran, Kan.  
John Boozman, Ark.  
Dean Heller, Nev.\*  
Roger Wicker, Miss.

\*New member





## New Orlando a Must for DAV Conventioners

**T**he 92nd DAV and DAV Auxillary National Convention promises to be another premier event for all of us advocating for veterans and their families. The annual meeting of DAV's national body is set for Aug. 10-13 at the world-class Hilton Orlando.

This is your opportunity to address the needs of injured and ill veterans of all generations. Be among the throngs of delegates who will draw up legislative initiatives aimed at fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served.

Major issues to be addressed include: lengthy delays veterans experience waiting for decisions from the VA on claims for benefits; improving mental health care for the psychologically injured; and funding for construction projects to maintain the VA's infrastructure.

"Attendees will hear from subject-matter experts, policy makers and administrators," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "More importantly, *they* will hear directly from those who attend the convention."

Our national officers will be elected and national leadership will provide in-depth updates on the organization's progress over the year.

"Standing together to create DAV's legislative goals is one of the most important things any member can do," Adjutant Wilson said. "It is important that

lawmakers and the White House understand that we are an organization of veterans fighting for veterans. The VA is our benefits and health care systems, and Washington is struggling to meet the needs of our nation's veterans."

Hilton Orlando is an upscale, resort-style hotel. It is one of the newest Orlando full-service hotels. It has tremendous proximity to all that "new Orlando" has to offer including art, theater, museums, shopping and dining. The hotel is near all of the major Orlando attractions, including SeaWorld Orlando, Universal Orlando and Walt Disney World Resort theme parks. The Orlando International Airport is a mere 15 minutes away.

Hotel reservations can be made by calling (407) 313-4300. Be sure to mention that you are attending the DAV National Convention in order to receive the special rate of \$124 single/double per night. More information is available online at [www.dav.org/events/](http://www.dav.org/events/). ■





## From the NATIONAL SERVICE DIRECTOR

GARRY J. AUGUSTINE



### The Veteran's Role in the Claims Process

Veterans submitting VA disability claims can work wonders in navigating the system by providing the complete information necessary, and our National Service Officers (NSOs) can provide sage advice to shorten the wait for benefits.

The VA has some promising new claims adjudication processes underway or planned this year, and our NSOs can provide explanations and tips that will help speed the development of successful claims decisions.

If VA must gather evidence for veterans, it takes time to obtain documents. If the veteran has his service medical records, he's already trimmed months from the development process. For those newly separating from the armed services, it's best to visit our Transition Service Officers (TSOs) on base with their medical records so that DAV can review them for possible injuries and illnesses that may be claimed. Veterans who left the service years ago and still retain their military medical records should provide them to an NSO for review. Without service medical records, the VA can spend months requesting them from the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Mo.

If a veteran has seen a private physician for a claimed illness or injury, obtaining those records is crucial. A correctly completed Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ) may eliminate the need for a Compensation and Pension

examination, again cutting months off the claims process. If you are represented by DAV, any evidence to be submitted to support your claim, including completed DBQs, should be brought to your DAV NSO for review before submission to the VA. Upon review, your evidence will be submitted along with a memorandum citing relevant laws and/or regulations to be considered and ensuring confirmation of receipt by the VA. This helps us track your claim and evidence through the VA claims process.

There's no doubt the VA's development process is a lengthy one, involving research and time consuming requests seeking evidence until all avenues of information are exhausted. Without the veteran providing records up front, the VA will attempt to get all the records pertaining to a claim from the military, private hospitals or physicians or any other resource a veteran identifies.

Once a claim has been submitted to the VA, it must be considered to see if it is plausible. If it is, the review may take some time because of the claims backlog.

But if all the evidence has been obtained by the veteran: service medical records, DBQs, private health records, "buddy" letters, command histories, daily reports, affidavits of support and photos, it can be presented to the VA as a fully developed claim, circumventing a lengthy search for all evidence available.

The review by a ratings veterans service representative will initially decide the case. In claims that are represented by DAV, an NSO will examine the decision, allowing the chance to intercede on the veteran's

*(Continued on pg. 27)*

# Corporations Generously Donate to DAV to **Honor Veterans**

By Thom Wilborn

Our nation's veterans were honored with generous donations to DAV from several major corporations during the Veterans Day period last November. Their contributions given to support DAV's free programs for veterans validates our role of service to honor those who have sacrificed for our nation.

The companies that sponsored fund raising programs to support DAV's mission recognize the need to fulfill the promises made to the men and women who served our country, and help to give respect and dignity to veterans.

"The generosity and support of these corporate sponsors is exciting," said National Headquarters Executive Director Marc Burgess. "We greatly appreciate their support and thank all those who remember veterans with donations to DAV."

"While a majority of DAV's donations come from a generous American public, giving by our corporate friends allows us the opportunity to meet the needs of more veterans and their families," Burgess said. "We support our veterans with disaster aid, volunteer services, our transportation network, benefits counseling and many more free services to ensure veterans lead high quality lives."

The Hertz Corporation raised more than \$60,000 in early November to support DAV's free programs for veterans and their families. Thompson Electric, Plumbing, Heating and Cooling

in Cincinnati, Ohio, donated more than \$55,000 raised from a donation campaign in August and September. Thompson has raised in excess of \$180,000 for our service members and their families during the past four years.

Charles Schwab raffled a Harley-Davidson motorcycle to benefit DAV at its IMPACT conference in Chicago, on Nov. 13-15, raising more than \$27,000. Meanwhile, Rosenthal Automotive of Northern Virginia donated \$25,000 raised from new and used vehicle sales during November.

ICF International made its second annual donation of \$20,000 to DAV and hosted a Mobile Service Office visit in Martinsville, Va., providing our benefits counseling assistance to area veterans.

In addition, the 12th Annual Golden Corral Military Appreciation Monday took place on Nov. 12 and raised nearly \$1.3 million for DAV Chapters. ■

*Assistant National Service Director John Maki, left, accepts a donation of \$25,000 from Rosenthal Automotive of Northern Virginia President Don Bavely.*





Above, Thompson Electric, Plumbing, Heating and Cooling President Wesley Holm, second from right, and National Headquarters Executive Director Marc Burgess, third from right, display a check denoting the company's fundraising efforts for the past four years. Attending the presentation is U.S. Representative Brad Wenstrup (R-Ohio), third from left, and on far right, Daniel Smiley, Past Chaplain, Department of Ohio.

Right, Roanoke, Va., National Service Office Supervisor Gidget Rizzo, right, accepts a \$20,000 donation from ICF International Senior Vice President Dr. Douglas Beck during ceremonies in Martinsville, Va. The event included DAV's Mobile Service Office, where DAV service officers helped veterans file claims and answered questions about VA benefits.



Left, National Headquarters Executive Director Marc Burgess, left, draws the winning ticket in a raffle for a Harley-Davidson motorcycle sponsored by Charles Schwab and Company in support of DAV. He's joined by Schwab Senior Vice-President for Advisor Services Neesha Hathi. The raffle conducted at the IMPACT conference in Chicago last November raised more than \$27,000 for DAV.





## New Law Establishes Burn Pit Registry

■ President Obama has signed legislation requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish a registry for service members and veterans who lived and worked near open-air burn pits in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere overseas. The provision, which DAV strongly supported, is part of the Dignified Burial and Other Veterans Benefits Improvement Act.

The new law seeks to determine the number of veterans who may have been exposed to burn-pit smoke so the VA can track their medical histories and keep them apprised of new treatments for associated conditions. Troops deployed in support of contingency operations and stationed at a location where an open burn pit was used will be eligible to register, as well.

“DAV has been in the forefront of efforts to track veterans exposed to burn pits and other environmental hazards so they can get needed health care and other benefits they may be eligible for,” said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. “This is a long-overdue step in the right direction.”

The measure also requires the VA to provide a casket or urn for veterans with no known next of kin and provides funds to care for a military cemetery in the Philippines.

The President also has signed legislation that provides veterans better access to the resources they need to pursue a quality education. The Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities for Veterans Act helps student veterans get the very best out of their education benefits.

## Defense Bill Mandates Suicide Prevention

Included in the National Defense Authorization Act signed by President Obama is a provision requiring the Pentagon to implement a standardized and comprehensive suicide prevention program. The amendment, sponsored by U.S. Senator Patty Murray, was crafted after a major study by the RAND Corporation showed that there are serious gaps and a lack of consistency in military services' suicide prevention programs. The new law comes as the number of active duty suicides continues to rise, with 2012 exceeding 2011.

The measure also expands eligibility for Department of Veterans Affairs mental health services to family members, strengthens oversight of the Department of Defense Mental Health Care and the Integrated Disability Evaluation System, improves training and education for health care providers, creates more peer-to-peer counseling opportunities and requires the VA to establish accurate and reliable measures for mental health services.

“This law is another step forward in our efforts to ensure that service members aren’t slipping through the cracks,” said Senator Murray in a written statement. “It will help to not only standardize suicide prevention efforts, but also contains provisions to reduce wait times, ensure proper diagnoses and achieve true coordination of care and information between the Pentagon and the VA. We cannot afford to be passive about the military suicide epidemic we face. We must continue to respond with every legislative and outreach effort possible in order to turn this tragic trend around.”





# Invisible Disability

## Hearing Loss Soars Among Young Veterans

*Mark Brogan leads a patrol in Iraq.*

By Thom Wilborn

**M**ark Brogan was serving as an Army captain when he was severely injured in Rawah, Iraq, on April 11, 2006. He suffered a penetrating head injury, multiple shrapnel wounds and a nearly severed right arm when a suicide bomber set off his explosives near Brogan and another soldier, who died in the attack. It wasn't until months later that Brogan learned of what he calls his most noticeable and problematic injury.

Debra Collins, a DAV member served 20 years in the Army — the last few suffering from an invisible disease that would leave her suffering on the floor or in an emergency room. “People thought I was crazy,” she said. “And it took years for my illness to be diagnosed.”

Both veterans suffered from traumatic events that cost them their hearing and balance. And both believe that the hearing loss is their greatest disability.

“About 50 percent of veterans seen at the Washington, D.C., VA medical center suffer from some type of hearing loss; either due to age or military noise exposure” said Clinical Audiologist Tara Parson-Grant. “I see approximately seven patients a day, five days a week or about 30 to 40 patients a week,” she said. “Today, we are seeing more young veterans who suffer from hearing loss than ever before. It’s a product of the improvised explosive devices (IEDs) used in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

“VA has determined that hearing loss is a significant health care problem for veterans,” said Washington Headquarters Executive Director Barry Jesinoski. “Unfortunately,

ly, veterans are more likely to suffer hearing loss than other population groups.”

The Hearing Loss Association of America reports the VA estimates that more than 59,000 veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have received disability ratings for hearing loss, and the trend is increasing. The association says that sudden, noise-induced hearing loss from gunfire and explosions is the number-one disability caused by combat in the current wars. There is no cure for the type of hearing loss that affects most veterans.

Parson-Grant is a veteran who served in Iraq during 2007-2008 and in Afghanistan during 2010-2011. “I’m proud to serve my country,” she said. “I get up every day and say ‘who can I help today?’” A major in the Maryland Army National Guard, Parson-Grant said veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan suffer some of the worst hearing losses because of IEDs. “These explosions have caused a significant loss in hearing in these veterans.”

The VA’s 2011 Veterans Annual Benefits Report estimates that nearly 702,000 veterans have hearing loss, with 841,000 cases of associated tinnitus, or ringing in the ears. An estimated 1.7 million veterans have auditory system disabilities, or about 13 percent of all veterans. Hearing loss accounted for 12 percent of all compensation and pension examinations performed in 2011.

Collins suffered from undiagnosed Ménière’s disease while she was on active duty. At times she couldn’t walk and was taken for emergency care, leaving her and doctors mystified about the source of her illness. Ménière’s disease

was diagnosed after she was separated from the Army, but since she developed the disease while on active duty, it is service-connected. Ménière's disease has no known cause or treatment, and has left her deaf in one ear. She has difficulty maintaining her balance, as well as tinnitus.

"I have terrible tinnitus that I almost have gotten used to at this point," said Brogan, a member of Chapter 24 in Knoxville, Tenn.

"Out of all of the disabilities I accrued out of the injury, hearing loss is one of the most noticeable and, including TBI, a frequent problem for me," said Brogan. "It is just so hard to understand what people are saying, even my wife, and she 'gets' it."

### Living with Hearing Loss

The first step in living with hearing loss is coping with it.

VA audiologists do amazing work helping veterans with hearing loss. "We provide diagnostic testing and hearing aid assessments, then fittings," said Parson-Grant. "Most veterans go through a period of denial regarding their hearing loss until they come here, and we diagnose it. It's more of a confirmation for them." Veterans may go through a five- to seven-year period of hearing loss denial.



*Debra Collins, seated, is fitted for new hearing aids by Washington, D.C., VA medical center clinical audiologist Tara Parson-Grant.*

A recent study found that most hearing impaired people have some social and psychological problems as a result of not being able to hear. A study of baby-boomers found that they believe their relationships with their adult children are adversely affected by their hearing loss. Conversely, almost half of the adult children surveyed believe that their parents' hearing loss affected their relationships. One in three young people said their parents' hearing loss caused them to miss important things in their lives.

Veterans 85 and older sometimes seek isolation due to their inability to hear others clearly. "They grow withdrawn, isolated and watch TV at home," Parson-Grant explained. "Sometimes we fit them with hearing aids, and they grow accustomed to them."

Those with hearing loss strategize to offset their loss. "Some of it is conscious, or unconscious," she said. "They learn to read lips very well, they sit where they can best hear a speaker or a movie."

For Collins, the VA provides hearing aids, batteries, a doorbell alarm with a flashing light, an alarm clock and a smoke detector that she can see. "The VA gives me awesome service," she said. "They take good care of me. I love the VA."

With hearing aids Collins sometimes overhears the conversations of others. "I could hear people talking down the hall," she said. "I didn't like it. I felt I was eavesdropping, and it made it difficult to hear the conversation I was having." But Parson-Grant said that's a part of normal hearing that Collins wasn't accustomed to noticing.

For the hearing enabled, those with hearing loss are sometimes thought of as aloof, confused or distracted. Dealing with others can be difficult. "People joke about it or feel that I'm ignoring them," said Collins. "A lot of people think I have selective hearing. If I go into a meeting, I have to sit in a section that will make it easier for me to hear. It takes a great amount of concentration to understand what is being said."

Those who work or live with the hearing disabled must make concessions in order to be heard. "People who know me go around to my good [hearing] side," Collins added. "Sometimes I have to remind people I can't hear well, and I try to get as close to people as I can to understand them."

"It annoys people to keep repeating themselves," she said. "It's never a big issue, but it's there."

Brogan's hearing loss was diagnosed several months after he was wounded, leaving him with severe to profound damage to the middle-ear system that helps him regulate his



balance. "My balance and dizziness were horrible," he said. "It made physical therapy much harder, but a physical therapist at Walter Reed greatly helped me overcome the symptoms."

He's found that some people's patience with him can wear thin. "The fifth time you say 'What?' they get angry with you," Brogan explained.

Brogan has found that crowded places are a problem for him. "It's difficult, because in a group, I'm lost," he said. "Amid background noise, I'm lost."

"The VA gave me great hearing aids, and they work very well," Brogan added. "I even have a remote control... that changes the volume and filters background noise in loud areas."

"It's hard to find friends that understand what it's like with any disability," he said. "Everyone just assumes, 'Hey, you look fine, you must be fine,' which couldn't be farther from the truth."

Brogan knows that hearing loss limits his social capabilities. "I'm taking sign language to prepare for any future hearing loss," he said. "The added brain injury makes me question if I heard it and understood it correctly. TBI (traumatic brain injury) is a set of issues on its own."

His brain injury is also erasing parts of his memory. "I took a trip in 2009, and I don't remember much about it. I don't remember the events of the vacation. I'm losing the ability to hold on to the memories I have."

Parson-Grant notes that current and future advances in hearing aid technology are based on improving old technology concepts. "Hearing aids change quickly," she explained. "We are constantly getting new training in a lot of the new technologies."

"Advances like Blue Tooth cell phones, televisions and

so-called wired rooms allow those with high-tech hearing aids to access the public address systems and bring those with hearing loss back into the hearing world," said National Service Director Garry Augustine. "Hearing aids can be adjusted to enhance the frequencies that can't be heard. They also can be adjusted to reduce background noise to hear conversations with those up close."

The American Academy of Audiology issued clinical guidelines in 2010 for treatment that explores intensive audio training to change the brain, and in turn, the individual's auditory behavior. The report concludes that re-programming the brain to hear better with devices could offer improvements beyond relying on the devices alone.

"Right now, the technology is limited, it isn't a complete solution," Brogan observed. "There's lots of rehabilitation that you can do, like speech reading. I am a member of some panels working to help veterans deal with hearing loss without technology and new techniques you can use to tell people that you have a hearing loss."

"VA gives you the technology, but they don't tell you how to operate it," he

said. "Sometimes technology takes getting used to, and you fear further injuring your hearing. You can lose what you have left."

"Among the problems with hearing loss is the social interaction with people," said Jesinoski. "Those with hearing loss have to communicate to others that they cannot hear well and give others the opportunity to understand and compensate for it."

"It is frustrating to veterans and all those around them," he said. "It is an invisible disability more frustrating for those with hearing loss than others around them." ■



*Mark Brogan and his wife, Sunny, detail their experiences following Mark's injury at a DAV Community of Heroes event in Nashville.*



# Volunteers Give Sew Much Comfort to Injured

By Ashleigh Bryant

**A**dvances in the medical field have yielded an endless number of prosthetic devices designed to enable users to simulate extension and range of motion as closely to the natural limb as possible.

A specially crafted prosthetic leg for golfing replicates the torsion control one needs for proper swing and follow-through. A transfemoral running limb has helped amputee runner Sarah Reinersten set world records in nearly every distance from 100 meters to the Ironman. Truly, these innovations have brought today's veterans light years ahead of the last few decades of prosthetic technology.

So why, then, is adaptive clothing still so outdated and, largely, unavailable? A quick Internet search reveals a distinct lack of outfitters catering to the needs of amputees and the convalescing, especially those younger veterans looking to retain a sense of their own personal style in a world of medical devices and hospital gowns.

The market, while small, exists, and it took a special group to meet the need.

Sew Much Comfort (SMC), a non-profit organization energized by the laboring fingers of volunteer seamstresses, creates or adapts clothing to meet the unique needs of wounded service members and veterans in hospitals at home and overseas.

SMC president Michele Cuppy explained it all began when her retired co-founder, Ginger, paid a visit to Walter Reed. She had seen an injured service member receive his Purple Heart in a hospital gown, unable to wear regular clothing because of the fixator on his leg.

"Ginger came to my house and asked me to sew a pair of adapted fixator pants which she brought to the service member," said Cuppy. "He was so grateful because he had not been able to wear any clothing for the past six months that he began to cry. His heartwarming reaction of tears, gratitude and excitement motivated us to make more fixator pants."

The hope then for a small group of seamstresses in Minnesota was to make 100 pairs of fixator pants and call it quits. But requests began pouring in, and after being featured in *Sew News Magazine* in 2005, another 500 seamstresses reached out to Cuppy to volunteer their services.

Today, SMC has grown to include 950 seamstresses across the United States and Germany who have produced 115,000 articles of adaptive clothing, totaling more than 460,000 volunteer hours. And with the help of a DAV Charitable Service Trust grant of \$5,000, the volunteer seamstresses will be able to clothe more veterans.

Not surprisingly, there have been no studies conducted to gauge the effect of a specially adapted pair of pants on an injured veteran's recovery, but the program's feedback is enough to suggest these comforts have a fairly significant emotional impact.



*Sew Much Comfort volunteers in Alexandria, Va., took a break from their normal clothing orders to help sew the new DAV logo onto the jerseys of its partner organization, the USA Warriors Ice Hockey Program.*



*Sew Much Comfort volunteers meet weekly to sew custom clothing for veterans, with their products going to aid veterans across the country. To learn more about the group, or to place orders for the free adaptive clothing, visit the SMC website at [sewmuchcomfort.org](http://sewmuchcomfort.org).*

"There are no words to describe how very much your Velcro pants, underwear and shirts helped my husband in the hospital," said one veteran's spouse. "Being able to put 'real' clothes on was the biggest step towards normalcy for him."

SMC's website is rife with words of gratitude for the unique service they provide. "Because I received your package a few weeks ago, I can now for the first time since my injuries attend our family's Christmas gatherings in 'normal-looking clothing,'" wrote a veteran. "I hope that others who have received your wonderful clothing items take a few minutes to share with you just how much of a positive difference you have made in their own recovery stories."

"It's terrific to see so many volunteers come forward and give their time and labor to support veterans," said Voluntary Services Director Ron Minter. "Having a favorite shirt or pair of pants seems like such a small thing to most of us, but it can really help bring some normalcy back to the life of a seriously injured veteran."

The majority of SMC's clothing goes directly to military and veterans medical facilities for patients to use as needed, but the volunteers also cater to special requests. Cuppy said the most unusual requests have been for wetsuits, dress uniforms, and even wedding attire, but mostly the patients just want something familiar and comfortable to wear.

"We were thrilled with everything in our order, but when we pulled out the LSU shirt and shorts you should have seen his face!" wrote one veteran's mother. "Now we can represent our beloved LSU and feel like he's at home when he wears the clothes."

Being able  
to put on  
'real' clothes  
is a major  
step toward  
normalcy.

Cuppy said she is moved by the way SMC's work touches lives and wishes only that the organization could do more.

"What is really hard to hear is when the wounded say, 'I wish I knew about your clothes because I could have really used them.' Some said they opened their own clothes and either taped or pinned the sides," said Cuppy. "Prior to our existence, no one was making adapted clothing for this purpose."

Based on the personal testimonies, one can see these custom and adapted garments are a blend of physical and emotional comfort in the wake of devastating and traumatic loss.

"Without your fine clothes I don't think I would have been able to be dressed without being in terrible agony, so I just want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all that you and the volunteers who help you do," wrote one veteran. He then went on to update the volunteers on his condition, saying, "By the way I came through fine. My pelvis was fixed, my legs healed and I lost my foot. Don't worry about the foot, though, it was my left one which I never liked anyway."

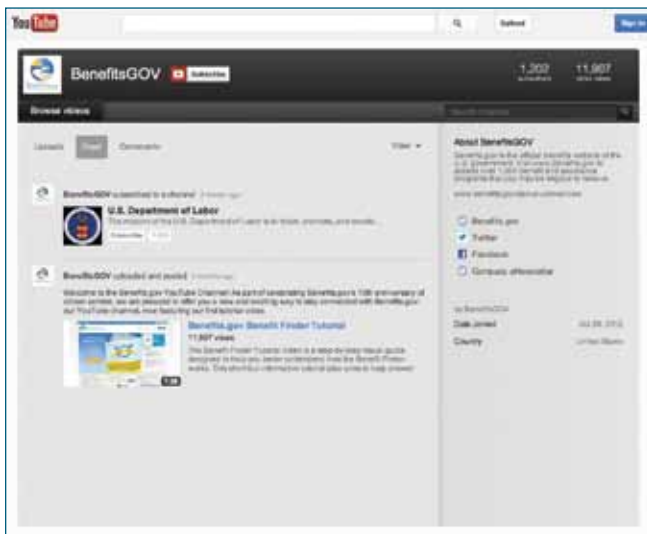
SMC is a labor of love in its truest sense, but also one of gratitude and tribute. It is delightfully reminiscent of a time when a nation at war pooled its collective time, energy and resources to provide for the needs of those wounded in service.

"Sew Much Comfort provides so many of our volunteers with a great sense of purpose in the work they are doing that they want to keep sewing," said Cuppy. "The ability to share their talent of sewing and be able to say 'thank you' to all those serving in the military motivates them to keep going. Many have pledged to keep sewing until all our troops come home." ■



## Benefits.gov Launch

■ The Benefits.gov Program announced the launch of its own YouTube channel in December. By visiting the channel at [www.youtube.com/BenefitsGOV](http://www.youtube.com/BenefitsGOV), veterans and active duty service members can find and apply for government benefits available to them. Current YouTube subscribers can also subscribe to the Benefits.gov channel to receive alerts to new video postings that can help them in the benefits search. The program's main website, [www.Benefits.gov](http://www.Benefits.gov), offers a search tool for citizens to navigate available benefits, many of which are specific to the men and women who have served in the armed forces.



## VA Starts Work on PTSD Research Center

■ In December, the VA broke ground on a new \$10 million mental health research facility at the Ralph Johnson VA Center in Charleston, S.C. The 16,000 square foot facility has been in the planning stage for eight years and will be a hub for significant research in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, general mental health issues and veteran homelessness. The facility will include space for a fully equipped scientific lab as well as clinical areas for the treatment of veterans and is designed to accommodate future expansion.

## Preparations for Memorial Construction

■ The Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO) began construction work in mid-December to relocate underground power lines near the site selected for the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial following the relocation of other data communication facilities earlier in the fall. Once the relocation and transfer of power lines is complete, the District of Columbia's Department of Transportation (DDOT) will begin making street improvements needed to accommodate construction of the memorial. DDOT's work is expected to begin in March. Authorized by Congress in 2000, the Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation schedule calls for the memorial's complete construction in September 2014 and formal dedication in October 2014.

## Senate OKs Bill for Fertility Treatments for Wounded Vets, Spouses

■ A bill authorizing wounded veterans and their spouses to receive government-funded fertility treatments has passed in the Senate but faces an uncertain future in the House of Representatives. Senate lawmakers, without objection, passed the bill that would change current VA medical coverage for an increasingly more common injury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: trauma to reproductive organs. Nearly 2,000 service members suffered this type of trauma between 2003 and 2011, but the VA did not provide coverage for procedures such as in-vitro fertilization.







## Testimonial Dinner for National Commander Polzin

**N**ational Commander Larry A. Polzin will be the guest of honor at a testimonial dinner Saturday, April 13, aboard the Queen Mary in Long Beach, Calif., celebrating his role of leadership in DAV.

The testimonial begins with a reception at 6 p.m. followed by a testimonial program and dinner at 7 p.m. The cost of dinner is \$50 per person, and checks, payable to DAV Department of California, must be mailed to the Department at 13733 East Rosecrans Ave., Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670, no later than March 13. Please indicate your dinner choice of grilled beef tenderloin or grilled salmon with your check. To make

a reservation or for additional information, please call the Department of California's Charlotte Robertson at 562-404-1266.

Room reservations aboard the Queen Mary may be made by calling the ship's Reservation Department at 877-342-0742. Please mention you are making reservations for the Disabled American Veterans Testimonial Dinner in order to receive the special group rate of \$125 to \$159 per night, plus tax.

In addition to the testimonial for Commander Polzin, arrangements are being made for tours of local places of interest.

## Testimonial Dinner for Auxiliary Commander Adams



**A** testimonial dinner to honor Auxiliary National Commander Donna Adams will be held Saturday, April 6, at DAV Chapter 20, 8447 N. 61st Ave. in Glendale, Ariz.

The event begins with a cocktail hour at 6 p.m. followed by dinner at 7 p.m. Dinner tickets are \$50 per person. Reservations are required, and tickets should be purchased no later than March 23.

Checks should be made payable to DAVA Commander's Testimonial and sent to Diane Stone, DAVA Commander's Testimonial, 6852 W. Cheryl Drive, Peoria, AZ 85345. For additional information, please contact Diane Stone at 623-979-2200.

Room reservations should be made directly with the InnPlace Hotel Phoenix North, 10220 N. Metro Parkway E., Phoenix, AZ 85051. Call 866-257-5990 and refer to the DAVA room block at code DAD05A. The room rate is \$69 plus tax, per night. Transportation to and from the airport is available at [www.Supershuttle.com](http://www.Supershuttle.com). The charge is approximately \$36 round trip. Cab fare is approximately \$60 round trip.

## No Agent Orange Presumption for 'Blue Water' Navy Veterans



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

■ A report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academy of Sciences concludes that there is insufficient evidence to determine whether Blue Water Navy veterans were exposed to Agent Orange-associated herbicides during the Vietnam War. The study was requested by the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2011. The IOM reviewed a wide range of data sources including peer-reviewed literature, exposure and transport modeling, interviews with veterans, ship deck logs and other government documents. In a Dec. 26 *Federal Register* notice the VA determined that available evidence does not support establishing a presumption of exposure to herbicides for Blue Water Navy Vietnam veterans. VA will continue to accept and review all Blue Water Navy Vietnam veteran claims based on herbicide exposure on a case-by-case basis.

## VA Seeks Expanded TBI Benefits

■ The Department of Veterans Affairs is proposing to add five diagnosable illnesses which are secondary to service-connected traumatic brain injury (TBI). The VA proposes to add a new subsection to its adjudication regulation to state that if a veteran who has a service-connected TBI also has one of the five illnesses, then the illness will be considered service connected as secondary to the TBI.

The regulatory change comes after an Institute of Medicine (IOM) study found “sufficient evidence of an association” between moderate or severe TBI and Parkinsonism; dementias (which VA understands to include presenile dementia of the Alzheimer type and post-traumatic dementia); depression (which also was associated with mild TBI); and diseases of hormone deficiency that may result from hypothalamo-pituitary changes.

Those findings are reported in the IOM’s “Gulf War and Health, Volume 7: Long-Term Consequences of TBI.”

The report also found “sufficient evidence of a causal relationship” between moderate or severe levels of TBI and diagnosed unprovoked seizures.

Although service connection would depend in part on the severity of the TBI (mild, moderate or severe) and the period of time between the injury and the onset of the secondary illness, the proposed rule clarifies that it does not preclude a veteran from establishing direct service connection even if those time and severity standards are not met. It also defines the terms mild, moderate and severe to be consistent with Department of Defense guidelines.



## From the AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER

### DONNA M. ADAMS



## America's Greatest Generations

**F**ifteen years ago, Tom Brokaw wrote a book about World War II veterans called *The Greatest Generation*. Brokaw was entirely correct. Those 16 million American men and women who served in the U.S. military in Europe and the Pacific saved the world, and they deserve every honor we can give them.

In 2003, I coordinated a reunion for Korean War veterans in Arizona, and as part of the entertainment, Korean dancers performed. The narrator was a Korean-American woman who stopped mid-way and told us that the Chinese overran her village when she was 10 years old. Her uncle was killed and her brother was taken away. She ended by saying, "To every man in this room, thank you for saving my life and thank you for saving my country." With my heart in my throat, I thought yes, they did that. They, too, are our greatest generation.

Then came Vietnam, and a new group of young men were drafted, but more men and women chose to enlist, to serve in a country many of us had never heard of in a war that many Americans were against. But they continued to serve, even knowing that they may be returning home to a country embittered by the thought of the military, or that they might not be coming home at all. In my mind, that makes them our greatest generation.

In 1990, the UN authorized the Gulf War. Again, the U.S. wasn't attacked on our soil and many of the men and women who volunteered their service were the children of those who were treated with disdain during Vietnam, but they went and they served honorably. This is our greatest generation.

Through all this time, we were involved in the Cold War, Grenada, Lebanon, Libya, Panama, Bosnia and Somali, among others. America's young people continued to volunteer to defend our country not knowing from one day to the next where they would be sent or if they would be called up for combat. They recognized the need, and they served, and

they became our greatest generation.

Today, we are again involved in conflicts continents away. They are being fought by a volunteer military that often are met with unthinkable injury or trauma. But they continue to serve with pride and patriotism. This is our greatest generation.

Whether they served in Lexington, Gettysburg, Verdun, Normandy, Southeast Asia, the Gulf or a host of other places, a fraction of Americans throughout our history have been willing to put on the uniform in defense of our freedom and our democracy. Those who served in the Continental Army are the same ones who would be serving in Afghanistan had they been born centuries later. These soldiers, Marines, sailors, airmen and coastguardsmen have earned our respect, and they deserve the best treatment that our country and its citizens have to offer.

There is also another group of Americans who have served without uniforms. They are the moms and dads, the sisters and brothers, the husbands and wives, the daughters and sons of our American heroes. They have waited for letters from their loved ones, welcomed them home and cried with each other at funerals. They have carried luggage, mowed the grass and put gas in the car when their veteran can't. These people have written to Congress for health care and benefits, waited at the pharmacy, treated wounds, tried to understand what their veteran is going through and told a VA doctor, "My veteran deserves better than that." They are easy to spot — they are the first ones with their hand over their hearts when the flag passes in honor of their veteran. They are our DAV Auxiliary. For their love and their support, the families of our veterans are among our greatest generation.

To each of our veterans, thank you for your service to our country. And to each of their families, thank you for your service to our veterans.





## From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN

### REV. DR. RONALD R. RINGO, Jr.

#### The Newness of Life in Spring

Each year we have the blessing of witnessing the newness of life in what we call spring. While we rejoice in the beauty and the renewing of life during this time of year, we often remain cautious or even a bit reluctant to believe that Old Man Winter won't rear his ugly head again with a late season storm.

I think we sometimes do this in our everyday lives as well. We have been taught the blessings of the Passover season, the promise of Easter and the story of Jesus' conquering of the grave showing that there is life after death. Especially when we lose someone dear to us, we sometimes question in our minds and hearts if we will ever see them again.

What would we do differently or how would we live differently, if we knew we only had a short time left here on earth? Would we spend our time making sure everything at work was done or spend more time with loved ones? Would we spend our time worrying or enjoy the simple pleasures all around us? I believe most of us would choose to live our lives to their fullest. We would take and make the time to enjoy life more completely.

This newness of life that we experience each spring can be a part of our attitude all year long if we seek to put it in our hearts and on our faces. It is what most people drop down and

ask for in their prayers. It is what most of us say we wish we had more of. The beauty of it is, we can have it throughout the year if we would look all around us for the joy of life, the precious, sweet, simple and most important things of life — those who share their lives with ours.

As we put away the fears of the unknown and the uncontrollable, we actually become a new person — a person of faith, joy and hope. God has promised this to each and every one of us. That doesn't mean there won't be difficult or hurtful times, but it does mean that there is a newness around the corner, if we can only remember that.

May we seek to look at the beauties of this life more clearly and more often and not waste our time, whatever that remains for us, on worldly cares and worries. Let us, "seize the day," renew our life and bless others along the way. This is my prayer for us all, this time of year. My hope is that you will have had a great Easter-Passover and spring season.

As always, it is my hope that this message will help you to, "mount up as on eagle's wings," and renew a little of your strength to keep moving forward and find joy (*Isaiah 40:31*).

Until next time, may God bless you, and may God continue to bless our great nation... SEMPER FI.

## Director's Column

*(Continued from pg. 13)*

behalf if there is an error. Once the claim is decided, it must be posted and can again take some time to process.

Veterans may contact the National Service Office in their area to inquire when an NSO can see them to review their records, determine the extent of their disability and sign a DAV power of attorney giving us the authority to represent them in their claim. A directory of National Service Offices is available at [dav.org](http://dav.org). Service members separating from the military should visit a TSO at a military separation center.

During the claims review process, veterans will receive several letters from the VA on the status of the claim, and providing forms as a formality. It's best to contact an NSO if there are any questions about VA communications. Some letters from the

VA regional office where a claim is being decided may request additional specific evidence or require a written response. An NSO can help to provide an appropriate reply.

Lastly, have great patience. Claims aren't decided overnight, and some, such as those related to exposure to ionized radiation, covert operations and military sexual traumas, where records may be difficult to find, frequently take much longer. Being patient and allowing the process to move forward is easier than becoming frustrated over the lack of a decision.

Our NSOs are top-notch professionals who undergo constant training in the VA claims environment. Each year, we represent hundreds of thousands of clients and seek a speedy solution to the backlog so that veterans can obtain their earned benefits. We work every day to fulfill the promises made to the men and women who served so they can lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. ■

## 2013 DAV Flight Team Schedule

Date	Air Show Name	City & State	Aircraft
March 16-17	Thunder in the Valley	Columbus, Ga.	Panchito
March 23-24	Florida International Air Show	Punta Gorda, Fla.	Panchito
April 6-7	MacDill AFB Air Show	Tampa, Fla.	Panchito
April 9-14	Sun & Fun	Lakeland, Fla.	Panchito
July 29-Aug 4	EAA AirVenture	Oshkosh, Wis.	Panchito
Aug 31-Sept 1	NAS Pax River Air Show	Patuxent River, Md.	Panchito
Oct 5-6	MCAS Miramar Air Show	San Diego, Calif.	TBD
Oct 26-27	Wings Over Houston	Houston, Texas	Special Delivery



# DAV Donates Flags to Nebraska Schools

**O**n Tuesday, November 27, the DAV Department of Nebraska held a flag presentation ceremony at the Lincoln Public Schools in Lincoln, Neb. The ceremony recognized 550 U.S. Flags that DAV donated to the schools earlier in the month.

The donation was spurred by the Nebraska Board of Education's ruling approving the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in schools. Upon approval of this ruling, the Lincoln Public Schools discovered that they needed hundreds of additional flags to ensure there was a flag in every classroom. DAV Chapter 7 Past Commander Ray Ayars learned of this need and immediately brought it to the attention of the local DAV. Commander Ayars offered to pay half the costs of the flags if DAV would contribute the other half. The DAV members quickly said yes and stepped up to answer the need.

"It was really an easy decision for the members of DAV Chapter 7 to purchase the flags for the classrooms," shares

Jim Shuey, Adjutant, DAV Department of Nebraska. "We had been supporters of the legislation and advocated to get it passed. The donation of the flags is our way of honoring our commitment to the Lincoln Public Schools and community."

DAV notified the school board of the donation, and 550 flags were delivered to Lincoln Public School classrooms.

"We are grateful to DAV for their generous contribution of American flags to our classrooms at Lincoln Public Schools,"

said Superintendent Steve Joel. "I think it is especially meaningful that this gift came from veterans, men and women who have contributed so much to our

country. On behalf of the students, teachers and staff members across our school district, I'd like to say thank you."

"It is important that we continue to educate our youth on the principles upon which this great country was founded which have been protected by veterans for more than 200 years," adds Shuey. "The flags displayed in the classrooms should be a constant reminder that the rights

and privileges we enjoy today were paid for with the sacrifice, service and blood of our nation's veterans. Whether students participate in the Pledge of Allegiance or choose not to, they are exercising a Constitutional right we as DAV members promised to defend." ■

**"I think it is especially meaningful that this gift came from veterans ..."**

*LPS Superintendent Steve Joel*



*Department of Nebraska Adjutant Jim Shuey, center, accepts the thanks of Lincoln, Neb., School Board Vice President Katie McLeese Stevenson for donating 550 U.S. flags to the city's school system. The flags help Lincoln comply with a State Board of Education rule requiring a flag in every classroom. The flags were provided by Lincoln Chapter 7 and the Department.*





**Veterans Day...**

*Past National Commander James Sursely addresses about 700 people gathered for one of the best-attended Veterans Day programs at the International Event Center near the Rochester, Minn., airport. Chapter 28 in Rochester co-sponsored the event along with the Soldiers Field Veterans Memorial Committee and others. The event included a breakfast provided by the Canadian Honker Restaurant.*

**Rewarding Service...**

*DAV van driver Don Boyce (left) is recognized for 15 years of dedicated service to the DAV Transportation Network. Honoring Boyce is Roger D. Roy of the DAV Department of West Virginia on Dec. 17. Boyce is 92.*





### **Helping Fund Education...**

*Chapter 25, Berkeley Calif., donates \$200 each to four Gulf War Afghanistan veterans attending the University of California on the GI Bill and one to a member of the Chapter. Pictured are from left, Chapter commander Nathaniel Harrison, Jerry Dobbs, Christian Fierro, Zachary Fierro, Russell Weeks, Andrew Medina and David Gan. Back row, Vice Commander Douglas Boyce, Adjutant Ed Harper and Lethal Alexander.*



### **Salute to Veterans...**

*Volunteers and members from DAV Beaufort Chapter 12 helped the VA conduct a "Salute to Veterans" at the VA Outpatient Clinic in Beaufort Naval Hospital.*



## Former VA Chief Mansfield Passes

■ With heavy hearts, DAV salutes the Honorable Gordon H. Mansfield, who passed away Jan. 29 at the VA medical center in Washington, D.C. He served as Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs from January 2004 to January 2009. He was Acting Secretary of the VA from Oct. 1, 2007 to Dec. 20, 2007.

"America's veterans have lost a true friend and resolute advocate with the passing of Gordon Mansfield," said National Commander Larry A. Polzin. "He was a role model for many veterans with disabilities, an outstanding leader and a true American hero."

Mansfield was honored as DAV's 2006 Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year and was inducted into the Spinal Cord Injury Hall of Fame in October 2006. He was a recipient of the Presidential Distinguished Service Award and the Villanova University Alumni Human Relations Medal.

Mansfield was involved in forming a DAV Chapter in Marion County, Fla., and was a life member of DAV.

"He was among the all-time great warriors fighting for his fellow injured and ill veterans," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "The word 'hero' can be used too freely at times, but it is perfectly fitting when speaking of Gordon. I will be eternally grateful for having had him as a friend."

He entered the Army in 1964 and served two tours of duty in Vietnam. While company commander with the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) during his second tour, he was wounded during the Tet Offensive of 1968 and sustained a spinal cord

injury. In spite of his injuries, he remained with his troops and ensured their safety and the evacuation of the injured before he permitted his own evacuation to a nearby Navy hospital. He was later transferred to the U.S. Army hospital at Camp Zama, Japan, and then to the Valley Forge Army Hospital in Pennsylvania where he began the long physical rehabilitation

process. The road to rehabilitation took him to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the VA medical center in Washington, D.C., where his treatment and therapy continued for the next five years. While there he began his legal studies at American University Law School and earned his law degree under the VA vocational rehabilitation program at the University of Miami School of Law.

Shortly after graduation, Mansfield was back in the VA medical center for a second major operation on his spine and for another rehabilitation program. It was after his recovery that he began practicing law, serving as counsel in a legal aid program providing assistance to his fellow veterans.

For his actions while his unit was under fire, Mansfield was decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross. He was medically retired by the U.S. Army at the grade of captain. His other combat decorations include the Bronze Star, two Purple Hearts, the Combat Infantryman's Badge and the Presidential Unit Citation. He was inducted into the U.S. Army Rangers Hall of Fame in 2007 and the U.S. Army Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame in 1997.



Mansfield



## Veterans Day Parade...

*The Honor Guard of Betsy Lane Ch. 169 in Pikeville, Ky., present a 21-gun salute, pictured from left to right are John Sword, Junior Hamilton, James Roberts, George Hall, George Kidd, Gretho Hamilton, Jackie Conn.*



## Past National Commander Pearson Passes

■ Past National Commander Lyle C. Pearson Sr. is being remembered as a man who put his all into everything he did, especially fighting for veterans. He passed Jan. 11 at the age 92 in North Mankato, Minn.

As a B-17 bomber pilot in World War II, he flew 50 combat missions before being shot down over Italy in 1944 and was held as a prisoner of war until 1945. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with Clusters and the Purple Heart.

Commander Pearson was one of just six American citizens who in 1974 was a guest of the Soviet Union to participate in the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Spending much of the rest of his life working to better the lives of fellow injured and ill veterans of all eras, he served as DAV National Commander from 1975 to 1976.

"Commander Pearson was a man of great passion, always working to help others," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "He meant a great deal to DAV, and DAV meant a great deal to him. He knew the issues and spoke with authority and conviction. His leadership and dedication to his fellow veterans were evident to all who were fortunate to know him."



Pearson

He was a county probation officer and eventually became chief of court services in Nicollet County, Minn., retiring in 1983.

Commander Pearson was among those featured in a DAV-supported World War II documentary, "A Testament to Freedom," which aired on public television in 2004. In the film, he said that during his time in the German prison camp and all the years since he felt lucky to be alive. "I was hungry, cold, beat up and battered," he said, "but I knew I was alive. My wife didn't know that for six weeks after I was shot down."

Commander Pearson was long known for his selflessness, serving for 54 years on St. Peter State Hospital's volunteer council. He was a fight judge for the Golden Gloves Boxing program and a regular donor for the Red Cross Bloodmobile and had received his 8-gallon donor pin.

Commander Pearson was predeceased by his wife Katherine, who served as DAV Auxiliary National Commander from 1987 through 1988.

"Today's veterans and their families are better off because of the years and years of work Lyle dedicated to them and to DAV," Adjutant Wilson said. "He was among the great men who made up the greatest generation. He will be dearly missed but never forgotten."

## Retired NSO James Bennett Passes

■ James C. Bennett, former supervisor of DAV's National Service Office in Reno, Nev., died Dec. 12. The retired U.S. Air Force veteran of both World War II and the Korean War was 86.

He joined DAV's professional ranks as a National Service Officer Trainee at the National Service Office in Buffalo, N.Y., in 1974. NSO Bennett was a life member of Chapter 170 in New York, which he helped organize.

"NSO Bennett's contributions to DAV and his strong commitment to fulfilling our mission were hallmarks of his career serving his fellow veterans and their families," said National Adjutant Arthur H. Wilson. "Those whose lives he touched often sent letters to DAV expressing their appreciation and thanks for his work on their behalf."



Bennett

Born in 1926, Bennett attended school in Nunda, N.Y., before entering the Army Air Corps in 1945. With a break in service after World War II, he re-enlisted in 1946 and enrolled in Officer Candidate School. He was commissioned a 2nd lieutenant in 1953. During his 22-year military career, he served stateside and in Japan, Guam and Crete. He retired in 1966 with the rank of captain.

"Dedicated NSOs such as James Bennett bring great credit to DAV for their excellent advocacy and representation for our injured and ill veterans, their families and survivors. Without them our nation would fail in its obligation to fulfill the promises to the men and women who served," Adjutant Wilson said.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Janet W. Bennett, and son James C. Bennett Jr. (Jimmy). He is survived by four children.

## Google Launches 'VetNet' to Help Veterans Find Jobs

Men and women leaving the military are facing one of the toughest job markets in recent history. The unemployment rate is slowly falling, but there are still millions of Americans out of work or underemployed, which makes for stiff competition for jobs.

In addition, the transition from military service to the civilian workforce has been historically tricky. With that in mind, the Internet giant Google has launched a new site dubbed "VetNet" ([www.vetnethq.com](http://www.vetnethq.com)).

VetNet is "a career service for those who've served." The site is free to use. Veterans and their family members, with a simple click on a green button, can get connected to other veterans and access a database of more than 1 million veteran-preferred jobs.

Veterans can choose classes and training sessions in three different tracks, depending on where they are in their career: Basic Training, Career Connections and Entrepreneur.

Current learning opportunities include resume writing 101, a panel discussion of veterans working in the transportation industry and an entrepreneurship class on paths to business ownership.

"For several years now, we've been working to help the veteran community through outreach programs and by connecting veterans and their families to useful Google products and services," Google told DAV in a written statement. "For example, we've built tools like the Veterans Job Bank to connect veterans with employers, today populated with more than a million jobs. And we created a Resume Builder to help job-seekers represent their experience in just a few clicks with Google Docs."

Google, which works regularly with DAV in Washington, D.C., to better serve veterans, teamed up with Hire Heroes USA, Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families and Hiring Our Heroes to create VetNet.



# VETNET

## HEADQUARTERS

HERE'S WHAT'S HAPPENING ACROSS VETNET



### Disabled American Veterans National Headquarters

Unaudited Statement of Financial Position • December 31, 2012

<b>Unrestricted Assets</b>		<b>Unrestricted Liabilities</b>	
Current Assets	\$ 38,797,839	Current Liabilities	\$ 120,240,975
Investments, at Market	324,087,427	Total Liabilities	120,240,975
Land, Buildings and Equipment,		<b>Unrestricted Net Assets</b>	
Net of Depreciation	5,915,134	General and Net Assets Designated by the	
Other Assets	103,500	Board of Directors	248,662,925
		Total Unrestricted Net Assets	248,662,925
<b>Total Unrestricted Assets</b>	<b>\$ 368,903,900</b>	<b>Total Liabilities and Unrestricted</b>	<b>\$ 368,903,900</b>
		<b>Net Assets</b>	
<b>Life Membership Assets</b>		<b>Life Membership Liabilities</b>	
Current Assets	\$ 2,348,570	Current Liabilities	\$ 123,524
Investments, at Market	54,502,408	Reserve for Future Distribution of	56,727,454
		Life Membership Dues	
<b>Total Life Membership Assets</b>	<b>\$ 56,850,978</b>	<b>Total Life Membership Liabilities and</b>	<b>\$ 56,850,978</b>
		<b>Reserve for Future Distribution of</b>	
		<b>Life Membership Dues</b>	

### Memorial Bench...

DAV members gather around a commemorative DAV bench at the Castro Valley, Calif., Veterans Memorial. Chapter 7 in Oakland, Calif., donated funds to help build the memorial, which includes six meditation benches noting veteran service organizations, and honors each military service. Michael L. Emerson, second on left back row, designed and built the memorial dedicated on Veterans Day at Castro Valley Community Park.



# Supporting DAV— For this couple, it's an investment

“We do enjoy the check we receive every month from the charitable gift annuity with DAV.”

“Most of our income from this CGA is tax free,” says Hildegard Weeks, DAV Auxiliary member. But she quickly adds the real reason why she and her husband, Cecil, funded a gift annuity with DAV: “We feel that any support we give DAV is an investment in our future and in our country's future.”

Cecil surely invested in America during 20 years in the Army, serving in Germany, France, Korea and Vietnam. Along the way, his sacrifices earned him the right to join DAV.

He's grateful for what DAV did for his family and for the benefits that helped provide a college education for their son who went on to serve in the Air Force. He likes the idea that their annuity “helps continue DAV's much-needed service, and provides an income in the future for my wife.”

Writing in *Forbes* last year, William Baldwin referred to gift annuities as “a lovely tax dodge,” but that's not the kind of thinking DAV hears as it works with members who establish annuities.

Far more typical are the responses of Cecil and Hildegard Weeks — people who see gift annuities as a way to make significant contributions to DAV without giving up income they currently receive from CDs, bonds or other investments.

In fact, that income can be very nice, depending on an annuitant's age. Just check out the box to the right. And the satisfaction of making the gift to help our fellow veterans and families? Well, the Weeks family said it all.



*Cecil and Hildegard Weeks, Gift Annuity donors*

## **Charitable Gift Annuity Benefits:**

- ★ Fixed income for life, largely tax-free
- ★ Rates range from 4.4% (age 60) to 9.0% (age 90)
- ★ Two-life rates are slightly lower
- ★ Charitable income-tax deduction
- ★ Guardian Society recognition for your generosity

Minimum gift is \$10,000.

Minimum age is 60.

To learn more and to receive a personalized illustration of the income and tax benefits for your age(s), call DAV's gift planning staff at **1-800-216-9802**, or e-mail **[giftplanning@dav.org](mailto:giftplanning@dav.org)** or return the attached postcard.

**We hope to hear from you soon!**



PROTECTING THOSE WHO SERVED



# Helping kids



DAV's long standing partnership with Golden Corral is now going to help our kids. This summer, more than 2,000 children of fallen and injured veterans will be attending free Camp Corral events throughout the nation. At least 200 of the camp participants will be sponsored through **DAV's new "Just B Kids" scholarship program**. Children between the ages of 8 and 15 will enjoy a week of non-stop fun and excitement.

If you have a special kid in your life who would like to attend Camp Corral for free, visit [www.justbkids.org](http://www.justbkids.org) to link to information on eligibility and to apply.



**2013**



**Schedule**

DATES	LOCATION	CITY	STATE
June 2-7	YMCA Camp Classen	Davis	Okla.
June 23-28	Millstone 4-H Camp	Ellerbe	N.C.
June 23-28	Eastern 4-H Center	Columbia	N.C.
July 7-12	4-H Memorial Camp	Monticello	Ill.
July 7-12	Canters Cave 4-H Camp	Jackson	Ohio
July 14-19	Rock Springs 4-H Center	Rock Springs	Kan.
July 14-19	Wahsega 4-H Center	Wahsega	Ga.
July 14-19	Texas 4-H Center	Brownwood	Texas
July 21-26	CSU's Pingree Park	Ft. Collins	Colo.
July 21-26	C.A. Vines 4-H Center	Little Rock	Ark.
July 28 - Aug. 2	James 4-H Camp @ Mingus Springs	Prescott	Ariz.
July 28 - Aug. 2	YMCA Camp Shady Brook	Sedalia	Colo.
July 28 - Aug. 2	4-H Camp Ocala	Altoona	Fla.
July 28 - Aug. 2	West Kentucky 4-H Camp	Dawson Springs	Ky.
Aug 4-9	4-H Camp Timpoochee	Niceville	Fla.
Aug 4-9	Swannanoa 4-H Center	Swannanoa	N.C.
Aug. 4-9	Northern Virginia 4-H Center	Front Royal	Va.
Aug. 11-16	YMCA Camp Loma Mar	Loma Mar	Calif.



## REUNIONS

### ARMY

**121ST AVIATION CO. REUNION** - May 16-19, 2013, Fort Worth, TX, Contact: John Schmied, (352) 633-0541, Email: johndschmied@yahoo.com, Website: www.1211avn.org.

**2ND INFANTRY REGIMENT** - May 16-19, 2013, Pigeon Forge, TN, Contact: Israel Tamés, (210) 239-6404, Email: tames25@sbcglobal.net.

**3D SQUADRON/15TH CAVALRY BLACK KNIGHTS ASSN.** - June 20-24, 2013, Colorado Springs, CO, Contact: Mike Cook, (502) 969-9202, Email: mwtjcook@insightbb.com.

**536TH MILITARY POLICE CO.** - Aug. 7-9, 2013, Glenwood Springs, CO, Contact: Bill Barnes, Jr., (440) 964-6838, Email: bill536mpckitz@yahoo.com.

**6TH AND 7TH BN'S, 15TH ARTILLERY (ALL BN'S/WARS WELCOME)** - May 16-19, 2013, Colorado Springs, CO, Contact: Ray Tingstrom, (808) 271-1521, Email: ertingstrom@yahoo.com.

**76TH/933RD ANTI-AIRCRAFT ARTILLERY BN ASSN. 1946-1951** - June 27-29, 2013, Colorado Springs, CO, Contact: Fred Murphy, (803) 783-1123.

**88TH INF. DIV., TRUST AND USFA, SOUTHEASTERN CHAPTER** - May 2-5, 2013, Columbus, GA, Contact: Preston Bryant, (803) 245-4462, Email: nimrod004@earthlink.net.

**L COMPANY, 21ST INF. REGIMENT, 24TH INF. DIVISION** - May 1-5, 2013, Branson, MO, Contact: George Vlasic, (910) 287-5618, Email: geonanvlasic@atmc.net.

**VIETNAM GUNTRUCKERS AND ALL TRANSPORTATION UNITS** - Aug. 6-11, 2013, Indianapolis, IN, Contact: John Dodd, (434) 724-1469, Email: johndodd@centurylink.net, Website: www.vietnam-guntrucks.com.

**VIETNAM VETERANS LINE HAUL REUNION** - April 30-May 5, 2013, Pigeon Forge, TN, Contact: Wesley Taylor, (904) 335-7402, Email: vietnam566th@yahoo.com.

### MARINES

**KILO CO., 3RD BN., 7TH MARINE REG. AND ATTACHED UNITS** - Sept. 18-23, 2012, Jacksonville, FL, Contact: William Rolke, (262) 780-0993, Email: k37usmc@att.net.

**MARINE AMMO CO. PERSONNEL REUNION** - May 8-10, 2013, Branson, MO, Contact: Tom Crotty, (513) 451-4694, Email: tomandcar@fuse.net.

**MARINES OF LONG AGO, ALL ERAS** - April 16-20, 2013, Myrtle Beach, SC, Contact: Joe "Red" Cullen, (203) 877-0846, Email: aircooledmg7@aol.com.

**VIETNAM MARINE CORPS UNIT, FIRST BN FIRST MARINES** - July 13-17, 2013, New Orleans, LA, Contact: Will Lomen, 1600 42nd Avenue E., Seattle, WA 98112, Email: wlomen@hotmail.com.

### NAVY

**NAVAL MINERFARE ASSN** - May 2-7, 2013, St. Louis, MO, Contact: Walt Crews, (405) 485-2660, Email: waltcrews@pdi.net.

**NAVY ODIN EARLY WARNING SQUADRONS VX-4 AND VW-2** - May 19-21, 2013, Savannah, GA, Contact: Walter S. Jones, (727) 517-1407, Email: wsjdrj@att.net.

**USS ARLINGTON (AGMR-2)** - April 3-9, 2013, Virginia Beach, VA, Contact: Ken Cox, (863) 307-3187, Email: kcox@tampabay.rr.com.

**USS BLOCK ISLAND (CVE-106/CVE-21)** - May 29-June 2, 2013, Pensacola, FL, Contact: Bill Macinnes, (619) 460-3568.

**USS BORDELON (DD/DDR-881)** - Sept. 4-8, 2013, Milwaukee, WI, Contact: Sebastian Riccobono, (414) 852-2103, Email: sriccobono@sbcglobal.net.

**USS CARPENTER (DD-825)** - April 25-29, 2013, Cincinnati, OH, Contact: Coy Ritchie, (303) 627-1527, Email: coyritchie@aol.com.

**USS COGSWELL (DD-651)** - June 2-4, 2013, Mobile, AL, Contact: George H. Overman, (760) 889-2216, Email: Secretary@usscogswell.com, Website: www.usscogswell.com.

**USS CONY (DD/DDE-508)** - May 15-19, 2013, Mobile, AL, Contact: Ken Cox, (863) 307-3187, Email: kcox@tampabay.rr.com.

**USS FDR (CV-42)** - May 15-19, 2013, Springfield, IL, Contact: Ray Hough, (318) 645-7673, Email: rghough@bellsouth.net, Website: www.ussfdrvc42reunion.com.

**USS GUNSTON HALL (LSD-5)** - April 28-May 1, 2013, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Ron Kennedy, (623) 907-3688, Email: bfrkron@yahoo.com.

**USS HOUSTON (CL-81)** - August 20-24, 2013, Chicago, IL, Contact: Donna Rogers, (717) 792-9113, Email: dlr7110@yahoo.com.

**USS INCHON (LPH/MCS-12)** - April 7-11, 2013, San Antonio, TX, Contact: David F. Fix, (717) 203-4152, Email: ussinchon@gmail.com, Website: www.ussinchon.com.

**USS JUNEAU (CLAA-119)** - Aug. 23, 2013, Seattle, WA, Contact: Edwin Cox, (843) 537-5848, Email: edwincox@bellsouth.net.

**USS LAWRENCE ASSOCIATION (DDG-4/DD-250)** - June 19-23, 2013, San Diego, CA, Contact: Craig Bernat, (814) 322-4150, Email: dguts@usslawrence.com, Website: www.usslawrence.com.

**USS PORTSMOUTH (CL-102)** - April 25-29, 2013, Herndon, VA, Contact: Walt Hohner, (732) 463-1745, Email: WPHohner@aol.com.

**USS RASHER (SS-269)** - April 3-7, 2013, New Orleans, LA, Contact: Richard Moore, (804) 815-0730, Email: drifterpilot@cox.net.

**USS SHANGRI-LA (CVA, CVS, CV-38)** - Aug. 21-26, 2013, Arlington, VA, Contact: Bob Hayner, (732) 458-2261, Email: bopahay@comcast.net.

**USS TARAWA (CV-40/LHA-1)** - April 25-28, 2013, Pensacola, FL, Contact: Walter Tothoro, (765) 362-6937, Email: walsue@accelplus.net.

**USS TICONDEROGA VETS ASSN (CV/CVS-14/CVA-14/CG-47)** - May 16-20, 2013, Colorado Springs, CO, Contact: George Passantino, (720) 929-1844, Email: georgepsr@aol.com, Website: www.bigb.net.

**USS TRATHEN (DD-530)** - May 6-8, 2013, Pigeon Forge, TN, Contact: Jimmy Reach, (865) 992-9048, Email: JimmyBobbie160@aol.com.

**USS WARRINGTON (DD-843)** - April 24-27, 2013, Norfolk, VA, Contact: Stephen E. Zenes, Email: stevez843@windstream.net.

**USS YELLOWSTONE (AD-27)** - June 2-5, 2013, Chattanooga, TN, Contact: Paul W. Bowen, (352) 208-5400, Email: bowp@att.net.

### AIR FORCE

**50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ACTIVATION OF THE 173RD AIRBORNE BRIGADE** - March 21-24, 2013, Columbus-Fort Benning, GA, Contact: Cary Rutland, (706) 587-5543, Email: caryrutlad173@charter.net.

**55TH & 58TH WEATHER RECONN. SQUADRONS** - June 5-8, 2013, Branson, MO, Contact: Conrad Layton, (918) 446-6945, Email: conradlay@aol.com, Website: www.sites.google.com/site/58thwrs/home.

**AIR FORCE OFFICER CANDIDATE SCHOOL (AFOCS)** - May 24-27, 2013, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Dave Mason, (757) 820-3740, Email: blokemason@verizon.net.

### COAST GUARD

**ALL COAST GUARD SHIPS & ALASKA BERING SEA PATROL REUNION** - May 19-22, 2013, Reno, NV, Contact: Doak Walker, (907) 789-2579, Email: allships33@gmail.com, Website: www.255wpg.org.

### ALL SERVICES

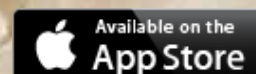
**SITE ONE HOLY LOCH, SCOTLAND REUNION ASSN.** - Aug. 27-Sept. 4, 2013, Scotland, Contact: Roland Kitridge, (508) 877-2960, Email: rk01701@yahoo.com, Website: www.holyloch.org.

### INQUIRIES

- Searching for anyone who served with the 765th Security Platoon, Vung Tau Army Airfield, Vietnam. Please contact Alan K. Abraham, 2645 Cochise Trail, Madison, WI 53711, Email: abraham.alank@gmail.com.
- Searching for anyone from Llcu #5 WWII, New Guinea and Philippines. Please contact Robert Hall, 403 No. Moccasin Place, Sapulpa, OK 74066-3217.
- Searching for anyone who served with me during 1972 at Clark Air Base in the Philippines in the 405th TOF Theatre Operation Facility. Please contact Charles Jerney, 1525 Star Valley Road, Alpine, CA 91901, Tele(619) 729-6204.
- Searching for anyone who served with me in the US Marines Corps 1965 and in Boot Camp USMC RD 1965 San Diego, CA. Please contact: Arsenio V. Credo, Jr., P.O. Box 1028, Blaire, WA 98230, (360) 223-4765.
- Searching for anyone who served with me on board the USS Flint (AE-42) from 1993-1995 who were exposed to asbestos during a boiler explosion incident. Please contact Emil H. Martinez at (619) 721-4249.
- Searching for anyone who served with me on the USS Yosemite (AD-19) out of Mayport, Florida, from 1988-1990. Please contact Sandra Rushing, 275 S. Redman Avenue, #317, Marshall, MO 65340, tele(660) 631-0151 or Email: rushingsj@yahoo.com.
- Searching for anyone who served with the Army Big Red One, 1st Division from Fort Denvers, Massachusetts in 1941 and stormed the beaches at Montinique. Please contact Francis Rapa, 7900 Castle Drive, New Port Richie, FL 34653.
- Searching for anyone who served with the F6 Battery Explosion Air Craft Flight line VA154 at Alameda Air Base during the summer of 1949. Please contact Murray Romans at (508) 384-1168 or Email: barbromans@verizon.net.
- Searching for Naval personnel stationed on NSD 3149, South of Samar, Philippine Islands, late December 1945. Please contact G. A. Hartley, 7806 Encinita Drive, Houston, TX 77083, (281) 277-3344.
- Searching for SMSgt. Joe Cole, USAF (Ret.) who served with me in Nha Trang, RVN, in the 2164th Comm Sq. (AFCS) from January through December 1969. Please contact Anthony Cossa, 201 Mulberry Place, Douglassville, PA 19518-1227, (610) 385-4968, Email: cossa1@yahoo.com.
- Searching for anyone who served on the USS LST-556 World War II. Please contact Orval "Toby" McKinney, 4955 LeGranda Highway, Hardyville, KY 42746-8234, (270) 565-3173.
- Searching for anyone who served with me on the USS Joseph Strauss (DDG-16), December 1962 to April 1966. Please contact Homer Ray Peterson, 5000 Old Buncombe Road, Greenville, SC 27232, (864) 236-5758; Email: kawliga@charter.net.
- Searching for anyone who served with me on the USS Oak Hill (LS-7) during Vietnam Era, August 1964 to August 1965. Please contact Franklin P. Embernate, P.O. Box 2841, Kailua-Kona, HI 96745, (808) 896-4680.
- Searching for anyone who was assigned to the 541st Combat Engineer Battalion in Heidelberg Germany 1975-76 at Tompkins Barracks. Please contact Walter Rapsheer, Jr., at Email: warjrl1@verizon.net.



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