

INTERCHANGE ONLINE



THE OFFICIAL ONLINE NEWSPAPER OF THE
NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL

Vol. 25 Issue 04

Veteran's News that needs to be Read Nov/Dec 2015



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2016

IN MEMORIAM

VVA Chapter #20 Allan Parks 1945 - 2015 US Navy 1963 - 1966

The deadliest attack in Afghanistan since 2013 killed six U.S. troops on Monday, including a family man from Long Island, New York; a South Texan; a New York City police detective; a Georgia high school and college athlete; an expectant father from Philadelphia; and a major from suburban Minneapolis. They were killed when their patrol was attacked by a suicide bomber on a motorcycle near Bagram Air Base, the Defense Department said. They were all from the Air National Guard unit:

Staff Sgt. Louis Michael Bonacasa NY

Tech Sgt. Joseph Lemm NY

Staff Sgt. Michael A. Cinco TX

Staff Sgt. Chester J. McBride Jr. Ga

Staff Sgt. Peter W. Taub PA

Maj. Adrianna M. Vorderbruggen MN




THE OFFICIAL ONLINE NEWSPAPER OF THE
NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL

VVA-NYSC Meeting Dates 2016

January 23

April 16

June 18

September 17

On-Line INTERCHANGE is the Bi-monthly publication of the VVA-NYSC. Comments and contributions are encouraged and can be sent to:

VVAINTERCHANGE@AOL.COM

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of this organization. Individuals with different viewpoints and opinions are invited to submit them to the Chapter by the **deadline** of the **Third Friday of each month**. Editor reserves the right to edit for length, grammar and reject any libelous or obscene material.

NEWSPAPER STAFF

EDITOR: Francisco Muñiz III

E-MAIL: VVAINTERCHANGE@AOL.COM



VVA-NYSC ON-LINE INTERCHANGE EMAIL ADDRESS: VVAINTERCHANGE@AOL.COM Phone: 516.712.4914

OFFICERS	NAME	TELEPHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS
President	Ned D. Foote	518.338.8147	Nedvva@roadrunner.com
I st Vice President	Grant T. Coates		gcoates@stny.rr.com
Secretary	Francisco Muñiz III	516.712.4914	secretary@nyvietnamvets.org
Treasurer	Nicholas DeLeo		ndeleo52@yahoo.com

DISTRICT DIRECTORS	NAME	EMAIL ADDRESS
CENTRAL DISTRICT DIRECTOR	Nicholas Valenti	npvalent64@yahoo.com
EASTERN DISTRICT DIRECTOR	Sam Hall	Sammyjh49@yahoo.com
SOUTHERN DISTRICT DIRECTOR	Joe Ingino	biggjoe77@verizon.net
WESTERN DISTRICT DIRECTOR	Ted Wilkinson	Yankeeted@aol.com

Liaisons	NAME	E-MAIL
Region II Director	Ted Wilkinson	Yankeeted@aol.com
Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America (AVVA)	Cherie Steers	csvva@optonline.net
VA Volunteer Services (VAVS)	Cherie Steers	csvva@optonline.net

Legislative Director

Bing Markee

bmarkee@nyvietnamvets.org

Sergeant of Arms

Bob Joyce

JBobF4/44@aol.com

SERVICE OFFICER PROGRAM**TELEPHONE NUMBER****EMAIL ADDRESS**

Dolores Garcia—Chief SO

Dolores.GarciaI@va.gov

Ben Weisbroth —Chief VARO

vsoben@aol.com

President's Message

Ned D. Foote

Well we should be into the cold weather and much snow. I don't know that for sure as I'm writing this on December 13 and it is 55 degrees and no snow. No way will I complain about that but as you read this I will say this cold weather and snow really sucks.

So what has been happening with in NYSC? Our main focus has been on HR 1769. You all know that now. It is the Toxic Research Act so our children and theirs that maybe effected by our exposure to Agent Orange and our newer Veterans who have been exposed to the burn pits and such. I won't go through all this as what we need is all our congress people sign onto this bill. Our New York congressman who have signed should be listed somewhere in this issue. As of this date (12/13/2015) we have 20 of our 27 congressman signed on and both of our Senators. We have done very well in NY thanks to all of your efforts.

I would like to get the other 7 so let's not quit bugging the hell out of them. I do wish all other states do as good as we are and we have the best chance in 2016 for passage. So, check to see if your congressman has signed and if not call their Washington Office and local office. **Only you can do as they will not listen to anyone outside of their district.** It also will not hurt to call them if they have signed and thank them for doing so.

State Council news. We had a meeting in October and more than likely had our January meeting when you read this. We continue to see new faces from chapters who we have not seen in number of years. This is great and we thank all of you for renewed interest in your State Council. We try to have informative speakers for our meetings and I think we have so far as to the response from you all.

Our Executive Board just met in December and we discussed who to invite for our 2016 meetings. We have lined up Todd Baxter of the Rochester Veterans Outreach Center to let us know all the services they provide not only to Rochester Vets but all the way to Buffalo and down to the Southern Tier. Vice President Grant Coates conducted the meeting as I was attending the Conference of State Presidents meeting in sunny Louisiana. I know he did an outstanding job and thanks Grant. I have not missed many meetings in past 30 years and would not this one but the Presidents meeting was changed after our meeting was set.

We also discussed our agenda and made a few changes. We are trying to keep fresh and new. We were having a problem with too many of you leaving after lunch or a bit later and our committee chairs trying to give report to half empty room. That is not fair to them as they put work in to let you all know what is going on in those issues. We have been getting done with our meeting by 4:00 so I hope you all can manage to stay till then. If some of you old timers remember we would stay over Saturday and finish up meeting Sunday. So we have shorten up our meeting allot.

Okay, what else do I want to say? No sense saying Happy Holidays and such because that will be over with. I can say Happy New Year. You all might be getting older but VVA is still running pretty strong and 2016 looks to be a banner year for us. So all of you Thanks. You all are doing a great job in your chapters and really making our State the best in VVA and I can keep telling the other Presidents how good we are even when they do not want to hear that but if you know me I can agitate when I want. But it is only because

(Continue on pg. 6)



Finally a Voice

The Birth of Vietnam Veterans of America! This film documents the founding of the Vietnam Veterans of America and examines whether the organization has stayed true to its founding principle that:

“Never Again Will One Generation of Veterans Abandon Another.”

Pre-Order Film

1 - 24 copies \$15 each

25 copies - \$337.50

50 copies - \$600 (*includes postage/shipping*)

For copies larger than 50 contact

KKing@NVDDC.ORG for discount pricing options.

Watch the trailer online: nvbdc.org/dvd.html

Visit: nvbdc.org to order online or order by mailing a check with “DVD” in the memo line and the order form below to:
NVBDC, 325 E. Crescent Lane, Detroit, MI 48207

(Continue on pg. 5)

This movie will be made possible by donations from Patriots like yourself and from these outstanding people and organizations:



Veterans: Dr. Millard Hall, Charles Hall, Dr. Thomas Hall, Samuel Hall, David M. Hall * VVA Chapter 223

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Please send me _____ copies of Finally a Voice DVD. Enclosed is a check for \$ _____

" Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it. "

Dwight D. Eisenhower

(Cont. from pg. 4 President's Message)

I am so proud of all. We have come a long way. See you at our meeting. Reminder you only need to go to our website: www.nyvietnamvets.org. You will find meeting dates and up to date news and anything else you might be looking for. It has been redone and I think it looks great. So please check it periodically and don't be afraid to send your comments.

Feliz Año Nuevo!

Editor's Note: He is showing off! His Grandson is teaching him Spanish. It means "Happy New Year!"

Secretary's Report

Francisco Muñiz III

We have completed another success year of production of the VVA-NYSC On-Line Interchange newspaper. We won our fourth biannual VVA State Council On-Line Newspaper award this past July. This has been accomplished due to those who submit committee reports, district reports and other items of interest to our membership.

I sent out our Agenda and Minutes and this message was returned with the following E-mail addresses stating that "A message that you sent could not be delivered to one or more of its

recipients. This is a permanent error. The following address(es) failed:

gscain@roadrunner.com, et404@verizon.net, robinsjm6@aol.com, mclayton1@hvc.rr.com, jbofu144@aol.com. Does it look familiar? Please empty your mailbox on a weekly basis and resend me your correct E-mail address so that you could receive our information.

Southern District Report

Joe Ingino

VVA Chapters #11, #32, #72, #82, #118, #126, #421, #807

Government Affairs

Joe Ingino - Chair

VVA National President testifies before HVAC Subcommittee on Health in support of H.R. 1769, The Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015

On Thursday April 23, 2015, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) National President/CEO John Rowan presented testimony before the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health in support of H.R. 1769, the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015.

This bi-partisan legislation introduced by the Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health Dan Benishek (MI) and co-sponsored by Congressman Michael M. Honda (CA-17). Representatives Gus Bilirakis (FL-12), John Conyers, Jr. (MI-13), Elizabeth H. Esty (CT-5),

(Continue pg. 18)



New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation

We provide grants to Vietnam Veterans of America-New York State Council, (VVA-NYSC) a veteran's service organization that advocates for legislation at the State and Federal level of government to provide housing, education, health and mental care services to veterans and their families. We provide funding for VVA-NYSC Veteran's Service Officer program that assist veterans with their military disability compensation and pension claims from the Veterans Administration.

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

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

We have an updated database of agencies that provide:

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

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

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

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

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

President	Vice President	Treasurer	Secretary
Francisco Muñiz III	Ned D. Foote	Grant T. Coates	Nick Valenti
Directors	Sam Hall	Stan May	

Note: If you receive a phone solicitation for donation to the New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation, please make a donation and information will be sent to you. If you do not want to donate, please just tell them , 'No, Thanks" and hang up the phone. Do not call the NYS Attorney Office and complain about the Foundation. You can send your tax deductible donation, to the extent allowed by law, directly to the Foundation at NY Vietnam Veterans Foundation, 48 March Lane, Westbury, NY 11590-6302.

Central District Report

Nick Valenti

VVA Chapters #85, #103, #205, #296, #377, #480, #704, #708, #803, #827, #896, #944

Central New York has been buzzing lately with numerous programs and activities in consort with private individuals and local businesses. One of the most recent achievements is the establishment of a Veteran Support Initiative called **"Clear Path for Veterans."** Located in Chittenango, New York, this program focuses on active duty military, Veterans of all eras, family members and caregivers utilizing an individualized and holistic approach. The programs in progress include: **Dogs2 Vets** - Veterans train their own dogs; **The Wingman Program** - Peer to Peer Mentoring for both Veterans and active, guard and reserve military members; **Wellness** - Self-care, Self Regulate, Integrative Medicine; **Culinary** - cooking and nutrition education, canteens, and Healthy meals for events; **Agriculture** - Community Gardening; **Recreation** - Basketball/Tennis Courts, Creative Arts Workshops, Hiking Trails, Picnic Areas, and Golf clinics; **Clear Path Kids** - Arts and Crafts activities, Play room and Special presentations. Want to know more visit www.ClearPathForVets.com or call 315-687-3300. They are located at 1223 Salt Springs Road, Chittenango, New York 13037.

The Syracuse Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC) is working to further develop an **In-Home Respite Caregiver Support Program**. Here is how it works: the volunteer attends approximately three (3) training sessions. Upon the successful completion of the training the volunteer is placed with a veteran to provide companionship. You will then spend 2 - 4 hours once a week in the home of a Veteran providing **respite for the caregiver and their family**. This provides a break for the caregiver allowing that person to renew their energy and spirit. Want to know more call Lisa Gaultieri at 315-425-4315 or email Lisa at lisa.gaultier@va.gov at Syracuse VA Medical Center, Voluntary Service, 800 Irving Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13210.

Did you hear about the **"Eligible Funds Increase?"** The eligible funds veteran exemption has been increased from \$5,000 to \$7,500 as of July 1, 2015. A veteran with an eligible funds exemption is entitled to an exemption equal to the amount of eligible funds that the veteran used to purchase the property, subject to a limit of \$7,500. It should be worth looking into with your assessor if you used Eligible Funds to purchase property and haven't had a status change.

VVA Chapter #205, **Incarcerated Veterans** made great use of the yarn donations so many of you provided. In their 2015, 29th **Annual Give-Away** the incarcerated veterans knitted some 869 hats; 329 scarves; 1 baby blanket; 1 set of mittens; and 15 teddy bears. These items were donated to area Churches, Salvation Army, and Pantries. In total I counted **20 veterans knitting the 1,215 donated items**. If you wish to contribute yarn for this program just remember the allowed **solid colors; pink white, green, yellow, brown, purple, and red**. You can bring your yarn donation to our **State Council meetings**. They will be held on **January 22nd & 23rd; April 15th & 16th; June 17th & 18th; September 16th & 17th**. Or, call me at 315-252-4535.

VVA Chapter #704 had a huge turnout for their **6th Annual Wreaths across America Program**. The Chapter with the cooperation of the Dana L. West Jr. Sr. High School students had a total of **17 wreaths** presented in the memory of all the branches of service, the 4 Cayuga County servicemen killed in Southwest Asia, and the Army National Guard. **Four Gold Star families participated** in the annual program with the local **National Guard and an American Legion Post #1324** participating. Ceremony was held at noon sharp to coincide with the Arlington National Cemetery Ceremony.

Veteran's News

One hundred and thirty five members of Congress have signed on in support of H.R. 1769, but we are missing your member! Contact your Representative NOW ask them to Co-sponsor H.R. 1769 the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015

Call your family members outside New York State and ask them to call their Congressional and Senate leaders to co-sponsor HR 1769 and S. 901.

NYTimes: Suicide Claims Another Marine as Holes in Safety Net Persist

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/30/us/suicide-claims-another-marine-as-holes-in-safety-net-persist.html?smid=nytcore-ipad-share&smprod=nytcore-ipad> The suicide rate in one Marine regiment is 14 times as high as that for all Americans, but the government's ability to monitor and treat veterans is halting and incomplete.

(Cont. on pg. 16)

Agent Orange Committee Report

Walter Schmidt—Chair

Decontaminating Soil: Perhaps an Answer to Agent Orange Contamination

It would seem heating the soil hot enough and long enough might do the job. As to who will pay for it, that's another question entirely.

Nikkei Asian Review - December 3, 2015 12:00 pm JST

An answer for Agent Orange - ATSUSHI TOMIYAMA, Nikkei staff writer

<http://asia.nikkei.com/magazine/20151203-INDIAN-OCEAN-CURRENTS/Tech-Science/An-answer-for-Agent-Orange?page=1>

Japanese construction company Shimizu in late October brought contaminated soil from Vietnam to Japan for purification experiments. The company's technology proved effective in cleaning up soil contaminated by the disaster at Tokyo Electric Power's Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant in March 2011. The Vietnamese government is paying close attention to the tests.

The Vietnamese government first took note of Shimizu's technology in the winter of 2014. It had been used in the Fukushima Dai-ichi cleanup effort, and at the polluted site of a new wholesale market that will replace Tokyo's Tsukiji Fish Market. Top Vietnamese military officers have praised the technology.

Vietnam began talks with the U.S. on cleaning up chemical defoliants in 2000 and, in August 2012, launched a project to purify soil in Danang with the U.S. Agency for International Development. With the necessary \$41 million raised mainly by the Vietnamese government, the plan is to purify some 80,000 cu. meters of polluted soil by 2016 by excavating it and heating it to a temperature of 335C (635F).

Shimizu's technology, meanwhile, passes contaminated soil through a sieve to separate reusable dirt from that which needs to be decontaminated. The "dirty" soil is heated to more than 1,000C (1,832F), removing contaminants effectively, according to Shimizu officials.

A Vietnamese government agency discussed Shimizu's technology at a symposium on the removal of dioxins, held in Hanoi on Nov. 24.

In Dong Nai, there are 9,114 people afflicted with a total of 17 different health effects, including limb deformities, cerebral disorders and pediatric cancer, according to a local dioxin victims' association. The government has repeatedly tried, and failed, to purify the soil, said Nguyen Dao, the head of the association. "We have to find new sponsors who offer new technology and financing."

The government provides each dioxin victim with 1.8 million dong (\$80) a month, Dao said. (wcs_note: average salary in Vietnam, 3.2 million dong (\$150) a month) But many sufferers are ineligible for this support and instead receive only 200,000 (\$9) dong in physical disability assistance. People are designated as dioxin victims based on whether their parents fought in the war, not their physical condition, she said.

516-797-7875 ao-chair@nyvietnamvets.org

wschmidt@ovsterbay-ny.gov

POW-MIA REPORT-Veteran Initiative

Grant T. Coats—Chair

The Veterans Initiative 2015 Mission to Vietnam

The 2015 Veterans Initiative team—VVA Vice President Marsha Four, POW-MIA Affairs Chair Richard DeLong, Vice Chair Grant Coates, and Protocol Officer and VVA Communications Director Mokie Pratt Porter—left January 21 for Vietnam on the VI's twenty-fourth mission. They brought with them the 299th case of a possible location of Vietnamese missing in action from the war. The VI has provided information on more than 13,000 war dead.

Once on the ground, the team immediately launched into its itinerary with a meeting with Nguyen Thi Binh, vice president of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam between 1992-97 and 1997-2002. She expressed gratitude to VVA for its continued humanitarian effort accounting for Vietnam's MIAs.

The next meeting was with Ambassador Nguyen Tam Chien, vice chair of the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO) and a longtime friend of the VI, along with other VUFO leaders.

While in Hanoi, meetings were held with Vietnam's Ministry of National Defence, Technology Centre for Bomb and Mine Disposal (BOMICEN), and the Veterans Association of Vietnam (VAVN). A meeting with Deputy Minister Ha Kim Ngoc of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was also attended by representatives of Vietnam's Office Seeking Missing Personnel, who work in partnership with the U.S. Department of Defense seeking missing personnel in Vietnam.

A roundtable discussion was held at the VUFO headquarters about the twentieth anniversary of the reestablishment of Vietnam-U.S. relations. In attendance were representatives from the Vietnam-USA Society, VUFO, VAVN, Vietnamese business people, U.S. veterans working in Hanoi, and the VI team. Deputy Director-General Le Chi Dzong from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Americas Department, and Marsha Four co-chaired the meeting.

After traveling to Hue, the VI team met with the president of the VAVN and People's committee of Thua Thien-Hue Province. A trip was made to the Truong Son Military Cemetery #9, where respects were paid to those buried at the cemetery. The cemetery superintendent credited the VI Program with helping locate 106 buried dead from one particular unit. They were identified and relocated to Cemetery #9.

A stop was made at the Phuoc Loc Cemetery, where remains from battles in the area of Fire Support Base Tomahawk had been reburied. A second stop was made at a memorial that had been built on the site of a mass grave located in the Phuoc Loc district of Thua Thien-Hue Province. Ceremonies also were performed at the site of FSB Tomahawk, at the top of Phu Gia Pass.

At Da Nang, meetings with DAFO, the Da Nang Union of Friendship Organizations, VAVN, and the Da Nang People's Committee were held.

The VI traveled to Quang Nam Province and met with VAVN and the People's Committee of Quang Nam, Tam Ky. While there, the VI went to the construction site of a Monument to Heroic Vietnamese Mothers in the An Phu ward in the central province of Quang Nam. The monument is Vietnam's version of a Gold Star Mothers monument.

On February 5 a meeting with VAVN of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) was held.

A meeting with Deputy Principal Officer Patrick Ellsworth of the U.S. Consulate General in HCMC was held, with a general briefing of ongoing activities in Vietnam, as well as the VI's ongoing mission to locate MIAs.

(Cont. on pg. 11)

(Cont. from pg. 10)

Meetings also were conducted with the Ho Chi Minh City Union of Friendship Organizations (HUFO), People's Committee of HCMC.

With the conclusion of the last meeting, the VI had completed twenty-eight meetings in twenty-one days, participated in three ceremonies honoring the war dead, stopped at three cemeteries, and paid respects at six memorials.

As a result of an unplanned and informal contact with a resident of Hanoi, arrangements were made to meet with a Vietnamese doctor who has been locating Vietnamese war burial sites and recovering remains for proper burials.

On the final day in Vietnam, the VI team met with the doctor for almost three hours and discussed research, interviews, and findings of war dead buried on the battlefield.

All of the meetings during the trip shared a theme of cooperation, eagerness to assist, and the desire for the Veterans Initiative to continue a humanitarian program that has been functioning for more than twenty years

CURRENT COMMITTEE REPORT - APRIL 2015

To Date: Missing - 1,628

No Further Pursuit Cases (over water) - over 600

Accounted: 955 since 1975

11 identifications of missing since November, 2014. Oldest remains recovered in 1989 and 1991. Newer technology being used on older remains in custody of CILHI.

The new accounting agency name has been officially changed to Defense Prisoner of War-Missing in Action Accounting Agency, acronym DPAA. Website and letterhead of Defense POW-Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), Joint POW-MIA Accounting Office (JPAC), and Life Sciences Equipment Laboratory, (LSEL). Any inquiries using the old title or acronyms will be routed to the new DPAA site. More concise and easy to use site for information relating to MIA issue.

Review of 2015 Vietnam Mission



The VI's Grant Coates was welcomed by the 95-year-old caretaker of the Phuoc Loc burial site memorial, one of several cemeteries and memorials the team visited.



Vice President's Report

Grant T. Coates

Now that the winter holidays are here, please reflect for a moment to the past events of your lives. For many, sharing gifts, meals, and memories of days past are filled with joy and laughter.

For many, a level of remorse and sadness accompany festive holidays. Loved ones that have passed on, old neighborhoods that have physically changed, friends moved on and contact lost.

But do not be sad. Memories are what you share with others. The memories of growing up and the events of childhood that shaped your values and principles have given each of you a personality that is shared with every person you meet, greet, and interact with.

I enjoy music. I use music as my life calendar. When I hear a song that was popular any time of my life, I recall events in my life that influenced my future. I am sure that if I say The Grassroots, many of you will remember 1967, 1968 and 1969. The Doors, Janis, Elvis, Isaac Hayes, the Temptations. Memories of proms, dates, cars, school, homework, starting families, military service are remembered.

Even though our president Ned Foote state in his article that "After eating most of the time we did do some work", he didn't mention that much of the time during meals was spent reminiscing about members of Vietnam Veterans of America that have passed on that were influential in our lives. Barry Heimbender, Artie Cohen, Harry "Sarge" Schaefer, Pat Gualtieri, and hundreds more have been known by many of us, and in some way have touched our lives. As long as we remember them, the legacy of their lives continues, and so does ours.

As a retired police officer and deputy sheriff, I have holiday memories of working while my family was home. My family was very understanding, and did not complain that I could not share the time of preparation for Christmas. They knew that I was protecting and helping others. Now that all of the children are adults with children, I can share stories of how gratifying the feeling is to help others. As adults, my children can understand and teach their children about caring, sharing, and remembering the past.

My greatest memories at the Christmas holiday season are my military service times, my wife and children's excitement of preparing food and treats and sharing with others, my fellow veterans and their families, and remembering those that have passed on to a greater world.

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukah and Happy New Year

Always Onward

Membership Affairs Committee
Ted Wilkinson, Chair

New York only had one winner this year in the National Membership Growth Award. Congratulations Buffalo Chapter 77 for receiving this award for chapters between 500 - 600 members.



Our fire sale has been successful. Approximately 8,000 veterans took advantage of the \$100 life membership.

New York State has 5,820 members, an increase of 2.8%, 156 members from last year.

VVA National has 77,179 members, an increase of 4.1%, 3,061 members from last year.

Eighteen chapters increased in membership, five chapters remained the same and 12 chapters decreased in membership last year.

Twelve chapters attended all 4 New York State Council meetings. All twelve of these chapters also attended the national convention. Congratulations go to Chapters 20, 32, 49, 77, 79, 82, 103, 205, 333, 704, 865, and 978.



Chapters that attended all 4 NYSC meetings in 2104

" No one wants advice - only corroboration. "

John Steinbeck

Western District Report
Ted Wilkinson

VVA Chapters #20, #77, #193, #268, #459, #603, #681, #865, #978

Another successful year by the Western District of New York State for Vietnam Veterans of America is in the books.

Some of the highlights of 2015... Rochester Chapter 20 reached the 600 member plateau in October, held a very successful HepC program in November and sent all 12 of their delegates to the National Convention.

Buffalo Chapter 77 attended the National Convention and was the recipient of the Membership Growth Award for chapters between 500 - 600 members, obtained a Cobra helicopter to be used for a western NY monument, had the honor of being Grand Marshall at the Canal Fest parade with over 50 members marching in the parade and are renting the building next to their office for their very busy food pantry.

Chapter 193 continues to grow in membership and contributed to the Batavia VA veterans travel van. Lockport Chapter 268 has made huge strides this year with the Traveling Wall in Lockport and once again organized and held the very well attended exhibit "Vietnam Veterans : Our Photo Album" at the Keenan House Gallery, first presented 25 years ago. Membership has also increased by 33%.

Dunkirk Chapter 459 continues to have their 2 meetings a month and are successful again handing out the Orange Blossom Poppies.

Niagara Falls Chapter 681 is still carrying the VVA banner thanks to the dedication of Chapter President John Portik.

Jamestown Chapter 865 serve at most of the veteran funerals in Chautauqua County, have donated once again \$5,000 to the VVA New York State Council Service Officer program and sent their delegates to the national convention.

Frewsburg Chapter 978 for the first time was represented at the national convention, held several fundraisers for a chapter member recovering from a heart transplant and Rev. Bob has done radio talk shows for VVA using his infamous radio voice.

One of the highlights of my year was being able to attend the 10th annual Stars and Stripes Celebration where Ken Moore, our fellow VVA life member, past president of Chapter 20, service officer for 20 years and outreach coordinator for Monroe county along with serving and inspiring other Veterans in ways too numerous to mention, received the Harris Award for Exemplary Service to Veterans. Our congratulations on this well-deserved award to Ken Moore!!



Dear Lord, I release my anger to you. I will strive to be honest in what I do and say. I submit my will to you. And, I will try my best to be aware of and act upon the boundaries I need to set with people who "push my buttons." Amen.

Region II Report

Ted Wilkinson

585-322-6722

Region 2 continues to grow! We are short about 100 members of having 14,000 members, and have increased in membership all but 2 months last year. The membership chairs of Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania are to be commended for their excellent work and dedication. Thank you very much

October 8th I visited Chapter 20 in Rochester, New York and found that the stories of over a hundred in attendance were true. This meeting had 122 present was very informative and great pizza.

October 9th-11th I attended VVA New York State Council meeting in Owego NY. The guest speaker was William Yale representing Sampson Cemetery in Seneca Falls, NY

October 14th-18th was Board of Director meetings for Vietnam Veterans of America in Silver Spring, MD. November 5th attended the 10th annual STARS & STRIPES Celebration held by the Veterans Outreach Center in Rochester NY. The Harris award for Exemplary Service to Veterans was presented to VVA life member Ken Moore.

I have attended both Pennsylvania State Council meetings this year and am very impressed with the agenda, attendance and enthusiasm.

The VA healthcare of Western New York held veteran advisory council meetings in October and December and have excellent reports.

January 7th -10th 2016 was Board of Director meetings for Vietnam Veterans of America in Silver Spring, MD.

† † † † † † † † † †

"All of us, at certain moments of our lives, need to take advice and to receive help from other people. "

Alexis Carrel

Cont. from pg. 10) VETERAN'S NEWS

Women Will Be Able Become Navy SEALs For The First Time

Two Female Soldiers Poised to Graduate From Ranger School

Another milestone for women in the military

VA Offers Virtual Reality Treatment for PTSD

Mental health providers at the Miami VA Healthcare System are now offering a virtual reality (VR) treatment option for Veterans with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Combining virtual reality with traditional treatments, providers can help veterans change how they perceive and respond to the symptoms of PTSD, which typically cause depression, isolation and anxiety. Read more about virtual reality treatment on VA's Vantage Point Blog. Veterans living with PTSD do not have to suffer alone. Veterans with PTSD can find help and support through the National Center for PTSD and their local VA health care facility.

For more on veteran benefits, visit the Military.com Benefits Center. For more on veteran mental health and wellness, visit this Military.com section.

VA Sets Date to Commemorate 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War

“Our Nation’s Vietnam War Commemoration is a long-overdue opportunity for all Americans to recognize, honor, and thank our Vietnam veterans and their families for their service and sacrifices during one of America’s longest wars. VA Central Office, along with nearly 9,000 organizations across the country, has joined with the Department of Defense as a commemorative partner to honor our Nation’s Vietnam veterans. I have designated March 29, 2016, as a day for our Department to express our tremendous gratitude and support to this generation of Americans through ceremonies across the Nation.”

– Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert McDonald

News from National League of POW/MIA Families

As reported in the December 15 edition of National League of POW/MIA Families’ Update: In mid-October and again more recently, DPAA posted changes to the list of Vietnam War missing and unaccounted-for US personnel, now numbering 1,624. For various reasons, including wishes of the family, DoD announcements are often delayed far beyond the ID dates and sometimes not even made. The geographic challenges, environmental factors, a medical condition, the nature or simplicity or frequency of the care needed and whether an attendant is needed. Staff at the Veteran’s local VA medical facility will work with him or her to determine if the Veteran is eligible for any of these reasons; or

- Lives in a State or Territory without a full-service VA medical facility which includes: Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire (Note: this excludes New Hampshire Veterans who live within 20 miles of the White River Junction VAMC) and the United States Territories (excluding Puerto Rico, which has a full service VA medical facility).

Veterans seeking to use the Veterans Choice Program or wanting to know more about it, can call 1-866-606-8198 to confirm their eligibility and to schedule an appointment. For more details about the Veterans Choice Program and VA’s progress, visit: www.va.gov/opa/choiceact.

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number of Americans now listed by DoD as returned and identified since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 is 961. Another 63 US personnel, recovered by the US and identified before the end of the war, bring the total of US personnel accounted for from the Vietnam War to 1,024. Of the 1,624 still missing and unaccounted-for, 90% were lost in Vietnam or in areas of Cambodia and Laos under Vietnam's wartime control: Vietnam-1,266 (VN-467, VS-799); Laos-302; Cambodia-49; PRC territorial waters-7.

Groups Demand Information on Camp Lejeune Disability Claims

In the December 7 edition of Military Times, Patricia Kime reports that the approval rate for disability claims filed with the Veterans Affairs Department for illnesses related to poisonous drinking water at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, has dropped by two-thirds since VA implemented a third-party review process to provide medical opinions on related diagnoses. The Camp Lejeune subject matter expert program requires a VA-appointed physician to review the medical files of former troops who lived on base from 1953 to 1987 and are seeking compensation for illnesses possibly related to drinking contaminated water there. But since the program was introduced in 2012, claims approvals have dropped from 25 percent to 8 percent, prompting critics to question the independence and training of the VA's 22 to 30-some experts, whom the department has not identified.

Veterans advocacy groups, including Vietnam Veterans of America, the Connecticut State Council of the Vietnam Veterans of America, and The Few, the Proud, the Forgotten, have filed a Freedom of Information Act request for records about the subject matter expert program, seeking information on the identities, training, and education of those experts.

VA Workers Keep Jobs despite Bad Misconduct

According to a December 4 NBC News4 report by Scott MacFarlane, some local Veterans Affairs employees weren't fired, despite severe cases of misconduct – including sleeping in hospital patient rooms or having sex while on the job, according to a News4 I-Team investigation. A review of agency disciplinary records shows agency leaders issued reprimands or brief suspensions to dozens of employees who'd engaged in misconduct in recent months at local Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Martinsburg, West Virginia.

US Air Force Running Out of Bombs to Fight ISIS

The US military says its 15-month bombing campaign on the Islamic State is depleting its munitions supply and that additional money and other support is “critical” for “the long fight.”

More Veterans eligible for VA Choice Card according to new changes implemented by VA

Changes Remove Barriers and Expands Access to Care

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced a number of changes to make participation in the Veterans Choice Program easier and more convenient for Veterans who need to use it. The move, which streamlines eligibility requirements, follows feedback from Veterans along with organizations working on their behalf.

(Cont. on pg. 18)

Veterans Incarcerated Report

Nick Valenti—Chair

As you may have gathered the Veterans Committee wants to take on a new look. The name change proposal (Veterans in the Justice System) strikes a much more positive tone and depiction of our veterans serving time in our nation's prisons. The new National Chair Dominick Yezzo is at the forefront of this movement.

The proposed change comes on the heels of some welcoming news from the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision. There has been a 76% decrease in the number of inmate veterans since 2007. Eight years ago there was reported that 9,141 veterans were jailed in New York State. Today that number is reported at 2,226 veterans.

(cont. from pg. 6) **Government Affairs:** Chellie Pingree, (ME-1), Mike Quigley (IL-5), Kevin Yoder (KS-3) and Lee M. Zeldin (NY-1) have also joined and co-sponsored the bill.

The passage of the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015 is one of the most important efforts that we can do to collectively assure that future military service generations learn from our experience and that our offspring receive the respect and consideration for the sacrifices and pain that they will endure from illnesses due to our service in Vietnam.

Again, we thank everyone for supporting H.R. 1769 and S.901, the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015 and look forward to working with each of you again in the 2nd Session of the 114th on this important legislation for veterans and their families. VVA urges you to take! Go to our Legislative Action site at <http://capwiz.com/vva/home/> Enter your Zip Code call and write your Representatives and ask them to join their colleagues and co-sponsor H.R. 1769, the Toxic Exposure Research Act of 2015.

(Cont. from pg. 17) VETERAN'S NEWS

Under the updated eligibility requirements, a Veteran is eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she is enrolled in the VA health care system and meets at least one of the following criteria:

- Told by his or her local VA medical facility that they will not be able to schedule an appointment for care within 30 days of the date the Veteran's physician determines he/she needs to be seen or within 30 days of the date the Veteran wishes to be seen if there is no specific date from his or her physician;
 - Lives more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility with a full-time primary care physician;
 - Needs to travel by air, boat or ferry to the VA medical facility closest to his/her home;
 - Faces an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to the closest VA medical facility based on geographic challenges, environmental factors, a medical condition, the nature or simplicity or frequency of the care needed and whether an attendant is needed. Staff at the Veteran's local VA medical facility will work with him or her to determine if the Veteran is eligible for any of these reasons; or
 - Lives in a State or Territory without a full-service VA medical facility which includes: Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire (Note: this excludes NH Veterans who live within 20 miles of the White River Junction VAMC) and the U.S. Territories (excluding Puerto Rico, which has a full service VA medical facility).
- Veterans seeking to know more about it, can call 1-866-606-8198 to confirm their eligibility. For more details about the Veterans Choice Program and VA's progress, visit: www.va.gov/opa/choiceact.

BURY ME WITH SOLDIERS

*I've played a lot of roles in life;
I've met a lot of men,
I've done a lot of things I'd like to think
I wouldn't do again.
And though I'm young, I'm old enough
To know someday I'll die.
And to think about what lies beyond, And
Beside whom I would lie.*

*Perhaps it doesn't matter much;
Still if I had my choice,
I'd want a grave amongst soldiers when
At last death quells my voice
I'm sick of the hypocrisy
Of lectures of the wise
I'll take the man with all the flaws
Who goes, though scared, and dies.*

*The troops I knew were commonplace;
They didn't want the war
They fought because their fathers and
Their fathers had before.
They cursed and killed and wept-
God knows they're easy to deride-
But bury me with men like these;
They faced the guns and died.*

*It's funny when you think of it,
The way we got along.
We'd come from different worlds
To live in one where no one belongs,
I didn't even like them all and,
I'm sure they'd all agree.
Yet I would give my life for them,
I know some did for me.*

*So bury me with soldiers, please,
Though much maligned they be
Yes, bury me with soldiers, for
I miss their company.
We'll not soon see their likes again
We've had our fill of war.
But bury me with men like them
Till someone else does more.*

©Rev. Charles R. Fink

(A Roman Catholic priest of the the Diocese of Rockville Centre, served in Vietnam from March 1969 to March 1970 as a sergeant in the 199th light Infantry Brigade)

COMMITTEES	CHAIRPERSON	E-MAIL ADDRESS
Agent Orange/Dioxin & Other Toxic Exposure	Walter Schmidt, VSO	wschmidt@oysterbay-ny.gov
Constitution	Grant T. Coates	gcoates@stny.rr.com
Finance	Charles Tipton	ctipton237@yahoo.com
Homeless Veterans	Tom Kelly	dsdba53@yahoo.com
Membership	Ted Wilkinson	yankeeted@aol.com
POW/MIA & Veterans Initiative (VI)	Grant T. Coates	gcoates@stny.rr.com
PTSD & Substance Abuse	Tom Harris	bkrdad@aol.com
Veterans Affairs	Sam Hall	Sammyjh49@yahoo.com
Veterans Health Care & Aging Veterans	Tom Harris Jerry McDermott	bkrdad@aol.com jmcdermott@murphynolan.com,
Veterans Incarcerated Committee	Nick Valenti	npvalen64@yahoo.com