

The Patriot Reader

VETERANS COUNCIL OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY

CHAIRMAN BILL DUDLEY

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Newsletter Editor Michael Rothfeld



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Message from the Chairman

July 4th is just a few days away. I'm sure we all have plans for this patriotic day to celebrate the birth of our Nation. Before that, however, we have another major event coming up on June 30 at Oglethorpe Park. The 450th Military Commemoration Committee in partnership with your Veterans Council will be dedicating 3 cannons at the park. This is but one of many legacy sites selected by our committee as we lead up to our 450th anniversary celebration in 2015. Each of these events will honor our military that have protected this city since the first settlement here in 1565. Please plan to join us at Oglethorpe Park at 10:30 AM this Sunday, 30 June. Our military guest speakers will be RADM Sinclair Harris, Commander, US Navy Southern Command and Fourth Fleet Commander and RADM Tim Fraser, Senior British Advisor to Commander, US CENTCOM. Look forward to seeing many of you there.

Our Battle of Midway was another huge success. On June 1, over 700 people attended this signature event at the Renaissance Hotel at World Golf Village to hear Admiral Bill Gortney, Commander, Fleet Forces Command honor

these valiant patriots of WW II. Admiral Gortney spoke of the courage, sacrifice, and selfless dedication of these brave sailors who went in harm's way to help fight an aggressor who had attacked our country and killed so



Chairman Bill Dudley and ADM Gortney at the Midway dinner

many of our brave men and women in uniform. Admiral Gortney drew on their service and sacrifice and compared it to the men and women who wear the cloth of our nation today in our all-volunteer military. There is a complete write-up on the Battle of Midway Commemorative Dinner in our **Patriot Reader** newsletter this month.

There are some great stories in this month's newsletter. Our editor, Michael Rothfeld continues to catch the essence of our Veterans who served and are willing to share their stories with us. Please take the time to read their stories of commitment and sacrifice and be sure to thank them for their



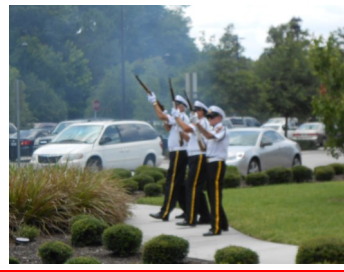
service as well as all our Veterans and active duty military. Our country stands today because of the sacrifice of a Veteran.

Be sure to put a place marker on your calendar for Nov. 3, 2013. We will be doing another in a series of films and salute to our Veterans in **Commitment to Honor**. The venue will be Anastasia Baptist Church with the program beginning at 2 PM and doors opening at 1:00 PM. This one you will not want to miss as your program committee is working hard to put together a superb program to honor those who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan and are being mentored by our heroes of Vietnam. Many of these soldiers are experiencing difficulties in entering back into the civilian world and our Vietnam Vets are there to lend a helping hand during this difficult transition.

Bill Dudley, Chairman
Veterans Council of
St. Johns Co, Inc

Clyde E. Lassen State Veterans Nursing Home

Patriotism is our motto



Boy Scouts from Troop 345 preparing to respectfully retire an American Flag
Retiring the Flag

Gun Salute as part of the Flag Ceremony

Thank you to Elk's Lodge #829 and Boy Scout Pack 345 for a wonderful flag ceremony that included the history of our American Flag with flags from each era as well as a flag retirement ceremony.

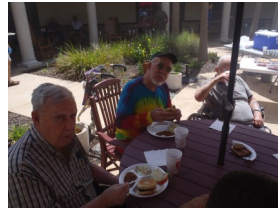


Mr. Paul ready to dig in at the luncheon the VFW held for our residents

Everybody digging in

Mr. Vinny with the tank in front of the VFW

The Vietnam Veterans of American of Clay County Chapter 1059 provided a fabulous cook out for all at Clyde E. Lassen SVNH



The cooks for the VVA cook out

Enjoying the VVA cook out

Deciding how many water balloons to throw at the Super Summer Spectacular celebrating the first day of summer

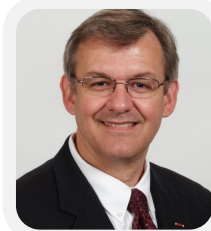
Waiting for the Hawaiian Ice after all the squirt guns were emptied and the water balloons launched



The Jacksonville National Cemetery

Greetings from the Support Committee at the Jacksonville National Cemetery!

The Jacksonville National Cemetery Support Committee will next meet on Tuesday, September 3rd at 7:00 pm, at Community Hospice, 4266 Sunbeam Rd., Jacksonville, 32257. All are invited.



Chairman Howard McGillin

ST. AUGUSTINE, Fla. (June 17, 2013)

Written by [Staff Sgt. Derrol Fulghum](#)



All around the globe, Soldiers celebrated the **Army's birthday on June 14**. In St. Augustine, more than fifty Soldiers, Airmen, civilians and retirees gathered at St. Francis Barracks to recognize the mission of defending freedom the United States Army has kept alive these last 238 years.

Maj. Gen. Emmitt R. Titshaw Jr., The Adjutant General of Florida, spoke at the ceremony. "From Lexington to Kandahar, the U.S. Army has served honorably and with distinction," Titshaw said. "No other service has the ability to adapt and meet a threat like the Army."



From left, Major General Emmett R. Titshaw, Jr.
CSM Dennis Rhoden, SPC Brie A. Harrell,
State CSM Mike Hosford, & COL Lisa Craig

Citing some of the most famous battles in our nation's history, Titshaw concluded: "I certainly hold you in high regard and I know the citizens of our country do too."

The President signs Stolen Valor legislation

Washington: The White House says President Barack Obama has signed a bill making it a crime to lie about receiving a military medal.

The Stolen Valor Act cleared both chambers of Congress last month.

The measure revives a law struck down by the Supreme Court in 2006. The court said it may be disreputable to lie about receiving a medal, but it's protected under the First Amendment.

The new law is narrower, making it a crime to lie about being decorated with some intent to profit personally or financially. That could include those who claim medals in order to receive veterans benefits, land a government contract or get a job reserved for veterans.

Violators could face up to a year in prison.

Bronze Star, WWII, OSS, France, Italy WWII Veteran Receives Recognition after 68 Years



By Michael Isam. St. Augustine, Fla, (June 15, 2013) – “It is fitting and proper we do this on this special day, the 238th anniversary of the United States Army,” said Maj. Gen. Emmett Titshaw, Adjutant General of the Florida National Guard as he awarded The Bronze Star with “V” device to the family of Staff Sergeant Egilio P., “Gene”, Delaini. The medal was originally awarded on or about July 27, 1945. The certificate did not reach him before his death in 2005.

Many times during a sometimes tearful award ceremony Claire Kaiser Delaini, “Gene’s” wife of more than 60 years, rubbed her thumb across the medal. It was as if husband and wife were together again. The moments were not lost on Maj. Gen. Titshaw, who presented the medal. It was evident in his speech and as he hugged her at the end of the presentation.

Delaini’s son Bruce presented facts about his father’s service, some of which are presented here.

Delaini, a first generation Italian-American, was born in 1915 in northwestern Connecticut. Drafted into the Army at age 25, he spent his first 18 months of service in the New Jersey Army National Guard artillery unit which was sent to Washington State. He became extremely bored and volunteered to become a paratrooper. After completion of jump school, he was summoned to Washington, D.C. and interviewed by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). He soon found himself a member of the elite OSS or 2671st Special Reconnaissance Battalion, Separate (Provisional) as it was known.

In a room filled to capacity with national guard personnel, many of whom are battle-hardened, and some only briefly exposed, each person had the “look”. The look that made faces as easy to read as a large-print novel while the circumstances of Delaini’s service were sounded for all to hear. Each one present listened intently and the memory of their own similar path was relived, if only for a moment.

“A demolition expert, his OSS Operational Group (OG) was assigned to the Nancy Mission as part of the preparation for the Allied invasion of southern France in August 1944”; “a 15 man unit parachuted into France on August 12th”; “worked independently on France’s border with Italy to thwart any enemy relief attempt once the Allied invasion began”; “there were numerous clashes with German forces,” and that was just France.

Looking over the audience, it was as if a cartoon character balloon was above the head of each attendee announcing “No wonder they are called the ‘Greatest Generation’ ”.

Delaini was pulled to North Africa to recoup and soon found himself reassigned to an OSS German OG. After being briefed, he was again parachuted, this time as during the Tacoma Mission in northern Italy. Part of a 4 man team, his rank and fluent Italian made him an extremely valuable asset. The German Army searched for his unit extensively, but never found them.

Delaini told of an incident where he was hidden in the barn of a partisan and could hear the German army march past him. His son Bruce quoted him as saying, “It was a little unnerving.”

The Tacoma Mission was the topic of many articles in the *Cleveland Press* and *Reader’s Digest* and a movie starring Gary Cooper was loosely based on this mission.

Delaini and his team operated in Italy from mid February until the end of the war. Many of the operations brought them into frequent contact with the Germans and Italian Fascists who were hunting them.

Bruce Delaini remarked that his father never fired a weapon or went hunting after the war. “I know what it is like to be the hunted,” said elder Delaini, “and I can’t do that to any creature; ever.”



Photos by Michael Isam: from the left, Friends and family of Staff Sergeant Egilio P. “Gene” Delaini; l to r; Bruce Delaini, Claire Delaini rubbing the medal, Maj. Gen. Titshaw; Claire Delaini receiving a hug from Maj. Gen. Titshaw



Vets 4 Vets is now 5 Years Old

by George McCrae



It hardly seems that long ago that Tom Waskovich suggested and planned a meeting to organize what has become Vets 4 Vets.

Born in November 2007, we became a member of Vet Group Inc. stationed in New Jersey and known as Vet Group South. Our Board found trying to support our veterans from St. Augustine to NJ was too much time wasted clearing and adjusting. We decided to try to go on our own. On 1 March 2008, we made our final withdrawal of funds from Vet Group South and became Vets 4 Vets, Inc. on 3 March 2008. From that date to now, some board members have changed, but the goal and the mission remains the same. We assist the needy and disadvantaged veterans in St. Johns County. We are a not-for-profit, 501 C3 Corporation.

We accomplish our mission by utilizing guide lines and by-laws established by our board. All veterans requesting help first visit our Veteran's Service Office (VSO). They provide us with the qualifications of the veteran as being honorably discharged and whether or not they are a true veteran. By requiring this guide line, we further assist the veteran by seeing what services they are entitled to that they may not have been aware of, such as medical. Upon certification of eligibility, VSO notifies us of the individual and what their needs are. The veteran is then interviewed by our representative to insure we have the financial support and can meet their need. This makes the request bonafied and forms are signed and assistance given.

Request for support could include financial such as for rent, food, utilities, medical, prescriptions; gas to get home or to work, vehicle repairs such as tires, battery; a death in the family with sudden expenses. Some was just to get a veteran out of the woods or sleeping under a bridge. We accomplish this goal with great pride and sense of achievement. We can look back on our five years and those we have helped and see our mission was accomplished and our veteran is better for it.

We cannot do this alone, however. We do this with your money and money donated by other Veteran organizations, dedicated individuals and thankful vets we've helped that are back on their feet. We do not stand in front of stores or on street corners begging for money. No one on our board is paid. So as the saying goes, "when donations stop, so do we". It would break our hearts to have to tell a vet in temporary need that we're sorry, but we can't help you, we are out of money. So please, keep us in your mind when you are considering donation to a charity. The need grows more every day. The veteran who never knew of us and applies to other charitable organizations is now being asked the question, "are you a vet?" and being immediately redirected to us. We are fine with that so long as we remain solvent.

Now allow me to give you a snapshot of how we have grown and what we have been able to accomplish.

We left Vets South in NJ with \$ 2.00 in our account in March of 2008. We were able to establish ourselves with our Veteran Organizations, some of who believed in our cause and continue to support us. At the end of 2008 we had helped 39 veterans, a huge accomplishment! At the end of 2009, we had risen to helping 66 veterans. By the end of 2010, we can proudly say 73 vets were helped and we were able to assist the VSO in the assistance to other vets at their annual standdown. At the end of 2011, we were up to 95 veterans, again helping with the standdown and becoming known as a bonafied organization intending to make a difference in the life of our needy vets. At the end of 2012, the economy had changed, but we were still able to assist 107 veterans.

Today we still are on a mission to make a difference to our honorably discharged vets that run into difficult circumstances where we can. As more veterans are returning home, jobs are few and difficult to find. Our reputation as a support organization to our veterans continues to grow and thus the ever increasing need for funding. The importance of your donations to us is of the highest level. If you already gave, thank you. If not, please review your distribution of charity funds and consider us. Keep us in mind and prayers.

Donations can be dropped off at the Veterans Service Office, 1955 US 1 South, Suite 550, St. Augustine, FL

A Night to Remember, the Sixteenth Annual Commemoration Of United States Victory At MIDWAY



June 1, 2013 Renaissance World Golf Village Resort, St. Augustine, FL

The Battle of Midway was one of the greatest naval victories of all time and changed the course of WW II. Before Midway, the Japanese were on the offensive, after Midway, the US was on the offensive and it was the beginning of the end for Japan.

The Battle of Midway dinner is to honor Midway survivors and their widows. The event also honors local Medal of Honor recipient Robert Ingram, former Prisoners of War, two Philippine Bataan Death March survivors, and Wounded Warriors. This is the largest Midway celebration in the world, there were over 700 in attendance. Rear Admiral Jack Scorby, Jr., Commander Navy Region Southeast introduced our keynote speaker, Admiral William E. Gortney, Commander Fleet Forces Command. ADM Gortney spoke about the heroics of the “Greatest Generation” and how they were able to stop the Japanese from destroying our ships and Navy. ADM Gortney stressed that it was the enlisted men that stepped up, took initiative and won the battle.

There were eleven Battle of Midway survivors in attendance as well as two Battle of Midway widows, all were introduced, brought up to the front, and bios read about each Navy veteran. They were stories of tragedy, survival and the human spirit overcoming all obstacles. Each year there are less and less Midway survivors in attendance and we cherish our time with these American heroes.

The Navy League Mayport Chapter and the Battle of Midway committee are to be commended for hosting this outstanding tribute. The Renaissance Hotel again showed why it is a 5 Star Hotel, it was truly a Night to Remember.



Photo by Capt. Jane Campbell, Fleet Forces Command PAO Officer, used with her permission



Joint Services Color Guard



The Honorees



ADM Bill Gortney and RDML Jack Scorby stand at attention as Robert Ingram's Medal of Honor citation was being read. Ingram was a Hospital Corpsman Third Class serving with Company C, First Battalion, Seventh Marines in Quang Ngai Province - Republic of Vietnam in 1966. He was shot four different times on March 28th - as he provided medical aid to injured Marines during an attack by North Vietnamese troops. He is credited with saving countless lives that day - without any regard to his own life.



Adm. Gortney, Bill Ingram, Adm. Scorby



Adm. Gortney, Capt (ret) Richard Stratton, Capt (ret) Thomas Letendresse, and Col (ret) Harold Kushner



Keynote speaker Adm. Gortney

Honoring Midway Heroes



**NEWS RELEASE 450th Military
Commemoration Committee Dedi-
cates 3 Cannons**

The 450th Military Commemoration Committee, in cooperation with the city of St Augustine, will dedicate the installation of replica British mid 1700 period cannons. The dedication will take place in Oglethorpe Park on Sunday, 30 June at 10:30. Speakers will include Dr Roger Smith, St Augustine, British period historian, US Navy Rear Admiral Sinclair M. Harris and British Royal Navy Rear Admiral Tim Fraser and other government and business leaders. This event is open to the public.

Oglethorpe Park is located in St. Augustine, in the Davis Shores area at the intersection of Oglethorpe Boulevard and Arredondo Street. From Town go Across Bridge of Lions - Turn Left on Arredondo Street.

Web Site: **450military.org**

For additional information contact:

Ted Pappas:

papp6047@bellsouth.net

Web Site: 450military.org



Cannon being set up for display,
photo by Ray Quinn



American Legion Post 37



On June 22, 2013 at 11am the home post had a dedication of our new flag pole to Mrs. Nikki Meggitt and family. All were invited for the dedication and the St. Augustine Sea Cadets (Navy League Cadet color guard) participated in the event.



Commander White introduced Ms. Nikki and family. Judge Advocate Michael Barnes read about the American flag, Kevin McKeefery read about the Florida Flag and Larry Weiss read on the P.O.W. FLAG. The Sea Cadets marched towards the pole, proceeded to hang the flags on the pole, raised them and saluted them (as all officers did as well). Commander White presented Mrs. Meggitt the plaque that is in place and thanked everyone for being there.

Also, Commander Richard White along with Kevin McKeefery received the Gold Brigade (Second one for Kevin McKeefery) award for bringing over 50 new members this past year each. While Kevin McKeefery recieved Three other awards at the State convention. Besides the Awards, we had 122% membership for the first time in the history of the Home Post 37.

Congratulations Post 37 for having a great Year.



The Meggitt family sits in the first row



Kevin McKeefery/ Adjutant/ First-vice Commander, Member Marine Corps League and Past Commander of American Legion Post 37



**American Legion Post 37 will have hamburgers and hot dogs on the
4th of July from 11am to 10pm**



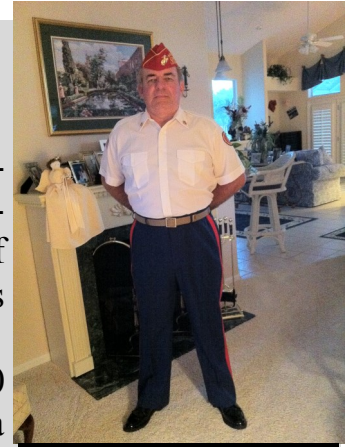
*Charlie in 1972 leaving Okinawa
for his second deployment aboard
USS Tripoli*

Charlie Myers, USMC

St. Augustine, FL

This is not a yarn of ones combat escapades; or in any way shape or form a claim to heroics. This is just a brief peak into the window of a life of a pimply faced South Philadelphia kid's attempt to break away from the street corner.

I was born in Philadelphia in the year 1950 just a few blocks south of Dock Street where a certain tavern used to stand called "Tun's Tavern", the birth place of the Continental Marines. My world consisted of a world of discipline from



*Charlie Myers, Adjutant Oldest
City Detachment # 383*

parochial school at the hands of catholic nuns, to the physical discipline of catholic priests throughout high school; and of course, the tough streets of South Philly.

Being the proud son of a WWII US Army veteran, I wanted to show that what all dads of that era stood for in defense of liberty was worth it by accepting the torch and standing tall for the American way; growing up on a diet of John Wayne movies may have had a part in it too. However, being nurtured on discipline, the US Army was not appealing, my focus shifted towards what appeared to be the continuation of discipline I was raised on, enter the United States Marine Corps. While my friends went off to the Jersey shore during the summer of 1969 to celebrate the completion of high school, I took my summer vacation on Parris Island, SC. As I exited the bus upon arrival at the Recruit Depot the mutual thoughts of so many before me flashed in my head; "what the hell did I do?"

After all of the training and hard corps discipline of boot camp that you more than likely have heard about over and over again, I was sent to Fort Belvoir's Corps of Engineering School to learn my MOS as a "cartographer", I bet you were expecting to hear the Navy Seal type training, but no, I became a "map maker."

Boredom quickly set in at my first duty station at Camp Geiger, NC (next door to Camp Lejeune). Myself and a few buddies said one day after consuming vast quantities of 3-2 beer "let's go see what this Vietnam thing is all about." So we filled the billet for our MOS and off we went ending up on Okinawa. However, my buddies continued onto the 1st Marine Division, now in country, which was our original destination, but they needed my MOS here on Okinawa with the 3rd Marine Division. Once I reported aboard Camp Schwab I found that life around the HQ was again boring. I heard about an opening to be a "chaser" at the Brig further south on the island at Camp Butler. So, off I go again. Well, life working in the Brig (or officially referred to as a "Correctional Facility") was never dull, especially when you have prisoner riots at 0400 and find yourself in a fight before you had a chance to digest morning chow. After being promoted to NCOIC ("non-commissioned officer in charge") of admissions, one of my tasks was to explore many a dark body cavity for contraband; this is not something to write home about.

After completing my tour and returning to the "world", I reported aboard Camp Lejeune, NC with the 2nd Engineers, again boredom was waiting; I longed for the streets and night life

of Okinawa. After just two months I filed a waiver and yes, I returned to the land of skivvy houses, bar streets and Orion Beer. However, this time I ended up with the 1st Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment (in Marine speak it is: 1/9, an infantry battalion). Okinawa was our home base, but we deployed aboard ships (USS CharlieDenver and USS Tripoli) to places of interest; the Philippines, Hong Kong and Vietnam, yes Vietnam my original destination.

The Marine Corps instills a strong spirit, which I had, but not a strong stomach, which I did not have. When deployed aboard ship I wondered if my sea sick days of deep sea fishing at the Jersey shore were just a onetime experience, wrong! As Neptune unleashed his anger more than once, more than once did I find myself making love to the porcelain throne. At times my only relief was when the torrent of water in the bowl splashed onto my face. It took about two days before I gained my sea legs. However, when we pulled liberty in ports, not a one of us could walk a straight line down the pier. Mercy was not a given virtue aboard ship. As the green faced jarheads lay moaning in their racks, those “SOBs” who were not affected would return to the squad bay and dump garbage cans from the galley onto their victims. To show that I could hack it and not to be any less of a Marine, I would venture onto the flight deck for serenity. When I opened the hatch and stepped onto the flight deck what did I see, bodies of Marines rolling back and forth like loose logs in a car wash on a roller coaster, thank God I was not alone.

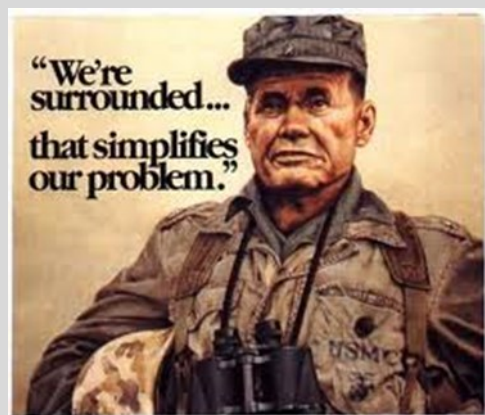
Upon my overseas adventures I received proof that there is a Santa Claus, I received orders to report to the 2nd Marine Air Wing at MCAS Cherry Point, NC; from a “grunt outfit” to the Air Wing, (are you kidding me!) this where I spent my last year in the Corps, being groomed for civilian life which I finally joined in 1973, without my pimples.



Charlie working as the confinement NCO in the Brig at Camp Butler, Okinawa 1970

“You’ve read the story now view the movie. Attached is a short YouTube project I composed from 42 year old 8mm film taken aboard USS Denver as we deployed from Okinawa.”

<http://youtu.be/7CaCrs8MaDs>





Flag Day at Coquina Crossing

June 14th, 2013

by Harry Manford



Flag Day is the day to celebrate the United States Flag, and that's exactly what the Coquina Veterans did. By resolution, the Second Continental Congress on June 14th, 1777 adopted the US Flag as we have come to know it today. So, the Coquina Veterans continues the commemoration.

The highlight of the ceremony was the proper disposal of unserviceable US Flags by fire. Prior to that, the Coquina Veterans had asked its community to give them all their torn, tattered, and frayed flags. They did. Fifty three (53) flags in total were submitted for the final respects and honor.

Boy Scout Troop 330 from St. Augustine assisted in the ceremony. There were six Scouts altogether and each participated. They learned first hand how the military gives this tribute plus they were accredited with Scout service hours to be used toward their individual achievement of badges and medals. The Coquina Veterans Color Guard led the way, and the Scouts picked it up from there without a hitch. It was our honor to have these wonderful young men assist.

The Coquina Veterans formally observes Flag Day each year on June 14th, and each time, the whole community is invited to attend. As a matter of fact, several community citizens volunteered to participate in the disposal, and why not. After all, it's **their** Flag too!

Buffalo Soldiers FL by SGM Dan Blackman, ret.

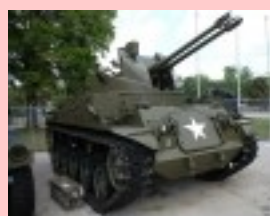
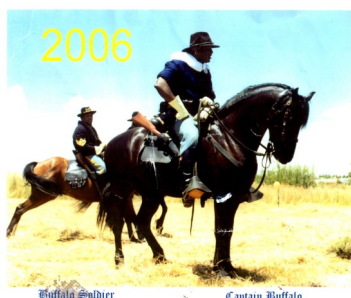
The Buffalo soldiers are coming to the St. Augustine, FL Fountain of Youth on Saturday 29 June 2013 and Hasting, FL Sunday 30 June 2013 at the Equestrian Center. The team will tell stories of the Black Western Horse Soldiers, and provide demonstrations that educate the public. The Central Florida team was founded in 1992 as a historical reenactment, public service organization. The goal of the group is to tell the true stories of the Black men who were the first to serve in the Regular U.S. Army, starting in 1866. The group also strives to tell the story of all Black men and women who struggle, fought and gave their lives to help make the United State the nation it is today.

Another goal of the organization is to use history to teach our young children, thru discussion, and living the part of the Soldiers of that era, sharing the ways they made their lives better.

As living historians, members of the group also portray the Negro-Seminole warriors who fought for Freedom in the 1830's in Florida, members of the U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War and the Buffalo Soldiers into the 20th Century thru WWI.

In 2012, the "Buffalo Soldier, FL" gave demonstrations, and conducted historical seminars around the world, in South Africa, Japan, England and France promoting the legacy of the brave Black Warriors. In the U.S. they have performed at West Point, Ft. Bliss, Ft. Davis, Ft. Leavenworth and numerous other events across the nation.

The goal of this organization is the serve and teach, come join us learn the story of the Buffalo Soldiers. This event sponsored by; The Veterans Council of St. Johns County and the 450th Military Commemoration Committee of St. Augustine, FL.



The Military Museum of North Florida is a non profit organization dedicated the honoring those men and women that have served their country in the armed forces via artifacts, displays and military memorabilia. Admission is free but donations are welcome.

The museum is located on Rt 16 in Green Cove Springs Fl 1 1/2 miles East of US 17 and 1 1/2 miles West of the Shands Bridge.

The Museums' hours are: 10:00 to 3:00 Thursday through Saturday and 12:00 to 4:00 on Sundays.

Call (904) 584-8719 for more information Herb Steigelman, Curator



Veterans History Project Featured on CBS News Broadcast

On June 6, 2013, the 69th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy, France, CBS News featured archival content from the Library of Congress Veterans History Project. Eclectic materials, including diaries, original photographs, and oral history recordings reflect the inclusive scope of the project as well as its continuing mission to preserve wartime memories from World War I through current conflicts. Bob Patrick, Director of the Veterans History Project, said "We're not trying to recreate history, or rewrite history, but communicate what the experience was like for those that go off to war and most importantly, at the end, what did it all mean to them?"

Through these efforts, many stories otherwise left untold are now shared with VHP volunteer interviewers. Paul Tshudi, a recent interviewee, served as a combat medic during the Vietnam War. He remarked that as an individual, VHP "helps him regain respect for his own service" and for the nation, "this is a way of honoring us and keeping that story forever."

Additional collection materials relate the unique experiences of:

Albert John Carpenter (WWI): <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/225>

Jose Mares (Korean War): <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/6059>

Frances M. Liberty (WWII): <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/2548>

The Mission of the Veterans History Project of the Library of Congress American Folklife Center is to collect, preserve, and make accessible the personal accounts of American war veterans so that future generations may hear directly from veterans and better understand the realities of war.

The St. Johns County Public Library System and Haven Hospice are local branches of this national project. For more information please contact:

Amy Ackerman at aackerman@sjcfl.us / 904-827-6960 or

Mikki Sampo at msampo@sjcfl.us / 904-827-6940 or

Kathy Furney at jkfurney@havenhospice.org / 904-810-2377





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*This incentive is in addition to current offers.



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On behalf of Doc's Friends, welcome to the B-29 Doc Restoration Project. A brief history...

Jerry Hanchett's brother, Mike, of Newton, KS, is working on this project



In May of 2000, the B-29 known as Doc was rescued and transported from California to Wichita. Doc's story began in March of 1945 at the Boeing plant in Wichita, Kansas.

Originally built by the Boeing Company in 1945, the B-29-20-BW, or B-29 Superfortress, was a one-of-a-kind airplane. The B-29 was designed and built by Boeing in Wichita and flown primarily by the U.S. Air Force at the end of World War II and then during the Korean War.

In 1987, after sitting more than 40 years in the Mojave Desert where it was a sun baked sanctuary for birds and many other desert creatures, Doc was rescued by a group of historians with a dream. The group, led by Tony Mazzolini and backed by the United States Aviation Museum, had a plan to restore the B-29 and eventually get it back into the air.

Following a nearly three year absence, volunteers have again revived Mazzolini's dream. Work is once again underway in Wichita, Kansas to fully restore and fly the B-29 once again. You can see photos/videos of the move [here](#).

In February of this year, Doc was acquired by "Doc's Friends" and the restoration of the B-29 Superfortress resumed. [Click here](#) to see how you can get involved and be a part of this history rebuild of the aircraft.

A group of business leaders from Wichita, KS founded Doc's Friends in early 2013 with a vision to see the historic Boeing B-29 Superfortress known as Doc restored to flying condition.

A new non-profit group, Doc's Friends has taken ownership of the airplane and will lead the effort to refurbish the vintage airplane. It is believed that Doc is the last known Boeing B-29 Superfortress that is in restorable condition.

Doc's Friends, a group of Wichita aviation enthusiasts, was recently formed to help make Mazzolini's dream of a flying museum come true. The board is chaired by Jeff Turner; other members include Charlie Chandler, Jack Pelton, Steve Clark, Lynn Nichols, Brad Gorsuch, Vic McMullen, and Ron Ryan. The airplane was [recently moved](#) from a storage hangar to active hangar space donated by Boeing, which will allow volunteers to resume work to restore the aircraft. "We've got all of our equipment to move back into place, and before long we'll be able to start working on it again. We'll get the wings on, the nacelles on, and it'll start looking like a real airplane again."

Parts needed for the restoration have been stored for several years in Newton, Kan. Parkhurst said the onboard wings are finished and those will be among the first of the larger parts that will be moved to Wichita from Newton.

Volunteers hope to have the plane restored and airworthy again within the next two years.

Doc was one of 1,644 B-29 Superfortress bombers built at Boeing Wichita's Plant II. At the height of production in 1944, there were more than 29,000 Boeing Wichita employees and about 45 percent were women. Those employees rolled out three and a half B-29s every day from a plant that operated around the clock.

Doc rolled off the final assembly line in 1944 and was delivered to the United State Army Air Forces in March of 1945. The bomber's career included overseas missions and a stint as a member of a radar calibration squadron in New York. The B-29 was one of a squadron of eight bombers named for Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs that were used for radar calibration in New York.

In 1956, Doc was decommissioned from the radar squadron and used as a target at the China Lake Naval Warfare Weapons Center in California's Mojave Desert. After being shot at multiple times and surviving, Doc was moved to a remote area of the Naval base and spent 42 years sitting in the desert—baking in the sun and serving as a sanctuary for birds and other desert creatures.

Meeting:
First Tuesday of each month
Time: 1900
St. Augustine Elks Lodge #829
1420 A1A South
St. Augustine, FL 32080



Mailing Address:
MCL #383
P.O. Box 1752
St. Augustine, FL 32085
Telephone: (904) 461-0139
www.mclfl383.org





LIBERTY PINES ACADEMY LIBERTY PARADE AND CELEBRATION

DAY: "WELL DONE!" FROM THE MARINE CORPS LEAGUE

On Friday morning May 24th under the bluest of skies that matched the blueness of their trousers, and as the baking sun sent torrents of perspiration flowing, the Oldest City Detachment #383 had the distinct honor of being a part of the Liberty Pines Academy's "Liberty Parade and Celebration Day."

Was it worth it? As the Oldest City Detachment #383 Color Guard stood at parade rest listening to the voices of innocents fill the air with patriotic songs, and as each grade of America's future paraded by in a sea of waving miniature US flags with their eyes wide open inspecting those "mature" Marines in their uniforms, one could only be reassured that the passing of the torch of liberty to the next generation will glow as bright as each face, and "yes, it was worth it!"

Our sincere gratitude goes out to Liberty Pines Academy for the invitation to participate in its ever growing program that showcases its support of our veterans. A special thank you to the faculty and parents: "well done!"

Oldest City Detachment #383, Marine Corps League, St. Augustine, FL ,
Visit us @: mclfl383.org

MEMORIAL DAY “MASSING OF THE COLORS”

ST. AUGUSTINE NATIONAL CEMETERY

“Present Colors!” echoed throughout the St. Augustine National Cemetery at 1000 this Memorial Day 2013 with the reply of numerous Color Guards snapping to attention, and the Oldest City Detachment #383, Marine Corps League was proud to participate.

This tribute, as all Memorial Days are, is to those comrades who are forever suspended in time, in our memories, and in our hearts for paying the ultimate price. It is said that it is our duty to remember the fallen, but we do not remember because we have never forgot. Remembrance is not only shown during special occasions such as Memorial Day by veteran organizations, but every day, everywhere and every place. Just look around and you will see military baseball caps or tee shirts being worn as a badge of remembrance.

Charlie Myers , Adjutant , Oldest City Detachment #383
Marine Corps League St. Augustine, FL Visit us @ mclfl383.org



Florida Veterans Programs & Projects, Inc. has donated copies of all 4 of its documentaries to the St. Augustine Historical Society. These documentaries all feature the heroic stories of local veterans. All the documentaries have been broadcast on local PBS, WJCT TV in Jacksonville.

K9 for Warriors, Ponte Vedra Beach

K9s For Warriors is dedicated to provide service canines to our warriors suffering from post-traumatic stress as a result of conflicts and war after 9/11.



Since 9/11 and the resulting conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan there are over 500 thousand disabled military warriors. One in five suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. One in six will attempt or commit suicide. Symptoms of PTSD are mental changes, including, but not limited to; hostility, aggression, depression, suicide, paranoia, acrophobia, nightmares, panic attacks, poor coping skills, memory loss, and lack of trust. PTSD affects not only the warriors but their families and the workplace. Studies have proven there are actual physical changes in the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex of the brain adding to the horrific war experiences that warriors have endured.

Service canines are a medically proven recovery aid for our warriors suffering from PTSD. Service canines are considered medical equipment and are recognized by the U. S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, and the American disability act of 1990.

At K9s For Warriors, our philosophy is to involve the veteran in the training of their new service canine partner, allowing them the opportunity to be part of the solution to their recovery. Our academy is staffed by skilled certified canine handlers and trainers. Each academy is three weeks in length where the warrior learns the skills needed to train their own canines. We provide a service canine, training, certification, equipment, seminars, vet care, most meals, and housing, free of charge. Each warrior is responsible for their own transportation to and from our facility which is located in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. Classes are limited to three to five warriors in each session.

K9s For Warriors is supported by The Wounded Warrior Project, Birdies for the Brave, Warrior Gateway, and many other military organizations. We highly recommend each applicant contact one of our many alumni to hear for themselves the positive recovery changes after attending our Academy. We feel the best way to gain the knowledge of our methods, and training techniques is to talk to fellow Veterans for their recommendations. K9s For Warriors will provide such information upon request.

K9s For Warriors will be accepting over fifty warriors for our Academy in a calendar year. Our goal is to help our warriors return to civilian life with dignity and independence. They fought for our tomorrows, we will fight for theirs.

OUR MISSION WILL BE MET!



KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban proposed a deal in which they would free a U.S. soldier held captive since 2009 in exchange for five of their most senior operatives at Guantanamo Bay, while Afghan President Hamid Karzai eased his opposition Thursday to joining planned peace talks.



The idea of releasing these Taliban prisoners has been controversial. U.S. negotiators hope they would join the peace process but fear they might simply return to the battlefield, and Karzai once scuttled a similar deal partly because he felt the Americans were usurping his authority.

The proposal to trade U.S. Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl for the Taliban detainees was made by senior Taliban spokesman Shaheen Suhail in response to a question during a phone interview with The Associated Press from the militants' newly opened political office in Doha, the capital of the Gulf nation of Qatar.

The prisoner exchange is the first item on the Taliban's agenda before even starting peace talks with the U.S., said Suhail, a top Taliban figure who served as first secretary at the Afghan Embassy in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad before the Taliban government's ouster in 2001.

"First has to be the release of detainees," Suhail said Thursday when asked about Bergdahl. "Yes. It would be an exchange. Then step by step, we want to build bridges of confidence to go forward."

The Obama administration was noncommittal about the proposal, which it said it had expected the Taliban to make.

"We've been very clear on our feelings about Sgt. Bergdahl and the need for him to be released," State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said. "We have not made a decision to ... transfer any Taliban detainees from Guantanamo Bay, but we anticipate, as I've said, that the Taliban will all raise this issue."

Bergdahl, 27, of Hailey, Idaho, is the only known American soldier held captive from the Afghan war. He disappeared from his base in southeastern Afghanistan on June 30, 2009, and is believed held in Pakistan. Suhail said Bergdahl "is, as far as I know, in good condition."

Donna Thibedeau-Eddy, who has spent the last few days at the Idaho home of the soldier's parents, Bob and Jani Bergdahl, said the family was hopeful.

From John Mountcastle
Special Issue IRS Exempt Organization Update Issue 2013-10

Check out this Summer's IRS Phone Forums!

“Charities and their Volunteers” – July 17



Many charities use all-volunteer labor to accomplish their work. Even those fortunate enough to have paid staff often rely heavily on volunteers to enhance their efforts.

This phone forum will help charity leaders and tax practitioners understand the tax rules that can come into play with volunteers. We'll discuss what charities and their volunteers need to do to avoid any unintended tax consequences for the organization or the volunteer.

Topics include:

- Out-of-pocket expenses
- Which expenses are deductible
- Travel expenses
- Vehicle expenses
- Recordkeeping

Reimbursing the volunteer

Click [here](#) to register for this event.

“Veterans Organizations – Complying with IRS Rules” — July 30

Veterans organizations occupy a special place in the world of exempt organizations. Not only are most veterans organizations exempt from tax, but contributions to them may be deductible, and some are permitted to set aside amounts that are used to provide insurance benefits to members.

This combination — tax-exempt status, deductibility of contributions and the ability to pay benefits to members — is relatively rare and is evidence of Congress's intent to provide special tax treatment for veterans organizations. This phone forum provides information to help them stay tax exempt.

Topics include:

- Requirements for exemption
- Recordkeeping
- Filing and reporting
- Unrelated business income tax
- Exempt activities

Bona fide guests

Click [here](#) to register for this event.

While Continuing Professional Education credit is offered to professionals, these webinars are not only for the professional. The information can keep your organization exempt and off the IRS' radar! If you are having trouble with the links (underlined words) above, please go to

<http://www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits/Charitable-Organizations/EO-Update,-June-18,-2013>



Vets 4 Vets

Gathering of Veterans
at the
5 Star Veterans Center
40 Acme St.
Jacksonville, Florida

VETERANS WELCOME HOME

Every Saturday 0930-1130

Starting on July 13th

Stop by for a cup of Coffee & Donuts

****We will never forget****



Currently sponsored by the Jacksonville Semper Fidelis Society and the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 1046. All veterans, those who support veterans and veterans organizations are welcome and encouraged to support this project. Contact information:

Les Bertrand

Welcome Home Coordinator

Email: les-Bertrand@comcast.net

Phone: 904-248-9453

Florida Veterans Programs & Projects, Inc., is honored to have its Prisoner of War documentary, along with the individual interviews of Army Colonel Hal Kushner and CPL Richard Bassett accepted into the library of the National Museum of the United States Army.



Because a great Army deserves a great Museum

For far too long the US Army has lacked both a comprehensive story place and a fitting tribute to relate and recognize the personal and professional sacrifices of its Soldiers. It is now time to hear them, and to say thanks to fourteen generations of American Soldiers whose leadership, character, and selfless sacrifice have forged and safeguarded our nation for over two centuries. A great Army deserves a great Museum.

To understand ourselves, our country, and our culture, we can learn much from our Army and its Soldiers, past and present. Their history is our history, told from a unique and remarkable perspective.

Regardless of the mission—whether combat, peacekeeping, or nation-building—Soldiers' stories exemplify the indomitable spirit that has so clearly defined the American character since 1775.

It is now time to build the National Museum of the United States Army.

To honor our Soldiers

Today there are approximately 11 million living US Army veterans, most of whom served during times of war. While there are more veterans of the Army than of any other service, the Army is the only one without a national museum or monument.

These 11 million living Army veterans – along with the more than 1 million men and women currently serving in the active Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard – deserve to be celebrated in a national, world-class museum. They deserve recognition and appreciation for their service to our nation.

To preserve our history

Not only will the National Army Museum honor our living veterans, but it will showcase the legacy of some 30 million men and women who have worn the Army uni-

form since 1775. These Citizen-Soldiers helped secure our nation's independence, and have served loyally, protecting America ever since. The over 200 hundred years of Army history have produced important artifacts, artwork, and documents. This rich past, which has been safeguarded by the Army, will be showcased properly for the benefit of the American public. The Museum will preserve, study, and exhibit Army history, including an estimated 750,000 artifacts and works of art.

To educate the public

By showcasing this history, the Museum will address an alarming trend in American education. Consider the following results of the *2006 National Assessment of Educational Progress*:

- * When asked to identify which country was a US ally at the beginning of World War II, less than half of American 12th graders chose the Soviet Union; nearly as many picked Germany or Italy.

- * When asked in which country the US fought from 1964-1973, 60% of American fourth graders did not correctly identify Vietnam as the answer.

Sadly, American students are losing touch with their nation's history. The National Army Museum will educate the public about our country's heritage. Interactive, multimedia exhibits will teach millions of visitors about the many ways in which the Army has impacted their lives, from developing vaccines to exploring space.

To inspire currently serving and future Soldiers

The Army's story is one that takes a whole museum to tell. It is a proud history, strung together by the individuals who have dedicated their lives to service. The story of the Army will be told in the National Museum through the stories of Soldiers – ordinary individuals who served their country and achieved extraordinary things.

At a time when so many Soldiers are currently serving our country and defending our national interests all over the world, it is especially important to inspire these young people and give them and their loved ones pride in an institution that is older than the United States itself. They deserve the National Army Museum.





The Ride Home, Inc.
September 19-21, 2013
National POW/MIA Recognition

**Until
They All
Come
Home**

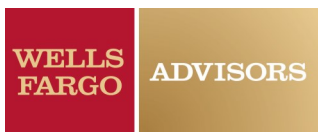
info@theridehome.com
theridehome.com

National POW/MIA Recognition Day
September 20, 2013



Keeping the Promise
www.dtic.mil/dpmo

"I will set him in the safety, for which he Yearns!" Robert Bergdahl



Christopher Thompson, CFP®, CRPC®

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Howard O. McGillin, Jr.
Colonel, US Army (Retired)
Attorney and Civil Mediator

Fairbanks & McGillin PL Attorneys and Counselors at Law

Practice focusing on Estate Planning (Wills/Trusts), Probate, Elder and Veterans Law and Small Business Law

Offices just off CR 210W
13 Nature Walk Parkway, Ste 103
St. Augustine, FL 32092
904-687-1140
WWW.FMPLLAW.COM



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*Our Family Serving Your Family
Since 1915*

*“Veterans and Family
Memorial Care”*



Ending homelessness, one person at a time

On October 3, 2013, the **Sulzbacher Center**, Northeast Florida's largest homeless services provider, will salute formerly homeless US Military Veterans, as they share their stories of hope and finding the *way home*.

Join in our 15th annual ***Transformations*** event, as we celebrate military veterans whose once-broken lives have been transformed by Sulzbacher Center programs and services.

How the Sulzbacher Center Helps Homeless Military Veterans

Unique Shelter Area

- Private veteran's-only dormitory
- 9 comfortably appointed, semi-private rooms
- TV and relaxation area
- 14 shower stalls and laundry



Special Case Management

- Designed to address Veterans' unique needs
- Works with the VA to prioritize stable housing

Veteran's Hope TEAM

- Mobile medical street outreach, specifically for homeless veterans living on the street
- Staffed by a physician and case managers with military experience
- Medical and psychiatric support
- Focus on relationship building to encourage vets to come into the Sulzbacher Center

Future Focus

- Create a special dorm and case management for women military veterans
- Developing partnerships for veteran job training and career development opportunities



15th Annual Transformations event

Tuesday, October 3, 2013

5:30 PM – 8:00 PM

Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront

Transformations has long been called the "feel good event" of the season. Substantial participation by supporters and new Sulzbacher Center friends will help make this year's event even more successful.

General admission: \$50.00 per person

Sponsorships available, starting at \$500.00

Transformations gifts help the Sulzbacher Center turn the overwhelming uncertainty of homelessness into hope.

Transformations Group Sales

Money raised will help initiate a special program at the Sulzbacher Center for homeless women military veterans and job training/placement for veterans over all.

Sales Goal: 600 tickets

Did You Know?

25% of America's chronically homeless are military veterans

400 homeless veterans live in Jacksonville

90% of homeless veterans received an honorable military discharge

It's time to improve the future of our homeless veterans by taking action in the present.

*Veterans Council of St. Johns County,
"Helping All Veterans"*

The Veterans Council of St. Johns County welcomes article submissions from all County Veterans & organizations. Articles should be of interest to all and veterans related. Submissions may be edited &/or shortened and used if space permits.

Send to: mrothfeld@anyveteran.org



Florida Guard online

<http://www.floridaguard.army.mil/>

The Veterans Council of St. Johns County, Inc. is a Not For Profit Florida Corporation.

Our formation date was July 4, 2001 in a proclamation issued by the St. Johns County Commissioners. It is composed of representatives of the various veterans' organizations within St. Johns County.

The Veteran's Council will work with city and county governments and other local organizations to achieve the mutual goal to provide a central agency to assist in the coordination and presentation of matters concerning veterans and veterans activities in St. Johns County.

The Veteran's Council will endeavor to precipitate, stimulate and assist various organizations as they perform patriotic events. One of the major purposes is the promotion and education of national patriotic matters.

**The St. Johns County Veterans Council meets the last
Thursday of the month at 7 pm at the Elks Lodge,
1420 A1A So., St. Augustine.**

Visit our Website: www.veteranscouncilofstjohns.org
(please note the NEW web address)

**Veterans Service Office
1955 US 1 South, Suite 550
St. Augustine, FL 32086**

(physical location)

The VSO Office is located in the St.
Johns County Health and Human
Services complex, behind the VA Clinic.

The office is open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily,
Monday through Friday excluding holidays.

Service is by appointment.
Phone: 904-209-6160 Fax: 904-209-6161
Joseph McDermott, CVSO
Rick Rees, Assistant VSO
Heather Andrews, Assistant VSO
Tammy Shirley, Office Specialist



The locally produced *Vietnam documentary, Service, Sacrifice
and Courage* has received **225,410** views to date on YouTube.

You can view part of it at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8Cs6Th7VNc>



Florida Veterans Programs & Projects, Inc. in association with Rolling Thunder Florida are making available free copies of its "Prisoners of War: Stolen Freedom" documentary to all Veterans Groups. Just contact Michael at: 904-829-0381 or mrothfeld@AnyVeteran.org and I will mail them or meet you to give you as many free copies as you need. Our goal is to have as many people see the documentary as possible.



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

Washington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
www.va.gov

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 18, 2013

New Technology in Place for Electronic Submission of Veterans' Disability Claims Capability Marks Major Milestone in VA Transformation to Digital Claims Process

WASHINGTON – A new online application from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) enables disability compensation claims to be processed faster in a more end-to-end electronic environment, and VA is urging Veterans and their Veterans Service Organization (VSO) representatives to make full use of its capabilities to receive speedier decisions and reduce the backlog of claims.

The availability of the joint VA-Department of Defense Web portal eBenefits, which now integrates with the new internal Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) electronic claims processing system, marks a major milestone in VA's transformation from paper claims records to a fully digital operating environment, one of the keys to VA's goal to eliminate the disability claims backlog by the end of 2015. VBMS has now been fielded at all 56 Regional Offices across the country, ahead of schedule. VA will continue to upgrade and improve VBMS based on user feedback, and add features and tools that make it faster and easier to process claims. Instead of filling out and mailing paper forms to VA, Veterans can now use eBenefits to enter claim information online using a step-by-step, interview-style application, with pre-populated data fields and drop-down menus similar to popular tax preparation software.

"There are so many advantages to making this move from paper to digital – for both Veterans and VA" said Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey. "Veterans can now file their claims online through eBenefits like they might do their taxes online."

By filing electronically, any compensation benefits that are awarded will be effective back to the date the Veteran started entering their claim information in eBenefits. From that initial claim establishment date, each Veteran has up to a year to gather all necessary records and hit "submit" to preserve their original date of claim.

eBenefits allows Veterans to upload digital images of records and evidence to support their claims, bypassing the need to physically mail in personal records and wait for confirmation of receipt. VA is advising Veterans to gather and submit all relevant medical records and file a Fully Developed Claim (FDC) in eBenefits, which entails entering all available evidence at the time the claim is submitted and verifying to VA that they have no more evidence to submit. Veterans filing an FDC will receive priority processing over the traditional claims process. VA can typically process FDCs in half the time it takes for a traditionally filed claim, and there is no risk to Veterans in filing an FDC. If VA finds that there is a piece of relevant evidence that was not submitted by the Veteran, but is needed for a rating decision (like private medical records), claims processors will work to obtain that evidence on the Veteran's behalf and process the claim in the traditional way.

Once logged into eBenefits, Veterans can also choose to have an accredited VSO representative assist with their claim submission by filing an electronic power of attorney form. Using this new system, the chosen

VSO representative, with proper authorization, will be able to see the contents of a Veteran's claim, track its status, and add additional information when needed. A Veteran and his or her representative can even work a claim simultaneously while both are logged into the system, enabling VSOs to assist more Veterans in their homes or even remotely.

VA will still accept claims in paper form, though processing may take longer than for an electronically-submitted claim. As of this summer, VA scans all new paper claims and uploads them into VBMS so they too can be processed electronically, though without many of the benefits provided when Veterans initiate the process in eBenefits such as guided questions that help ensure complete and accurate information and the immediate receipt of information without having to wait for the scanning and processing of paper documents. In addition to filing claims online, registered eBenefits users can track their claim status and access information on a variety of other benefits, like pension, education, health care, home loan eligibility, and vocational rehabilitation and employment programs.

A free Premium eBenefits account is required to file claims electronically. The quickest and most convenient method of establishing a free premium eBenefits account is to complete the remote verification process through the eBenefits home page, or use DoD's common access card (CAC) to register for and/or upgrade to a free premium account. Veterans can also establish an account by telephone at 1-800-827-1000, option 7, if they are in receipt of VA benefits via direct deposit, or by visiting a VA regional office or TRICARE Service Center (if they are a military retiree). For the location of the nearest VA regional office, visit www.va.gov and search the VA regional benefits office locator.

While compensation claims are pending, eligible Veterans are able to receive healthcare and other benefits from VA. Veterans who have served in recent conflicts are eligible for 5 years of free healthcare from VA. Currently, over 55% of returning Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans are using VA healthcare, a rate of utilization greater than previous generations of Veterans.

This is the latest effort in support of the Secretary's plan to eliminate the backlog. On May 15, VA announced that it is mandating overtime for claims processors in its 56 regional benefits offices through the end of fiscal year 2013 to help eliminate the backlog, with continued emphasis on high-priority claims for homeless Veterans, those claiming financial hardship, the terminally ill, former Prisoners of War, Medal of Honor recipients, and Veterans filing Fully Developed Claims.

In April, VA announced an initiative to expedite compensation claims decisions for Veterans who have waited one year or longer. On April 19, VA began prioritizing claims decisions for Veterans who have been waiting the longest by providing decisions based on evidence currently in hand that allow eligible Veterans to begin collecting compensation benefits quickly while waiting for their final eligibility decision.

For more information about VA benefits, go to <http://www.benefits.va.gov>. For more information on VA's Transformation, go to <http://benefits.va.gov/transformation>.

VA Processes Nearly All Disability Claims Pending Over 2 Years, Moves to Complete Those Older Than 1 Year

Over 65,000 Claims Eliminated from the Backlog in 2 Months

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that as a result of the initiative launched in [April](#) to expedite disability compensation claims decisions for Veterans who have waited a year or longer, more than 65,000-claims – or 97 percent of all claims over two years old in the inventory – have been eliminated from the backlog.

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) staff will now focus their efforts on completing the disability claims of Veterans who have been waiting over one year for a decision, while completing the final batch of oldest claims in progress.

“Over the past two months, VA has been dedicated to providing earned benefits to the Veterans who have waited the longest,” said VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. “Thanks to our hard-working VBA employees, we have completed nearly all claims that have been pending two years or longer. We’ve made great progress, but know much work remains to be done to eliminate the backlog in 2015.”

“The success of this phase of the effort was due in part to the implementation of mandatory overtime for the Veterans Benefits Administration’s (VBA) claims processing staff, as well as the dedicated support of physicians from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), who expedited exams to provide medical evidence needed to rate these pending claims,” said Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey.

The remaining two-year-old claims will be finalized in the coming days except for those that are outstanding due to unique circumstances, such as the unavailability of a claimant for a needed medical exam, military service, vacation, or travel overseas.

In May, VA announced that it was mandating [overtime](#) for claims processors in its 56 regional benefits offices to increase production of compensation claims decisions, which will continue through the end of FY 2013. Today, VA has the lowest number of claims in its inventory since August 2011 and has reduced the number of claims in the VA backlog – claims pending over 125 days – by 10 percent since the initiative began.

Under this initiative, VA claims raters may make final or provisional decisions on the oldest claims in the inventory, which will allow Veterans to begin collecting compensation benefits more quickly, if eligible. Veterans are able to submit additional evidence for consideration a full year after the provisional rating before VA issues a final decision. If no further evidence is received within that year, VBA will inform Veterans that their ratings are final and provide information on the standard appeals process, which can be found at <http://www.bva.va.gov/>. If a Veteran disagrees with a final decision and chooses to appeal, the appeal is entered into the appellate processing system, and is not reflected in the claims inventory.

VA continues to prioritize disability claims for homeless Veterans, those experiencing extreme financial hardship, the terminally ill, former Prisoners of War, Medal of Honor recipients, and Veterans filing Fully Developed Claims, which is the quickest way for Veterans to receive a decision on their compensation claim (<http://www.benefits.va.gov/fdc/>).

Claims for Wounded Warriors separating from the military for medical reasons will continue to be handled separately and on a priority basis with the Department of Defense through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES). Wounded Warriors separating through IDES currently receive VA compensation benefits in an average of 61 days following their separation from service.

VA’s inventory is comprised mostly of supplemental claims from Veterans already receiving disability compensation who are seeking to address worsening conditions or claim additional disabilities. Regardless of the status of compensation claims, Veterans who have served in combat since Nov. 11, 1998, are eligible for five years of free medical care for most conditions from VA. This eligibility was enacted through the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008.

Veterans can learn more about disability benefits on the joint Department of Defense/VA web portal eBenefits at www.ebenefits.va.gov.



Please don't forget to send your articles or Veteran organization information for the Veterans Council of St. Johns County Newsletter to Editor Michael Rothfeld at: mrothfeld@anyveteran.org

We want to tell everyone about where you served, who you served with, any interesting or exciting battles you were in, etc. We also want to know what you are doing now, what veterans groups you belong to, how to join, when they meet and what they do.

This is your Newsletter, please contribute.

The views expressed in The Patriot Reader Newsletter articles, submissions and spotlights are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Veterans Council of St. Johns County or the editors of The Patriot Reader. It is the purpose of this periodical to share a variety of information that pertain to local veterans and their organizations.