

INTERCHANGE ONLINE



THE OFFICIAL ONLINE NEWSPAPER OF THE
NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL

Vol. 25 Issue 03

Veteran's News that needs to be Read Sept/Oct 2015



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On this Veterans Day, we salute our Veterans and extend our gratitude for their service. They are our relatives, friends, neighbors and co-workers. These individuals committed to a cause larger than their own and accepted the challenge to defend our Nation. Our Veterans put everything on the line to protect our freedom. We may never be able to repay them for their sacrifice, but we can show them just how much we appreciate all that they've done. Everyone can do something to let Veterans know how much we appreciate their service. Visit <http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/veterans-day/>

IN MEMORIAM



Pat Gualtieri
VVA #126
US Army
1945—2015

**One who blooms in our
heart can never be forgotten**



Wayne E. Olson
VVA #865
US Army
1942—2015



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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.

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President's Message

Ned D. Foote

Did I say winter? What happened to summer? I guess besides the great weather the highlight was our convention. Thanks to all who came. We were way shy of our 69 delegate's last convention but hope next one our numbers will be back up. We have always had most delegates to a convention but this time we were beat out by Tennessee. I hope you all don't want that to happen again and need to start now for next one. Also as a region we have dropped to number 4. NJ and PA have trouble sending delegates also and I know there wasn't much opposition to officer positions.

Yes John Rowan ran unopposed and the Secretary and Treasurer also. But a very important position was VP. We forget that but if anything happened with the President we need to have the most capable VP to take over. Some of you are getting older and sicker. So let's remember next convention in 2017.

Staying with this a little more. I won't say who the officers and directors are as I'm sure it will be in this edition somewhere. The convention went very well from opening to banquet. Some debates were presented and constitutional changes with resolutions passed or defeated. New friendships were gained and old friends got together.

For me personally, I am and always will be John's campaign manager. To me he is my guy to go to the end of VVA and I cannot be more proud of him and even more proud of being his friend. So congrats once again John! The second that I'm most proud of at this convention was the production of "Finally a Voice" the birth of VVA. You know the story behind it so what I will say that the money was raised to complete the film. We had a little left to make 300 DVD's. I got to introduce the film clip that was shown with the full 1 hour version on Friday. We had no idea how this would go as many negative comments have been made while a small group of us continued to pursue completion. What did turn out was a standing ovation for the film and when we brought up John Giannini, the film director, he had a standing ovation. We or I should say, Bill Newcomb, Wayne Miller and Ken Moore sold the 300 copies in a two hour session. Thanks guys.

We also handed out over 1000 flyers for people to order their copy at \$15. We have now gone ahead and ordered 1000 copies but now we need to sell them to all those who have flyer but have not ordered. The flyer will be in this edition so please purchase the film. It is VVA, your organization and now all who have viewed this understand why a few of us saw the value in this and worked to have it completed.

Couple of other convention news. Some awards NY won. Chapter 77. Biggest increase in membership with chapter 20 not far behind. And yes. Mr. Muñiz III once again received the VVA National's E-News paper Award of the Year—4th time. Thanks Francisco for all you do.

Now for NYSC stuff. We more than likely had our October meeting when you read this. I would say we have been having more chapters coming who we have not seen in many years. We see now that when they do come they come back. All we ever said give us your time and you will be happy when you leave with more knowledge of our issues. We try to bring speakers in on a variety of issues. October we have Bing Markee our legislative director to bring us up to date on state issues. We had William Yale present the Sampson Veterans Cemetery. We again and now push for you to contact your Congressmen to sign on HR 1769. Come guys and ladies. This is for our children and theirs. Bug the hell out of them.

Our Executive meeting again will meet in December in Saratoga. That is when we figure what we do as a State Council

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for new year. So let's keep coming to meetings. They are very informative. Let's start communication a whole lot better as again I will complain that I send many emails out to you chapters with no reply back. I would not keep bugging you like with HR1769 if I heard back that your members have been making contact. Also I am very tired to have to keep hounding you all to do your simple Finance and Election reports and those of you HSGP report.

I always like to end on the negative but on the other hand I think most chapters do a terrific job and keep it up. We have some chapters that need help to maintain and we need to evaluate their existence. This organization is getting on in years and we all have had many talks in trying to figure where we go from here.

Finally a Voice

Ned D. Foote

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."

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

NYSC has partnered with John Giannini a Vietnam Veteran film maker. He took footage of our very first convention and other events that show how VVA started, what we have been doing and how we have lived up to our motto of "Never again will one generation of Veterans abandon another"

The name of the film is: "Finally a Voice" The birth of Vietnam Veterans of America. The film was completed and shown at the VVA National Convention to a standing ovation. We also will have DVD's and will be available for \$15 each at the State Council meeting.

Here is the link to view a trailer of this film:

<https://vimeo.com/user3855652/review/124943697/be3c67ee35> Thanks

Secretary's Report

Francisco Muñiz III

HELP!

Could someone inform President Foote that it is the Fall Season. Winter is a long ways out! Even though for me it is FREEZING!

We had a great VVA 17th Biennial Convention with the largest delegates in attendance. Unfortunately, New York was third in the number of delegates present at the convention. Wait until next time!

The following individuals were elected to the be our Leadership for 2015—2017:

NEWLY ELECTED OFFICERS

John Rowan, President (NY)	Marsha Four, Vice President (PA)
Bill Meeks, Secretary (TX)	Wayne Reynolds, Treasurer (AL)

AT-LARGE BOARD OF DIRECTORS (10)

Dottie Barickman (IA);	Richard C. DeLong (LA);	Charlie Hobbs (TN);	Joe Kristek (NC);
Felix Peterson (OK);	Dave Simmons (WV);	Dan Stenvold (ND);	Kerwin Stone (TX); Sandie Wilson (MI); Jerry Yamamoto (CA)

REGION DIRECTORS

Region 1, John Miner (VT); Region 2, Ted Wilkinson (NY); Region 3, Sara McVicker (MD);

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How PTSD Became a Problem Far Beyond the Battlefield

Though only 10 percent of American forces see combat, the U.S. military now has the highest rate of post-traumatic stress disorder in its history. Sebastian Junger investigates. BY SEBASTIAN JUNGER (Continuation from last issue)

Hero's Welcome

When soldiers return to modern society, they must go through—among other adjustments—a terrific oxytocin withdrawal. The chronic isolation of modern society begins in childhood and continues our entire lives. Infants in hunter-gatherer societies are carried by their mothers as much as 50 to 90 percent of the time, often in wraps that keep them strapped to the mother's back so that her hands are free. That roughly corresponds to carrying rates among other primates, according to primatologist and psychologist Harriet J. Smith. One can get an idea of how desperately important touch is to primates from a landmark experiment conducted in the 1950s by a psychologist and primatologist named Harry Harlow. Baby rhesus monkeys were separated from their mothers and presented with the choice of two kinds of surrogates: a cuddly mother made out of terry cloth or an uninviting mother made out of wire mesh. The wire-mesh mother, however, had a nipple that would dispense warm milk. The babies invariably took their nourishment quickly in order to rush back and cling to the terry-cloth mother, which had enough softness to provide the illusion of affection. But even that isn't enough for psychological health: in a separate experiment, more than 75 percent of female baby rhesus monkeys raised with terry-cloth mothers—as opposed to real ones—grew up to be abusive and neglectful to their own young.

In the 1970s, American mothers maintained skin-to-skin contact with their nine-month-old babies as little as 16 percent of the time, which is a level of contact that traditional societies would probably consider a form of child abuse. Also unthinkable would be the common practice of making young children sleep by themselves in their own room. In two American studies of middle-class families during the 1980s, 85 percent of young children slept alone—a figure that rose to 95 percent among families considered “well-educated.” Northern European societies, including America, are the only ones in history to make very young children sleep alone in such numbers. The isolation is thought to trigger fears that make many children bond intensely with stuffed animals for reassurance. Only in Northern European societies do children go through the well-known developmental stage of bonding with stuffed animals; elsewhere, children get their sense of safety from the adults sleeping near them.

More broadly, in most human societies, almost nobody sleeps alone. Sleeping in family groups of one sort or another has been the norm throughout human history and is still commonplace in most of the world. Again, Northern European societies are among the few where people sleep alone or with a partner in a private room. When I was with American soldiers at a remote outpost in Afghanistan, we slept in narrow plywood huts where I could reach out and touch three other men from where I slept. They snored, they talked, they got up in the middle of the night to use the piss tubes, but we felt safe because we were in a group. The Taliban attacked the position regularly, and the most determined attacks often came at dawn. Another unit in a nearby valley was almost overrun and took 50 percent casualties in just such an attack. And yet I slept better surrounded by those noisy, snoring men than I ever did camping alone in the woods of New England.

Many soldiers will tell you that one of the hardest things about coming home is learning to sleep without the security of a group of heavily armed men around them. In that sense, being in a war zone with your platoon feels safer than being in an American suburb by yourself. I know a vet who felt so threatened at home that he would get up in the middle of the night to build fighting positions out of the living-room furniture. This is a radically different experience from what warriors in other societies go through, such as the Yanomami, of the Orinoco and Amazon Basins, who go to war with their entire age cohort and return to face, together, whatever the psychological consequences may be. As one anthropologist pointed out to me, trauma is usually a group experience, so trauma recovery should be a group experience as well. But in our society it's not.

“Our whole approach to mental health has been hijacked by pharmaceutical logic,” I was told by Gary Barker, an anthropologist whose group, Promundo, is dedicated to understanding and preventing violence. “PTSD is a crisis of connection and disruption, not an illness that you carry within you.”

This individualizing of mental health is not just an American problem, or a veteran problem; it affects

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everybody. A British anthropologist named Bill West told me that the extreme poverty of the 1930s and the collective trauma of the Blitz served to unify an entire generation of English people. "I link the experience of the Blitz to voting in the Labour Party in 1945, and the establishing of the National Health Service and a strong welfare state," he said. "Those policies were supported well into the 60s by all political parties. That kind of cultural cohesiveness, along with Christianity, was very helpful after the war. It's an open question whether people's problems are located in the individual. If enough people in society are sick, you have to wonder whether it isn't actually society that's sick."

Ideally, we would compare hunter-gatherer society to post-industrial society to see which one copes better with PTSD. When the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho fighters returned to their camps after annihilating Custer and his regiment at Little Bighorn, for example, were they traumatized and alienated by the experience—or did they fit right back into society? There is no way to know for sure, but less direct comparisons can still illuminate how cohesiveness affects trauma. In experiments with lab rats, for example, a subject that is traumatized—but not injured—after an attack by a larger rat usually recovers within 48 hours unless it is kept in isolation, according to data published in 2005 in *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*.

The ones that are kept apart from other rats are the only ones that develop long-term traumatic symptoms. And a study of risk factors for PTSD in humans closely mirrored those results. In a 2000 study in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, "lack of social support" was found to be around two times more reliable at predicting who got PTSD and who didn't than the severity of the trauma itself. You could be mildly traumatized, in other words—on a par with, say, an ordinary rear-base deployment to Afghanistan—and experience long-term PTSD simply because of a lack of social support back home.

Anthropologist and psychiatrist Brandon Kohrt found a similar phenomenon in the villages of southern Nepal, where a civil war has been rumbling for years. Kohrt explained to me that there are two kinds of villages there: exclusively Hindu ones, which are extremely stratified, and mixed Buddhist/Hindu ones, which are far more open and cohesive. He said that child soldiers, both male and female, who go back to Hindu villages can remain traumatized for years, while those from mixed-religion villages tended to recover very quickly. "PTSD is a disorder of recovery, and if treatment only focuses on identifying symptoms, it pathologizes and alienates vets," according to Kohrt. "But if the focus is on family and community, it puts them in a situation of collective healing."

Israel is arguably the only modern country that retains a sufficient sense of community to mitigate the effects of combat on a mass scale. Despite decades of intermittent war, the Israel Defense Forces have a PTSD rate as low as 1 percent. Two of the foremost reasons have to do with national military service and the proximity of the combat—the war is virtually on their doorstep. "Being in the military is something that most people have done," I was told by Dr. Arieh Shalev, who has devoted the last 20 years to studying PTSD. "Those who come back from combat are re-integrated into a society where those experiences are very well understood. We did a study of 17-year-olds who had lost their father in the military, compared to those who had lost their fathers to accidents. The ones whose fathers died in combat did much better than those whose fathers hadn't."

According to Shalev, the closer the public is to the actual combat, the better the war will be understood and the less difficulty soldiers will have when they come home. The Israelis are benefiting from what could be called the shared public meaning of a war. Such public meaning—which would often occur in more communal, tribal societies—seems to help soldiers even in a fully modern society such as Israel. It is probably not generated by empty, reflexive phrases—such as "Thank you for your service"—that many Americans feel compelled to offer soldiers and vets. If anything, those comments only serve to underline the enormous chasm between military and civilian society in this country.

Another Israeli researcher, Reuven Gal, found that the perceived legitimacy of a war was more important to soldiers' general morale than was the combat readiness of the unit they were in. And that legitimacy, in turn, was a function of the war's physical distance from the homeland: "The Israeli soldiers who were abruptly

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New York Vietnam Veterans Foundation

Francisco Muñiz III

President

I have been informed that many Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter members and many donors, within New York State, have been receiving continuous phone calls from the following phone number: 607-821-4927.

Our fundraiser has implemented a local phone number to reach out to our prospected donors within New York State. They felt that having a local number would help to increase our ability to increase our funding.

They are representing NY Vietnam Veterans Foundation, the funding arm of Vietnam Veterans of America-New York State Council.

If you answer a call, you could request the name of the caller and either listen to the scripted message, or just say thanks and say not at this time, just hang up, or do not answer a call from an unknown caller.

If the caller is rude, just request their name and record time of call and send me an E-mail message to NYVVPRES@NYVIETNAMVETS.ORG and I will address the issue with the administrator of the program.

Upon stating that you will donate you can have them send you some information on the Foundation and your agreed amount to donate. Or if you want you can make a donation by using a credit card. You will be transfer to a verification phone line to accept your credit card number and security number.

If a donation is made, it takes about a week-an-half for them to receive your donation. The donation goes to a New York Mail box number which then is mailed to Michigan where it is processed. Sometimes, their computer sends another "Friendly Reminder." If you have made a donation, just disregard the notice and discard. They are working on this issue on their end.

Once you make a donation they will call you again the following year.

Donations sent directly to the Foundation's address will be credited completely to the Foundation.

Thanks for your Donation - It really helps with our programs.

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mobilized and thrown into dreadful battles in the middle of Yom Kippur Day in 1973 had no doubts about the legitimacy of the war,” Gal wrote in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* in 1986. “Many of those soldiers who were fighting in the Golan Heights against the flood of Syrian tanks needed only to look behind their shoulders to see their homes and remind themselves that they were fighting for their very survival.”

In that sense, the Israelis are far more like the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho at Little Bighorn than they are like us. America’s distance from her enemies means that her wars have generally been fought far away from her population centers, and as a result those wars have been harder to explain and justify than Israel’s have been. The people who will bear the psychic cost of that ambiguity will, of course, be the soldiers.

A Bright Shining Lie

‘I talked to my mom only one time from Mars,’ a Vietnam vet named Gregory Gomez told me about the physical and spiritual distance between his home and the war zone. Gomez is a pure-blooded Apache who grew up in West Texas. He says his grandfather was arrested and executed by Texas Rangers in 1915 because they wanted his land; they strung him from a tree limb, cut off his genitals, and stuffed them in his mouth. Consequently, Gomez felt no allegiance to the U.S. government, but he volunteered for service in Vietnam anyway. “Most of us Indian guys who went to Vietnam went because we were warriors,” Gomez told me. “I did not fight for this country. I fought for Mother Earth. I wanted to experience combat. I wanted to know how I’d do.”

Gomez was in a Marine Corps Force Recon unit, one of the most elite designations in the U.S. military. He was part of a four-man team that would insert by helicopter into enemy territory north of the DMZ and stay for two weeks at a time. They had no medic and no backup and didn’t even dare eat C rations, because, Gomez said, they were afraid their body odor would give them away. They ate Vietnamese food and watched enemy soldiers pass just yards away in the dense jungle. “Everyone who has lived through something like that has lived through trauma, and you can never go back,” he told me. “You are 17 or 18 or 19 and you just hit that wall. You become very old men.”

American Indians, proportionally, have provided more soldiers to America’s wars than almost any other ethnic group in this country. They are also the product of an ancient and vibrant warring culture that takes great pains to protect the warrior from society, and vice versa. Although those traditions have obviously broken down since the end of the Indian Wars, there may be something to be learned from the principles upon which they stand.

When Gomez came home he essentially isolated himself for more than a decade. He didn’t drink, and he lived a normal life except that occasionally he’d go to the corner store to get a soda and would wind up in Oklahoma or East Texas without any idea how he got there.

He finally started seeing a therapist at the V.A. as well as undergoing traditional Indian rituals. It was a combination that seemed to work. In the 1980s, he underwent an extremely painful ceremony called the Sun Dance. At the start of the ceremony, the dancers have wooden skewers driven through the skin of their chests. Leather thongs are tied to the skewers and then attached to the top of a tall pole at the center of the dance ground. To a steady drumbeat, the dancers move in a circle while leaning back on the leather thongs until, after many hours, the skewers finally tear free. “I dance back and I throw my arms and yell and I can see the ropes and the piercing sticks like in slow motion, flying from my chest towards the grandfather’s tree,” Gomez told me about the experience. “And I had this incredible feeling of euphoria and strength, like I could do anything. That’s when the healing takes place. That’s when life changes take place.”

America is a largely de-ritualized society that obviously can’t just borrow from another society to heal its psychic wounds. But the spirit of community healing and empowerment that forms the basis of these ceremonies is certainly one that might be converted to a secular modern society. The shocking disconnect for veterans isn’t so much that civilians don’t know what they went through—it’s unrealistic to expect anyone to fully understand another person’s experience—but that what they went through doesn’t seem relevant back home. Given the profound alienation that afflicts modern society, when combat vets say that they want to go back to war, they may be having an entirely healthy response to the perceived emptiness of modern life.

One way to change this dynamic might be to emulate the Israelis and mandate national service (with a military or combat option). We could also emulate the Nepalese and try to have communities better integrate people of different ethnic and religious groups. Finally, we could emulate many tribal societies—including the Apache—by

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by getting rid of parades and replacing them with some form of homecoming ceremony. An almost universal component of these ceremonies is the dramatic retelling of combat experiences to the warrior's community. We could achieve that on Veterans Day by making every town and city hall in the country available to veterans who want to speak publicly about the war. The vapid phrase "I support the troops" would then mean actually showing up at your town hall every Veterans Day to hear these people out. Some vets will be angry, some will be proud, and some will be crying so hard they can't speak. But a community ceremony like that would finally return the experience of war to our entire nation, rather than just leaving it to the people who fought.

It might also begin to re-assemble a society that has been spiritually cannibalizing itself for generations. We keep wondering how to save the vets, but the real question is how to save ourselves. If we do that, the vets will be fine. If we don't, it won't matter anyway.

Reprint with permission: Vanity Fair June 2015

Central District Report

Nick Valenti

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

The Vietnam Veterans of America, New York State Council Report from **Central District** showed a strong **attendance record**. Of the ten (10) VVA Chapters that make up Central District eight (8) were represented. The ninth Chapter was unable to attend due to a prior planned "50th Vietnam War Anniversary" dinner sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Not only did the DAR hold a dinner in recognition of the anniversary of the war, the local Vietnam Veterans Chapter #944 conducted a wreath laying ceremony. Also included in the day's events was the reading of the sixty seven (67) soldiers from the County that were killed in Vietnam. Other community accomplishments Chapter 944 has spearheaded include a section of Route 49 stretching from Rome to Utica being renamed the Oneida County Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway. The time frame for this renaming of Route 49 included a Gold Star Mothers Day event that included the laying of a wreath as a means of remembrance and honor.

It was also reported by Western District Director **Ted Wilkinson** who is also the **newly elected Region 2 Director** that Central District had four (4) Chapters attending the National Convention held in Springfield, Illinois. Congratulations to the three (3) Central District Chapters who had perfect attendance. These Chapters attended the three State meetings held in Owego, New York as well as the National Convention.

The **guest speaker** we had at the October 10, 2015 New York State Council meeting was **William Yale, Executive Director of Sampson Veterans Memorial Cemetery**. His power point presentation traced the July 30, 2011 dedication of the cemetery to the present day. In brief here are some of the topics touched on by the presenter: Burial in Sampson Veterans Memorial Cemetery is an honor reserved for Armed Forces Veterans discharged from active duty under other than dishonorable conditions; a veteran's legal spouse is also entitled for burial in the cemetery; Sampson Veterans Memorial Cemetery is located in Romulus, New York in Seneca County; the cemetery operates under VA National Cemetery guidelines. Want to know more? Visit **Facebook @ Samson Veterans Memorial Cemetery** or go to www.sampsonveteranscemetery.com. You can also **phone 607-379-0197 or fax 607-403-4024**.

A new VA Facility will be opening in the Southern Tier. Representative Richard Hanna recently announced that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will construct a new Community Based Outpatient Clinic (**CBOC**) in **Binghamton, New York** to assist Veterans in the Southern Tier. Per the announcement the new facility will be located at 203 Court Street in Binghamton and has a lease term of 20 years. This outpatient clinic will allow the **VA to provide Primary Care, Diagnostic Services, Physical Therapy, Cardiology, Gastrointestinal Services, and Behavioral Health and Group Therapy**. It is anticipated that the completion of the facility will occur in the winter of 2016/2017.

H.R. 1769 is slowly gaining ground in New York State. The number of Representatives that are cosponsoring the bill from our State now stands at sixteen (16) with two (2) more saying they will join once they get back into session. If so that leaves us with nine (9) more to push toward supporting the Toxic Exposure Bill of 2015. Remember, this bill is not just for Vietnam Veterans. This bill is for all those veterans who came after us and all those veterans who will follow. We need the Research to find out just how our children, grand children, great grandchildren and beyond have been affected by Toxic Exposure in South West Asia, as well as Southeast Asia.

Southern District Report

Joe Ingino

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

I went to the National Convention in Springfield Illinois. At the convention I went to government affairs, where they spoke about H.R. 1769 and S. 901, these are the congressional and senate bills. It is about Toxic exposure and research act of 2015. Also attended a Legislative Coordinator Breakfast. They spoke on the Toxic bill and other Vietnam issues. One thing I am asking everyone to do is to contact a senate or congressional person, and family members out of state to do the same thing, about the Toxic bill.

I would like to congratulate, John Rowan on his reelection as President of Vietnam Veterans of America . Marsha for Vice President, Bill Meeks as Secretary, Wayne Reynolds as Treasure, & our own Ted Wilkinson as Region II Director as well as the rest of the Board of Directors - at - Large.

I was invited with my family to Chapter 32 , their picnic , which was at St. Albans VA Hospital. I am now a Board of Director for the New York State Veterans Nursing Home in Stoney Brook.

God Bless America and God Bless our Troops

Legislative Director's Report

Bing Markee

This is an update on and wrap-up of the 2015 state Legislative Session in Albany. First, I apologize for not appearing at the October 10th state council meeting, for which I was on the agenda, but a late-breaking family matter precluded my attendance. Please accept this written report in lieu of my appearance.

The 2015 session got off to a late start as a result of the death of the governor's father, former Governor Mario Cuomo. The formal opening of the legislative session historically commences with the governor's "State of the State" address, but the address was delayed (and incorporated with the annual governor's budget address) as a result of the death.

Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water, each year seems to outdo the previous ones in terms of the "can you top this?" syndrome. First, long-standing Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver was arrested and was unable to survive a subsequent leadership challenge, which resulted in the election of new Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie of Bronx County. Following that, Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos was indicted and also had to step aside, resulting in the election of new Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan of Suffolk County. Popular Senate Deputy Majority Leader Tom Libous was arrested (and subsequently lost his seat completely following a felony conviction) and was replaced by new Senate Deputy Majority Leader John DeFrancisco. These changes had no demonstrable effect on the respective houses politically or geographically, as the new leaders are of the same respective party affiliations, and hail from basically the same areas of the state as their predecessors. As a result, veteran-related legislation was unaffected.

Nonetheless, these upheavals caused inordinate delays in the movement of legislation in the session. However, notwithstanding that, the first half of session, commonly referred to as budget season, resulted in another (technically) on-time budget again this year, making it the fifth in a row. It was definitely a slow start, but a big finish, with only a one-week delay in the conclusion of the scheduled session, which is fairly typical. There were more than 14,000 bills introduced, of which 718 passed both houses; this was the most productive year (in terms of number of bills passed) since 2008. More than 600 of those bills were passed during the last 13 session days.

The leadership of the respective houses' veterans' committees has not changed. Senator Thomas Croci heads up the senate committee, and Assemblyman Michael DenDekker heads up the assembly committee.

At this writing, the senate and the assembly both stand adjourned at the call of their respective leaders. There are rumors, as there are almost every year, of a "special session" to address certain outstanding issues, but no definitive plans for same.

(Cont. on pg. 11)

(Cont. from pg. 10)

While the governor, to date this year, has signed 361 bills into law, the only veteran-related bill chaptered (other than highway re-naming bills) is one that calls for the repayment of DMV fees to veterans who elected to secure a new driver license displaying the "veteran" designation prior to the regular expiration of their license. That bill was signed into law (Chapter #149) on August 13th, and the state promptly issued reimbursement checks (I know this for a fact, because I personally received one, dated August 24th!) for the \$12.50 fee. No veteran-related legislation has been vetoed by the governor to date this year.

Some half-dozen other bills that potentially affect our members were passed by both houses, but they await transmittal to the governor for action, and I will report on them in future updates.

You will be kept apprised of significant developments.

Welcome Home!

Western District Report

Ted Wilkinson

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

Five out of the eight Western District chapters attended the 17th VVA National Convention, Delegates from Chapters 20-14, 77-3; 193-2; 865-2 and 978-2 for a total of 23 out of the 52 representing New York State.

Congratulations To VVA Chapter 77 winning the VVA national MEMBERSHIP GROWTH AWARD.

Five Western District chapters had perfect attendance for the VVA-NY'S Council this year, and also sent delegates to the convention.

I attended the advisory council meeting for Veterans Affairs Western New York Healthcare System that was held at the Buffalo VA on October 9th.

VVA Chapter 20 is having over 100 member attending their meeting, awesome!!

VVA Chapter 268 is alive and well with the wall visiting Lockport in June and then having a very successful Vietnam Photo exhibition during the month of September. These events are directly responsible for their recent membership surge.

VVA Chapter 978 secretary Cal Fain has a new heart as of early October and is doing well, all of the prayers are working. The chapter was inspired with PSA's talked about while they attended the convention in Springfield; they have professionally made their own PSA's with Rev Bob using his radio voice and face.

VVA Chapter 193 has put duck away for the last time after a twenty some year run of continuous Duck Derby.

POW-MIA REPORT-Veteran Initiative

Grant T. Coats—Chair

The list of missing and unaccounted-for U.S. personnel from the Vietnam War numbers 1,626 as of 8 October, 2015. Some of calendar year 2015 identifications were results of advancements in technological processes that were not available in prior years. The advancements hopefully may aid with identification of unknown remains recovered from the past as well as the future.

Services were held throughout the United States September 18th honoring National POW/MIA Recognition Day. Services held at the Pentagon were attended by VVA representatives, and hosted by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey. General Dempsey retired the next week, on September 25th, with 41 years of service. Mr. Ashton Carter, Secretary of Defense stated that the U.S. was using modern methods of identification to account for the missing, looking to expand partnerships, and new technology in the areas of forensic science.

Mr. Michael S. Linnington was appointed on June 19, 2015, as the first permanent Director of the Defense POW/
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MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), following his retirement as a Lieutenant General from the United States Army. Mr. Linnington's 35-year military career included duties in key command and staff positions worldwide.

Brigadier General Mark Spindler assumed duties as the 2nd Deputy Director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) September 22, 2015 after most recently serving as the 47th Commandant of the United States Army Military Police School and Chief of the Military Police Regiment at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. As Deputy Director of DPAA, Brigadier General Spindler is responsible for the global analysis and investigation, search and recovery, and laboratory operations to identify unaccounted-for Americans from past conflicts in order to support the Department of Defense's personnel accounting.

Sergeant Major Michael E. Swam is the Senior Enlisted Leader. Some of his previous assignments include the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii and Central Identification Laboratory, Hickam AFB, Hawaii.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) is now tasked with the recovery and accounting of missing service members from past conflicts. The DPAA continues to realign the organizational structuring of the once Defense Prisoner of War Missing in Action Office (DPMO), the Joint Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Accounting Command (JPAC), and the Life Sciences Equipment Laboratory (LSEL). The former JPAC detachments in Thailand, Vietnam and Laos will continue to be Detachments 1, 2 and 3 in Bangkok, Hanoi and Vientiane, respectively.

The Veterans Initiative and the Special Operations Association have entered a partnership in the area of researching cases of missing in action of the Vietnam War. Shared case information and requests for research hopefully will result in positive case closures for both organizations.

The committee has been participating in a monthly veteran service organization, family service organization, and military service organization conference call with DPAA. Updates on progress of DPAA, current and future activities of investigative and recovery teams as well as question and answer sessions from the various organizations are held.



Artifacts, survival pocket knife and an aviator's watch, presented to VVA's POW/MIA/Veterans Initiative at their last visit in Vietnam in February 2015. They belong to pilot, Lt. John Brooks Sherman of Darian, CN with no known living relatives.

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.

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One of the questions is just how did this come about? Some of the decline can be attributed to the VA's Health Care for Reentry Veterans Program. This program has coordinators in upstate New York visiting prisons across the region to help veterans who are approaching release make a successful transition back to their communities by providing VA resources and support.

Veterans are counseled twice a year before their release. In total 43 state prisons are visited plus the federal prison in Ray Brook, New York. Presentations are made to groups of veterans who are within two (2) years of release. Also, individual meetings are set up for those Veterans who are within six (6) months of release for the purpose of developing a reentry plan. Once released, if the Veteran requests further assistance, a short term - 4 month - case management program is established.

Since 2008 approximately 5,000 reentry plans for Veterans and more than 850 prison visits have been completed. During this time the coordinators help to enroll Veterans into VA health care and assist them in accessing other VA benefits such as housing and employment.

If you want to read about the Veteran Inmate population you will find an article in the "Veterans Wellness" summer 2015 issue. This is where I received my information.

Finally, in local Chapter news VVA Chapter 205 at Auburn Correctional Facility is going strong. Having roots dating to 1985 this Chapter is a standout when it comes to community service. Once again they are conducting their "Give Away" program in December of this year. It can be a bigger success if we can get them more yarn. The yarn is used to knit gloves, scarves, and hats to be donated to children and homeless veterans. The colors that are acceptable to the Department of Corrections are pink, white, green, yellow, brown, purple, and red. You can send the yarn to me and I will arrange to have them donated to the veterans Chapter located at Auburn Correctional. My address is 14 Grove Ave., Auburn, NY 13021. Remember, only the seven colors I have enumerated. A special shout out to Don Witmarsh. He came to my home this past summer and donated a cartoon of yarn for Auburn Correctional. Thank Don, but don't be shy I will bring in more if you or anyone else wishes to donate.

Editor's Note: BOD motion #26 to establish the "Veterans in the Justice System Committee" which was passed on July 25, 2015 was rescinded by the national board on Friday October 16, 2015. While the president is certainly able to establish any committee he desires, he cannot change the name of a standing committee (Robert's Rules of Order 11th edition page 490, line 32 to page 492, line 9) nor can he give the functions of a standing committee to any other committee. (RONR page 492, line 6... A special committee may not be appointed to perform a task that falls within the assigned function of an existing standing committee.)

Membership Affairs Committee **Ted Wilkinson, Chair**

Congratulations to Chapter 77 Buffalo on winning the National Growth award for the group between 500-600 members categories. They were the only NY chapter to win a growth award and no other state won more than one award. Each of the 11 categories were won by different states.

For the month of August, NY State gained 26 members the 3rd most in VVA behind only Florida with 54 and Texas with 44. The convention was well attended again this year with NY State having 18 different chapters sending a total of 52 delegates. Region 2 had 88 delegates which means that the total delegates for Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania was 36.

The membership growth award will continue again this year ending on Feb 28, 2016 for the largest percentage of growth within your chapters group. The category of 600 - 700 members has only 4 chapters, 500 - 600 members has only 2 chapters, 400 - 500 only has 5 chapters, 300 - 400 has only 4 chapters. NY has one chapter in each of these 4 categories. Hopefully we can bring in more than one award next year. The categories for chapters under 300 members have much more competition so we will need some good recruitment work; use the tools available such as pushing the life membership fire sale. The VVA fire sale is going quite well. August, the first month of the fire sale, had 1405 people take advantage during

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the 31 day period. NY State had 120 choose life membership, 9.3% of the national total. Nineteen people became NY State life members at large. Sixteen NY chapters took advantage of this 6 month life membership special.

Chapter 8, 1 member	Chapter 72, 1 member	Chapter 193, 4 members
Chapter 11, 3 members	Chapter 77, 51 members	Chapter 268, 8 members
Chapter 20, 13 members	Chapter 82, 2 members	Chapter 333, 2 members
Chapter 32, 3 members	Chapter 103, 2 members	Chapter 459, 6 members
Chapter 49, 2 members	Chapter 118, 1 member	Chapter 869, 1 member
Chapter 60, 1 member		

Any chapters that have members without a DD-214 on file with National, **MUST** get a copy to National membership. If you prefer you may black out your social security number. National does not need that information.

I am pleased to announce that I will be serving on the National membership committee. The committee reached its goal of 75,000 members last year. The goal now is to advance these numbers and be more involved with the chapters assisting with membership recruitment. Flyers, posters, decals and such are available. The membership tent will be on the mall in Washington D.C. again this year for Veterans Day. If you're there, stop and visit.

The Membership Affairs committee short term goal is to work with the Membership Department on implementing "real time" rosters.

YEARLY & MONTHLY GROWTH PERCENTAGES

Top VVA Chapters in Membership

Rank	Chapter	State	Members		Rank	Chapter	State	Members
1	172	MD	1052		15	1067	AL	355
2	203	TN	752		16	1054	SD	353
3	862	PA	713		17	82	NY	331
4	154	MI	675		18	12	NJ	309
5	77	NY	613		19	628	WV	300
6	451	MD	612		20	223	CA	284
7	20	NY	594		20	800	NJ	276
8	391	CA	517		22	49	NY	273
9	1036	FL	466		23	47	CA	267
10	137	TX	461		24	528	MI	266
11	11	NY	453		25	224	WI	264
12	751	OK	409		26	165	WA	263
13	299	IL	407					
14	317	MO	391					

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A. The National Membership Growth Award is designed to recognize membership growth at the VVA chapter-level.

B. Winners will be based on the percentage of growth during the VVA fiscal year. March 1st - February 28th.

C. Each year in March, the MAC Chair will request the membership totals of each Chapter within VVA from the National Membership Department. The report will consist of three columns: In an effort to recognize membership growth in Vietnam Veterans of America, the Membership Affairs Committee has created the National Membership Growth Award.

(1) Membership totals on March 1st of the previous year,

(2) Membership totals on February 28th of the current year, and (3) Percentage of change.

D. Winners will be decided from the following numerical categories:

25 - 50 members	401 - 500 members	901- above members
51 - 100 members	501 - 600 members	
101 - 200 members	601 - 700 members	
201 - 300 members	701 - 800 members	
301 - 400 members	801 - 900 members	

E. Winners will be announced at the National meeting each year.

F. Second place achievers will be given honorable mention.

G. Should there be a tie for the highest percentage in one category, then the award will be given to each Chapter in the tie.

H. Chapters that remain below the 25-member minimum during the fiscal year are ineligible for the Award.

AVVA National Convention Springfield Illinois Report

Cherie Steers—AVVA NYS—President

New York had 3 delegate for the Convention myself as the delegate for New York State, Dottie Goldblum as the delegate for Chapter 82, Cathy Penfield as the delegate for 865 and Barbara Blood was an alternate for 865.

First National President Nancy Switzer also attended. Those elected by the delegates were Sharon Hobbs President, Cathy Keister Vice President, Joanna Henshaw Secretary, Kathy Andras Treasurer, and Region Directors: Region I Vacant, Region II Nancy Rekowski, Region III Beverly Pounds, Region IV Jeri Wallis, Region V Cecilia Essenmacher, Region VI Diane Nicholson, Region VII Percilla Newberry, Region VIII John Birch, and Region IX Elayne Mackey.

Change to the bylaws: The candidate must be a regular member in good standing and actively participate in the chapter within the region they want to represent. They do not have to reside in the region. Also it was passed that regions can vote on Deputy Directors if they wish. They don't have to. If a deputy is elected the same rules apply.

Regular membership remains anyone who is ineligible for membership for membership in VVA and who wish to further the purposes of both VVA and the Corporation. Dual membership will be limited to those who are eligible for membership in VVA. If you wish to see the amended by laws they are available on the AVVA website.

Important notice: AVVA is having a fire sale of their own from November 1, 2015 thru December 31, 2015. It is \$100.00 for a Life Time membership. The applications are on the AVVA website and must be postmarked by December 31, 2015.

Call me or email if you need any information. E-Mail: csvva@optonline.net; Phone # 516-822-5938

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Secretary's Report

Region 4, Craig Tonjes (FL); Region 5, Tom Burke (OH); Region 6, Mike Demske (WI);
Region 7, Dennis Andras (LA); Region 8, Ron Morgan (OR); Region 9, Dick Southern (CA)

LIAISONS

Charles R. Montgomery Jr, (VA). Chair, - CSCP

Sharon Hobbs , President, AVVA

We Did It Again!



Thanks to all who submit articles to help this publication to be acknowledged by VVA National. This is the **4th** consecutive win! Inform your Chapter membership to send in their E-Mail address to President Foote so that they can receive this FANTASTIC publication right in their E-Mail Mailbox:

ENEWS@ALBANY.TWCBC.COM

Also, do not forget to view the VVA-NYSC Web Site, at least, once a week at:

WWW.NYVIETNAMVETS.ORG

WHEN YOUR VETERAN PASSES AWAY

VVA-NYSC has been able to have our **WHEN YOUR VETERAN PASSES AWAY** brochure updated and some were distributed to the Delegates at the June State Council meeting.

Special thanks to the New York State Funeral Directors Association and the NY'S Tribute Foundation for their support of this publication.

There were just a few printed out and you can download the link to make copies for yourself or Chapter Membership:

<http://www.nysfda.org/index.php/members/publications/251-when-a-veteran-passes-away>

Pass this on to your membership and fellow veterans.

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Agent Orange Committee Report

Walter Schmidt -Chair

Veteran Affairs department in dilemma over toxic exposure claims

<http://www.ibtimes.com.au/veteran-affairs-department-dilemma-over-toxic-exposure-claims-1471218>

In a hearing on Tuesday at Capitol Hill, Senators said that the Veterans Affairs Department (VA) should actively support veterans in their claims regarding the illnesses caused by environmental exposures and contaminants during their tours of duty.

From the deserts of Arabia to South of China Sea, from Iraq to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and places elsewhere; health-related issues are common for service members. While working, soldiers might be exposed to pollutants that have led to deterioration in their health. A USA Today report claims that some people in the VA department have inappropriately used their positions of authority and financial benefits, which questions their accountability over society.

Despite these hurdles, the VA continues its "passive-aggressive rebuttal of scientific findings" and disapproves the claim regarding compensation and healthcare, accused Richard Burr, Senator, R-N.C. But Burr is encouraged by VA Secretary Bob McDonald who is taking an initiative to improve the department's better understanding of exposure-related problems.

"Our government rewarded them for their service by negligently poisoning them," says Burr. He feels that it is appalling how the United States government has mistreated the families. This was in reference to 1 million residents of Camp Lejeune who consumed contaminated drinking water at the installation from the mid-1950s through 1987.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y. and Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont. have sponsored a bill, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, that will grant benefits to hundreds of thousands of sailors in the waters off Vietnam who served on destroyers, aircraft carriers and other large Navy ships, and who have illnesses associated with exposure to the toxic defoliant Agent Orange.

A Military Times report said that in 2011, the Institute of Medicine released a study saying that there were not adequate evidence or information whether these "blue water" veterans were exposed to Agent Orange. While some agree regarding the compensation, others feel that the sailors 46 were not directly exposed to toxic elements, and therefore, claims regarding their illness are not valid.

The Veterans Benefits Administration is taking initiatives to improve its determinations for the claims related to toxic exposures. This will include contracting with the Institute of Medicine and other scientific bodies to study the issues in the best possible way, said David McLenachen, VA acting deputy secretary for disability assistance.

Veteran Affairs department in dilemma over toxic exposure claims

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Agent Orange Report

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Study Links Agent Orange to Plasma Cell Cancer Precursor

<http://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/09/12/study-links-agent-orange-to-plasma-cell-cancer-precursor.html>

A study using stored blood samples of U.S. Air Force personnel who conducted aerial herbicide spray missions of Agent Orange during the Vietnam war found a more than 2-fold increased risk of the precursor to multiple myeloma known as monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance, or MGUS, according to an article published online by JAMA Oncology. While the cause of MGUS and multiple myeloma (plasma cell cancer) remains largely unclear, studies have reported an elevated risk of multiple myeloma among farmers and other agricultural workers and pesticides have been thought to be the basis for these associations, according to study background. Dr. Ola Landgren of the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, New York, and coauthors examined the association between MGUS and exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War in a study sample of 958 male veterans. Half the subjects' veterans exposed to the herbicide as part of Operation Ranch Hand and the other half -- for comparison purposes -- were not exposed. The study found the overall prevalence of MGUS was 7.1 percent in the Operation Ranch Hand veterans and 3.1 percent in the comparison veterans, which translates to a 2.4-fold increased risk for MGUS in Operation Ranch Hand veterans. The authors noted limitations to their study, including a lack of women in the study group and the potential for unknown confounding factors such as family medical history and civilian occupation. "Our findings of increased MGUS risk among Ranch Hand veterans support an association between Agent Orange exposure and multiple myeloma," the study concludes.

Walter C Schmidt VSO CPA—VVA NYSC AO Committee Chair

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VA Retail Immunization Care Coordination Program

VA and Walgreens are national partners, providing no-cost flu shots to enrolled Veterans of the VA health care system.

From August 1, 2015 to March 31, 2016, enrolled Veteran patients nationwide have the option of getting their flu shot at any of Walgreens' 8,000 locations in addition to their local VA health care facilities.

Walgreens has the capability to electronically send vaccination information to the VA electronic health record (EHR). The VA-Walgreens national partnership is part of VA's eHealth Exchange project.

Last year's national pilot program ensured that many Veterans got their no-cost flu shot at their local Walgreens, satisfying their wellness reminder because they either found it more convenient or did not have a scheduled appointment at a local VA health care facility.

For more information please visit: <http://www.ehealth.va.gov/immunization.asp>

NOTE: There are two types of Flu shots: one for veterans under 65 years old and one for veterans older than 65 years old. Also, there is a new Pneumonia shot for veterans over 65 years old (Pneumovax). Please check with your VA provider or private healthcare provider for further information.

VVA Chapter #32 - Queens, NY performed its 100th Indigent Burial on October 5, 2015. Thanks for serving those in need within your community.

VVA Chapter #11 - Suffolk, NY WALLS OF WARS MONUMENTS at Northport VA Medical Center.



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