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## Meetings

The Chapter 120 membership meeting will be held on Thursday, January 5, 2017 at 7:00pm in the Machinists Union Hall, 357 Main St., East Hartford.

The Board of Directors will meet on Wednesday, January 26 at 7:00pm. Call the Chapter office for any changes in schedule. Chapter members are welcomed to attend.

## Notice

If you have moved or changed your address, PLEASE notify us immediately. Call the Chapter office at (860) 568-9212, mail us at the address on the back of this newsletter or e-mail the Newsletter editor at [JRCVVA120@aol.com](mailto:JRCVVA120@aol.com).

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## Trump considering Navy Adm. Michelle Howard to run VA



Admiral Howard

The New York Times reported on December 15 that President-elect Donald Trump is considering Navy Adm. Michelle Howard to head the Department of Veterans Affairs. Howard, who serves as the commander of U.S. Naval Forces in Europe, was the first African-American woman to command a U.S. Navy ship.

Several other names have been reported as being considered for VA Secretary, but it appears that President-elect Trump is holding off on his selection for now in comparison to rather quick selection of other cabinet positions.

Names being considered for VA Secretary:

Scott Brown, former senator from Massachusetts  
Jeff Miller, former chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee  
Sarah Palin, former governor of Alaska and vice-presidential nominee

Earlier, a group of 20 veterans organizations sent a letter to Trump asking him to “strongly consider” keeping Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald.

“While you continue your deliberations over who you will select to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs, we ask you to strongly consider the proven track record of the current VA Secretary, Bob McDonald, who is leading the largest transformation in the department’s history,” the groups said in the letter. The groups said that McDonald led an agency-wide transformation of the VA, which is showing “early signs of success.”

In keeping with its rational ideology and refuting media reports, Vietnam Veterans of America President John Rowan released a message on December 16.

### Message from John Rowan, President, Vietnam Veterans of America

*Vietnam Veterans of America will welcome and is prepared to work with whomever President-elect Trump chooses as Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Contrary to what has been alluded to in recent news reports regarding the selection of the future Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Vietnam Veterans of America has not expressed an opinion regarding the President-elect's choice for this position. Vietnam Veterans of America is much more interested in what is done rather than who is doing it. ~ John Rowan, VVA National President and CEO.*

|   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
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*Chapter/State News*

**VVA Life Member to represent Chapter 120**

The following Letter of Appointment was sent by Frank Mello, President of Connecticut Chapter 120 Vietnam Veterans of America to all concerned:

From: President, Connecticut Chapter 120 Vietnam Veterans of America  
 To: Mayor, Town of East Hartford  
 Town Clerk, Town of East Hartford  
 Chair, Patriotic Commission, Town of East Hartford  
 Subj: LETTER OF APPOINTMENT

Paul F. Barry, Jr., is hereby appointed as Annual Commissioner to the Patriotic Commission of the Town of East Hartford to represent Connecticut Chapter 120, Vietnam Veterans of America from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017.

Sincerely,  
 Frank Mello  
 President  
 Connecticut Chapter 120, Vietnam Veterans of America

**Connecticut VVA Veterans' Advocate Passes on**

Charles "Charlie" Cottle, VVA State Council delegate and a life-long veterans' advocate, died November 24, 2016 from cancer caused by his exposure to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune during his service with the US Marine Corps. He will be sorely missed by his brother and sister Vietnam veterans. Rest in peace "Charlie" – until we meet again.

**Charles Cottle**



Charles J. Cottle 71 of East Haven passed away peacefully on November 24, 2016 at CT Hospice with his children by his side. He was born September 17, 1945 in Nanticoke, PA to the late John and Jennie (Mech) Cottle. Charles is survived by his four loving sons, Charles Cottle (Stacy) of Taftville, CT, Erik Cottle (Jasmine) of Branford, Mark Cottle (Chrissy) of East Haven, Greg Cottle of Worcester, MA along with four grandsons, David Cottle, Matthew Cottle, Christopher Cottle and John Cottle and a sibling, Gary Cottle of Kentucky.

Charlie was a lifelong East Haven resident and proud of his Polish heritage. After being honorably discharged from the Marine Corps, he worked as a private contractor for Sikorsky in Vietnam and later as a computer technician for Burroughs and other companies. For the last decade, Charlie was an employee and friend of Goody's Hardware. He was a dedicated advocate for the Vietnam Veterans of America and for the rights and proper treatment of returning veterans as well as POW/MIAs. He enjoyed riding his Harley with the Brothers HOG group, was a Lego enthusiast and loved spending time and money with friends and family. He was a loving son, father, grandfather, friend and Marine and will be sorely missed.

Family will received friends from 2 – 5 PM on Sunday, November 27, 2016 at the Clancy-Palumbo Funeral Home, (Clancy Funeral Home), 43 Kirkham Ave., East Haven. A private graveside service was held at East Lawn Cemetery with full Military Honors.

**Birthday Wishes**

Birthday wishes go to our members born in January. May you have many more!

- |                         |                             |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>James G. Ashwell</i> | <i>Vernon Biederman</i>     |
| <i>Stephen Brown</i>    | <i>William Coney</i>        |
| <i>Andrew Crafa</i>     | <i>Arthur N. Desrosiers</i> |
| <i>Stanley T. Duro</i>  | <i>Henry E. Jackson</i>     |
| <i>Samuel L. Lavoie</i> | <i>Helen McDonald</i>       |
| <i>William M. Quirk</i> | <i>Penny Siggia</i>         |
| <i>Jim Tackett</i>      | <i>Elizabeth W. Vozzo</i>   |

**Happy Birthday!**

## Membership Awards for 2016

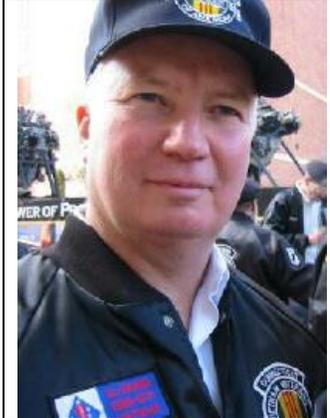
Member of the Year and the Appreciation award were presented during the annual Holiday Dinner Dance held on December 3.

### Member of the Year



Frank Zizzamia is a member of the Chapter Board of Directors, delegate to the State Council, and has contributed greatly to the success of Chapter 120 over the years.

### Appreciation Award



Paul Barry Jr. is a member of the Chapter Board of Directors, delegate to the State Council, member of the Town of East Hartford Veterans and Patriotic Commissions, and has been a valuable asset to the Chapter and State for many years.

*Congratulations, Frank and Paul!*

## Chapter members decorate Christmas tree at Rocky Hill Veterans Home



Chapter members decorated the Christmas tree at Rocky Hill Veterans Home on December 3. The group then proceeded to Col. Gates cemetery to lay a wreath at the grave of Thomas Blanchard, the youngest Marine to die in Vietnam from Connecticut.

## Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame Class 2016 Announced

Lieutenant Governor Nancy Wyman, Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) Commissioner Sean M. Connolly, and Major General Thaddeus Martin, Adjutant General of the Connecticut National Guard, inducted ten veterans into the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame for 2016. Established in 2005, the Veterans Hall of Fame recognizes the continued service of Connecticut veterans who have made significant contributions to their communities after leaving military service.

### The Class of 2016:

#### Robert Joseph Burns, U.S. Navy, Naugatuck

Robert Burns served during both World War II and the Korean conflict. After the military, Mr. Burns became a member of the VFW, Catholic War Veterans, and the American Legion where he is a mentor and advocate for other veterans. For 18 years, he has served as fundraiser, food drive volunteer, and an active member of the Veterans Who Care Committee, an organization founded in 1989 to assist Connecticut veterans and their families in need of essential services. Mr. Burns also volunteered for 45 years as a coach, umpire, and referee for youth sports in Naugatuck, and on a committee dedicated to Naugatuck beautification efforts.

#### Francis Cletus Conahan, U.S. Navy, Ledyard

After leaving the military, Francis (Frank) Conahan was a member of the Ledyard Volunteer Emergency Squad for over 10 years. He participated in over 300 calls and received five Stork awards for assisting in the successful delivery of five healthy babies. The Conahan's are also licensed foster parents and certified to provide respite care, handle emergency placement, and care for children with complex medical needs. They have taken in 126 children ranging in the age of 2 weeks to 10 years old. Mr. Conahan has potentially helped save nearly 1200 lives through blood and platelet donation, and he assists in other community efforts including volunteering for a variety of nonprofit organizations.

#### Bradford (Brad) Davis, U.S. Marine Corps, Bloomfield

After serving in the U.S. Marine Corps, Brad Davis has made countless contributions to the veteran's community in Connecticut. Most notably, he worked in partnership with Lieutenant Governor Nancy Wyman to establish the Connecticut Wall of Honor at the Capitol to recognize the military men and women killed in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan since 9/11. Mr. Davis is also affiliated with a number of veteran's organizations and participates in numerous parades and ceremonies. As a radio personality, Mr. Davis plays a key role in the annual Connecticut Children's Medical Center Radiothon Fundraiser. Since 2003, over \$2 million dollars have been raised to benefit CT Children's Hospital in Hartford. He also collects food for community pantries and shelters.

#### Archie Elam, U.S. Army, Stamford

A graduate of West Point and a veteran of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Archie Elam continues to exemplify the qualities of a true community leader. He is a life member of the VFW and was recently elected as the Commander of the

Fairfield County District representing 2300 veterans. He also held the position of CT VFW's State Surgeon and led their statewide visitation and outreach programs for veterans in hospitals, nursing homes, and other care facilities. Mr. Elam coordinated the Fairfield County VFW fundraisers and managed a community project where 100 volunteers planted 4,500 flags on the graves of veterans. In addition, he is involved in youth education and sponsored two Eagle Scout projects that built computer databases for veterans' cemeteries.

**Richard Iannucci, U.S. Navy, Stratford**

After a long military career, Richard Iannucci now volunteers at the helm of Port 5, a Bridgeport organization that advocates for and celebrates veterans. As the Commander, Mr. Iannucci runs the business and motivates volunteerism and community service, as well as leading fundraising efforts. He works closely with other nonprofit organizations to raise awareness of the need for programs and services to support veterans including job training, education, and skill-building. He actively coordinates Veterans Day and Memorial Day efforts in the community to ensure that the service and sacrifices of the men and women in the military do not go unrecognized.

**Paul Wm. Orstad, U.S. Navy, Norwich**

Paul Orstad has 20 years of experience and leadership in the U.S. Navy and is now dedicated to mentoring young people. For over 25 years, he's served as the volunteer chairman for the U.S. Submarine Veterans National Scholarship committee. His efforts have helped raise more \$650,000 for scholarships for the children and grandchildren of veterans, enabling them to continue their education. For the past 16 years, Mr. Orstad has also led volunteers in serving more than 1,000 veterans and law enforcement officers at the annual Thanksgiving event in his community. He is also a volunteer leader with the Boy Scouts of America.

**Linda S. Schwartz, U.S. Air Force, Pawcatuck**

Linda Schwartz was an Air Force nurse and served during the Vietnam War. She retired in 1986 after sustaining injuries in an aircraft accident while serving as a USAF flight nurse. After her military career, she earned a Doctorate in Public Health from Yale and went on to become a subject matter expert to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on homelessness, mental health, and other issues. Dr. Schwartz was appointed to head the CT Department of Veterans Affairs in 2003, and, following her years of service to the state, was confirmed in 2014 by the U.S. Senate to serve in the federal government as the Assistant Secretary of Veteran Affairs for Policy and Planning. She also sat on several boards including the American Nurses Association and the Vietnam Women's Memorial, and was only woman elected President of the National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs. She has been awarded multiple commendations and medals.

**Salvatore Sena, U.S. Marine Corps, Newington**

After his military career, Salvatore Sena joined the Marine Corps League of CT. In 2007, after serving as Adjutant and Senior Vice Commandant, he became Commandant. During this time, he was also the Detachment Chaplain and Funeral Honors Coordinator, expanding funeral honor details from 90 to over 400 per year. Mr. Sena visits the family of the deceased to assist

with preparation, administrative tasks, and family support. He also sponsors a clothing drive for homeless and needy veterans, collects toys for the Toys for Tots annual drive, and distributes blankets and other items to residents at the Rocky Hill Veterans Home. Mr. Sena coordinates the annual picnic for the Cromwell Children's Home and is the head coach for the Columbian Squires, a youth baseball team with the Knights of Columbus.

**Kjell T. Tollefsen, U.S. Army, Killingworth**

Kjell Tollefsen served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. Since then, he has helped coordinate many special events to honor and thank veterans, including Remembrance of the Fallen; the Vietnam 50th Commemoration, and the two-day Vietnam War commemoration at the New England Air Museum; an historic event attended by more than 10,000 people. Mr. Tollefsen is also a volunteer for the Central Connecticut State University Veterans History Project which archives oral histories of wartime at the Library of Congress. He has served five times as a "Guardian" and team leader for American Warrior honor flights, escorting World War II Veterans from Connecticut to Washington D.C. to visit their memorial. Mr. Tollefsen is a long-time supporter of causes benefiting veterans.

**Arthur Ward, U.S. Marine Corps, Bristol**

Since leaving the U.S. Marine Corps, Mr. Ward has remained a dedicated advocate for veterans and has been actively involved in local veterans' organizations, served on executive boards, and worked on committees coordinating events and services for veterans and their families. He continues to educate young people about veterans, going to schools to speak to students and raise awareness of the importance of honoring our veterans. As a Bristol councilman and mayor, Mr. Ward prioritized advocacy for veterans and ensured a strong voice for programs and services that assist veterans and their families. He continues to work with young servicemen and women, providing support as they prepare for deployment.

The Veterans Hall of Fame is administered by the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs and the Connecticut Military Department. Residents are encouraged to make nominations to the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame Class of 2017 when the application process commences late next summer.

**Receive "The Connection" by E-Mail**

The monthly Chapter 120 newsletter, *The Connection*, is available by e-mail. Currently, 96 members receive the newsletter by e-mail, saving the Chapter over \$600 in postal fees annually. The newsletter is available in Adobe format (.pdf), attached to your e-mail. If you wish to receive the newsletter via e-mail, please e-mail the newsletter editor at [jrcvva120@aol.com](mailto:jrcvva120@aol.com)



## On The Hill



*From Military Times*

## Congress passes slimmed-down veterans reform bill

Lawmakers passed a veterans omnibus bill in the waning hours of Congress' legislative session, but without many of the most sweeping and controversial provisions the two chambers had struggled with in recent months.

Instead, the measure heading to the president's desk is a collection of mostly non-controversial items, including small changes in the benefits appeals process, an extension of education benefits to

some war widows and increased access to benefits for homeless veterans.

It doesn't include accountability provisions championed by critics of the Department of Veterans Affairs, who insist the bureaucracy does not have the ability to properly discipline criminal employees. It also omits a costly expansion of veteran caregiver benefits and proposed trims to the post-9/11 GI Bill, which several veterans groups had protested.

And it doesn't include an overhaul of the benefits appeals process or a consolidation of VA's outside care programs, two priorities that department leaders had pleaded with lawmakers to approve before the end of the year.

Still, House and Senate leaders hailed the passage as important steps forward in improving assistance for veterans, noting the changes should improve health care and benefits access. Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., called it "a down payment on the promise and the debt that we owe to veterans."

Under the bill — named for retiring House Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jeff Miller, R-Fla., and the Senate committee's former ranking member Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn. — the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims will expand from seven to nine judges for the next three years, to help clear the backlog cases there.

It also mandates a host of new reports on the reasons behind that backlog, and would allow the VA to pay some survivor benefits to veterans' family members even if they don't formally apply for the payouts.

Burial at VA cemeteries would be expanded to include some reservists with service-connected illnesses and training accidents. Certain education benefits would be expanded to include spouses of troops killed between Sept. 11, 2001, and Jan. 1, 2006, who had previously been ineligible.

The health care provisions include new language allowing veterans who served in classified missions to seek mental health

treatment without fear of security violations and to ease rules for hiring more mental health specialists.

The bill also mandates new research on the potential health effects from toxic exposures on veterans' children, with an eye toward possibly covering those illnesses in the future.

Union officials had voiced opposition to the bill over a measure changing how the department sets pay scales for some employees. VA leaders had backed dropping review panels required to set those salaries, and lawmakers ignored those concerns in their final passage.

## Veterans Affairs News



*From Stars & Stripes*

## Advocates: Fairness for Veterans Act is only 1 step in fight against 'bad paper' discharges

While a measure protecting veterans with service-related

conditions from receiving other-than-honorable discharges has made its way to President Barack Obama, advocates who led the effort to get it there want more to be done for the thousands of veterans they say were unjustly released.

With the backing of veterans' organizations and a bipartisan group of lawmakers, the Fairness for Veterans Act was included in the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, which is awaiting the president's signature.

If signed into law as expected, the measure would require Defense Department panels that review discharges to consider medical evidence from a veteran's health care provider. Panels would have to review each case presuming that post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, sexual assault trauma or another service-related condition led to the discharge.

The measure expands and codifies a memo issued by former Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel in 2014. The memo called on the Department of Defense to give the benefit of the doubt to Vietnam veterans who sought to correct their military records, contending PTSD could have contributed to their other-than-honorable discharges.

Discharges that are other-than-honorable, including a "general" discharge, are known as "bad paper" and can prevent veterans from receiving federal benefits, such as health care, disability payments, education and housing assistance.

Fighting wrongful "bad paper" discharges has been a longtime goal of Vietnam Veterans of America. The group's president, John Rowan, said the passage of the Fairness for Veterans Act "is a reason for every American to celebrate."

"But we must keep the pressure on," he said.

Veterans' advocates and lawmakers estimate that 22,000 veterans with mental illnesses have received other-than-honorable discharges since 2009.

Vietnam Veterans of America have appealed to Obama to pardon all post-9/11 veterans who were administratively separated from the military and did not face a court-martial. In a letter to Obama, VVA compared it to President Jimmy Carter issuing an executive order in 1977 to pardon Americans who avoided the draft.

The group also called on President-elect Donald Trump to continue a pardon program.

"It would allow veterans to access health care and the GI Bill, so they can move forward with their lives," said Kristofer Goldsmith, an Iraq War veteran who has advocated on behalf of veterans with "bad paper" discharges for nearly a decade. "Denying these benefits does nothing to save money; it does nothing to help the United States military or civilian population. All it does is hamstringing someone's life."

The Fairness for Veterans Act doesn't automatically upgrade bad paper discharges. And many veterans may not hear of the change or seek to have their discharges upgraded, Goldsmith said. The process takes time and -- in some cases -- requires hiring a lawyer.

Goldsmith knows the trials of a "bad paper" discharge firsthand.

He was given a general discharge from the Army after surviving a suicide attempt in 2007. Goldsmith said he was diagnosed at the time with an adjustment disorder but was actually suffering from PTSD.

He and his lawyer have spent about 10 years appealing to the Defense Department for an upgrade.

"I'm still applying for a discharge upgrade; I'm sitting in the backlog," Goldsmith said. "But I've recovered. I've found my purpose. My bad paper discharge motivated me to improve my life, and it's now about making sure I'm there for veterans who haven't been as lucky as me."

Goldsmith works for Vietnam Veterans of America and started his own group, High Ground Veterans Advocacy.

Besides appealing to Obama and Trump, Goldsmith and the rest of Vietnam Veterans of America are asking lawmakers to hold hearings on the issue of bad paper discharges when they return for the 115th Congress in January.

Ideally, Goldsmith said, they would be joint hearings between the House and Senate committees on Veterans Affairs and Armed Services.

"We want Congress to face not just the veterans' service organizations who have been educated about this issue, but the victims of the failed system and the lawyers who are working so hard to help them," he said.

## **VA Grants Full Practice Authority to Advance Practice Registered Nurses**



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced that it is amending provider regulations to permit full practice authority to three roles of VA advanced practice registered nurses (APRN) to practice to the

full extent of their education, training, and certification, regardless of State restrictions that limit such full practice authority, except for applicable State restrictions on the authority to prescribe and administer controlled substances, when such APRNs are acting within the scope of their VA employment.

"Advanced practice registered nurses are valuable members of VA's health care system," said VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. David J. Shulkin. "Amending this regulation increases our capacity to provide timely, efficient, effective and safe primary care, aids VA in making the most efficient use of APRN staff capabilities, and provides a degree of much needed experience to alleviate the current access challenges that are affecting VA."

In May 2016, VA announced its intentions, through a proposed rule, to grant full practice authority to four APRN roles. Though VA does have some localized issues, we do not have immediate and broad access challenges in the area of anesthesia care across the full VA health care system that require full practice authority for all Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs). Therefore, VA will not finalize the provision including CRNAs in the final rule as one of the APRN roles that may be granted full practice authority at this time. VA will request comment on the question of whether there are current anesthesia care access issues for particular states or VA facilities and whether permitting CRNAs to practice to the full extent of their advanced authority would resolve these issues.

APRNs are clinicians with advanced degrees and training who provide primary, acute and specialty health care services; they complete masters, post-masters or doctoral degrees. There are four APRN roles: Certified Nurse Practitioner, Clinical Nurse Specialist, Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist, and Certified Nurse Midwife.

"CRNAs provide an invaluable service to our Veterans," Under Secretary for Health Shulkin continued. "Though CRNAs will not be included in VA's full practice authority under this final rule, we are requesting comments on whether there are access issues or other unconsidered circumstances that might warrant their inclusion in a future rulemaking. In the meantime, we owe it to Veterans to increase access to care in areas where we know we have immediate and broad access challenges."

All VA APRNs are required to obtain and maintain current national certification.

The final rulemaking establishes professional qualifications an individual must possess to be appointed as an APRN within VA, establishes the criteria under which VA may grant full practice authority to an APRN and defines the scope of full practice authority for each of the three roles of APRN. Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists will not be included in VA's full practice authority under this final rule.

VA is the nation's largest employer of nurses; as of July 2016 its workforce of approximately 93,500 nurses (RNs, LPNs, NAs) includes approximately 5,769 APRNs

For more information about openings for nurses or other health care positions at VA, visit [Vacareers@va.gov](mailto:Vacareers@va.gov).

## **New Regulation Decreases Cost of Outpatient Medication Copay for Most Veterans**



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is amending its regulation on copayments for Veterans' outpatient medications for non-service connected conditions. VA currently charges non-exempt Veterans either \$8 or \$9 for each 30-day or less supply of outpatient medication, and under current regulations, a calculation based on the medication of the Medical Consumer Price Index (CPI-P) would be used to

determine the copayment amount in future years.

“Switching to a tiered system continues to keep outpatient medication costs low for Veterans,” said VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. David J. Shulkin. “Reducing their out-of-pocket costs encourages greater adherence to prescribed outpatient medications and reduces the risk of fragmented care that results when multiple pharmacies are used; another way that VA is providing better service to Veterans.”

This new regulation eliminates the formula used to calculate future rate increases and establishes three classes of outpatient medications identified as Tier 1, Preferred Generics; Tier 2, Non-Preferred Generics including over-the-counter medications; and Tier 3, Brand Name. Copayment amounts for each tier would be fixed and vary depending upon the class of outpatient medication in the tier.

These copayment amounts will be effective February 27, 2017:

- \$5 for a 30-day or less supply - Tier 1 outpatient medication
- \$8 for a 30-day or less supply - Tier 2 outpatient medication
- \$11 for a 30-day or less supply - Tier 3 outpatient medication

These changes apply to Veterans without a service-connected condition, or Veterans with a disability rated less than 50 percent who are receiving outpatient treatment for a non-service connected condition, and whose annual income exceeds the limit set by law. Medication copayments do not apply to former

Prisoners of War, catastrophically disabled Veterans, or those covered by other exceptions as set by law.

Copayments stop each calendar year for Veterans in Priority Groups 2-8 once a \$700 cap is reached.

More information on the new tiered medication copayment can be found at: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-12-12/pdf/2016-29515.pdf>

### ***From the Service Rep's Desk***



## **The One Number to Remember for VA**

The Department of Veterans Affairs has introduced 1-844-MyVA311 (1-844-698-2311) as a source for veterans and their families who do not know what number to call.

This new national toll-free number will help eliminate the feeling of frustration and confusion that veterans and their families have expressed when navigating the 1000-plus phone numbers that currently exist. With 1-844-MyVA311, veterans, families, and caregivers can access information about VA services like disability, pension, healthcare eligibility, enrollment, and burial benefits, in addition to a self-service locator to find the nearest VA facility. And if they are looking for immediate assistance with housing or are having a mental health crisis, MyVA311 will route callers to the Homeless Veteran help line and the Veterans Crisis Line.

Meanwhile, all of the existing VA numbers will continue in service.

## **VA to Let Vets Pre-Select Cemetery Burials before Death**

A rule change at the Veterans Affairs Department will allow veterans to apply for burial in national cemeteries before their death, rather than requiring family members to apply on their behalf after it.

Veteran burial benefits previously were approved at the “time of need.” For families, that meant waiting until after the veteran died to apply for the benefits via fax or email by sending in a copy of the veteran's DD-214 or separation documents and then following up by phone.

The rule change instead allows veterans to be approved for burial in a VA national cemetery “pre-need,” or before death, through VA Form 40-10007 submitted by fax, email or mail. The form can be filled out by the veteran or by someone else on his or her behalf.

Burial locations are assigned based on availability at the time of need, VA officials said. Although veterans cannot reserve a gravesite, they can indicate on the form a cemetery preference. Doing so allows VA officials to predict need at cemeteries, and

may help inform decisions for those choosing a burial site after the veteran's death, officials said.

The predetermination process qualifies veterans for burial in 135 cemeteries and 33 soldiers' lots operated by the VA nationwide. The process does not include Arlington National Cemetery, which is operated by the U.S. Army and uses a different application system.

After receiving the burial benefits application, the VA will provide written notice of its decision regarding eligibility. The decision and supporting documents will then be stored electronically by the VA to make burial arrangements faster when they are needed, they said.

The change is an easy way for the VA to simplify the burial process for grieving families and allow veterans to put their affairs in order.

In addition to burial in a national cemetery, the VA provides most veterans who were not dishonorably discharged with a government headstone or marker, a burial flag and a presidential memorial certificate after death. Some veterans' survivors also qualify for burial allowances, designed to cover some burial and funeral costs.

The predetermination form (40-10007) can be submitted by fax to 1-855-840-8299, email to Eligibility.PreNeed@va.gov or mail to the National Cemetery Scheduling Office, P.O. Box 510543, St. Louis, MO 63151, according to the VA.

### 50 Years Ago

- **January 8** - GARY GEORGE WETZEL, MEDAL OF HONOR.
- **January 8** - OPERATION CEDAR FALLS BEGINS. Elements from the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions as well as the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment begin Operation CEDAR FALLS to clear out the Iron Triangle north of Saigon. The American troops kill an estimated 750 enemy soldiers and capture a large store of documents which temporarily neutralized enemy operations in the Iron Triangle.
- **January 27** - DONALD W. EVANS, JR. MEDAL OF HONOR.



### Hartford Vet Center



25 Elm Street, Suite A  
Rocky Hill, CT 06067

Phone: (860)-563-8800  
Fax: (860)-563-8805

We are the people in VA who welcome home war veterans with honor by providing quality readjustment counseling in a caring manner. Vet Centers understand and appreciate Veterans' war experiences while assisting them and their family members toward a successful post-war adjustment in or near their community.

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