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Meetings

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

The Board of Directors will meet on Thursday, October 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.

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RAND Study Finds ACA Repeal Will Strain VA; Any ACA Repeal Must Invest in VA Infrastructure



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 19, 2017 No. 17-48

Contact: Mokie Porter 301-996-0901; mporter@vva.org

“Last week, RAND Corporation, a widely respected, nonpartisan research institution, released the report, Veterans Health Insurance Coverage Under the Affordable Care Act and Implications of Repeal for the Department of Veterans Affairs,” said John Rowan, President of Vietnam Veterans of America. “The study released by RAND Corporation adds weight to this argument that we’ve been making to Congress through countless meetings and hearings.”

The report found that efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act would result in the VA being flooded with older, lower income, and less-healthy nonelderly veterans. This additional patient load would be caused by the end of ACA insurance plans that formerly uninsured veterans have opted to use.

“We’re at a time when demand at the VA is increasing because the Vietnam generation is aging, and new veterans are starting to deal with health issues related to their recent deployments,” Rowan continued. “VVA urges in the strongest possible terms that any ACA repeal must be tied to an increase in funding for the Veterans Health Administration to offset any influx of new VA patients. Our veterans shouldn’t be an after-thought.”

Recommendations from the report:

Policymakers considering reforms that would reduce veterans' access to non-VA insurance coverage should be careful to account for potential spillover effects on VA demand.

The composition of veteran populations affected by health care reform has the potential to shape the impact of ACA repeal on VA demand, since VA eligibility and use vary widely across subgroups of veterans; policymakers need to consider which veterans are likely to be affected by health care reform in order to realistically assess impacts of insurance coverage losses on the VA.

CHAPTER 120 OFFICE 568-9212

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 Danbury (Area Code 203) 790-4000

All Telephone Numbers are Area Code 860 unless otherwise noted

Chapter/State News

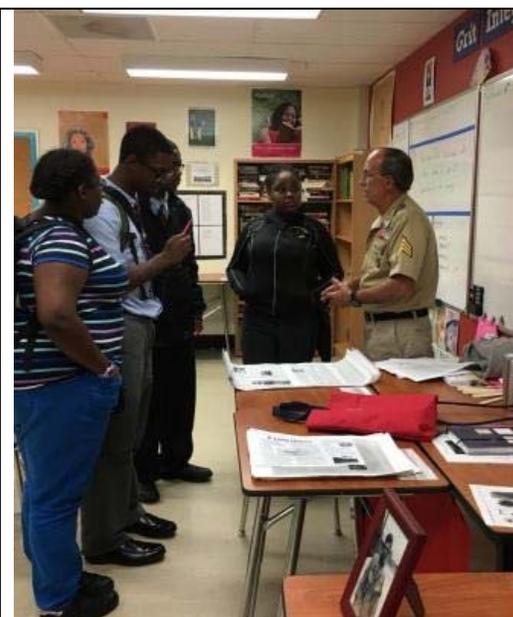
VAVS Committee Representative needed

Chapter 120 is looking for a volunteer to serve as the Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) Committee Representative for VVA at the VA Connecticut Medical Center. The VAVS Committee serves in an advisory capacity to medical center management in coordinating on a local level, the established plans and policies for volunteer participation of the committee's respective organizations, chapters, departments and resources in the VAVS Program. Each member of the committee keeps medical center management advised about their organization's policies and procedures for volunteer assistance and provides guidance within their membership for appropriate participation in the VAVS Program. Quarterly meetings of the VAVS Committee are scheduled each fiscal year. If you are interested in this position, please contact Frank Mello at the phone number located on this page.

Chapter 120 participates in community activities



Chapter 120 members attended the 9-11 Ceremony held at Goodwin College on 9/11/17.



On September 14th, Chapter 120 member Bob Venti visited the Achievement First Hartford High School and shared his Vietnam War experiences with a group of junior and senior scholars. Four scholars asked more questions of Venti after the presentation.

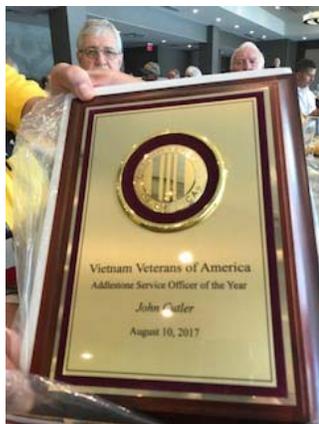
Birthday Wishes

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

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Charles F. Barrera</i> | <i>John J. Barry</i> |
| <i>Paul F. Barry Jr.</i> | <i>John Beas</i> |
| <i>Gary H. Benson</i> | <i>Robert T. Burgess</i> |
| <i>Clyde H. Callejo</i> | <i>Dean Clarke</i> |
| <i>Roger Conley</i> | <i>James H. Darby</i> |
| <i>Roger Feder</i> | <i>Michael Grip</i> |
| <i>Theodore A. Groenstein</i> | <i>Lawrence Labarre</i> |
| <i>Nancy Rousselle</i> | <i>Dennis Sines</i> |
| <i>Dave E. Spafford</i> | <i>Steven A. Wowk</i> |

And a special birthday wish to Nathaniel J. Cutler, grandson of Chapter members Mike Belliveau and John Cutler.

Service Officer presented with Award



At the State Council meeting on September 17, President Pattie Dumin announced that John Cutler was awarded the Addlestone Service Officer of the Year at the National Convention's Veterans Benefits breakfast. This is the first year that this award was granted and is planned to be an ongoing award at future conventions. David Addlestone was a Vietnam-era judge advocate, public defender, and senior staff attorney with the Lawyers

Military Defense Committee in Vietnam. In 1980, Addlestone helped found the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP). He has co-authored numerous articles and books on military and veterans' law, including the American Veterans and Service members Survival Guide, of which he was the co-manager, co-editor, and contributing writer.

From The Hartford Courant

Veterans Stand Down: State Vets Gather In Rocky Hill



Veterans from throughout the state gathered at the Veterans Home off West Street, where white tents crowded the grounds. Launched in 1992, the Stand Down at first was focused mostly on homeless veterans, but the scope has widened to serve any veteran seeking information on

available services. There were about 100 providers and exhibitors, including colleges, businesses, healthcare organizations, state and federal agencies, government and private legal advisers and of course, an array of veterans organizations.

The event offers veterans one-stop shopping for services and makes a big difference in their lives, American Legion executive Bob Murray said. Many people volunteer to make the Stand Down meaningful, Murray said, including his late wife, who knitted 200 wool hats each year to give away at the annual event.

The Buffalo Soldiers of Hartford, a motorcycle club that promotes and preserves the legacy of African-American service members, piled donated clothing on several tables. The men's clothing always goes quickly, Army veteran and club member Bob Harris said, pointing to a table that had been replenished three times in the first 1 ½ hours.

To reach even more veterans, state Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Sean Connolly said the agency is considering a regional approach to the Stand Down. The idea is to hold events in each of the state's five Congressional Districts, using community colleges as bases, Connolly said.

U.S. Attorney Deirdre Daly, who represents the District of Connecticut, was among state and federal officials at the Stand Down. From a speakers' platform, Daly told veterans that her office stands ready to protect their employment and voting rights, among other services. She referred veterans to the U.S. Department of Justice website, www.servicemembers.gov.

The Fairfield native said she knows about veterans' struggles. Daly is the granddaughter, daughter and sister of veterans. Her father, U.S. Army Capt. Michael Daly, won the Medal of Honor in World War II.

"I really understand the sacrifice and the difficulties they faced when they came back," Daly said.

The VVA Connecticut State Council, Chapter 120 and Chapter 270 donated over \$1,000 to this year's Stand Down.

Chapter 120 Holiday Dinner Dance – Mark your calendars

Our 31st Annual Holiday Dinner Dance will be held on December 9, 2017. Please note that this event is being held on the second Saturday of December. Invitations and tickets will be mailed in October.

From The New London Day

Judge orders Army to review discharge status of two CT vets



A Connecticut judge is asking the Army to reconsider its denial to upgrade the discharge status of two Connecticut former soldiers, who allege that they, and tens of thousands of Army veterans across the country, received less than honorable discharges for behavior later attributed to post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health conditions.

Judge Warren Eginton of the U.S. District Court of Connecticut on Tuesday directed the Army to review the claims of Steve Kennedy, 31, and Alicia Carson, 28, and report back to the court within 90 days.

Kennedy, of Fairfield, who served in the Army, and Alicia Carson, who served in the Army and the Connecticut Army National Guard but now lives in Alaska, filed a class-action lawsuit on April 17 in U.S. District Court in Bridgeport on behalf of approximately 60,000 less-than-honorably discharged post 9/11 Army veterans with PTSD.

The suit claims that the Army "routinely" fails to treat soldiers' serious mental health conditions, and instead gives them less-than-honorable discharges, "often because of infractions related to mental health crises."

Veterans with these kinds of discharges are usually ineligible for crucial health and retirement benefits and for state benefits such as property tax exemptions. And the discharges also can make it difficult for veterans to get a job.

Kennedy returned from a yearlong deployment in Iraq with severe PTSD and depression that the Army did not adequately diagnose or treat, according to the suit.

“Rather than giving veterans with PTSD the treatment they need, the Army is kicking them out and denying them benefits that would help make them whole,” Kennedy said in a statement.

After he got back from Iraq, Kennedy abused alcohol, self-mutilated and began having suicidal thoughts despite leading his team to top performance marks, the suit alleges. He didn’t seek help because he feared being labeled weak and losing the trust of members of his unit, the lawsuit says. After being told he could not take leave to attend his own wedding, Kennedy went absent without leave, or AWOL.

He was given a “general” discharge and dismissed from the Army on July 27, 2009. The Army board twice rejected Kennedy’s requests to upgrade his discharge status.

Initially, Kennedy, who is the Connecticut team leader for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, sued individually, but amended his suit and refiled a federal class-action. It has yet to be classified as a class-action lawsuit, and that effort is on hold while the Army performs its review.

A 2014 memo from then-Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel was supposed to make it easier for veterans like Kennedy and Carson to upgrade their discharge status. The memo directed review boards to give liberal consideration to PTSD-based applications. A class-action lawsuit filed by Vietnam combat veterans also seeking to upgrade their discharges due to PTSD, led, in part, to the Hagel memo being released. Eginton also was the judge in that case.

In a statement, Kennedy said the Army review board “has systematically failed in its duty of correcting inequitable discharges, furthering the injustice against us and compounding the stigma around mental health in the military.”

The Department of Defense issued guidance in August to clarify Hagel's 2014 memo, explaining that the liberal consideration policy includes conditions resulting from post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, sexual assault or sexual harassment.

Carson, a former Southington resident, deployed to Afghanistan with the Army in early 2010 and within five months was promoted from assistant gunner to gunner. Her command also recommended she be placed in a Special Forces unit, the suit says.

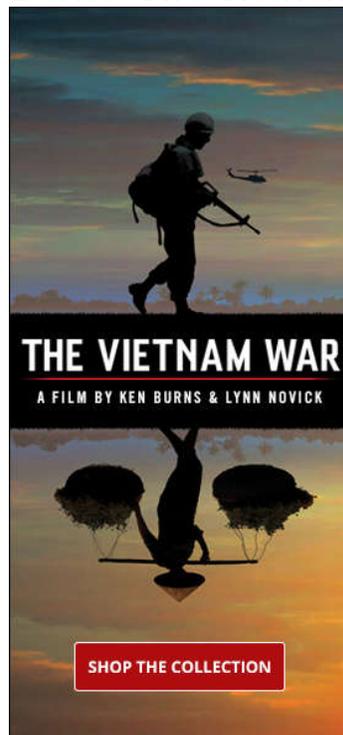
When she returned to the U.S., Carson was diagnosed by clinicians from the departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs with PTSD and traumatic brain injury. She got a doctor’s note

excusing her from drills, but the National Guard gave her a general discharge because of her absences, the suit says.

The lawsuit seeks to upgrade Kennedy and Carson's discharges to honorable and to compel the Army to fairly adjudicate PTSD applications.

Kennedy and Carson are represented by law student interns Jordan Goldberg, Catherine McCarthy, Jonathan Petkun, Giovanni Sanchez and Helen White, and supervising attorneys Aaron Wenzloff and Michael Wishnie of the Yale Law School Veterans Legal Services Clinic.

Burns’ The Vietnam War



Many of us have started watching Ken Burns & Lynn Novick’s 10-part documentary film series “THE VIETNAM WAR”, which began on Sunday, September 17 on most PBS stations across the country. For some, the documentary may bring back powerful emotional memories and so we urge you not to watch it alone. If you do find yourself bothered by such strong emotional memories, please don’t hesitate to call:

The Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 (Press 1)
Or
The Vet Center Combat Call Center
1-877-WAR-VETS
Extra operators will be on stand-by

Newsletter articles/stories/photos

Any articles, stories and/or photos submitted for the newsletter must be received by the "cut off" date for any given month. Photos must be accompanied by text which describes the event, names, dates and any other pertinent facts so our readers understand the story behind the photo(s). The newsletter editor will announce the "cut off" dates at each Chapter meeting. The "cut off" date for our November 2017 newsletter is 20 October 2017. Due to space availability, the editor reserves the right to include or not include photos for a given month.



POW/MIA News

POW/MIA Recognition Day at Newington VAMC

Chapter 120's Mary Beaulieu was the guest speaker at the POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremony at the Newington VAMC on September 15, 2017. Mary impressed the attendees so much that the Catholic War Veterans requested her to speak at their seminar next May.



Mary Beaulieu with Chapter 120 members in support.



POW/MIA Monument at Newington VAMC.

McKeague swears in as Director of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency

The U.S. Department of Defense announced the selection of Kelly McKeague to be the Director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. McKeague was sworn in on September 5 during a ceremony at the Pentagon.

McKeague, who retired from the U.S. Air Force in 2016 at the rank of major general, served as the DPAA Deputy Director and as the Commander of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, one of the entities merged in 2015 to form the Department's newest defense agency.

"I know the importance of the agency's mission and I look forward to working with DPAA's team of dedicated professionals," said McKeague.

Fern Sumpter Winbush, who has been serving as Acting Director, will resume her role as Principal Deputy Director for the agency, responsible for formulating policy, overseeing business development, and increasing outreach initiatives.

"My time serving as the Acting Director has been challenging and rewarding as I worked to move the agency forward in our mission of providing the fullest possible accounting of U.S. personnel missing from past conflicts to the families and the nation," said Winbush. "As an agency, we have accomplished much over the last two years, and I am confident the incoming Director will take over an agency postured for continued success."

McKeague, who served as an independent business consultant since his military retirement, says he is looking forward to this opportunity.

"I am humbled and blessed to serve on behalf of the families whose loved ones served our country," he said. "The fulfillment of this agency's solemn obligation is my honor to endeavor."

A native of Hawaii, McKeague began his military career in 1981 as a civil engineering officer, serving in a variety of assignments at base, major command and Headquarters U.S. Air Force levels. In 1995, he entered the Maryland Air National Guard and served on active duty as a civil engineer. His assignments include the Air National Guard Readiness Center, followed by legislative liaison tours at the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force and the National Guard Bureau. He also served as the Chief of Staff, National Guard Bureau and Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for National Guard Matters.

On The Hill



Bill to provide help for veterans exposed to burn pits passes senate

Congress moved closer Monday September 18 to approving help for tens of thousands of veterans exposed to toxic "burn pits" in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The military used jet fuel in open-air burn pits to try to dispose of everything from plastics to medical waste. The resulting smoke and fumes are suspected of causing serious illnesses and death.

Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) co-sponsored a bipartisan measure that authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to create a special medical center of excellence to study – and treat – the health effects.

“We need to better understand and address the relationship between burn pit exposure and the health needs of our brave men and women in uniform, and this bill will help accomplish that,” Klobuchar said.

Senate passage of the bill is welcome news for veterans like Jeremy Wolfsteller. He served in Iraq and experienced the burn pits first hand.

“We didn’t want to breathe in this black, dark smoke,” he said. “It was an awful experience. It’s something I don’t wish upon anyone.”

The American Legion has warned that without quick action to investigate the health impact of toxins released from burn pits, they could be this generation’s Agent Orange.

“We don’t want to see a delay like the Vietnam veterans had,” Wolfsteller said.

Health effects from exposure to chemicals found in burn pits may include cancer, neurological effects, reproductive effects, respiratory toxicity, and cardiovascular toxicity. Studies suggest that troops who worked in these areas are subject to higher rates of asthma, emphysema, and rare lung disorders.

“We don’t want to see a delay like the Vietnam veterans had,” Wolfsteller said.

The “Helping Veterans Exposed to Burn Pits Act” passed the Senate as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018.

The bipartisan bill still needs approval in the House.

Veterans Affairs News

From Military.com

VA Wait Times As Good or Better Than Private Sector: Report



VA health care is as good or in some cases better than that offered by the private sector on key measures including wait times, according to a study commissioned by the American Legion.

The report, issued Tuesday September 20 and titled “A System Worth Saving,” concludes that the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system “continues to perform as well as, and often better than, the rest of the U.S. health-care system on key quality measures,” including patient safety, satisfaction and care coordination.

“Wait times at most VA hospitals and clinics are typically the same or shorter than those faced by patients seeking treatment from non-VA doctors,” the report says.

The 17-page report was co-authored by Phillip Longman, a senior editor at the Washington Monthly and adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins University, and Suzanne Gordon, a health care journalist and assistant adjunct professor at the University of California at San Francisco School of Nursing.

The report comes at a time when the Trump administration, Congress and the VA are considering a long-term overhaul of the Veterans Choice Program, which allows veterans to seek VA-funded care through private providers.

In July, Congress approved a \$3.9 billion bill to extend the Veterans Choice Program on private care for six months. Funding for Choice had been due to run out in mid-August, according to the VA.

The Choice program, established after a 2014 scandal over extended wait times for care at VA medical facilities, allows veterans who face a more than 30-day wait for an appointment, or who must travel more than 40 miles to a VA facility, to instead seek VA-funded care through private providers.

In a memorandum last week to VA Secretary Dr. David Shulkin, the VA’s Office of Inspector General warned that the Choice program continues to be plagued by problems with duplicate payments, overpayments, and a failure to offset payments against outside insurance coverage.

“These deficiencies must be addressed in the process of awarding additional contracts to any [contract payment processors] that may be selected for the future iteration of the Choice Program currently under consideration by Congress,” the IG’s Office said.

Since the Choice program’s inception, the American Legion and other Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) have cautioned against attempts to use it as a smokescreen to privatize the VA.

Legion-commissioned report says, “Although there are opportunities for VA to improve its performance by entering into partnerships with other health-care providers, no evidence supports the claim that privatizing VA or substantially outsourcing its services would bring veterans better care.”

The report continues, “In evaluating the quality of VA care, one should first remember to ask an all-important question: “Compared to what?”

On wait times, “The entire American health-care system faces acute shortages of doctors, especially primary care physicians and mental health professionals. This means that even fully insured patients seeking care outside VA often face long wait times to see doctors,” the report states.

The report cites numerous studies, including one by industry consulting firm Merritt Hawkins showing the wait time to get a

first appointment with a private-sector doctor averaged 24 days in 15 metropolitan areas.

“By contrast, the latest available data shows that one in five VA patients is seen on the same day he or she makes an appointment,” the report says.

“Even though roughly 16 percent of VA primary care facilities are operating at over 100 percent of capacity, for the system as a whole, the average wait time to see a VA primary care doctor is five days, and nine days for appointments with VA specialists,” it states.

“The familiar narrative about wait times at VA being worse than in the rest of the system is just demonstrably untrue,” the report says.

From The Associated Press

Trump to Award Medal of Honor to Alabama Veteran



Army Capt. Gary M. Rose (Ret)

President Donald Trump will award the Medal of Honor to a retired Army medic from Alabama who risked his life several times to provide medical care to his comrades during the Vietnam War, the White House announced.

Trump will award retired Army Capt. Gary M. Rose of Huntsville, Alabama, the nation’s highest military honor for

his actions in combat. Trump will honor Rose for his conspicuous gallantry during a White House ceremony on Oct. 23.

The White House said Rose, 69, will be recognized for risking his life while serving as a medic with the 5th Special Force Group during combat operations in Vietnam in September 1970. Rose repeatedly ran into the line of enemy fire to provide medical care, and used his own body on one occasion to shield a wounded American from harm.

On the final day of the mission, Rose was wounded but put himself in the line of enemy fire while moving wounded personnel to an extraction point, loading them into helicopters and helping to repel an enemy assault on the American position.

As he boarded the final extraction helicopter, the aircraft was hit with intense enemy fire and crashed shortly after takeoff. The White House said Rose ignored his own injuries and pulled the helicopter crew and members of his unit from the burning wreckage and provided medical care until another extraction helicopter arrived.

Rose is a 20-year veteran of the Army. He will be the second person to be awarded the Medal of Honor by Trump. The president honored James McCloughan of South Haven, Michigan, in July for his actions to save wounded soldiers in a Vietnam kill zone.

From the Service Rep’s Desk

From Military.com



VA Begins Disability Ratings Update

The VA is in the process of rewriting the Schedule for Rating Disabilities.

The over 70 year old federal regulation for the disability rating

criteria is being rewritten to update medical terms and more accurately reflect the changes that medicine and treatment have undergone in the time since the original code was written in 1945.

The VA has been working on rewriting the code since 2009. A group of subject matter experts and physicians are reviewing each of the 15 body systems that make up the Schedule for Rating Disabilities and making the necessary changes.

The first installment of the updated schedule was released on September 10, 2017 covering the “Dental and Oral Conditions” body system. According to the VA, the new schedule will contain updated medical terms, include diagnostic codes for conditions previously rated under other conditions, add or change disability levels where needed, and combine some diagnostic codes.

The VA says that no existing dental or oral conditions were removed from the schedule as a result of the update.

If you had a claim or appeal for a dental or oral condition pending before Sept. 10, 2017, the VA will consider both the old and new rating criteria when making a decision. All claims for dental or oral conditions received by VA on or after Sept. 10 will be rated under the new rating criteria.

The VA also said that they won’t change any existing disability ratings unless you file an appeal of an existing rating. In that case, the existing rating may go up or down based on the new schedule.

VA will be updating the rest of the rating schedule in the coming months until all 15 body systems are modernized.

Membership Renewals

Is your membership renewal about to become due? Please renew today so you can continue to receive the Chapter newsletter, as well as the VVA Veteran! And as you renew, please consider joining the other 222 members who have chosen Life membership for \$100. You must submit a copy of your DD214 to qualify for Life membership.

50 Years Ago

October 1 - THAI TROOPS LAUNCH OPERATION NARASUAN. In their first large-scale separate operation in Vietnam, Operation NARASUAN, Thai troops of the Queen's Cobras Regiment fight the enemy and assist in the pacification of the Nhon Trach District of South Vietnam's Bien Hoa Province, killing 145. In civic action projects that are part of the same operation, the regiment constructs 20 miles of roads and treats nearly 49,000 patients through its medical units. Thai military strength in Vietnam, 2,205 in 1967, would increase to 11,568 by 1969.

October 1 - AMERICAN CRYPTOLOGISTS GET MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH. American cryptologists on an RC-130 ACRP flight (Commando Lance) intercept a Low Very High Frequency voice communications network, located in southern North Vietnam. The communications are determined to have belonged to North Vietnam's General Directorate of Rear Services and contain mostly logistics information. This information helps military leaders and US policy makers estimate the strength of the enemy in South Vietnam. It is also a significant factor in ascertaining future plans and intentions of the enemy.

October 12 - WILLIAM THOMAS PERKINS, JR. MEDAL OF HONOR.

October 14 - PAUL HELLSTROM FOSTER, MEDAL OF HONOR.

October 15 - WEBSTER ANDERSON, MEDAL OF HONOR.

October 17 - HAROLD BASCOM DURHAM, JR. MEDAL OF HONOR.

October 27 - NORTH VIETNAMESE AIRCRAFT MOVED. Two-thirds of North Vietnamese aircraft move into Southern China.

October 29 - VIET CONG LAUNCH BATTLE OF LOC NINH. The 9th People's Liberation Armed Forces Division, a Viet Cong main force unit, attacks Loc Ninh, a district town near the Cambodian border in the northern part of III Corps. In more than a week of sustained contact, the 1st Infantry Division and South Vietnamese elements repulse the enemy, killing some 1,000 soldiers.

October 31 - RILEY L. PITTS, MEDAL OF HONOR.

Receive "The Connection" by E-Mail

The monthly Chapter 120 newsletter, *The Connection*, is available by e-mail. Currently, 97 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



Hartford Vet Center



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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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