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Meetings

The Chapter 120 membership meeting will be held on Thursday, February 7, 2019 at 7:00pm in the Machinists Union Hall, 357 Main St., East Hartford.

The Board of Directors will meet on Thursday, February 28 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 ctchapter120@aol.com.

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VA to implement appeals modernization



U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) announced that on January 18, the Federal Register published regulations accompanying the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (AMA). The law will help Veterans experience a more transparent

claims decision-review process.

After publication of the regulations, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie certified the department's readiness to implement appeals modernization, which will transform a complex appeals process into one that is simple, timely and provides greater choice to Veterans who disagree with a VA decision.

Implementation will occur 30 days after the Secretary certifies, as required by law. Accordingly, the AMA will become effective February 19.

"VA has been preparing for full implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act over the past 18 months," Wilkie said. "Our staff has worked diligently, particularly in the last few weeks, to ensure the new, streamlined process is available to Veterans in February.

The AMA was signed into law Aug. 23, 2017. Under the act, Veterans will now have three options for claims and appeals: (1) supplemental claim; (2) higher-level review; or (3) direct appeals to the Board of Veterans' Appeals. All decision reviews submitted after February 2019 will fall under the new system.

Once the Appeals Modernization Act is fully implemented, VA's goal is to complete supplemental claims and higher-level reviews averaging 125 days. Decisions appealed to the Board under its direct docket will average 365 days. Under the legacy process, appeal resolutions averaged three to seven years.

For more information about VA appeals modernization, visit <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/appeals.asp> and <https://www.bva.va.gov/>

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Chapter/State News

Winter coats donated to local towns



Chapter 120 members Roger Anderson, Pete Lund, Leigh Lovering and Ken Lewis delivered donated winter coats to the South Windsor Town Hall in December 2018. Members also delivered coats to Windsor, Manchester and East Hartford during the holidays.

Chapter Product Sales

Chapter 120 Life member Leigh Lovering has graciously accepted the position of Product Sales Chair. Leigh has announced that Chapter 120 will conduct a “fire sale” at the February Chapter membership meeting to sell the existing inventory of product at drastically reduced prices. Proceeds from that sale will help purchase new items for Chapter members. So come to the February meeting to take advantage of these incredible savings!

Chapter 120 Elections Coming Soon

Elections for six National Convention delegates and two alternates will be held at the Chapter 120 membership meeting on April 4, 2019. Three members of the Election Committee will also be elected on that date. If you are interested in running for a Delegate to the National Convention to be held in Spokane, WA on July 15 - 20, 2019, you should start planning for your trip and consider expenses necessary to attend the Convention. Historically, the Connecticut State Council and Chapter 120 have assisted with the majority of expenses. But there is no way at this time to know how much that financial backup will be this year. If you are interested in a Delegate position or wish to nominate a Chapter member for that position, please contact the Election Committee (Bill Chiodo, Ken Lewis or Tim Siggia). Election Rules are posted below.

Connecticut Chapter 120 Election Rules

Revised November 2, 2006

Section 1. Annual Elections

- A. The Chapter officers will be elected on even numbered years at the April meeting and will serve a two (2) year term in office. They are the following: President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer.
- B. The Board of Directors will be elected on even numbered years at the April meeting and will serve a two (2) year term of office.

Birthday Wishes

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

Vernon Bertrand Paul S. Egan
 Michael F. Kane Kathryn M. Lechause
 Richard Linnon Robert Longworth
 Diana Mello George T. Miller
 Joseph Rinaldi Roger Rowley
 Robert Savino Earl J. Schofield
 Francis T. Schulze Timothy M. Siggia
 Joe C. Visco

Happy Birthday!

- C. The State Council Delegates will be elected on even numbered years at the April meeting and will serve a two (2) year term of office.
- D. *The Delegates to the National Convention* will be elected on odd numbered years at the April meeting and will serve a two (2) year term in office.
- E. The three (3) member *Election Committee* will be elected at the April meeting and will serve a one (1) year term.

Section 2. Candidates

- A. Candidates must have been a member for a minimum of fifteen (15) days prior to the election.
- B. Candidates must have on file with the Chapter, or present to the Election Committee their DD-214, or other proof of qualification for membership.
- C. Candidates may be nominated from the floor on the night of the election. Candidates must be present to accept the nomination or have submitted a letter of intent to the Election Committee.
- D. Candidates will be allowed space in the newsletter to campaign but not to defame or slander the other candidates. Space allowable will be at the discretion of the Newsletter Editor.
- E. Candidates will be allowed five (5) minutes to speak at the April meeting if desired.
- F. Candidates may use the membership list for a mailing pursuant to the Chapter rules and Federal laws governing the membership list.

Section 3. Voters

- A. To be eligible to vote, you must have been a member for fifteen (15) days prior to the election. This would include new members or reinstated members that are not paid up for the prior year.
- B. Voting members must have on file with the Chapter, or present to the Nominating Committee, their DD-214 or proof of qualification for membership.
- C. Voting members must have paid their dues for the current fiscal year. Membership may be renewed the night of the election, but must be paid prior to casting their vote.

Section 4. Election Procedures

- A. The voting period will be from the close of nominations until 8:00 PM.
- B. The quorum required to hold the election should be 10 members.
- C. A candidate can request a recount of the ballots for his or her office if the margin between the candidates running for that office is 10% or less based on the number of total votes cast.
- D. The ballots will be kept for one (1) year in a sealed envelope signed by the Election Committee or their appointees.
- E. Results will be announced the night of the election.
- F. If an Election Committee member is running for an elected position, they shall appoint a volunteer vote counter from the floor.
- G. The vote will be taken by a secret paper ballot.

VVA Membership Change

On October 20, 2018, VVA's National Board of Directors passed a motion to have one class of membership: Life membership. All active and pending three-year members have been converted to life members. This change was reflected on the October 2018 membership roster. After October 31, 2018, all dues payments received for one-year membership will be refunded along with instructions for renewing as a life member. Active one-year members will remain active until their current term expires and are invited to renew as life members thereafter. The link to the new membership application is <https://vva.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/APPLICATION-FOR-MEMBERSHIP.pdf>.



POW/MIA News

From DPAA and CIA archives

U.S. Civilians Accounted For From Vietnam War

Edward J. Weissenback and Roy F. Townley, killed during the Vietnam War, were accounted for on September 25, 2018.

On December 27, 1971,

Weissenback and Townley, employees of Air America Incorporated, two of four crewman aboard an Air America C-123K flight from Udorn Airfield, Thailand, headed for Xienhom District, Xaignabouli Province, Laos. The aircraft was last heard from when they were northeast of Sayaboury, Laos.

In the morning of 27 December 1971, C-123K "293" left Udorn Thailand for Ban Xieng Lom on a flight for Peppergrinder, carrying 12,892 pounds of mixed ordnance including 75mm shells, 81mm rounds, 222 caliber small arms ammunition and white phosphorus smoke rounds. The aircraft disappeared shortly after. The reason why "293" disappeared was never determined, but the aircraft probably strayed from course and, over exceedingly hostile country, was hit by enemy fire and rapidly destroyed. Search and rescue efforts were continued through Dec. 31, 1971, but no sign of the aircraft or the four crewmembers were found. Crew members included Pilot in Command George L. Ritter, co-pilot Roy F. Townley and kickers Edward J. Weissenback and Khamphanh Saysongkham.

Receive "The Connection" by E-Mail

The monthly Chapter 120 newsletter, The Connection, is available by e-mail. Currently, 100 members receive the newsletter by e-mail, saving the Chapter over \$1,600 in printing and 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 ctchapter120@aol.com

At The Capitol



New VA Committee Leadership

The new VA Committee is now on board for Legislative year 2019. But it's interesting to note that not one of the committee leadership members are a veteran! And neither have ties to veterans in their immediate families. Only four members of the committee are veterans – and even those members have no war time experience.

Of the 35 bills proposed as of January 25, thirteen (13) could affect Vietnam veterans:

Proposed S.B. No. 146 - AN ACT EXPANDING CERTAIN VETERANS' ACCESS TO PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS. To require that pension benefits granted to certain veterans by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs be disregarded when determining income eligibility for certain state Medicare programs, as well as permit the Commissioner of Social Services to pursue exempting such benefits from income eligibility criteria as unreimbursed medical expenses.

Proposed S.B. No. 428 - AN ACT ELIMINATING THE REQUIREMENT TO REAPPLY FOR PROPERTY TAX REDUCTIONS FOR CERTAIN DISABLED VETERANS. To eliminate the requirement for certain disabled veterans who receive a property tax reduction to reapply for such reduction.

Proposed H.B. No. 5293 - AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN VETERANS' PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS. To increase the amount of a property tax exemption a municipality may provide to certain disabled veterans.

Proposed H.B. No. 5294 - AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A FREEZE OR REDUCTION ON PROPERTY TAXES FOR QUALIFIED DISABLED VETERANS. To permit municipalities to provide a freeze or reduction on property taxes for disabled veterans that meet certain qualifications.

Proposed H.B. No. 5370 - AN ACT PROMOTING VETERAN-OWNED BUSINESSES. To give veteran-owned businesses a ten per cent price preference on state contracts and set aside five per cent of all such contracts for award to such businesses.

Proposed H.B. No. 5371 - AN ACT REQUIRING A STUDY OF HARDSHIPS PREVALENT AMONG VETERANS. To study hardships prevalent among veterans in Connecticut.

Proposed H.B. No. 5372 - AN ACT EXEMPTING VETERANS FROM THE PASSPORT TO THE PARKS MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION PROGRAM FEE. To allow veterans to not have to pay the motor vehicle registration fee associated with the Passport to the Parks program.

Proposed H.B. No. 5565 - AN ACT ALLOWING WAIVER OF BUILDING PERMIT APPLICATION FEES FOR CERTAIN VETERANS. To allow municipalities to waive building permit application fees for veterans honorably discharged from active military service.

Proposed H.B. No. 5563 - AN ACT CONCERNING POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER ISSUES IMPACTING VETERANS INVOLVED IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM. To provide judges with information related to mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder issues that may impact veterans involved in the criminal justice system.

Proposed H.B. No. 5569 - AN ACT CONCERNING DISABLED VETERANS' PROPERTY TAXES. To assist disabled veterans by increasing the property tax exemption municipalities are allowed to provide to certain disabled veterans.

Proposed H.B. No. 5669 - AN ACT CONCERNING PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR HOMES AND MOTOR VEHICLES OWNED BY DISABLED VETERANS. To increase the property tax exemptions for homes and motor vehicles owned by disabled veterans.

Proposed H.B. No. 5672 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE OBSERVANCE OF VETERANS' DAY. To prohibit public school sessions on Veterans' Day.

Proposed H.B. No. 6395 - AN ACT CONCERNING TRANSPORTATION FOR VETERANS. To assist veterans in securing public transportation to their places of employment and to medical appointments.

On The Hill



Representative Mark Takano Elected Chairman of House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Representative Mark Takano (D-CA) released the following statement after he was elected by his Democratic colleagues to serve as Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs:

“This Congress, we have an incredible opportunity to build on this Committee’s work to guarantee veterans access to high-quality, timely care and the benefits they deserve. Today’s veterans’ population is more diverse than ever before, a testament to the shifting demographic strength of our nation’s service members. With these changes will come a new set of challenges for the VA.”

“As Chairman I will work to develop a “VA 2030” plan that equips VA with the tools needed to meet these challenges head-on, guaranteeing its success now and into the future. Our Committee’s commitment to bipartisanship has helped protect VA whistleblowers and student veterans, expand earned benefits, and improve access to care. I look forward to working alongside my colleagues to further reject ideological agendas, and continue placing our service to veterans above ourselves and fulfill our promise to our nation’s veterans. Serving as Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs will be the honor of my lifetime, and I look forward to working closely with our veterans, veterans’ service organizations, and members on both sides of the aisle and in both chambers to serve and improve the lives of veterans across the country.”

Ranking Member Roe Introduces the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019

On January 3, 2019, Rep. Phil Roe, M.D. (R-Tenn.) Ranking Member of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs introduced the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, H.R. 203.

“The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 would ensure that our Vietnam Veterans receive the benefits they deserve. This bill mirrors the language of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018, which passed the House 382 - 0 during the 115th Congress. One of my final acts as Chairman in 2018 was holding a bipartisan press conference to urge the Senate to pass H.R. 299. Needless to say, despite the endless efforts of Senate Veterans Affairs’ Committee Chairman Isakson and Ranking Member Tester, the Senate never passed the legislation. This is why I have introduced this bill that mirrors the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018 and I encourage my colleagues in the House to once again swiftly pass this bipartisan piece of legislation.

“Currently, Blue Water Navy Vietnam veterans are unable to receive the presumption of exposure to Agent Orange because VA’s presumption policy extends only to those who served on land in Vietnam or in Vietnam’s inland waterways. This legislation would extend the presumption of exposure of Agent Orange to our Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans. I hope that my colleagues in the House and Senate waste no time in passing this bill and sending it to President Trump so we can ensure that Blue Water Navy Vietnam veterans receive the benefits they deserve.”

Rep. Takano later introduced an identical bill, H.R. 299.



Veterans Affairs News



From NVLSP

NVLSP Files Class Action Lawsuit Accusing VA of Disseminating False Information to Veterans

On New Year's Day, the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) filed a class action lawsuit in the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) accusing the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) of sending false information throughout 2018 to tens of thousands of veterans who had applied for VA reimbursement of emergency medical expenses they incurred at non-VA facilities. The lawsuit, filed with the pro bono assistance of Sidley Austin LLP, asserts that the VA has a practice and policy of informing these veterans – falsely – that they cannot qualify for any reimbursement if they have partial coverage for their emergency medical expenses under a health plan contract. This VA representation is inaccurate, according to NVLSP, because it directly violates the binding decision issued by the CAVC in 2016 in *Staab v. Shulkin*, which invalidated a VA regulation because it prohibited reimbursement if the veteran had partial coverage under a health care plan.

This is the second time in three months that NVLSP has filed a class action lawsuit in the CAVC claiming that the VA has systematically – in violation of the *Staab* decision and the statute upon which that decision was based – mishandled tens of thousands of reimbursement claims. On October 30, 2018, NVLSP filed a class action on behalf of veteran Amanda Wolfe and other veterans challenging the regulation adopted by the VA in January 2018. According to Ms. Wolfe’s lawsuit, that regulation violates the law because it prohibits reimbursement for those emergency medical expenses that the veteran must pay as a deductible or coinsurance payment under the veteran’s health care plan.

In its New Year’s filing, NVLSP represents petitioner, Peter E. Boerschinger, who seeks to represent the tens of thousands of other veterans who, like him, received the inaccurate VA correspondence about the reimbursement criteria. As part of Mr. Boerschinger’s lawsuit, NVLSP also seeks to compel the VA to provide corrected information to all veterans who received the inaccurate communications and to reinstate their reimbursement claims.

“By misinforming so many veterans of their eligibility for reimbursement of non-VA medical expenses, the VA is once again failing to live up to its obligations to those who served our country. The *Staab* decision in 2016 could not have been clearer. How VA officials could allow these false boilerplate letters to be sent to tens of thousands of veterans seeking reimbursement lies beyond my comprehension. This campaign is a systemic deception by the VA that must be stopped,” said NVLSP Executive Director Bart Stichman.

“The mere inclusion of the language advising veterans that they are not eligible for reimbursement if they have coverage through a third-party health plan obviously has a chilling effect. It discourages veterans from pursuing and appealing their claims, leaving them to have to bear the unnecessary burden of paying thousands of dollars in health care expenses,” said Stichman.

From U.S. Medicine

Efficiency at the Expense of Effectiveness?



Recent problems with initiatives implemented by the Veterans Benefits Administration point to much larger, systemic issues in how the agency rolls out new programs, according to the VA Office of the Inspector General.

Appearing before the House VA Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs in December, OIG officials testified that VBA’s emphasis on efficiency has come at the cost of their ability to review and process claims effectively.

Lawmakers expressed frustration at what they consider a pattern of reactionary behavior at VA—rolling out a new program; learning about problems afterward; then rushing to fix them.

“If the IG didn’t flag these programs, I don’t know how the VBA would have ever identified the problem and taken corrective action,” declared Subcommittee Chair Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL). “I think one reason that VBA’s new initiatives fail or have problems is because VBA is so anxious to find a silver bullet that painlessly solves all the problems. VBA repeatedly rolls out new initiatives without testing them or considering the downstream impact, how it would impact VA, or how it would serve the veteran.”

OIG cited four recent reports they believe are emblematic of the problem. One released late last year found that VBA staff requested unwarranted medical reexaminations in 111 of 300 cases reviewed. The report found that a lack of internal controls and inadequate quality assurance reviews were among the root causes of the problem.

Another report, released in August 2018, found VBA may have mistakenly denied PTSD claims related to military sexual trauma due to lack of specialized reviewer training and the absence of any additional level of review. Inaccurate claims decisions were also the focus of a third review—this one looking at claims of service-connected ALS. The OIG found that in 100 sample cases, VBA staff made 71 errors involving 45 veterans’ ALS claims.

A fourth report looked at VBA’s Intent to File (ITF) submission initiative. The initiative allows a veteran to preserve an early effective date, even if they don’t yet have all the information to file the formal claim. The OIG estimated that, of the 1 million ITF submissions received by VA between March 2015 and

September 2017, as many as 137,000 cases may have had incorrect dates assigned—errors made by VBA’s electronic claims processing system. While VBA assured legislators that this issue has been resolved, with the rate of incorrect claims down to 4%, the fact that the errors occurred because VBA was unprepared when the initiative went live is why VBA included it in its summary of VBA’s larger issues.

“Root causes of the problems we found include deficient internal controls, inadequate program leadership and monitoring, lack of IT system functionality and the unintended impacts of VBA’s National Work Queue implementation,” VA Inspector General Michael Missal told lawmakers. The NWQ is designed to distribute claims daily to each VA regional office based on factors such as workload capacity, claims processing priorities and special missions (claims that require special handling). When the NWQ went live in 2016, many specialized claims, including MST-related claims, were assigned to processors that did not have the proper expertise or experience.

While Missal testified that he believes policy changes and programs such as the NWQ are well-intentioned, problems occur due to VBA leadership making decisions without considering possible unintended consequences. “They’re sacrificing accuracy for timeliness,” Missal said. “VBA is rolling out national initiatives after small and short pilot programs [and they’re] implementing programs that do not have fully developed IT systems and robust internal controls.”

Missal also cited communication issues within VBA as a continuing problem. “There are instances where one side is aware of an issue, but the other side doesn’t get the same information,” he said.

VBA officials agreed with the inspector general’s unflinching critique and promised better performance in the future with VA Undersecretary for Benefits Paul Lawrence admitting that VBA has a history of implementing too many programs too quickly.

“Previously, we issued unilateral decisions and did not engage our stakeholders early enough,” Lawrence said. “VBA is now focused on continuous improvement [and] fostering a culture of collaboration.”

Asked how VBA intended to make these changes, Lawrence said he hoped to change the culture by modeling better practices at the leadership level. “Decisions were made very quickly with not the right expertise in the room,” he said. “We want to slow things down. We want more people in the room to make sure we have the right voices.”



From Military.com

VA Renews Opposition to Agent Orange Benefits for Blue Water Navy Vets



The Department of Veterans Affairs shows no signs of backing off opposition to extending Agent Orange health care and benefits to “Blue Water Navy” Vietnam veterans, setting up another major battle this year with veterans groups and overwhelming majorities in the House and Senate.

The VA still lacks “sufficient evidence” to prove a presumptive link between service off the coast of Vietnam and the illnesses caused by the widespread use of the defoliant Agent Orange, Paul Lawrence, the VA’s undersecretary and head of the Veterans Benefits Administration, said Thursday January 17.

“In terms of presumptives, they come with a real requirement of sufficient evidence to indicate it’s warranted,” he said in a panel discussion on a VA Town Hall webcast.

Veterans who served on the ground or on the inland waterways of Vietnam are now eligible for Agent Orange health care and benefits. But existing studies do not show definitive causation between the illnesses suffered by the estimated 90,000 Blue Water Navy veterans and the use of Agent Orange, Lawrence said.

“We understand the situation,” he said. “We talked about having more studies in 2019 that would give us more insight into what the causation was and the definitive conclusions behind it.”

He gave no indication of when the studies might be completed.

Blue Water veterans can file a claim, which will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, Lawrence said, but they “must be supported by science.”

Last August, Lawrence and VA Secretary Robert Wilkie stunned Congress by announcing their opposition to a bill extending Agent Orange benefits to Blue Water sailors that had overwhelming bipartisan support in the House and Senate.

The bill had passed 382-0 in the House and appeared headed to easy passage in the Senate with the support of Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Georgia, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman.

However, Lawrence, at a Senate Veterans Affairs Committee hearing, said, “It’s difficult to hear from veterans who are ill,” but “there is no conclusive science” from a report by the Institute of Medicine to show a service connection.

Major veterans service organizations (VSOs) disputed Lawrence on the evidence, but the bill failed in December when Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyoming, citing the costs, blocked a Senate vote.

The Congressional Budget Office had estimated that about 90,000 sailors could be covered by the bill, which would likely cost about \$1.1 billion over 10 years.

On January 4, House Democrats reintroduced the “Blue Water Navy” bill, setting up another lengthy battle with the VA on extending Agent Orange benefits.

In a statement, Rep. Mark Takano, D-California, the new chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said, “We must get to work and finally secure the benefits our Blue Water Navy veterans earned over 40 years ago.”

Delay, Deny, Until They Die

Medal of Honor Recipient Charles Kettles Dies at 89



LtCol. Charles Kettles

When a brigade of U.S. troops was ambushed by the North Vietnamese Army in the Song Tra Cau riverbed on the morning of May 15, 1967, Lt. Charles Kettles volunteered to lead the rescue, and he refused, again and again, to back down when faced with a barrage of gunfire.

His aircraft was badly damaged, left spilling fuel, and his gunner was severely injured during the treacherous operation. But

he helicoptered in and out of the battlefield four times, saving the lives of 44 soldiers in a death-defying emergency operation that would become a legendary tale of bravery in the Vietnam War.

Nearly 50 years later, Kettles received the Medal of Honor on July 18, 2016.

Kettles died Monday January 21. The war hero from Ypsilanti Michigan was 89 years old.

Kettles was humble when he remembered what that day meant to him.

“Out of all of that, there is really only one thing that means anything -- those 40 names are not on the wall in Washington,” Kettles said during a Veterans Day speech at Concordia University in 2017, a year after having the Medal of Honor placed around his neck by President Barack Obama in the East Room of the White House.

Kettles' famed flight leading six UH-1D helicopters directly into enemy fire sought to carry reinforcements to the embattled 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division and to evacuate the wounded, according to U.S. Army records.

Enemy fire inflicted heavy damage to the helicopters in the landing zone, but Kettles refused to depart until all reinforcements were off-loaded and wounded personnel were on board. Kettles led them out of the battle area and then returned with more reinforcements, knowing intense enemy fire was awaiting his arrival. He landed in the middle of enemy mortar and automatic weapons fire that wounded his gunner and damaged his helicopter, military records show.

Later, an emergency extraction of the remaining 44 troops was ordered. Among them were four members of Kettles' own unit, left behind when their helicopter was destroyed.

Kettles again volunteered to return to the deadly landing zone for a third time, leading six evacuation helicopters back in and out of the battlefield.

And he wasn't done yet.

A squad of eight stranded soldiers pinned down by enemy fire had been unable to reach the evacuation helicopters. So Kettles turned his helicopter around and returned a fourth time, without additional aerial support, to rescue the remaining troops.

Kettles served active duty tours in Korea, Japan and Thailand before returning in 1956 and establishing a Ford Dealership in Dewitt, with his brother.

He answered the call to serve again in 1963, when the U.S. was engaged in the Vietnam War and needed pilots. Kettles was assigned as a flight commander with the 176th Assault Helicopter Company, 14th Combat Aviation Battalion, and deployed to Vietnam from February through November 1967, according to military records. His second tour of duty in Vietnam lasted from October 1969 through October 1970.

After receiving the Medal of Honor, Kettles was honored with a number of other distinctions. He received an honorary Doctor of Public Service degree from EMU, where he previously earned his degree. EMU also named its Military and Veterans Service Center in Kettles' honor in 2016.

"His actions during combat were extraordinary, and his career stands as a shining example of all that we appreciate and honor in our veterans and those serving now," said Michael Wise, assistant director of Military and Veterans Affairs at EMU. "The Kettles name connotes excellence and commitment, aspects we strive for in our programs and initiatives to benefit veterans who attend Eastern."



50 Years Ago

- **February 5** - THOMAS P. NOONAN, JR., MEDAL OF HONOR
- **February 9** - THOMAS W. BENNETT, MEDAL OF HONOR
- **February 9** - WILLIAM R. PROM, MEDAL OF HONOR
- **February 13** - THOMAS E. CREEK, MEDAL OF HONOR
- **February 16** - GARY L. MILLER, MEDAL OF HONOR
- **February 22** - GEORGE C. LANG, MEDAL OF HONOR
- **February 22** - ROBERT D. LAW, MEDAL OF HONOR
- **February 22** - WESLEY L. FOX, MEDAL OF HONOR
- **February 23** - LESTER W. WEBER, MEDAL OF HONOR
- **February 23** - OSCAR P. AUSTIN, MEDAL OF HONOR
- **February 23** - ROBERT W. HARTSTOCK, MEDAL OF HONOR
- **February 24** - JOHN L. LEVITOW, MEDAL OF HONOR (Connecticut)
- **February 25** - WILLIAM D. MORGAN, MEDAL OF HONOR



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Welcome Home



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