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Meetings

Chapter 120 membership meeting will be held on Thursday, June 3, 2021 at 7:00pm in the Machinists Union Hall, 357 Main St., East Hartford. *State COVID-19 guidelines apply.*

The Board of Directors will meet on Thursday, June 24 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 cchapter120@aol.com.

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VA to Readjudicate Veteran and survivor claims for possible herbicide exposure



Veterans who were previously denied service connection for an herbicide related presumptive condition due to lack of in-country Vietnam service will have their claims automatically readjudicated by VA.

The department began readjudicating claims in April for Veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War but were denied for one or more herbicide related conditions, on the basis that military service was not performed on the landmass of the Republic of Vietnam or on its inland waterways.

“Readjudication means VA will review the evidence of record and provide replacement decisions in the cases of Veterans who were previously denied service connection benefits,” said Acting VA Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. “We have the proper resources in place to meet the needs of our Veteran community and will ensure all eligible Veterans’ and their survivors’ claims are examined thoroughly and fairly.”

The review also applies to eligible survivors of deceased Vietnam-era Veterans and is part of the Veterans Benefits Administration’s implementation of the Nov. 5, 2020, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California order in *Nehmer vs. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, requiring VA to readjudicate previously denied claims.

VA will determine if benefits for qualifying disabilities can now be paid retroactively to the date of previously denied claims. The court’s decision requires automatic readjudication in such cases without requiring a new claim, and potentially paying benefits to the survivors or estates of deceased beneficiaries.

VA will send a Notification Letter to the veteran explaining this process.

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Danbury (Area Code 203)	790-4000
All Telephone Numbers are Area Code 860 unless otherwise noted	

Chapter/State News

Elections held in May

Elections for National Convention Delegates and the Election Committee were held at the Chapter meeting on 6 May.

Delegates to the National Convention

- Paul Barry
- Phil Morneau
- Gerry Wright
- 2 vacant

The Chapter is looking for two members for the remaining National Convention Delegates. If interested, please contact the Elections Committee or any Directors.

Elections Committee

- Ken Lewis
- Frank Mello
- Tim Siggia

Agent Orange Monument Unveiling Ceremony

Event Date: Saturday, June 5, 2021 - 6:00pm

6:00 P.M. at Veterans Monument Park on Monument Lane located on the corner of Route 6 and Route 316. (Rain or shine)

Funds are being raised through the Buy a Brick Program. The bricks will be placed in a walkway at this park. Show your support for our Veterans.

Questions? Please call the Town Clerk's Office at 860-742-7305 Ext 2 or contact Gerry Wright 860-982-3944 or happyhauler@comcast.net



Birthday Wishes

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

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Moe Armstrong</i> | <i>Dorothy Barry</i> |
| <i>Peter Beley</i> | <i>Bo J. De Alba</i> |
| <i>Robert Dowding</i> | <i>Gary M. Gazdzicki Sr.</i> |
| <i>Joseph S. Hachey</i> | <i>Donald Kelly</i> |
| <i>Harry Kiernan</i> | <i>Donald Mooers</i> |
| <i>Leland E. Moulton</i> | <i>Jeff Nielsen</i> |
| <i>James M. Parent</i> | <i>Ronald Pariseau</i> |
| <i>Arthur N. Steben, Jr.</i> | <i>Robert Stepanian</i> |
| <i>George W. Washington</i> | |

Happy Birthday!

POW/MIA News



Pilot Accounted For From Vietnam War

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced May 14 that U.S. Naval Reserve Cmdr. Paul C. Charvet, 26, killed during the Vietnam War, was accounted for March 1, 2021.

On March 21, 1967, Charvet was the pilot of an A-1H Skyraider airplane assigned to Attack Squadron 215 aboard the USS Bon Homme Richard. During a mission near Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam, his plane disappeared in an area of low cloud cover and fog a kilometer northeast of Hon Me Island. His remains were not recovered after a search of the area. On March 22, Radio Hanoi Broadcast reported an American aircraft was shot down the day before off the coast of Thanh Hoa Province. Charvet’s plane was the only U.S. aircraft loss in that area March 21. Charvet was considered missing in action until Dec. 2, 1977 when his status was changed to “Presumed Killed in Action.”



A unilateral recovery team from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam recovered possible remains and material evidence, which was turned over to the U.S. in September 2020 and sent to the DPAA Laboratory at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, for analysis.

DPAA is grateful to the government of Vietnam for their partnership in this mission.



A-1H SKYRADER w/ROCKET POD

Current Status of Unaccounted-for Americans Lost in the Vietnam War

	Vietnam	Laos	Cambodia	China	Total
Original Missing	1,973	573	90	10	2,646
Repatriated and Identified	728	288	42	3	1,061[1]
Remaining Missing	1,245	285	48	7	1,585

At The Capitol



House passes two Veterans bills

The House passed two veterans' bills in May:

H.B. No. 5592 - AN ACT REDEFINING “VETERAN” AND ESTABLISHING A QUALIFYING REVIEW BOARD. To redefine “veteran” and to establish a Qualified Condition Review Board. This bill expands the general definition of “veteran” under state law to include those released with an other than honorable (OTH) discharge based on

specified qualifying conditions and applies this new definition across veterans benefit programs. In doing so, it extends state-based benefits to certain veterans who are currently ineligible. Passed by the House and sent to Senate on 5/10/2021.

H.B. No. 5737 - AN ACT CREATING A VETERANS AND MILITARY TOURISM TRAIL. To create a Veterans and Military Tourism Trail linking museums, memorials, battleground sites and historic sites in the state relating to veterans and the United States armed forces. Passed by the House and sent to Senate 5/18/2021.

On The Hill



House Passes 10 Bipartisan Bills for Veterans

The House of Representatives passed 10 bipartisan bills brought to the floor by the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. The legislation helps build equity for all veterans regardless of race, gender, sexuality, or housing status, strengthens oversight of VA and COVID-19 relief dollars, and expands mental healthcare resources for veterans, especially in rural areas. All of these bills align with Chairman Takano’s commitment to build a more welcoming and equitable VA, improve VA’s management and oversight, and combat veteran suicide.

“I am pleased that the House took strong bipartisan action today to support our veterans by passing legislation that builds equity for veterans, provides more rigorous oversight of VA, and ensures that veterans can access the mental healthcare resources they need regardless of where they live,” said Chairman Takano. “With Memorial Day coming up, these ten bills showcase how we can continue to come together to uphold our promise and commitment to all those who have borne the battle. I thank my

colleagues in the House for their support of these important bills for our veterans.”

Full list of passed legislation:

- H.R. 2704 – Improving VA Accountability to Prevent Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Act of 2021 (Rep. Pappas)
- H.R. 2788 – Equal Employment Counseling Modernization Act (Rep. Lamb)
- H.R. 2911 – VA Transparency and Trust Act of 2021 (Rep. Bost)
- H.R. 240 – Homeless Veterans with Children Reintegration Act (Rep. Brownley)
- H.R. 711 – West LA VA Campus Improvement Act of 2021, as amended (Rep. Lieu)
- H.R. 2167 – GI Bill National Emergency Extended Deadline Act, as amended (Rep. Sherrill)
- H.R. 2878 – Native VetSuccess at Tribal Colleges and Universities Pilot Program Act, as amended (Rep. Gallego)
- H.R. 1510 – To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a report on the use of cameras in the medical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs, as amended (Rep. McKinley)
- H.R. 2494 – To amend title 38, United States Code, to establish in the Department the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration, and for other purposes (Rep. Wenstrup)
- H.R. 2441 – Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act (Rep. Axne)

From Connecting Vets

Bipartisan bill introduced to create charter for Native American vets



Bipartisan legislation has been introduced which would create a congressional charter for the National American Indian Veterans (NAIV).

Supported by Sen. Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) and Sen. Ben Ray Luján (D-N.M.) the bill would create the first congressionally chartered

organization tasked to help Native American veterans.

"NAIV works closely with Tribal Veterans Services Officers to make certain the Native veterans receive proper benefits and resources. Congress regularly looks to NAIV for input when addressing issues facing Native veterans. This charter will help give NAIV a larger platform to continue advocating for and serving the more than 140,000 Native veterans living in the United States," said Sen. Rounds in a press statement.

Creating a congressional charter for NAIV would give the organization a federal mandate, as well as greater representation at state and federal levels of government in advocacy for Native American veterans.

“Native Americans have served our nation honorably in the Armed Forces – often times at higher rates than any other demographic. I’m proud to introduce bipartisan legislation to create a Congressional Charter for the National American Indian Veterans Organization," Sen. Luján said.

Receive “The CONNECTION” by E-Mail and Help Your Chapter Today

The monthly Chapter 120 newsletter, The Connection, is available by e-mail. Currently, 97 members receive the newsletter by e-mail, saving the Chapter nearly \$1,800 in postal fees, printing costs and mailing supplies annually. The newsletter is available in Adobe format (.pdf), attached to your e-mail. If you wish to receive the newsletter via e-mail in lieu of postal mail, please e-mail the newsletter editor at ctchapter120@aol.com

Veterans Affairs News



From Federal News Network

Disability claims backlog will get worse before it gets better, VA warns

The Department of Veterans Affairs is juggling a variety of challenges to deliver benefits more quickly and work down its backlog of disability claims, which skyrocketed last year as the COVID-19 pandemic placed new constraints on an already complex process.

There are 191,700 disability claims in VA’s backlog today. The Veterans Benefits Administration expects the backlog will grow and then peak sometime this summer, to somewhere in the range of 225,000-to-240,000 pending claims by August.

“Not all the challenges we face are related to the pandemic,” Thomas Murphy, VBA’s acting undersecretary for benefits, told the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on May 12. “Under a recent court order, VBA must re-adjudicate over 62,000 Blue Water Navy claims. These claims were added to the inventory in April. In addition, we’re about to begin processing claims for the three new Agent Orange presumptive conditions mandated by Congress of bladder cancer, Parkinsonism and hypothyroidism. We’ve seen a slow decrease in the backlog over the last couple of months, but these new issues and a continued rollover of claims currently in inventory, will see a short-term spike in the backlog this summer.”

If all goes well, the disability claims backlog should drop to 140,000 by the end of this fiscal year and return to pre-pandemic levels of about 100,000 by the end of 2022, Murphy said.

“I’m concerned, however, that next year isn’t soon enough for disabled veterans weathering the storm of this pandemic,” Jon Tester (D-Mont.), chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs

Committee, said. "I'm also concerned that as VBA concentrates on speed, it risks sacrificing quality. Disabled veterans must have confidence that their claims will be fairly and accurately decided."



THANKS FOR YOUR SERVICE!

VBA made progress with the disability claims backlog in recent months. When the department last testified on this topic before the House back in March, it had 210,000 disability claims in the backlog.

Murphy said VBA is trying to scan and digitize more veterans' records, which helped the department address veterans' claims with slightly more speed.

The pandemic created a chokepoint within the National Archives and Records Administration, which stores military records at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, Missouri. Veterans need access to those records in order to begin the disability claims process with VA, and the pandemic forced NARA to close its facilities.

"We got to the point where we were right around 100,000 [records requests]," said Murphy, who sent VBA officials to the NPRC to determine what VA could do to help.

VBA spoke with NARA and encouraged the agency to add additional employee shifts on nights and weekends so it could process more records requests. VA will also help NARA pay for additional employee overtime to process those requests using some of the COVID-19 relief funds it received from Congress, Murphy said.

As of April 11, NARA had a working inventory of 8,700 military records requests, which Murphy said falls within the agency's pre-pandemic levels. NARA today can turn documents around within a few days' time, he added.

"At the same time, we know that NARA is sitting on several hundred-thousand records requests that come through other sources, but we've been prioritized because we're taking care of veterans," Murphy said.

Congress skeptical of VA's reliance on contractors for C&P exams

Compensation and pension (C&P) exams, which the agency uses to determine a veteran's eligibility for health and other benefits, is another chokepoint.

The department temporarily paused in-person exams for two months starting last April during the height of the pandemic. VBA's contractor workforce gradually restarted in-person exams over the course of last year, and the Veterans Health Administration is performing more of its own face-to-face exams as well.

Still, at least 58,000 veterans haven't shown up for their C&P exams, Murphy said, and their claims will stay pending until they do.

Contractors, which VA rely on to conduct nearly 90% of its C&P exams today, are a key part of the department's plans to work down the backlog of pending disability claims.

The department said VBA's contractors conduct roughly 45,000 C&P exams each week.

"While it's a bad thing to have our backlog doubled, it's only doubled based on what we had," Murphy said of the backlog. "That includes us shutting down for five months. We have a fairly quick recovery here. Our contractors are covering in excess of 45% more exams per day than we were, and VHA has more than doubled the capacity of examinations they are doing. Through leveraging what we have in VHA and tie that with our contractors, we're able to quickly recover from this and get all of our veterans through in a fairly expeditious manner. It can never be fast enough; I get that. But it's going fairly well."

Some in Congress, however, are skeptical VA's contractors are truly equipped to conduct accurate exams, and the Government Accountability Office said the department didn't have a system in place to ensure their vendors have completed proper training.

The department said VBA is communicating with VHA about the number of C&P exams it needs VA examiners to handle. But GAO said VA's long-term strategy for the C&P exam workload isn't clear.

"They do appear to coordinate on a day-to-day basis on what exams need to be done right now," Elizabeth Curda, GAO's director of education, workforce and income security, said. "But what concerns us [is] that as of this year to date, the contractors are now performing 90% of exams, and a lot of medical examiners we spoke to weren't aware the capacity was shifting to mostly contractors."

VBA said it has three layers of quality checks to ensure contractors' C&P exams are up to par, including financial penalties for the vendors if they fail to meet quality metrics.

"[With] the training program, the requirements [and] the credentialing that we have, the quality of the examination you

can get from one of our contract providers is equivalent to what you can get in VHA,” Murphy said.

From the Service Rep's Desk



Hartford Regional Office - In-Person Benefit Services Resume By Appointment Only

In-person benefit service appointments must be scheduled in advance. To schedule an

appointment with a VA representative at the Hartford VA Regional Office, please call (860) 666-7342 during operating hours. Masks are required at all times within VA Newington Health Care Clinic, including during in-person service appointments. The Hartford Regional Office will continue adherence to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines which requires the use of social distancing, face coverings, hand sanitizer and requiring sick individuals to stay at home.

From Task & Purpose

This photo of Marine recruits on their first day at boot camp is begging for a caption contest

"How's anyone gonna see my war face if I'm wearing a mask?"

By James Clark

A recent photo from Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, California has me at a loss for words. Well, almost.

The image, which was published to the military's online media database, shows three would-be Marines at receiving — the first portion of recruit training when it feels like you're getting yelled at a lot, but is in fact only a taste of what's to come. During receiving recruits file paperwork, get a fresh new haircut, file more paperwork, get issued the clothes they'll wear for the next several months, and learn the basic rules of life during Marine Corps boot camp: You must refer to yourself in the third person, always speak at maximum volume, and end every sentence with "sir" or "ma'am."

The photo by Sgt. Brooke C. Woods shows recruits with Fox Company, 2nd Recruit Training Battalion, on May 11, 2021 with their arms outstretched holding face masks. According to the photo caption, the not-even-first-phase recruits (there are four phases to recruit training, not counting receiving) were being "informed of the articles under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which they are required to follow during recruit training, and as Marines."

Because I recognize those red booths in the photo, and since the recruits are still wearing normal clothes and have shaggy hair,

I'm going to say with relative certainty that they only just stepped off the yellow footprints and that this is their first day at boot camp — welcome to recruit training, fellas, you're gonna love it there! There's also a very good chance that these recruits are being instructed, by the numbers, how to properly wear a mask during the ongoing novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

During recruit training, every single thing you're told to do — no matter how small — gets turned into a precision drill movement. Gonna shave your face? Not so fast, your drill instructor has to walk you through the proper way to do that. Gonna clean your nasty body? First, you need to be taught which parts to clean and how to properly use soap. (I'm serious, one of our drill instructors in recruit training felt the need to explain how soap works and that it should be applied to areas of the body that are dirty or smelly and that you should wash your nether regions.) Are you about to get dressed? They're going to time you, and you'll be expected to put on your clothes in a specific order. It stands to reason that how to properly wear a face mask, especially during a global pandemic, would be explained in as much detail as all those other things.

Given that the original photo caption doesn't give us a lot to go on, let's have a little fun with it, shall we? It's time for some creative commentary, and that means a caption contest. Here, I'll go first:



I'm sure you all can do better. So, hop on into the comments and throw out some suggested captions.

James Clark is the Deputy Editor of Task & Purpose and a Marine veteran. He oversees daily editorial operations, edits articles, and supports reporters so they can continue to write the impactful stories that matter to our audience. In terms of writing, James provides a mix of pop culture commentary and in-depth analysis of issues facing the military and veterans community.



From The Washington Post

Army Ranger who led 60 men in hellish battle against hundreds receives the Medal of Honor 70 years later



President Joe Biden presented the Medal of Honor to retired Army Col. Ralph Puckett, 94, on Friday May 21 “for conspicuous gallantry during the Korean War,” according to the White House announcement. Korean President Moon Jae-in also

joined the ceremony.

Puckett, a former Army Ranger colonel, was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for “extraordinary heroism” during a battle near Unsan, Korea, in November 1950, according to his award citation. He was a lieutenant at the time, commanding the Eighth Army Ranger Company which consisted of 51 Army Rangers and nine Korean soldiers, when he held off an overwhelming force of Chinese soldiers before eventually being forced to retreat. Having been seriously wounded, he told his soldiers to leave him behind, but was ultimately dragged to safety.

Throughout his 22-year career, the Washington Post reported, Puckett has received a second Distinguished Service Cross, two Silver Stars for valor, five Purple Hearts, and two Bronze Star Medals with the “V” device for valor. He retired in 1971 and has been “a spiritual and cultural leader of sorts for the 75th Ranger Regiment,” regularly meeting with soldiers at Fort Benning and even traveling overseas to Iraq and Afghanistan, the Post reports. He was inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame in 1992.

Jean, Puckett’s wife, told the Post that he felt “the Distinguished Service Cross was honor enough,” but that another retired Army officer, John Lock, and some of their family members were pushing for the Medal of Honor.

Puckett recalled in an oral history project that it was freezing cold on Nov. 25, 1950, the day his company was preparing to take their objective which would require them to move across 800 yards of “open, clear, frozen rice paddies.” While moving to the hill, the citation reads, Puckett “deliberately exposed himself to enemy machine gun fire to enable his men to spot locations of the machine guns.” They lost four Rangers and one Korean soldier, Puckett recalled.

After taking Hill 205 the company was soon hit by Chinese forces in what would be the first of several assaults. Puckett was wounded by a hand grenade, but called in an artillery strike and stopped the attack. He recalled that he went to check the

perimeter when he heard Chinese forces blowing whistles and bugles again, signaling another coming attack.

He called for artillery once again and stopped the second assault. Two more would follow it.

In the early hours of the following morning, Puckett heard whistles and bugles from the Chinese forces which he knew was signaling yet another attack. This time, however, when he called for artillery he was told it wouldn’t be possible to get it immediately because of another mission happening at the same time.

“I went back and started checking the perimeter again, doing whatever I was supposed to be doing. The pressure increased, I ran back to the fox hole, got on [the radio], same story: ‘We’ll give it [artillery] to you as soon as this mission is fired,’” Puckett recalled. “I said, ‘We’re under great pressure. We’re crumbling. We’re being overrun. I just gave my unit the word to withdraw.’ And that was the end of the conversation.”

By that point Puckett had been wounded three times. After finishing his call on the radio, Puckett said he was lying in the foxhole “unable to do anything.”

“I could see three Chinese about 15 yards away from me and they were bayonetting or shooting some of my wounded Rangers ... when all of a sudden two of my Rangers charged up the hill,” he said. It was two privates first class, Billy G. Walls and David L. Pollock, according to the Post. Puckett said they shot and killed the three Chinese soldiers and came over to where he was lying on the ground.

“Walls said ‘Sir, you hurt?’ I thought that was the dumbest question I’d ever heard in my life. But I didn’t say that to Walls, I said, ‘I’m hurt bad, I can’t move, leave me behind.’ Walt hands his rifle to Pollock — Walls was a big man, still is — picks me up, throws me over his shoulder, starts staggering down a very steep mountain face with Pollock giving covering fire.”

Eventually, Walls set Puckett down saying he was too heavy to carry. He and Pollock each grabbed one of Puckett’s wrists and they dragged him the rest of the way to the bottom of the hill.

Puckett said in the video that he’s “been very proud” of his Rangers who held off a series of attacks from what was estimated to be several hundred enemy soldiers. Good training is the basis for success, he said, which is exactly what those Rangers had that freezing day in November 1950.

“I have to add, in conclusion of that story of Hill 205 that I certainly am pleased and glad that Walls and Pollock disobeyed my order to leave me behind on the hill you wouldn’t be talking to me, I wouldn’t be talking to you today,” he said. “They saved my neck.”

After Korea, Puckett also served an 11-month combat tour in Vietnam in 1967-68 in the 101st Airborne Division before retiring from active duty in 1971 with the rank of colonel.

Helping Hands for Our Fellow Veterans



Won't You Please Give a Helping Hand to a Brother or Sister Veteran?

Several veterans have contacted Chapter 120 asking for help in paying the most basic of needs for themselves and their families. These veterans are those who do not qualify for regular federal, state or local assistance – they fall into that financial category where they make too much to qualify for assistance, but not enough to afford basic needs for their families, like food, fuel for heat, or clothing for their children.

Chapter 120 has decided to ask you – our members – to lend a helping hand to your fellow veterans and their families. Won't you please consider donating for this worthy cause? Even a small amount of \$5 can make a difference – or more if you can afford to help a fellow veteran and his or her family.

Please send your generous gift, made out to Connecticut Chapter 120, to:

Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.
Connecticut Chapter 120
Attention: Helping Hands for Veterans
P.O. Box 4136
Hartford, CT 06145

Chapter 120 has established a separate line item in the budget to collect donations to assist these fellow veterans and their families in need. *And don't forget, your donations are tax deductible.*

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 July/August 2021 newsletter is 9 July 2021. Due to space availability, the editor reserves the right to include or not include photos for a given month.

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