



# The Sentinel



Vol. 8 No. 7

Vietnam Veterans of America – Chapter 1002 – Wallkill Valley  
P.O. box 463, Vernon, NJ 07462 - 973-271-2413

October 2021

Website: [www.VVA1002.org](http://www.VVA1002.org)

President: John Harrigan

1<sup>st</sup> Vice President: John Brady

Secretary: Carl Ohlson

2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President: Walt Hazelman

Chaplin: George Burns

Treasurer: Owen Martin

Sergeant at Arms: Ted Andrews

## **FROM THE MINEFIELD:**

*Submitted by John Harrigan*

As some things are still being curtailed there is really not much going on in the Veterans community. The Salute to Veterans at the Fairgrounds scheduled for 11/7 has been canceled and will be held virtually. Whatever that means? From what I understand it was canceled due to the large number of people being older and in a confined space (The Richards Building) and they would be eating. Just my thoughts, why not have the parade for the Veterans and forget the food. Maybe next year will be different?

Veterans Day will be celebrated at the Cemetery on 11/11 at 11 am. We again will be placing Flags on the 400 graves, so if you have time come out and give us a hand.

On Sunday November 14<sup>th</sup> at 2pm a Veterans Mass will be celebrated for all Veterans here at St Francis de Sales Church. This is a Mass for all Veterans, and family members. There will be refreshments after the Mass in Boland Hall and all are invited to attend. Please try and attend this Mass in honor of all Veterans no matter where or when they served.

Our last meeting of the year will be on November 28<sup>th</sup> and the Girl Scouts will be serving us a lunch in honor of Veterans Day.

That's it for now. See you at the Meeting.

## **1<sup>st</sup> VICE PRESIDENT:**

*Submitted by John Brady*

Happy Birthday to the United States Navy, October 13, 1775 "A GLOBAL FORCE FOR GOOD".

Not much to report this month, we are still meeting Thursday mornings in St. Charles Room at St. Francis de Sales Church from 0900 to approx. 1200. So come and enjoy some good company and have a few laughs besides "solving" all the worlds' problems. 🤖

You can also meet Flynn, Matt Fredericks' dog who has adopted us as her official service group. She loves the attention and being petted to the point of exhaustion.

One item to report is that the Salute to Veterans Parade at the Sussex County Fairgrounds has been cancelled due to COVID 19 concerns. It was scheduled for Sunday, November 7. However, Daylight Savings will still end on that day regardless, remember to turn your clocks, digital or otherwise, back one hour.

## **SERVICE OFFICER:**

*Submitted by Skip Kays*

If you want any further information, or have any suggestions you can contact me at 973 459-9392 or at [skays1@embarqmail.com](mailto:skays1@embarqmail.com)

## **The VA "gives" and the VA takes away**

Word is that VA benefits will get a "hefty" COLA increase next year. I think I heard close to 55, but don't quote me. It may also show up in December. Time will tell.

*Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another!*

### **From a VA Press Release from last week, Time to sped up processing claims . . . again.**

Starting in October, the VA will hire and train new staff to ensure Veterans' claims are adjudicated quickly and help reduce an expected increase in the backlog of claims pending more than 125 days. VA is taking the following proactive steps to help in the reduction:

1. Hire and train 2,000 new employees to assist in claims processing.
2. Leverage authority to transfer CARES funding to VBA and utilize the American Rescue Plan to fund overtime to ensure timely claims processing.
3. Deploy requested Fiscal Year 2022 budget resources to support Agent Orange presumptive processing, as well as for general Compensation and Pension claims processing.

As of October 11, there were more than 204,000 backlog claims in an inventory of 603,000 total claims. VA identified more than 70,000 claims to review for additional entitlement stemming from the presumptive relationship between Agent Orange and Parkinsonism, bladder cancer, and hypothyroidism. Many of these will enter the backlog in October, which is projected to reach 260,000 pending claims.

"VA is committed to ensuring timely access to benefits and services for all veterans. This includes making sure that veterans who may have experienced adverse health effects from military related exposures can get access to the benefits they need," said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "As we process claims such as those for three new disabilities presumptively linked to Agent Orange exposure, including proactive application of Nehmer provisions, as well as three new Gulf War particulate exposure presumptives, we anticipate the claims backlog to increase this fall. The hiring of new employees will help us resolve these claims more quickly."

Several factors have contributed to the recent backlog. Beginning in March 2020, operational changes necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an untimely delay of the Federal Records Centers' retrieval of documents and suspended Compensation and Pension (C&P) examinations. VA workload has also increased as a result of the aforementioned recent decisions and actions, including a court order mandating the review of previously denied Veterans on the basis of qualifying service in the 12 nautical miles surrounding Vietnam.

The backlog has decreased by more than 14,000 claims since the end of August 2021.

### **And VA Resumes Overpayment and Medical Copayment Collections:**

VA is resuming over-payment notifications for new debts

and debts that were paused during the COVID-19 pandemic from Apr. 6, 2020, through Sept. 30, 2021. Although debt collections and collections on medical copayments restarted on Oct. 1, 2021, VA will not begin to deduct debts from benefits payments until Jan. 2022. Options to request debt relief due to financial hardship will be included in debt notification letters that will be sent to veterans.

### **Veterans Legacy Memorial expands to include VA-grant funded state, territorial and tribal Veterans cemeteries**

The Department of Veterans Affairs expanded the Veterans Legacy Memorial site October 2021 to include individual pages for nearly 500,000 Veterans interred in 93 state, territorial and tribal Veterans' cemeteries. These pages join the nearly four million VLM pages already on the site memorializing Veterans interred in VA's 155 national cemeteries.

VLM offers family and friends a way to share lasting memories of a Veteran by uploading written tributes, photos, biographies, documents, and other information to Veterans' pages.

"VLM offers families a meaningful way to pay tribute to our Veterans," said Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Matthew Quinn. "Because of the expansion of VLM to VA grant-funded State, Territorial and Tribal Veterans cemeteries, many families — including my own — will have the opportunity to memorialize their Veterans online."

The 93 cemeteries which will have their Veterans added to VLM are all recipients of VA grants through the National Cemetery Administration's Veterans Cemetery Grants Program. These cemeteries also use the same software program NCA uses to schedule and record interments in VA national cemeteries, which provides the foundation for each Veteran's page in VLM.

"Memorializing our nation's Veterans and providing their families with a way to honor and remember their service is important to every state and territory," said National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs president Thomas Palladino. "NASDVA is excited to see the National Cemetery Administration's sustained efforts to grow VLM and tell the stories of the men and women who served, and our members will continue to utilize and promote it in our state and tribal territories."

More than 22,000 submissions have been made to Veteran's profile pages in VLM since the site launched in 2019. All content submitted to VLM is reviewed by NCA moderators before being posted to a Veteran's page to ensure it conforms to the VLM User Policy.

For more information contact NCA's Chief of Digital Services at James.LaPaglia@va.gov.



# The Sentinel



Vol. 8 No. 7

Vietnam Veterans of America – Chapter 1002 – Wallkill Valley

October 2021

Website: [www.VVA1002.org](http://www.VVA1002.org)

## S. Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry - You can get one also



One of my old shipmates in Utah told me that this information had been passing around in his veteran's group. I did some research and it appears to be for real.

The Vietnam Cross of Gallantry is the equivalent of the French Croix de Guerre. The VCOG was originally authorized only to specific individuals and units. In May, 1974 the Government of (South) Vietnam (Republic of Vietnam) authorized the VCOG all foreign military personnel and units for valorous chievement/participation during the Vietnam conflict, March 1, 1961 through March 28, 1973. In April 1975 the GVN re-authorized the VCOG to all foreign military personnel who served in Vietnam until the end of the war, including foreign personnel who risked their lives in the final evacuation operations (General Order 8, MACV). All recipients of the Vietnam Service Medal and Armed Forces

Expeditionary Medal (Vietnam) are also authorized the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry.

The VCOG is a symbol of gratitude to all Allied soldiers, sailors, Marines and airpersonnel who worked and fought and sacrificed themselves for the freedom of the Republic of Vietnam. Authorization to all foreign military personnel was presented by the GVN to Military Assistance Command, Vietnam and all subordinate units under General Order 8, 1974.

I have a somewhat lengthy list of details as to how to get it officially added to your DD214 (if you don't already have it). Contact me and I will email them to you.

The upshot is that on the above date in 1974 all US personnel who served and had the Vietnam Service Medal qualified. Having left Vietnam in 1971 and the Navy in 1973, not a shock that I, along with a lot of other people didn't know.

## WOMEN VETERANS:

*Submitted by Walt Hazelman*

No report.

## POW/MIA:

*Submitted by Bob Gilbert*

No report.

## AGENT ORANGE:

*Submitted by Owen Martin*

**When Rivers Are Contaminated, Floods Are Only the First Problem**



As floods increase in frequency and intensity, chemicals buried in river sediments become “ticking time bombs” waiting to activate.

Hurricane Harvey flooded or damaged at least 13 Superfund sites in 2017, sending cancer-causing compounds into Texas waterways.

Dioxins—the category of chemicals that includes Agent Orange—have been banned in the United States since 1979. But that doesn’t mean they’re gone. Like in the plot of countless scary movies, dioxins and other banned chemicals are just buried beneath the surface waiting to be unearthed.

A new perspective paper in Journal of Hazardous Materials calls attention to an understudied area: the remobilization of pollutants buried in riverbeds. Chemicals have a knack for binding to sediments, meaning chemical spills in rivers frequently seep into sediments instead of flowing downstream. Future layers of silt bury the pollutants and hide the problem.

But persistent chemicals in riverbeds are “ticking time bombs,” warned Sarah Crawford, an environmental toxicologist at Goethe University Frankfurt and lead author of the paper. The buried chemicals can easily be remobilized. “It just takes one flood event,” she said.

### Blue Water Vietnam Veterans are Getting Benefits Payouts, but not Always the Right Amount



By Leo Shane III - Blue Water Vietnam veterans are getting their disability benefits paid out by the Department of Veterans Affairs, but it might not be

exactly how much they deserve, according to a new watchdog report.

The VA Inspector General’s Office found that while department staff have done a good job at getting benefits flowing to newly eligible veterans covered by the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act two years ago, nearly half of the claims decisions investigators reviewed from 2020 were “inaccurate.”

The mistakes total an estimated \$37 million: about \$12 million in underpayments based on veterans eligibility and \$25 million more in excess payments to individuals.

“Employees did not always know how to correctly process these claims, particularly determining accurate retroactive effective dates for evaluations,” investigators stated in the IG report, released late last week. “[Benefits officials] should increase oversight to help ensure employees processing these claims clearly understand how to correctly evaluate and decide them.”

Benefits for ‘blue water’ veterans finalized after years-long fight

The move ends a years-long fight to get faster disability benefits for up to 90,000 Navy veterans who served in Vietnam.

In a statement, VA officials told the Inspector General that they have improved training in recent months and put in place “special focused quality reviews” to address the problem.

### COMMUNITY/PUBLIC AFFAIRS:

*Submitted by Lou Storms*

No report.

### Scheduled Meetings:

Meetings are held at 2:00 p.m. the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of each month unless otherwise **noted**.

#### 2021

24<sup>th</sup> October

28<sup>th</sup> November

**December – NO meeting**

#### 2022

23<sup>rd</sup> January

27<sup>th</sup> February

27<sup>th</sup> March

24<sup>th</sup> April

22<sup>nd</sup> May

26<sup>th</sup> June

24<sup>th</sup> July

28<sup>th</sup> August



# The Sentinel



Vol. 8 No. 7

Vietnam Veterans of America – Chapter 1002 – Wallkill Valley

October 2021

Website: [www.VVA1002.org](http://www.VVA1002.org)

---

**Dates to have information in for the newsletter:**

21<sup>st</sup> November

16<sup>th</sup> January

**Calendar of Events:**

Visit [www.VVA1002.org](http://www.VVA1002.org) for information on upcoming events.

## **NEW MEMBERS:**

### **“WELCOME HOME”**

No report.

## **PASSINGS:**

No report.

## **Homeless Committee:**

We still are in need of someone to take over this committee so if you or you know of someone who is interested, please contact John Harrigan.

## **MEMBERS CORNER:**

*Submitted by Owen Martin*

### **VA Extends Disability Deadline for Gulf War Vets**

The Department of Veterans Affairs has extended the time limit for Gulf War veterans to claim presumptive disability for certain chronic illnesses related to their military service.

The illnesses, commonly referred to as “Gulf War Syndrome,” are considered “presumptive” by the VA, meaning veterans claiming a disability related to them are not required to prove they were caused by military service.

While there is no time limit for claiming disability benefits from the VA in normal circumstances, some presumptive conditions do come with time restrictions.

According to the Disabled Veterans Of America (DAV) Gulf War Syndrome affects approximately 200,000 veterans of the 650,000 service members who served in operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

To qualify as disabling, a covered illness must have caused illness or symptoms in the veteran for at least six months and:

- Occurred during service in the Southwest Asia theater of military operations from Aug. 2, 1990, to the present. This also includes Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003-2010) and Operation New Dawn (2010-2011), or;
- Been diagnosed as at least 10% disabling by the VA after service.

Originally the VA was scheduled to stop awarding benefits to new Gulf War veterans with a related disability diagnosis that was given after Dec. 31, 2021. However, the VA has extended that cutoff date to Dec. 31, 2026.

## **MISCELLANEOUS:**

1. **Special Note: If you are a veteran in emotional crisis and need help RIGHT NOW, call (toll free 24/7) 1-800-273-8255 and tell them you are a veteran. All calls are confidential.**
2. Jackets (\$60 (summer) & \$70 (winter)); t-shirts (\$15); hats (\$10); golf shirts (short sleeve \$28; long sleeve \$33) are still available. See Owen Martin for purchases or to place an order (pre-payment for orders are appreciated)
3. Important note to families of deceased veterans, and/or requestors: *Submitted by Bob Caggiano*  
It is the right of every deceased Veteran to have a Military honors team attend the graveside service, to present the Flag at no charge to the family. Honors Teams are sent out, at the expense of the US Government.  
In January 2000, Congress passed legislation guaranteeing Veterans the right to at least two uniformed servicemen, a flag ceremony, and the playing of TAPS at their funeral. Unfortunately, there are not enough buglers to play TAPS, so the historic melody has been played on a CD player at many Veterans' last ceremony, or more currently on a bugle that plays Taps using an electronic insert. The volunteer organization "Bugles Across America" (a.k.a. BAA) was created to honor the service of veterans by providing Taps live by a bugler using a real instrument (such as a bugle, trumpet, cornet, or flugelhorn) at funerals or any other ceremony requiring a bugler. There are currently over 7500 volunteer buglers nationwide in all 50 states, and some overseas who stand ready to serve. BAA volunteers perform Taps as a free service.  
As a Vietnam era veteran member of VVA Chapter 1002 and a BAA volunteer bugler, I am available to play for anyone who needs a bugler for Taps (or other appropriate bugle calls) for any honorable discharged veteran or related military ceremony. In the event I cannot play because of a scheduling conflict, I can generally still provide a substitute bugler so please contact me - Bob Caggiano, USAF Veteran, (973) 222-7591 (cell) or FinalTaps@gmail.com.





# The Sentinel



Vol. 8 No. 7

Vietnam Veterans of America – Chapter 1002 – Wallkill Valley

October 2021

Website: [www.VVA1002.org](http://www.VVA1002.org)

---

## **Editors Corner:**

By Linda Skellenger (AVVA)

Please have information to be included in the November newsletter to me by Sunday, November 21<sup>st</sup> by email: [skelle@ptd.net](mailto:skelle@ptd.net) or by snail-mail to:

Linda Skellenger  
174 Lewisburg Rd.  
Sussex, N.J. 07461