



The Sentinel

Vol. 8 No. 8

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

November 2021

Website: www.VVA1002.org

President: John Harrigan

1st Vice President: John Brady

Secretary: Carl Ohlson

2nd Vice President: Walt Hazelman

Chaplin: George Burns

Treasurer: Owen Martin

Sergeant at Arms: Ted Andrews

FROM THE MINEFIELD:

Submitted by John Harrigan

Veterans Day was again celebrated at the Veterans Cemetery in Sparta with about 100 people in attendance for the service and to place Flags on the 400 graves. I would like to Thank all the Chapter Members who attended, and the ones who were the Honor Guard and George Burns our Chaplin for doing the invocation and the prayers. After the service I represented the Chapter at the Sussex County Rotary meeting and talked about what we as a Chapter do to help Veterans and some of what is needed in the Veteran Community.

On Sunday November 14th we had the Veterans Mass here at St Francis De Sales and that was also attended by about 100 Veterans and their family. I was approached by some people after the service and was told it was the best one we have had. I would like to Thank Fr Chris and the Staff of St Francis for the meal they supplied in Boland Hall. I can't Thank them enough for what St Francis Church has done for the Veteran's.

Thank Linda Skellenger for continuing to do our monthly newsletter. She has really been a great help in getting all the information out there for our members.

This will be our last meeting this year and this year there will be no Christmas party but we will see what we can do about having one next year.

I want to wish everyone a Merry Christmas



and Happy New Year and hope to see more of our members coming back in the new year. Our next meeting will be January 23rd at 2pm.

See you at the meeting.

1st VICE PRESIDENT:

Submitted by John Brady

First off Happy Birthday United States Marine Corps, November 10, 1775 "SEMPER FIDELIS"

Wish to extend a big thank-you to Fr. Chris, the office staff and choir at St. Francis de Sales for the Veterans Mass on Sunday November 14. Also to the Boy Scouts for attending and assisting for handing out the pamphlets and dishing out the food and cleanup afterwards.

I would also like to thank the Boy Scouts for the flag retirement ceremony on Thursday evening November 18. The ceremony was conducted with great respect for our flag and the veterans who attended.

Hope many of you can attend our monthly meeting on Sunday, November 28 at 14:00. The meeting will be in St. Charles room where we've been holding them but afterwards we'll go upstairs to Boland Hall where the students from Sussex Vo-Tech will be serving us food. I heard chipped beef on toast will be the main course!!!! 😊😊😊

Finally, I want to wish everyone a Happy, Safe and Healthy Thanksgiving.

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

Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another!

I came across this which deals with Navy Vets. I would believe that the other services are, or will do the same.

Settlement Spurs Navy to Take Another Look at 'Bad Paper' Discharges of Traumatized Vets

15 Oct 2021 Stars and Stripes | By Alison Bath.

The U.S. Navy has agreed to review more than nine years' worth of "bad paper" discharges given to thousands of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder or certain other trauma-related health conditions.

That announcement follows preliminary court approval Tuesday of a settlement of a 2018 lawsuit alleging that a Navy board had improperly denied a Marine Corps veteran's request for a better discharge status.

The suit was filed by Tyson Manker and the National Veterans Council for Legal Redress. Manker, who served from 1999 to 2003 and earned multiple awards and commendations, received an other-than-honorable discharge for smoking marijuana.

The settlement would require the Navy to review discharge status upgrade applications made to the Naval Discharge Review Board between March 2, 2012, and the effective date of the settlement.

The review applies to Navy and Marine Corps veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan era who were given general or other-than-honorable discharges and were partially or fully denied upgrade relief, the Navy said Wednesday.

The settlement also expands reapplication rights for eligible applicants who were discharged and received an adverse review board decision between Oct. 7, 2001, and March 2, 2012, the Navy said.

In addition, the Navy agreed to provide discharge review board members and staffers with annual training in PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, military sexual trauma and other behavioral or mental health conditions, according to the settlement.

In the lawsuit, Manker contended that the review board had unfairly rejected his request for a discharge status upgrade despite evidence that he had developed post-traumatic stress disorder and a traumatic brain injury after returning from deployment to Iraq in 2003.

The board adjudicates applications from Navy and Marine Corps veterans seeking to upgrade their general or other-than-honorable discharges.

Those discharges, also known as "bad paper," stigmatize veterans and keep them from receiving health care, education and other military service benefits.

Other service branches also are under scrutiny for similar discharges, including the Air Force, which was sued in September by two veterans claiming

discrimination against service members with mental health conditions.

Manker's lawsuit argued that among other failings, the board was not complying with a 2014 memorandum from then-Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel directing military review boards to consider PTSD and related conditions as mitigating factors in an other-than-honorable condition of service.

[Update on the S. Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry – for those interested](#)



I may have said this last month, but confirmed with reviewing various DOD and service organization papers.

You are authorized this medal if you have the Vietnam Service Medal and don't have to do anything if you want it, etc. However if you want it to be part of your record then you have to go through the effort of securing a DD-215.

[New Jersey got in the act and authorized a Vietnam and other service medals.](#)

Lou Storms mentioned this to me so I followed up a bit.

According to the NJ website listed below, (although you can just search for NJ Vietnam medal) <https://www.nj.gov/military/veterans/services/awards/vietnam-service.shtml>.

This is the story from the website:

"The Vietnam Service Medal was created by the New Jersey Legislature in 2000 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the United States, North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the National Liberation Front's provisional revolutionary government signing an agreement to end the war in Vietnam.

The conflict that was declared over in 1973 was a uniquely important event in the political and domestic history of Southeast Asia and of this country. The United States' involvement in that conflict resulted in great domestic turmoil and dispute in this nation, as well as more than 50,000 American soldiers killed, including 1,515 from New Jersey.

It is fitting and proper for this State to recognize and honor those among its residents who served proudly and



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those who died bravely in that conflict on the 25th anniversary of its ending, because in 1973 those same individuals were often ignored or scorned for their service to their country.”



The application process is fairly simple, almost. On the website is an application form.

They have different medals, Distinguished Service Medal; Meritorious Service Medal; Korean Service Medal; Vietnam Service Medal; POW-MIA Medal; Desert Storm Medal; and Global War on Terrorism Medal.

The State will either mail it to you if you ask, or award it in an in person ceremony which they have started doing again. It seems that they are really interested on doing the in person ceremonies. I don't know if they send someone out from Trenton to do this or they forward them to the veteran's organization to perform.

It is available for posthumous awards also.

I had some correspondence with the office, and mailed in my application in mid-October. Having heard nothing I contacted them the other day and was told that they had not received the application. This is not atypical when dealing with the State government. But, they accepted my application by email. I was told that in the case where no ceremony is requested it takes about two weeks to mail them out, assuming they get it in the first place. We shall see.

These of course are commemorative medals, not actual military service medals. I had wondered for instance about all the pictures of Civil War Veterans

taken later on in life and many had a bunch of medals showing. I did a little research and as for the North, the only medal issued was the MOH, so, most of those medals were commemorative in nature.

My great great grandfather from Cannonsville, NY served in the Civil War, Company A, 144th Regiment from NY. I have a picture of him in the service uniform, and just before he died at 100 years sold. He was a member of the Grand Army of the Republic organization and like many if not most of those kind of organizations back then, they issued their own medals. Frequently pretty flashy ones.

If you want any further information on this feel free to contact me.

WOMEN VETERANS:

Submitted by Walt Hazelman

No report.

POW/MIA:

Submitted by Bob Gilbert

No report.

AGENT ORANGE:

Submitted by Owen Martin

[Agent Orange Exposed Veterans](#)

are eligible for free VA health care for exposure-associated diseases

- [PETITION FOR RULEMAKING](#)
- [REFERENCES](#)
- [ABOUT](#)

1. -
2. Significance of the Asymptomatic Disease MGUS to Veterans' Advocates

« [THE STEALTH AGENT ORANGE DISEASE Significance of the Asymptomatic Disease MGUS to Veterans' Advocates](#)

10 Oct 2021 | [Uncategorized](#)

This article addresses the question “Why should Veterans’ advocates care that Agent Orange exposed Veterans are over twice as likely as unexposed Veterans to be diagnosed with the generally asymptomatic disease MGUS?” Recent research by scientists at the NIH, CDC, and others that showed that MGUS is significantly more prevalent in Agent Orange exposed Veterans is described in a [previous post](#). Why is this a big deal?

Findings of [recent research by Mayo Clinic scientists](#) that answer our question are presented in Table 1 below. This research quantified the percentage of Mayo Clinic patients with either of the two major biologic subtypes of MGUS (IgM MGUS and non-IgM MGUS) who progressed to each of five diseases that are on the current presumptive Agent Orange list over a 34 year period.

Significantly, lifelong monitoring of patients with MGUS showed that almost one in six (16.2 percent) of IgM MGUS patients and more than one in eleven (9.4 percent) of non-IgM MGUS patients progressed to an Agent Orange disease during the study period. IgM MGUS patients were 13.1 times more likely and non-IgM patients were 8.3 times more likely to be subsequently diagnosed with the deadly Agent Orange disease AL (light chain) amyloidosis compared to a general population served by the Mayo Clinic.

Moreover, non-IgM MGUS patients were 27.5 times more likely to be diagnosed with the often painful Agent Orange disease multiple myeloma. While multiple myeloma remains incurable, in recent years new therapeutic agents have been approved for multiple myeloma which has led to a [significant improvement in survival](#), particularly if the disease is diagnosed early.

IgM MGUS patients were 287.7 times more likely to be diagnosed with the incurable Agent Orange disease Waldenstrom macroglobulinemia and 10.6 times more likely to be diagnosed with other non-Hodgkin’s lymphomas. As with multiple myeloma, it is an exciting time for Waldenstrom macroglobulinemia therapy development with [novel and promising treatment options](#) on the horizon.

Research has shown that the [health outcomes](#) of MGUS patients are likely to be better when MGUS patients are aware they have MGUS and when they are monitored for progression and complications by their healthcare provider. It is for this reason that the Chief of Myeloma Service at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York, Dr. Ola Landgren, (and the lead author of the research first mentioned above) has recommended that Agent Orange exposed Veterans be [screened for MGUS](#).

In fact, because of the significance of MGUS, a research team has recently invited over 140,000 of Iceland’s citizens to be screened to see if they have MGUS to confirm the hypothesis that nation-

wide [screening for MGUS](#) is beneficial. Those diagnosed with MGUS are being invited to participate in a large randomized clinical trial to determine the optimum way to monitor (follow-up) MGUS patients for progression and complications. One arm of the randomized clinical trial is assessing a more intensive lifetime MGUS monitoring regime that includes regular blood and urine tests for AL amyloidosis, which is often not diagnosed until it is too late. This regime reflects the reality [documented by an international expert](#) in diagnosis and treatment of amyloidosis at the Mayo Clinic, Dr. Morie Gertz, that “At Mayo Clinic, 9% of all patients seen with a monoclonal gammopathy are ultimately proven to have light chain amyloidosis. Even adjusting for referral bias, 3–4% of all patients with monoclonal proteins seen have light chain amyloid. Furthermore, if a provider does not see one patient with AL amyloidosis for every five patients with multiple myeloma, it is likely the diagnosis is being overlooked.”

So, the answer to the above question is as follows: Veterans’ advocates should care that Agent Orange exposed Veterans are much more likely to have the pre-malignant disease MGUS because life-long monitoring of MGUS patients and earlier interventions using recently-discovered therapies are likely to improve Veteran health outcomes. As was noted above, progression to the current Agent Orange diseases listed in Table 1 are much more likely to occur among MGUS patients than in the general population. In [accordance with US law](#), Veterans should be offered no-cost VA healthcare for monitoring of MGUS for progression and complications, and treatment of MGUS to prevent progression to current Agent Orange diseases or complications, if medically appropriate.

If you do care, take up this advice of the famous American cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Then join the Vietnam Veterans of America in asking your members of Congress to support bills that would [add MGUS to the Agent Orange presumptive list](#).



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Table 1. Relative Risk to a Group of Mayo Clinic MGUS Patients for Progression to Current Presumptive Agent Orange Diseases, by MGUS Subtype^a

Current presumptive diseases associated with Agent Orange exposure to which MGUS may progress	Percent of MGUS patients who progressed over time to an indicated presumptive Agent Orange disease		How much more likely MGUS patients were to progress to an indicated Agent Orange disease compared to the risk in a general population	
	IgM MGUS patients	Non-IgM MGUS patients	IgM MGUS Patients	Non-IgM MGUS patients
AL (light chain) amyloidosis	1.4%	1.0%	13.1 times more likely	8.3 times more likely
Chronic B-cell leukemia (CLL)	1.4%	0.0	4.3 times	0.0
Multiple myeloma	0.0	8.2%	0.0	27.5 times
Waldenstrom macroglobulinemia, a type of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma	5.2%	0	287.7 times	0.0
Other non-Hodgkin's lymphomas	8.1%	0.2%	10.6 times	0.2 times
Progression to any of the above Agent Orange diseases	16.2%	9.4%	10.8 times	5.7 times

^aKyle, R. A. et al. Long-term follow-up of monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance. *N. Engl. J. Med.* 378, 241–249 (2018).

COMMUNITY/PUBLIC AFFAIRS:

Submitted by Lou Storms

Some of you may remember Sandy Mitchell from Project Help, spoke at one of our meetings a couple of years ago.

Project Help has grown through the years and is very active in providing help to veterans in need.

Project Help has two active campaigns right now. They have a Christmas Toy Drive underway. Donations will be accepted from December 12th thru December 18th. Donations should be new, unwrapped and can be anything from Hats, Scarves & Gloves, Art Supplies, Craft Kits, Games and Books, to Toy Trucks and Dolls, etc. They will be distributed to veteran and military families on December 19th.

They are also asking for gently used or new, Men's Winter Coats, Sweatshirts, Pants, Boots and Gloves, which will be distributed to homeless and at

risk veterans. Socks, Hats and Underwear must be new. Donations accepted from November 20th thru December 18th.

Items can be dropped off at 125 Morris Tpk, Newton or 55 Bank Street, Sussex up until December 18th. Call 862-266-9726 for drop off times.

Scheduled Meetings:

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

2021

28th November

December – NO meeting

2022

23rd January

27th February

27th March

24th April

22nd May

26th June

24th July

28th August

Dates to have information in for the newsletter:

16th January

Calendar of Events:

Visit 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 Walt Hazelman

The unclaimed soldier: Thousands of veterans, especially from the Vietnam era, die alone every year

BY

MARY JORDAN AND KEVIN SULLIVAN

• THE WASHINGTON POST • NOVEMBER 11, 2021

DES MOINES — Everyone on the third floor of South View Manor was accounted for except James Dean Ryan in Room #301. A police officer, checking on a worrying smell, opened his door and found Ryan face down on his living room floor, another Vietnam veteran who died alone.

Ryan's son and other relatives were notified, but many wanted nothing to do with him, alive or dead. No one stepped forward to bury him after his death last November. So the 66-year-old with talents for disco dancing and repairing furniture became yet another of America's unclaimed dead.

There is no requirement for local governments — who are responsible for unclaimed bodies — to report them to any national authority, so there is no official count. But tens of thousands of lives in the United States end this way each year, according to a Washington

Post investigation that included more than 100 interviews over six months with medical examiners and local officials from Maine to California.

A striking number — thousands every year — served in the military, especially during the Vietnam War, according to funeral directors who directly handle their bodies.

"Vietnam vets got the rawest deal of anyone," said Jim Mowrer, an Iraq War veteran who never met Ryan but volunteered to carry his urn at his Iowa funeral in June. "We have a lot of making up to do to Vietnam vets."

While those who served in uniform after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks are publicly thanked for their service, soldiers in the 1960s and 1970s were often

jeered. Back then, the United States was fighting a long war against North Vietnam, a communist nation supported by the Soviet Union and China, that many felt was unwinnable. It caused massive civilian casualties in Southeast Asia and street protests around the United States.

"One of the most painful chapters in our history was Vietnam — most particularly, how we treated our troops," President Barack Obama told Vietnam veterans in 2012, on the 50th anniversary of the start of the war. "You were often blamed for a war you didn't start. ... You came home and sometimes were denigrated, when you should have been celebrated. It was a national shame."

More than 8 million people served in uniform during Vietnam and those who are alive are typically in their 60s and 70s. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 530 Vietnam veterans die every day.

The overwhelming number are buried by family and friends. But a growing army of strangers are volunteering to wave flags and say prayers for the thousands who have no one.

"They're estranged from their family. They die alone. They commit suicide," said Linda Smith of the Missing in America Project, which helps arrange funerals for unclaimed veterans. "They don't have anyone to mourn them — that's what we do. The number is huge. It's really sad."

Last year, 1,752 unclaimed veterans were buried in the 150 veterans' cemeteries run by the federal government, according to the VA. An unknown number of others were buried in state-run cemeteries, like the Iowa Veterans Cemetery where Ryan was interred. Still more were buried in the thousands of private cemeteries all over the country.

— — —
Ryan was 20 and recently married when he joined the Army in 1974. His father had served during the Korean War, his grandfather fought in World War II and Ryan felt it was his turn.

So the Iowa high school dropout with plans of opening a furniture-repair shop became an expert marksman with an M-16.

The transition was rough.

He rarely spoke about what happened after he enlisted, but according to his ex-wife Linda Janes, "It did a job on him."

He went to Fort Bragg, N.C., where his training included jumping out of planes and parachuting into mock Vietnamese villages built on the Army base. He was never sent to Southeast Asia, nor were most of those who served during Vietnam.

But Ryan was deeply disturbed by his training in survival behind enemy lines, according to relatives. At the time, there were widely publicized accounts of the torture endured by American prisoners of war, including



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John McCain, a Naval officer who became a U.S. senator from Arizona. Two friends of Ryan's were killed.

According to Ryan's military records, he was honorably discharged, but only after being granted unexplained "excess leave."

"He had a nervous breakdown," said Janes, Ryan's second wife, who married him two years after he left the Army.

One month after he returned home, his first wife, Pamela, divorced him. He seemed changed, according to those who knew him at the time, and could become violent and angry. A judge signed a decree giving Pamela custody of their 2-year-old daughter and Ryan "his shotgun, tools and toolbox."

A remarkable 38 percent of service members sent to Vietnam were divorced within six months of returning home, according to a study cited by VA.

Ryan let his military crew cut grow out until his thick brown hair reached his shoulders. He took jobs plastering walls and welding pipes and he met Janes, a local girl who loved how he danced to the Bee Gees, Abba and Diana Ross. "I always wanted a guy who was a good dancer — and he was a heck of a dancer."

She also saw his pain. In apparent flashbacks to his Army training exercises, she said, "at times, he cried to me about how they would drop him down and [he would] see kids strapped with dynamite."

She said when she or Ryan dealt with the VA, which runs a massive system of hospitals and outpatient facilities, it was so frustrating, they often just gave up.

Lori Wetlaufer, Ryan's stepsister, said he told her at least twice over the years how upset he was at not being able to get an appointment with a VA doctor. The last time she ran into him was at a gas station a year before he died, looking gaunt, and buying beer and cigarettes.

Janes said the military knew Ryan had a mental breakdown, but "there was no follow-up." She is sure Ryan suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. He left the Army in 1975 and PTSD was only officially recognized as a psychiatric disorder in 1980.

Now, there is a far greater public understanding of how witnessing terrifying events can trigger depression, anxiety and substance abuse. But Vietnam veterans did not have the same mental health services that are available now.

Janes said she and Ryan were on their own, commiserating with other veterans and their families. She recalled a friend whose husband, a Vietnam veteran, would jump out of bed in the middle of the night and hide in a corner.

Ryan could not stop drinking — whiskey, beer, just about anything. Some people who knew him called him "J.D." and others "Jim," but everyone agreed he could be an angry drunk.

Wetlaufer said Ryan had a sweet side but often turned abrasive and "pushed a lot of people away."

Jerry Dacre, a neighbor who lives in Ryan's apartment building, said not long ago Ryan was stabbed by a man he had let sleep in his apartment. His kind side helped that homeless man, and his angry side then fought with him over money. "When he was sober, he was a good old boy. But when he drank, the demons came out," Dacre said.

Janes said Ryan was at times physically abusive and once pointed a gun at her. She said her son never had the father other kids in the neighborhood had. Janes said Ryan would often apologize and be on good behavior, only to slide back into anger, and go back to drinking liquor and smoking marijuana. After nine years of marriage, she divorced him in 1986.

"He went downhill after that," she said. "His life was so screwed up, and he just burned bridges all the way around."

The Vietnam Veterans of America and its 700 local chapters often help with funerals for the unclaimed. Increasingly, other nonprofit groups are stepping in to help, many of which use social media to invite the public to serve as proxy family.

"I think the root of this problem is PTSD. It causes enormous personal problems," said John Rowan, the national president of the VVA. "We see a lot of these folks who are single or divorced, and they are estranged from their families."

Rowan attended his first funeral for an unclaimed veteran in New York in 2008. That year, amid a national recession that made affording funerals harder for many, local officials began seeing a spike in bodies languishing in morgues. The numbers have continued to rise since.

Rowan said police found John A. White, a former U.S. Army sergeant who had been awarded a chest full of

medals in Vietnam, dead in his hotel room near the Empire State Building. He had very little in his room except his dress uniform hanging in the closet.

"He had nobody in his life," said Rowan. "We gave him a final salute."

Other Vietnam veterans made sure White was buried in his uniform and formed an honor guard for the soldier awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Bronze Star Medal.

After Des Moines police discovered Ryan's body on Nov. 12, the medical examiner found records that he had been treated at a local VA hospital. They called Lanae Strovers at Hamilton's Funeral Home because they knew she had a special interest in burying veterans.

Strovers had lost a friend who suffered from PTSD. She called the VA hospital to warn them that he desperately needed help. His mental health appointments kept getting canceled, and she pleaded with them to let him see a doctor. Three weeks later, she said, he died of an intentional drug overdose.

As Strovers began searching for Ryan's relatives, she saw names of family members listed in his father's obituary. She messaged a stepbrother she found on Facebook. He didn't reply but forwarded the message to his sister, Lori.

She was a lot younger than Ryan and though her mother and his father married later in their lives, she never really spent time with him. Wetlaufer called Ryan's son, but he replied, "No, thank you." He wanted nothing to do with the man who had mistreated his mother and abandoned him.

His parents were dead, no other family members felt close to him and many were angry with him. Wetlaufer told Strovers that having the government bury him was probably the best solution. Aware that money is often a factor when a family declines to bury their relative, the funeral director explained that there were veterans' benefits available to reduce the costs, including a free space in the state military cemetery.

In the end, seven months after he died, he was buried with other unclaimed veterans in a military send-off.

The United States has prioritized veterans' burials since the Civil War, when the public was outraged at bodies left on battlefields and buried in unmarked graves. Some states prohibit a veteran from being buried in a public cemetery for the poor and abandoned.

The federal government spends half a billion dollars a year to bury veterans, from maintaining its cemeteries to the \$27 million for U.S. burial flags presented to families.

Mowrer, the Iraq vet, said he would like more focus on veterans while they are alive. The military excels at training young soldiers and burying dead ones, but Janes said, it "backs away from a lot of things in between."

It's the job of the VA to provide health care and benefits. Its budget is nearly 10 times larger than the Justice Department, which includes the FBI.

Congress is considering the Biden administration's proposed \$270 billion budget for Veterans Affairs for next year, a significant increase to help fund more mental health services, including for substance abuse and suicide prevention.

Last week, President Biden announced new efforts to improve access to mental health care for veterans, noting that an average of 17 veterans a day die by suicide. "We have only one truly sacred obligation as Americans — to prepare and properly equip our women and men in uniform when we send them into harm's way, and to care for them and their families when they return," Biden said.

The VA's bureaucracy, more than its resources, has long been the target of veterans' complaints. Janes said the paperwork required was defeating; a missing ID number or lost document meant no benefit. Several funeral directors interviewed about unclaimed veterans say they stopped applying for federal burial benefits years ago because the process is too cumbersome.

States and counties also offer veteran burial benefits, a rare budget item with bipartisan support. Polk County, Iowa, which includes Des Moines, reimburses funeral homes up to \$2,000 to handle unclaimed veterans, compared to \$750 for unclaimed civilians.

Funerals typically cost more than \$7,500, and funeral homes like Strovers' often donate services for unclaimed veterans. So do a growing army of volunteers.

Every year, the Missing in America Project arranges for services, chaplains, music, flowers and handcrafted urns for hundreds of unclaimed veterans, up from 30 to 40 a year when it launched nationally in 2007.

— — —
On June 18, Ryan and several other unclaimed veterans who ranged in age from 52 to 92 were honored at Hamilton's Funeral Home, where volunteers prayed, recited poems and sang "America the Beautiful."

Then the urns were loaded into a black hearse that was accompanied to the cemetery by 60 motorcycles, five police cruisers and a mile-long procession of cars and trucks. As they arrived, children waved American flags.

"These are heartwarming, but also gut-wrenching," said Terry Mitchel. "There is a reason we wear dark glasses."

Mitchel rode the lead Harley-Davidson for the Patriot Guard Riders, a group formed in 2005 to protect veterans' families from extremists from the Westboro Baptist Church that were disrupting military funerals. Patriot Guard Riders also form funeral honor guards for veterans, including many unclaimed.

At the Iowa gravesite, four kilted bagpipers played mournful tunes and a country artist sang the national



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anthem. Two hundred people came to pay their respects to veterans that almost all of them had never met.

Two uniformed soldiers folded Ryan's burial flag in a precise 13-step ritual.

Strovers picked a volunteer to receive the flag, a state representative, when she got no reply from the family.

Mowrer wore white gloves to carry Ryan's remains in an urn made of polished cherry wood. He placed it in a niche in Wall 7, where a plaque lists Ryan's name and reads, "You are not forgotten."

Usually at unclaimed services, no one who knew the deceased shows up. But Wetlaufer and her husband did. Afterward, she praised the lovely service but said she did feel a pang of sadness when his name was called out as Ryan James instead of James Ryan. It was a reminder that strangers had arranged J.D.'s funeral.

Janes thought about attending. She had heard about it from a friend who saw the public notice of the burial of unclaimed veterans on Facebook.

"I feel bad that nobody wanted to get his body," she said. But she can still feel the pain he caused her before she left him 35 years ago. "If I went, I knew I would cry. I decided that he wasn't going to make me cry anymore."

The Washington Post's Alice Crites contributed to this report.

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.



Editors Corner:

By Linda Skellenger (AVVA)

Please have information to be included in the January newsletter to me by Sunday, January 16th by email: skelle@ptd.net or by snail-mail to:

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