**Disabled American Veterans**

**Department of Florida**

**Newsletter**





**November 2017**

**By Andy Marshall, Executive Director**

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As of October 31, 2017, membership was 56, 937 life members. We are 1, 341 members short of goal

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**IRS ELECTRONTIC FORM 990-N (e-postcard) Due soon**

**The electronic Form 990—N will be due to the IRS for all chapters with less than $25,000 income after 6/30/2010. Please do not forget to reply electronically. You must do this or lose your non-profit status.**

**Currently the following chapters will lose theirs unless they act immediately. They are: 7,20,22, 41, 49,73,81,83,111,113,119,138,and 138. Letters have been sent to these chapters. Also, annual financial are due to the Department and if over $10,000 in income must go to national by Set 1, 2010.**

**Senior Vice Commander Brad Bouter’s Message**

. I will hopefully visit a number of Chapters this month and attend the Veteran’s Day Ceremony for Orange County.

I hope to see many of you at our upcoming Chapter Service Officer Certification Training at the Lake Mary Marriott. Remember to ensure you included all your Chapter Service Officers on the Chapter Officer Report you filed. Also, we have some chapters who did not include their e-mail addresses on the Chapter Officer Report. Our Department Newsletter is sent via e-mail and some Chapters are not receiving it because they left off their e-mail address and a few others have bad e-mail addresses on their report.

 **State Commander Frank Chicollo Message**

I am hoping you are enjoying this beautiful fall weather. I attended our Department Service Officer Training recently as a Department Service Officer. It was nice talking to many of you during the training. I hope to see many more of you at our Chapter Service Officer Certification Training and Midwinter Conference scheduled for January. Chapters should have received the registration packets already.

Following the DSO Training I went to Department Headquarters for a meeting with the Department Vice Commanders and Executive Director Andy Marshall. We reviewed our Statement of Policy and other documents and discussed the upcoming Midwinter Conference.

Department Line Officers will be travelling around the State to visit our Chapters. I hope to meet and talk with Chapter members who don’t attend our Midwinter Conference and Department Convention during my travels. It will be nice to talk with you during our visits and find out how the Department of Florida can help your chapter. If you wish for a Department Officer to attend a Chapter function or other area event please request our presence at your event by sending your request to our Department Headquarters.

**New Financial Form**

National has put out a new edition of the Finance Report, 901334 (5/17). Everyone should have already reeived their forms. Please do not use any old ones. Make copies of the new form so you can do all of your figuring and erasures, if needed, on them. Your reports are due NLT September 30. Don’t forget to submit the required 990 to the IRS. If you do both at the same time, you won’t forget.

All death benefit and nonservice-connected pension claims in Florida to come through the DAV National Service Office at Bay Pines.

To be more concise, all benefits claims must come through this office.

1. We keep a copy of poa which comes in handy when trying to get status from Philly
2. We make a record in our case management system (CMS) and track what's going on
3. If VA loses the claim, we at least can produce a copy of our memo when arguing effective dates

August 31, 2008

**Department Chaplain Chip Hanson**

Now that Halloween is over, the holiday season has begun. On Saturday, November 11 we have Veteran’s Day and Thanksgiving on Thursday, November 23.

This is supposed to be a happy time of the year between Thanksgiving and Christmas, but there are many active duty/reservists serving overseas and some in hostile environments. Many of them are away from their families for the first time while others who have been deployed on multiple stints of duty are away from the family and friends again. Some veterans seem alone while they are patients in Nursing Homes or ALF’s.

We must not forget them during especially during this time of year. Visit a veteran in a Nursing Home during the holidays and bring a little cheer in their lives. All of us have our own way of trying to bring some light into a life and sometimes all it takes is just a hug and a smile and a good ear for listening

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**Department Judge Advocate John Markiewicz**

. Since the National Order of Trench Rats (NOTR) decided to separate from the DAV, all chapters are remined that they need to review their Constitution and By-laws and revise them to remove all reference to the NOTR from these documents.

It is also a good time to review these entire documents, especially if they are more than five years old to check if any other changes or revisions are needed. I strongly urge you to use the Model Constitution and By-laws that are posted on the DAV website to ensure you have covered all the essentials and eliminated all the non-essential information that is typically included in these documents. A chapter has the following contained in their By-laws. “…the chapter election will be held in may of each year following notification to each of its members…’ That’s an expense to the chapter and in order to have an legal election, they MUST notify all their members of the election

CONGRATULATIONS TO ORANGE BLOSSOM GARDENS 150 FOR BEING THE FIRST CHAPTER IN THE DEPARTMENT TO REACH ITS MEMBERSHIP GOAL!

**Department Junior Vice Commander Mary Ann Keckler**

 Here is wishing you all a Happy Thanksgiving. Things are starting to crank-up in the DAV world. Last month when Hurricane Irma spread her wrath on Florida and Puerto Rico, DAV played an important role in helping our veterans in distress from the Hurricane. Many Chapters were active in the communities following Irma’s aftermath. National Service Officers distributed over 500 vouchers to families who lost food and lodging as a result of the storm.

Department Officers have attended two Stand Downs in October—the first in Tampa where Commander Chicollo, Adjutant Andy Marshall and myself volunteered our time assisting Homeless Veterans and recently in Pasco County where I assisted Homeless Veterans again. \

With all that is going on in this world today, let us reflect on the families and military men and women that have given the ultimate sacrifice for this great country. God bless America. Thanks to all that served to make our Country what it is today---Land of the Free.

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  BOOKS.  VERY FEW CHAPTERS ARE TAKING ADVANTANGE OF THE LEE GREENWOOD GIFT BOOK "GOD BLESS THE USA".  WHAT AN EASY WAY FOR YOUR CHAPTER TO MAKE MONEY.  YOU MUST HAVE BOOKS ON HAND AT YOUR CHAPTER, AND USE THEM EVERY TIME YOU HAVE A FUNCTION AT YOUR CHAPTER OR COMMUNITY.  THE BOOKS WILL SELL IF YOU PRESENT.  BOOKS COST YOUR CHAPTER $1.50 AND CAN EASILY BE SOLD FOR $5.00.  100 BOOKS SOLD WILL NEW YOUR CHAPTER $350.00.  YOU DO NOT HAVE TO GET APPROVAL FROM THE DEPARTMENT OR PAY 10%.  PLEASE CALL OR EMAIL ME AT dav150jack@gmail.com, 0r 352-250-4743.  I ALSO HAVE ABOUT 600 OF HIS BIOGRAPHY, SAME DEAL.

**Legislative Update**

**Military Update:** After 18 months of review by his department, VA Secretary David J. Shulkin awkwardly announced Wednesday that he plans to “further explore” adding ailments to the list of compensable conditions VA presumes were caused by exposure to [Agent Orange](http://www.military.com/benefits/veterans-health-care/agent-orange.html) and other herbicides used during the Vietnam War.

The decision to punt long-anticipated decisions on Agent Orange-related ailments will disappointment thousands of aging veterans with bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, Parkinson-like tremors and hypertension (high blood pressure).

Veterans and survivors were hopeful some or all of those conditions would be added to VA’s presumptive list of ailments linked to wartime herbicides, based on the latest and final review of medical and scientific literature on Agent Orange from the National Academy of Medicine (formerly known as the Institute of Medicine).

Instead, on the Nov. 1 deadline date that VA itself had set for this packet of decisions, Shulkin issued a brief statement at 6 p.m. promising only more delay.

“After thoroughly reviewing the National Academy of Medicine (NAM)’s latest report regarding veterans and Agent Orange, and associated data and recommendations from [VA’s] NAM Task Force, I have made a decision to further explore new presumptive conditions for service connection that may ultimately qualify for disability compensation. I appreciate NAM’s work and the commitment and expertise of [my] Task Force, and look forward to working with the [Trump] administration on the next steps in the process.”

A last sentence, not attributed to Shulkin, explained that the VA “will begin work with the administration to concurrently conduct a legal and regulatory review of these potential presumptive conditions for awarding [disability compensation](http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-benefits/veteran-disability-compensation.html) to eligible veterans.”

In the past, VA began a regulatory review only after the Secretary approved new ailments for the list. Shulkin hasn’t name any new illnesses. In conceding that VA experts already had “thoroughly” reviewed the latest science, however, Shulkin seemed to signal that parties elsewhere in the Trump administration didn’t want a VA announcement at this time rejecting or embracing new conditions.

“We thought we were going to get a decision sometime today,” said Rick Weidman, executive director for policy and government affairs for Vietnam Veterans of America. “Obviously we were mistaken. What they issued, to quote Sarah Huckabee Sanders [White House press secretary], is a Nothing Burger.”

I am shocked and dismayed if this is the VA Secretary’s decision, to continue to delay,” emailed Carla Dean, who lost her husband, a Vietnam veteran, to bladder cancer last year. Now president of the Bladder Cancer Foundation of Florida, Dean said she remained hopeful that Shulkin will do the “right thing soon.”

One Vietnam veteran from Wisconsin who has fought bladder cancer since 2006 expressed “complete disappointment” with Shulkin’s statement. Asking that his name be withheld, he said he served at a “heavily sprayed” combat base in Quang Tri province. Lifelong residual effects of bladder cancer surgery, he said, include incontinence, impotence, severe weight loss and fatigue. He twice has been denied VA [disability compensation](http://www.military.com/benefits/veterans-health-care/va-disability-compensation-rates.html) because his cancer is not “presumptive.” list.

A spokesman for Rep. Phil Roe (R-Tenn.), chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said he is reviewing VA’s announcement. But Roe “believes veterans waiting for a final decision deserve certainty, and [he] hopes Secretary Shulkin will work quickly to finish the legal and regulatory reviews.”

 NAM delivered its report, Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 2014, to VA in March last year, after reviewing medical and scientific literature published from Oct. 1, 2012, through Sept. 30, 2014. NAM found evidence to support changing the strength of association between herbicide exposure and several ailments.

For bladder cancer and hypothyroidism, it found “limited or suggestive” evidence of an association to herbicide exposure, an upgrade from “inadequate or insufficient” evidence found earlier. For some ailments, including Parkinson’s and ischemic heart disease, limited or suggestive evidence has been judged strong enough to add the illnesses to the presumptive list. For other diseases, including hypertension, which is common in an aging population, it hasn’t been enough.

The NAM review also looked again at cardiovascular conditions and herbicide exposure. It didn’t upgrade the link to heart ailments but it did affirm limited or suggestive evidence that hypertension is linked to herbicide exposure.

It also studied whether conditions with Parkinson’s-like symptoms should fall into the same limited or suggestive category as Parkinson’s disease itself. NAM found “no rational basis” for excluding Parkinson-like symptoms from the same risk category. Parkinson’s disease was added to VA’s presumptive list in 2010.

Under a law Congress let expire in 2015, the VA Secretary had 180 days to consider a NAM report before deciding whether to expand the list of presumptive diseases to trigger automatic eligibility for [disability compensation](http://www.military.com/benefits/veterans-health-care/va-disability-compensation-options.html). Shulkin is under no such deadline. But a VA study group, followed by a VA task force, reviewed the NAM report. At one point a senior VA official predicted that by July 2016 then-VA Secretary Bob McDonald would have what he needed to decide on new presumptive ailments. Yet a year passed and McDonald opted to leave those decisions for the Trump administration. Shulkin had been McDonald’s top health official during the NAM review period.

By late summer this year, Shulkin promised a decision on new ailments to the presumptive list by Nov. 1. Weidman said he suspects the White House’s Office of Management and Budget blocked any plan to add new ailments to the list.

Weidman said members of Vietnam Veterans of America “are going to be really angry” with more delay, because “there is probably enough evidence now for the Secretary to declare other ailments” as tied to Agent Orange exposure, “glioblastoma first among them.” And sailors and Marines who served aboard ship off Vietnam, the Blue Water Veterans, should have been deemed eligible like ground forces for compensation for presumptive ailments long ago, Weidman said.

On September 29, Public Law 115-62, the Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2017, was enacted into law.  The bill extends a number of current authorities in veterans' programs, including Health Care, Benefits, Homelessness, and other matters. The provisions discussed below are supported by resolutions approved by DAV's membership at our national convention this summer.

DAV strongly supports this law, which extends, by two years, authority for VA to provide nursing home care to veterans with service-connected disabilities; to provide assistance and support services for caregivers; to continue a pilot program for child care for certain veterans in order to allow them to receive health care; to extend a pilot program offering women veterans counseling in retreat settings; and to support beneficiary travel and grants for innovative transportation for veterans living in highly rural areas.  It also allows VA to reimburse veterans for beneficiary travel to Vet Centers in the same manner as if they received services within VA health care facilities for one additional year.  A pilot program to provide neurobehavioral therapy and services to veterans with traumatic brain injuries was extended only by three months pending the submission of a final report to Congress due this December.

The Act also allows VA to continue to provide rehabilitation and vocational benefits to active duty service members with severe injuries for one more year. This authority allows VA to address immediate rehabilitative needs of service members while their probable medical discharges are pending.

The Act extends, by one year, many provisions to assist homeless veterans, including the Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) program administered by the Department of Labor, in addition to grants for child care for certain veterans participating in these programs.  It extends authority for referral and counseling services for certain "at risk" veterans and provides supportive services for very low income families in permanent housing to preempt homelessness.  It extends, by two years, "special needs" grants to homeless provider grantees who work with populations who require additional attention such as hospice services or intensive mental health care and authority for VA to continue to provide comprehensive community services to homeless veterans with serious mental illness.

In addition, the law authorizes, for two additional years, appropriations for adaptive sports programs for disabled veterans and service members. It also extends authority for specially adapted housing grant programs.

DAV commends Congress for acting quickly to ensure these important authorities for veterans were not allowed to lapse.  Service-disabled veterans depend upon these programs to reintegrate successfully into their families, communities and vocations.

  Click the link below to log in and send your message:
<https://www.votervoice.net/BroadcastLinks/J65xnKFA63YSDmprn4oRYA>

**VA Launches Program Aimed at Providing Veterans More Options in Claims Disagreements**

**WASHINGTON** – Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it will launch the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program, or “RAMP,” with the goal of providing Veterans with the earliest possible resolution of their disagreement with VA’s decision on their benefit claims.

RAMP will provide expanded opportunities for Veterans to enter the new, more efficient claims review process outlined in the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017, which was signed into law by President Donald J. Trump on August 23.

“At its core, VA’s mission is to provide Veterans with the highest quality of service,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “The new process under the RAMP initiative reflects major steps in not only VA’s effort of continuous improvement, but also in providing greater choice for Veterans and their families.”

VA began its 18-month implementation of the new process immediately after the bill became law.

By February 2019, all requests for review of VA decisions will be processed under the new, multi-lane process. VA’s legacy appeals process was slow and complex. The new law streamlines the process and includes safeguards ensuring claimants receive the earliest effective date possible for their claims.

Participation in RAMP is voluntary; however, Veterans can expect to receive a review of VA’s initial decision on their claim faster in RAMP than in the legacy appeals process. The initiative allows participants to have their decisions reviewed in the Higher-Level or Supplemental Claim review lanes outlined in the law.

The reviewer can overturn previous decisions based on a difference of opinion, or return it for correction. Participants who select the Supplemental Claim Lane may submit new evidence and may receive VA’s assistance in developing evidence in support of their claim.

Veterans who disagree with the decisions they receive in RAMP can appeal to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals in the new process and have their appeal decided by the Board when the new law becomes effective in February 2019. Veterans who participate in RAMP will not be able to return to the legacy appeals process.

VA encourages eligible Veterans with pending appeals to participate in RAMP and the benefits of the new review process. VA will begin sending eligible Veterans an invitation to participate in early November and continue the program until February 2019.

VA will continue working with Congress, Veterans Service Organizations and other Veteran advocates to implement the new appeals process over the next several months as VA continues to make bold, positive change on behalf of Veterans, their families and survivors.

The report’s findings were based on data gathered from 50 US states along with Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia and analyzed more than 55 million people who left the US military between 1970 and 2014.

“These findings are deeply concerning, which is why I made suicide prevention my top clinical priority,” said VA Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin.

Critics blasted Shulkin’s agency for attempting to throw the "suicide stats out the back door" by releasing the report at "the close of business" in late Friday, when it was likely to go unnoticed by most news outlets.

The new VA report confirmed previous studies that suicide rate among veteran women had been steadily rising over the past decade. The age-adjusted rate of suicide has shown a 24-percent increase for both men and women veterans between 1999 and 2014.

The number of sexual assault reports in the US military hit a record high last year, the Pentagon says.

While in general more American men commit suicide than women, the rate of suicide among female veterans has outgrown that of male veterans during the same period.

Today, the VA is providing care to some two million women veterans. This is while, almost 15 percent of the US Army’s 1.3 million troops on active duty are women.

‘Military sexual trauma’

While all soldiers are deemed vulnerable to experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, financial constraints and injuries in warfare, female soldiers in the US military face more serious challenges.

Female US military personnel experience more instances of sexual harassment, sexual discrimination and rape in the military compared to men, an issue that leads to mental health issues, or "military sexual trauma," to borrow the words of Letrice Titus, herself a veteran.

The systematic discrimination against women in the US military came to light in 2014, after groups of female veterans sued the VA for denying claims by thousands of women who said they had suffered PTSD after enduring harassment during their service.

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**Calendar of Events**

**November 2017**

November 4 DAV 5K Tulsa

 DAV 5K San Antonio

November 5 DAV 5K Newport News

November 7 Election Day

November 10 Marine Corps Birthday

November 11 Veterans Day

 DAV 5K Boston

 DAV 5K Atlanta

 DAV 5K Cincinnati

November 13 Golden Corral Military Appreciation Dinner

November 23 Thanksgiving





