

The Veterans Monthly



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VA to Improve Healthcare for Women Veterans

NEW INITIATIVE AIMS AT ADOPTING POLICIES DESIGNED TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND ENHANCE SERVICES FOR WOMEN VETERANS



Bergmann & Moore, LLC provides premium legal services to Veterans and their dependents. While consultations and other services are offered free of charge, fees are charged for representation before VA on the condition that the case is won. The firm encourages Veterans and their dependents to make full use of the free services available to them through local Veterans Service Officers and/or Veterans Service Organizations.

Female veterans have long faced difficulties in receiving adequate medical care through VA. Though women have a long and storied history serving this nation, it was not until the late 1980s that VA began to offer women's medical and psychosocial care as part of the Women Veterans Health Care (WHV) Strategic Health Care Group. Though health services for women have existed at VA in some capacity for over two decades, significant progress must still be made to meet the WHV's goal "[t]o be a national leader in the provision of health care for women, thereby raising the standard of care for all women." A survey released earlier this year by the American Legion found that a quarter of female veterans said that the availability of gender-specific services in the VA health care system was poor, and more than half felt that sexual trauma services at VA health care facilities were inadequate. Jimmie Foster, commander of the American Legion, said that "[t]oo many times, women veterans who seek help at a VA hospital are mistaken as civilian wives." Nearly one-third of

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the 3,000 plus female Veterans surveyed were dissatisfied with their Women Veterans Program Manager. Each VA Medical Center has a Women Veterans Program Manager who is designated to assist women Veterans and coordinate services. Another common complaint among female Veterans is that they have difficulty receiving treatment for issues – particularly mental health concerns – related to combat because the VA medical providers do not recognize women as being readily exposed to combat in today's military.

There are also ancillary issues to receiving VA health care that disproportionately affect women. For example, women are more commonly the primary care givers for small children, and many VA facilities are not equipped for children – lacking childcare assistance and facilities for changing babies and nursing.

These issues are becoming more acute, as the fastest-growing group of Veterans is women. About 1.8 million of the almost 23 million living Veterans are women, and approximately 12 percent of the more than two million service members who have been deployed overseas as part of the War on Terror are females. The female Veteran population has almost doubled in less than a decade, as has the number of women using the VA healthcare system. VA anticipates that an additional 300,000 women will enter the VA healthcare system in the next 5 to 10 years.

However, VA has recently undertaken several initiatives to improve healthcare services for women Veterans. VA's 2011 budget includes over \$217 million dedicated to women's health issues. One way VA is attempting to enhance healthcare is by asking female Veterans for their input. Members of VA's Health Resource Center have been placing calls to women Veterans since the beginning of June. The first group the Health Resource Center has reached out to are those that are enrolled but not using health care services. VA is looking for suggestions to enhance care. Patricia Hayes, chief consultant of the VA WHV Strategic Care Group, explained, "[w]e want these veterans and their caregivers to talk candidly about why they are not using VA, whether they are aware of the gender-specific services we offer, and what additional services they would like VA to offer." The Health Resource Center employees inform Veterans about VA's services.

They can also connect the caller to a patient advocate if the Veteran has complaints. VA has already reached over 1,000

female Veterans. About a quarter of those to whom VA has reached out have asked for more information and another quarter had their questions answered during the call. The Health Resource Center plans to keep reaching out to female Veterans for several years and hopes to reach as many of the 1.8 million female Veterans as possible. ■

To find out more, please visit:

www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2129



Medical Minute

Skin Disorder Chloracne Caused by Agent Orange

Chloracne is a skin condition similar to acne. The condition represents itself as an eruption of blackheads, cysts, and pustules. Physicians sometimes confuse chloracne with more common skin disorders. Chloracne usually shows up around the eyes and temples, and is accompanied by excessive oiliness.

The cause of chloracne is well established: long-term exposure to TCDD or dioxin, as well as other herbicides. The National Academy of Sciences has confirmed the positive association between Agent Orange and chloracne in its report on "Veterans and Agent Orange: Health Effects of Herbicides Used in Vietnam."

VA offers free Agent Orange registry health exams to all Veterans who served in Vietnam or another area where Agent Orange was sprayed. Veterans who experience chloracne within one year of exposure to herbicide during military service to a degree of at least 10% disabling may be eligible for disability compensation.

The best way to treat chloracne is to remove the source of contamination. In more chronic or severe cases the pustules can be treated via oral antibiotic or isotretinoin. Sadly, chloracne may be resistant to any treatment. The condition has been known to last anywhere from two years to several decades. ■



CARIBBEAN WOMEN VETERANS INC.

AN INTERVIEW WITH AWILDA TORRES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Q. How did CWVI get started?

A. A group of former Women Veterans of America of Puerto Rico members were not happy with being part of an organization that they believed did not adequately meet the needs of the Puerto Rican Women Veterans. Being an advocate of Women Veterans Rights for over 20 years, I suggested we form our own group and include the Caribbean in order to attract membership from those in the U.S. Virgin Islands. We incorporated on July 10, 2010 as a nonprofit organization at the Puerto Rico State Department.

Q. What is the mission of CWVI?

A. The mission of CWVI is to represent each and every woman Veteran in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean in order to obtain equal treatment and better health services and programs for women Veterans, and keep advocating for the equal rights that our counterparts in the U.S. enjoy.

Q. What services does CWVI offer?

A. As we are not certified Veterans Service Officers (VSOs), we gather all the information regarding the Veterans' claims and help them get additional health records and put a binder together in chronological order. When we know that the Veteran has enough evidence to substantiate her claim we send her to a certified VSO. We also represent women Veterans' issues at the Veterans Hospital monthly meetings and at the state and federal level. We also keep them informed of changes to disability claims and other issues through our Facebook



CWVI Members on Veterans Day.

page: Caribbean Women Veterans Inc. We help with appointments, health issues, and counseling.

Q. What will CWVI look like in ten years?

A. The future of CWVI is hard to predict, as the recruitment of women Veterans is hard as many of them think that taking an active role in an organization will jeopardize their benefits. However we are starting to come up with some plans to attract more member to the organization by sacrificing some of our personal funds to print t-shirts for sale and other give out gadgets to attract members. If we could get enough support to advertise the organization to all Puerto Rican municipalities we could see an increase of at least 300 members. ■

For more information, visit: [www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Caribbean-Women-Veterans Inc/113545522036516](http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Caribbean-Women-Veterans-Inc/113545522036516)



A map showing Guaynabo, Puerto Rico.

Military adopts new approach to mental health



In a radical about face from the military's masculine tradition, the military is not only trying to physically prepare soldiers for combat, but mentally prepare them as well. A controversial \$125 million project designed to instill psychological strength in a similar manner as physical fitness was designed by psychologists to prepare them for the mental rigors of combat. The new program has been embraced by the soldiers.

The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness is designed to make soldiers more psychologically 'resilient' amid the pressures of combat, repeated deployments, and family and financial crises, a 180 turn from many military traditions. But as psychologists study how mental health issues, such as PTSD develop, they have realized that that approach is counter-productive and may increase the risk of mental disorders.

The traditional approach was to wait until soldiers developed symptoms before they were treated; now the army is trying preventative treatment in hopes of lessening the effects of military service. Although the program has been embraced by soldiers, it is often criticized by outside psychologists who do not believe that it will work and could in fact disrupt a soldier's natural coping process and all that it amounts to is a large research project on preventative therapy.

For more information, see: www.washingtonpost.com/local/army-program-works-to-make-soldiers-fit-in-body-and-mind/2011/05/13/gHQAVsCqxH_story.html?hpid=z3

U.S. Merchant Mariners Fight For Benefits

The U.S. Merchant Marine delivered troops and supplies to battlegrounds during World War Two and endured enemy fire, but the former Mariners have been consistently denied compensation because they were not active duty members of the armed forces. Supporters of the Mariners are relaunching a campaign this summer to compensate the Mariners with the introduction of a bill to the U.S. Congress titled "Belated Thank You to the Merchant Marines of World War II Act." The bill asks for each Mariner to be awarded \$1000 per month and is estimated to cost \$97 million next year and decrease annually as surviving Mariners pass away.



Sculpture depicting Merchant Mariners at the Naval Memorial Amphitheater in Washington, D.C.

Around 250,000 Americans served in the Merchant Marine during WWII, with 9,300 killed and 12,000 wounded. Most of the casualties occurred in the Atlantic Ocean when ships were sunk by German U-boats. The group American Merchant Marine Veterans says 8,000 Mariners are still alive.

The legislation is opposed by an array of Veterans groups, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The VFW calls the bill unfair because it singles out a small group of individuals. Moreover, merchant mariners who served during WWII have been entitled to disability pensions and medical care since the 1980s. ■

For more on the bill's history, please visit: www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,81348,00.html

New Enforcement Of Veteran Hiring

Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act

Veterans' unemployment has reasserted itself as an issue against the backdrop of a struggling economy. In 1974, Congress passed the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act (VEVRAA) to require contractors "to employ and advance in employment qualified covered veterans." 38 U.S.C. § 4212 (2009). This law provided for an affirmative action program to return Veterans to the private workforce by making a hiring preference a condition of doing business with the government. Though almost four decades old, VEVRAA survives today and also covers those who have served in Afghanistan or Iraq.

The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), part of the Department of Labor (DOL), recently reentered the conversation by proposing changes to the regulations that implement VEVRAA. However, even Veterans groups remain skeptical that OFCCP's efforts amount to a substantive improvement. The executive director of Vietnam Veterans of America, Rick Weidman, testified before Congress last year that the essential problem is not regulation but enforcement. "The message needs to get out that there are consequences to noncompliance," he said.

Mr. Weidman's statement implies, at least in part, that few people understand the scope of VEVRAA. Anybody who does business with the government with a contract value of \$100,000 or more must comply with the act. 41 C.F.R. § 60-300.1(b) (2010). Some sources estimate the number of such agreements as more than 110,000 - in other words, a large workforce that does business with the American public.

Another way to understand Mr. Weidman's concern about disused provisions is to see who can bring a grievance. Any Veteran covered by VEVRAA who believes a prime or sub-contractor violates the law may make a complaint to the Secretary of Labor, who must then investigate the allegation. 38 U.S.C. § 4212(b). Given that broad ability, and assuming many contracts falter under VEVRAA, a person could conclude either that Veterans remain unaware of their rights or that the DOL does not meaningfully follow up on complaints. Either way, Mr. Weidman and others may well be correct that new regulations will not help.

A person then wonders how many contractors do not comply with VEVRAA and how Veterans could prove it. At this point, and maybe unexpectedly, one starts to see that OFCCP and Mr. Weidman may not be so far apart after all. One requirement that OFCCP proposes would push employers to set benchmarks for, and track the progress of, Veteran hiring. The real surprise might be that past regulators never had or required this information. OFCCP also wants to gather data on other activities, like the number and success of employment referrals from other services. In short, the office appears to agree that enforcement is the basic problem; they just happen to think the best vehicle to improve it is a clearer re-write of the regulations.



Active-duty service members meet with recruits at a job fair.

The gap between OFCCP and critics like Mr. Weidman narrows considerably when considered in comparison with those who dislike affirmative action on principle. In their opinion today's Veterans willingly signed on the dotted line, received free healthcare and job training, and paid no taxes to boot. Meanwhile, civilians had to worry about job security, room and board, and paying their own way through college. They point out that thousands of Veterans never even saw front-line action. Thus Veterans already received enough of a handout from taxpayers; affirmative action afterward does nothing more than add insult to injury.

The opinion does everything from misunderstand the modern military organization to getting facts objectively wrong. Take comfort in the fact that the majority of Americans understand that magnetic yellow ribbons are only a token and Veterans have earned benefits beyond bumper stickers. At the end of the day, Mr. Weidman and OFCCP are merely haggling over how best to help. ■

To find out more about veteran employment, please visit:
<http://jec.senate.gov/public/>

A Brief History of the Air Force Cross

The United States Air Force became a separate military service on September 18, 1947 with the implementation of the National Security Act of 1947. A new era began in which airpower became firmly established as a major element of the nation's defense. It was only fitting that this new separate service has its own award to honor its heroes.

The Air Force Cross was first proposed in 1947 after the establishment of the Department of the Air Force. It was designed by Eleanor Cox, an employee of the Air Force and was sculpted by Thomas Hudson James of the Institute of Heraldry. It is a bronze cross with an oxidized satin finish. Centered on the obverse of the cross is a gold-plated American bald eagle, wings displayed against a cloud formation, (as is used on the seal of the Air Force). This design is encircled by a laurel wreath in green enamel, edged in gold. The reverse of the cross is engraved with the recipient's name.

The decoration was not established by Congress until July 6, 1960 with the passage of Public Law 88-593. This law changed the designation of the "Distinguished Service Cross" to "Air Force Cross" in case of awards made under Air Force authority. For Air Force personnel, this award is second only to the Medal of Honor.



The Air Force Cross is awarded for extraordinary heroism, not justifying the award of a Medal of Honor, to any person, who while serving with the U.S. Air Force while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force, or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in conflict against an opposing Armed Force in which the United States is not a belligerent party. Civilian personnel are authorized to receive this award.

The first award of the Air Force Cross was made posthumously to Major Rudolf Anderson, Jr. for extraordinary heroism during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. The Cross was presented to Major Anderson's widow by President Kennedy at the White House. A total of 192 Air Force Crosses have been awarded. Included in this total, two awards were made for actions during World War II (retroactively awarded), 180 awards for actions in the Vietnam War, four for heroism during the 1975 Mayaguez Incident, two for actions in Desert Storm in 1991, one for the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu in Somalia, and two for actions in Afghanistan in 2003.

Three Vietnam Veterans - Leland T. Kennedy, John A. Dramesi, and James Robinson Risner - earned two Air Force Crosses and one Vietnam War recipient, James H. Kasler, earned three. Fifty of the awards have been posthumous, including 30 to members missing in action. Twenty-three Air Force Crosses have been awarded to enlisted men, including 12 involved in pararescue. Twenty-four recipients were POWs who returned alive.

Over the years the Air Force has grown in capability and personnel and has made vast technological advancements. Today over 329,000 active duty military members serve in the Air Force. The Department of the Air Force includes ten major commands as well as field operating agencies, direct reporting units and their subordinate elements. In addition, there are two Reserve components, the Air Force Reserve, which is also a major command, and the Air National Guard. The mission of today's Air Force is straightforward: "to fly, fight and win...in air, space, and cyberspace." ■

The award citations and biographical information pertaining to Air Force Cross recipients is available online at www.militarytimes.com/citations-medals-awards.



Veteran Events Calendar

Here is a list of some exciting
events happening nationwide
throughout August

National Veterans Wheelchair Games

David L. Lawrence Convention Center
1000 Fort Duquesne Boulevard • Pittsburgh, PA 15222
Telephone: (817) 225-2415
August 1st-6th, 2011
www.pva.org

Disabled American Veterans 2011 National Convention

National Convention on the New Orleans Riverside
2 Poydras Street • New Orleans, LA 70140
Telephone: (504) 651-0500
August 6th-9th, 2011
www.dav.org

Vietnam Veterans United Annual 5K Run

PO Box 26 • Allen Park, MI 48101
Telephone: (734) 552-8538
August 21st, 2011
www.runmichigan.com

Highground Annual Ride to Remember Motorcycle Rally

The Highground Veterans Memorial Park
W7031 Ridge Rd • Neillsville, WI 54456
Telephone: (715) 743-4224
August 19th-20th, 2011

Under Fire: Misuse of VA's Los Angeles Campus

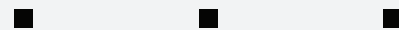
In early June, groups working with the ACLU filed suit against the VA to compel them to use some of their property in West Los Angeles to house homeless Veterans. The streets of Los Angeles bear a full 10% (about 8,000) of the national total of homeless Veterans while swaths of disused VA campus property lay closed to them, either abandoned or rented out.

The suit brought national attention to the arrangement and prompted outrage. In response, VA proposed to reopen one of the buildings, but critics remained unconvinced. The scheme had neither a budget nor a timeline, which many interpreted as disingenuous. As anticipated, ACLU criticized the plan, calling it “a direct slap in the face.” VA contended in its own defense that, until Congress authorized spending, they could do little more than offer a blueprint.

In the meantime, unflattering reports and opinions have poured out of media outlets. They usually note that the campus - half the size of Central Park - houses the likes of car rental businesses and golf courses instead of treatment facilities for Veterans. Congress has so far dodged much of the blame, and by the end of June, the Senate committees for Appropriations and Veterans Affairs had approved funding to start delivering on VA's assurances. Nobody expects serious disagreement, but the measure still needs further approval before it becomes reality.

Regardless, Veterans' advocates continue to push for judicial intervention. They hope their case will result in an order from a federal court that will force the government to act more swiftly and decisively. Exactly what form such an injunction would take remains an open question, but the suit's basic contention is that VA has violated the terms under which it received the land. ■

For more information, please visit:
<http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jun/09/local>



VSO Spotlight

**Richard Ayers, Veterans Service
Officer for Liberty County, Texas**



Liberty County sits between Harris, Jefferson, Chambers and Polk counties and is blessed by the Trinity River running through it. The city of Liberty is the county seat and along with Dayton, Cleveland, Ames, Daisetta, Hull, Raywood and several other cities and communities we have a very historical area. There are approximately 6,110 Veterans residing in Liberty County.

Website: www.co.liberty.tx.us/ips/cms/othercountyoffices
Know a VSO who should be honored? Email us at drohde@vetlawyers.com and we'll feature them.



Q: Can you share a little information about Liberty County?

A: I started this job on 19 June 2006 after returning home from Florida where I worked for the Internal Revenue Service. The most rewarding part of the job is seeing the joy Veterans exhibit once their needs are met. There are too many cases to share to find one that supersedes another. The greatest challenge is making it known throughout Liberty County about the availability of both offices and the different areas we can assist with. We have the assistance of the local radio station (Shine all 9) and all the local newspapers and yet we still do not reach far enough here in Liberty County. We have a van that takes Veterans on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays to the Michael Debakey Medical Center in Houston, Texas. Many Veterans are not aware of this service.

Q: What is your most memorable case?

A: The most memorable case that I've been involved with was the assistance given to VFW Post 8953 in getting a Highway named after a Congressional Medal of Honor winner Richard A. Anderson. That comprised the help of Liberty and Polk Commissioners Courts, DOT as well as the added and needed assistance of Representative John C. Otto.

Q: How long have you been a VSO?

A: I started this job on June 19th, 2006 after returning home from Florida where I worked for the Internal Revenue Service.

Q: What is your favorite part of the position?

A: The most rewarding part of the job is seeing the joy Veterans have once their needs are met and in many cases that includes medical or financial assistance.

Q: What are your biggest challenges in this position?

A: There are too many to share to fine one that supersede another. The greatest challenge is making it known throughout Liberty County about the availability of both offices and the different areas we can and will assist. We have the assistance of the Local radio (Shine all 9) station and all the local news paper and yet we still do not reach far enough here in Liberty County. We have a van that services veterans on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursdays by taking them to the Michael Debakey Medical Center in Houston, Texas and many are not even aware. ■

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