



# 2nd Battalion 1st Infantry Chapter, Americal Division Veterans Association (ADVA)

WEBSITE: [www.2-1-196th.com](http://www.2-1-196th.com)



Volume 5

*"A Soldier Once... And Always"*

November 2015

**Commanders Corner:** Back out in the country after 3 days of being citified in Norfolk at the annual ADVA Reunion. The reunion was very successful and it was great to seeing everyone. We had 23 members in attendance. Most of them were accompanied by their lovely ladies, without whose support and assistance we'd be in a world of hurt. They are truly the backbone of our lively hospitality room and are always willing to pitch in and do whatever it takes. The free hospitality room was excellent as were the other accommodations. The ADVA Executive Committee covered various reports regarding membership, finances, reunions, product sales, and the scholarship fund and approved some near term and long term proposals on the updating and maintenance of the ADVA web site. This information was also presented at the general membership meeting and the announcement was made that the next reunion will be held in Albuquerque, NM from Sept. 14<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup>. Once again, in spite of the protests lodged in Atlanta, these dates will conflict with the Kokomo veteran's reunion. It was also presented that there are tentative plans for the 2017 reunion to be held in Minneapolis, MN. (I'm still holding out for Indianapolis but, we'll see what comes down the pike). We held our annual chapter meeting after the general meeting. The meeting opened with a prayer led by Don Hicks; followed with our financial report. It looks like we are doing okay and have a lot of life members on the rolls. As we get more life members, our annual dues income will start to suffer a bit, so let's see what we can do to drum up some new members. We still have about 50 chapter challenge coins available after being well received at the reunion. All income over the expense of the coins will go into the chapter fund. Cost is \$7.50/coin if picked up and \$10/coin if mailed. Contact me if you want one. Elections were held for the 3 top chapter offices and we now have a new Secretary/Treasurer; Jesse Mendoza will be assuming the duties so ably performed by Don Hicks (and Renee) for our 1<sup>st</sup> 4 years. Rich Heroux and I will be serving another term as vice-commander and commander, respectively; and chapter councilman, Stan Disorda, will be serving on the ADVA Executive committee for the next 2 year term. Congratulations to both Jesse and Stan. Rich provided CD's of Don Sloat's Medal of Honor ceremony and I reminded everyone the VFW has highly recommended that all Vietnam vets apply for Agent Orange claims with the VA. Chapter members from Bravo Company also presented Rich Heroux with the beautiful "Bravo Knife" made by Bob "Doc" Tatum. Last but not least, I'd like to welcome to our newest members William Oswald (D Co.) and Rich Rinaldo (A Co.). Jesse Mendoza may be reached via email at [eboney@att.net](mailto:eboney@att.net) or 1109 Burkett Cir., Cameron, TX 76520; phone 254-605-0048. Thanks to all attending this year.

Chuck: *Keep safe and may the bond of battle never be broken!*



**Six MIAs Recovered:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of five service members missing from World War II and the Korean War. Recovered are:

- **Army Cpl. Martin A. King**, was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, when he was declared missing in action while fighting in North Korea on Nov. 2, 1950.
- **Army Cpl. Robert V. Witt**, 20, of Los Angeles, was assigned to 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, when he was captured while fighting in North Korea on Dec. 2, 1950. The 31st RCT, historically known as Task Force Faith, was deployed east of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea when it was attacked by overwhelming numbers of Chinese forces. Witt was reported as missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950. It was later learned he had been captured, but died in a North Korean prisoner of war camp on Jan. 31, 1951.
- **Army Cpl. Grant H. Ewing**, 28, was buried Oct. 19 in his hometown of Fort Lupton, Colo. Ewing was assigned to Battery C, 38th Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, which was deployed north and east of the town of Kunu-ri, North Korea. On Nov. 25, 1950, his division was attacked by Chinese forces, which forced them to withdraw south through a series of Chinese roadblocks known as "the Gauntlet." Ewing was reported missing in action. It would be later learned he was captured by Chinese forces, but died in a POW camp in February 1951.
- **Army Cpl. George H. Mason**, 19, was buried Oct. 20 in his hometown of Byhalia, Miss. Mason was assigned to 2nd Reconnaissance Company, 2nd Infantry Division, which was deployed near Chuam-ni, South Korea, when their defensive line was attacked by Chinese forces and forced to withdraw south to a more defensible position. Mason was reported as missing in action on Feb. 14, 1951.
- **Army Cpl. Robert E. Meyers**, 21, of Greencastle, Pa., was buried Oct. 26 in Arlington National Cemetery. Meyers, who was assigned to Company A, 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, was declared missing on Dec. 1, 1950, after his unit was involved in combat operations in the vicinity of Sonchu, North Korea. His remains were among those returned after the war, but unidentifiable at the time, and subsequently buried as an "unknown" in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii, also known as the "Punchbowl."
- **Marine Corps Cpl. Roger K. Nielson**, from Adams, Colo., who was killed in action while fighting on the Pacific island of Tarawa on Nov. 20, 1943. He was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. He will be buried with full military honors on a date and location yet to be announced.

**If you have a pulse you have a purpose."**

**Retired Army Captain to Get Medal of Honor for Heroism in Afghanistan:** A former U.S. Army captain born in France will be awarded the Medal of Honor next month for heroic actions during combat in Kunar Province, Afghanistan, in 2012, the White House announced on Wednesday. Retired Capt. Florent A. Groberg, 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, was a personal security detachment commander for his brigade commander, Col. James Mingus, when he moved to stop a suicide bomber's attack. At the time Groberg, then a first lieutenant, was assigned to Task Force Mountain Warrior. Groberg and another soldier, Sgt. Andrew Mahoney, threw the man to the ground, where he exploded a vest filled with explosives and ball bearings. Both soldiers were injured by the blast, which also killed four other Americans. Groberg sustained a serious wound to his left leg. Both men were awarded the Purple Heart and Mahoney was awarded the Silver Star. Killed in the attack were Command Sgt. Maj. Kevin Griffin, Maj. Thomas Kennedy, Air Force Maj. Walter D. Gray, and Ragaei Abdelfattah, a representative of the U.S. Agency for International Development. Groberg was hospitalized at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center from August 2012 until May 2015, according to the White House. He was medically retired on July 23, 2015. Groberg was born in Poissy, France, on May 8, 1983. He became a naturalized U.S. Citizen on February 27, 2001, and graduated from Walter Johnson High School in Bethesda, Maryland in June 2001.

**West Point to Give Award to Actor Gary Sinise:** The U.S. Military Academy will honor the man who portrayed Lt. Dan in "Forrest Gump" when it gives actor Gary Sinise its annual Thayer Award. Sinise, also known for his role in the TV show "CSI: New York," will receive the award at West Point on Oct. 22. The award is named for a former West Point superintendent and is given to citizens who serve the national interest. West Point cited Sinise's decades of advocacy for service members, including his work for the Disabled American Veterans organization. Sinise also performs for troops as part of the Lt. Dan Band, named for the hard-nosed officer who befriends Forrest Gump. Past recipients of the Thayer Award include Dwight Eisenhower, Douglas MacArthur, Bob Hope, Neil Armstrong, Tom Brokaw and Colin Powell.



**Message From the Executive in Charge/Vice Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals:** The Board of Veterans' Appeals had another record-breaking year, serving 55,713 Veterans, surpassing the FY 2014 number of Veterans served. The Board set this new all-time high while maintaining a quality rate of 93.98 percent, exceeding our longstanding goal of 92 percent. The Board also conducted 12,738 Board hearings with Veterans, which represents a 17-percent increase over the number of hearings conducted in FY 2014. These achievements are particularly impressive in light of the fact that the Board's staffing levels remained fairly consistent with the levels in FY 2014, and this was a big year for the Board in transitioning to a largely paperless environment — factors that make these achievements all the more remarkable. As I stated last week, these accomplishments could not have been achieved without the hard work and continued commitment of *all* Board employees to VA's noble mission of serving those who have served us all in defense and protection of our freedom. A true demonstration of I CARE. Great work, team!

**Women Will Likely Have to Register for the Draft, Army Secretary Says:** Women will eventually have to register for the draft if "true and pure equality" is to be realized in the U.S. military, Army Secretary John McHugh said recently. "If your objective is true and pure equality then you have to look at all aspects" of the roles of women in the military, McHugh said, and registration for the draft "will be one of those things. That will have to be considered." McHugh said draft registration was not a subject to be decided by the services or the Department of Defense, and will ultimately have to be dealt with by Congress. He expected a "pretty emotional debate and discussion." However, as more military occupational specialties are opened to women, the debate on Selective Service System registration was inevitable, McHugh said. "If we find ourselves as a military writ large where men and women have equal opportunity, as I believe we should," he said. The question on women and the draft was posed to McHugh and Gen. Mark Milley, the new Army chief of staff, at the annual three-day meeting and exposition of the Association of the U.S. Army at the Walter E. Washington convention center in Washington, D.C. Milley deferred the question to McHugh, saying he could not comment on policy. The subject of women registering for the draft was a topic of debate at an Aspen National Security forum in Colorado this summer. In one panel discussion, retired Navy Adm. Eric Olson, former commander of the SEALs and the Special Operations Command, said that women should have to register for the draft if they also can serve in combat. On a separate panel, Air Force Secretary Deborah James said that she would have no problem with women registering for the draft. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter was to decide in January on whether combat roles, mostly in the infantry, armor, artillery and Special Operations, should be opened to women. Proposals to abolish the Selective Service System as a relic of the era before the all-volunteer force of the early 1970s occasionally come before Congress, but the proposals have never gained traction. Nearly 17 million male U.S. citizens and male immigrant non-citizens between the ages of 18 and 25 currently are registered for conscription with the Selective Service System, an independent government agency. The 18-25 males are required by law to have registered within 30 days of their 18th birthdays and must notify Selective Service within 10 days of any changes to information they provided on their registration cards, such as a change of address. Violations can be considered felonies.

**Chapter Member Elected Purple Heart Commander:** Douglas Greenlaw, former 1st Lt. and CO of Delta Company, 2/1 Infantry, 196th LIB, Handle "Delta 6", Vietnam 1967-1968, Greenville, SC, was elected at the recent State Convention to the position of Commander, The Military Order of the Purple Heart for the State of South Carolina.

SPECIAL READING: Please look over the article sent to the Chapter from one of members Jerry Hughes. He is a driving force behind the design and construction of the Key West, Florida Vietnam Memorial. You can find the report on page seven (7).

**To those who fought for it, freedom has a flavor the protected will never know." These words were scratched on a bunker wall outside Khe Sahn, Republic of Vietnam by an unknown POW.**



**Navy Moves Toward Unisex Uniforms and Covers:** Under orders from Secretary Ray Mabus, the Navy has announced changes that will eventually make uniforms and covers more gender-neutral. And so, the unisex "Dixie Cup," or enlisted white hat, will come into being and be available for wear by E-6s and below next April. Female sailors will also be allowed to carry bigger purses, so long as they match their shoes. Effective immediately under the new regulations, the Alternative Combination Cover (ACC) and current male combination cover for officers and chief petty officers can now be worn by both men and women in service dress uniforms. All officers and chiefs will be required to wear either the ACC or the current male Combination Cover by Oct. 31, 2016, the Navy said. Beginning Oct. 1 next year, the Recruit Training Command will begin issuing re-designed Service Dress Blue uniforms in jumper style for both men and women. The jumper will incorporate a side zipper and the slacks will have a front zipper to help with changing in and out of uniform, the Navy said. Both men's and women's uniform pants will have the traditional 13 buttons but those are just for show. By the fall of 2016, male and female recruits at boot camp will be issued new SDBs, meaning the eventual end of the female version of the "crackerjack" with jacket and tie for female petty officers and junior sailors. Another eventual change is coming to the choker-style women's Officer and Chief Petty Officer (CPO) Service Dress White (SDW) Coat. That will be worn by both men and women in the coming years.

**Agent Orange Law Changes as New Cost Fears Surface:** Two weeks ago, the House and Senate veterans affairs committees quietly allowed a provision of the Agent Orange Act of 1991 to expire. How significant that will be for Vietnam veterans and their benefits is disputed. Committee staff and the Department of Veterans Affairs agree the change has not impacted the VA secretary's authority to decide to expand the list of diseases presumed connected to wartime herbicide exposure. But veteran advocates and at least one lawmaker suggest the change is intended to dampen VA cost risks and perhaps ease political pressure on the secretary and Congress facing a potential tsunami of disability claims. That scenario assumes that a final review of medical science will establish a stronger link between Agent Orange and hypertension (high blood pressure), a condition that the Center for Disease Control says is so common it afflicts a third of the U.S. adult population. VA asked Congress to keep the Agent Orange law intact five more years. A VA committee member, offered a compromise, a bill to leave the law unchanged for two years, long enough so its secretarial review requirements held during VA consideration of a final report of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academy of Sciences on health conditions associated with Agent Orange. The VA committees declined to back these delays because, said a House committee staff member, under separate law "the secretary already has authority to make such [presumption] decisions, and we felt he did not need to be compelled by [the Agent Orange] law to do so." The provision that "sunset" Oct. 1 required the secretary to adhere to certain standards and procedures in determining if additional diseases associated with herbicide exposure should be presumed service connected. Vietnam War veterans diagnosed with ailments on the presumptive list qualify for VA disability pay and medical care. The expired provision also set a timetable for the secretary to accept or reject IOM findings and required him to explain in writing if he declined to add IOM identified conditions to the presumptive list. The committee allowed the Agent Orange Act to expire and it's altogether possible the next IOM report, due in March, will support adding hypertension and stroke to the presumptive list.

**In Reversal, Obama Plans to Keep 5,500 US Troops in Afghanistan:** President Obama reversed course on his Afghanistan withdrawal plan Thursday and announced that 5,500 U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan indefinitely on a \$15 billion-a-year mission to counter a resilient Taliban and the growing threat of ISIS. "It's the right thing to do," Obama said while insisting that he was not "disappointed" at having to go back on his original plan to have all U.S. troops out of Afghanistan before he left office with the exception of about 1,000 for embassy security. "Afghan forces are still not as strong as they need to be," Obama said in explaining his decision. "Meanwhile, the Taliban has made gains particularly in rural areas and can still launch deadly attacks in cities including Kabul." "This isn't the first time those adjustments have been made" in the force levels in Afghanistan, Obama said, "and it probably won't be the last. I am firmly convinced that we should make this extra effort." The 9,800 U.S. troops now in Afghanistan will stay through most of 2016 and the force will drop to about 5,500 for prolonged counter-terror and training missions by the end of 2016 or early 2017, Obama said from the White House Roosevelt room. Obama was flanked by Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, Vice President Joe Biden and Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, for the 12-minute announcement that meant he would not be able to fulfill his campaign pledges to end the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq before the next president's inaugural. When the war in Afghanistan ends for the US will now "ultimately be answered by the next commander-in-chief," White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said in a conference call with reporters after Obama's remarks. Sixteen U.S. troops have been killed in Afghanistan this year to bring the total to 2,372 since the U.S. began operations there in late 2001, and more than 17,600 have been wounded. At the end of his remarks, Obama spoke directly to the troops who will be asked to make more sacrifices on future deployments to Afghanistan. "To our men and women in uniform, I know this means some of you will rotate back into Afghanistan, Obama said. Afghanistan remained a dangerous place, he said, and I do not send you into harm's way lightly." "It's the most solemn decision I make, but as your commander-in-chief, 'I believe this mission is vital to our national security interests in preventing terrorist attacks against our citizens and other nations,' Obama said. To the American people, I know many of you have grown weary of this conflict," he said. "Yet given what's at stake in Afghanistan, I am firmly convinced that we should make this extra effort."

**No COLA in 2016; Higher Part B Premiums Possible:** The government announced this week that there will be no cost-of-living (COLA) adjustment next year for millions of military and federal civilian retirees, Social Security recipients, and veterans and survivors receiving Department of Veterans Affairs checks. COLA increases are tied to the Consumer Price Index, which has been flat due to low gasoline prices. Even so, some Medicare Part B enrollees—those who delayed receiving Social Security and those who aren't eligible—could see their premiums increased by more than half, from the basic \$105 per person per month to \$159. Higher earners would pay more. A White House spokesman acknowledged that the potential premium increase was an unintended consequence resulting from calculating COLA adjustments. There have been Part B premium increases in the past, but a 52-percent increase in one year is unprecedented. Congress is working to prevent this from happening.

**The founding fathers all agreed there are two classes of people that should not be allowed in government; Witches and barristers.**

**What is a Veteran: These excerpts of an essay printed annually in the Richmond Times-Dispatch.** Some veterans bear visible signs of their service: a missing limb, a jagged scar, a certain look in the eye. Others may carry the evidence inside them: a pin holding a bone together, a piece of shrapnel in the leg, or perhaps another sort of inner steel: the soul's ally forged in the refinery of adversity. Except in parades, however, the men and women who have kept America safe wear no badge or emblem. You can't tell a veteran just by looking. He is the cop on the beat who spent six months in Saudi Arabia sweating 2 gallons a day making sure the armored personnel carriers didn't run out of fuel. She is a nurse who fought against futility and went to sleep sobbing every night for two solid years in Da Nang, South Vietnam. He is the parade riding veteran who pins on his ribbons and medals with a prosthetic hand. He is the POW who went away one person and came back home another – or didn't come back at all. He is the career quartermaster who watches the ribbons and medals pass him by. He is the old guy bagging groceries at the supermarket – palsied now and aggravatingly slow- who help liberate a Nazi death camp and who wishes all day long that his wife were still alive to hold him when the nightmares come. He is an ordinary and yet an extraordinary human being – a person who offered some of his life's most vital years in the service of his country, and who sacrificed his ambitions so that others would not have to sacrifice theirs. So remember: each time you see someone who has served our country, just lean over and say "thank you." That's all most people need, and in most cases it will mean more than any medals they could have been awarded or were awarded. Two little words that mean a lot: "Thank you."

**Individual Unemployability:** Over the past few months, the issue of Individual Unemployability (IU) has been both a topic of discussion and one of rising concern for Veterans. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), for eligibility to IU, a veteran must be unable to maintain substantially gainful employment as a result of his or her service-connected disabilities. Marginal employment, such as an odd job, is not considered "substantial gainful employment" for VA purposes. In addition to the employment barrier, a veteran eligible for IU must have one service-connected condition ratable at 60 percent or more disabling, or two or more service-connected disabilities, at least one condition that is ratable at 40 percent or more disabling, with a combined rating of 70 percent or more disabled.

Reports published by the Congressional Budget Office in August 2014 and the General Accountability Office in June 2015 made recommendations for substantial changes to the IU program. If implemented, these changes would cause significant financial harm to wounded, ill and injured veterans, their survivors and dependents.

Many of the views expressed within these reports are quite troubling, particularly the notions of restricting, limiting, or eliminating entitlement to IU on the basis of age and offsetting IU benefits when veterans are in receipt of other earned federal benefits such as military compensation or Social Security benefits; concepts that Veterans vehemently opposes.

No legislation has been introduced to address IU, but discussions are underway. DAV wants the voice of DAV members, the auxiliary and other veterans who are concerned about the preservation of veterans' benefits to be part of this discussion. DAV asks you to contact your elected officials with your own letter to reject changes to the VA's definition of Individual Unemployability.

[Here are interesting fact about Vietnam:](#)

**Americal Fighting Forces:**  
A story by pfc mike kelsey

The combat effectiveness of a division can be seen in the faces of its soldiers, read in the maps and plans of its leaders, and related in the chronicle which unfolds with the meshing of Man and Idea. Americal Division soldiers have worked doggedly and without much fanfare to compile and enviable battlefield record in the first 11 months of Army operations in the Chu Lai area. They have climbed, waded and flown their way to an enemy body count of about 13,500 while, losing themselves about 1,100 killed and 6,300 wounded – a kill ratio of slightly less than 13:1. And an infantryman takes more pride in his unit's kill ratio than a sportsman does in his dog. "the kill ratio is very important to the man in the field," related one NCO who had spent some 23 months in Vietnam and had participated in more than 250 combat assaults. "He knows that if it is high, he is working in a good outfit, and that his own chances of survival are greater. He respects the team effort more than he perhaps normally would. And he has more faith in his leaders."

A "good" kill ratio, a "good" battlefield record, these are things which do not simply happen. Both outstanding soldiers and swift, decisive leaders are musts, and a little luck never hurt anyone. Americal is currently involved in two major, named search and destroy operations. Wheeler/Wallow, the senior of the two, is being conducted in the high ground northwest of Tam Ky by the 196th Brigade; the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 1st Cavalry; and Troop C of the 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry. Operation Muscatine, being conducted by elements of the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade near Quang Ngai, was kicked off by the 198th Brigade in late December. The pictures, stories and sketches which follow draw on action which have been parts of these operations and another, Task Force Miracle, which involved a quick reaction on the part of three Americal battalions to the enemy's Tet attacks. The only criteria on which they were chosen was their ability to portray the fine qualities of the soldiers and leaders of the Americal Division.



Twenty one Chapter members were available for this picture taken at the ADVA annual reunion in Norfolk, VA.

**EVERYTHING I NEEDED TO KNOW IN LIFE I LEARNED AS AN INFANTRYMAN IN VIETNAM.**



**National Medal of Honor Museum:** The National Medal of Honor Museum Foundation has unveiled architectural designs for the planned \$ 98 million tribute to recipients of the military's highest valor award. The foundation has accelerated efforts to finance the 107,000 square foot museum it intends to build on the eastern shore of Charleston Harbor in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. The museum represents a core part of a legacy eyed by the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, which consists exclusively of the 79 living recipients of the medal. The intended message the Society wants to convey is that ordinary people can do extraordinary things when they put service above self. "It's about the legacy of the medals and the ideals behind it," said foundation and CEO Robert Wilburn, who served as an intelligence officer for the Air Force at the Pentagon during the Vietnam War. "The recipients don't want this to be a monument to themselves but an educational opportunity."

**Support House of Representatives Bill HR 313:** Representative Stephen Lynch (MA) introduced H.R. 313, a bill that would protect service-disabled veterans employed by the federal government from discrimination when they are absent from work due to their disabilities and the need for health care. Wounded, injured, and ill veterans are significant consumers of health care, often due to their military service. Many veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are subjected to reductions in pay and other penalties due to unexcused absences from work while they seek health care to address their service-connected conditions. This bill would prohibit federal departments and agencies from taking any adverse action against veterans who need to be away from work to address their health care challenges consequent to military service. This bill was approved by the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs at a recent business meeting; however, it has not been scheduled for floor debate. Please write your Representative to urge support and approval of this bill by the House of Representatives.

**McCain Bill Would Let All Veterans Seek Care Outside VA:** Just before Congress left town Sen. John McCain introduced a bill that could increase the controversy over how to fix the Department of Veterans Affairs, proposing that all veterans be eligible to have private care paid for by their VA insurance. Currently, veterans who live more than 40 miles from a VA facility and those who face long wait times can apply to seek medical care in the private sector on their VA insurance. That was part of the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014, a three-year pilot program that McCain, R-Ariz., championed as a way to give veterans more convenient access to health care and to make it easier to fire senior VA officials. McCain's latest bill would make the choice card pilot program permanent and erase the qualifications in the 2014 law, opening the option to every VA eligible veteran. The proposed legislation would remove uncertainty from within the VA, among providers, and especially among our veterans, while sending a strong signal to all Americans that this program is here to stay," McCain said in a released statement. "More than a year after the VA scandal first came to light and a year since VA reform legislation was signed into law, wait times are still too long and veterans are still not getting the care they have earned and deserve." Veterans groups seemed caught off guard by the bill Thursday, and many contacted by Stripes said they had not yet taken a position on the proposed legislation. In the past, most veterans advocates have come out strongly against privatizing VA health care, and this bill appears to put much more emphasis on paying for private health care for veterans. There was some early pushback on McCain's new bill, including from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, who said existing legislation has achieved the goal of simplifying veterans' choice in their health care.

**IG Report: 300,000 Veterans Died While Waiting for Health Care at VA:** More than 300,000 American military veterans likely died while waiting for health care -- and nearly twice as many are still waiting -- according to a new Department of Veterans Affairs inspector general report. The IG report says "serious" problems with enrollment data are making it impossible to determine exactly how many veterans are actively seeking health care from the VA, and how many were. For example, "data limitations" prevent investigators from determining how many now-deceased veterans applied for health care benefits or when. But the findings would appear to confirm reports that first surfaced last year that many veterans died while awaiting care, as their applications got stuck in a system that the VA has struggled to overhaul. Some applications, the IG report says, go back nearly two decades. The report addresses serious issues with the record-keeping itself. More than half the applications listed as pending as of last year do not have application dates, and investigators "could not reliably determine how many records were associated with actual applications for enrollment" in VA health care, the report said. The report also says VA workers incorrectly marked thousands of unprocessed health-care applications as completed and may have deleted 10,000 or more electronic "transactions" over the past five years. Linda Halliday, the VA's acting inspector general, said the agency's Health Eligibility Center "has not effectively managed its business processes to ensure the consistent creation and maintenance of essential data" and recommended a multi-year plan to improve accuracy and usefulness of agency records. Halliday's report came in response to a whistleblower who said more than 200,000 veterans with pending applications for VA health care were likely deceased. The inspector general's report substantiated that claim and others, but said there was no way to tell for sure when or why the person died. The VA has said it has no way to purge the list of dead applicants, and said many of those listed in the report are likely to have used another type of insurance before they died. VA spokeswoman Walinda West said the agency has publicly acknowledged that its enrollment process is confusing and that the enrollment system, data integrity and quality "are in need of significant improvement." Sens. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., and Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., chairman and senior Democrat of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, said in a joint statement that the inspector general's report pointed to "both a significant failure" by leaders at the Health Eligibility Center and "deficient oversight by the VA central office" in Washington. The lawmakers urged VA to implement the report's recommendations quickly to improve record keeping at the VA and "ensure that this level of blatant mismanagement does not happen again." VA has contacted 302,045 veterans by mail, asking them to submit required documents to establish eligibility, West said. To date, the VA has received 36,749 responses and enrolled 34,517 veterans, she said. "As we continue our work to contact veterans, our focus remains on improving the enrollment system to better serve veterans," West said. The Health Eligibility Center has removed a "purge-and-delete functionality" from a computer system used to track agency workloads, West said. VA will provide six months of data to demonstrate that any changed or deleted data on VA workloads has undergone appropriate management review, with approvals and audit trails visible, she said.

["The economy is so bad that: I received a pre-declined credit card in the mail. CEOs are now playing miniature golf. Exxon-Mobile laid off 25 Congressmen. Angelina Jolie adopted a child from America. Motel 6 will no longer leave the light on anymore. A picture is only worth 200 words. They renamed Wall Street "Wal-Mart Street". Finally, I called the Suicide Hot-Line. I got a call center in Pakistan and when I told them I was suicidal, they got excited and asked if I could drive a truck."](#)

## Social Security beneficiaries won't get bigger payments in 2016.

There wasn't enough inflation in 2015 to trigger a cost-of-living adjustment to monthly benefits. However, there are a few ways Social Security will change next year.

**No payment increase.** This is the third time there has been no Social Security payment increase since automatic cost-of-living adjustments began in 1975. There was also no increase in payments in 2010 and 2011. In January 2015 the cost-of-living adjustment was 1.7 percent. Social Security payments are adjusted to keep up with inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers, but are not decreased when the index does not detect inflation. The average monthly benefit for retired workers is expected to be \$1,341 per month in 2016, and retired couples who are both receiving benefits will receive an average of \$2,212 monthly.

**Stagnant tax cap.** In years when there is no cost-of-living adjustment, there is also no change in the maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security tax, which will remain \$118,500 in 2016. Earnings above this amount are not subject to the Social Security portion of the payroll tax or used to calculate retirement payouts.

**Earnings limit unchanged.** The Social Security earnings limit for people who work and claim Social Security payments at the same time will remain \$15,720 in 2016 for people ages 65 and younger. Social Security beneficiaries who earn more than this amount will have \$1 in benefits temporarily withheld for every \$2 in earnings above the limit. For people who will turn 66 in 2016, the earnings limit climbs to \$41,880, and the reduction in payments for earning too much declines to \$1 withheld for every \$3 in excess earnings. Once a retiree turns 66 in 2016, the earnings limit no longer applies and benefit payments are recalculated to factor in withheld payments and continued earnings.

**Existing beneficiaries protected from Medicare premium increase.** Most retirees who are already receiving Social Security benefits will continue to pay the same Medicare Part B premium in 2016, because Medicare Part B premiums are prevented by law from increasing faster than Social Security payments for most existing beneficiaries. However, retirees who first sign up for Medicare Part B in 2016 and high income Medicare beneficiaries may pay higher monthly premiums than people who previously signed up for Social Security.

**Maximum possible benefit declines.** The maximum possible Social Security payment for a 66-year-old worker who signs up for Social Security in 2016 will be \$2,639 per month, down \$24 from \$2,663 in 2015. "A decrease in full maximum benefits occurs when there is no cost-of-living adjustment, but there is an increase in the national average wage index," according to a statement from the Social Security Administration.

**More online services.** The Social Security Administration is continuing to add to the services offered online. Workers can already create a My Social Security account that allows them to view their taxes paid and get a personalized estimate of their monthly payments at various claiming ages. Retirees can use this account to adjust their direct deposit, obtain a benefit verification letter, request a replacement SSA-1099 form or, most recently, obtain a replacement Medicare card.

**Longer office hours.** Following years of cutbacks, the Social Security Administration expanded office hours in many of its field offices beginning in March 2015. However, most offices continue to close to the public at noon on Wednesdays so that employees can work to reduce backlogs. If you prefer to conduct your Social Security business in person, you will now have an hour longer to do it on most weekdays.



# Vietnam Living Memorial to be dedicated on Veterans Day

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

BY MANDY MILES Citizen Staff

[mmiles@keysnews.com](mailto:mmiles@keysnews.com)

It took the steady hands of a skilled crane and construction crew to set six granite panels in place on the Vietnam Living Memorial at Bayview Park.

“The guys from D.L. Porter did a great job with the crane and especially the wind,” said project organizer and Vietnam veteran



Jerry Hughes, also complimenting the Vermont-based team from Picture This in Granite, which etched the six black granite panels that will form the memorial at the new Veterans Memorial Garden.

“We’ll be all set for our dedication ceremony at 11 a.m. on November 11, which is of course Veterans Day,” Hughes said Monday evening. The living memorial will include the names of 362 Vietnam veterans who lived in Key West or were stationed here prior to the end of the

Asian conflict in April 1975. Other

veterans who have lived in Key West since the end of the war are encouraged to support the project by sponsoring an engraved brick that will become part of the memorial garden.

In addition to the 362 names, the black granite panels — six in all — include

tributes to all branches of the military: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard and Merchant Marines; a map of Vietnam showing the major battles, etched scenes of the war and a memorial to all military conflicts that affected Key West and its population.

The Nov. 11 dedication ceremony will be followed that evening by a Patriotic Gala Celebration Party from 5 to 8 p.m. at the new Veterans Memorial Garden, Hughes said, adding that this year’s Veterans Parade will end at Bayview Park to give all residents and visitors a chance to see the new memorial and gardens. “The whole

community is invited to the dedication in the morning and the Patriotic Gala in the evening,” Hughes said. For information, visit [vietnamlivingmemorial.com](http://vietnamlivingmemorial.com).

Jerry Hughes is a frequent contributor to the 2/1 Chapter ADVA publication. Everyone should avail themselves of this opportunity.

