



**The Veteran's Voice**  
**Newsletter**  
**March 2024**  
**Edition**



# THE VETERANS VOICE

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VA continues to expand access to health care and benefits for toxic-exposed Veterans as a part of President Biden's Unity Agenda for the nation

**WASHINGTON** — Today, the Department of Veterans Affairs issued a proposed rule outlining plans to expand the locations and time frames for which VA presumes exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides. If this proposed rule becomes final, VA will implement a new presumption of exposure to locations where herbicides were tested, used, or stored outside of Vietnam. Specifically, this proposed rule would add locations in the United States (full list of US locations where Agent Orange was tested or stored), Canada, and India to the existing presumptives for Agent Orange in Vietnam, Cambodia, Johnson Atoll, Guam, American Samoa, Korea, Laos, and Thailand.

A presumption of exposure means that VA automatically assumes that Veterans who served in certain locations were exposed to certain toxins. Presumptives lower the burden of proof required to receive disability benefits, helping Veterans get the benefits they deserve as quickly as possible. This expansion of presumptives will help Veterans who served in the specified locations receive health care and benefits for certain cancers and chronic conditions. To be eligible, a Veteran must have served in the identified location(s) during a specific time period and currently have a condition(s) presumptively associated with herbicide exposure.

Delivering world-class health care and benefits to toxic-exposed Veterans is a top priority for VA and the Biden-Harris Administration. As a part of President Biden's pledge to serve Veterans with military toxic exposures, over the past few years, VA has expanded presumptive service connection for more than hundreds of health conditions related to toxic exposures under the PACT Act – the largest expansion of Veteran care and benefits in generations. Thanks to this historic action, VA is delivering more care and more benefits to more Veterans than ever before in U.S. history.

"This proposed change would make it easier for Veterans exposed to herbicides who served outside Vietnam to access the benefits they so rightly deserve," said **VA Secretary Denis McDonough**. "Our goal is to provide every Veteran – of every era – with the VA health care and benefits they deserve, and this is another step in the right direction."

Veterans who want to file an initial claim for a herbicide-related disability can visit VA's website, use VA Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits, or work with a VA-recognized Veterans Service Organization to assist with the application process. Veterans may also contact their state Veterans Affairs Office. Survivors can file claims for benefits based on the Veteran's service if the Veteran died from at least one of the recognized presumptive herbicide diseases.

This proposed rule also codifies provisions in the PACT Act, the Blue Water Navy Act of 2019, and the National Defense Authorization Act for 2021.

# THE UNTOLD TRUTH OF THE VIETNAM WAR'S 'DONUT DOLLIES'

BY KELSEY ROSLIN



Though many of the harsh realities of the Vietnam War were splayed across American newspapers and television sets as journalists reported from Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon, some stories still went untold. Among those were the ones that involved women's volunteer contributions overseas, like those of an elite Red Cross group affectionately known as Donut Dollies, according to The Desert Sun. Britannica notes that the Vietnam War became known as the "first television war" because of technological advances in film and satellite transmission, and more than ever before, the world could see how brutal the conflict was, which made Americans eligible to be drafted angry and afraid.

As the war raged on without an end in sight, many college-educated young people became increasingly opposed to it with each passing day. They rejected the mounting American presence and suppression of free speech on campuses as they became disillusioned with the United States' approach to the situation in Vietnam, History reported. Many young people across college campuses joined anti-war movements and pushed back against being drafted. But some women saw all of this happening and went by choice to help the American soldiers overseas feel some sense of home and to see the truth for themselves. They were called Donut Dollies.

## DONUT DOLLIES WEREN'T THE OFFICIAL NAME

The Donut Dollies of the Vietnam War were officially called the Supplemental Recreational Activities Overseas staff, a section of the Red Cross, according to the Red Cross. It just doesn't have the same ring to it, and the name Donut Dollies represented the comforting nature of the young American women that came to Vietnam. But the name began even earlier with the "Donut Lassies" of World War I. When the initial idea to have female volunteers offer a respite from the horrors of war was launched by the Salvation Army, the intention was to boost morale by reminding soldiers of some of the joys of home, like the presence of a friendly girl-next-door type, the chance to play games, talk, and get coffee and food, according to The Smithsonian. Because they couldn't serve, women volunteered. During World War I, one of their unexpected ways to help morale was making donuts.

In 1917, two women named Margaret Sheldon and Helen Purviance had the idea that making hot donuts would bring smiles to soldiers' faces. They could get the ingredients needed, and so they set about bringing happiness to the men with unexpected donuts. As the popularity of their pastries increased, between the pair of them they figured out how to make 2,500 donuts a day, according to The Smithsonian. This name stuck, and it followed women volunteers in the Red Cross for years to come, even when they weren't serving donuts.

## THE MONIKER LASTED THROUGH FOUR WARS

Originally started during World War I, variations of the donut-themed names and contributions continued through World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. As All That's Interesting reported, what began as a makeshift

practice in World War I with two volunteers became a key focus in wars to follow. During World War II, when the name Donut Dollies became popular for the women of the Supplemental Recreational Activities Overseas (SRAO) volunteer group, the Doughnut Corporation of America equipped the Donut Dollies with 468 machines capable of making 48 dozen donuts an hour.

The ranks of Donut Dollies grew substantially during the Vietnam War, with 627 women volunteering under the name to put themselves in harm's way. They would serve a year at a time, according to the Red Cross. The program's height was in 1969, and it's estimated that each month, the women of the SRAO volunteer group helped close to 300,000 servicemen. Even when the means of boosting morale changed between wars, the spirit of bringing joy in small ways remained.

#### THEY DIDN'T SERVE DONUTS IN VIETNAM

While the original Donut Dollies used the ingredients they had at hand to make warm baked treats, AARP reported that it was too hot in Vietnam to enjoy donuts. Instead, they served things like Kool-Aid and other refreshments, and they offered a reminder of something soldiers were desperately missing — the normalcy of home. Even though they weren't making donuts, calls would come in requesting the Donut Dollies after a unit was decimated. They would show up and see which men wanted to talk. The name represented much more than girls handing out a breakfast item — they brought hope and comfort with them. One Donut Dolly, Rachel Torrance, told PBS, "Our mission over there was to break the monotony of the war and to remind them of home."

According to Spectrum News 1, many of the men that relied on the emotional support the Donut Dollies provided in Vietnam began to fall in love with them. Bobbi Stephens, who volunteered for a year, had many men confess their feelings. She told them to go home and wait and see if they still felt the same. One man did, and they ended up getting married.

#### THEY PLAYED GAMES IN WAR ZONES

When spirits were lowest, the Donut Dollies had to get creative. Their task was to boost morale, but without huge funding or psychological training. So, they would play games and trivia with the men, listen to records, and talk. One former volunteer, according to The National Museum of the United States Army, said, "Our job was to smile and be bubbly for an entire year — no matter what the situation."

That meant that even when they were scared or had seen soldiers they knew die, they still had to show up and try to boost the troops' spirits. While the armed forces had weapons, training, and gear, the Donut Dollies had the kindness and creativity to spread laughter and distraction. According to The U.S. Department of Defense, when they didn't drive between locations, they were taken in helicopters to fire bases, where they would create trivia and games based on topics the men enjoyed at home, like football and music. A former Dolly named Linda Pelegrino told the Red Cross, "It is very hard to explain to someone, 'Yeah, we played games in the war zone.' It's definitely a history of Red Cross that I wish more people knew about."

#### IT'S TAKEN DECADES FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO BE RECOGNIZED

There are many war stories that focus on fighting, death, and destruction. When photographers recounted their experiences and shared their most influential photos for places like Time, there was an absence of recognition for the contributions of American women on the ground.

According to Spectrum News 1, it took many years for the public to learn about the heroic volunteer work the Dollies did in Vietnam. In the late '80s, a television show called "China Beach" focused on characters serving in a field hospital in at a base during the war, and they consulted with a Donut Dolly named Linda Hallenbeck-Pelegrino to get details right for a character they named after her. In 2019, a documentary came out about two of the Dollies. The documentarians wrote for their IMDB synopsis that "amazingly, over 50 years since the first Donut Dollies arrived in Vietnam, many people have still never heard of them."

### **THREE DONUT DOLLIES DIED**

While more than 600 women served in Vietnam as Dollies, some of them didn't return home. They were very much part of the war, and they faced similar dangers that those fighting did. Though they were supposed to be "nonsexual symbols of purity and goodness," according to The Huffington Post, they were often up against familiar threats they faced in the U.S. like sexism and sexual assault. Bobbie Lischak Trotter recounted in a Donut Dolly Dispatch that though the men were largely appreciative of the women, one told her to "go home and make babies or whatever it is you women do," and she also had to deal with an attempted assault.

According to AARP, the women also had to deal with unwanted propositions and Peeping Toms. Three even died while volunteering at what the Red Cross advertised would be the greatest year of these young women's lives. According to an avionics newsletter about Vietnam called Avel Vietnam, Lucinda J. Richter died after getting an infection at just 21. Find A Grave lists that another Dolly died in Vietnam in a Jeep accident — her name was Hannah Elizabeth Crews. And then, there was the tragic murder of Ginny Kirsch.

If you or anyone you know has been a victim of sexual assault, help is available. Visit the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network website or contact RAINN's National Helpline at 1-800-656-HOPE (4673).

### **THE MURDER OF GINNY KIRSCH**

When they left for Vietnam, the young women that volunteered with the Red Cross likely knew that they would face some dangers, and possibly death, but not from the hands of the men they went to help. Tragically, a young volunteer named Virginia E. "Ginny" Kirsch was stabbed to death, according to the Tribune Chronicle.

Patrick M. McLaughlin, a former U.S. attorney for Northern Ohio and president of the Greater Cleveland Veterans Memorial Inc., filed a Freedom of Information Act request in order to get details about her death and wrote about them in an opinion piece for Cleveland.com. According to that report, Kirsch was only in Vietnam for two weeks before she was murdered in her own bed. The Tribune Chronicle reported that an American Army man named Gregory Kozlowski was arrested after Red Cross items were found in his possession. But the evidence was insufficient, and he was never charged. He later returned to the U.S. and was arrested for the murder of a man in the states, where he is rumored to have revealed during questioning that he had stabbed a woman in Vietnam. He was found not guilty by reason of insanity for the murder in the U.S.

### **THE RULES FOR JOINING WERE MORE STRICT THAN THOSE FOR THE MILITARY**

In order for a man to sign up to fight in Vietnam, especially because of the draft, the requirements were fairly lax. With the anti-war movement and the war being heavily broadcasted, many people were reluctant if not vehemently opposed. According to the Selective Service System, you only needed to be 18 to be put into the draft lottery (which is still true today). The list of reasons you couldn't serve was much longer than the requirements. You couldn't be gay, hold an essential job, or have a serious health issue, according to Business Insider.

In order to be a Donut Dolly, you had to be a young woman, have a college degree, a great personality, letters of recommendation, the ability to pass physical exams, and more, according to the Red Cross. With the strict requirements, only one in six who applied to volunteer their time and talents were chosen, notes All That's Interesting. As the New York Times reported, these women also had to be able to care for the emotional scars of the soldiers.

### **THEY TRAVELED BY HELICOPTER, JEEP, AND MOBILE CLUBHOUSES**

The women tasked with boosting morale as Donut Dollies also had to understand Red Cross procedures, Army procedures, and drive "club mobiles," which were like traveling clubhouses in a bus design, according to former WWII club mobiler Elma Ernst Fay. Originally, the Red Cross built service clubs to offer aid and a place to relax during the war. In 1942, to avoid having to charge servicemen for food and aid, buses were converted into traveling service clubs

to offer assistance, and Donut Dollies drove them — complete with kitchens to make the treats, record players, recent books, and more.

In Vietnam, they also traveled by club mobiles, as well as trucks, Jeeps, and helicopters into some of the most dangerous areas, according to the U.S. Department of Defense. The National Museum of the United States Army's data shows that in order to get to the servicemen during the Vietnam War, the Donut Dollies traveled more than 2 million miles to remote stations.

#### THEY WERE BEHIND THE SCENES AND ON THE FRONT LINES

According to The Donut Dollie Detail, Donut Dollies like Marrilee Shannon were never considered veterans, despite spending a year or more serving their country. The women had to learn how to be therapists, drivers, cooks, and more. A Donut Dolly named Connie Dugan Popel recounted to the U.S. Department of Defense that they received just two weeks of training prior to leaving for Vietnam, and many of them didn't truly understand what they were getting into.

According to the Los Angeles Daily News, Dorset Anderson, a Donut Dolly from '68 to '69 and one of the subjects of a documentary about the women, recalled that they would often have to hide in underground bunkers when the bases they were at came under fire. Mary Tsinnajinnie-Cohoe, the only Navajo Dolly, told the Gallup Sun that many of the women were likely exposed to Agent Orange, but they can't receive veteran benefits. The Dollies also didn't know what was happening back in the U.S. "We didn't really know that Vietnam was very unpopular back in the United States. We wanted to boost the morale about the American GI and so we talked about the United States in a positive way," said Tsinnajinnie-Cohoe.

#### MANY JOINED TO UNDERSTAND THE WAR

"I was engaged to a pilot who was flying over Vietnam and was shot down and was declared missing in action. I was heartbroken and could not understand why America was in this war and what we were doing there that would get our best and brightest killed," Donut Dolly Paula Wright Haley told The Dollie Detail. So, she went to Vietnam to try to understand her loss. She was from Texas, so the soldiers called her Tex.

Another Dolly, Karen K. Jankowski, told The Washington Post that she went because she said that "hippies and everybody were against the war. I wanted to see for myself what it was." Joining at the start of the Tet Offensive, Judy Stevens became a Dolly in support of the troops and a desire to have a first-hand experience of what they were going through (via Jacksonville.com).

#### THE PROGRAM IS NO LONGER ACTIVE, BUT SOME DOLLIES ARE

When the Vietnam war raged on, there was no such thing as Skype, and the ways in which the Dollies could communicate or stay in touch were few. When they returned, many of them didn't talk about the war, or know who to talk about it with that would understand, according to the Tampa Bay Times.

Now, many Dollies are connecting online with new technology, and soldiers are putting names to faces of those that saved them, according to The Washington Post. One veteran, Jim Roberts, had photographed two Donut Dollies during his time in Vietnam. After only spending a few hours with them, they were gone. He forgot their names, but he never forgot the hope that they gave him, and with the help of the internet they got to speak to each other on Zoom. The Dollies now connect online and share their stories in chat groups and pages like The Donut Dollies documentary Facebook page.

**Submitted by AVVA member Priscilla L. Miles. Thank you Priscilla**

**I seriously cannot  
Wait until all the  
Pieces come together and  
I finally understand  
Why I went through  
Everything I did?**

**From I needed a Viking Poetry**



# AGENT ORANGE NEWSLETTER

INFORMATION FOR VIETNAM-ERA VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

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### TOXIC EXPOSURE SCREENING

As a Veteran, during your military service, you may have been exposed to environmental hazards, such as Agent Orange. To learn more about your exposures, you can have a toxic exposure screen (TES) (<https://www.va.gov/files/2023-01/Toxic%20Exposure%20Screening%20Fast%20Facts%20V1.13.22%201330hrs.pdf>) during a routine health care appointment, which will allow your exposures to be documented in your record. The TES includes a series of questions that take about 5-10 minutes, and the potential exposures to various hazards are recorded. This screening is not

environmental health registry exams (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/benefits/registry-evaluation.asp>) and clinical resources to address any concerns. If you have any questions about the TES, you can contact your local VA health care team via Secure Message or call 1-800-MyVA411 and press 8. You can also inquire about the TES during your next VA health care appointment or contact your local VA facility and ask to be screened by the TES Navigator if you want to be screened sooner. It is important to note that you will be screened at least once every five years, even if you do not have any concerns at present. We recommend that you take advantage of this opportunity better understand your health.

### VIETNAM-ERA VETERANS, THE PACT ACT AND THE AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY

Do you know the difference between the PACT Act and the Agent Orange Registry? The PACT Act, more formally known as the Sergeant First Class Health Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, was signed into law on August 10, 2022. It expands health care benefits for Veterans. The Agent Orange Registry helps Veterans understand possible long-term health problems that may be related to Agent Orange exposure. Learn more about the difference between these two initiatives.

#### The PACT Act

- The PACT Act is a law that empowers VA to provide expanded benefits and care to Veterans who were exposed to environmental hazards during military service.
- It ensures that every Veteran enrolled in VA health care can receive an initial toxic exposure screening at VA and follow-up screening at least every 5 years.



meant for diagnostic purposes but can address concerns about your health and deployment. Following the screen, you will receive information about benefits,







- It solidifies VA's process for establishing presumptions of service connection of toxic exposure-related conditions.

### Presumptive Conditions

The PACT Act added to the list of health conditions that we assume (or “presume”) are caused by military exposures. If you have a presumptive condition, you don't need to prove that your service caused the condition. You only need to meet the service requirements for the presumption.

For Vietnam Veterans, the PACT Act added the following presumptive conditions:

- High blood pressure (also called hypertension)
- Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS).

### Presumptive Locations

The PACT Act added 5 locations as additional presumptive locations for Agent Orange exposure:

- Any U.S. or Royal Thai military base in Thailand from January 9, 1962, through June 30, 1976

- Laos from December 1, 1965, through September 30, 1969
- Cambodia at Mimot or Krek, Kampong Cham Province from April 16, 1969, through April 30, 1969
- Guam or American Samoa or in the territorial waters off Guam or American Samoa from January 9, 1962, through July 31, 1980
- Johnston Atoll or on a ship that called at Johnston Atoll from January 1, 1972, through September 30, 1977

Find additional locations and time frames (<https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange/#full-eligibility-requirements>).

If you served on active duty in any of these locations, VA will automatically presume that you had exposure to Agent Orange.

### Health Care

If you served on active duty in any of these locations during these time periods, you are eligible to apply for VA health care:

- The Republic of Vietnam between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975
- Thailand at any U.S. or Royal Thai base between January 9, 1962, and June 30, 1976
- Laos between December 1, 1965, and September 30, 1969
- Certain provinces in Cambodia between April 16, 1969, and April 30, 1969
- Guam or American Samoa (or their territorial waters) between January 9, 1962, and July 31, 1980
- Johnston Atoll (or on a ship that called at Johnston Atoll) between January 1, 1972, and September 30, 1977

Learn more about health care eligibility (<https://www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility/>) and about the PACT Act (<https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/#vietnam-era-veteran-eligibility>).

### Agent Orange Registry

The Agent Orange Registry (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp>) provides eligible Veterans with a free health evaluation related to Agent Orange exposure.

- It alerts Veterans to possible long-term health problems that may be related to Agent Orange exposure during their military service.
- The registry data helps VA understand and monitor the potential for health problems related to Agent Orange exposure.







- It is not a disability evaluation or required for other VA benefits.
- Enrollment in VA health care is not required to join.

## Agent Orange Registry Eligibility

Veterans are eligible for the Agent Orange Registry if they served in the following locations and time frames:

- Vietnam - Veterans who served in Vietnam anytime between 1962 and 1975, regardless of length of time. This includes "Brown Water" and "Blue Water" Navy Veterans.
- Korea - Veterans who served in a unit in or near the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) any time between September 1, 1967, and August 31, 1971.
- Thailand
  - \* U.S. Air Force Veterans who served on Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) bases between February 28, 1961, and May 7, 1975.
  - \* Army Veterans who provided perimeter security on RTAF bases in Thailand between February 28, 1961, and May 7, 1975.
  - \* U.S. Army Veterans who were stationed on some small Army installations in Thailand anytime between February 28, 1961, and May 7, 1975. The Army Veteran must have been a member of a military police (MP) unit or was assigned a military occupational specialty whose duty placed him or her at or near the base perimeter.

- C-123 Airplanes - Veterans (including some Reservists) who state that they flew on or worked on a C-123 aircraft between 1969 and 1986.
- Veterans who served in additional locations added by the PACT Act
- Other Veterans - Veterans who may have been exposed to herbicides during a military operation or as a result of testing, transporting, or spraying herbicides for military purposes.

To schedule a registry evaluation, contact your local VA Environmental Health Coordinator (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp>),

### QUESTION: CAN I BE TESTED FOR AGENT ORANGE EXPOSURE?

As a Vietnam-era Veteran, you may wonder if there is an examination or medical test to find out if you have been exposed to Agent Orange. Perhaps you want to know your level of exposure.

If you served during certain times and at particular locations (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/locations/index.asp>), VA presumes that you were exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides. If you have a presumptive disease (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/conditions/>) and served during the designated time and location, you will automatically be considered eligible for VA benefits. If you feel that you were exposed to Agent Orange or herbicides and have a health condition other than those listed that you believe is related to your exposure, VA encourages you to submit a claim for disability benefits.

Learn more about submitting a claim for disability benefits at [www.benefits.va.gov/benefits](http://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits) or call 1-800-827-1000.

### WHAT IS EARLY-ONSET PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY?

Peripheral neuropathy is a condition in which nerves that are outside of the brain or spinal cord are damaged. Signs and symptoms of early-onset peripheral neuropathy include:







- Tingling, prickling, or numbness in the fingers or toes
- Burning, throbbing, or shooting pain that is greater at night and may extend to the hands or feet
- High sensitivity to touch
- Muscular weakness
- Pain that is evenly distributed on both sides of the body (for example, in both hands and feet)

If you are concerned about symptoms of early-onset peripheral neuropathy, consult with your health care provider. If you have early-onset peripheral neuropathy that presents within 1 year of herbicide exposure to a degree that is at least 10% debilitating, VA presumes that your condition is connected to your exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides during service. You may qualify for disability benefits and medical care.

Learn more about peripheral neuropathy and Agent Orange ([https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/conditions/peripheral\\_neuropathy.asp](https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/conditions/peripheral_neuropathy.asp)) Learn about filing a claim for disability benefits at [www.benefits.va.gov/benefits](http://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits) or by calling 1-800-827-1000.



### Find your advocate for benefits with VA's accredited list of Veteran Service Organizations

Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) are private groups that advocate for Veterans, service members, dependents, and survivors. A VA-accredited VSO can help you understand and apply for VA benefits, or request further review or appeal of an unfavorable VA benefits decision. VA's Office of General Counsel has a search tool to help you find VA-recognized organizations and VA-accredited individuals that you can contact for help with VA benefits claims. Find the tool at <https://www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp>.

### THE WOMEN'S OPERATIONAL MILITARY EXPOSURE NETWORK

The War-Related Illness and Injury Study Center in Palo Alto, CA, formed the Women's Operational Military Exposure Network (WOMEN) with a mission to combine a comprehensive clinical care program with cutting-edge research to assess and study the effects of military exposure on women who served. WOMEN's vision is to enhance, educate and promote women Veterans' health by continually asking questions, studying possibilities with proven research techniques, and disseminating findings to scientific and Veteran communities.

Although WOMEN has a strong interest in post-9/11 women Veterans as well as Gulf War era Veterans, it serves women Veterans from all eras. The WOMEN team acknowledges that although women were not authorized to serve in combat during the Vietnam War, most women were exposed to the same trauma and combat environment as their male peers. As it related to Vietnam-era,



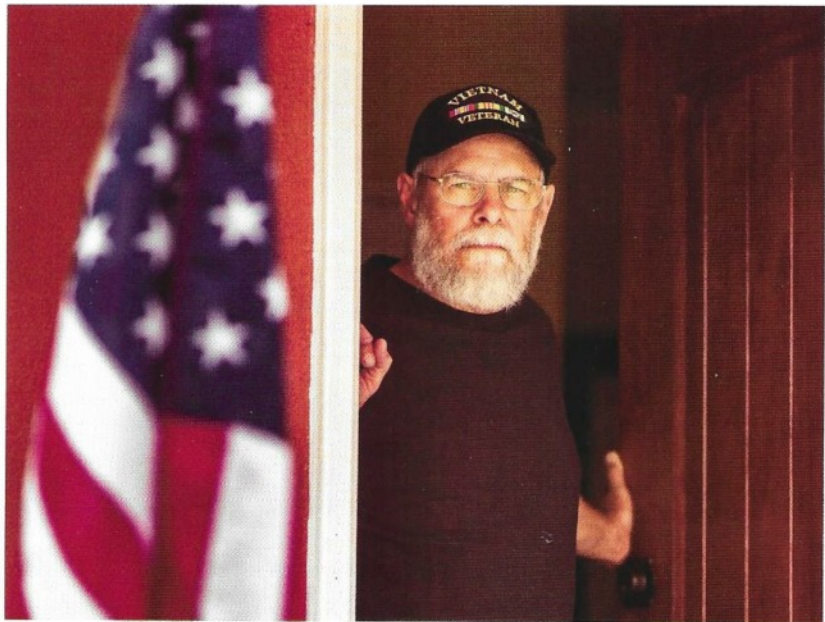


WOMEN is conducting research on menopause and its effect on cognition, especially in the setting of previous traumatic brain injury, and an examination of military exposures and the potential effect on their children’s health.

## VA HOLDS ANNUAL MILITARY ENVIRONMENTAL EXPOSURES TRAINING CONFERENCE

VA’s Health Outcomes Military Exposures (HOME) is committed to educating health care providers about military environmental exposures and their impact on health. As a part of this effort, HOME held its annual Military Environmental Exposures Training Conference—July 11-13th, 2023, in St. Louis, MO. This conference provided essential training for VA staff to develop and sustain skills needed to evaluate Veterans with military environmental exposure concerns. Attendees included VA health care providers and staff who care for Veterans with exposure concerns, including environmental health clinicians and coordinators, primary care physicians and other health care providers.

At the conference, attendees received up-to-date information on the requirements and best practices for implementing and conducting military environmental exposure assessments and environmental health registry exams (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/benefits/registry-evaluation.asp>), such as the exam



for the Agent Orange Registry (<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/benefits/registry-exam.asp>). Additionally, attendees were provided with an overview of the PACT Act (<https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/>), the toxic exposure screen, and the roles and responsibilities of environmental health coordinators and clinicians. This year, all attendees were required to complete the VA/American College of Preventive Medicine’s Military Environmental Exposures Level 1 Certification and obtain an Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record account prior to attending the conference. The certification provided foundational knowledge to effectively identify and treat military environmental exposures that are of concern to Veterans.

The conference included lectures, case studies, breakout sessions, scientific poster displays, and a comprehensive question-and-answer session to test the knowledge of attendees.

## TELEPHONE RESOURCES

### Health Care

1-877-222-8387

### Benefits

1-800-827-1000

### TDD (Hearing Impaired)

1-800-829-4833



# President's Corner

**Hello Everyone**

**Its hard to believe that it has been 49 years since the end of the Vietnam War and 58 years since I returned back to the world. I would like to re-print something that I wrote in our newsletter back in 2013. Something that I feel is still appropriate to the way I feel today.**

## **WHY I REMEMBER**

**So here I am again, reflecting back on things that some say I should forget, or they look at me and wonder why I want to remember. I want to remember because it's a part of who I am, but it's also slowly slipping away.**

**Without it, how could I ever account for that period of time in my life.....Vietnam comes back again. It comes back at the most unexpected of times, always blind siding me with its appearance out of nowhere.**

**I often smile inside when something causes me to flashback, because I'm aware that I still remember. *And I want to remember!* Those times are a blur of mud and dust, unexpected terror, and Hueys from heaven, and oh yeah, , even a few floor shows.**

**Years that I'm still trying to sort out. But most of all it's a blur of places, faces and names. Every one of the faces is a brother to our dying breath, no matter politics, color or religion, but many are and always will be just a blur.. This was the "collage course" many of us took. Some went by choice, some went by the luck of the draw, and many came home in coffins. Those like me did the best they could with the cards we were dealt, and most came home in one manner or another....the luck of the draw. Membership to our club was closed long ago.**

**I'm getting off point a little bit here, but understand, that these guys were my classmates and frat brothers, in a course that cannot be taught and can only be learned. I want to remember that camaraderie, that absolute trust we had in each other and the good times. I don't care to remember the smell of burning shit or the heat and absolute exhaustion of humping' a loaded ruck. I'd rather forget the absolute blackness of the jungle at night, because its still there every night...without the bugs.**

**No matter how spectacular the battle for a firebase at night was, silhouetted against the mountains....I'd rather forget because I know people were dying.**

**For those that didn't go, I don't know what those years were like for you, but here is where I graduated!**

**Respectfully  
Joseph Armstrong  
President**

***From the Desk***  
***Of***  
**Conrad Letellier**  
**1st<sup>st</sup> Vice-President**

**Hello Brothers & Sisters,**

**The only information that I have this month is as you all know we are holding our chapter elections this coming April. We need to fill the following positions in order to keep our chapter alive and doors open. President, 1<sup>st</sup> vice president, 2<sup>nd</sup> vice president, secretary, treasurer, and 5 board of director positions.**

**If these positions are not filled we can no longer continue as a chapter. These positions do not require a lot of time, maybe an hour of your time once a month.**

**Please help us out and consider running for one of these positions.**

**Respectfully**

**Conrad**



# Membership Corner

By

Conrad Letellier Membership Chairman

At the present time recruitment is going very slow. I am still trying to contact our members for updated contact information.

Recently we sent out letters to our members that do not have an email address. Out of the 46 letters sent out 4 have come back as return to sender no forwarding information available.

How can we keep you the members informed and updated on things going on if we do not have your current contact information?

We need your current address, phone number, email address. If any of these have changed since you joined our organization please let us know so that we can update your information.

Respectfully

Conrad

# VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER

## Conrad Letellier

### Brothers & Sisters

This is my first article as a veterans service officer. Many of you already know what a service officer is and what they do, but for the benefit of those that do not, here is an description.

A VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER (VSO) IS AN INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS UNDERGONE TRAINING AND TESTING ON VA REGULATIONS AND IS RECOGNIZED BY THE VA AS BEING ABLE TO ASSIST VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES WITH THEIR CLAIMS. THEY ARE ACCREDITED BY ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS THE VFW, AMERICAN LEGION, DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS, AND OTHERS.

The role of a VSO is to assist veterans and their families in accessing military and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits. They can help veterans write and submit their benefits claims to the VA, gather information that supports their claim, track the claim through the system, and file appeals for denied claims.

If you have a claim or think you may have a claim contact me and we can further discuss which direction to take to help you. The same goes for family members.

I can be reached at 207-494-9287 if no one answers please leave a message and I will get right back to you.

Each month I will try to have information here for you.

Respectfully

Conrad Letellier  
Veterans Service Officer  
D.A.V.

# **POW MIA INFORMATION**

*Conrad Letellier*

On this page you will find information on the ongoing efforts of accounting for our many Prisoners of War (POW) and Missing In Action (MIA)

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, the agency within the Department of Defense responsible for tracking down MIAs, reported in May 2020 that 81,900 Americans were still considered MIA:

72,598 from World War II  
7,580 from the Korean War  
1,587 from Vietnam  
126 from the Cold War  
6 from conflicts since 1991

The State of Maine currently has eleven still missing and or unaccounted for. Their information is below.

## **MAINE POW / MIA'S**

Malcome Arthur Avore USN Hallwell, Maine  
John Henry Ralph Brooks USA Bryant Pond, Maine  
Carl Russell Chruchill USAF Bethel, Maine  
Richard Clair Dority USA Dover/Foxcroft  
Blenn Colby Dyer USMC Standish, Maine  
Walter Louis Hall USA Old Town, Maine  
Terrence Higgins Hanley USN Gardiner, Maine  
John Norman Huntley USA Portland, Maine  
Joseph Tony Musetti Jr. USN Hall Quarry, Maine  
William Stephen Sanders USAF Winthrop, Maine  
Peter George Vlahakos USMC Auburn, Maine



**From The Desk of the Events Coordinator  
Jim Davis**



# **MEETING NOTICE!**

**NEXT CHAPTER MEETING WILL BE SUNDAY 03 MARCH 2024.  
MEETING WILL START AT 1:30 PM 13:30 HRS.  
THERE WILL BE A BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING PRIOR TO  
OUR REGULAR MEETING. B.O.D MEETING STARTS AT 12:00  
HRS**

# Jackie Robinson

1919 - 1972

*Jackie Robinson was a multitalented athlete and the first African American to play in Major League Baseball. He was Rookie of the Year, a six time All-Star and a World Series Champion with the Brooklyn Dodgers.*



AFRICAN AMERICAN

ALL-STAR

ARMY

BASEBALL

BROOKLYN

CHOCK FULL O NUTS

COLOR BARRIER

COURT MARTIAL

DIABETES

DODGERS

FIRST BASEMAN

FORTY-TWO

GEORGIA

HALL OF FAME

ISUM

JACKIE

MAJOR LEAGUE

MVP AWARD

POLITICS

RACISM

ROBINSON

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

ROOSEVELT

SEGREGATION

SPORTS

UCLA

WORLD SERIES

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# *Membership in VVA is the Right Choice*

First I want to say "WELCOME HOME "

The goals of Vietnam Veterans of America are to promote and support the full range of issues important to Vietnam veterans. To create a new identity for this generation of veterans and to change public perception of Vietnam veterans.

VVA is a "home of our own" - a community of fellowship with people who share our experiences, needs, and hopes for the future.

Be as active as your time, talents, and interests allow. Or, simply be a proud member of VVA, knowing that your membership helps VVA work for you and your fellow Vietnam veterans.

Membership includes a subscription to our award-winning newspaper, The VVA Veteran, bringing you updates on issues and legislation affecting veterans, as well as unique articles on the people, places, and history of the Vietnam experience.

Membership is open to U.S. armed force veterans who served on active duty (for other than training purposes) in the Republic of Vietnam between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975, OR in any duty location between August 5, 1964 and May 7, 1975.

Our chapter is working very hard to help our brothers and sisters, their families and veterans of today.

We meet once a month at the American Legion Post 26 located at 508 Elm Street Biddeford. Meetings start at 1:30 (13:30)

If you would like further information on joining our chapter please email me your mailing address at [cwomaine@metrocast.net](mailto:cwomaine@metrocast.net) I will send the information to you.



# Jackie Robinson

## Word Search

### SOLUTION

