

VETERANS HELPING VETERANS



McHENRY COUNTY CHAPTER



"The Chapter with a Heart"

December 2008

McHenry County Chapter of ViêtNow
"THE CHAPTER WITH A HEART"

MEETING: General Meetings are open to the public and are held on the **fourth (4) Tuesday of each month** at 7:30 P. M. at the McHenry VFW – 3002 W. Route 120, McHenry.

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**** BOARD OF DIRECTORS ****

PRESIDENT:	Joe Lewis	815-568-8939
VICE-PRESIDENT:	Bobby Jones	847-409-1947
SECRETARY:	Tony Bilus	815-648-2826
TREASURER:	Steve Rucki	847-458-9850
DIRECTORS:	Rick Cross	815-403-3613
	Joe Ferrenti	815-653-4114
	Mike Wisniewski	815-344-5873
	Bill Richards	815-344-9591
	Harry van Beetz	847/516-9722

ADVISORS: All Past Chapter Presidents

****COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS ****

BYLAWS:	Joe Lewis	815-568-8939
CHAPTER PROGRAM		
GRANTS:	Joe Lewis	815-568-8939
CONVENTION:	Joe Lewis	815-568-8939
"JIM TOBER BASKETS":	Rose Lewis	815-568-8939
MEMBERSHIP:	Rose Lewis	815-568-8939
NEWSLETTER:	Rose Lewis, Editor	815-568-8939
	Billie Blair Asst. Editor	815-385-2905
NOMINATION/ELECTION:	Joe Kersten	815 338-1796
POW/MIA:	Steve Rucki	847-458-9850
PTSD:	Alan Belcher	815-344-0411
CHAPTER VETERAN		
SERVICE OFFICER	Ted Biever	815-338-9292
"RAP" GROUP INFO:	Alan Belcher	815-334-0411
VAC: Delegate:	Joe Kersten	815-338-1796

VETERANS HELPING VETERANS: All Chapter Board Members and Membership

****NATIONAL OFFICERS ****

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		John Bates (Dawn)

National Office Telephone: 815-227-5100 and E-mail: vnnatl@inwave.com

EDITORIAL POLICY: The Newsletter Staff will evaluate all articles submitted as to appropriateness and Relevancy. Newsletter items must be submitted to the editorial staff by the Chapter meeting each Month.



HEAR YE – HEAR YE

**TO ALL OUR MEMBERS –
We need your help!!**

**THE ANNUAL JIM TOBER CHRISTMAS BASKET
PROGRAM**

The following dates are –

**Saturday, December 13 – Time to Meet -1 pm - Shop/Gifts/Food - Wal-Mart
& Aldi Foods, Woodstock – Meet at Wal-Mart (need help in both stores)**

Friday, December 19 @ 6:30 pm– Start wrapping gifts @ Lewis Household

Saturday, December 20 @ 11 am – SORT/PACK/finish wrapping

**Sunday, December 21 -- Start 11 am – DELIVERY from the Lewis
Household, 915 N. Hale Street, Marengo
(815) 568-8939**

HO-HO-HO

☺ God Bless Us Everyone ☺

**See you at our next Chapter Meeting
November 25th @ 7:30 pm**

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SAM'S CLUB MILITARY OPEN HOUSE: Sam's Club announced it will host open houses for military personnel, including retired and active service members and their families, nationwide, to make their holiday brighter. Military personnel can shop and save on their holiday meals and gifts at Sam's Club without a membership. The company will also waive its 10% non-member service fee. The military open houses will be held Monday, 1 DEC and Monday, 15 DEC in 598 Sam's Club locations in the U.S., during regular club hours. For more information refer to samsclub.com. [Source: mrrgrg-ms-talk 26 Nov 08 ++]

COLA 2010: With a 5.8% COLA in the bank for 2009, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) promptly tanked to start the new fiscal year. The October CPI dropped 1.3% compared to the September number - the biggest October decline in 61 years. And because the September number, in turn, was lower than the July-to-September average that's the starting point for the 2010 COLA, we start the first month of the COLA year in a 1.5% hole. And with gas prices continuing their steep fall off into November, it looks like inflation will start off FY2009 in an even deeper hole than it did in 2007, when we ended up the year with a 2.3% COLA. [Source: MOAA Leg Up 21 Nov 08 ++]

AGENT ORANGE & HEART DISEASE: Scientists studying dioxin exposure in humans — including Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange — have found a correlation between the chemicals and the death rates of heart disease and cardiovascular disease. The research, presented in Environmental Health Perspectives shows that there are consistent and significant dose-related associations with heart disease and modest associations with cardiovascular disease. Researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health and the Environmental Protection Agency said they realized that most dioxin studies had centered on cancer rates, but no one had produced a review of research about cardiovascular disease. "Future studies in both animals and humans should assess whether cardiovascular effects are present at environmentally relevant doses," the authors wrote. Environmental Health Perspectives' editor, Hugh Tilson, said the report is of interest because cardiovascular disease is a leading cause of death in many countries, and dioxin exposure can be prevented. [Source: NavyTimes Kelly Kennedy article 21 Nov 08 ++]

VA FRAUD UPDATE 15: A Veterans Administration employee and 13 other people have been charged with conspiring to steal nearly \$2 million in disability claims. All but one of the defendants is a veteran. Each is charged with conspiracy to defraud, as well as paying or receiving bribes, and some with money laundering. They are scheduled to appear Dec. 16 for arraignment in U.S. District Court in Louisville. Veterans Affairs service Representative Jeffrey Allan McGill and Daniel Ryan Parker, a veteran and officer with the Disabled American Veterans, were among the 14 charged 18 NOV by a federal grand jury with conspiring to defraud the U.S. of \$1.9 million through the submission of false veterans' disability claims to the Department of Veterans Affairs. The indictment outlines an alleged scheme for veterans to falsely claim to have suffered from bipolar disorder, hearing loss, frostbite, back injuries and other ailments and disabilities. The indictment says veterans received lump-sum payments for back pay and then kick backed as much as two-thirds of it to Parker and McGill.

If convicted on all charges, Parker could be sentenced to up to 90 years and fined \$2.25 million; McGill, who lives in La Grange, could be imprisoned for 70 years and fined \$1.75 million. "They're all veterans," U.S. Attorney David Huber said at a news conference 20 NOV. "That's what's sad about all of this." Parker, 37, of Crestwood, is free on \$25,000 bond. He is also charged with stealing \$47,000 from Disabled American Veterans. His attorney, Brian Butler of Louisville, said his client plans to plead not guilty. "We've been aware of the investigation for months and have cooperated with investigators," Butler said. Huber said the remaining defendants, who live in Kentucky, Illinois and West Virginia, would voluntarily surrender at arraignment. Huber said Parker and McGill received between \$500,000 and \$600,000 in kickbacks, with the rest of the stolen money being split among the participants.

According to the indictment, starting in 2003 and continuing until this month, Parker and McGill recruited friends, relatives and acquaintances who were military veterans to file fraudulent claims with the VA. Parker and McGill then allegedly either altered the veterans' medical records, or created counterfeit medical records, to give the appearance that the veterans had service related disabilities. That resulted in the veterans receiving 100% disability for problems such as depression or cancer due to Agent Orange exposure during combat in Vietnam, according to the indictment. Huber said the case came to light after a tip from a confidential source. He declined to discuss how the source knew about the alleged plot. "But for that confidential source, this case may not have been known for some time, if at all," Huber said. Michael Keen, the resident agent in charge for the Department of Veterans Affairs in Louisville, said the scheme could hurt veterans who needed the funds allegedly purloined. "Obviously, the Department of Veterans Affairs doesn't have a bottomless pit of money," Keen said. Huber said prosecutors will try to recoup the money taken during the scheme. [Source: NavyTimes AP Brett Barrouquere article 20 Nov 08 ++]

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VA MILEAGE REIMBURSEMENT UPDATE 06: Veterans traveling to and from Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities started being reimbursed for their travel at a higher rate effective 17 NOV. The increase, from 28.5 cents per mile to 41.5 cents per mile, was mandated by law this year, and Congress provided funding for the increase. Veterans who have service-connected disabilities, receive VA pensions or have low incomes are eligible for the reimbursement. The deductible that applies to certain mileage reimbursements will stay the same for now, at \$7.77 for a one-way trip and \$15.54 for a round trip, with a cap of \$46.62 per month. On Jan. 9, these deductibles will decrease to \$3 for a one-way trip, \$6 for a round trip, with a maximum of \$16 per month. [Source: NavyTimes Karen Jowers article 18 Nov 08 ++]

GIFT CARDS: Under the current economic situation there are numerous retail outlets cutting back operations and/or closing stores in the upcoming months. Veterans might want to take this into consideration if they plan to purchase Gift Cards as presents for the holiday season. Also, don't forget that those lifetime warranty replacements are only as good as the lifetime of the company that provides them, NOT your lifetime. There is no law preventing them from doing this. On the contrary, it is referred to as Bankruptcy Planning. A partial list of announcements so far follows:

- Ann Taylor: A company spokeswoman said Ann Taylor will be closing 117 stores nationwide. The company hasn't revealed which stores will be shuttered but will let the stores that will close this fiscal year know over the next month.
- Bombay: CLOSED
- Cache: Women's retailer Cache announced that it is closing 20 to 23 stores this year.
- Circuit City: Has filed chapter 11 bankruptcy re-organization.
- CompUSA: CLOSED. They have clarified in their details on store closings that any extended warranties purchased for products through CompUSA will be honored by third-party provider, Assuring Solutions. Gift cards, rain checks, and rebates purchased prior to 12 DEC can be redeemed at any time during the final sale. For those who have a gadget currently in for service with CompUSA, the repair will be completed and the gadget will be returned to owners.
- DHL: Don't plan on sending those gifts via DHL. The German owned company, is pulling out of the US market in NOV 08 laying off 14,900 of its 18,000 U.S. employees.
- Dillard's: Dillard's Inc. said it will continue to focus on closing underperforming stores, reducing expenses and improving its merchandise in 2008. At the company's annual shareholder meeting, CEO William Dillard II said the company will close another six underperforming stores this year.
- Disney Store: The Walt Disney Company announced it acquired about 220 Disney Stores from subsidiaries of The Children's Place Retail Stores. The exact number of stores acquired will depend on negotiations with landlords. Those subsidiaries of The Children's Place filed for bankruptcy protection in late MAR. Walt Disney In the news release said it has also obtained the right to close about 98 Disney Stores in the U.S. The press release didn't list those stores.
- Eddie Bauer: Eddie Bauer has already Closed 27 shops in the first quarter and plans to close up to two more outlet stores by the end of the year.
- Ethan Allen Interiors: J.C. Penney, Lowe's and Office Depot are scaling back Ethan Allen Interiors: The company announced plans to close 12 of 300+ stores in an effort to cut costs.
- Foot Locker: To close 140 stores. In the company press release and during its conference call with analysts,, it did not specify where the future store closures (all planned in fiscal 2008) will be. The company could not be immediately reached for comment.
- Gap Inc.: Closing 85 stores. In addition to its namesake chain, Gap also owns Old Navy and Banana Republic. The company said the closures (all planned For fiscal 2008) will be weighted toward the Gap brand.
- Home Depot: Nearly 7+ months after its chief executive said there were no plans to cut the number of its core retail stores, The Home Depot Inc. announced 13 NOV that it is shuttering 15 of them amid a slumping U.S. economy and Housing market. The move will affect 1,300 employees. It is the first time the world's largest home improvement store chain has ever closed a flagship Store for performance reasons. Its shares rose almost 5%. The Atlanta-based company said the underperforming U.S. stores being closed represent less than 1% of its existing stores. They will be shuttered within the next two months.
- J. Jill: see Talbot's
- KB Toys: Has posted a list of 356 stores that it is closing around the United States as part of its bankruptcy reorganization. To see the list of store closings, go to the KB Toys Information web site, and click on Press Information
- Lane Bryant, Fashion Bug, Catherine's: Spokeswoman Brooke Perry said the owner of retailers Lane Bryant, Fashion Bug, Catherine's Plus Sizes will close about 150 underperforming stores this year. The company hasn't provided a list of specific store closures and can't say when it will be offered.
- Levitz: The furniture retailer is going out of business. Levitz first announced it was going out of business and closing all

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76 of its stores in DEC 08. The retailer dates back to 1910 when Richard Levitz opened his first furniture store in Lebanon PA. In the 1960s, the warehouse/showroom concept brought Levitz to the forefront of the furniture industry. The local Levitz closures will follow the shutdown of Bombay.

- Linens & Things: Under liquidation and closing all stores by year end.
 - Lowe's: Will close some stores.
 - Macy's: Will close 9 stores.
 - Mervyn's: Closing all stores
 - Movie Gallery: Will close 160 stores as part of reorganization plan to exit bankruptcy. The video rental company plans to close 400 of 3,500 Movie Gallery and Hollywood Video stores in addition to the 520 locations the video rental chain closed last fall.
 - Pacific Sun Wear: Will close its 154 Demo stores after a review of strategic alternatives for the urban-apparel brand. Seventy-four underperforming Demo stores closed last May.
 - Piercing Pagoda: see Zale's
 - Sharper Image: The Company recently filed for bankruptcy protection and announced that 90 of its 184 stores are closing. The retailer will still operate 94 stores to pay off debts, but 90 of these stores have performed poorly and also may close.
 - Sprint Nextel: New Sprint Nextel CEO Dan Hesse appears to have inherited a company bleeding subscribers by the thousands, and will now officially be dropping the ax on 4,000 employees and 125 retail locations. Amid the loss of 639,000 postpaid customers in the fourth quarter, Sprint will be cutting a total of 6.7% of its work force (following the 5,000 layoffs last year) and 8% of company-owned brick-and-mortar stores, while remaining mute on other rumors that it will consolidate its headquarters in Kansas. Sprint Nextel shares are down \$2.89, or nearly 25%, at the time of this writing.
 - Talbot's: About a month ago, Talbot's announced that it will be shuttering all 78 of its kids and men's stores. Now the company says it will close Another 22 underperforming stores. The 22 stores will be a mix of Talbot's women's and J. Jill another chain it owns. The closures will occur this fiscal year, according to a company press release.
 - Whitehall: Closing all stores
 - Wickes: Wickes Furniture is going out of business and closing all of its stores. Wickes, a 37-year-old retailer that targets middle-income customers, filed for bankruptcy protection last month.
 - Wilson's the Leather Experts: Closing 158 stores
 - Zale's: The owner of Zale's and Piercing Pagoda previously said it plans to close 82 stores by 31 JUL 09. Now, it announced that it is closing another 23 underperforming stores. The company said it's not providing a list of specific store closures. Of the 105 locations planned for closure, 50 are kiosks and 55 are stores.
- [Source: Veteran Council Florida Michael T. Isam article 18 Nov 08 ++]

NATIONAL RESOURCE DIRECTORY: The Department of Defense in NOV launched the National Resource Directory, a collaborative effort between the departments of Defense, Labor and Veterans Affairs. The directory is a Web-based network of care coordinators, providers and support partners with resources for wounded, ill and injured service members, veterans, their families, families of the fallen and those who support them. Located at <http://www.nationalresourcedirectory.org>, the directory offers more than 10,000 medical and non-medical services and resources to help service members and veterans achieve personal and professional goals along their journey from recovery through rehabilitation to community reintegration. It is organized into six major categories: Benefits and Compensation; Education, Training and Employment; Family and Caregiver Support; Health; Housing and Transportation; and Services and Resources. It also provides helpful checklists, Frequently Asked Questions, and connections to peer support groups. All information on the Web site can be found through a general or state and local search tool. Inaugural comments regarding the directory were:

- "The directory is the visible demonstration of our national will and commitment to make the journey from 'survive to thrive' a reality for those who have given so much. As new links are added each day by providers and partners, coverage from coast to coast will grow even greater ensuring that no part of that journey will ever be made alone," said Lynda C. Davis, Ph.D., deputy under secretary of defense for military community and family policy.
- "The VA is extremely proud to be a partner in this innovative resource. This combination of federal, state, and community-based resources will serve as a tremendous asset for all service members, veterans, their families and those who care for them. The community is essential to the successful reintegration of our veterans, and these groups greatly enhance the directory's scope," said Karen S. Guice, M.D., executive director, federal recovery care coordination program at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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- “The National Resource Directory will prove to be a valuable tool for wounded, ill, and injured service members and their families as they wind their way through the maze of benefits and services available to them in their transition to civilian life. The Department of Labor is pleased to have the opportunity to work with our partners at DoD,” said Charles S. Ciccolella, the assistant secretary of labor for the veterans’ employment and training service.
[Source: DoD News release No. 962-08 17 Nov 08 ++]

VA PRESUMPTIVE VIETNAM VET DISEASES: The Department of Veterans Affairs presumes that specific disabilities diagnosed in certain veterans were caused by their military service. If one of these conditions is diagnosed in Vietnam Vet, VA presumes that the circumstances of his/her service (i.e. exposure to Agent Orange) caused the condition, and disability compensation can be awarded. This includes DIC education and CHAMPVA for spouses of veterans rated 100% or surviving spouses late-veterans that died from discussed medical problems. The following disabilities may be presumed for those who served in the Republic of Vietnam between 1/9/62 and 5/7/75:

- chloracne or other acneform disease similar to chloracne*
- porphyria cutanea tarda*
- soft-tissue sarcoma (other than osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma or mesothelioma)
- Hodgkin's disease
- multiple myeloma
- respiratory cancers (lung, bronchus, larynx, trachea)
- non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- prostate cancer
- acute and subacute peripheral neuropathy*
- type 2 diabetes
- chronic lymphocytic leukemia

Note*: Must become manifest to a degree of 10% or more within a year after the last date on which the veteran was exposed to an herbicide agent during active military, naval, or air service.

[Source: County of Humboldt Veterans Service office 12 Oct 08 ++]

GI BILL UPDATE 31: Anticipating a tidal wave of GI Bill claims next summer when a new full-tuition benefits plan takes effect, the Department of Veterans Affairs plans to hire 400 people for its regional offices in a push that will begin 1 DEC and have new staff on board to begin training by 1 MAR. The Post-9/11 GI Bill, which takes effect 1 AUG 09, is so generous compared to existing benefits that VA officials are preparing to deal with an estimated 526,000 benefits claims next year, said Keith Wilson, director of VA’s education service. Testifying before a House subcommittee that is concerned about whether VA will be ready, Wilson said initial plans to use a completely automated claims process have not worked out and that most claims will be manually processed, with help from a computer program to help make sure all necessary information is available. He described manual claims processing as a “throwaway” solution that would be abandoned as soon as an automated system is ready. He expects that to take up to two years more. Wilson did not say what would happen to the 400 new hires after the automated system is available, but members of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee — who have been monitoring startup problems — said they expect the claims workers would be transferred to other duties, because VA also has a large backlog of disability benefits claims that need to be tackled.

Implementing the Post-9/11 GI Bill is more complicated than processing claims for current educational benefits because the programs have major differences, including who gets paid. The new program will send tuition checks directly to schools, while the student will receive a living stipend and book allowance. The living stipend will be based on housing costs in the ZIP codes where the schools are located. Benefits will cover the full cost of tuition and fees for a four-year-public college or university, with a maximum rate set for each state. Trying to assure lawmakers and veterans that VA will be ready, Wilson said December will bring two significant signs of progress. First, he expects regulations spelling out the details of benefits and eligibility to be published by 1 DEC. Also, VA plans to begin contacting private schools to reach agreement on another benefit of the new GI Bill in which the government and private schools will cover some tuition costs that exceed the basic benefit limits. VA’s schedule calls for agreements with private schools to be completed by 15 FEB so that a full list is available by 1 APR. “We would like veterans to have that information by spring, when they start to make decisions about where they will go to school,” Wilson said. [Source: NavyTimes Rick Maze article 18 Nov -08 ++]

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RESERVE LEAVE BENEFITS: The Labor Department has written new rules to expand Family and Medical Leave Act benefits that represent a dramatic change in how National Guard and reserve members and caregivers responsible for seriously injured troops will be treated by employers. One benefit, which applies immediately, allows up to 26 weeks of unpaid time off without fear of losing a civilian job for spouses, parents, siblings, children or other blood relatives taking care of seriously injured or disabled service members. The one catch is that it only applies while the injured service member is still in the military, and ends after separation or discharge. A second benefit, which employers have 60 days to implement, allows families of mobilized Guard and reserve members up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave, with their job fully protected, for a variety of deployment-related reasons, including attending military briefings, handling legal or financial issues, emergency child care arrangements and even taking a vacation of up to five days if the service member gets mid-deployment rest and recuperation leave. Families of active-duty members are not eligible for the deployment-related time off because Congress did not authorize it, Labor Department officials said.

Joy Dunlap of the Military Officers Association of America said the two additions to the Family and Medical Leave Act, known as FMLA, will be a great boon to families who are struggling with the demands of ongoing military operations. But blocking active-duty families from the deployment leave is something her association plans to challenge, she said. "They included a wide variety of things, and I think this is going to be very positive for the family members of those covered," Dunlap said. "This will help them to take care of important household matters and help them protect marriages, and will help retention of service members." Dunlap also cautioned that Family and Medical Leave Act benefits are not available to everyone. Generally, benefits are provided only to workers at companies with 50 or more employees who are full-time workers with at least a year on the job, she said. Victoria Lipnic, assistant labor secretary for employment standards, said the rules attempt to be as generous as possible under limitations of the law but acknowledged there are restrictions. "We were as generous as we could be," she said. Caregiver leave has been authorized under FMLA since January, but regulations explaining how companies are supposed to apply it have only now been finalized, Lipnic said. Under the rules, a caregiver can take up to 26 weeks of unpaid leave over one year, with the clock beginning on the first day of leave. The policy allows leave to be taken only once per injury, but more than one person in a family might be qualified. If there is a second injury or a subsequent diagnosis of a new problem, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, the benefit could be used again, Lipnic said. While FMLA applies to a limited group of immediate family members, military caregiver leave has a broader definition under which spouses, siblings, parents, children and next-of-kin — the nearest blood relative — could qualify. In extended families, more than one blood relative could receive the leave, Lipnic said.

The deployment leave program, which applies to Guard and reserve families, is aimed at people whose lives are "turned upside down" and who "have a lot of issues to deal with," Lipnic said. There are several broad categories in which the leave can be used, she said. For example, unpaid leave could be taken if the Guard or reserve member must deploy with less than seven days' notice; attend military-related events like briefings; accommodate school activities or emergency child care; make financial or legal arrangements; attend counseling, which would not necessarily have to be provided by a health care provider; or attend post-deployment events, such as arrival ceremonies and briefings. Regulations also have a catch-all clause that allows time off for other events not covered if the employer and employee agree, Lipnic said. In what may become one of the more controversial aspects of the new rules, unpaid leave could be used for up to five days of vacation if the service member received rest and recuperation leave while deployed. The five-day leave would be provided each time the service member receives R&R. Lipnic said the deployment leave provisions were worked out after discussions with military associations and the Defense Department. While regulations are being published now, employers technically do not have to provide deployment leave until JAN because they have 60 days to implement the regulations, she said. A key reason the rules are being expanded for military families was 2007 testimony before a House subcommittee by the wife of an injured Army sergeant. Sarah Wade, the wife of Army Sgt. Edward Wade, told a House panel that after her husband was injured by a roadside bomb in Iraq, she tried to hold on to her restaurant job in Chapel Hill, N.C., while making three trips a week to visit her husband, who was being treated 250 miles away at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. Wade said she was fired after about 15 months for being away from work too much and also was forced to drop out of college. [Source: ArmyTimes Rick Maze article 14 Nov 08 ++]

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BURN PIT TOXIC EMISSIONS: The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) organization has issued a call to all service members and veterans who think they may have illnesses related to burn pits in Afghanistan and Iraq: "Anyone out there who thinks they may have had a long-term health effect ... needs to file a complaint" with the Department of Veterans Affairs, said Kerry Baker, DAV's associate national legislative director. They should also Contact DAV so they can collect data and look for trends. Noting that it took Vietnam veterans 20 years to gain benefits for exposure to the defoliant Agent Orange, Baker said, "We don't want to see these guys have to wait 20 years. We want to see Congress act right away." Service members/veterans should be alert for respiratory-related problems, such as allergies, sleep apnea, trouble breathing, asthma and lymphocytic leukemia, as well as skin diseases. Of the 300 to 400 disability cases Baker said he has personally reviewed since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began, he said 30%t potentially could be linked to the burn pits. He said he's amazed by the numbers of troops reporting sleep apnea.

Sen. Russ Feingold (D-WI) also has demanded an investigation in a 31 OCT letter to Army Gen. David Petraeus, the new chief of U.S. Central Command. "After years of helping veterans of the Vietnam and Gulf Wars cope with the health effects of toxic battlefields, we have learned that we must take exposures to toxins seriously," Feingold wrote. He asked Petraeus to inform him of pending investigations into the "prevalence of health care conditions among those potentially exposed to toxins and particulates," as well as why more incinerators are not taking the place of burn pits in Iraq. Pentagon officials say no long-term illnesses are associated with the burn pits. But Military Times has received more than 50 letters from troops responding to a 3 NOV story, expressing concern about the time they spent near the billowing black clouds emitted by open pits where the military has burned its waste — everything from plastic bottles, which emit dioxins when burned at low temperatures, to petroleum products that emit benzene.

One Air Force bioenvironmental engineer, Lt. Col. Darrin Curtis, was so worried by the chemicals he thought were being released into service members' living and work spaces at Joint Base Balad, Iraq, that he warned: "In my professional opinion, the known carcinogens and respiratory sensitizers released into the atmosphere by the burn pit present both an acute and chronic health hazard to our troops and the local population." Troops say they coughed their way through their deployments; several said respiratory problems and headaches continued long after their deployments ended. Air Force officials say they had cleaned up the Balad burn pit as of JUN 08 by using two incinerators and recycling plastic bottles. A report shows that tests in 2007 reflected an "acceptable risk" for cancer-causing and other poisonous toxins from the pit. "It's a fantastic before-and-after story," said Army Capt. Lynn Thompson, waste management officer for Balad from March to October. "The contractor who runs the place is planning to build a tennis court about 100 meters west of the trenches." The burn pits are now "trench burners," which burn hotter and produce less smoke. Still, he said, "Trench burners are no substitute for zero-emission incinerators. They are not intended to be a permanent solution. It is the best we can do with the funding available." While that's good news for troops on future deployments, the burn pits in Balad and across Iraq and Afghanistan have burned since the beginning of the wars — initially managed by troops working directly inside the pits to keep them burning.

Service members told Military Times that they have asthma that was diagnosed after they left Balad; that they have allergy-like symptoms for the first time in their lives; that an unusual number of people in their units have developed cancer; that they are failing the runs on their physical fitness tests because of breathing problems; and that their headaches still haven't gone away months after returning home. One Army officer reported a brain tumor. "The fact that DoD says it's safe just makes no sense at all," Baker said. "Dioxin was used in herbicides in Vietnam. Now it's a byproduct of the burn pits. But you don't just have dioxin — you have a list of other chemicals. We need to look at the combined effect of all these chemicals." John Bradley, a legislative consultant for DAV, said the group can look to see whether there is a positive association between a deployment and disease, and that can lead VA to presume those diseases were caused by this war. The proof shouldn't rest on the veteran, he said.

Army Staff Sgt. Danielle Nienajadlo said her time in Balad led to a nightmare that will haunt her for the rest of her life. As a vehicle mechanic, she spent much of her time at the motor pool near the burn pit. Her living quarters, she said, were within a couple of miles of the pit, and when they ran for physical fitness training, they inhaled the fumes as they passed the plume. She said the smoke constantly hung over her living quarters. "We were always covered in ash and dirt," she said. "People got bloody noses and headaches." Before she arrived, she had a full physical, including a blood workup, because she wanted to become a helicopter pilot. But upon arrival at Balad, she started coughing and blowing out black stuff. Soon, she lost her appetite. She felt nauseated, was constantly tired and had trouble breathing. She went to sick call several times, only to be told she might be stressed out. One night, she stayed up all night with hot sweats and a fever;

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she went to the emergency room and begged doctors to draw her blood. They did. Her white blood cell count was over the top: She had leukemia. She believes the burn pit served as a catalyst for her cancer. "I know I got it out there," she said. The cancer took over her lungs, and she couldn't breathe. After a full course of chemotherapy at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington, D.C., where she remains, she said she's doing better, though she will be checked every three weeks for the next five years to make sure it doesn't come back. "I'm in remission," she said. "I know I'm blessed. If I'd waited another day, I would've died." [Source: NavyTimes Kelly Kennedy article 14 Nov 08 ++]

VETERAN LEGISLATION STATUS 29 NOV 08: All bills introduced in the 110th Congress that have not been passed into law are void unless they are reintroduced into the 111th Congress. Congress will convene the 111th Congress on JAN 09. Refer to the Bulletin's House & Senate attachments for or a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community that have been introduced in the 110th Congress. Support of these bills through cosponsorship by other legislators is critical if they are ever going to move through the legislative process for a floor vote to become law. A good indication on that likelihood is the number of cosponsors who have signed onto the bill. A cosponsor is a member of Congress who has joined one or more other members in his/her chamber (i.e. House or Senate) to sponsor a bill or amendment. The member who introduces the bill is considered the sponsor. Members subsequently signing on are called cosponsors. Any number of members may cosponsor a bill in the House or Senate. At <http://thomas.loc.gov> you can also review a copy of each bill's content, determine its current status, the committee it has been assigned to, and if your legislator is a sponsor or cosponsor of it. To determine what bills, amendments your representative has sponsored, cosponsored, or dropped sponsorship on refer to <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d110/sponlst.html>. The key to increasing cosponsorship on veteran related bills and subsequent passage into law is letting our representatives know of veteran's feelings on issues. At the end of some listed bills is a web link that can be used to do that. You can also reach his/her Washington via the Capital Operator direct at (866) 272-6622, (800) 828-0498, or (866) 340-9281 to express your views. Otherwise, you can locate on <http://thomas.loc.gov> who your representative is and his/her phone number, mailing address, or email/website to communicate with a message or letter of your own making.

Refer to http://www.thecapitol.net/FAQ/cong_schedule.html for future times that you can access your representatives on their home turf. [Source: RAO Bulletin Attachment 13 Nov 08 ++]

HAVE YOU HEARD: Well, A Girl Potato and Boy Potato had eyes for each other, and finally they got married, and had a little sweet potato, which they called 'Yam.' Of course, they wanted the best for Yam. When it was time, they told her about the facts of life. They warned her about going out and getting half-baked, so she wouldn't get accidentally mashed, and get a bad name for herself like 'Hot Potato,' and end up with a bunch of Tater Tots. Yam said not to worry; no Spud would get her into the sack and make a rotten potato out of her! But on the other hand she wouldn't stay home and become a Couch Potato either. She would get plenty of exercise so as not to be skinny like her Shoestring cousins. When she went off to Europe, Mr and Mrs. Potato told Yam to watch out for the hard-boiled guys from Ireland. And the greasy guys from France called the French Fries. And when she went out west, to watch out for the Indians so she wouldn't get scalloped. Yam said she would stay on the straight and narrow and wouldn't associate with those high class Yukon Golds, or the ones from the other side of the tracks who advertise their trade on all the trucks that say, 'Frito Lay.' Mr. and Mrs. Potato sent Yam to Idaho P.U. (that's Potato University) so that when she graduated she'd really be in the Chips. But in spite of all they did for her, one-day Yam came home and announced she was going to marry Tom Brokaw. Tom Brokaw! Mr. and Mrs. Potato were very upset. They told Yam she couldn't possibly marry Tom Brokaw because he's just.....A
COMMENTATER

VA Disability Compensation Rates - 2009



The following tables show the 2009 VA compensation rates for veterans with a disability rating 10 percent or higher. These rates are effective as of 1 December, 2008.

Dependents Allowance: In addition, veterans entitled to compensation whose disability is rated as 30 percent or more, shall be entitled to additional compensation for dependents as follows (monthly amounts):

10% - 20% (with or without dependents)

Percentage	Rate
10%	\$123
20%	\$243

30% - 60% without children

Dependent Status	30	40	50	60
Veteran Alone	\$376	\$541	\$770	\$974
Veteran with Spouse Only	\$421	\$601	\$845	\$1064
Veteran with Spouse & One Parent	\$457	\$649	\$905	\$1136
Veteran with Spouse and Two Parents	\$493	\$697	\$965	\$1208
Veteran with One Parent	\$412	\$589	\$830	\$1046
Veteran with Two Parents	\$448	\$637	\$890	\$1118
Additional for A/A spouse (see footnote b)	\$40	\$54	\$68	\$81

70% - 100% Without Children

Dependent Status	70	80	90	100
Veteran Alone	\$1,228	\$1,427	\$1,604	\$2,673
Veteran with Spouse Only	\$1,333	\$1,547	\$1,739	\$2,823
Veteran with Spouse & One Parent	\$1,417	\$1,643	\$1,847	\$2,943
Veteran with Spouse and Two Parents	\$1,501	\$1,739	\$1,955	\$3,063
Veteran with One Parent	\$1,312	\$1,523	\$1,712	\$2,793
Veteran with Two Parents	\$1,396	\$1,619	\$1,820	\$2,913
Additional for A/A spouse (see footnote b)	\$95	\$108	\$122	\$136

VA Disability Compensation Rates - 2009

30% - 60% With Children

Dependent Status	30%	40%	50%	60%
Veteran with Spouse & Child	\$453	\$644	\$899	\$1129
Veteran with Child Only	\$406	\$581	\$820	\$1034
Veteran with Spouse, One Parent and Child	\$489	\$692	\$959	\$1201
Veteran with Spouse, Two Parents and Child	\$525	\$740	\$1019	\$1,273
Veteran with One Parent and Child	\$442	\$629	\$880	\$1106
Veteran with Two Parents and Child	\$478	\$677	\$940	\$1178
Add for Each Additional Child Under Age 18	\$22	\$30	\$37	\$45
Each Additional Schoolchild Over Age 18 (see footnote a)	\$72	\$96	\$120	\$144
Additional for A/A spouse (see footnote b)	\$40	\$54	\$68	\$81

70% - 100% With Children

Dependent Status	70%	80%	90%	100%
Veteran with Spouse & Child	\$1,409	\$1,634	\$1,837	\$2,932
Veteran with Child Only	\$1,298	\$1,507	\$1,694	\$2,774
Veteran with Spouse, One Parent and Child	\$1,493	\$1,730	\$1,945	\$3,052
Veteran with Spouse, Two Parents and Child	\$1,577	\$1,826	\$2,053	\$3,172
Veteran with One Parent and Child	\$1,382	\$1,603	\$1,802	\$2,894
Veteran with Two Parents and Child	\$1,466	\$1,699	\$1,910	\$3,014
Add for Each Additional Child Under Age 18	\$52	\$60	\$67	\$75
Each Additional Schoolchild Over Age 18 (see footnote a)	\$168	\$192	\$216	\$240
Additional for A/A spouse (see footnote b)	\$95	\$108	\$122	\$136

VA Disability Compensation Rates - 2009

FOOTNOTES:

- **A.** Rates for each school child are shown separately. They are not included with any other compensation rates. All other entries on this chart reflecting a rate for children show the rate payable for children under 18 or helpless. To find the amount payable to a 70% disabled veteran with a spouse and four children, one of whom is over 18 and attending school, take the 70% rate for a veteran with a spouse and 3 children, \$ 1,513, and add the rate for one school child, \$168. The total amount payable is \$1,681.
- **B.** Where the veteran has a spouse who is determined to require Aid and Attendance (A/A), add the figure shown as "additional for A/A spouse" to the amount shown for the proper dependency code. For example, veteran has A/A spouse and 2 minor children and is 70% disabled. Add \$90, additional for A/A spouse, to the rate for a 70% veteran with dependency code 12, \$1,461. The total amount payable is \$ 1,556.

These rates were provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The original copies can be found at: <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Rates/comp01.htm>.

VA Travel Reimbursement

Reimbursement for mileage or public transportation may be paid to the following:

1. Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated at 30% or more;
2. Veterans traveling for treatment of a service-connected condition;
3. Veterans receiving a VA pension;
4. Veterans traveling for scheduled compensation or pension examinations;
5. Veterans whose income does not exceed the maximum VA pension rate;

In 2009 Mileage Reimbursement will be made at the rate of 41.5 cents per mile. On January 9, 2009, these milieage deductibles will decrease to \$3 for a one way trip, \$6 for a round trip, with a maximum of \$18 per calendar month. However, these deductibles can be waived if they cause a financial hardship to the veteran. The deductible is also waived for veterans traveling for scheduled compensation or pension examinations.

VETERANS HELPING VETERANS



postage

McHenry County Chapter
P.O. Box 998 McHenry, IL 60051

Next Meeting

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

@ 7:30 pm

HAPPY HOLIDAYS to all of you.



McHenry County Chapter VietNow Membership Application

DATE _____ DATE OF BIRTH _____

NAME _____ PHONE () _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

SEVICE BRANCH _____ DATES OF DUTY (1957-CURRENT _____

_____ I am a veteran and want to be a FULL MEMBER OF VietNow

_____ I am not a veteran but want to be an ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF VietNow

Enclosed is my check for _____

**Memberships are \$15 annually renewable June 30th.
Veterans must enclose a copy of their DD214 form.
Send with check payable to: McHenry County Chapter of VietNow
PO Box 998, McHenry, IL 60051**

For a sum of ten (10) times the yearly dues , one can become a LIFE MEMBER