



Women Veterans of America National Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 1

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New National Commander Takes Office

Mary D. Ross, US Army, Retired, was elected as the new Commander of Women Veterans of America (WVA) at the National Convention held in Nashville, Tennessee in September 2010. Commander Ross is a founding member of WVA Chapter 20 in Nashville, Tennessee, and is an active member of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Tennessee Valley Healthcare System's Women Veterans Network. She works full-time as Deputy Executive Director of Operation Stand Down Nashville, Inc., and is a member of the Tennessee State Veterans Nursing Homes Board. Commander Ross is also Past President of the Military Order of Purple Heart Auxiliary. She stated "I am honored to be elected as your new National Commander. I promise to continue to work to make WVA the strong, respected organization that it deserves to be,



*WVA National Commander
Mary Ross*



*Outgoing National Commander Janet Cook
passing the Commander hat pin to Incoming
National Commander Mary Ross*

and I will do my best to carry out the mission that the founders of WVA established 20 years ago. I am honored to wear the Commander pin on my hat that has been passed down to me from our late Past National Commander and co-founder, Colleen Mussolino." Commander Ross will lead a very competent slate of National Officers, including Vice-Commander Sue Getz, Chapter 6, Ohio; Adjutant Lois Dillree, Chapter 20, Tennessee; Finance Officer Becky Rigby, Chapter 20, Tennessee; and Chaplain Shirley Cas. Each of the incoming and returning officers is

dedicated to the strengthening and expansion of Women Veterans of America on a more national level, establishing new Chapters and increasing membership.

National Convention Photos

Women Veterans of America members assembled in Nashville, Tennessee, in September, 2010, to conduct the business of the organization. About 50 members from Florida, Ohio, Tennessee and Texas gathered, starting with registration and a hospitality reception on Friday evening, and wrapping up on Sunday morning. During these three days, women veterans visited with their sister veterans, learned about the current state of medical benefits for women veterans, traded stories, and carefully considered and voted on issues that are important to the administration of the organization.



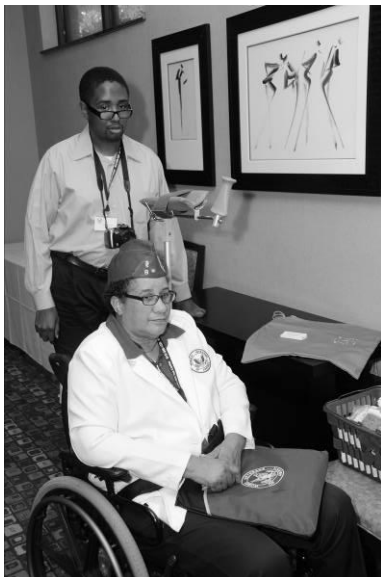
Host Chapter 20 Commander Mary Ross welcomes attendees



Members proudly joining in the Pledge of Allegiance



Chapter 6 from Dayton, Ohio, came prepared with a display of Chapter activities and T-shirts for sale!



Houston Chapter 8 member Jackie Hall with her nephew, Josh, who is an Associate member



Tennessee Valley Women Veterans Program Manager Carol Pope talks with newly elected Adjutant, Lois Dillree, Chapter 20, Nashville, Tennessee



National Women Veterans Advisory Committee member Lindsay Long is a member of WVA Chapter 20



Kathy Bell, Chapter 20, Nashville, Tennessee, was reelected Sgt. at Arms for two more years



Karen Shaver, Commander, Chapter 8, Houston, Texas, gives her Chapter Report



Incoming National Officers (left to right) Sergeant-at-Arms Kathy Bell, Finance Officer Becky Rigney, Adjutant Lois Dillree, Vice Commander Sue Getz, and Commander Mary D. Ross. Not pictured: Chaplain Shirley Harrison



Kathy Bell, left and Becky Rigby take the oath of office as Sgt. at Arms and Finance Officer



Corina Collins, Chapter 20 member and resident computer geek provided technical support



Outgoing National Adjutant Robin Blanchard opened the program with a stirring rendition of the National Anthem



Important business was conducted at the WVA National Convention in Nashville, Tennessee, with representatives from Chapters around the country



Outgoing National Finance Officer Jean Daugherty admires one of the door prizes



WVPM Carol Pope, left, with Keynote Speaker Deputy Field Director MaryAnn Woodward-Smith, center, talking with Nashville, Tennessee Chapter 20 member Pam Gibbs



Chapter 20 Chaplain Wanda Bruce Graham conducted a very moving Memorial Ceremony



Associate Director for Nursing Janice Cobb extended a welcome to Nashville on behalf of VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System



Incoming and Outgoing National Commanders admiring the new Nashville Chapter 20 sign which was presented as a personal gift from Commander Cook to Chapter 20 in appreciation for hosting the National Convention



Commander Emeritus Mildred Cipolla was honored for her 20 years as a Founding Member of WVA



Incoming Vice Commander, Sue Getz, Chapter 6, Dayton, Ohio



Miss Ginnie Tribble, an inspiration for many members of Nashville Chapter 20, with outgoing Commander Janet Cook



Commander Emeritus Mildred Cipolla and Chapter 20 member Ann Antomattei



There was magic in the air, as demonstrated by Vice Commander Sue Getz and Adjutant Robin Blanchard



Francis Shumaker and Joyce Gray from Chapter 20



Nashville Chapter 20 Vice Commander Stacey Hopwood



Chapter 20 member Estrella Whitehurst decorating for the National Convention



Houston Chapter 8 member Heather Chandler helping to set up for the open market place



Sister veterans from Nashville Chapter 20 and Dayton Chapter 6 getting better acquainted



Becky Rigby, Chapter 20, Nashville, Tennessee is our new Finance Officer



Sister veterans enjoying time to visit with one another (l to r) Judy Robbins, Estrella Whitehurst, Cora White and Andi Johnson

Guest Speaker Provided Health Care Update

MaryAnn Woodward-Smith, Deputy Field Director, Area 3 West, Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Administration was the keynote speaker at the Women Veterans of America National Convention. Ms. Woodward-Smith brought words of welcome from Dr. Patty Hayes, Chief Consultant, Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group. Dr. Hayes was unable to attend the convention. Ms. Woodward-Smith, the former Women Veterans Program Manager (WVPM) for Tennessee Valley Healthcare System and Lead WVPM for VISN 9 was no stranger to this gathering of women veterans. Everyone enjoyed reconnecting and hearing about her new job with VA Central Office. Ms. Woodward-Smith briefed those present on the current state of women veterans health care and changes that are being made within VA for the expected influx of women veterans in the next few years. Ms. Woodward-Smith showed the Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group's



Deputy Field Director MaryAnn Woodward-Smith

new outreach video, *You Served, You Deserve*. "The Women Veterans Health Strategic Healthcare Group is working hard to ensure that all women Veterans receive **equitable, high-quality, and comprehensive health care** services in a sensitive and safe environment at all VA facilities. We are working to *enhance the language, practice, and culture of the VA to be more inclusive of women Veterans.*" stated Ms. Woodward-Smith. "We want to be a national leader in the provision of health care for women Veterans, thereby raising the standard of care for all women" Ms. Woodward-Smith encouraged the women Veterans present to reach out to their sister Veterans and educate them about VA health care benefits and services and encourage them to use the VA. "The best outreach to women Veterans is through word of mouth from another woman Veteran" she said. Ms Woodward-Smith also spent time with WVA members during the convention, answering questions about VA benefits and services for women veterans.



DFD MaryAnn Woodward-Smith shares information with Houston Chapter 8 Commander Karen Shaver

Chapter Reports

This newsletter is one of the ways that Women Veterans of America members can communicate with one another. It is important that we keep abreast of Chapter activities,

and it is a way for Chapters to spotlight their community outreach and service. There is a new way for Chapter members to submit newsworthy events and photos—log into our National Website at www.wvanational.org, and click on the “Newsletter” icon. You will find copies of past issues and you can also send proposed articles by clicking on newsletter@womenveteransofamerica.org. Submit your news and photos at any time, and watch for them to appear in an upcoming issue.

National Officer Update

Due to medical issues, National Adjutant Lois Dillree has resigned her office. We wish her a speedy recovery and hope that she will be able to fully participate in Women Veterans of America activities in the future.

News and Notes from VA

Improved Access to VA Benefit Information

In September, 2010, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it is launching a multi-year initiative called Veterans Relationship Management (VRM) that will greatly improve veterans' access to health care and benefits information. "VRM will transform Veterans' interactions with VA by using innovative 21st century technologies," said VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. "Veterans will have a better experience when they contact VA for assistance, and our employees will be able to quickly convey accurate, up-to-date information through call centers and the Internet." Ultimately, veterans will find enhanced self-service capabilities, and VA employees will have the best tools to serve veterans, their families and survivors better.

By the end of 2010, VRM will deliver improved telephone services to enable veterans to reach a call center agent faster. Recording and review of calls will ensure the quality of services provided to veterans. To help guarantee success, VRM enhancements will be rolled out in six-month increments.

An important component of VRM is the Internet site, which puts the veteran in the driver's seat for information. VA collaborated with the Department of Defense to provide a single sign-on capability for both servicemembers and veterans. Single sign-on will quickly establish an individual's identity and allow that person to complete transactions without having to re-enter information.

Self-service access through the Internet site (www.ebenefits.va.gov) is already available in some benefit areas, including military personnel records, VA home loan eligibility certificates, and status information on compensation and pension claims. VRM is just one of the many initiatives VA is launching to help veterans get timely access to health care and benefits. VA provides tax-free compensation, pension, education, loan guaranty, vocational rehabilitation, employment and insurance benefits to eligible veterans, their families and survivors through 57 VA regional offices.

More VA Health Care and Benefits for Vietnam Veterans

Veterans exposed to herbicides while serving in Vietnam and other areas will have an easier path to access quality health care and qualify for disability compensation under a final regulation that will be published on August 31, 2010 in the Federal Register by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The new rule expands the list of health problems VA will presume to be related to Agent Orange and other herbicide exposures to add two new conditions and expand one existing category of conditions.

“Last October, based on the requirements of the Agent Orange Act of 1991 and the Institute of Medicine’s 2008 Update on Agent Orange, I determined that the evidence provided was sufficient to award presumptions of service connection for these three additional diseases,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “It was the right decision, and the President and I are proud to finally provide this group of Veterans the care and benefits they have long deserved.”



The final regulation follows Shinseki’s determination to expand the list of conditions for which service connection for Vietnam Veterans is presumed. VA is adding Parkinson’s disease and ischemic heart disease and expanding chronic lymphocytic leukemia to include all chronic B cell leukemia’s, such as hairy cell leukemia.

In practical terms, Veterans who served in Vietnam during the war and who have a “presumed” illness don’t have to prove an association between their medical problems and their military service. By helping Veterans overcome evidentiary requirements that might otherwise present significant challenges, this “presumption” simplifies and speeds up the application process and ensure that Veterans receive the benefits they deserve. The Secretary’s decision to add these presumptives is based on the latest evidence provided in a 2008 independent study by the Institute of Medicine concerning health problems caused by herbicides like Agent Orange.

Veterans who served in Vietnam anytime during the period beginning January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975, are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides. More than 150,000 Veterans are expected to submit Agent Orange claims in the next 12 to 18 months, many of whom are potentially eligible for retroactive disability payments based on past claims. Additionally, VA will review approximately 90,000 previously denied claims by Vietnam Veterans for service connection for these conditions. All those awarded service-connection who are not currently eligible for enrollment into the VA healthcare system will become eligible.

This historic regulation is subject to provisions of the Congressional Review Act that require a 60-day Congressional review period before implementation. After the review period, VA can begin paying benefits for new claims and may award benefits retroactively for earlier periods. For new claims, VA may pay benefits retroactive to the

effective date of the regulation or to one year before the date VA receives the application, whichever is later. For pending claims and claims that were previously denied, VA may pay benefits retroactive to the date it received the claim. VA encourages Vietnam Veterans with these three diseases to submit their applications for access to VA health care and compensation now so the agency can begin development of their claims.

Individuals can go to a website at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/AO/claimherbicide.htm> to get an understanding of how to file a claim for presumptive conditions related to herbicide exposure, as well as what evidence is needed by VA to make a decision about disability compensation or survivors benefits. Additional information about Agent Orange and VA's services for Veterans exposed to the chemical is available at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange.

Marking Veterans' Graves in Private Cemeteries

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is offering bronze medallions to attach to existing privately purchased headstones or marker to signify a deceased's status as a veteran. This new item can be furnished instead of a traditional government headstone or marker for veterans whose death occurred on or after Nov. 1, 1990, and whose grave in a private cemetery is marked with a privately purchased headstone or marker. Under federal law, eligible veterans buried in a private cemetery are entitled to either a government-furnished grave marker or the new medallion, but not both. Veterans buried in a national or state veterans cemetery will receive a government headstone or marker of the standard design authorized at that cemetery. The medallion is available



Each service has its own medallion

in three sizes: 5 inches, 3 inches and 1 ½ inches in width. Each bronze medallion features the image of a folded burial flag adorned with laurels and is inscribed with the word "Veteran" at the top and the branch of service at the bottom. Next of kin will receive the medallion, along with a kit that will allow the family or the staff of a private cemetery to affix the medallion to a headstone, grave marker, mausoleum or columbarium niche cover. More information about VA-furnished headstones, markers and medallions can be found at <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm/hmtype.asp>. VA is currently developing an application form for ordering the medallion. Until it is available, applicants may use the form for ordering government headstones and markers, VA Form 40-1330. Instructions on how to apply for a medallion are found on the VA Web site at www.cem.va.gov/hm_hm.asp. Veterans with a discharge issued under conditions other than dishonorable, their spouses and eligible dependent children can be buried in a VA national cemetery. Other burial benefits available for all eligible veterans, regardless of whether they are buried in a national cemetery or a private cemetery, include a burial flag, a Presidential Memorial Certificate and a government headstone or grave marker. The new medallions will be available only to veterans buried in private cemeteries without a government headstone or marker. Families of eligible decedents may also order a memorial headstone or marker when remains are not available for interment. VA

operates 131 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. More than 3 million Americans, including veterans of every war and conflict -- from the Revolutionary War to the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan -- are buried in VA's national cemeteries on more than 19,000 acres. Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the VA Web site on the Internet at www.cem.va.gov or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 1-800-827-1000.

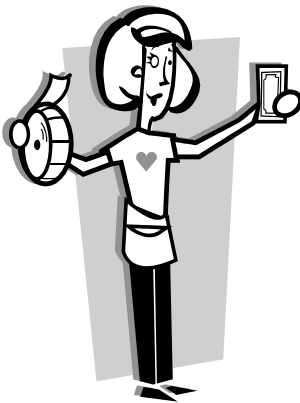
Ohio State Veterans Bonus

The state of Ohio has announced that 200,000 Ohio veterans may be eligible for a recently approved state veterans bonus. Eligible veterans who served in the Persian Gulf, Iraq or Afghanistan wars may receive \$100 for each month of active duty service up to \$1,000. Veterans serving on active duty elsewhere in the world during these wars may receive \$50 per month of service up to a maximum of \$500. An eligible veteran may combine their service bonuses for a maximum payment of \$1,500. Family members of deceased veterans may also be eligible for compensation. Veterans can download an application or get more information at: www.veteransbonus.ohio.gov. Notary service for applications will be available at all of Ohio's more than 200 county clerks of courts locations. In addition, assistant attorneys general offices in Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Youngstown and Toledo will provide the needed notarization on veterans' applications free of cost.



Volunteerism—How WVA Can Continue to Serve

Random acts of kindness are nice, but Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki told graduates at the University of Maryland University College (UMUC) that the world needs more “people who are regularly, habitually and deliberately kind.”



“We can no more put a value on kindness than we can put a price on heroism,” Shinseki told nearly 1,300 graduates. “People who make caring for others a personal devotion, a part of their everyday lives, that’s what’s needed – people who are willing to serve the needs of others.”

At the Department of Veterans Affairs, Shinseki noted, about 140,000 volunteers help Veterans at VA’s hospitals, Vet Centers and cemeteries. Conservatively, VA prices their time as worth \$240 million, while the volunteers also contribute more than \$80 million yearly in gifts and donations.

“There are some things they do that we can’t put a price on. Not everything can be reduced to a dollar value,” Shinseki added. “What’s the price of a Thank you? How

about an hour of patience? What's the going rate for dignity and respect for a combat Veteran? Such values cannot be calculated."

[One of the core values of Women Veterans of America (WVA) is to volunteer at VA medical centers. Do you think that women veterans are invisible? Make yourself known by becoming a volunteer. You will not go unnoticed.]

The VA Secretary noted that Veterans in the class of 2010 were the first to take advantage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the largest improvement in the traditional VA educational program since its inception in 1944. "By time [the original GI Bill] ended in 1956, it had profoundly transformed America economically, educationally and socially, catapulting our economy to the world's largest and our nation to a global leader and a victor in the Cold War," Shinseki said.



He saluted the UMUC staff for their programs tailored to the educational needs of the men and women on active duty. About 60,000 of the school's 100,000 students are military personnel. The school operates on 130 military installations, including four in Iraq and four in Afghanistan. "UMUC and the military have long shared a vital partnership in education," said Shinseki, a retired Army four-star general. "Wherever the Army went campaigning, UMUC went with us."

National Cemeteries

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) honors veterans with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate their service to our nation. VA operates 131 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. More than 3 million Americans, including veterans of every war and conflict - from the Revolutionary War to



the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are buried in VA's national cemeteries on more than 19,000 acres. Arlington National Cemetery is administered by the Department of the Army. Since May of 1864, Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia, has served as a cemetery, a memorial, and a national monument to America's war heroes. Over 300,000 veterans have been interred on these hallowed grounds since the Civil War and, on average; the cemetery buries 27 veterans every day. Additional information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the Internet at www.cem.va.gov or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 800-827-1000. To make burial arrangements at the time of need at any VA national cemetery, call the national cemetery scheduling office at 800-535-1117.