



Women Veterans of America National Newsletter

Volume 2, Issue 2

February 2009

From the Commander

The number one goal of this administration is to bring organization to Women Veterans of America (WVA). Much to my surprise upon taking office last September, I discovered that there is no national register of WVA members, nor is there a roster of Members-at-Large. I have also discovered that some of our Chapters have only two or three active members. It seems that no one knows how many members WVA actually has. The former Vice Commander reported at the WVA Convention last September that she was in the process of compiling a master roster when she encountered major computer malfunctions and all of the information she had was lost. We are essentially starting over from scratch.

Although membership is really the responsibility of the Vice Commander, I have instead tasked our National Adjutant, Robin Blanchard, with gathering membership information. She had previously devised a format for her local Chapter to use to organize their membership rosters, and she willingly offered to share this format with all of our Chapters. She will help individual Chapters get organized. All you have to do is ask. If you need help, contact Robin at Nationaladjutant@womenveteransofamerica.org and she will set up a time to go over it with you. I am requesting that every Chapter provide the requisite information to Robin, in the format that she has requested, if possible. If the format will not work for you, you can send in the information in whatever format you have it, and Robin will take it from there. Even if you only have a few members, we need to know who and where you are. In order to fulfill our legal requirements to remain a 501(c)(19) organization, we have to maintain a set ratio of veteran members to nonveteran associate members, and we cannot know if we are legal until we have that information. If Women Veterans of America is to remain a viable organization, you **must** send in this information.

In addition to membership rosters, I need each Chapter to send a list of your current Chapter Officers, with the dates of their election. Also include a schedule of your Chapter meetings. Please send all of this information as soon as possible, but definitely not later than March 31, 2009. That's three things: Membership Roster; List of Officers; and Meeting Schedule.



*WVA National Commander
Janet E. Cook*

Women's History Month: First Lady Visits WIMSA



First lady Michelle Obama addresses an audience of primarily female service members at a March 3, 2009, event honoring Women's History Month and military families at Arlington National Cemetery's Women in Military Service for America Memorial in Arlington, Virginia. White House photo by Joyce N. Boghosian

“Throughout our nation’s history women have played an important role in the military as well as in organizations supporting the military during times of conflict,” she said. “Our foremothers and our sisters today have joined our forefathers and our brothers today in securing our liberty and protecting our country.” Echoing remarks President Barack Obama made recently at Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, the first lady said service doesn’t end with the person wearing the uniform, adding that she’s been honored and deeply moved to meet military families in recent years. “They are mothers and fathers who have lost their beloved children to war; they are husbands and wives keeping the families on track while their wives and husbands are deployed on duty,” she said, “They are grandparents, aunts and uncles, and sisters and brothers who are taking care of children while single moms or dads in uniform are away.”



Brig. Gen. Wilma Vaught, USAF (Ret.) showing First Lady Michelle Obama around the Women's Memorial

Making History

March is Women’s History Month. Becoming a part of history, U.S. Army General Ann E. Dunwoody is the first female four-star general in U. S. history, pinning on her new stars during a promotion ceremony at the Pentagon, November 14, 2008. She was nominated last June by former President George W. Bush.



General Dunwoody is Commander of U. S, Army Materiel Command at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. She was commissioned in 1975, and has had an illustrious 33 year career, with assignments that included serving as Deputy Chief of Staff, Logistics, as well as Commanding General of Army Combined Arms Support Command at Fort Lee, Virginia. At her promotion ceremony, she quipped, “There is no one more surprised than I, except of course, my husband [Craig Brothie, a retired USAF pilot], and you know what they say, behind every successful woman there’s an astonished man. I grew up in the Army and came from a family who, since 1862, has defended our nation. When I joined the Army right out of college, I planned to only stay for a two year commitment, but it wasn’t too long before I realized that there are no other shoes (boots) I would rather fill than the ones I’m wearing right now. It is a calling to be a soldier and there is a great sense of pride and camaraderie in serving the greatest Army in the world.”

Among the many military decorations that General Dunwoody has received are the Distinguished Service Medal, several Meritorious Service Medals, and the Kuwait Liberation Medal from service during Desert Storm. She also has a Master Parachutist Badge.

Shingles Vaccination Now Available

If you have ever known someone who has experienced a shingles outbreak, you know how painful it can be. Shingles is a disease that affects the nerve endings and causes severe pain and blisters. The Herpes Zoster virus causes shingles. This is the same virus that causes chicken pox; only those people who have had chicken pox (or have had the chicken pox vaccine) can get shingles. The virus can remain dormant for many years without causing any symptoms. However, it can break out without warning, and can leave behind significant pain for years even after the initial outbreak is cleared up. You are more likely to get shingles as you get older. A vaccine for shingles was approved in June 2008, and is in the VA formulary. Talk with your primary care provider about receiving the shingles vaccine if you are over age 60.



VA Claims Processing

In order to receive Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits, a veteran must first file a claim. Some VA claims can be filed on-line, while others still require a paper claim form. Approval for some benefits is pretty much automatic, simply by virtue of having had service during a specific period of time, contributing to a specific program, and receiving a qualifying character of discharge. Other claims require that certain evidence be gathered and considered, with eligibility for the benefit decided by claims examiners (adjudicators).

Many veterans may not understand the process that a claim for non-medical veterans' benefits goes through or may not understand who has the authority to decide the outcome of a claim. Only the VA can approve or deny a claim for VA benefits. VA means the US Department of Veterans Affairs, which is staffed by Federal employees. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has 56 Regional Offices (RO), with at least one in every state. A claim for VA benefits will go through several steps once it reaches the VA Regional Office Claims Center. There are a lot of different fields of expertise within each VA RO, and each claim is unique. A claim is routed to a specific area, based on the type of claim, where it is considered and decided by well-trained, knowledgeable VA employees who have received specialized training in the area in which the claim falls. Although the only organization that can approve or deny a VA claim is the VA—that is the US Department of Veterans Affairs, there are people outside of the VA who can help veterans in the process of pursuing a claim.



Sometimes when a veteran needs to file a claim for VA benefits, he or she may not be able to get to a VA Regional Office. In that case there is help available out in the community. There are County Service Officers (CSO) or Veterans Service Organization (VSO) representatives in the community who can assist with filing a claim and who know how to gather the evidence needed for a favorable outcome. County Service Officers are employees of the county who are hired or appointed by the local government. Veterans Service Organization's representatives are either volunteers or employees of their Veterans Service Organization, such as American Legion (AL),

the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), and many others. These non-VA personnel receive training from the VA as well as from their own organization to assist veterans in their understanding about VA benefits and to help in the filing of a claim. These folks are a valuable resource for veterans. Their services are free and they are knowledgeable of the VA system. They are there to help in gathering and organizing the evidence needed for the successful outcome of a claim for benefits.

Attention, Please



Commander Sharon E. Smith, Chapter 37, Edmond, Oklahoma, will host our next National Convention!! It will be held in Oklahoma City, August 6-8, 2010 (the date was changed from September to August at the request of Commander Smith and approved by the National Executive Committee). Start making

plans now to attend.



New VA Outpatient Clinics to Open

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) plans to open 31 new outpatient clinics in 16 states within the next two years. Veterans will have easier access to world-class health care.

The new clinics will be established in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Vermont. VA operates the largest integrated health care system in the country, with 153 hospitals and about 745 community-based clinics. In 2008, VA provided health care to about 5.8 million people during nearly 600,000 hospitalizations and more than 62 million outpatient visits.

Having health care for veterans in community-based clinics makes preventative care easier for patients, helps health care professionals have closer relationships with their patients and permits easier follow-ups for patients with chronic health problems.

The new clinics are scheduled to activate in 2009 and 2010. The exact locations, along with their opening dates and the health care services they will provide, have not been determined. Local VA officials will keep communities and their veterans informed of milestones in the creation of the new clinics.

Travel Reimbursement

Certain veterans, including service connected veterans, veterans receiving VA pensions and veterans with low incomes, receive a mileage reimbursement when they travel to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities for scheduled appointments. The rate of reimbursement had been frozen at 11 cents per mile since 1979. Effective in January 2008, the rate was increased to 28.5 cents, and was further raised to 41.5 cents per mile in November 2008. These increases were seen as necessary due to the increased cost of gasoline last year and the current difficult economic outlook. Although it is a goal of VA to have



healthcare available to veterans within 30 miles of their home, this is an ideal which has not yet been reached. These increases in travel reimbursement could mean the difference for some veterans between getting health care or going without.

There also is a deductible amount applied to certain mileage reimbursements, which has decreased from \$7.77 to \$3.00 for a one way trip and from \$15.54 to \$6.00 for a round trip. The maximum deductible per calendar month has decreased from \$46.62 to \$18.00. These deductibles can be waived if they cause a financial hardship to the veteran.

New Law Authorizes Veterans' Salutes During National Anthem

Veterans and active-duty military not in uniform can now render the military-style hand salute during the playing of the national anthem, thanks to changes in federal law that took effect in October 2008. "The military salute is a unique gesture of respect that marks those who have served in our nation's armed forces," said then Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "This provision allows the application of that honor in all events involving our nation's flag." The new provision improves upon a little known change in federal law last year that authorized veterans to render the military-style hand salute during the raising, lowering or passing of the flag, but it did not address salutes during the national anthem. Last year's provision also applied to members of the armed forces while not in uniform.



Traditionally, members of the nation's veterans service organizations have rendered the hand-salute during the national anthem and at events involving the national flag while wearing their organization's official head-gear. The most recent change, authorizing hand-salutes during the national anthem by veterans and out-of-uniform military personnel, was sponsored by Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, an Army veteran. It was included in the Defense Authorization Act of 2009, which former President Bush signed on October 14, 2008. The earlier provision authorizing hand-salutes for veterans and out-of-uniform military personnel during the raising, lowering or passing of the flag was contained in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, which took effect January 28, 2008.

Please use every occasion possible to correctly salute our flag and the playing of our national anthem. If we, as women veterans, render a hand salute instead of placing our hand over our heart, we will be recognized as veterans instead of just fading into the ranks of civilians.

Women Veterans and the VA

Women veterans are entitled to the same benefits and medical care as their male counterparts including health care, disability compensation, educational assistance, work-study allowance, vocational rehabilitation, employment and counseling services, insurance, home loan benefits, nursing home care, survivor benefits and various burial benefits.

Women veterans are the fastest growing segment of the veteran population, second only to elderly veterans. Approximately 1.7 million women veterans comprise 7 percent of the total veteran population. Approximately 255,000 women use Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care services. Today, over 200,000 women are serving in the Armed Forces. These women will become veterans and will be eligible for VA services. VA estimates that by 2020 women veterans will comprise 10 percent of the veteran population.

VA has a multitude of services and programs to respond to the unique health care needs of women veterans. VA offers comprehensive, high-quality primary health care services for women, including Pap smears, mammography and general reproductive health care. Along with these services, VA's mental health care for women veterans includes substance abuse counseling, evaluation and treatment of military sexual trauma (MST) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Chapter Reports

Chapter 11, West Palm Beach, Florida

Women Veterans of America (WVA) members from Chapter 11 in West Palm Beach, Florida, made their presence known at the Veterans Day Parade on November 9, 2008. They proudly wore their WVA headgear as they traveled in a truck with a Women Veterans of America sign on the door, as reported by Commander Charlotte M. Rebillard.



Left to right: Commander Charlotte M. Rebillard and Vice-Commander Geraldine Palkovic



Chapter 11 showing its pride in the Veterans Day Parade

Chapter 11 WVA members also enjoyed a Holiday Luncheon on Saturday, December 6, 2008, at the Golden Corral Restaurant in West Palm Beach. It is always a fulfilling experience when sister veterans gather for food and fellowship, sharing stories and memories. That's what it's all about, enjoying the camaraderie and friendship, and letting others know that women veterans are active in their community.



Left to right: Vice-Commander Geraldine Palkovic, with Chapter 11 members Marian Wells and Josie Anton



Left to right: Chapter 11 members Joan Ford and Teri Westevelt

Chapter 20, Nashville, Tennessee

Medal of Honor Workday

The National Medal of Honor Museum of Military History's Archive Center in Chattanooga, Tennessee, was the location of a recent workday for Women Veterans of America (WVA) Chapter 20 from Nashville, Tennessee and the VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System Women Veterans Network (WVN). WVA and WVN members from Nashville, Knoxville and Chattanooga met there on Saturday November 1, 2008, rolled up their sleeves and went to work. The task was to sort books. The museum has received donations of books over the years, ranging from a few books to



WVA National Commander Janet Cook and National Sgt.-at-Arms Kathy Bell working at Medal of Honor Museum

entire private library collections. Many of these books are about military history, but many of them were either inappropriate for the museum or so badly damaged from years of improper storage that they were not of any value. After a briefing by the museum director, Navy veteran Patty Parks, the job of sorting began. Books of historical value were kept, many books on varied subjects were sorted out to be donated to a school or library, some that were in excellent condition were put aside to be auctioned off on eBay, and those that were irreparable were discarded. About midway through, there was a break for sandwiches, chips and cookies furnished by the museum's director, then work resumed. It was tedious and dirty work, but it made a difference for the museum's archive center.

Veterans Day in Tennessee

On November 11, 2008, Women Veterans of America Chapter 20 from Nashville, Tennessee, joined the VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System Women Veterans Network on a bus chartered by the VA for a special Veterans Day celebration. The bus pulled out at 5:00 a.m., on the way to Knoxville, Tennessee, to join the Women Marines Association and the East Tennessee Women Veterans Network in the Veterans Day Parade. Knoxville was honoring Women Veterans for the very first time in the history of the Veterans Day parade there. Women veterans from Clarksville, Murfreesboro and Chattanooga, Tennessee and from as far away as Texas and Oklahoma joined in. When everybody got together, there were more than 50 women veterans lined up to march or ride on special floats through the streets of Knoxville. It's hard to miss



National Commander Janet Cook, center, pictured with Chapter 20 members Doc Bishop from Oklahoma and Margie Ayala, recently returned Iraqi veteran

noticing that many women veterans all together in one place, and the families lining the parade route seemed to cheer just a little louder as the women veterans passed by.

The Grand Marshal was a ninety-two year old WWII woman veteran, Marion Richards. She and her escort, Marine Corps MAJ (Ret.) Belinda Twohig, rode in the middle of the group of women veterans. Mrs. Richards served as an Army Nurse in the South of England on D-Day, June 6, 1944. While working the night shift at an Army Hospital, she stood outside looking



up and listening to the night sky as thousands of aircraft headed towards Normandy. The next afternoon she tended to the wounded that returned from the battlefield, and 40 days later she waded ashore on Omaha Beach to serve at a field hospital. She was later assigned to a tent hospital in Liege, Belgium, where she found herself among the American forces surrounded by the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge. During this time she was constantly under fire from artillery and buzz bombs. Less than a quarter of a mile away 30 of her fellow medical staff was killed when one of the German rockets struck. Today Mrs. Richards is a proud veteran and currently a resident of Ben Atchley State Veterans Home in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Tennessee State Women Veterans License Plate



Laura Comas, WVA Chapter 20 and VA Tennessee Valley Healthcare System Women Veterans Network member, championed the cause of having a Women Veterans license plate in Tennessee. After months of political leg work and design efforts, Tennessee is now one of the first states in the Union to have a license plate honoring Women Veterans. The plate pays homage to Molly Pitcher, a Revolutionary War “Woman Veteran”. Now women veterans all across the State of Tennessee are proudly displaying the plate on their cars and trucks.



Chapter 33, Sonora, California

Commander Judy Carson-Carroll reported that Chapter 33 has been active in several community service projects with Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 391. In April, 2008, they raised \$3,000.00 for the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life through a chili and soup feed and donations received from a raffle. Additionally, Chapter 33 assisted with a homeless veteran Stand Down, making sack lunches for the participants to take out. Plans were underway for a fundraiser for homeless veterans on March 7 of this year, once again featuring a chili and soup event, all you can eat, in Sonora, California. Sadly, though, attendance at Chapter meetings has dwindled down to three or four members attending, so Chapter 33 has decided to go to an Inactive Status for now. Their remaining funds were donated to the Veterans Emergency Team (VET) for the homeless vets in the area. They will continue their membership with National. Hopefully, interest will pick up and membership will be revived in the future, and they can re-activate. We will keep them on our communication lists and keep them up-to-date on WVA activities and events.

The next issue of your newsletter is scheduled for early June. I’m sure that everybody would like to know what your Chapter has been doing. Let’s keep each other informed. Please submit articles of interest about your Chapter and its activities, with photographs, no later than May 15, 2009, to Nationalcommander@womensveteransofamerica.org.

Ooops: In the November issue, two photos were incorrectly identified. Please accept my apologies. It should have been Sylvia Morrill, not Shirley, and Kathleen Hoffman, not Kelly.