



# The Alabama Veteran

## *"Proudly Serving America's Finest"*

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SUMMER 2008

### IMPORTANT DATES

- September 1 - Labor Day
- October 3 - SBVA meeting/Salute to America's Veterans, Alabama National Fair
- October 13 - Columbus Day
- November 2 - Daylight Savings Time
- November 4 - Election Day
- November 7 - Supermarket of Veterans Benefits, Dothan, Ala.
- November 11 - Veterans' Day

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## State Board of Veterans Affairs sets priorities

Setting priorities that will improve the quality of care and services for Alabama veterans was the main topic for discussion by the State Board of Veterans Affairs (SBVA) at its quarterly meeting held at the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs on July 18.

A new state veterans home, education benefits, renovation projects at the state's veterans homes, and a review of a proposed state veterans cemetery were a few items on the board's agenda.

The board's Long Range Planning Committee Chair Roland Day said a fourth veterans home in Pell City should be the state VA department's top priority because of the high demand for long-term care for Alabama's veterans. The board agreed with the committee's recommendation.

The state's three veterans homes in Bay Minette, Alexander City and Huntsville are at capacity, and each home has an average monthly waiting list of 30 to 50 veterans.



**Board Vice-Chairman Wayne Dial (left) and Commissioner Clyde Marsh (center) present the ADVA's Legislator of the Year Award to Senator Ben Brooks.**

The board expects construction of the fourth home to begin in 2009 or 2010 if the approved federal funding is allocated to the department next fiscal year.

Legislative Committee Chairman Joe McDonald said the G.I. Dependent's Education Bill will be the committee's number one priority in 2009. McDonald said if the bill is approved by both the House and Senate next legislative session, it would extend college benefits from four to five years for dependent children and from two to three years for spouses of veterans killed in action, a POW or MIA, or with a 20% or greater service-connected disability.

Ken Rollins, chairperson of the Veterans Homes Committee, said the Veterans Health Administration's recent survey of the state's three veterans homes showed quality services and care for veterans at each of the homes.



**At the July 18 board meeting, SBVA member Bill Wyatt (right) presents a \$500 donation to each of the state's three veterans homes on behalf of the Blue Star Salute Foundation, Inc., which he is also a member.**

Continued on page 3.



## Commissioner's Corner

W. Clyde Marsh

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) has experienced a very busy and productive third quarter as the department enters the final operational quarter of fiscal year 2008.

With the help of ADVA employees, we have made numerous improvements in our county offices, and in the quality of training that will help veterans for many years to come. Many upgrades have been made to our existing veterans' homes as well as several of our more environmentally challenged county veterans service office buildings. The ADVA veterans' home improvement initiative is ongoing as is the department's efforts in acquiring office space that is suitable for our veterans service officers, administrative support assistants and our veterans.

The most important asset we have is our employees, who are veterans' advocates taking the requisite time to get in the trenches wherever needed, and to do whatever is necessary to assist veterans with their benefits. As we continue to provide quality service to our veterans, let us not forget the three C's - communicate, cooperate, and coordinate. Alabama Veterans are depending on you and so am I.

I want to devote some time to address the process for applying for a veteran's "Review of Discharge".

First, each of the military service branches have discharge review boards that have the authority to change, correct or modify a veteran's discharge or dismissal of service that are not issued by a sentence of general court-martial. The discharge review board has no authority to address medical discharges.

Veterans, or if the veteran is deceased or incompetent, the surviving spouse, next of kin or legal representative, may apply for a review of discharge by writing to the military department concerned, using DD Form 293 - "Application for Review of Discharge From The Armed Forces of the United States."

The DD Form 293 may be obtained at a VA regional office, from veterans' service organizations, or from the Internet at <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/infomgt/forms/forminfo/forminfo63.html>.

If the veteran's discharge date is more than 15 years from the current date, a veteran must petition the appropriate service Board of Correction of Military Records using DD Form 149 - "Application for Correction of Military Records Under the Provisions of Title 10, U.S. Code, Section 1552."

A discharge review is conducted by a review of an applicant's service record and, if requested, by a hearing before the board.

Persons are ineligible for VA benefits regardless of action taken by a discharge review board if their discharge was a result of a continuous period of unauthorized absence in excess of 180 days, unless VA determines there were compelling circumstances for the absence. A Board for the Correction of Military Records can also consider such cases.

Veterans with disabilities incurred or aggravated during active duty may qualify for medical or related benefits regardless of separation and characterization of service.

Veterans separated administratively under other than honorable conditions may request that their discharge be reviewed for possible re-characterization, provided they file their appeal within 15 years of the date of separation.

This process for a "Review of Discharge" is just a reminder that veterans we serve have this option available to them if they need it.

Questions regarding the review of a discharge should be addressed to the appropriate discharge review board at the address listed on the DD Form 293.

## Around the State

### SBVA Sets Priorities (Continued from page 1)

The SBVA reviewed a proposal for a state veterans cemetery in southwest Alabama. The board agreed to continue with a feasibility study to determine funding sources for the perpetual maintenance and operations of the cemetery.

The board also set a priority of renovating the day room at the Bill Nichols State Veterans Home in Alexander City, which will provide more space and accommodations for its residents.

At the board meeting, members recognized Senator Ben Brooks with the ADVA's Legislator of the Year Award for his support of the Alabama G.I. Dependent's Education Bill. The senator said he was honored to receive the award and promised his continued support of future SBVA initiatives that will improve the quality of benefits and services for Alabama's veterans and their families.

### VA plans to open three clinics in Alabama

Plans are underway for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to open new outpatient clinics in Childersburg and Guntersville, and one Vet Center in Madison County.

The clinics will provide primary health care and other services to area veterans. The new VA facilities will bring the total number of VA clinics in Alabama to 13.

Dr. Robert Ratliff, interim director at the Birmingham VA Medical Center said the VA's goal is to make health care more accessible by locating clinics near concentrations of veterans.

The Childersburg clinic will

have 12 staff members and will be able to serve some 1,700 veterans. The Guntersville clinic is projected to have 11 members on its staff with the capability of serving more than 2,500 patients.

The new Vet Center in Madison County will provide combat veterans with adjustment counseling and other services.

All three VA clinics are expected to open in 2009.

To locate a VA Clinic in Alabama, Veterans can call 1-800-827-1000, or visit the VA Web site at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov).

## Alabama National Cemetery Dedicated in Montevallo

A dedication ceremony was held July 13 for the new Alabama National Cemetery in Montevallo, Ala.

"To build a national shrine for the veterans of Alabama is our mission," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "With this new cemetery, we are providing a final resting place and lasting tribute to the men and women who have protected and defended our nation."

VA's Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs William F. Tuerk provided the keynote address and joined local officials as the dedication plaque was unveiled. Military honors included a firing detail, flyover, and the ceremony ended with the playing of "Taps."

The new 479-acre national cemetery in the town of Montevallo, approximately five miles west of Interstate 65, will serve nearly 200,000 veterans living in the greater Birmingham area.

VA selected Quincy Whitehead as the cemetery's first director. Before this appointment, she served as the director at



Army Col. (Ret.) "Stretch" Dunn sings the National Anthem at the dedication of the Alabama National Cemetery.

Barrancas National Cemetery in Pensacola, Fla.

When the entire 45-acre initial construction is complete, the interment areas will provide for 7,395 full casket grave-sites, 999 in-ground

cremation sites and approximately 2,700 columbarium niches. Initially, the cemetery staff will work from a temporary office, a committal service shelter and an equipment facility until construction is finished.

When completed, the new cemetery will include an administration and public information complex, with an electronic gravesite locator and public restrooms, a maintenance facility, entrance and flag assembly areas, a memorial walkway, and two committal shelters.

Veterans with a discharge of 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 marker. For more information on the Alabama National Cemetery, call the cemetery's office at 1-205-665-9039.

## Around the State

### MOAA Alabama Council of Chapters address VA issues

At a June 18 meeting of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) Alabama Area Council of Chapters quarterly business meeting, Commissioner Clyde Marsh met with council members to address veterans issues and to outline the ADVA's services and benefits the department provides to Alabama Veterans.

Pete Landrum, Senior Defense Policy Advisor to Sen. Jeff Sessions also attended the meeting. Landrum addressed the council on Congressional initiatives to improve the quality of benefits and services for veterans.

Commissioner Marsh presented the ADVA's plan to increase the benefits of the Alabama G.I. Dependent's Scholarship Program.

The state VA scholarship currently pays for tuition, books and fees for up to four academic years for dependent children and two academic years for spouses of veterans who have a 20% or greater

disability rating, were a POW, MIA or killed while serving on active duty.

Commissioner Marsh said the ADVA is hoping to get legislation passed that would increase the scholarship benefit by one year for both dependent children and spouses.

The commissioner presented the council with the state VA's plan for a fourth veterans home in Pell City. If the approved federal funding is allocated next fiscal year, the commissioner said construction of the home should begin sometime in 2009 or 2010.

Pete Landrum said Congress would likely pass the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill into law. He said the G.I. Bill would provide the greatest increase in educational benefits to veterans in the last 30 years. He also added that Senator Sessions is supporting legislation that will correct the offset of the Survivor Benefit Plan (SPB) and the Dependent Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for surviving



**Commissioner Clyde Marsh highlights the benefits and services offered through the ADVA during MOAA's quarterly business meeting.**

spouses of troops killed in action. Surviving spouses lose some of their SBP benefits, which the service member paid for,—if they also receive the DIC for their children. The council also addressed the issue of retirement pay and disability compensation. Currently, veterans that receive VA disability compensation have to forfeit some or all of their military retirement pay. MOAA is advocating a policy change that would allow veterans to receive both their full retired pay and disability compensation.

### William "Bill" Myrick is the American Legion's VSO of the Year



**William "Bill" Myrick receives the Veterans Service Officer of the Year Award from American Legion Adjutant Braxton Bridgers. Mrs. Peggy Myrick joined her husband at an Aug. 8 ceremony in Montgomery.**

Each year the American Legion in Alabama awards the Veterans Service Officer of the Year Award to a person who has provided an exceptional service to veterans and their families.

This year the American Legion's prestigious award went to Veterans Service Officer William "Bill" Myrick, who has been serving veterans for almost four decades.

Myrick spent 37 years with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in Montgomery before retiring in Jan. 2006. Later that same month he joined the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs as the Veterans Service Officer for Elmore County. As VSO, he provided service to the some 8,500 veterans there and also served as itinerant VSO in Coosa County. In 2007 Myrick helped veterans file over 300 compensation, pension, medical and education claims for a total of \$336,900 in veterans benefits. In April of this year, Myrick was reassigned to the ADVA Claims Division at the Montgomery VA Regional Office.

### Rica Lewis-Payton takes helm as Director of Birmingham VA Medical Center



*"Ms. Lewis-Payton has a wide range of health care leadership experience throughout many levels of VA."*

**Dr. Robert W. Ratliff**

Rica Lewis-Payton, former Chief Operating Officer for the South Central VA Healthcare Network, has been appointed director of the Birmingham VA Medical Center.

"Ms. Lewis-Payton has a wide range of health care leadership experience throughout many levels of VA," said Dr. Robert W. Ratliff, former Interim Medical Center Director.

Ms. Lewis-Payton has held many positions in the medical profession in both Mississippi and Alabama. In 2006 she was selected as a Woman of Distinction by Central Mississippi Girl Scouts of America. In 2007 she was selected in the "Top Ten of the 50 Leading Business Women" in Mississippi.

## Around the State

### 2-1-1 number connects people to special services in Alabama

Alabama veterans seeking assistance for services now have an easy to remember phone number that can connect them to special services and resources in their community.

In 2002, the United Way launched the 2-1-1 number for free access to health and human service information and referral. The 2-1-1 service is available in each of Alabama's 67 counties.

By making services easier to access, 2-1-1 empowers individuals with the information they need to get help—and to give help.

The United Way's 2-1-1 number is available to people from all walks of life. From veterans with disabilities to senior citizens who often slip through the cracks, 2-1-1 is there to help those in need of special services.

There are over 16,000 nonprofit

state, faith-based and community organizations in Alabama that provide a number of specialized services.

Jo Ann Johnson, 211 Connects Coordinator in Montgomery, said people in need often don't know where to start and get frustrated and confused navigating through the ever-growing maze of services. "211 strengthens Alabama communities by eliminating barriers and connecting people to resources that can help," said Johnson.

2-1-1 is locally designed by community stakeholders who are aware of their local and state needs and resources. The number offers information on a broad range of services, including rent assistance, food banks, affordable housing, health resources, child care, after-school programs,



elderly care, financial literacy, and job training programs.

Alabama became the fourth state in the U.S. to establish a 2-1-1 system. Over 53,000 calls were made to 2-1-1 in Alabama in 2007.

If you have a need for a particular service, call 2-1-1, or visit the Volunteer Information Center of Central Alabama Web site at [www.click.vic.org](http://www.click.vic.org).

### A Salute to America's Veterans planned for the Alabama National Fair's opening day

A special day for America's veterans is being planned for the opening day of the Alabama National Fair in Montgomery on Oct. 3, 2008.

Officials for the fair have formed a planning committee with representatives from the active services, veterans service organizations and the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs. The committee is planning a program titled "Salute to America's Veterans" that will honor all veterans for their service and sacrifice.

The opening day of the fair will include a patriotic concert by the 98th "Silver Wings" Army Band from Ft. Rucker, military displays, and a special tribute to the "Greatest Generation". The fair opens at 4 p.m. with a "Salute to America's Veterans" beginning at 4:20 p.m. inside Garrett Coliseum. WWII veterans who will take an Honor Flight to Washington D.C. the following day will be honored during the program.

Randy Stephenson, the fair's general manager, said this is the first time in the fair's 53 year history that it has dedicated a day to honor veterans.

Admission to the fair is free to all veterans, which will be on the honor system.

### Task Force on Military and Overseas Voting seeks ways to improve absentee voting

A Task Force on Military and Overseas Voting has been formed in Alabama to research and study potential ways of making the voting process more convenient and timely for military members who are outside of the state and possibly serving overseas during state and national elections.

Secretary of State Beth Chapman chairs the task force. State VA Commissioner Clyde Marsh, a member, has met with the Secretary, other task force members, probate judges, circuit clerks, military officials, political scientists and other interested parties to gather information regarding the level of technology that is available for electronic absentee voting for veterans.

During a testimony before the Committee on House Administration in Washington on April 15, 2008, Chapman said America should no longer keep Democracy within the confines of a voting booth. "If our military voters cannot come to a voting booth, then we simply must take the voting booth to them," said Chapman.

Chapman said Alabama laws would have to be changed in order to utilize the technology for electronic absentee voting. She said when laws are passed, Alabama will be ready to implement them immediately.

## Around the State

### Behind the Name Fort Mitchell National Cemetery

*VA facilities all over the country bear the names of Americans who made significant contributions to their country. Who were they? The federal VA is featuring a series of articles about historical figures for whom some of VA's national cemeteries are named. This article features Alabama's historical Fort Mitchell National Cemetery.*

Many VA facilities are named for great Americans. Their stories reach back to the earliest periods in U.S. history and up

through today, as Congress has recently enacted legislation honoring six contemporary Americans



Historical Fort Mitchell

by dedicating VA facilities

in their name. Located just over the Georgia line in Seale, Ala., Fort Mitchell was designated a national cemetery in 1987, but its graves date back to World War I. The fort itself was built by the Georgia Militia in 1813, offering protection to European settlers heading west and serving as a staging area for military excursions into Creek Indian Territory.

*Historic Fort Mitchell* is named for Georgia Governor David Brydie Mitchell (b.1766), a Scottish immigrant who at age 17 came to Savannah to settle his late uncle's estate, then chose to remain in America, becoming a citizen in 1789.

He studied law and over the years held many political and military positions, culminating in the governorship of Georgia, until 1813.

America was then at war with Great Britain and Mitchell set about strengthening Georgia's defenses, including the building of Fort Mitchell on land he donated.

He was elected governor again in 1815, and supported legislation to outlaw dueling, having once killed an opponent himself. He served only two years before resigning in 1817, when President Monroe appointed him as agent for the Creek Nation.

### Capital City Club Montgomery extends special membership to veterans

The Capital City Club provides an atmosphere of distinction where members may meet their friends, entertain their guests and dine in gracious residential surroundings.

Special emphasis has been placed on these elements that are the essence of a private club – high caliber membership, camaraderie, personal recognition, quality and consistency of food and service, décor and those privileges and amenities that enhance the quality and enjoyment of life.

The Capital City Club is atop the RSA Tower on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> floors located at 201 Monroe Street in Montgomery, Ala.

The Capital City Club management is extending the "201 Ambassadors Council" special membership package to all veterans desiring to join the club. Under this special program, a veteran can join the Club by paying a \$201 application fee versus the normal published initiation fees which could run up to \$1,200. The \$201 would immediately be refunded back to the veteran in the form of food and beverage credits. Veterans may apply monthly dues in the category of their choice.

Veterans who are interested in a private club atmosphere in the capital city, or other affiliated clubs in Alabama and throughout the nation at a significantly reduced cost, call Phyllis Fenn, membership director, at (334) 834-8920, or e-mail her at [phyllis.fenn@ourclub.com](mailto:phyllis.fenn@ourclub.com), for more information or details about applying for membership. The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs would like to thank Charles Anderson, the club's general manager, and his staff for paying special recognition to veterans by indefinitely extending the special membership offer.



News to Use

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Governor urges Alabama residents to file for the Economic Stimulus Payment

At an Aug. 4 press conference, Gov. Bob Riley urged all eligible Alabama citizens to file for the federal government's economic stimulus payment before the Oct. 15, 2008, deadline.

The IRS is reporting that 112,004 Alabamians eligible for the economic stimulus payment have not filed their 2007 tax return to receive the rebate. This amounts to a total of \$33,601,200 in unclaimed payments.

In a statement by the IRS released July 30, 20 million low-income seniors, disabled veterans and others with disabilities who are not otherwise required to file a tax return and, as a result, are at risk of missing out on their \$300 payments (\$600 for married couples).

On June 20, the IRS announced that 5 million people in this group had not yet filed. With the cost of energy, food and other expenses on the rise, IRS officials said the economic stimulus payments are as critical as ever, and assistance is available to those who need it.

At the news conference, State VA Commissioner Clyde Marsh said the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) is reaching out to inform veterans about the stimulus rebate. He said the ADVA is partnering with the IRS to help veterans file for the tax rebate who are residing at the state's three veterans homes. The commissioner said veterans service officers in Alabama's 67 counties are another source of information for veterans needing assistance.

According to the IRS, the stimulus payment should not affect other benefits received such as SSI, Food Stamps or Medicaid.

The IRS is mailing a package of information to recipients of VA benefits who did not file a tax

return last year.

The IRS and United Way in Alabama will help people file their 2007 tax form to receive the stimulus payment at no cost. The public can call the IRS offices in Birmingham, Dothan, Florence, Huntsville, Mobile or Montgomery; the IRS toll free number at 1-800-829-1040; or visit the IRS Web site at www.irs.gov. The United Way also has a helpline at 211, or 1-866-869-4921.



Gov. Bob Riley urges Alabama citizens to file for the economic stimulus payment at an Aug. 4 press conference held at the Shiloh Baptist Church in Montgomery.

Top 20 counties with unclaimed payments.

County	Unclaimed Payments	Total Value
Jefferson	16,695	\$5,008,500
Mobile	10,103	\$3,030,900
Madison	4,845	\$1,453,500
Montgomery	4,667	\$1,400,100
Tuscaloosa	3,843	\$1,152,900
Baldwin	3,804	\$1,141,200
Etowah	3,121	\$936,300
Shelby	3,016	\$904,800
Walker	2,752	\$825,600
Calhoun	2,605	\$781,500
Morgan	2,571	\$771,300
Houston	2,454	\$736,200
Marshall	2,272	\$681,600
Lauderdale	2,152	\$645,600
Cullman	2,151	\$645,300
Talladega	2,061	\$618,300
Lee	1,897	\$569,100
St. Clair	1,733	\$519,900
Elmore	1,708	\$512,400
De Kalb	1,684	\$505,200
<b>Total Value</b>		<b>\$33,601,200</b>

## News to Use

### VA Offers online resource service

The Department of Veterans Affairs is offering an online service, My HealtheVet (MHV), which is a gateway to veteran health benefits and services.

It provide access to trusted health information, links to federal and VA benefits and resources, the Personal Health Journal and online VA prescription refill service. In the future, MHV registrants will be able to view appointments, co-pay balances and key portions of their VA medical records online.

My HealtheVet is a powerful tool to help veterans better understand and manage their health, according to VA officials.

The Web site also features a section called "Learn About" which provides resources on a variety of topics. To visit the MyHealtheVet site, go to [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov).

#### ALABAMA BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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#### American Veterans

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#### Veterans of Foreign Wars

Roland Day-Birmingham  
Wayne Dial-Talladega  
Linda Turner-Gaines- Lisman  
Charles Stephens-Fort Payne

#### Military Order of the Purple Heart

Byron White-Birmingham

#### Vietnam Veterans of America

Ken Rollins-Oxford

### VA Reaching out to Veterans with mortgage problems

WASHINGTON—Many home owners have found it difficult recently to pay their mortgages, but quick intervention by loan counselors at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has actually reduced the number of veterans defaulting on their home loans.

"VA is reaching out to veterans—both those who use our home-loan guaranty program and those who don't take advantage of our guaranties—to keep people in their homes," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. "I'm proud of our solid record of success in helping veterans and active-duty personnel deal with financial crises."

Accounting for much of this success are VA counselors at nine regional loan centers who assist people with VA-guaranteed loans to avoid foreclosure through counseling and special financing arrangements. The counselors also can assist other veterans with financial problems. VA counselors have helped about 74,000 veterans, active-duty members and survivors keep their homes since 2000, a savings to the government of nearly \$1.5 billion.

To obtain help from a VA counselor, veterans can call 1-877-827-3702, or visit the VA Web site at [www.homeloans.va.gov](http://www.homeloans.va.gov).

### DAV provides transportation services to Alabama veterans

Because so many sick and disabled veterans lack transportation to and from VA medical facilities for needed treatment, the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) operates a nationwide Transportation Network to meet this need.

Across the nation and here in Alabama, more than 196 DAV Hospital Service Coordinators (HSCs) operate more than 180 active programs at VA hospitals and Outpatient Clinics. These HSCs have recruited a corps of nearly 5,000



volunteer drivers whom they coordinate to provide transportation for veterans needing this service. Additionally, DAV Departments and Chapters purchase and donate most of the vans to the VA medical facilities for use in the Transportation Network. The DAV in Alabama provides transportation services to veterans in most of Alabama's 67 counties. For more information on DAV van services in Alabama, call HSC Director of Services Deborah Walker at (251) 478-5080.

## VA Special Feature

# USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park

On the coast of Mobile Bay are two National Historic Landmarks - Battleship USS Alabama (BB-60) and Submarine USS Drum (SS-228), and one of America's finest displays of military artifacts from WWII to Iraqi Freedom.

On January 9, 2008, the USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park celebrated 43 years as a memorial to all American veterans that have served in all branches of the U. S. Armed Services. As a tribute to these men and women, the Battleship Park has designed exhibits that are engaging and informative for all ages.

In the past few years, there have been some changes to the Battleship Memorial Park.

The park has repaired all the damaged caused by Hurricane Katrina and in addition to a new entrance into the park, new exhibits such as the F/A 18 Hornet, F-14 Tomcat and a PBR Riverboat have been added.

The USS Drum has also undergone a few changes as well. The Submarine Veterans have spent numerous hours assisting the park staff in repairing and restoring the Drum. On the third Saturday of each month, the public can take a personal tour of the USS Drum with a



submarine veteran.

The Battleship Memorial Park now has a Membership Program with several options for membership available. The public can inquire about the USS Alabama Battleship Park Membership Program by calling 251-438-2834, or e-mail at [alassere@ussalabama.com](mailto:alassere@ussalabama.com).

The Battleship Memorial Park is committed to memorializing veterans and preserving America's military history for future generations.

## The History of the Purple Heart



It is one of the most recognized and respected medals awarded to members of the U.S. Armed Forces. Introduced as the "Badge of Military Merit" by General George Washington in 1782, the Purple Heart is also the nation's oldest military award.

In military terms, the award had "broken service," as it was ignored for nearly 150 years until it was re-introduced on February 22, 1932, on the 200th anniversary of George Washington's birth. The medal's plain inscription "FOR MILITARY MERIT" barely expresses its significance.

On August 7, 1782, from his headquarters in Newburgh, New York, General George Washington wrote:

*"The General ever desirous to cherish virtuous ambition in his soldiers, as well as to foster and encourage every species of military merit, directs that whenever any singularly meritorious action is performed,*

*the author of it shall be permitted to wear on his facings over the left breast, the figure of a heart in purple cloth, or silk, edged with narrow lace or binding. Not only instances of unusual gallantry, but also of extraordinary fidelity and essential service in any way shall meet with a due reward. Before this favour can be conferred on any man, the particular fact, or facts, on which it is to be grounded must be set forth to the Commander in Chief accompanied with certificates from the commanding officers of the regiment and brigade to which the candidate for reward belonged, or other incontestable proofs, and upon granting it, the name and regiment of the person with the action so certified are to be enrolled in the book of merit which will be kept at the orderly office.*

*Men who have merited this last distinction to be suffered to pass all guards and sentinels which officers are permitted to do. The road to glory in a patriot army and a free country is thus open to all. This order is also to have retrospect to the earliest staff of the war, and to be considered*

*as a permanent one."*

After the Revolutionary War, for unknown reasons, the medal apparently was not awarded again until 1931, when Army Chief of Staff General Douglas MacArthur resurrected the idea for the medal.

On February 22, 1932, the War Department announced the establishment of the Purple Heart award in General Order No. 3.

Possession of the Purple Heart medal does not by itself qualify veterans for VA disability compensation. However, since November 1999, Purple Heart recipients have been placed in VA's enrollment priority 3, unless eligible for the higher priority groups (1 or 2) based on service-connected disabilities. Recipients are also exempt from co-payments for VA hospital care and medical outpatient care, but not from pharmacy co-payments for medications prescribed for non-service connected conditions.

*Contributed by USDVA Public Affairs*

## VA Special Feature

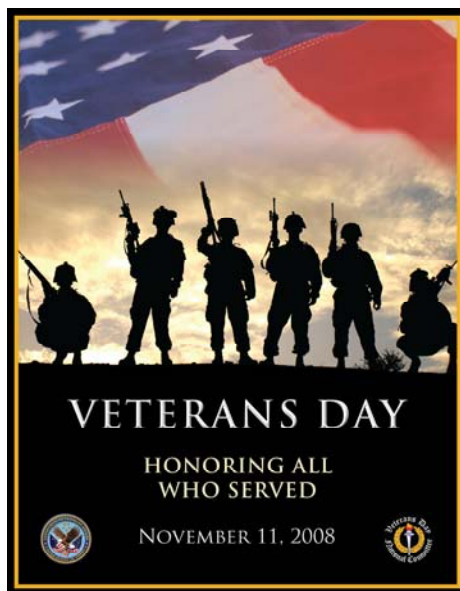
### The Origins of Veterans Day

In 1921, an unknown World War I American soldier was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. This site, on a hillside overlooking the Potomac River and the city of Washington, D.C., became the focal point of reverence for America's veterans.

Similar ceremonies occurred earlier in England and France, where an unknown soldier was buried in each nation's highest place of honor (in England, Westminster Abbey; in France, the Arc de Triomphe). These memorial gestures all took place on November 11, giving universal recognition to the celebrated ending of World War I fighting at 11 a.m., November 11, 1918 (the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. The day became known as "Armistice Day."

Armistice Day officially received its name in America in 1926 through a Congressional resolution. It became a national holiday 12 years later by similar Congressional action. If the idealistic hope had been realized that World War I was "the War to end all wars," November 11 might still be called Armistice Day. But only a few days after the holiday was proclaimed, war broke out in Europe. Sixteen and one-half million Americans took part. Four hundred seven thousand of them died in service, more than 292,000 in battle.

The first celebration using the term Veterans Day occurred in Birmingham, Ala., in 1947. Raymond Weeks, a WWII veteran, organized "National Veterans Day," which included a parade and other festivities, to honor all veterans. The event was held on November 11, then designated Armistice Day. Raymond Weeks received the Presidential Citizens Medal from President Reagan in November 1982. The



tradition of local parades and ceremonies to honor veterans that Weeks started 61 years ago are now annual events celebrated nationwide on November 11.

On Memorial Day 1958, two more unidentified American war dead were brought from overseas and interred in the plaza beside the unknown soldier of World War I. One was killed in WWII, the other in the Korean War. In 1984, an unknown serviceman from the Vietnam War was placed alongside the others. The remains from Vietnam were exhumed May 14, 1998, identified as Air Force 1st Lt. Michael Joseph Blassie, and removed for burial. To honor these men, symbolic of all Americans who gave their lives in all wars, an Army honor guard, the 3rd U.S. Infantry (The Old Guard), keeps day and night vigil.

In 1968 the law changed the national commemoration of Veterans Day to the fourth Monday in October. It soon became apparent, however, that November 11 was a date of historic significance to many Americans. In 1978, Congress returned the observance to its traditional date.

The focal point for official, national ceremonies for Veterans Day continues to be the memorial amphitheater built around the Tomb of the Unknowns. At 11 a.m. on November 11, a combined color guard representing all military services executes "Present Arms" at the tomb. The nation's tribute to its war dead is symbolized by the laying of a presidential wreath followed by the playing of "Taps."

Veterans Day ceremonies at Arlington and elsewhere are coordinated by the President's Veterans Day National Committee. Chaired by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the committee represents national veterans organizations.

Additional information on the history of Veterans Day, can be found on the Internet at <http://www.va.gov/vetsday/>.



**The "Statue of the Three Servicemen" in Washington, D.C., honors Vietnam veterans, living and dead, who served in the war.**

*The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs contributed this article as part of "Celebrating America's Freedoms"—a collection of stories about America's customs and national symbols.*

## National VA Update

### VA Announces New Nursing Academy Sites

WASHINGTON - To provide compassionate, highly-trained nurses to serve the health care needs of the nation's veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is establishing new partnerships with seven of the country's finest nursing schools. The partnerships will bring to 10 the number of collaborations between the Department and nursing schools under the VA Nursing Academy.

"The expanded role of VA in the education of nurses will ensure the Department has the nurses needed to continue our world-class health care for veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. VA officials said the Nursing Academy expands the teaching faculty and improves recruitment and retention.

The VA Nursing Academy is a virtual organization with central administration in Washington. It expands learning opportunities for nursing students at VA facilities, funds additional faculty positions so competitively selected nursing school partners will accept additional baccalaureate-level students, and increases recruitment and retention of VA nurses. The five-year, \$40 million program began in 2007.

Seven nursing schools will form new partnerships with nine VA medical centers. Joining the VA Nursing Academy partnership this year are: The VA medical center in Charleston, S.C., with the Medical University of South Carolina; the VA facility in Hines, Ill., with Loyola University in Chicago; the VA medical center in Detroit, Michigan, with the University of Detroit Mercy, and Saginaw Valley State University; the VA center in Oklahoma City, Okla., with the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center; VA facility in Providence, R.I., with Rhode Island College; and the VA medical center in

Tampa, Fla., with the University of South Florida.

Partnerships already in the VA Nursing Academy include the VA medical center in Gainesville, Fla., with the University of Florida; the VA medical center in San Diego with San Diego State University; the VA medical center in Salt Lake City with the University of Utah; and the VA medical center in West Haven, Conn., with Fairfield University in Connecticut. VA expects to add several more nursing-school partnerships in the future.

VA currently provides clinical education for approximately 100,000 health professional trainees annually, including students from more than 600 schools of nursing.

VA's "Enhancing Academic Partnerships" pilot program enables competitively selected VA-nursing school partnerships to expand the number of nursing faculty, enhance the professional and scholarly development of nurses, increase student enrollment by about 1,000 students, and promote innovations in nursing education.

Information about the pilot program can be obtained from the VA's Office of Academic Affiliations web site at [www.va.gov/oa](http://www.va.gov/oa).



The VA is offering a series of short video features about veterans' rights and benefits along with inspiring stories of service and sacrifice made by America's men and women in uniform. The video features are available at [www1.va.gov/opa/feature/amervet/index.asp](http://www1.va.gov/opa/feature/amervet/index.asp).

### VA Accepts On-Line Applications

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today that on-line applications are now accepted from veterans, survivors and other claimants filing initial applications for disability compensation, pension, education, and vocational rehabilitation and employment benefits without the additional requirement to submit a signed paper copy of the application.

Effective immediately, VA will now process applications received through its on-line application website (VONAPP) without the claimant's signature. The electronic application will be sufficient authentication of the claimant's application for benefits. Normal development procedures and rules of evidence will still apply to all VONAPP applications.

VONAPP ([www.va.gov/onlineapps.htm](http://www.va.gov/onlineapps.htm)) is a Web-based system that benefits both internal and external users. Veterans, survivors and other claimants seeking compensation, pension, education, or vocational rehabilitation benefits can apply electronically without the constraints of location, postage cost, and time delays in mail delivery.

VONAPP reduces the number of incomplete applications received by VA, decreasing the need for additional development by VA claims processors. The on-line application also provides a link to apply for VA health care benefits and much more.

Over 3.7 million veterans and beneficiaries receive compensation and pension benefits from VA and approximately 523,000 students receive education benefits. Approximately 90,000 disabled veterans participate in VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program.

For more information about VA benefits, go to VA's website at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov), or call the VA toll-free number at 1-800-827-1000.

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## National VA Update

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### Summit Brings Renewed VA Drive for Women Veterans

WASHINGTON—An aggressive push to ensure women veterans receive the highest quality of care in VA medical facilities was pledged by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake at a recent VAA National Summit on Women Veterans' Issues.

Although VA already has services for women patients equal to those men receive, Peake told the audience of more than 400 women-veteran advocates, "We are reinventing ourselves by expanding our women-centric focus to initiate new programs that meet the needs of women veterans."

Citing the demographic shift that brings increasing numbers of women to VA for care and the need for changes, Peake announced formation of a work group to focus on women's needs in prosthetics and rehabilitation, hiring women's advocates in VA medical centers, developing quality measurements specifically for women patients, purchasing more state-of-the-art, specialized women's health care equipment, and expanding medical education in women's health for VA care providers.

Summit attendees also learned that VA recently established a work group whose goal is to ensure every female veteran enrolled in VA care has a women's health primary care provider, especially to meet gender-specific needs.

The June 20-22 conference in Washington focused on how to ensure VA meets women-specific health needs and how to inform more women veterans of their VA benefits. It was the fourth women's summit, which VA holds every four years.

Summit co-sponsors included the American Legion Auxiliary, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans and Veterans of Foreign Wars. Other assisting veterans groups included The Blinded Veterans Association, Military Officers Association of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, The American Legion, Vietnam Veterans of America and TriWest.

Rhonda Tidmore, Veterans Service Officer and Women Veterans Coordinator for the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, represented the department at the national summit.



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